

HOW  
**KODAK**  
GOT  
ITS  
NAME

*[We are often asked where the name "Kodak" came from or to reveal the story behind its origin. We have printed this account of it to answer such inquiries more fully than a letter could.*

*—Eastman Kodak Company]*

The word "Kodak" was first registered as a trademark in 1888, having been adopted the year before as the name of a camera that was to make photography everybody's hobby. This first Kodak camera sold for \$25 already loaded with film; and after 100 exposures, it was returned to the factory for the developing and printing of the pictures and the insertion of another roll of film. The cost of the processing and of the new roll of film was \$10. The camera made excellent pictures.

From that day to this, the Kodak trademark has been applied to hundreds of products manufactured by Eastman Kodak Company. Partly on this account—and partly because the legal profession has always considered it a "model" trademark—"Kodak" has a kind of fame all its own.

Just how the name came into being is known from personal accounts by people "who were there" and through remarks about it made by founder George Eastman himself—either orally to inquirers or in his letters.

There has been some fanciful speculation, from time to time, on how the name was originated. But the plain truth is: George Eastman invented it out of thin air! His most succinct statement in the matter was made to Samuel Crowther of *SYSTEM Magazine* in 1920: "I devised the name myself . . . The letter 'K' had been a favorite with me—it seems a strong, incisive sort of letter . . . It became

a question of trying out a great number of combinations of letters that made words starting and ending with 'K'. The word 'Kodak' is the result."

The reception of the trademark "Kodak" was mixed. The ink was scarcely dry on the registration papers from Washington before business associates began questioning Mr. Eastman about the name for the new camera—and in particular, where it came from. To Mr. C. W. Hunt in New York, Mr. Eastman wrote (September 15, 1888): "There is, you know, a commercial value in having a peculiar name; it cannot be imitated or counterfeited. You are in error, however, if you think 'Kodak' is a foreign word. It is truly American. This is to say, it was born here in this country."

Writing John M. Manley, University of Chicago, December 15, 1906, Eastman stated: "In regard to the word Kodak I can say that it was a purely arbitrary combination of letters, not derived in whole or part from any existing word, arrived at after considerable search for a word that would answer all requirements for a trademark name. The principal of these were that it must be short; incapable of being misspelled so as to destroy its identity; must have a vigorous and distinctive personality; and must meet the requirements of the various foreign trademark laws."

The "requirement" of trademark law to which Eastman referred was doubtless the basic one: that a trademark cannot be merely a descriptive word out of the dictionary.

Today the word "Kodak" is registered in some 90 countries throughout the world as the trademark of Eastman Kodak Company. It is obviously one of the company's most valued assets.

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