

Interview with Charles K. Flint,
Manager, Kodak Park

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FLINT

Mr. Flint was a consulting engineer with the firm of Westinghouse, Church, Kerr & Company in New York City when Mr. Eastman was looking for someone to take charge of constructing the 16-story Kodak Office building on State Street in Rochester. Mr. Flint was recommended for the job by Mr. W.S. Austin, a former associate, who had been employed by Eastman Kodak Company as a Superintendent at Kodak Park.

Mr. Flint, when construction work began on the Kodak Office building in the winter of 1911-12, was impressed by Mr. Eastman's grasp of details and his insistence of controlling those details. Mr. Flint prepared contracts for Mr. Eastman to execute as Mr. Eastman signed all contracts made by the company. Mr. Flint supervised the construction of the Kodak Office building during 1912 and part of 1913. Then he was sent to Toronto to supervise the construction of Eastman Kodak Co. Limited plant.

Mr. Eastman had definite ideas on matters of building. Mr. Flint observed that when Mr. Eastman returned from abroad he always wanted to look over the new buildings and additions that had been completed in his absence. Mr. Flint remembered that after the plastering was completed in Kodak Office and pipes had been installed, the sprinkler system pipes were painted cream-color so they would harmonize with the color of the interior walls. Mr. Flint asked Mr. Eastman "How do you like the cream color on the pipes?" Mr. Eastman answered

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crisply, "It's all wrong." Mr. Flint inquired anxiously "In what way?" Mr. Eastman answered "The sprinkler pipes should be red." Mr. Flint explained he had them painted cream color so they would be inconspicuous. However, for purposes of ready identification in case of fire, the cream-colored pipes were re-painted a vivid red as Mr. Eastman recommended.

From 1914 to November, 1915, Mr. Flint was in Canada where he finished the construction of the plant of Eastman Kodak Co., Limited. Then Mr. W.S. Austin, a Superintendent of Kodak Park, left the employ of Eastman Kodak Company and Mr. Flint came to Rochester to take the vacated position.

Mr. Flint was impressed by Mr. Eastman's taste and by his observation in architectural matters. While Mr. Eastman didn't make architectural drawings, he intelligently criticized the drawings made by others. McKim, Mead and White of New York City were given the job of designing the exterior of the 16-story Kodak Office building. In consultation with Mr. Eastman, that company designed the front entrance, the embellishment on the facade with terra-cotta design, and the gargoyles on the cornice.

Mr. Flint remembered Mr. Eastman was much interested in the plans for remodelling the interior of the Kodak Office in Paris in 1912. When Mr. Eastman saw interesting details of construction or unusual types of material used in business buildings outside of Rochester he told his associates of these ideas on his return. One time he came back from England enthused about the use of teakwood for steps because it was so hard and long-wearing and had such an attractive rich, deep color. Mr. Eastman also observed different types of lighting and types of lighting fixtures. In spite of his architectural interest, Mr.

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Eastman did not read architectural magazines.

Mr. Flint remembered "fatherly" advice which Mr. Eastman gave him when he had been here a year or less. At the time, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company planned to rebuild the Windsor Station (which had been destroyed by fire) at Montreal. Mr. Flint was asked by the architects on that job (McKim, Mead and White) if he cared to take the position of engineer for the architects. Mr. Flint mentioned the possibility of his taking the position to Mr. Frank W. Lovejoy, and then Mr. Eastman sent for him. Mr. Eastman came to the point at once and said "I understand you are considering employment on this new project in Montreal." Mr. Flint answered "Well, I have been asked whether I'd be interested. Furthermore, I have had some experience along that line of work and perhaps I am better fitted for it than for work with the Eastman Kodak Company."

Mr. Eastman said he should like to give Mr. Flint his views on the Eastman Kodak Company and the opportunities he believed it offered to a young man in the organization. In his cool, logical way Mr. Eastman pointed out that Kodak was growing; it was world-wide in its activities and interests, and a great future growth seemed probable. After Mr. Eastman expressed his views, he suggested that Mr. Flint weigh the matter carefully before he made a decision. It was significant of Mr. Eastman's character, Mr. Flint thought, that he offered him no inducements to remain--although he evidently wanted him to. Mr. Eastman didn't ask whether the salary would be more on the other job, nor did he offer to pay Mr. Flint more to remain at Kodak Park. Mr. Flint was so impressed by Mr. Eastman's sincerity that he quickly made up his mind to remain in the organization directed by such a man.

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Mr. Eastman was very efficient, but once in a great while a mistake might "get by" him. Mr. Flint recalled that, after he had been here a few years, he received a letter from Mr. Eastman concerning a salary change. The letter read "Beginning January 1 next, your salary will be at the rate of..... a year." The new rate was lower than the old and Mr. Flint was puzzled as to whether "the boss" intended to cut his salary or a mistake had been made in typing. Mr. Flint went to Mr. Eastman's office, showed him the letter and inquired if it were correct. Mr. Eastman asked "What's wrong with it?" Mr. Flint answered briefly "The pay you mention is lower than I have been getting." Mr. Eastman had the matter looked up and found that the letter of a previous year had been copied verbatim. Mr. Eastman chuckled at Mr. Flint's discomfort and also at the fact that he himself had not noticed the error.

Mr. Eastman was an unusually good letter writer, Mr. Flint said. He expressed his ideas completely, although consisely. Mr. Eastman believed that business letters should be brief and he urged the use of brief letters by correspondents in his company. No word or phrase with a secondary meaning, which could be misunderstood, was included in business letters written by Mr. Eastman.

Mr. Flint was amazed by Mr. Eastman's ability to do two things at once. He went to Mr. Eastman's office on Saturday morning in 1912 with a contract to be signed and found "the boss" at his high desk reading his mail. "What's on your mind?" Mr. Eastman asked, without looking up. Mr. Flint answered "I have a contract I'd like you to sign." Mr. Eastman continued "You read the contract while I go ahead and finish the mail." Mr. Eastman continued to read his letters while

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Mr. Flint read the contracts to him. Mr. Eastman stopped Mr. Flint several times to say a point should be changed in the contract and told him to consult Mr. Walter S. Hubbell, the company's legal adviser, about the particular points.

Mr. Eastman made rapid decisions, and his quickness was based on understanding, not on impulsiveness. When Mr. Eastman started new buildings, new projects or new processes he called a conference of those who were most interested in and who knew most about the subject. Mr. Eastman did not act without consulting others where the opinions of others were valuable. Conferences were as long and as thorough as the situation required, for Mr. Eastman listened to the opinions of everyone who had useful comments. When he concluded that further discussion would add nothing to the understanding of a situation, Mr. Eastman made the decision very quickly.

Sometimes decisions involved the expenditure of large amounts of money but Mr. Eastman did not hesitate because his careful forethought had eliminated uncertainties so far as humanly possible. Mr. Eastman always was willing to consider any course of action by which he had a 50%, or better, chance to be successful and to make profit. He guided Kodak rapidly into new fields, for progress and profits were never held up by long discussions or "red tape." Mr. Eastman was trusted by his Board of Directors to make decisions and he made them efficiently. This celerity amazed Mr. Flint as he had become accustomed to work with consulting engineers who made long studies and prepared long reports before a shovel of dirt was turned for erection of a building. With Eastman Kodak Company, a decision for a construction project might be made in the morning and dirt "flew" in the afternoon!