Kimball, Mrs. Harold C.;
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Interview with Mrs. H.C. Kimball, 10 East Boulevard

Mrs. Kimball is a daughter of Mr. Charles F. Pond, who was Secretary and Treasurer of the Rochester Savings Bank in which George Eastman was assistant bookkeeper in his early days. Mr. Eastman told Mrs. Kimball that previous to his bank job he had worked in the old Reynold's Arcade Building, in an office shared by Mr. Samuel D. Porter (real estate) and the firm of Baill & Brewster (insurance). This was his second job in regular employment. Previously he had worked for Captain Cornelius Waydell, an insurance agent in the Reynold's Arcade (he started March 8, 1866) with whom he earned thirty-five dollars before the end of the year. It is interesting to know that while in his teens he and a schoolmate had earned some money (he earned five dollars and put it in the bank) by making walnut brackets in filigree pattern and selling them for bookshelves. This early interest in handicraft remained a lifelong trait of George Eastman.

Among his early duties with the insurance company was the sweeping of the floor every morning, and one can imagine that, because of his neatness and his thoroughness, the floor was swept clean. After he had swept the floor he undoubtedly set the spudors in just the right positions so that persons who used them would be least likely to miss and soil the floor with stains of tobacco juice.
Mrs. Kimball met Mr. Eastman in 1899 at a reception given by Mrs. Wesley G. Angle soon after Mr. Eastman had made a substantial gift to Mechanic's Institute, Rochester. Her first impression of him was his weakness in "small talk"—although she found he could speak fluently if he was really enthused about a subject. His lack of ease in company may have been due to his secluded early life, and she remembered him saying he had never known any girls well in school. He had two sisters, one of whom was an invalid who (like his mother in her last years) had to be moved about in a wheel-chair. There was no opportunity for him to develop his "heart" for, apparently, he never fell in love and was not emotional by nature. Due to his lack of emotional experience, Mr. Eastman could not always understand other person's feelings. When tragic experience came to him, deeper understanding of the human heart came with it. Mr. Eastman told Mrs. Kimball he had believed people were weak if they gave way to their feelings, yet when his mother died he cried all day. "I could not have stopped to save my life," he confessed. After he had this experience he understood the emotions of others who suffered from tragedies and when Mrs. Kimball's oldest son was killed, she knew Mr. Eastman felt sympathy for her, although she couldn't express it readily.

Mr. Eastman's late entry into active social life made him ill at ease in company. He seemed relaxed when away from Rochester, probably because he felt he did not have to maintain the dignity of his position as strictly as he did at home. He enjoyed being with people
who were not in awe of him, and if they were jocular, he responded in mood, although usually he didn't initiate joviality. His age, his wealth, and his bias toward business tended to make him serious and restrained.

At Oak Lodge he "loosened up", and Mrs. Kimball said that Mr. Eastman sometimes liked to play pranks. In 1917, the first time she had been on a horse in many years, he led her down a little bank across a creek, which was difficult riding, although he rode easily enough himself. She believed he wanted to tease her and see if she could stay on her horse.

The men in the party at Oak Lodge often went out to shoot in the morning and the women were driven by car to an appointed spot about noontime for a picnic. Mr. Eastman often cooked the steaks and chops, and after the meal they sat and talked for a while. Then the women might return to the lodge, or they might follow behind the men while they hunted.

Mr. Eastman believed in the value of work in building character. He said to Mrs. Kimball "It is infinitely better for boys to have to work hard than to be brought up in idleness. Very few persons would work if they didn't have to, and they would then deteriorate." He did not despise working with his hands—in fact he was proud of his manual skill. At Oak Lodge, in the 'twenties, Mrs. Kimball found him at work on the water pipes (the maids couldn't do this and there were no plumbers around, so Mr. Eastman made the plumbing repairs himself.) She made the amused comment "You're having a lot of fun, aren't you?"

Mr. Eastman retorted "I would rather wipe a lead joint well, than anything I know of." He said this seriously, which indicated he really enjoyed working with his hands, and respected the value of such work.
Mr. Eastman was refined but not squeamish. A barbeque was held in 1917 at Oak Lodge and several hogs were killed. He asked the women (Mrs. George Bonbright, Mrs. A. Eastwood and Mrs. H.C. Kimball) if they would like to come out to the shed to see how the hogs were killed and how their carcasses were dipped in hot water to remove the hair. The sight almost sickened them but, although Mr. Eastman was not cruel, it did not seem to bother him in the least. He was very realistic, and apparently not easily shocked.

In the matter of scandal, although above indulgence in improprieties himself, he was not disturbed when he heard of the missteps of others. He seemed to accept such things as part of the realities of life. Early experience with poverty and with illness (of his sister) probably disciplined him to face the grim realities of life.

Mr. Eastman became more sociable as he grew older and, among other activities, he took up dancing when it was very much in vogue at the time of the World War. He said, in answer to someone's question, that what he should like to do more than anything else was "to dance the two-step without having to count to myself as I step." He didn't get the rhythm of dancing, and he was rather stiff, despite his best efforts.

Being a modest man, Mr. Eastman did not pretend to knowledge he did not possess. If he didn't know, his answer was "I don't know anything about it" and if the person with whom he talked did know, he asked for information. He was modest in other ways. The largeness of his home was not intended to impress but to accommodate the many persons he wanted to entertain there. He did not pretend to have great knowledge of art but he accumulated many fine pictures. This was true to books also. He enjoyed music, but did not claim a
technical knowledge of it. Against his musical tastes, Mr. George Bonbright once said to him knowing he had learned to play the flute.

"The trouble with you is you should have learned to play the banjo. No girl would marry a man who plays the flute as badly as you do."

Mr. Eastman had great self-control. He was temperate in eating, he seldom drank, and he had no depraved tastes or instincts (His only intemperance seemed to be in working.) His early training seemed to have given him a conservative old-fashioned viewpoint. His habit was to control his impulses and he had no admiration for persons who were impulsive and did not exercise self-control.

He became more appreciative of the company of others in later years, particularly of the bright and light conversations of women friends. Sometimes he took friends to concerts at the Eastman Theater with him and Mrs. Kimball, who went with him, said he enjoyed the music although he seldom if ever applauded. He was annoyed if persons in the audience near him talked during a concert. In the closing years his hearing failed somewhat, and his friends had to speak louder to him. He seemed to continue to enjoy music just the same.

He liked to keep his home cool, so cool that women had to wear their wraps in the music room in the winter. "My goodness, me," Mrs. Kimball said to him, "You should have your house warmer. You men have heavy coats but the women are freezing in their evening gowns." Mr. Eastman replied "Let them get their wraps and put them on." There were open fireplaces in most of the rooms of his home, the music room being the exception. A smooth bed of ashes was made, three or four inches thick, and small logs, about a foot long, were
piled in the fireplaces. Mrs. Kimball inquired why he had such small logs. He said "Because I like to have a fire going, yet a big fire gives off too much heat. These little logs give just enough." The banked ashes maintained an even glow and did not allow the fire to burn out quickly.

Someone has said of Mr. Eastman that he liked to "control the alternative." Mrs. Kimball believed his desire to make gifts while he lived, rather than in his will (to be distributed after his death), was that he wanted to control his benefactions rather than to make endowments in which future control might be for purposes that he might not approve.
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