

# Seth Eastman's Sketchbook



**TRICENTENNIAL THEME:** San Antonio History

**SUBJECT:** Art/Social Studies

**GRADEBAND/LEVEL:** Middle School/Grades 6-8

**SUBMITTED BY:** The McNay Art Museum

**TEKS:**

Art:	6 <sup>th</sup> 117.202.3A-C	7 <sup>th</sup> 117.203.3A-C	8 <sup>th</sup> 117.204.3A-C
Social Studies:	113.18.2B;3A	113.19.1A;2C	113.20.11A-C

## DESCRIPTION:

U.S. Army officer Seth Eastman made sketches during a trip down the Mississippi River, the Texas coast, and then San Antonio, Seguin, and Fredericksburg from 1848-49. Meticulously labeled and dated, Eastman's sketches provide among the earliest surviving images of the area before the advent of photography.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES:

-  Examine the drawings of Seth Eastman and make assumptions based on visual evidence.
-  Compare primary sources such as journal entries and drawings.
-  Research information about the artist and time period, and find visual connections to the drawings.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

A class set of an Eastman sketch (Seth Eastman's sketches are available to view online at [collection.mcnayart.org](http://collection.mcnayart.org). Click on 'Search Collection' and then type "Seth Eastman" in the search field.)  
A copy of a journal entry from Mr. Eastman during his time in San Antonio



**ENGAGE** (Opening Activity - Access Prior Learning / Stimulate Interest / Generate Questions): Analyze one of Seth Eastman's sketches. What visual information does the drawing contain? Make a list of everything that you see. Noting the date of the drawing, what clues does the artist include that hint at the moment in time depicted? What is possibly missing? What questions do you have about this drawing? What are some of the artist's possible motives in making this drawing?

**EXPLORE** (Probing or Clarifying Questions):

Compare a sketch by Seth Eastman with excerpts from his journal at the sometime. What details from his writing appear in his drawings? What observations does Eastman make visually or in writing, but not in both? What could be his reasons? What is unique about Eastman's point of view?

**EXPLAIN** (Concepts Explained):

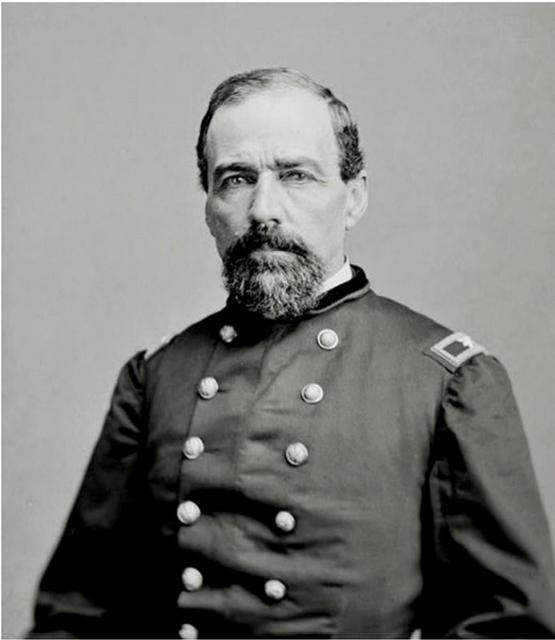
Distribute informational clues about Seth Eastman and San Antonio history to participants. Each participant reads their clue and makes a silent connection to the featured Eastman sketch. Participants find a partner and share the connection made between the sketch and clue, and discuss. Partners find another pair and share their clues and connections. Groups of four report to the larger group to form a broader understanding of the sketch. Participants organize their clues by topic and review. Alternative: Students gather information about the artist and time period and write their own clues.

**ELABORATE** (Applications and Extensions):

With reproductions of Eastman's sketches, find the locations of the drawings and take a photograph from the same vantage point or use Google images or Google Maps street view. What original aspects of the location remain? What has changed and why? Is there anything interesting about the perspective that the artist took of this place?

**EVALUATE:**

Discuss student findings, check for understanding, and evaluate their final conclusions.



Seth Eastman, ca. 1860.

“These old Missions were constructed by the Jesuits for the purpose of civilizing the Indians—and a great part of the rough work of the building them was done by the Indians—They are built of Lime stone—They are now going to ruins.”

Seth Eastman Journal, August 10, 1849



“This day was only a start—went to Mission of San Jose five miles and there encamped—Made several sketches during the day—This old Mission was built about 1800 or a little later—very finely constructed with much sculptur in from around and over the Door—It has been deserted for years—a few Mexican families now reside around it and in that portion of the church formerly occupied by Priests.”

Seth Eastman Journal, August 10, 1849

Mrs. Anna Jane Moeb, great-granddaughter of Seth Eastman, sold the Eastman sketchbook to San Antonio businessman and history enthusiast Paul Adams.

Adams, later sold it to the Pearl Brewing Company, and it was shown at the McNay for the first time in 1960, where it resides today.

“The Mission of Conception is but 2 miles from San Antonio. San Jose 5 miles and San Juan about 9 miles—all on or very near the San Antonio River—San Jose is the largest and best constructed of the three—The Church of the Alamo situated within the wall of the Alamo is in San Antonio at the NE corner of the town—This is well built and much ornamented—It is at present in a worst state of ruin than any others.”

Seth Eastman Journal, August 10, 1849

“San Antonio is a Mexican town but rapidly becoming yankeeized—Flat roofs are giving way to the old-fashioned shingled yankee roofs—Most of the houses—or rather many of them are built of stone cemented with lime—others of Adobie which are square or rectangular bricks of clay-baked in the sun—These make very handsome walls but cannot be very strong.”

Seth Eastman Journal, August 10, 1849

“When you get to end of one of the streets, you re at the end of town--nothing beyond it but a wild prairie over which the Indians roams as free and wild as the ground that he treads--San Antonio is situated on the San Antonio River, which is a most beautiful and rapid spring stream.”

Seth Eastman Journal, August 10, 1849

## Seth Eastman Abbreviated Timeline

**1808** born in Brunswick Maine in 1808

**1829** graduated from the United States Military Academy (USMA)

**1829** stationed at Fort Crawford in Wisconsin where he observed Sioux Indians

**1830** transferred to Fort Snelling in Minnesota Territory, the northern most of the frontier posts at the convergence of the St. Peter's River and the Mississippi River. While there he studied Dakota culture, made sketches, and married Wakan Inajin-Win (Stands Sacred), the daughter of a Dakotah chief, and fathered a daughter Winona, also called Mary Nancy Eastman.

**1833** returned to USMA to serve as assistant teacher of drawing for seven years.

**1835** married Mary Henderson, daughter of a surgeon from Warrenton, Virginia, and she co-wrote *Dacotah or Life and Legends of the Sioux Around Fort Snelling*, which Eastman illustrated.

**Late 1830s** exhibited paintings at the National Academy of Design and transitioned from draftsman to established oil painter

**1840** rejoined First Infantry near Sarasota, Florida participating in the Seminole War

**1841** returned to Fort Snelling where he documented enmity between Sioux and Chippewa tribes

**1846** Eastman had in his collection about 400 pictures by landscape painter Charles Lanman, who made the fashionable steamboat tour from St. Louis Falls to St. Anthony earning the title of "soldier-artist of the frontier."

**1847** Congress authorized the Bureau of Indian Affairs to collect and prepare for publication historical and statistical information concerning the history, condition, and prospects of Native American tribes of the United States.

**1848** The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo signed in February ending the Mexican-American War (1846–1848); establishing the Rio Grande as the southern border for Texas; and United States ownership of territories in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

**1848** quote from John S. Robb in St. Louis *Weekly Reveille* about open illustrator post for US Bureau of Indian Affairs report, "It would be hard to find a man possessed of the same artistical ability, who combined with it a thorough knowledge of Indian character."

**1848** **October 31**, arrival in New Orleans

**November 5**, arrival in Matagorda Bay

**November ?**, encampment in Seguin on the Road to San Antonio

**November 20 or 21**, arrival in San Antonio characterized by Eastman as "a wretched place, full of desperate characters"

**December 9**, arrival near Fredericksburg characterized by Eastman as "fine country, full of game and Indians" also "Buffalo meat sells in town at 3 cents per pound, a deer one dollar, salt 8 cents a pound, and flour \$20 per barrel"

**1849** **March** ordered back to San Antonio  
**May–July** traveled with topographical engineers marking the road to El Paso del Norte  
**August 1** encamped on Frio River enroute to San Antonio  
**August 10** left San Antonio enroute to Laredo stopped at Mission San Jose and made several sketches  
**August 14** journey continued south and Eastman notes the plentiful rattlesnakes killing 6 in one day.  
**September** Eastman leaves Texas for furlough with wife and family in Virginia

**1850–1855** Eastman works on the five-volume report *The Indian Tribes of the United States* making drawings of weapons, musical instruments, tools, costumes, artifacts, pictographs, landscape views, and tribal customs. During his time in Texas, Mary Eastman lobbied for his placement at the Bureau for Indian Affairs.

**1852** Mary Eastman countered Harriet Beecher Stowe's landmark antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with a book of her own *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; Or Southern Life As It Is*

**1850s** Eastman painted a several large oil paintings of Indian subjects, notably *Indians in Council*. One is currently at the Corcoran Gallery and another purchased by the Gilcrease Foundation in Tulsa, Oklahoma

**1859** While on post in Utah, Eastman's plates and sketches for *Indian Tribes of the United States* were delivered to the secretary of the interior which would prevent Eastman from publishing this material later. He petitioned for payment of his property and a value of \$75 each (\$5025 total) was settled upon, but never paid.

**1855–1861** continued military service; promoted to Major; returned to Texas and many other outposts in Comanche territory; returned to Washington frequently due to illness

**1861** promoted to lieutenant colonel and posted to New Hampshire at the outbreak of Civil War

**1866** placed in command of Harrodsburg Military Asylum in Kentucky

**1867** through an act of congress Eastman received a commission to paint the rooms of the committees on Indian affairs after his own designs.

**1870** painted room of the House Committee on Military Affairs based on some of the forts where he was stationed throughout his career

**1875** Brigadier General Seth Eastman died at his easel on August 31; buried at Oak Hill Cemetery, Washington DC

## Sources

McDermott, John Francis. *Seth Eastman Pictorial Historian of the Indian*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961.

Burkhalter, Lois. *A Seth Eastman Sketchbook, 1848–1849*. San Antonio: University of Texas Press, Austin, 1961.