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He Looked to the Stars: Andover New Hampshire's Premier Astronomer and Author, Prof. John Robie Eastman, A.M. Ph.D., Rear Admiral, USN (Ret.) (1836-1913)

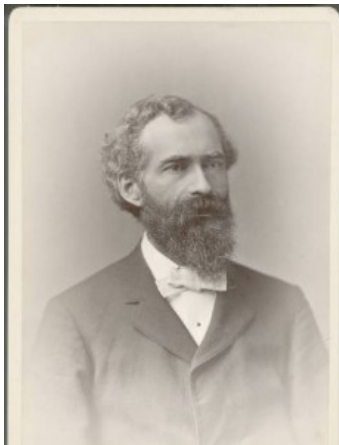
Posted on 4 November, 2014 by [Janice Brown](#)

There are so many interesting people from New Hampshire who are relatively unknown to most current natives—**John Robie Eastman** is one. The son of Royal F. & Sophronia (Mayo) Eastman, he was born 29 July 1836 in Andover, Merrimack Co. NH and d. 26 Sep 1913 in Franklin, Merrimack Co. NH, at a private hospital.

John Robie Eastman lived and worked on his father's farm during his boyhood, attending the district school and also the academies at Andover and New London NH. In 1860 he entered the Chandler School at Dartmouth College, and graduated in 1862 with the degree of M.S., receiving a Ph.D from the same institution in 1877. He began teaching in 1853 and continued, teaching every winter and sometimes in the autumn and spring, until 1862, when he was appointed an assistant in the U.S. Navy Observatory, at Washington D.C.



John Robie Eastman, [photograph from the Naval Oceanography Portal](#), Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command, United States Navy



Courtesy, [Special Collections, University Library, University of California Santa Cruz](#).
Lick Observatory Archive.

On February 17, 1865 he was appointed Professor of Mathematics in the U.S. Navy, with the rank of lieutenant commander, and assigned to astronomical duty at the Naval Observatory, where he continued, with occasional absences on special astronomical expeditions, until his retirement.

From 1874 to 1891 he had charge of the Meridian Circle observations and computations; and also was in charge during that period of the annual astronomical publications of the Observator. He observed the *total solar eclipses* [Aug. 7, 1869 at Des Moines, Iowa](#); [Dec. 22, 1870 at Syracuse, Sicily](#); [July 29, 1878 at West Las Animas, Colorado](#), and [May 28, 1900 at Barnesville GA](#). He was also in charge of the [Transit of Venus at Cedar Keys, FL in 1882](#).

He had been engaged almost continuously in astronomical observations, computations, and

research since 1862, the bulk of his published works appearing in the annual volumes of the Government Observatory. Professor Eastman prepared and edited the [Second Washington Star Catalogue](#), which contains the results of the nearly 80,000 observations made at the Naval Observatory 1866-91. He was the author of [Transit Circle Observations of the Sun, Moon, Planets, and Comets](#), 1903.



United States Naval Observatory — Washington, DC.
Exterior View of the James Melville Gillis building, 1903.
Note the people playing tennis on the front lawn.

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once President of the [Cosmos Club](#), of Washington DC.

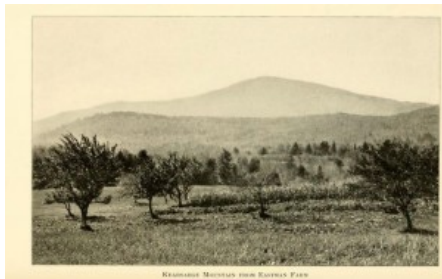
He retired from active duty, on account of age, July 29, 1898. By special order of the Navy Department he was continued on active duty until October 12, 1898. In June 1906 he was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral, United States Navy. He was a resident of Washington D.C. for thirty-six years. Before retirement he purchased the farm on which he was born in Andover NH, managing it, and spending much of his time there from April through December, and then continuously after retirement.

He served on the board of directors of Dartmouth College, Hanover NH from 1906-1909, including Chairman of the Committee on Instruction. He was a member of the New Hampshire Legislature in 1905. Later he was a member of the N.H. Board of Equalizations, which fixes the State tax on railroads and other public-service corporations. In 1910 John Robie Eastman published the History of Andover, New Hampshire, [Volume 1](#) and [Volume 2](#) [Genealogies].

Editor's note: some of the details in the above biography were taken from:

- John Robie Eastman obituary in the New York Times, dated 27 September 1913
- [Dartmouth Sketches of the Class of 1862](#), by Horace Stuart Cummings, 1909

John Robie Eastman was a descendant of [3 participants in the American Revolution](#), a distant cousin to both [Daniel Webster](#) and myself, though his Eastman line.



View of Kearsage from the Eastman Farm in Andover NH, from [History of Andover NH](#).

====GENEALOGY OF JOHN ROBIE EASTMAN====

- **Roger Eastman, son of Nicholas & Ann Barbara (Rooke) Eastman, b. 1610, d. 1694
- John Eastman, son of Robert & Sarah (Smith) Eastman, b. 1640, d. 1720; m. Mary Boynton
- Zachariah Eastman, son of John & Mary (Boynton) Eastman b. 1679, d. 1732; m1) Martha Thorn; m2) Phebe West
- Jeremiah Eastman, son of Zachariah & Martha (Thorn) Eastman 1704
- [Jeremiah Eastman](#), son of Jeremiah & Lydia (Brown) Eastman 1732-1802; m. Hannah Quimby

[Ephraim Eastman](#), son of Jeremiah & Hannah (Quimby) Eastman, b. 15 Marh 1768 in Deerfield NH, d. 6 July 1853 in Andover NH; he m. October 1800 to Lydia Robie, daughter of John & Mary (Eastman) Robie of Weare NH. She b. 23 April 1777 and d. 26 July 1843 in Andover NH. Ephraim Eastman moved to [Andover NH around 1790](#) and settled on the Beech Hill section.

Children of Ephraim & Lydia (Robie) Eastman:

1. Mary Eastman, b May 1801, d. Aug 1816
2. Versal Ransom Eastman, b. 13 Dec 1803; d. 26 Nov 1869; m. Salome B. Eastman
3. +Royal Friend Eastman, b. 30 March 1805 NH
4. Hiram Eastman, b 7 Nov 1806; m. Ann Salome Calef
5. Butler Eastman, b July 1809, d. 28 March 1809
6. John Langdon Eastman, b 1 April 1810, d. 27 May 1887; m. Mary C. Morey
7. Ephraim Eastman, b. abt 1815; d. 6 May 1863, m. Mary Frost
8. Lydia Eastman, b. 15 Feb 1814; m. Asa N. Eifield

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Royal Friend Eastman, son of Ephraim & Lydia (Robie) Eastman, b 30 March 1805 NH, [d 9 April 1868 in Andover NH](#); m1) [28 Nov 1833 in NH](#) to Sophronia Mayo. She b 1 January 1814 in Andover NH [or Brewster MA] and d. 22 Aug 1840. He m2nd) [28 Dec 1843 in Salisbury NH](#) to Nancy A. Langley, daughter of [Isaiah & Sarah \(Freese\) Langley](#) of Deerfield NH. She b 1 January 1815 in Andover NH, and [d. 4 March 1896 in Wilmot NH](#), age 82. [They are all buried at Proctor Cemetery in Andover NH](#). He [was a captain in the 2nd Company, NH Light Infantry](#), organized in 1827 and disbanded in 1845.

1850 US Census > NH > Merrimack > Andover

Royal F. Eastman 44

Nancy Eastman 34

Helen M. Eastman 16

John R. Eastman 14

Ephraim Eastman 82

1860 US Census > NH > Merrimack > Andover

Royal F. Eastman M 54 NH

Nancy Eastman F 42 NH

Hellen Eastman F 26 NH

John R. Eastman M 24 NH

Edwin Eastman M 17 NH [not a child of Royal]

Children of Royal F. & Sophronia (Mayo) Eastman:

1. Helen Marr "Hellen" Eastman, b. 11 May 1834 Andover NH. In 1870 living in Hopkinton NH, a school teacher. She died Dec. 17, 1928 in Boscawen NH and [is buried in Proctor Cemetery in Andover NH](#).
2. +John Robie Eastman, b. 29 July 1836 in Andover NH, died 26 September 1913 in Franklin NH.

John Robie Eastman, son of Royal F. & Sophronia (Mayo) Eastman, b. 29 July 1836 in Andover, Merrimack Co. NH and d. 26 Sep 1913 in Franklin, Merrimack Co. NH at a private hospital. He [married 26 Dec 1866](#) to Mary Jane Ambrose, daughter of Samuel A. & Dorothy (Atkinson) Ambrose. She was [b. 6 March 1840 in Boscawen NH](#), and died three months after her husband, on 5 February 1914 in Worcester MA. [They are buried in Andover, NH](#). [*Subject of this story, see more biography above*].

1900 US Census > NH > Merrimack > Andover

Brown, Mary A. Head W F Aug 1833 66 single NH NH NH

—
Eastman, John R. Boarder W M July 1836 63 married 33 yrs NH NH NH

Eastman, Mary J. Boarder W F March 1840 60 married 33 yrs 0 ch 0 living NH NH NH

[Salt Lake Herald 1913-09-27](#)

NOTED ASTRONOMER DIED

Franklin N.H. Sept 26 — Prof. John Robie Eastman, a well known astronomer, died here today aged 77.

Saturday September 27, 1913, Cleveland Leader (Cleveland OH), page 11

EASTMAN—PROF. JOHN ROBIE astronomer, died at Franklin, N.H. yesterday from a general breakdown. For many years Prof. Eastman ranked as a rear admiral on the staff of the Naval observatory at Washington. He was

seventy-seven

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Franklin, N.H., Sept. 28. — Professor John Robie Eastman, a well known astronomer, died here today, aged 77 years. For many years Prof. Eastman was on the staff of the naval observatory at Washington.

Friday, February 6, 1914, Boston Herald (Boston MA) Page 3

Obituary: Mrs. Mary J. Eastman [Special Dispatch to the Herald.]

WORCESTER, Feb 5—Mrs. Mary J. Eastman, widow of Rear Admiral John Robie Eastman, U.S.N., retired, died today at the home of her sister, Mrs. Frank R. Hayden, at 131 Pleasant Street. She had been in poor health since the death of her husband at Franklin N.H. on September 26, last year. Mrs. Eastman was born in Boscowen, N.H. on March 6, 1840. She was the daughter of Samuel A. Ambrose. Her husband was for 30 years chief of staff at the naval observatory in Washington, and was retired in 1893. During her long residence at the capital, Mrs. Eastman was prominent socially, and was one of the leaders of the Twentieth Century Club of that city. A brother, Carl W. Ambrose of Natick, survives her.

No children.

[end]

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