Interview with Franklin C. Ellis, Public Relations Department 12/29/39

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Mr. Eastman gave little attention to publicizing himself although he had a keen desire to publicize the industry and the company, and would talk freely with newspaper men when there was something definite to be told. It was 1920 before he granted the first personal interview for publication. This appeared in System magazine.

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One of the questions he asked was "What gave you the greatest urge to build a big business?" apparently expecting "Love for my mother" or some similar sentiment. Mr. Eastman's brief response was simply "Money!"

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At the time of Mr. Eastman's death this running tabulation of his distributions amounted to $75,000,000. The next day a statement of Mr. Eastman's attorney recorded the total benefactions as approximately $100,000,000. Causes which had not been made public had been recipients of approximately $25,000,000.

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When the weight of years brought feebleness, Mr. Eastman did not relish having persons help him on with his overcoat or assist him into his car. He had seen Mr. Hubbell, his legal adviser, languish as an invalid for several years and then die and perhaps this aroused fears for himself. Being helped by anyone would, in a way, deprive him of "controlling the alternative."

Mr. Ellis does not feel that Mr. Eastman had a desire for dominance in the sense of wishing to crush opposition. Mr. Fell, returning from convention work in England when Eastman Kodak was in public disfavor as a "trust", told Mr. Eastman of tricks played by competitors at the Convention. Mr. Fell said "I have a plan to put these fellows where they belong." Mr. Eastman looked the plan over and remarked "That will be pretty hard on our competitors, won't it?" "Yes, it will" replied Mr. Fell. And Mr. Eastman concluded "I am the father of this industry and I feel a responsibility for our competitors as well as for ourselves. We will not deal with them in this way."

With his genius for organization Mr. Eastman was adept at picking the right man when he himself was stuck by a problem. In 1893, at the time of the first Chicago World's Fair, static was one of the problems of film makers. This electrical phenomenon caused streaks and markings on the film which marred its usefulness. A chemical was devised which removed the effects of static—but also removed the film's effective emulsion. In this crisis Mr. Eastman sent for Mr. William G. Stuber who was a master emulsion maker, and whose father before him had been a well-known photographer. Mr. Stuber removed the static trouble and started on his way to the top with Eastman Kodak Company. Of him Mr. Eastman said "He
knows more about emulsion than anyone in the world."

Colonel Stuber now retains the equipment and the pictures used in Mr. Eastman's office, with a picture of Mr. Eastman as an addition. One picture that has intrigued Mr. Ellis is a modest 6 x 8 glossy print of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—an institution to which Mr. Eastman gave $20,000,000.
The following sketchy notations on Mr. Eastman and the early days of the Kodak Company are gleaned from a notebook kept by the late Frank W. Crouch, a long-service employee of the Kodak Company.

As an indication of the small scale of the business in the years immediately following 1898, it was sometimes necessary to wait three days to receive remittances amounting to $100 for deposit. Once, when Mr. Eastman was in Chicago on business, he made a draft for $4000 in payment for some sort of business purchase. The company did not have that much money, but Mr. Penn, at the bank where the company did its banking business, arranged to take care of the matter until Mr. Eastman’s return.

Mr. Eastman’s eye for detail caught such things as dust in the speaking tubes, which were the old-fashioned method of intra-office communication.

On one occasion, not atypical, Mr. Eastman went to Chicago by a train that left at 4:35 in the morning, having worked at the office until then.

Crouch came to Rochester to try to sell Mr. Eastman the Autographic invention for the Kodak, hoping to receive as much as $10,000 for it. Mr. Eastman, foreseeing the full advertising value of this invention, offered him a third of a million dollars, and startled Mr. Crouch by sending instructions to prepare a check for that amount. This was later than most of the episodes in this memorandum; perhaps 1912.

Mr. Eastman tried to enter Kodak Park once without a pass. In spite of Mr. Eastman’s identifying himself to the gateman, the gateman refused to admit him until his superior gave the word. Mr. Eastman praised the gateman for this scrupulous following of instructions.

In his zeal to accomplish a large number of things, Mr. Eastman would run upstairs two steps at a time.

As Mr. Crouch’s family grew, Mr. Eastman greeted the advent of a new Crouch grandchild by saying that there would ultimately be enough Crouch grandchildren to run the Kodak Company.

Mr. Eastman bought, for $38,000, the lot on which the Maplewood Y.M.C.A. now stands. He sold it to the Y.M.C.A. for $12,000.
One of Mr. Eastman’s subordinates once went to talk to him about an important matter, but he found Mr. Eastman in an impatient mood. Instead of breaching the thing he had come to talk about, he questioned Mr. Eastman about several relatively unimportant matters. Mr. Eastman said: "Why did you come to take up my time with things like that?" The subordinate replied, "It didn’t, Mr. Eastman, but I found that you weren’t in a mood to discuss what I did come about."

For years, as Mr. Eastman rode to work, he checked his watch by the clock on a church tower. Then, for a week or so, he found that the clock had stopped. He telephoned the priest to ask what was the matter, and learned that the clock needed repairs but there was not sufficient money to pay for the repairs. Mr. Eastman replied with the suggestion that the clock should be repaired and the bill should be sent to him, because he had got good use from the clock for many years.

Mr. Crouch was such a ready raconteur that I am sure his family would have heard these episodes many times over. They could undoubtedly expand these episodes, and, what is more important, they could pretty surely identify and expand many of the notes in Mr. Crouch’s notebook that mean nothing to me.

Public Relations Department

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Even at the time of his death something like $25,000,000 of Mr. Eastman's benefactions remained unrevealed. The only reason that even the existence of this huge amount of undisclosed benefactions became known was the disparity between the approximate $75,000,000 list of announced benefactions and the simple revelation at the time of Mr. Eastman's death that his gifts had amounted to $100,000,000. (Recheck all the foregoing statements.)

Mr. Eastman was extraordinarily modest. He did not solicit the perpetuation of his name in any of the institutions that he assisted or created. Indeed, he even opposed the name "Eastman Theater" for one of his most cherished projects until the decision of those associated with him in planning the theater overcame his objection. Yet the genuineness of this very modesty, "modesty," the freedom from any false modesty, was shown by the fact that Mr. Eastman did not hesitate to give out information about his gifts or about his "philosophy" when he thought the information to be of public interest -- and the public to him was often his "fellow employees of the Eastman Kodak Company."

On the 8th of December, 1924, he distributed to the employees a printed announcement that he had sold certain stocks to four educational institutions on such a basis that the institutions would benefit to the amount of about $15,000,000. On the afternoon of the day before (according to Mr. Paul Benton of the Times-Union) Mr. Eastman invited a morning...
newspaper to send a reporter to his home to receive a statement, and to the reporter he gave a copy of the announcement to employees, for publication the next morning.

Late in the evening the newspaper staff were surprised to see Mr. Eastman step off the elevator into the busy "city room."

Approaching the editor in charge, he asked if the statement were perfectly clear.

"Yes, Mr. Eastman. It's perfectly clear," the editor replied.

"Are there any questions you would like to ask?"

"No, Mr. Eastman. Everything is quite understandable and satisfactory."

So Mr. Eastman left. The newspaper printed the letter to employees exactly as Mr. Eastman had offered it.

The afternoon newspapers, anxious for a "new angle," approached Mr. Eastman, and from him they obtained an important interview explaining why he had distributed the bulk of his remaining stock in the Eastman Kodak Company.

Apparently Mr. Eastman's nocturnal visit to the original newspaper was in the expectation that he would be asked to say more about a remarkable gift. He was deeply absorbed in helping the four educational institutions and he was ready to talk in detail about them; but he waited to be asked.

(checked with Mr. Root the Dean Professor.)
A flight of aeroplanes came to Rochester's Municipal Airport in the spring of 1931, bearing the aerial photographic class from the Air Corps school at Chumute Field, Rantoul, Illinois. Lieutenant George W. Goddard was in command.

Mr. Eastman was invited to the field to inspect "the flying darkroom," a photographic laboratory built into a plane for developing and printing pictures during flight.

When Mr. Eastman came to the field his green Lincoln car was driven not by Harvey, the uniformed chauffeur, but by a small man in a Panama hat and dark civilian clothes. (check)

It was Camiel DeMest, Mr. Eastman's head gardener, neatly dressed for a special occasion.

Mr. Eastman, who enjoyed flying, had been promised a trip over Rochester. After inspecting the "flying darkroom" and after meeting the aerial photographers, the students of aerial photography, Mr. Eastman, with Mr. DeMest, was piloted on an aerial tour of Rochester in another plane. At Mr. Eastman's request, the ship flew over the newly enlarged Kodak Office, over the Eastman home, over the new River Campus of the University of Rochester, and over the new Meadowbrook tract of homes built for Kodak employees.
This desire to see from the perspective of an aeroplane
the newest developments in which he was interested was perhaps
less revealing of Mr. Eastman's character than the reason for
taking Mr. DeSmet to the Airport as substitute chauffeur.
Mr. DeSmet had been a student of aerial photography (check)
during the War, with flying experience (check). Mr. Eastman
gave remembered that, and when the invitation to fly with Lieutenant
Goddard, an outstanding aerial photographer, Mr. Eastman was
so thoughtful as to take Mr. DeSmet along.
On the occasion of Mr. Eastman's last aeroplane flight, in the spring of 1931, he appeared weak and listless, lacking in animation. Those present commented on his apparent condition.

Two or three months later came Mr. Eastman's birthday -- his last birthday -- and a remarkable change was apparent.

The day was a beautiful, sunny Sunday, July 12th. Mr. Eastman had house guests for the occasion: Mr. and Mrs. Dryden and Mr. and Mrs. Martin Johnson. During the morning the directors of the company assembled next door at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hutchison. Then, in a casual group, they walked across the sunny lawn to greet Mr. Eastman, who was with his guests on the terrace adjacent to the house on the east. Gay and carefree conversation followed. Mr. Eastman was smiling and animated. He seemed to have taken on a new youth.

What made the difference? Was it the brightness of the day? Was it the fun of a birthday -- fun at any age? Or was it the companionship of relatives and of youthful friends who had shared zestful pleasures and of men who had worked together with him in building Kodak? Probably all these things contributed to restoring to a while the enjoyment of life without which Mr. Eastman could not have filled his life as full of accomplishment.