How Eric Sloane Retold American History

Brandon Lisi

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How Eric Sloane Retold American History

Brandon Lisi

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
Department of History and Non-Western Cultures
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A copy of the thesis was submitted to the Graduate Office as evidence that the thesis requirements has been met. The copy was forwarded to the University Library for archiving.

For the Graduate Office Date 06-11-2008
Dedicated to the memory of Eric Sloane
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have existed without Barbara Russ of the Eric Sloane Museum. I worked for her as a seasonal employee between June and November of 2019, while the museum was closed for renovation. I arrived on the first day without knowing who Eric Sloane was, or the importance he would eventually have in my life. Barbara was an excellent teacher because of her genuine passion for Sloane and his story. She showed me his books, thirty or more, all written and illustrated by one man. In the archives, I had the privilege to read Sloane’s letters and sort through a treasure trove of newspaper clippings documenting his life. Barbara spent a career discovering details that I could have never found on my own.

When I told her of my intention to write this thesis, she was immensely supportive at every step: I borrowed her books and scanned hundreds of archival documents. I can never thank her enough for the assistance she provided. The best I did in return was remove unwelcome snakes that found their way into the museum.

To the Friends of Eric Sloane, including President James Mauch, I extend to you my greatest thanks for carrying on Sloane’s fascinating legacy. To Scott Sheldon, I thank you for your enthusiasm. The work you've done for the museum is nothing short of inspiring. To Joni Park, thank you for your timely donation of documents. They were put to good use in this thesis. To Robert Burton and James Daly of the Connecticut Antique Machinery Museum, thank you for being amazing neighbors. Your museum has a remarkable story to tell, and I can’t wait for the next festival. Jim, thank you for always stopping in to say hello throughout the season. I’m embarrassed to say that I still haven’t read Alfred Lansing’s Endurance, but now that my thesis is finished, I’m sure that I will, at last, have time.
To those that worked on the museum during the renovation: Troy, Kevin, Zack, Eric, Tiffany, Willy, and Dwight, thank you for your hard work and for keeping me company during the coldest months of my research.

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Last but not least, I must thank the entire Department of History at Western Connecticut State University: to all the faculty members and my fellow students, thank you for making the last two years such an enjoyable educational experience. Most importantly, I have to thank my thesis advisors, Dr. Leslie Lindenauer and Dr. Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox. I could not ask for better mentors. Both challenged me to produce great writing, and I am grateful for all the time they spent refining this project. Learning from them is a tremendous honor.
ABSTRACT

HOW ERIC SLOANE RETOLD AMERICAN HISTORY

This thesis seeks to prove the significance of Eric Sloane during the Cold War reconstruction of America’s historical memory. Sloane’s quest for identity parallels that of his country: grappling with the past to form narratives. He was almost universally praised, frustrating some academics. Therefore, this thesis also analyzes the split between professional and popular history through the lens of Sloane’s extensive work. It reveals his shortcomings but also the continued usefulness of his contributions. It explains how a storyteller without professional training retold American history, leaving behind enduring narratives that last to this day.
## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ................................................................. xi

CREATING IDENTITY ........................................................................ 1

THE STORYTELLER ........................................................................ 19

CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF ERIC SLOANE ................................. 24

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................... 26
INTRODUCTION

Eric Sloane defies definition. He was a renowned artist, a television meteorologist (in 1939), a prolific collector of Americana, and an author of thirty-four books. In the 1983 summer edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Frederic A. Birmingham wrote: “If we take Henry Thoreau, Winslow Homer, Robert Frost and Huck Finn and stir well, we may not have exactly Eric, because he is unique, but we’ll have something of an idea.” Many have compared Sloane to nineteenth-century figures. It is as though he leapt from a romantic past into a mid-twentieth-century world confronting memory.

The heritage movement was America’s quest for identity. The country was not so young anymore, leading many to worry that the past might be forgotten. These anxieties were exacerbated by the Cold War and the global threat of communism.

Meanwhile, Eric Sloane was on his own quest for identity and never settled down. The trajectory of Sloane’s life and that of his country’s memory intersected at a crucial moment. Sloane was both influenced by the heritage movement and influenced it himself by actively participating in a selective memory reconstruction of American history. Sloane’s direct contribution was to embed his ideas into the physical remnants made by the subjects he was writing about. Because he shied away from the abstract and relied upon the material traces of early Americans, Sloane successfully instilled his ideas into the national consciousness. This thesis seeks to prove the significant extent of that influence.

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1 James William Mauch, *Aware: A Retrospective of the Life and Work of Eric Sloane* (Laurys Station, PA: Garrigues House, 2000) 73. This specific detail was mentioned in Eric Sloane’s *Eighty: An American Souvenir* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985), No pagination. The exact year of Sloane’s work as a weatherman is disputed and is discussed in part one of this thesis.

In addition to proving Sloane’s connection to the broader historical revisionism of the 1950s and 60s, this thesis will secondarily analyze the divide between popular histories like the ones Sloane produced, and academic histories that are not written for general consumption.

The scope of this thesis, therefore, goes beyond the life and legacy of Eric Sloane. It analyzes a crucial time when the collective understanding of American history changed dramatically. It reveals the power that public historians and museums can have on national conceptions of heritage and identity. Sloane’s work is thereby the lens through which this topic will be examined. It also considers the risks associated with popular histories of this kind, but also their immense power. Sloane brought early 19th-century America to life with his breathtaking artwork and illustrations, accompanied by the words of a true romantic. He approached history like a showman, capable of enchanting prose and dazzling drawings. However, he also tended to stretch the truth and crossed a line into irresponsibility, as this thesis will prove. Ultimately, this work is not a rejection of Sloane, but a case for his importance despite his errors. Readers will emerge with a greater understanding of how historical narratives are formed and equip them with a critical lens to read Sloane.

The historiographical framework for this thesis is based upon Michael Kammen’s *Mystic Chords of Memory*. The book’s final section considers the events between 1945 and 1990 when American myth and heritage radically changed in the aftermath of World War II. Kammen’s notes directed much of the research, and his conception of history and memory are integral themes in this thesis.

Other influences include Hayden White’s article on historical interpretation. Specifically, the idea that a historical narrative necessarily contains “a mixture of adequately and inadequately

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explained events.”\footnote{Hayden White, “Interpretation in History,” New Literary History 4, no. 2 (1973), 281.} Such ideas arouse questions of authenticity, especially when one considers how most narratives were formed in the past. Nevertheless, those same chronicles of old are rich with detail and context, bringing the past to life in ways that Sloane would repeat centuries later. The power of narrative is what makes history a part of pop culture.

The phenomenon of marketing the past, however, would emerge from mid-twentieth century commercialism intersecting with the heritage movement. And Sloane was in the thick of it. Roy Rosenzweig’s article on this very subject in Presenting the Past is, therefore, another building block upon which this thesis is built.\footnote{Roy Rosenzweig “Marketing the Past: American Heritage and Popular History in the United States, 1954-1984,” in Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenweig (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986).}

The foremost historian on Eric Sloane is undoubtedly Dr. James Mauch, author of Aware: A Retrospective of the Life and Work of Eric Sloane. It is a comprehensive biography and celebration of Sloane’s philosophy of awareness. Dr. Mauch’s endnotes were a treasure map through Sloane’s extensive bibliography.

To that end, a complete list of Sloane’s books and publications was recorded by Dean L. Mawdsley in 1990, with a supplemental edition released in 2003.\footnote{Dean L. Mawdsley, The America of Eric Sloane: A Collector's Bibliography (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1990).}

In 2009, Sloane’s widow Mimi co-authored Eric Sloane’s America: Paintings in Oil with Michael Wigley, a book that studies Sloane’s visual language and provided additional biographical information for this thesis.\footnote{Michael Wigley and Mimi Sloane, Eric Sloane’s America: Paintings in Oil (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009).}

Another invaluable source of evidence is Everard, written by Sloane’s sister, Dorothy Hinrichs, in 1998. This handwritten scrapbook is a stream of consciousness memoir that
contains typos and lacks organization and page numbers. However, she shares many stories from their childhood and offers significant insight into her brother’s life story.\(^8\)

Most of the remaining primary sources used in this thesis were found in the Eric Sloane Museum Archives. Within, there are some 317 newspaper and magazine articles written by or about Eric Sloane between 1945 and 2018. Six other letters of interest were also selected for inclusion in this project. Many of them have never been read or analyzed outside a small circle of people.

The archive also houses many copies of Sloane’s books, including reprints and republications. These subsequent editions reveal a man who was never quite satisfied with what he had done before. His search for new challenges never ended.

Also examined were 89 individual letters sent by Sloane’s contemporaries in 1986 to the White House Director of Communications, recommending that Sloane be posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. U.S. Representative Nancy Johnson of Connecticut led the initiative. These letters are further supported with video interviews of Sloane’s contemporaries conducted by Barbara Russ. The interviews offer the perspective of Everett Raymond Kinstler (one of Sloane’s lifelong friends),\(^9\) Forrest Fenn (who featured hundreds of Sloane paintings in his gallery),\(^10\) Dolph Traymon (the owner of the Fife n’ Drum, Sloane’s favorite local restaurant),\(^11\) Don Davis (former CEO of Stanley Tools, who donated the property for the

\(^{8}\) Dorothy says she presented the scrapbook as an idea for her brother. He had no interest in it at all, but told her that she should write it. After Sloane died, she did. Dororthy Hinrichs, interview by Howard Miller, November 7-8, 1985, transcript, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut, pp. 26.


museum), Ruth Hinrichs (Sloane’s fifth wife), Dorothy Hinrichs (Sloane’s sister), Roger Gonzales (a Kent shop owner who sold picture frames to Sloane), Abe Nicholas (Sloane’s neighbor and a country store owner in Warren, Connecticut), Haig Tashjian (owner of Sterling Portfolio), and John Reid (a friend who was with Sloane the day he died).

One of the few interviews of Sloane himself comes in the form of a video documentary. It was produced by Ken Meyer Productions in 1982 and is frequently played at the Sloane museum. The film explores Sloane’s ideas about American life at the start of the 19th century, and gives an overview of his career.

The purpose of this thesis is not to write a biography (or hagiography) of Sloane. However, the text reveals much about Sloane’s life and career development.

Part One: Creating Identity is the longest and most substantive portion of the thesis. It tells two stories: how Sloane discovered his life’s purpose and how American history was in a period of reforging its mythos. The section weaves its way through Sloane’s life and the critical moments of the heritage movement. It compares and contrasts the search for identity among Americans with Sloane’s own desire to find himself. This section discusses his change in career and interests over time and his slow acquisition of the Eric Sloane Museum collection. It

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14 Dorothy Hinrichs, interview by Howard Miller, November 7-8, 1985, transcript, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut.
15 *Eric Sloane: My Neighbor and My Friend*, M.H. Bird Productions, 2015. Sloane’s habit of painting on masonite required specialty frames that were designed by Mr. Gonzales.
illustrates just how close Sloane was to positions of significant influence and how his ideas became embedded as principles of the heritage movement.

Part Two: The Storyteller reflects upon Sloane’s disputes with academics and other experts. This section considers details that were learned after Sloane’s death and focuses upon the interplay between historical scholarship and popular history.

The thesis concludes with a brief section entitled: the Legacy of Eric Sloane. Above all, it makes the case for Sloane’s relevance today. Not only is his work deeply inspiring, but many of his books and paintings provide substantial insight into the world of the past. Having been closed for over a year, Sloane’s museum is currently undergoing extensive renovations, including a complete rebuild of the Noah Blake Cabin. Many of those who knew Sloane have retired or passed away. It is up to a new generation of historians to preserve his legacy and continue to support the work of the Eric Sloane Museum. This section will show how questions of memory do not end. This is especially pertinent when one considers how new audiences can be built. Sloane is a great contributor to the study of early Americana, but he is not without his flaws. It is vital to present Sloane as an important thinker, but also show the public that the conception of history adapts over time.

In its totality, what follows is the story of how Eric Sloane retold American history.
CREATING IDENTITY

America has a unique history. Unlike many countries whose historical narratives extend back into medieval or even ancient times, America’s founding mythos takes place in relative modernity. In the aftermath of World War II, this young nation was thrust onto the world stage as one of two dominant superpowers. Simultaneously, America’s memory of its past was fading with time. Politicians, intellectuals, and other leaders all across the country voiced their concern over the potential loss of their collective heritage. America was and still is a diverse nation of immigrants. Yet the country’s leaders in the mid-twentieth-century felt compelled to unify national heritage into a single monomyth. In the fifteen years after World War II, cynicism and critique of America’s heritage and traditions amounted to blasphemy.\(^\text{19}\)

This phenomenon can only be understood through the Cold War. The state was attempting to use historical narratives as a means to unify its citizens around traditional values. In the words of Michael Kammen, “Traditions are commonly relied upon by those who possess the power to achieve an illusion of social consensus. Such people invoke the legitimacy of an artificially constructed past in order to buttress presentist assumptions and the authority of a regime.”\(^\text{20}\) In 1956, for instance, the United States dropped its original motto, “E Pluribus Unum” in exchange for “In God We Trust.” According to Scott Merriman, this was “in large part to differentiate itself from the Soviet Union, its Cold War enemy that was widely seen as promoting atheism.”\(^\text{21}\) Indeed, every opportunity to remind Americans of their past was utilized. The movement also developed in response to the commercialization of society, as many believed in a


growing “social amnesia.” According to Kenneth Chorley, president of Colonial Williamsburg:
“The most striking feature of America today is change. In a highly mobile, rapidly shifting society, we are in danger of losing our perspective, and of losing a refreshing contact with the well-springs of American tradition.”

For Eric Sloane, the question of heritage was a guiding force behind his work. Roger Gonzales, who worked with Sloane and framed many of his paintings, recalls: “He thought that we were losing a lot of our heritage, and I think this was his way of keeping it in the forefront of people’s minds.” The direction of modern life clearly disturbed Sloane, and he constantly critiqued it in almost all of his writings. In *American Yesterday*, Sloane wrote: “Without realizing it, the laws and regulations of city and industrial living have stripped us of the habit of taking responsibility for our own moral judgments.” Sloane was not alone in his sentiment; these criticisms were also shared by his contemporaries. Jonathan Alexander, M.D., Director of Nuclear Cardiology & Cardiac Rehabilitation at Danbury Hospital, described his feelings in a 1986 letter to White House Communications Director Pat Buchanan:

[Sloane] intuitively knew how easy it is for those of us living in the ‘modern age’ to forget the simpler times. He felt it was easy to be impressed by complex, new-fangled inventions that made us ever more removed from the basic elements of nature and man’s hard work. He was aware of our propensity, in a rapidly changing world, to discard the old in favor of the newest.

The eventual demise of an authentic American memory pervaded the thoughts of many. As a result, it invigorated a national interest in the country’s heritage, character, and identity. When

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26 Correspondence from Jonathan Alexander to Patrick Buchanan, July 2, 1986, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut. This is one of many letters written to Mr. Buchanan in 1986, recommending that Sloane be posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
Sloane began contributing to this movement, he himself was at the end of a long journey. He remade himself, just as his country was doing.

Eric Sloane was born Everard Jean Hinrichs on February 27, 1905, the son of German and Irish parents living in New York City. His father George began his entrepreneurial career at 14, selling poultry on Washington Street. By 1898, he was “well established in the poultry and egg business.” Everard’s upbringing was one of privilege, and the boy spent his summers in the idyllic landscape of Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey, where the family owned a large house on a secluded island in the middle of the lake. His sister Dorothy recalls of the young Everard: “his pencil was always busy on any available (even if inappropriate) scrap of paper.” He took to drawing and, it seems, Everard was a romantic even at a young age. Dorothy recounts that in 1919, “some early type of airplane, a rare sight then, slowly flew, perilously close to the water, down the river past where we sat - and Everard, in great excitement, raced along the water's edge as if in pursuit.” That a machine of human ingenuity could seemingly transcend the laws of gravity and soar through the sky like a bird might seem mundane to the modern reader. But to a boy of 14 in the early 20th century, it is moments like these that have the power to change someone forever. It must have been an awe-inspiring experience, for Everard would retain his love of aircraft and the skies for the rest of his life.

Yet Everard was far from an ideal youth. “Our father, who at such an early age had begun to earn his living, seemed constantly angry at Everard, calling him an ‘idler’ and a ‘loafer.’”

This was especially true in comparison to his older brother, George Jr. A high school track star,

27 Dorothy Hinrichs, Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).
28 Dorothy Hinrichs, Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).
29 Dorothy Hinrichs, Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).
30 Dorothy Hinrichs, Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).
graduate from the Agricultural College at the University of Toronto, and devoutly religious, George carried a notebook with him everywhere and logged all of his expenses, “from a ten-cent shoeshine to a candybar.” Much to George and the family’s chagrin, Everard was quite the opposite. Mischievous to a fault, Dorothy describes Everard as “generous, not only with his own possessions, but with those of others. He ‘borrowed’ George’s motorcycle and gave it away. Dad’s fine hemstitched linen handkerchiefs became his paint rags; mother’s silver saltshakers were used in gunpowder experiments.” When confronted by his brother over these lost items, Dorothy reports that there were many wrestling matches between the brothers. “While George, grim and red-faced, ground his teeth in fury, Everard laughed and mocked his brother’s seriousness as they fought.” Fed up with his son’s misconduct, George Sr. sent Everard to a military academy in Bordentown, New Jersey, at the age of 14 or 15. This did not have the desired effect. Everard found new ways to get into trouble and was often punished by the school officials. It is not known how long Everard spent at the academy, only that sometime after being sent, his mother brought him back, much to his father’s displeasure.

But young Everard found inspiration from the world around him in the form of famed artist and type designer Fred Goudy, his neighbor in Forest Hills on Long Island. As Sloane recalls in *Return to Taos*:

> As a small boy it was a rare thrill for me to visit on Deepdene Lane and watch letters take shape in the Goudy Studio. The performance created for me a reverence for fine lettering that will last all my life. In a rare moment of leisure, Mr. Goudy told me how some of America’s first painters began by making

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33 Dorothy Hinrichs, *Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister* (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998). Despite the squabbles from their youth, Dorothy notes that they were not just brothers, but close friends even late in life. One family photo from the 1960s stands out in particular: posing for a picture together, Everard looks at his brother with a wry grin, holding a flower pot atop his brother’s head.
outdoor signs. He showed me how, as in handwriting, the soul of the maker is put into lettering. He taught me the subtleties of traditional letter design and the beauty of free-hand show-card script.\(^{34}\)

Following in the footsteps of his mentor, Everard would go on to attend the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts, commuting into the city from the family’s new home in Forest Hills Gardens on Long Island. There, he became infamous for unreliability, often losing interest in creative projects, even after he had been paid for them. His sister observed that “he somehow retained the admiration, mixed with exasperation, of most of those who knew him, for with a wide-eyed ‘who, me?’ expression, he could conquer most animosity.”\(^{35}\) While at art school, he designed and sold advertising show-cards and personalized Christmas cards. They were printed on parchment paper, featuring the customer’s name and a Christmas message written in gothic lettering. Dorothy has since mused, “I can only hope that they were delivered on time!”\(^{36}\)

There is some disagreement over the next step in Sloane’s education. No longer attending the New York School of Fine and Applied Art, he is said to have attended the Yale School of Art and also took informal classes at the Arts Students League.\(^{37}\) John Reid (most likely in error) claimed that Sloane attended the Science Students League as well.\(^{38}\)

In any case, Everard dropped out of art school in 1925 and headed west. He lacked a driver’s license and a clear destination. Sloane would recall some years later, “I have always believed that a chicken doesn’t cross the road to get to the other side, but just for the sake of

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\(^{37}\) Dorothy Hinrichs, interview by Howard Miller, November 7-8, 1985, transcript, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut, pp. 40.

adventure." In the spirit of that statement, he drove across America in the family’s rickety Model T Ford featuring a phony license plate made from a cardboard shoebox. All he left behind was a message for his father: “Borrowed the T. Will be careful. Don’t worry.” Along the way, Everard made his living as a sign painter. “I had done a sign or two for local merchants and they had paid me my first earned money. I would show my father, I thought, that I could earn my own way in the world.”

Often, Everard was not paid in cash for his sign painting work. His first sign-painting job was for a General Store in Flemington, New Jersey, and he received as payment “a tankful of gasoline and a yard-long bologna.” But when offered a supply of home-made bottled goods from his second customer, Everard “settled for ten dollars instead.” In a time before interstate highways, Sloane made his way from one end of the country to the other. It is no surprise then that he believed “few creations of man are as romantic as the road.” Those roads would take him all the way to Taos, New Mexico. In 1982, Sloane described his vivid memory of that place:

It’s an elevation of about 10,000 ft in the mountains. And I saw a rainbow and three complete storms at the same time. They were separate storms. And you don’t see that sort of thing in the east. And I was so impressed with it I decided to leave sign painting and try to tell the story of the sky in oil paints.

Sloane had discovered one of the passions that would define his life. During this time, Sloane was estranged from his family and was something of a black sheep. Dorothy did not hear from

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45 *Profiles in American Art*: Erirc Sloane, (Ken Meyer Productions, 1982).
her brother for many months. His first communication to her after all that time stands out in her memory:

Many years later he told me of jobs on Midwestern farms where machinery was pulled by 25 or 30 horses, of painting signs and advertisements for restaurants and stores, of sleeping rolled up in a blanket out on the prairie, of hearing coyotes and wolves howling on moonlit nights. For a couple of years we heard only sporadically from him, but one communication stands out in my memory. He sent home a newspaper clipping from New Orleans, telling of his appearance in that city as a wanderer, who had just been awakened from amnesia and discovered a pronounced artistic talent, being currently known as ‘the Mystery Man of the Latin Quarter.’ This ploy, I’m sure, was an inspired means of gaining attention and publicity!46

Sloane didn’t just find a new passion for painting the sky. He also changed his name.

He had been mocked his whole life for the name ‘Everard Hinrichs.’ Everett Kintsler, a friend of Sloane’s, was one such person who engaged in that kind of teasing.47 Such name-calling extended back to Sloane’s childhood, especially in the context of anti-German sentiment during the First World War. Dorothy described the proper pronunciation of the family’s name and how it was often misused:

Most people call it Hind-rick but it's really Hinrichs, this is one of the reasons Eric changed his name, because he hated the name Hind-Rick, which everybody called him. And apparently when he was a small boy in school, they teased him and it was during the first war, you know. And they probably called him a Hiney-and the Kaiser, and so on, and he told a cousin of mine, I have a letter describing it, that when he was about sixteen, he was going to change his name as soon as he could. So he did.48

Yet the idea for the name change may have come about while Sloane was still in art school.

Apparently, the young artist developed a close relationship with John French Sloan, the famous artist of the ashcan school. According to James Mauch:

46 Dorothy Hinrichs, Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).
48 Dorothy Hinrichs, interview by Howard Miller, November 7-8, 1985, transcript, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut, pp. 1.
The idea of a change in name grew from a conversation between [John] Sloan and fellow painter George Luks that Everard overheard. In it, the two men discussed the merits of working under an assumed name in order to experiment artistically without fear of early works coming back to “haunt” the artist. Sloane himself stated that he took Sloan’s last name, adding the letter “e” to the end so as not to claim a non-existent relationship. “Eric” was likely a simple corruption of “Everard,” yet Sloane would assert in later years that the name came from the middle of the word “America.”

Eric Sloane was an amalgamation of all that Everard Hinrichs hoped to be. He was actively remaking himself. He found a newfound avenue to express his love of the clouds while working at the Half-Moon Hotel on Coney Island. He paid his rent by “doing any and all art work that was needed - all sorts of signs, menu design, decorative murals, et cetera.”

At the nearby Floyd Bennett Field, Sloane “met many of the early transatlantic pilots and lettered their planes.” Some have even claimed that Sloane sold his first cloud painting to Amelia Earhart herself. Yet this did not satisfy Sloane, who was looking to take his cloud paintings to the next level: “I thought I should learn about the sky. I should learn meteorology and what makes the clouds and what makes the sky. So I decided to come home and go to MIT and learn meteorology.” It is worth noting that Sloane’s New York Times obituary made no mention of Sloane attending MIT. Dr. James Mauch commented on this in Aware, stating that although the school “has no record of Sloane’s attendance, he likely attended the university around 1938. Note that his professor, Sverre Petterssen, wrote a foreword to Sloane’s Clouds, Air

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50 Dorothy Hinrichs, Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).


Whatever his actual professional training, in 1939, Sloane was apparently hired as a television weatherman for the DuMont station in New York. Many sources seem to disagree on this. Haig Tashjian claims that Sloane began his career as a weatherman on WOR radio in 1927. Contrary to statement’s Sloane made in his own life, Michael Wigley says that Sloane’s brief work as a television weatherman occurred in 1946. The extent of Sloane’s training and involvement in meteorology remains a mystery to this day.

What can be confirmed definitively is that Sloane’s knowledge of aviation and the weather proved useful with the onset of World War II. He illustrated an instruction manual for the air force entitled *Your Body in Flight, An Illustrated Book of Knowledge for the Flyer*. As a classified document, it was made available only to all flying personnel of the Army Air Forces. One such person to benefit from this material was Donald M. Kendall, who would go on to become the CEO of Pepsi: “I first became aware of Eric Sloane’s patriotism during World War II. I was a Navy pilot in the Pacific, and thanks to Eric Sloane’s book on weather and clouds a lot of Navy pilots avoided storm clouds which at times were as dangerous as the enemy.”

Sloane’s next book was also created in the interest of American national security. *Camouflage Simplified* served as a guide on the art of camouflaging ground objects from air raids. Simultaneously, he created three-dimensional weather and aviation displays for the

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56 Haig Tashjian and Chris Tashjian, interview by Barabara Russ and David White, November 19, 1998, transcript. Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut. Mr. Tashjian was likely mistaken on the year. In 1927, Sloane would not have had the professional training or qualifications.
58 Correspondence from Donald M. Kendell to Patrick Buchanan, January 17, 1986, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut.
Museum of Natural History and would go on to establish the Hall of Weather.\textsuperscript{59} Two more books followed, \textit{Skies and the Artist: How to Draw Clouds and Sunsets} and \textit{Eric Sloane's Weather Book}.

Up to this point, Sloane’s entire career was defined by his art and his expertise on the skies. He discovered an entirely new passion in 1953 when he moved to the Connecticut countryside along Candlewood Lake. According to Dorothy, “It was here, surrounded by old barns, early farmhouses, rugged stone walls, and the ambience of the New England countryside, that he seemed to have found his métier.”\textsuperscript{60} However, Sloane claims that his interest in the early American extended all the way back to his MIT days. In fact, he was led onto the path of history after a sarcastic comment from one of his professors:

When I got to MIT I found that meteorology was entirely without romance, was all mathematics. And I complained to my professors who facetiously said ‘You won’t find any romance here. If you want romance in weather go back to the early American almanacs and weather diaries.’ So I took them seriously. I left and began to collect the diaries of the early American farmers and found them more exciting than my quest of weather. So for a while, a long while, 50 years, I’ve been doing the story of the early American, instead of what I started out doing: the story of weather.\textsuperscript{61}

It is here that Sloane’s life intersected with his country’s intellectual history. Sloane had already done work for the United States government and now found himself at the center of the heritage movement. All around him, “journals of opinion were inundated with essays concerning democracy and national character; and numerous books stressing the latter, especially, also appeared.”\textsuperscript{62} In 1954, as if perfectly in time with Sloane’s development, \textit{American Heritage: The Magazine of History} changed owners and made drastic style changes. “Its new management

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[60] Dorothy Hinrichs, \textit{Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister} (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).
\item[61] Profiles in American Art: Eric Sloane, (Ken Meyer Productions, 1982).
\end{footnotesize}
promised potential subscribers ‘a good deal of nostalgia,’ thereby revealing their shrewd sense of
the contemporary mood.” Sloane would write a total of six articles in the magazine between
1955 and 1972. A sampling of the headlines demonstrates Sloane’s newfound obsession with the
early American: “Mills of Early America;” “Sketches from the Vanished Landscape;” “Lore of
the Woodworker;” and “Early American Implements: Why Are They.” Thomas W. Sefton,
President of San Diego Trust & Savings Bank, would go on to describe these works as keeping
“alive those traditional values which brought about the greatness of the nation.”

It is important to note, however, that American Heritage was not an ordinary publication.
Oliver Jensen, co-founder of the magazine, once said, “We are the nation’s memory.”
Referring to a full-page advertisement in the October 17, 1954, New York Times Book Review,
Roy Rosenweig notes that:

"American Heritage would be - above all - entertaining to read. It would ‘bring to
life again the vivid, exciting story of our country’s past’ - an “endlessly
fascinating” and “vast and vivid” story that “is as exciting, as flamboyant, as
filled with actions and thought and daring (and true purpose) as any citizen ever
had.” And the list of ‘What You Will Find In American Heritage’ brought home
the message that the magazine would be fun. Although the advertisement
promised the reader ‘important things to think about,’ it gave much more space to
previewing “fascinating things to look at,” “tales of adventure,” “things to smile
at,” and “a good deal of nostalgia.” The advertisement gave equal weight to the
new magazine’s packaging: its beautiful hard-cover binding, lack of advertising,
“heavy, glossy paper,” and profuse illustrations, “many in glorious color.”

64 Dean L. Mawdsley, The America of Eric Sloane: A Collector's Bibliography (Hartford, CT: Connecticut
65 Correspondence from Thomas W. Sefton to Patrick J. Buchanan, April 7, 1986, Eric Sloane Museum Archives,
Kent, Connecticut.
in Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy
in Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy
The magazine had found a successful way to market the past. Subscriptions surged to 309,000 in 1960, peaking at 336,000 in 1968. “Because a lavishly illustrated hard-cover magazine of history had never before been published in the United States, it enjoyed an element of novelty and became (in the words of one editor) ‘an ideal coffee table item.’”

Sloane was well-liked among the magazine’s staff. His editor, Bruce Catton, would write a glowing foreword to Sloane’s book *Return to Taos*, published in 1960. At that time, Catton was the country’s most famous Civil War historian and was the featured speaker at *Democracy in Action* in 1957. Michael Kammen describes the event’s “anti-Communist tone marked it very clearly as a liberal phenomenon especially responsive to the Cold War mood of the mid- and later 1950s.”

Little did Sloane know that he was about to play a significant role in the propaganda war with the Soviet Union. In 1974, Pepsi Cola was allowed into the Soviet Union for the first time. This influx of Americanism included art: specifically, Sloane’s paintings, to be displayed at the U.S.S.R. Academy of the Arts in Moscow. Though reluctant, he yielded to Donald Kendall, the CEO of Pepsi and fan of Sloane’s early works. Apparently, on the flight over to Russia, each painting had its own seat on the plane. Eric Sloane was now as American as Pepsi. Kendall recalls that “Soviet citizens lined up for three and four blocks every day to see his paintings because, for the first time, they saw a country they could relate to.” Sloane says the “Russians were surprised to know that the Americans had farms.”

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71 Dorothy Hinrichs, interview by Howard Miller, November 7-8, 1985, transcript, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut, pp. 41.
73 Correspondence from Donald M. Kendall to Patrick Buchanan, January 17, 1986, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut.
the exhibit. But it was not just the Russian people who were dazzled. Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev himself “purchased two paintings for his home.” Shortly after the exposition, Brezhnev penned a letter to Sloane on June 26, 1974:

Dear Mr. Sloane,

I was very glad to receive as a gift your painting of sickles which symbolize the peaceful labor of the people.

I fully share your opinion on the great importance which the ideological content of a painting has in the real art. That’s why the art which reflects mutual expectations of the peoples, their aspirations of peace and peaceful labor, for friendship and cooperation deserves the greatest recognition and respect.

I was glad to learn that the exhibit of your paintings in Moscow was highly appreciated by art lovers of our country.

Wishing you further success,

L. Brezhnev. 76

As a result of the international trip, his constant output of paintings, and prolific writing habits, Sloane became a national sensation. According to many of his friends, Sloane rubbed shoulders with the rich and famous. One of Sloane’s closest friends was Everett Raymond Kinstler, an artist of over 2,500 portraits, whose lengthy list of subjects includes every American President from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush (including the official White House portraits of Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan), three first ladies, Alan Shepard, John Wayne, Christopher Plummer, Peter O’Toole, Gregory Peck, Clint Eastwood, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Tennessee Williams, and Dr. Seuss. Most notably, Kinstler painted Katharine Hepburn’s favorite portrait of herself. 77 According to Kinstler:

[Sloane] knew a lot of people like the Rockefellers, and he’d invite them over, and basically said ‘look, we need a fire house, we need a fire engine, we need a hook and ladder company, we need funds for a school.’ And they would purchase

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his paintings, and he’d get other people like myself to give something, and they’d auction off and the money would go to his causes.  

Kintsler also says that Sloane was a close friend of Daniel Terra, a renowned chemical engineer who became President Reagan’s Ambassador at Large for Cultural Affairs from 1981 to 1989. Terra purchased a large number of Sloane’s paintings for his museum collection in Chicago.

Dolph Tramom, owner of Kent’s Fife n’ Drum restaurant, claims to have seen Sloane out to dinner on separate occasions with the likes of Vladimir Horowitz, Paul Newman, and Meryl Streep. While living on Aspetuck Road in New Milford, Connecticut, Ruth Hinrichs recalls that Sloane became friends with Ed Anthony, one of Herbert Hoover’s campaign managers.

In 1968, Sloane was inducted into the National Academy of Design, and also became President of the Dutch Treat Club. The society had at one time featured John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Truman Capote, Leon Uris among their members. By the end of his life, “Sloane’s paintings were permanently collected in more than fifty museums worldwide.”

Not surprisingly, Sloane’s next major project would put him, once again, in a position to represent America. In 1976, he was commissioned by the National Air and Space Museum to paint a seven-story mural. It took a luncheon with lunar astronaut Michael Collins to convince him to accept the commission. After all, Sloane was afraid of heights. He would later recall,

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“How do you complain about seven-story heights to a man who has been to the moon twice?”

In the end, the painting titled “Earth Flight Environment,” would stretch 75 feet across and 58 feet, 6 inches high. The museum’s website describes the L-shaped mural in beautifully romantic terms:

[The painting] depicts a panoramic view of a western landscape with a lone airplane on the right, lightning, rain, rainbow and cloud formations rise toward a rocket airplane; at the top of the vertical section is the aurora borealis and the stars of space; the border at the bottom is decorated with a variety of weather map symbols.

Tom Crouch, Senior Curator at the National Air and Space Museum, has said of the mural: “its dedicated to the spacious skies of the United States that we talk about, and no one painted them as well as Eric Sloane did.”

All the while, Sloane was fulfilling his passion by collecting tools and implements from around the country. According to Roger Gonzales, “he was trading paintings with antique dealers for tools and weathervanes.” Pretty soon, Sloane’s Warren home became what his sister Dorothy described as “a veritable museum of early artifacts.”

Eventually, Sloane was approached by one of his friends with a proposition. Don Davis, CEO of Stanley Tools, brought up the idea to Sloane to donate his home collection to the state to establish a proper museum. Davis was so serious about it he offered to donate the property and

90 Dorothy Hinrichs, Everard: A Haphazard Scrapbook of Memories of Eric Sloane and His Family, as Recalled by His Sister (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1998).
construct the building. They reached their decision in December of 1967. The land, also the site of the Kent Iron foundry, was being used in cooperation with Kent as the town dump.

Such museums were nothing new at that point. In his article on American Folk Museums in the Journal of American Folklore, Howard Wright Marshall identifies the purpose of such museums is to “attempt serious ethnological research and the revision of local history to include folk cultural materials representative of regional life and work.” In nearby Monroe, New York, Roscoe William Smith, founder of the Orange and Rockland electric company, established a replica 19th-century village, then known as Museum Village of Old Smith’s Clove, which opened on July 1, 1950. Yet there seemed to be something special about the newly created Sloane-Stanley museum (later renamed to the Eric Sloane Museum in 2005). Sloane did not take a backseat but rather took control of every last detail. Not only did he design the displays, but also forcefully asserted himself when necessary. When the museum’s flagpole was placed in a spot not to his liking, Sloane ran it over with his car.

Cooler heads must have prevailed. Sloane remained active at the museum, and its opening was attended by Governor John N. Dempsey and a bevy of other Connecticut legislators. After the ceremony, the governor penned a letter to Sloane:

My gratitude is voiced not only as Governor of Connecticut, speaking for the people of our State, but also as an individual proud of our history and concerned for its preservation. We are dependent on the program of the Connecticut Historical Commission to safeguard for us records of the past which otherwise

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92 Correspondence from D.W. Davis to Eric Hatch, December 12, 1967, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent Connecticut.
96 Correspondence from William J. Morris to Louis Gladstone, October 27, 1969, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut.
would be forever lost. May the exhibits in the Sloane-Stanley museum serve throughout the future as a reminder to all who view them that the State of Connecticut is the place where Yankee ingenuity originated to the benefit of consumers throughout the nation and the world.97

Dempsey’s comment about the importance of Connecticut revealed just how self-serving such museums could be for state governments that invested in them. Much of Sloane’s literature focused beyond Connecticut, and yet the museum became a symbol of state pride.

In their first season between May 30 and November 2, 1969, the museum was attended by a total of 5,387 adults and 445 children. Admissions sales for that year were $2,804.75. Book sales amounted to $1,805.53.98

Throughout it, Sloane continued to be motivated by an obsession to preserve the past. On September 15, 1971, he wrote to Governor Dempsey, imploring him to preserve the Cornwall Bridge Railroad Station. “This station is rotting, vandalized and within a year will be too far gone to do anything with but demolish.”99 Whether or not it was the result of Sloane’s prodding, the station was renovated in 1971 and added to the National Register of Historic Places on April 26, 1972.100 It still stands today in all of its glory.

As this section has demonstrated, Eric Sloane had his fingerprints all over the heritage movement. He found his purpose after decades of searching and helped America trace its heritage during a crucial moment in its development. He retold American history to an entire generation of Americans, but also impacted perceptions of America internationally. This historical showman was in the spotlight, telling fascinating stories of America’s beginnings. But

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100 National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form - Cornwall Bridge Railroad Station § (1972), https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/72001313_text.
as the next section will show, Sloane was a storyteller who emphasized narrative and memory. In the words of Michael Kammen, “History and memory are not merely fractured. They are frequently at odds.”\textsuperscript{101}

In 1962, Eric Sloane published what was perhaps his most celebrated book: *Diary of an Early American Boy*. Much of the text was based upon a diary supposedly found in an attic. Sloane claimed it belonged to Noah Blake, a young boy living in rural Connecticut in the early 19th century. Noah’s diary entries were supplemented with Sloane’s magnificent drawings and short sections of prose to provide context. The story became so popular that a replica of Noah Blake’s cabin was built on the museum’s property using old tools, local wood and stone. According to David White, the book was nearly adapted into a movie.

Noah Blake’s diary, still housed in storage at the Eric Sloane Museum, has never been authenticated. And the reason why has become clearer in recent years. Buried in the museum’s archives is an undated letter that Eric Sloane sent to his brother George, asking to safely return the diary. He wrote: “When your friend has seen the little diary, do send it back for I use it as a display now and then, and if it got misplaced I’d have to forge a new one and that would take quite a while with home-made nut ink.” Sadly, there it is in black and white: Eric Sloane forged the famed Noah Blake diary.

One might chalk it up as Sloane’s attempt to do “real” history, especially considering his comments from two years earlier in 1960. In *Return to Taos*, Sloane addressed a number of his critics:

In writing the book *American Barns and Covered Bridges* a few years ago, I said that the American barn was “pure New World design.” Almost immediately there were challengers. “A dreadful heresy has appeared in letters,” said Lewis Gannett in the New York *Herald Tribune*. “I challenge Sloane to prove it,” wrote the

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102 Correspondence from Albert Ondush to Patrick Buchanan, April 10, 1986, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut.
104 Correspondence from Eric Sloane to George Hinrichs, Undated, Eric Sloane Museum Archives, Kent, Connecticut.
Professor of Architecture of Penn State. “Barn architecture was not invented in this country at all,” said expert Rodney Gilbert, “for our early barns are precisely like the oldest surviving churches of England.” These learned men were correct in a strict sense, but romantically speaking (and history should be recorded in that vein also), the spirit in which things are built is a most important part of their architecture. It would be impossible to build any sort of structure without including some design that has already been applied. But when the first American barns were built, foreign farmers were still using lean-to barns and roofed-over mangers. Only feudal barons and the Church built barns which were of architectural significance, and they were *tithe barns*, built to receive tithes paid in kind. For a private English farmer to build a barn like those of the Pennsylvanians was unthinkable. An interesting difference between the early American barns and the churches of England which so closely resembled them is that the entrance of the church was almost always at the gabled end, while our barn was entered from the side.\footnote{Eric Sloane, *Return to Taos: Eric Sloane's Sketchbook of Roadside Americana* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 36-37.}

His lack of citations in this statement reveals just how far he was willing to take the narrative side of “narrative historian.” To be fair, Sloane was certainly not the only writer who wrote history this way. Esther Forbes, a writer of New England folklore once wrote that “what one believes happened is more enduring, in a way more ‘true,’ than reality.”\footnote{Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 545.} Yet that standard for truth and evidence would never hold up in an academic context. Truth is truth regardless of one’s perceptions. It seems that Sloane and Forbes were both writing histories the way they had always been written. What one might call creative nonfiction today was actually yesterday's history. Medieval historian Lewis Thorpe articulated this problem from a metahistorical context:

> The historians of ancient Rome considered themselves free to write imaginary speeches for their historical characters, and to include or even to invent anecdotes about them; their account of events was subjective, literary, and often deliberately inaccurate; far from quoting precise references, the sources which they deigned to mention were more often than not false ones, and occasionally there were pure fabrications. Certain of these infuriating, if endearing, habits lasted down to Victorian times.\footnote{Lewis Thorpe, “Introduction,” in *Two Lives of Charlemagne* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1969), 28.}
It is clear though that Sloane continued the practices of the chroniclers well into the twentieth century. It is important, however, to point out that all discussions of history inevitably form narratives that can never capture the full breadth of human experience. This is because “all of history cannot be remembered.” A historical narrative, therefore, cannot be separated from the author and their culture, experiences, and audience. Inevitably, some context will be left out, because historical narratives rely in some way or another on summary. In the words of Raymond D. Fogelson, “The historian makes histories. Histories do not exist as performed narratives awaiting discovery.”

Nor can histories be separated from who wrote them and when. What material is selected, what evidence is used, whom the history is written for, becomes especially complicated when one considers how much individual interpretation factors into the telling of history. After an indefinable point in time, current events, with all of its subjectivity, debate, and disagreement, transforms from present-day politics into recorded history. Most anticipate the disagreements within society over politics, but simultaneously the historian is expected to record events as a journalist would. Hayden White’s ideas are especially relevant in discussion of this issue. He observes that “all historical narratives contain an irreducible and expungable element of interpretation.”

It is important to understand how a storyteller like Sloane was able to reach a huge audience, but most scholarly works are largely ignored by the general public and politicians alike.

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Sloane was so popular, and so closely associated with American values, that in towns like Bridgewater, Connecticut and Sugar Loaf, New York, the fourth of July was Eric Sloane day. The events would draw crowds of admirers from New York City, “bus loads” of people, according to Roger Gonzales. This demonstrates that a part of Sloane’s appeal was not just his work, but his personality and ability to connect with people. Those that saw his passion, never forgot it. As Michael Kammen articulates, “The personal interests and obsessions of individuals tend to be more influential and enduring than grandiose schemes guided by lofty abstractions.”

In addition, Sloane’s power as a visual storyteller allowed those not even interested in reading his books to look through the drawings. This was a strategy that Sloane might have learned from his time writing for American Heritage. A crucial element of that magazine’s popularity, according to Roy Rosenzweig, was their “commitment to the visual dimension of the past.” These are all strategies that every historian should attempt to emulate.

That said, Sloane should not be excused for his dishonesty in the case of Diary of an Early American Boy. Yet that was not his only mistake.

In The Spirits of ’76, a book that Sloane wrote for America’s bicentennial, he attributes the following quote to Abraham Lincoln:

You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. You cannot help the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer. You cannot help the proof by destroying the rich. You cannot build character and courage by taking away a man’s initiative and

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independence. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.\textsuperscript{115}

Yet these words were never spoken by America’s sixteenth president. The quote comes from William J.H. Boetcker’s 1916 booklet \textit{Inside Maxims}.\textsuperscript{116} The origin of this misattribution is not known, but it has been repeated again and again. Sloane was not alone in his mistake. President Reagan mentioned the quote in a speech with the misattribution. Most recently, it was misattributed by former-Ohio Governor John Kasich in 2015.

Despite the pervasiveness of this myth throughout American politics, these are the types of mistakes that historians cannot afford to make. Lessons from the past are too important. While perfection can never be achieved, a historian must be fully transparent, leaving a paper trail of sources and footnotes to fact-check a historical narrative. In addition, a historian should always specify what is conjecture and what is known beyond reasonable doubt.

These are the risks of the narrative historian who writes in the style of the past. Yet that does not mean that one must sacrifice narrative altogether. Nor does it mean that Sloane should be dismissed. The next section will demonstrate his continued importance and lasting legacy.

CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF ERIC SLOANE

On March 6, 1985, Eric Sloane died one week after his eightieth birthday. He was being honored at a luncheon of the Dutch Treat Club when he suffered a massive heart attack on the streets of New York.

Yet the memory of Eric Sloane lives on. Perhaps what he should be remembered for most is his industriousness. Forrest Fenn refers to him as “the most productive man I ever saw. At one time I had seven of his paintings wet off the easel in my office waiting for the paint to dry so I could put them in my bins. That’s how prolific he was.” Roger Gonzales recalls that “he never gave up. He was tireless. He always went 90 miles an hour no matter what he was doing.” Sloane is said to have painted 300 days out of every year, and “he averaged a new published book every year for the last thirty years of his life.”

Despite his shortcuts and the mistakes he made, Sloane’s remarkable legacy is something all historians and writers should aspire to emulate. For those that do not understand Sloane, those that wish to separate history and memory, should consider these words from Michael Kammen:

True history can never be totally disengaged from social memory, or serve as an exquisite corrective for its flaws. Not enough people pay attention to scholarly history. They never have, and I don’t believe they ever will. Historians, for their part, are not infallible, even when they ‘merely’ function in their capacity as custodians of the past. Historians are participating members of society regardless of whether they are unloving critics or uncritical lovers of their culture.

It is as though he was talking about Eric Sloane himself. The power of Sloane’s body of work is undeniable. There will likely never be another man who shares his unique enthusiasm for so many disparate subjects.

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Most importantly, Eric Sloane brought everyone closer to the early American pioneers.

The secret to his method was summed up in *Diary of an Early American Boy*:

For a long while I have collected early American wooden tools - those things that pioneer people fashioned at home. It seems that they put so much of themselves into these implements that just being with them is like being with the people who created them. Closing your hand around a worn wooden hammer handle is very much like reaching back into the years and feeling the very hand that wore it smooth.\(^{121}\)

This, more than any other reason, was how Eric Sloane retold American history.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FxBZx6MPtY&feature=emb_title.


