

Biography of Annette Elizabeth Hawkins Eaton (1908-1985)¹

Annette Elizabeth Hawkins Eaton was born in Washington, D.C. on April 25, 1908, to William Langston Hawkins (1878–1943) and Maud Johnson Hawkins (1881–1947). In 1925 she graduated from Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, the well-known college preparatory school whose language staff at the time included Anna Julia Cooper and Clyde C. McDuffie in Latin, Eva Dykes in German as well as Angelina Grimké and Otelia Cromwell in English. Her younger brother, Walter Lincoln Hawkins (1911-1992), who later achieved considerable fame in the field of polymer chemistry, also attended Dunbar. During her high school years Eaton was a keen student of French. In the yearbook for her class of 1925 she gives her motto as: *Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera*, an idiom meaning, literally, "Help yourself, heaven shall help you."²

Eaton served as salutatorian of her class before going on to earn her B.A. at Smith College in 1929 where she was a member of both the Greek Club and the Latin Club. She taught in the D.C. Public School system for almost two decades (1930–1948), At one point she was acting vice principal of Banneker Junior High School.

On August 23, 1935, she married James G. Eaton (1903-1974).

In 1938 she earned her M.A. at The Catholic University of America with a thesis entitled "*Epistola ad Sacram Virginem Demetriadem*: A Translation with a Text and Introduction." In 1943 she also earned her doctorate at same institution with a dissertation entitled "The Influence of Ovid on Claudian," written under the aegis of Professors Roy J. DeFerrari, Martin R.P. McGuire and Bernard H. Skahill. While Eaton was not the first woman of African descent to earn a doctorate,³ she is the first one known to have earned a doctorate in Classics.

Eaton was first hired by Howard University as a visiting lecturer in Classics in 1943–1944 and once again in Spring of 1948. She was also the secretary to E.E. Just, the Hollywood-handsome Head of the Zoology Dept at Howard University. Here is her note: 'From Latin to intimate contact with insects in a zoology lab is quite a change, but I am enjoying it immensely.'

From 1944 to 1946 Eaton was president of the alumnae chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, a sorority founded at Howard in 1913. In 1948 she became Associate Professor of Classics and from September 1, 1954, to June 30, 1955, she served as Acting Head of the Classics Dept.

In 1956 she joined the American Philological Association and in the same year became an honorary charter member of Howard's Eta Sigma Phi chapter (Gamma Xi). She was also the advisor to Howard's Classics Club for many years. From 1966 to June 1968, she was a consultant in Latin Studies for the DC School system and for four months she was the system's Assistant Director of the Foreign Lang Dept. At Howard she was an advocate of the natural method for teaching Latin and used Hans Henning Ørberg's *Lingua Latina Secundum Naturae Rationem Explicata* as the textbook in her Elementary Latin course.⁴ In 1968 she was promoted to Professor of Classics, a post she would hold until her retirement from Howard in May 1976.

¹ This biography is excerpted from "Annette Elizabeth Hawkins Eaton (1908–1985): The First Woman of African American Descent to Earn a Doctorate in Classics" which Michele Valerie Ronnick presented in 2024 at the Southern Section meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South in San Antonio, TX.

² During the Bourbon Restoration in France (1814–1830) a French society called *Aide-toi* stirred the electorate against the government/

³ Georgiana Simpson, b. 1865, was the first to do so at the age of 55 with a dissertation entitled "Herder's Conception of 'Das Volk'" (University of Chicago, 14 June 1921). The second was Sadie Alexander Mossell, b. 1898, with a dissertation in economics entitled "The Standard of Living of Negro Families in Philadelphia" (University of Pennsylvania). Her uncle was the black classicist Lewis Baxter Moore. The third was Eva Dykes, b 1893, with a dissertation entitled "Pope and His Influence in America from 1715-1850" (Radcliffe0.

⁴ Eaton reviewed Ørberg's textbook in *The Classical World*, 1968, Vol.61 (8), p.335-336.

In 1968 she also served as president of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States. Her presidential address, entitled “The Future of CAAS,” was published in *Classical World* 62 (1969): 1-3. In 1969 she ventured into CAMWS territory and presented a paper entitled “The Latin Program in Washington, D.C.” at the organization’s spring meeting in Boulder, CO. She was Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Howard University from 1968 to 1971 and from 1973 to 1976 she was a member of the school’s Board of Trustees.

While affiliated with Banneker JHS she co-authored with Lorraine R. (Mrs Virgil Heathcock), a teacher at Shaw Junior High School, *A Year With the Classics*, a textbook designed for the District of Columbia Public Schools.⁵

In 1937, Eaton published two other equally mysterious texts, *Classics Myths in English* and *Classics Myths in Latin*, both for beginning students of Latin. No copies of either book are known to exist. She wrote various articles, including “Latin in Secondary Schools: A Six Year Program,” published in the *Foreign Language Annals* in 1968. She also published items in the *Journal of Negro History* including several book reviews.

Dr. Eaton died on February 1, 1985. A commemoration of her life was held on February 22, 1985, in the Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel of Howard University. She received a posthumous *ovatio* from the CAAS at its fall meeting Oct-17-19, 2024 in New Brunswick, NJ.

⁵ v. Little is known about this work. A fascicle of the work, chapters 7-9, bearing a copyright date of 1946, is held in the papers of Professor Emerita Emma Lapsansky-Werner [b 1945 in DC attended Banneker PhD U Penn 1975 Am His/culture], at Haverford College. “The authors are conscious of the fact that this mimeographed copy, contains many typographical errors, However, this copy was prepared, for experimental use only and was not intended to be a finished. The errors will be called to the attention of each class daily and will be corrected in the revised copy.” Reges Romae, Horatius, Servius Tullius, Tullia, Tarquinius Superbus and the Oracle at Delphi, Brutus, Virginia, Cincinnatus, Camillus Primum Secundum Bellum Punicum Julius Caesar with questions in English and Latin and passages for composition and vocabulary; Latin test grade C of Beatrice Stevenson May 1959