Interview with Mrs. Robert Ranlet, 1/16/40
28 North Goodman Street,
(A friend of Mr. Eastman)

Mrs. Ranlet dwelt upon the pleasantness and affability of George Eastman when he was away from business. She found this "softer" side of his nature manifested on a trip which she made with Mr. Eastman and a small party of his friends in 1916 when they went to the woods of the high Sierras. On such a trip he would relax and be a "homey" sort of man who took an interest in her sewing, asking what she was making, or why she was doing it in a particular way, and other little questions that indicated his interest and his curiosity in the creation of things. He often mentioned to her at such times that he liked to see people use their hands. (He had rather stubby but deft hands himself). He would also pay little compliments, perhaps murmuring "How lovely!" if the article upon which she was working seemed cleverly done. This reflected his appreciativeness of good handiwork.

Mr. Eastman was sensitive to human relationships and was alert to observe the conduct of other people. At the start of this trip Mr. Eastman had seen Mrs. Ranlet's daughters as they bade their mother good-bye and he later said that he thought the relationship between Mrs. Ranlet and these girls was a very beautiful one. His own devotion to his mother had undoubtedly made him appreciative of an understanding relationship between parents and children.
In spite of his putting matters of business temporarily aside when on a trip Mr. Eastman did not relax in one particular. He maintained his passion for detail and efficiency. Every item of camp equipment was perfect structurally and from the viewpoint of efficiency. Even the amount of calories that the food contained had been figured out. Mr. Eastman’s ingenuity would contribute to this efficiency, as for instance in the matter of packing material for the eggs which they carried. He had buckwheat seeds poured in the space between the eggs and the corrugated partitions in the containers to prevent the eggs being broken.

That habit of putting a heavy black line on walls or other places where utensils should hang was exercised by Mr. Eastman on his camping trips. On the coverboard of the portable kitchen were pencilled outlines showing the proper place for each knife, spoon, and other implement to be hung. If anything happened to be missing from its marked position at the end of a meal it just had to be found before any further action was taken, even if everyone in the camp were rounded up for the search. Then when the missing article was placed over its outline Mr. Eastman became quite contented again.

Caution, of the meticulous legalistic sort, was indicated by one of Mr. Eastman’s invariable procedures. Whenever trees had to be cut down to make a camp site Mr. Eastman would take his kodak and make a photograph of the site exactly as the party found it. His idea was that if the owner of a tract should happen to claim that his property had been infringed upon and his trees cut down Mr. Eastman could show photographs proving whether or not this had actually been done.
Mr. Eastman obviously felt that whatever he did was worth doing with care, and this trait manifested itself even in the way he wore his clothes. He put his hat on carefully and at just the position on his head that he felt it should be. He would not throw his overcoat on but would carefully adjust the collar and cuffs of his under-jacket so that he would feel dressed in a finished fashion. Even the tying of shoestrings so they would not accidentally become unfastened was not beneath his attention. He once demonstrated to Mrs. Ranlet this little trick of tying a shoestring (she cannot recall exactly what it was) and told her it had been shown to him by a sister of Nelly Ely, who was a world-famous traveller. Apparently Mr. Eastman picked up and absorbed information of a practical nature wherever he found it, whether it was regarding something big or something so humble as a shoestring.

George Eastman had few personal wants and yet this situation left him sad. One night they were seated about the camp fire which threw up fluttering tongues of flame, while the stars blinked overhead in the clear western skies and the sound of the neighing miles was borne to them now and again. In this comfortable condition they spun yarns and talked with greater freedom than they might have under more conventional surroundings. Mr. Eastman, in a mood of reminiscence, told of one of his earlier wants (in his early twenties) which happened to be for a pair of gold cuff links. As he passed a certain jeweler's window on his way to and from work he would look at them and long for them. He saved a little money each week, undoubtedly worrying that the links might be sold to someone else.
before he got their purchase price, and when he had the full amount saved he bought them. "The day I bought those cuff links was one of the big days of my life" he declared with a smile, adding something to the effect that they weren't very heavy or very beautiful either. The smile became more wistful as he added "To think that today I can have anything I want and there is nothing that money can buy that I feel any great desire for."

Mr. Eastman used to like to tell about the favorable impression of being a "human" sort of person which he made upon at least one visitor to his office. Although Mr. Eastman was busy when this man called he granted him a few minutes time. The man must have appreciated the courtesy and have been impressed favorably with Mr. Eastman for as he passed the reception clerk on the way out he commented "Gee, he's a swell guy, and he's just as human as you and I are!"

Of course Mr. Eastman received many unwarranted requests for donations and this annoyed him greatly. Once he said to Mrs. Ranlet "It's a perfectly terrible thing to give money to anything because immediately you get thousands of undesirable letters from all over the country." There was an occasion, though, in which a request for assistance proved to be legitimate and also very amusing. A department head at M.I.T., before Mr. Eastman had been identified with the beneficent Mr. Smith, came to him with a project for a chemical laboratory at that school and asked Mr. Eastman's financial assistance for the project. Mr. Eastman's tight lips didn't widen a bit as the earnest professor pleaded for $100,000 nor did his bright eyes sparkle with the amusement he must have inwardly felt at such
a request after he had already secretly given millions to M.I.T. Later when this man learned that Mr. Eastman and Mr. Smith were identical he asked, with something akin to embarrassment, as to what Mr. Eastman thought of him on that occasion. Mr. Eastman cordially replied "You put up a good case. I was glad to give you the money on its merits."

Along another line of thought, Mrs. Ranlet spoke of Mr. Eastman’s relationship to flowers. He didn’t know much about botany or even the art of raising them, but he did like to have them about him for their decorative value. He had a marked aversion to red flowers—or to anything red on his table or in his house furnishings and decorations. Miss Cherbuliez told Mrs. Ranlet that once she had placed red flowers on the table and Mr. Eastman had said "I can’t stand those red flowers. They will have to come off." Mr. Eastman never had red flowers in his garden, Mrs. Ranlet says.

Mr. Eastman was a lover of orchids, possibly because they are rare and difficult to acquire. He also appreciated their ornamental value on a beautiful woman. He would buy orchid bulbs and then raise them in his orchid house. If a rare one should bloom the gardener would call it to his attention and Mr. Eastman would decide upon the fortunate woman to receive it.

A very rare and expensive orchid which Mr. Eastman once sent to a lady went astray, but the fun he derived from the incident compensated him for its loss. When this flower had bloomed Mr. Eastman decided he would send it to Mrs. Ernest Willard. Mrs. Willard happened to be out when the orchid was delivered at her home and the maid put it in some out of the way corner, presumably to keep it cool,
and then forgot all about it! Several days later when it did come
to attention the box was opened and only a dead, yellow object re-
mained. Mrs. Willard expressed her regret to Mr. Eastman. "I'm
sorry it happened, too" he said ruefully. "That orchid cost $150
and it was the only blossom on the plant." But to avoid hurting her
feelings he hastened to add in a bright and joking manner "When I
give orchids to my friends I wish they would at least open the box."
Afterwards he would bring up the incident and this phrase, much to
his own amusement and that of others.

Mr. Eastman liked things of permanent rather than of trans-
itory value. This was illustrated by an idea which he brought back
after a visit to the home of his niece, Mrs. Dryden. While there
he noted the fine solid driveway beside her house. Previously he
had a gravel drive at Eastman House and it would have to be raked
and smoothed almost every time a car passed over it. After seeing
Mrs. Dryden's drive he decided to have one laid for his own home
that would last.

He was always getting ideas from others and applying them
in his own living. For instance he might make a visit to someone's
home and notice such a matter as the arrangement of sofas or chairs
about the fireplace. When he came back home he would say "I liked
that arrangement. I'm going to try it here."

Mr. Eastman's picnics were loads of fun and Mrs. Ranlet
believes he enjoyed them because it gave him a chance to cook, and
also because it afforded a pleasant outlet for his urge to plan.
Of course, he enjoyed them for the pleasure of eating a picnic lunch,

Ranlet, Mrs. Robert
too, because he had a good healthy appetite. Some of the favored
picnic spots were the Oakes and a place beyond Fairport in the rolling
hill country. He didn't like crowds so they went off the main road
and after getting fire and utensils set up Mr. Eastman would broil
steaks over the roaring outdoor fire. Corned beef hash was another
dish that he liked. Mr. Eastman enjoyed his hot food really hot
and exercised his ingenuity to keep it that way. Plates were nested
in such a way that one plate could be put in another one that was
filled with hot water and thus was kept warm. He would also fit
rubber bands around the cups and fit them one within another so that
suction formed a partial vacuum and thus kept their contents hot.

In cooking, Mr. Eastman would plan enough but not too much.
Just the correct number of eggs, for instance, would be boiled or
otherwise prepared to properly meet the needs of the number of per-
sons to be served, and not a single egg more or less would be pre-
pared. He was a good cook, and outside the field of camp cooking
Mrs. Ranlet recalls that he had excellent recipes for lemon pie
and for sauce to be used on hot cakes or puddings.

Mrs. Ranlet felt that Mr. Eastman was uncommunicative to
his mother for fear he might worry her and this is one indication
of his concern for her happiness. Mrs. Ranlet once asked Mr. East-
man "Do you talk over your ambitions, or your interests or your
anxieties with your mother?" He replied "I never disturb my mother.
I feel that my problems are my own burden."

Mr. Eastman began to develop his marvelous self-discipline
early in youth as the following story indicates. He told Mrs. Ranlet
of his hard work as a young man when he would come home from the
bank and would put his emulsion to cooking on the kitchen stove. Later he would go to sleep in the living room off the kitchen with an alarm clock by his side set for the next time the emulsion should be taken care of. Mrs. Ranlet asked "Could you go to sleep?" Mr. Eastman replied "I trained myself so I could drop back to sleep like that". He snapped his fingers to indicate the speed with which he could "turn off" his consciousness and find slumber.