Interview with Ben Cline, 
15 Quentin Road

Mr. Cline came with Eastman Kodak Company in May, 1892, when the organization was still in its infancy. At that time, emulsion was poured out of a teapot to coat the glass plates that were then in use. Cameras were made in small quantities, under Mr. Brownell's direction, in a shop across the street from the present car barns in State Street and an old fellow brought down the finished ones--in lots of a few dozen daily--in a cart. As the staff was small, Mr. Eastman in those days often"pitched in"and helped the boys in the Shipping Department to pack the goods. Mr. Brackett Clark, a director, was a"handsy man" and he saved money for the firm when he bought second-hand locks and put them on the doors.

Mr. Cline's job in the early days was to report the failures among negatives which amateurs at that time had to send in to the factory for developing. One day he had some circular pictures, that he considered failures, stuck on a wall board, and Mr. Eastman asked him why a pin was stuck in the center of a negative. "Because it's a failure" answered Mr. Cline. "How do you know the customer will think so?" Mr. Eastman shot back very sharply, apparently because he was not willing to have any picture called a failure until everything possible was done to make it a success.

When George Eastman was personally constructing his first little square pocket Kodak at Camera Works he regularly passed through Mr. Cline's room at 7:30 every morning (Mr. Cline got there
at 7.00) When this model was completed Mr. Eastman handed it to
Mr. Cline and said "Take it out and see what you can do with it."
Mr. Cline took pictures of some newsboys, and when Mr. Eastman was
shown them he said "That's the sort of pictures I want--pictures
that tell a story."

Harry Strong, the son of Mr. Eastman's partner--who lodged
with the Eastman family for a time--told Mr. Cline that Mr. Eastman
had a straight-edge razor for each day in the week, and each was
labelled by the name of the day and used in its turn. At a time
when many working men usually shaved only on Saturdays, Mr. Eastman
was one of the first men who Mr. Cline knew who shaved daily.
Mr. H.J. Gaisman, who invented the device for autographing Kodak
pictures, also invented the Auto-Strop razor and he gave Mr. Eastman
one of these, which pleased him very much.

Once a problem arose in the mechanism for developing films
and Mr. Cline worriedly consulted with Mr. Eastman. As he habitually
did when he had a deep problem, Mr. Eastman stood with coat flung
back and hands in his rear trouser's pockets, and meditated while
looking out the window. His answer was "Cline, if you can't solve
this problem, we'll find someone who can." Fortunately, Mr. Cline
discovered that they had been using too light colored "aprons" for
holding the negatives in development, and these had let light through
which fogged the film. When he told this to Mr. Eastman he said
"Is that all? We can fix that." Mr. Cline was much relieved.

Mr. Eastman abhorred vulgarity or lack of refinement. Mr.
Cline even avoided making pictures of newsboys if they had dirty
faces. Once when they experimented with early motion-picture machines,
a would-be comedian in the plant ate his lunch sloppily when a scene
"shot." Mr. Eastman was disgusted when this scene was projected and left the room before the picture was finished.

Mr. Cline acted as Mr. Eastman's photographer for many years and once he photographed the painting of George Eastman that now hangs in the Rochester Chamber of Commerce. There was a reflection of light in the corner of the picture as he photographed it, but he didn't dare move the picture. When Mr. Eastman saw the print, he called attention to the reflection and suggested that Cline draw the shades and make it over. He smiled gently as he said "Sometimes you can teach an old dog new tricks."

Mrs. Eastman apparently had the same respect for her son that he had for her. When she was in a wheel-chair, to which a broken hip resulting from a fall confined her in later years, Mr. Cline was sent to make her photograph. He inquired "Mrs. Eastman, how would you like your picture taken today?" To which she responded in a solemn, measured and emphatic manner "Just as my son would like to have it made."

In spite of Mr. Eastman's invariable punctuality, the joke was on him at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Mr. Eastman had wired Lewis B. Jones, who was then Kodak Advertising Manager, to meet him in a Chicago hotel at 8 A.M. Jones was there on the dot and he found Mr. Eastman pacing up and down the lobby. "You're an hour late!" Mr. Eastman barked. Mr. Jones politely demurred and showed his watch, with the hands at 9 o'clock. The light broke, and Mr. Jones explained "Mr. Eastman, you haven't changed your watch from Eastern time to Central! You must set it back an hour." Mr. Eastman's anger disappeared." I guess the drinks are on me" he admitted with a grin.
Mr. Eastman, in the early days of Kodak, drove his horses to work in the morning and then his men drove them home. Later, when he had a car, his chauffeur was once detained and Mr. Eastman drove the car to work and then 'phoned the chauffeur to come in the street car and get it. From hearsay, Mr. Cline related that Mr. Eastman once told his chauffeur to meet him at the railroad station with the car. The chauffeur was intoxicated so Mr. Eastman put him in the rear seat and drove home himself.

For many years Mr. Eastman objected to the smoking of pipes in his office, as it may have made him feel that the smoker was giving attention to his pipe rather than to business. Mr. Charles S. Abbott, manager of the American Arisotype Company, however, would come to Mr. Eastman's office on business and smoke all he pleased. Later Mr. Eastman would smoke cigarettes after his lunch at the office, and this was only one instance of his greater mellowness in later years. Mr. Cline believes that George Eastman was sharp in the early days because he keenly felt the responsibility he owed to his stockholders, but as the business became prosperous and secure in later years he was able to be more mellow in his manner.

Mr. Eastman was refined by nature but he was not seriously annoyed if "fancy" language was unintentionally spoken to him. Once when there was a rope-controlled elevator in the shop, Eddie McDermott, who worked in bottling the toning solution, and Mr. Eastman--both on different floors--tried to get the use of the elevator at the same time. Ed pulled the rope to get the car down and the man at the other end pulled to get it up. Ed roared "You C-- D------"
fear, let go of that elevator!" The other fellow got the elevator and Ed looked up the shaft and saw shoes, pants and the rest come down on the car and resolve into the figure of Mr. Eastman. He gasped "I didn't know it was you, Mr. Eastman!" "That's all right, Eddie", said Mr. Eastman, as though he thought nothing of it.

The patriotic spirit of Mr. Eastman was indicated in the Spanish-American war when, according to what Mr. Cline has heard, he gave $100 a piece out of his own pocket to national guardsmen in his employ who were called to the colors. During the World War, Mr. Cline made pictures of Red Cross activities in Rochester and he was thoughtfully given the use of Mr. Eastman's car to take him to the Armory, Ordnance plant and other places.

Mr. Eastman was pretty keen and a fast thinker as his detecting of "lemonade" one one occasion indicates. There was a company picnic at Schubert Park down the Genesee River. Some of the men made a ten-gallon crockful of gin rickey, which the others were told was lemonade. Mr. Crouch, who never indulged, took a small dipper-full. Mr. Eastman came up and was invited to drink some. He was about to drink when he recognized the smell and said dryly, "No, I don't think I'll take any lemonade today!"

One of the games which Mr. Eastman enjoyed was billiards. He and Mr. Strong often played at the Powers Hotel in the early days and later Mr. Eastman had a billiard table at his home. No one could whistle while he played billiards, according to Mr. Strong's son, Henry, who had whistled and was reprimanded by Mr. Eastman.
Mr. Eastman was not prudish. Once at a banquet where the
only waiters who could be obtained were a rough bunch, Mr. Eastman
sat beside Mr. Ames who noted the man was having trouble with the
champagne bottle. Mr. Ames growled in a hearty, coarse voice
"Didn't you ever open champagne before?" The tough waiter glared
and shot back "I'll open all you can pay for, you --- of a -----.
Mr. Eastman was greatly amused.

Frankishness was not beyond Mr. Eastman. According to a
story told to Mr. Cline, on a trip which Mr. Eastman made with
Henry Strong in the entourage he once wired ahead for hotel reser-
vations "Colonel Strong and party coming on such a train." Mr.
Eastman knew that his friend and partner was self-conscious when
called "Colonel" so he greatly enjoyed Mr. Strong's embarrassment
when they arrived and found that the desk clerk, bell hops and
the others all called him "Colonel."

Mr. Eastman at the early period of his career was not sufficiently
notable to associate intimately with celebrities. When President
Harrison visited Kodak Park in....., Mr. Kent and Mr. Clark were
present at the reception, among others, and Mr. Cline and several
other employees took the group picture. Some years later he said
to Mr. Eastman "I didn't see you in that group." "No" replied Mr.
Eastman, "I wasn't important enough to be with that bunch."

Miss Whitney told Mr. Cline a story that indicates Mr. Eastman
could be humorous about women. He told her "I know one woman I
won't marry and then related how he had stood on his lawn one day
near the sidewalk and heard a woman say regarding his house "You couldn't get me to live in that barn!"

Mr. Eastman always wanted to learn things. One time before he was to go on a cruise, Mr. Cline found him with a piece of rope in his hand in his living room with a book before him, while he practiced tying different sorts of knots. He wasn't going to appear to the sailors as an ignorant landlubber.

Probably because he liked to cook, he appreciated some other man having the same enthusiasm. Cline showed him a snapshot which he was developing of a camp scene in which Theodore Roosevelt was cooking the meal. "He's a regular fellow, isn't he?" commented Mr. Eastman admiringly.

Mr. Eastman seldom explained details when he gave directions, for someone to do something. He once asked Cline to make a photo of "that side of the conservatory". This was so vague an order that Mr. Cline checked with Miss Cherbuliez, the housekeeper, before he found out what was really wanted—a picture of the wall that would indicate to a friend how some drapes should be made.

Mr. Eastman, because of his building enthusiasm, liked to see models of structures before the buildings were erected. A model was made of his home before it was built, and others were made of the Chamber of Commerce and of the Kodak Office. Mr. Cline, as a pleasant gesture, when he was asked to photograph the model of Mr. Eastman's house also photographed the lawn and pasted a cut-out of it on a montage which showed the ensemble of house and setting. Mr. Eastman was delighted by Mr. Cline's enthusiasm for visualizing the completed job.
In 1909 Mr. Cline went west with a John Wanamaker party to make Indian scenes in the Ouster country, for use in illustrated lectures to be given in Wanamaker's store. Mr. Eastman gave Mr. Cline permission to go for three weeks and said "The west is beautiful country and you can see it at their expense." He asked Mr. Cline how much they would pay him, and was told it was the same salary he was getting with Eastman Kodak Company. Mr. Eastman's shrewd advice was "They want you badly. Ask double that amount." Mr. Cline did so, and he received it.

He had a very interesting trip and took some splendid pictures of Indians from a dozen tribes. When Mr. Eastman looked at them he said they were the first portraits he had seen of Indians that looked like people. He liked the close-ups of expressions on their faces, photographed by Mr. Cline as they went about their daily business. Mr. Eastman was always interested in the human side of affairs, whether with regard to Indians or others.

Mr. Eastman was a modest man and he didn't like to see his own picture staring at him from the wall. Mr. J.H. Kent, vice-president of Eastman Kodak at the time, presented Mr. Eastman with a large crayon portrait of himself, on behalf of the stockholders, upon Mr. Eastman's return from a European trip. Mr. Eastman expressed his appreciation of their thoughtfulness but he said "That's all right to hang up after I'm dead. I don't think I'd like to have it hung in my office now."

Those who placed their confidence and their money with Mr. Eastman's business profited by their trust in him. A young man of
whom Mr. Cline heard had invested $1000 in Eastman stock and once he was worried about its safety. Mr. Eastman said "If you leave it with me it will be enough to support you some day." The young man took this advice—with the predicted results. As an indication of the profit which stockholders made from their investment in Eastman Kodak, Mr. Penn, who kept the first $1000 he invested in Kodak in a separate account, ran this original investment to $25,000 at the time of his death. As the stock has been split ten for one since then, the equivalent value at present would be that many times greater.