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THAYER

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Interview with Mr. Henry L. Thayer,
C a s h i e r

Mr. Thayer came with the company on July 5, 1895, beginning as an errand boy at Kodak Park and later becoming assistant to Mr. Crouch. Mr. Crouch left to go with a local clothing concern and then came back. It was probably a case of money, but later things didnt seem so attractive as they had when he made the change and he returned. The change was voluntary as, in Mr. Thayer's opinion, if Mr. Eastman discharged a man he was usually done for so far as he was concerned.

Mr. Eastman had very little to say and what he did say was to the point. He insisted upon others speaking directly to their point.

Mr. Eastman was a believer in the value of vacations. Mr. Crouch had been on the job for years without having a real rest and when this was called to Mr. Eastman's attention he said Mr. Crouch should go, although the latter expressed the view that it would take as long to train his "boy" (Mr. Thayer) how to take charge as it would to stay and do it all himself. Mr. Crouch, however, did take his vacation and upon returning was able to report that things had gone better than he expected. So Mr. Eastman said "After this I want you to take a vacation every year the same as the rest of the employees."

As an errand boy Mr. Thayer often had occasion to deliver things to Mr. Eastman, who would not usually bother to say "Good Morning"--unless Mr. Strong or someone else were present when he

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usually did speak. Mr. Strong, according to Mr. Thayer, was like his younger partner in being taciturn.

Mr. Thayer tells how he obtained Mr. Eastman's autographed photograph. One day he went up with his daily financial statement and saw some pictures on his desk. Mr. Eastman was away on an African trip at the time. He said to Miss Whitney "Those are awfully nice pictures of Mr. Eastman. I wonder if you could prevail upon him to let me have one?" She promised to remember and when he returned Mr. Thayer was called up.

"Open that package" said Mr. Eastman, pointing to the same one Mr. Thayer had seen before. He did, and there was the selection of Mr. Eastman's photographs. "I understand you'd like one of my pictures", he said, "so you may pick one out". Mr. Thayer did so, thanking him and saying he would hang it in a prominent place in his home. Then he started out. "Would you like my autograph on that picture?" Mr. Eastman added, and upon Mr. Thayer's assent he wrote across the bust "To my friend Henry L. Thayer (date)"

"That makes the picture more valuable to me than before" Mr. Thayer said. "Well", said Mr. Eastman, "if you like it, I'm glad to give it to you."

by this interviewer
Asked/why he wanted this picture Mr. Thayer replied "Mr. Eastman was an unusual man and as a boy ^I felt it was a wonderful thing to have a personal memento of such a person." Mr. Thayer still has this same feeling.

Mr. Thayer spoke of Mr. Eastman's unusual reserve. People did not "warm up" to Mr. Eastman quickly. In general, Mr. Thayer thinks, corporation heads of the present time are more sociable than those of the old school.

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From the album of memory Mr. Thayer recalls his mental picture of Mr. Eastman, about 1895-96, on the old high-wheel bicycle riding to work with his small lunch package over the handle-bars. The pavement was of blocks and there were no springs in the bicycle so it was bumpy riding. He would come down Main and then State Streets and on arrival would put his bicycle in the cellar with those of others. The lunch was put up in a package about ten inches long wrapped in plain brown paper and tied with a white twine. He was not an especially hearty eater at lunch-time. Mr. Eastman wore a cap in the bicycling days.

Later he used to have a coachman drive him down in a high two-wheeled rig with Mr. Eastman in the body of the contraption and the driver on a high seat in the back with a long whip. Mr. Eastman usually had brown or bay horses. Carter, the driver was retained for many years.

Mr. Thayer believed that Mr. Eastman had a flair for what could be called "showmanship". Mr. Eastman gave a stag dinner when Eastman House was completed with more than a hundred men, the heads of Kodak from all over the world, being present. He had an arbor, covered with wisteria, constructed from the dining room to the stables. It was in the fall of the year and the weather was not cold. Tables seating six or eight persons were arranged down through the arbor alongside a brick walk. Mr. Eastman had electric lights all through there, some of them being colored. An orchestra was stationed on the porch to furnish music during the dinner. After dinner they went into the house and were entertained in the music room by an organist and by vaudeville artists from New York.

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After a time Mr. Eastman announced "We are going out on the other side of the house and we'll look at the garden." Mr. Thayer believes it was a moonlight night. They all went out on the east side of the house and were told to stand absolutely quiet. In a few minutes they heard a whistle blow and then the whole yard burst into a display of fireworks. Mr. Eastman had a beautiful yard of roses and short shrubs and had twelve men stationed in different parts of the yard who touched off bombs, lights, fire-crackers, etc. This lasted fifteen or twenty minutes. It was necessary to have policemen in front of the house to keep the crowd from the street out of the yard.

Mr. Eastman liked to enjoy himself and to give enjoyment to his friends--often on a lavish scale. He once gave a New Year's party and invited Kodak department heads and his intimate friends from the city. He built, especially for this occasion, a temporary dance hall on the east side of his house. This temporary structure was about 150 feet long by 50 feet wide. Inside of the hall was lattice work on the ceiling and sides, and into this was woven wisteria vines. There were two orchestras, one at each end of the room. There was a big dinner at midnight and they all danced until 4 o'clock. After the ball this structure was demolished.

Mr. Thayer's impression was that when one went to Mr. Eastman's house on parties one didn't see Mr. Eastman for some time. At the dance mentioned he didn't see him until the Grand March, half an hour or more after his arrival. When Mr. Eastman did greet him there was no "shoulder patting". He simply said "Good evening, Mr. Thayer" with perhaps a few brief but cordial words in addition.

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