

*Radio talk  
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Rochester station*

GEORGE EASTMAN

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*Speedy  
and Int.*

The importance of George Eastman to this city certainly needs no emphasis stronger than the presence here of that industry, created by him, which contributes to the support of some one-sixth of our population; nor can words attest his generosity more eloquently than the many local institutions founded or endowed by him.

Born in Watersville, Oneida County, on July 12, 1854, Eastman was a resident of Rochester from his sixth year. A few years after the family moved to the city, the elder Eastman died, leaving his widow and three children in straitened circumstances.

On March 8, 1868, George went to work on his first steady job, as office boy in the real estate office of Cornelius Waydell from whom he received the goodly salary of three dollars a week. At the same time he began the first in the series of account books from which so much can be learned of his character and early interests. Each year reveals an increase in his bank account and his expenditures are shown to have been largely for utilitarian purposes. Now and then, however, a youthful craving for pleasure crops out and there are frequent evidences of generosity and of attempts at self-education. Thus there are the careful notations of "sixty-five cents for ice-cream" on his fourteenth birthday, of contributions toward the care of an injured boy, of many gifts, including a century plant for his mother, of a subscription to Harper's (it took a week's pay for this), of French and riding lessons and membership in a gymnasium. In 1871 he bought a flute on the installment plan. Colonel Henry A. Strong, who was at this time a boarder in the home of Eastman's mother and who later became his first

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business partner, used to say that although George had practised "Annie Laurie" for two years, he was so unsuccessful in mastering it, that he failed to recognize the tune when, years later, he heard it played by some one else.

By the summer of 1876, the young Eastman was earning fourteen hundred dollars a year as a bookkeeper in the Rochester Savings Bank. At about the same time he became seriously interested in photography. In 1877 he bought \$94.36 worth of "sundries and lenses" and arranged with a local photographer for lessons. He soon became an ardent amateur, concerned not only with the problems of picture taking but also with those of printing and developing. In this era of 'wet plate' photography, the whole process had to take place immediately which entailed the carting about of a large amount of equipment. In the first interview ever granted by Eastman he described this paraphernalia: "I bought an outfit and learned that it took not only a strong but also a dauntless man to be an outdoor photographer. My layout, which included only the essentials, had in it a camera about the size of a soap box, a tripod, which was strong and heavy enough to support a bungalow, a big plate-holder, a dark-tent, a nitrate bath, and a container for water."

Two years later he obtained patents on two inventions, an emulsion for coating plates and a machine for applying the emulsion, and in 1880 he rented "the entire third floor" of an office building in downtown Rochester and went into the manufacturing of plates and other supplies. At first he retained his bookkeeping post, "giving the business," he afterwards wrote, "what attention I could between the hours of three P.M. and breakfast time." Later in that same year, however, he resigned from the bank, and forming a partnership with Colonel Strong, devoted his whole time to the new business.



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The succeeding years present a picture similar to that of any struggling new industry - this one, of course, being characterized by the tremendous amount of research and experimentation that was entailed. The first "Kodak", carrying a roll of film for <sup>?</sup>~~two~~<sub>100</sub> hundred exposures and taking a round picture, two and one half inches in diameter, was put on the market in 1888. The whole outfit, including the camera, had to be sent to Rochester for developing. The catchy name "Kokak" was invented by Eastman himself as was the equally arresting phrase, "you press the button, we do the rest."

The decided advantages of the new camera and the effectiveness of the advertising campaign carried on by Eastman from the very beginning of his company soon spread the fame of the Kodak all around the world. In the days before testimonials were solicited and used for advertising Rudyard Kipling wrote in praise of the Kodak, and it was introduced by Gilbert and Sullivan in their opera, "Utopia", in one scene of which two "bashful maidens" stepped forth from a chorus of camera-laden beauties and sang:

"To diagnose  
Our modest pose  
The Kodaks do their best;  
If evidence you would possess  
Of what is maiden bashfulness  
You only need a button press -  
And we will do the rest."

Extensive advertising was only one of the policies consistently followed by Mr. Eastman from the beginning. Others were the utilization of world-wide markets, the employment of trained scientists, and the sharing of profits with employees. As early as 1884 he employed "a young chemist who devotes his time entirely to experiments". This young man was later discovered in a plot to form a new company using the Eastman secret formulae and processes. His faith unshaken by this incident, Eastman continued to employ trained men, paying them well and expecting much of them in return. "The technical men", he once wrote, "must make a record to hold their jobs. If they do not they are not any better



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than uneducated men; in fact, not as good, because an educated man who is not efficient is a spoiled man." To the tiny corps of workers in Rochester during this period came inquiries of all sorts from amateur photographers, many of the letters being answered in Eastman's own handwriting. "We cannot," he wrote to one inquirer, "give you the exact temperature that the flat iron should be to get the best results, but if you will ask your wife to heat for you a flat iron just right to iron a shirt, you will have it."

With the invention of celluloid film and pocket Kodaks, the business grew by leaps and bounds. The films now did not have to be sent to Rochester but could be developed in any locality, and amateur photographers increased rapidly in numbers. "The craze is spreading fearfully," said a writer in the Chicago Tribune, "Chicago has had many fads whose careers have been brilliant but brief. But when amateur photography came, it came to stay."

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Kodak Company was adding branches in many countries as well as widening out in scope and continuing its experimentation especially, at this time, in the line of moving picture film. In 1900 Eastman was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by the government of France, one of the few public honors he ever accepted. His wealth was now assuming large proportions and the first evidences of his astounding liberality became apparent. In 1899 he received his first large sum that was not tied up in the business, \$969,000, and within a year had given or promised to give to individuals or institutions nearly half of it. Part went to employees and officers of the company in accordance with Eastman's theory that profits should be divided and part went to other ends. Eight years before this when his fortune was not nearly so large he had donated ten thousand dollars to Mechanics Institute, writing at the same time to some of his associates: "I would like very much to see you put your name down for <sup>5</sup>\$5,000. You have made a good deal of money in Rochester." There was apparently, even at this date, the idea in his mind of



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returning to the city where he had made his money, the benefits of that fortune. At about this time, however, he went on record as saying that he was opposed to higher education. When in 1903 he gave the University \$65,000 (to which he later added another ten thousand) for a new science building, he explained this seemingly inconsistent action on the grounds that Dr. ~~Rhess~~ Rhess had "let me alone", an indication, perhaps, that the earlier remark may have been merely the result of annoyance at being 'hounded'.

*see his statement*

The history of his numerous benevolences in later years does not need to be recited. He returned to society the bulk of his fortune. To the University of Rochester he gave nearly \$40,000,000, and large sums to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and to Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes. Eastman thus explained his choice of recipients of his wealth; "In the first place, the progress of the world depends almost entirely upon education. Fortunately the most permanent institutions of men are educational. They usually endure even when governments fall . . . ."

By 1924 Eastman felt that he could safely retire from active leadership in the company he had founded. Its twentieth century growth had been phenomenal. Wise price and labor policies, a constant interest in research had combined with the development of a great new industry the more to give to Kodak a commanding position. "I am trying," he wrote to a friend, "to fix it so that I will have to come down to business only about every second rainy Thursday."

During this period he personally supervised the plans for a number of European dental dispensaries similar to the one given Rochester; interested himself in such civic projects as the Community Chest and the Bureau of Municipal Research; and became an ardent advocate of calendar reform and the thirteen month year, as well as retaining his interest in the University, especially in the Music



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School. During his early life Eastman had known little about music and had based his support of it on "hearsay" but as he grew older he had given it more and more personal attention and had found in it a source of great pleasure and relaxation. He had an organ installed in his great house on East Avenue and employed a "resident organist" to give concerts for him and for small groups of friends. His endowment of the Music School and Eastman Theater and his support of a civic orchestra as well as the gift of musical instruments to the public schools were inspired by a genuine love for music and a desire to have it become a more important factor in the life of the community. He also became a collector of paintings, choosing with great care the ones that he hung in his home. His sole criterion in this matter was his personal taste and he would buy only those pictures that he liked when he saw them hung on his walls. On more than one occasion he was known to go to considerable expense to have some masterpiece appraised and sent to him only to return it because it did not "fit in". One of his greatest pleasures during the latter part of his life came from participation in that sport of rich men-- big game hunting. He made several trips to Africa with Martin and Osa Johnson and brought back a number of trophies which he placed in his home in rather incongruous company with his eighteenth century English portraits.

His interest in his varied activities was apparently so keen and so little was known of the true state of his health, that the news that he had taken his own life came as a tremendous shock. He died on March 14, 1932, in his seventy-eighth year, feeling that his "work was <sup>finished</sup> done" and leaving behind him in the city which he had loved so sincerely many living memorials in the form of institutions destined throughout the years to add to the "enrichment of community life".