Interview with Charles F. Ames,
Vice-President

Mr. Ames knew Mr. Eastman before coming with Eastman Kodak Company. He was connected with the Blair Camera Company of Boston which infringed upon a patent on roll-holders held by Eastman Kodak Company. The suit was dropped upon the Blair Company’s promise to discontinue making these holders. However, they had a thousand in stock priced at $8.00 each, list price, and Mr. Ames, in 1893, came to Rochester to persuade Mr. Eastman to allow them to dispose of these.

"Why, yes" said Mr. Eastman pleasantly, "You can sell those roll-holders. There is no objection on our part at all if we can get our usual profit of $2.40 on a roll. You can sell them and pay us a royalty on the basis of $2.40 apiece." Mr. Ames couldn’t budge him so they paid the royalty and sold the roll-holders. This was an instance of Mr. Eastman’s fairness.

If one got the best of things with Mr. Eastman he was a good loser, said Mr. Ames, and illustrated with a story of the selling of the Blair Camera Company to Eastman Kodak Company. The owner, Mr. R.L. Goff, a wealthy and conscientious business man of Providence, had the option of accepting Kodak stock for the deal and he eventually trebled the amount he received for the deal in this way. Mr. Goff had Mr. Ames make a very fair inventory of the value of the company’s material assets. This was done and then a wire was received from Mr. Eastman reading "My machine expert, F.A. Brownell, will be in Boston on [date] to check the inventory and when checked he will meet you and close the deal."

Ames, Charles F.
Mr. Ames resented this as he felt that his own inventory had been a fair one. So he went over it again and where he felt that he could add to items, he added to them, putting on about $20,000 additional in the process. When Mr. Brownell, a pompous person, and Mr. Jawbill arrived Brownell would occasionally say an item was too high and Mr. Ames would revise it downward. However, only $4,000 was cut down, leaving the inventory $16,000 higher than Mr. Ames had originally made it.

Mr. Eastman asked Mr. Ames if he would like to come to Rochester with some of the men as he was going to move the plant from there to here and he could find a place for him. Some other plants, also were brought to the Photo Materials Building. Mr. Eastman asked Mr. Ames to make a complete new inventory of the various items of these investments. Mr. Ames took the Blair inventory at figures he originally made. Mr. Eastman looked at his sheet and said "There must be something wrong in this. The Blair Camera Company inventory is $16,000 less than the inventory we had when we took it over. How do you explain that?"

Mr. Ames said "The inventory that I've used was the correct one that I made to sell the Blair Company. You sent an expert to cut it to pieces. So we made another one $16,000 higher than the first.

"Then", said Mr. Eastman "We really paid $16,000 more than if we hadn't sent Mr. Brownell down there?"

Mr. Ames nodded agreement. After a tense moment Mr. Eastman concluded "It's all right." He didn't even change his expression when he said it.
Mr. Eastman would give a man credit for achievement, and would reward him in due time, but he wouldn’t “pat him on the back” and tell him he was a good fellow. As an example Mr. Ames mentioned the buying of the Rochester Optical Company, which was on the rocks having lost $75,000 the year before Eastman Kodak Company took it over. Mr. Ames was sent over as manager to make it pay and he did just that without any great difficulty, being able to show a profit of $90,000 the first year. After Mr. Eastman had read the report he sent Mr. Ames a letter saying, in effect, “Success had gone beyond my expectation” and that “on looking over the report I find it was, on the whole, a very satisfactory year.” One never knew the degree of satisfactoriness of a job to Mr. Eastman. Of course, if it were bad one would soon know about it.

Mr. Eastman would get up very early mornings and ride out with Carter in his rig. Mr. Ames was rooming uptown at the time and one morning looked at his clock which apparently had been set wrong and so was really an hour fast. He got down to work usually at 8:00 o’clock but this morning it being actually 7:00 he was a little surprised at the deserted appearance of the place until he finally woke up to the fact of his mistake. So he sat at his desk to while away the time. He heard someone come in and there was Mr. Eastman with Carter and the rig outside. Said Mr. Eastman “I saw you at the window as I was passing and thought I’d come in and see you a minute. You get here pretty early, don’t you?” “Oh, not very early” said Mr. Ames seriously and then broke down and told how it happened. Mr. Eastman laughed and went out.
Mr. Eastman drove his horse and rig for several years. Then he obtained one of the first electric autos in Rochester about 1901-02. Later he obtained a gas car which he first drove himself and then taught Carter. Mr. Ames thinks his first car was a Winton, although he continued to keep the electric car for some time afterwards. Mr. Eastman was always conservative in the color of his cars. Mr. Ames thinks Mr. Eastman wore the then customary "duster" on his longer automobile trips. His mother used to go along in the big closed car in which Carter would take her.

Mr. Ames noted that Mr. Eastman smoked more in later years than when he first met him. He used a lighter. He would light up a cigarette after musicales, and after lunch in the office if visitors were present would smoke with them. He often lunched alone in his office. Miss Whitney would not lunch with him but would go out.

Asked regarding Mr. Eastman's method of seeking fun, Mr. Ames said he seemed to go in for "periods of hobbying." For instance, when there was a dancing craze just before the war Mr. Eastman went in for that for several years. He would have informal parties with waltzing, a nice supper and a good orchestra.

Mr. Eastman did some hunting locally. When sportsmen began to shoot pheasant around here he used to go out hunting pheasant. He used to go to the gun club conducted by Mr. Harrison, the sporting goods man. Mr. Eastman was a good shot. Pat Beattie, a stockholder, had a big farm on Latte Road and Mr. Eastman would go down once or twice during the season with him.
Asked if Mr. Eastman expressed any sentiments of active dislike or disapproval of women, Mr. Ames said he never heard any criticism or approval. Mr. Eastman was too busy to think about women one way or the other.

Regarding his reading. His library contained light as well as serious volumes. There were a great many books on science in his possession but undoubtedly he enjoyed such an item as a detective story occasionally.

Mr. Ames was among the many who attended the Eastman entertainments at home being on a rotating list of about 500 and being asked two or three times during a winter. These were continued until a year or two of Mr. Eastman's death, gradually cutting down on them toward the last. The crowd usually went home at nine o'clock, according to Mr. Ames.

Mr. Eastman was not bashful, but he was retiring. He was taciturn and did not always explain matters fully. Mr. and Mrs. Ames were on-time embarrassed by this trait. They were invited to "a little dinner for a customer" one evening. Mr. Eastman did not tell the exact size of the "little dinner" and when they arrived Mr. Eastman and one man were present. Mr. Ames remained with the men while Mrs. Ames went upstairs with her wraps. She had an idea they were early and so she "stalled" for quite a while until the "crowd" would arrive. Mr. Ames noticed Mr. Eastman was fidgeting and he, too, was uneasy when he became aware of the situation. Luckily Mrs. Ames appeared and the situation was eased when it became obvious--without any explanation from Mr. Eastman--that the party was to consist of only five persons.
Abruptness was an Eastman trait. Or perhaps the following may further illustrate his distaste for going into unnecessary details. Mr. Ames states that if one wanted his approval on a deal sometimes before it had been half explained to him he would give the decision. Apparently this was one way of saving time.

His memory was excellent. If one ever repeated anything in a talk Mr. Eastman would say "You told me that before." He might even resent something being repeated from a previous interview. So Mr. Ames always tried very hard to guard against making repetitions.

Mr. Ames has one of the earliest stories of Mr. Eastman. This was given him by Mr. Mortimer Miller who later became General Manager of the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company here. When Mr. Miller was a boy he worked for a window shade concern which sold wall paper, shades and the like. Mr. Eastman then had a place on Court Street. He was experimenting and he needed some dark window shades which would cover one or two of his windows. The total bill for those which he bought was not more than seven or eight dollars. Mr. Miller told Mr. Ames in later years of Mr. Eastman's difficulty in trying to pay this bill promptly. But Mr. Miller got two dollars on one cell and more another day until finally the entire bill was paid.

There was only one man apparently that didn't use "Mr" to the Kodak head. This was Schuyler Colfax, who called him "chief." Mr. Colfax was always familiar with everyone. He was a "hail fellow, well met" but very likeable and not at all offensive. He worked on motion pictures here during the war, and had been a manufacturer of paper in Dayton when Mr. Eastman bought him out in 1900 or thereabouts. Bert Penn, Mr. Bonbright, and a few other cronies used to call Mr. Eastman "George."
When Mr. Penn was running the Alliance Bank he would come to the office and have lunch with Mr. Eastman two or three times a week. When Eastman stock was re-issued Mr. Penn would handle it. He was Mr. Eastman's closest chum. They were always together. They would play golf together and it was noted that Mr. Eastman didn't play much golf after Mr. Penn died.

Among the items in Mr. Crouch's notebook, upon which Mr. Ames was thought to have possible light, it was brought up that Mr. Eastman had suffered a carbuncle on the back of his neck in the early days and Mr. Ames remembered seeing a bad scar remaining from this carbuncle on Mr. Eastman's neck.

Another Crouch item read "matching $5.00 gold pieces over 'phone with Abbott." Mr. Abbott, said Mr. Ames, was the head of the American Aristotype Company of Jamestown which was bought by Eastman Kodak Company around 1900. He was a jovial person and just the type that could inveigle Mr. Eastman into the fun of matching $5.00 gold pieces over the telephone with him.
Early in the '30's, the writer was located in Boston as Manager of the Blair Camera Company. This was before daylight loading film was introduced. The Blair Company manufactured a roll holder for 50-exposure films that used a measuring roll for perforating film so that it could be determined where the film should be cut for the different exposures.

The Eastman Kodak Company brought suit against the Blair Company for infringement of patents for measuring the film. They obtained an injunction prohibiting the Blair Company from making or selling such roll holders.

The Blair Company had on hand approximately 1,000 of these holders completed and could not sell them. The writer had never met Mr. Eastman up to this time, but he decided to go to Rochester and make some arrangement if possible to dispose of the roll holders mentioned above.

Mr. Eastman's office at that time was in the old building which was located where the present office building now stands. This building had an inscription on the front in large letters:

"You press the button; we do the rest."

Mr. Eastman's desk was located in a fairly large office near the center of the room. The writer had no trouble in getting an interview and after a very pleasant discussion of the matter of roll holders, Mr. Eastman said that he thought they could make a satisfactory arrangement so that the Blair Company could sell such roll holders without any loss. When asked what the proposition might be, he produced from a pigeon-hole of his roll-top desk a little memorandum and stated that the selling price of each roll holder for each holder was $6.00, and that the cost of those manufactured by the Kodak Company was $5.48, and that he had no objection to selling such roll holders if we paid a royalty of $2.52 each. This seemed to the writer a little more than should be paid, but apparently there was no argument as Mr. Eastman's mind had already been made up and there would be no reduction. The roll holders were sold and we paid the royalty.
In 1899 the Blair Camera Company which was owned by D. L. Goff of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was sold to the Eastman Kodak Company. The deal was made directly with Mr. Eastman who came to Boston to look over the factory and the plan with Mr. Goff was to take over the company as a going concern, figuring the inventory of machinery, tools, and fixtures at a fair value.

After the deal was made, Mr. Eastman said that when the inventory was ready, he would return and close the transaction. The writer was delegated to prepare this inventory, and Mr. Goff gave instructions to figure the inventory at a price that would seem right in accordance with the deal. We secured the services of an expert in used machinery, who was neutral, and prepared the inventory, advising Mr. Eastman that it was ready. He replied to the effect that he would send an expert to Boston to check the inventory, arriving the next day.

The writer, feeling that the expert would try to reduce the inventory which was completed, decided to prepare a new inventory to submit to the expert. This inventory was marked up approximately 15 per cent above the one which we already had completed. The expert finally arrived and with the inventory, examined machinery, item by item, and made occasional complaints that we had figured the prices in excess of what we should have. In all cases, we willingly reduced the price as he suggested with the result that the inventory was approximately $16,000 more than the original one that had been prepared. Mr. Eastman came to Boston and the deal was completed and the company was taken over by the Kodak Company.

The writer was asked by Mr. Eastman if he would be interested in having the machinery packed and shipped to Rochester and to come here with it, turning it over to the Kodak Company. This was done, and after arrival
in Rochester, a proposition was made by Mr. Eastman to enter the employ of the Kodak Company and consolidate the Blair Company machines and tools with the Photo Materials Company, and the American Camera Manufacturing Company, which concerns had previously been purchased by the Kodak Company. The writer was instructed to prepare an inventory of the assets of the different companies which had been purchased including the Blair Company and submit it to Mr. Eastman as an inventory to use as a basis for starting the company’s Hawk-Eye building on St. Paul Street.

After this inventory was prepared, the writer submitted it to Mr. Eastman. He looked it over carefully and finally he made the remark that there seemed to be something wrong with the inventory of the Blair Camera Company — that it was approximately $16,000 less than the amount that they had taken over. The writer was asked to explain if possible how this had happened. It was explained to Mr. Eastman just exactly how it had happened and why the inflated inventory had been submitted to the expert, but that his expert had not cut it down to the point where the original inventory had been figured. It was the writer’s belief that his new job with the Kodak Company was at an end, but Mr. Eastman looked at the figures and said: "Your explanation is perfectly satisfactory."
In 1904 the writer was sent to Mexico City to investigate the advisability of granting a sole agency for all Kodak products to a concern located there that held an exclusive agency in Mexico for the Seash Dry Plate Company and the American Aristotype Company, which concerns had previously been purchased by the Kodak Company. After spending several days going over different matters with the dealer, the writer could not see any advantage in giving a sole agency to any one dealer. The party interested was somewhat disturbed, and stated that he would have dealings direct with Mr. Eastman and would not discuss the matter further with the writer, already having sent a telegram to Mr. Eastman to this effect.

The writer wired Mr. Eastman in substance as follows:

"Unable to carry on further discussion with party interested here who state they prefer to hold dealings direct with you. They state they have already advised you by wire to this effect. Please send instructions."

Mr. Eastman’s return reply was as follows:

"Have received no communication. Use your own judgment."
EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

January 26, 1940

Mr. C. F. Ames
Kodak Office

Dear Mr. Ames:

I am attaching hereto the writeup of your interview with Mr. H. Nicholson. I wonder if you would go over it for corrections and revision.

Would you also keep it for a few weeks and whenever you think of something concerning Mr. Eastman, not already in the record, jot it down in your own hand at the end of the writeup, as the writeups will be retyped.

It is impossible at one brief sitting to remember all the incidents and stories about Mr. Eastman. But as they come back to your memory, will you set them down.

Sincerely,

[signature]

P.S. The writeup may be returned at your convenience.