

## **Of Historical Interest:**

### **George Eastman's Devotion to Hillside**

Hillside's 150 year's of dedication to children and families has traditionally commanded commitment and support from a multitude as well as a diversity of volunteers. Recent research, however, reveals a fascinating story about the participation in Hillside's history by one of Rochester's most notable and charismatic citizens - George Eastman.

Foresighted as he seemed to be with so many civic responsibilities in both the corporate and the socially needful worlds, Mr. Eastman chose Hillside's predecessor, the Rochester Orphan Asylum, as one of his first, important community commitments. In 1892, he became a member of the Board, and most importantly, he was president of the institution in 1901, when the Orphanage on Hubbell Park and the 29 children "of obscure lineage" who lived there were destroyed in a devastating and tragic fire.

As president of the Board, George Eastman presided very the decision not to rebuild on the city site, but rather to purchase Hillside's present location high on a hill overlooking Monroe Avenue and the Bristol hills - then a "country setting,,"

With the sense of ownership, the attention to detail, and the intense personal involvement that were part of Eastman's very individual life's style, Mr. Eastman adopted Hillside and the children there as if the property and the offspring were his own.

Luckily for Hillside, the need for a new campus and buildings came about just as Eastman's own residence on East Ave, designed by .J. Foster Warner with gardens by Alling De Forest, was finished. Mr. Eastman had taken intense delight in every last little detail of its creation, and he declared to friends at the time that he was sorry to have his big house completed. So the urge to build and form and meet a need remained unsatisfied for George Eastman, and Hillside was the fortunate beneficiary.

In 1904, Eastman was both president of the Board and Chairman of the Building Committee for the orphanage. Records show that he was instrumental in retaining his own personal architect, Foster Warner, to design a whole new campus with one and two-story brick and shingle cottages and halls surrounding a central, flower-bedecked "green." Again, Eastman chose only the best, for the green would be designed by his own former landscape architect, Alling De Forest.

In concept, such a cluster arrangement for orphanages was far-ahead of its time. To research its planning, Eastman insisted that a committee of trustees and the architect accompany him on a trip to look over similar institutions. Only one orphanage took his fancy. It was located on the Hudson River, used the cottage style, and was the only one of its kind in the nation.

Warner designed the site plans for the new campus, but it was his own personal gift

to Hillside in which Eastman took particular delight. He engaged Warner to design a new Eastman Cottage for Boys at Hillside and soon found, as he told friends, that he could "get just as much fun out of " masterminding all the details - playroom, porch, storm enclosures, wood finishes, and so forth of the Eastman Cottage for Boys for \$11,414 as he did out of building his own house for thirty times as much.

The cottage provided a model for most of the architecture on the Hill, and he cared for its construction quite intrusively. In one instance, he wrote to a relative about the woodwork and stain in his Eastman Cottage with reference to a noted home he had seen in the Northeast. "The woodwork in that house does not begin to be as good as in a cottage I am building for the Rochester Orphan Asylum." He was referring to the Elizabeth Gardner Museum in Boston.

In meeting the challenges as Board member, President, and Building Committee Chairman of the Orphanages, Mr. Eastman took his responsibilities very seriously and in great detail. He ordered coal off-season to obtain the best rates, he mandated insect screens and gas fixtures ("absolutely plain black, simple fixtures, like those in the Country Club"). He pressured Foster Warner to get out specifications and sent for the (masons, carpenters, plumbers, heaters, and painters. He instructed Warner to "make drawings for the two long tables for the dining room, and also have information as to the height -and kind of chairs most suitable, also the size of beds required, as I would like to order these articles and have them ready."

"I also would like to have the drawing made for the four-wheeled truck which is to be used in carrying dishes from the kitchen to the dining room," he wrote. He asked that "the 24 drawers in the living room cupboard be locked, the locks to have a common key. If they are not in the contract please add them as extras."

He even instructed Warner to protect the apples, potatoes and other garden produce on the orphan asylum grounds for the winter of 1904-05 by finishing "a place 20 feet square in one of the cellars right away." He added instructions to board it up and lock it, thus "saving the expense of making a root cellar."

Eastman wrote that presiding over the design of his gift cottage to Hillside was "fun" for him, especially since Mary Mulligan and other vivacious young ladies were so involved in the women's committee for the former asylum. Mrs. Mulligan often acted as a hostess for his social occasions in his new home, He had courted her as a young man, but she had chosen Mulligan for her life's mate.

Mr. Eastman continued his formal association with Hillside until 1917, when he founded the Community Chest in Rochester and decided that his allegiance to the orphanage might present a conflict of interest with his new, more broadly based project.

In the intervening years, he read reports on foster homes and passed personally on the adoption of children. He did seem to know there were some limits he could not exceed in the daily life of the agency: "I have already said all I can for you to the managers of the Orphan Asylum," he told one applicant for the position of matron, "namely that I will be glad if they will give you a place if they think you competent.

You will readily appreciate the fact that I cannot dictate to them whom they shall employ."

Even after his formal association with Hillside ended, Eastman continued his detailed interest in the agency and its residents. For example, there is a touching account, dated 1922, of a breakfast meeting with the current president of Hillside, who described her great concern over the nutritional deficiencies in meals provided for the children on the hill.

Eastman took note of her worries and attended so closely to the records of individual children that he could write up the case of one of the girls, "Eleanor King, who has since come up to full weight and was I understand in the graduating class."

The case was written up in the bulletin of the Tuberculosis Association and Eastman sent those bulletins out to friends and acquaintances.

Except for his generous provision to Hillside in his original Will of 1924, a touching letter to a young friend, Newton Castle concludes Eastman's deep commitment to the concern of mental health.

Castle had regretted an invitation to attend Eastman's New Year's party because of his "mental condition." George Eastman took the time to counsel his young friend with the following, poignant reply:

"While I am a mere layman I think I can detect in your letter evidence of what is called "increased psychic motor activity." This is a serious disease, leading in some cases to melancholia and prolonged disablement. The best remedy for it in young men and women is to induce the patient to keep his or her feet moving on a horizontal plane surface for as many hours consecutively as they can endure it, preferably under as agreeable conditions as can be devised. It may be that a neurologist like Dr. Angell could fix you up... I do not happen to know the Dean of your college and he may be entirely unsympathetic with mental suffering but he could not hold his job if he did not realize that a man returning to college after a vacation will do better work if most of his energies do not have to be spent in throwing off the effects of mental disease, All of the above is merely in the way of suggestion. Still hoping that *you* can come to the party, I remain" Your friend."

A consummate problem solver and community philanthropist, Mr. Eastman was far ahead of his time in worrying about these "children of questionable lineage," the mentally and emotionally disturbed, the placement of children in good homes, the selection of the best caretakers for the institution, the design of the campus and residences - and even good nutrition.

were he alive today, Mr. Eastman would undoubtedly take great pride, not only in his own early investment of funds and service to the Rochester Orphan Asylum, but also in the stewardship through the years with which Hillside Children's Center has arrived at its outstanding position today in the Rochester community and as a

preeminent advocate for children on the national horizon.

George Eastman was a visionary. He was practical, sensible, and yet creative and expansive in caring for the needful. In its service to children and families in distress, Hillside Children's Center carries on this precious legacy.

Research on George Eastman's association with Hillside was taken from notes by Elizabeth Bashore Braver, author of Eastman's biography, planned to be published in the near future.

November 14, 1990