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## The Kodak Fallout

By [RICHARD B. WOODWARD](#)

Visitors to the George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y., over the past decade could not help noticing that the museum-in-a-mansion, the world's largest repository for all matters photographic, was struggling to keep up appearances. Everything about the former home of the man who introduced photography for the masses—from the mismatched furniture in the offices, to the sun-bleached curtains in the living room, to the grimly lighted café for visitors—seemed to convey an air of making do with less.

Upkeep and improvements won't be any easier now that the house's longtime benefactor, Eastman Kodak, has sought bankruptcy protection under Chapter 11. That everyone associated with the museum in recent years had seen this day coming, as digital technology conquered the photography and film market, has not softened the shock. For the first time since being chartered in 1947, the George Eastman House will have to get along without financial support from the company that has been its foundation.



George Eastman House

George Eastman's 1905 mansion, part of the museum since 1947.

Anthony Bannon, the museum's director over the last 15 years, tried to be both upbeat and realistic. "It's not grave but it's still serious," he said by phone the day before a recent trustees' meeting. "If we had not reached out and established connections with other donors and institutions in the last couple of decades,

worse." the situation would be far

To meet its projected budget of \$8.6 million for 2012, the George Eastman House must now raise approximately \$200,000, the amount that Kodak contributed annually to 2010 and 2011 operations. That is about 2.3% of the total budget, not an insurmountable shortfall for many institutions but still a hardship in a region with a shaky economic base and blighted by a recession.

For all concerned the new dispensation will take some getting used to. Throughout much of the museum's history, it and Kodak have seemed to be one and the same. Established as the George Eastman Museum of Photography (and more properly called the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film), the museum is situated in Eastman's palatial 50-room former home among 10.5 acres of lawn and gardens.

A succession of directors have brought together an array of materials that reflected the mind-set of its tutelary spirit. George Eastman was an inventor, businessman, collector and pillar of Rochester whose strategies promoted the growth of cinema as well as photography. The philosophy of the George Eastman House, allied to but different from that of an art museum, has been to preserve artifacts relating to the machinery and processes of photographic media, along with the images this technology produced. The archives include, for example, some 25,000 cameras and four million film stills along with 3,500 daguerreotypes and major holdings of prints by Lewis Hine, Edward Steichen and Ansel Adams.

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*Scrambling to preserve the world's  
largest repository for all things  
photographic.*

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Financing over the decades has come in large part from the company that Eastman founded in 1889 and built into a dominant force in photography and film for more than half a century. In 1976, Kodak still commanded 90% of the film market.

In the museum's early years, Kodak was "far and away the major donor," Mr. Bannon said. And that largesse continued for more than two decades. But as Fujifilm and other rivals began to eat into Kodak's profits during the 1970s, support from the corporation, at least for operating costs, began to steeply decline. In 1979 the Kodak gift was about \$1 million, about half what it had been a decade before.

As a percentage of its annual budget, this sum was still substantial. In 1989 Kodak's donation paid for 23.8% of operations, not counting what was given in restricted grants for special exhibitions and projects. (It provided, for instance, \$17 million of the \$30 million the museum raised for a capital improvement campaign in the mid-1980s.) By 1999 Kodak's annual gift was \$500,000, or 9.3% of the operating budget.

In the past few years, as the photographic world has turned almost completely digital, that share of the operating budget has dwindled to less than 3%. During this time the George Eastman House has been forced to broaden its base of support. Although Kodak has remained the largest single donor, other new contributors have included the Louis B. Mayer Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. In 2000 the museum forged a partnership with the International Center for Photography in New York so that they might work together on exhibitions to highlight the George Eastman House's rich collections and capitalize on ICP's location in New York City. This arrangement contributes nothing to the George Eastman House's costs of maintaining itself or expanding, however, and funds for buying new work have been conspicuously lacking.

"We're a museum based in collections," Mr. Bannon said. "We must continue to collect or we fail."

The past few years have seen a steady flow of donations, if not of purchases. In 2010 the museum received three large gifts: Kodak bequeathed its archives and materials for the Coloramas, those colossal photographic advertisements for the company's film products that once rose above the main hall in Grand Central Terminal; James Ivory of Merchant-Ivory Productions donated the prints and original negatives from 40 films, including "A Room With a View," "Howard's End" and "The Remains of the Day"; and Technicolor Corp., which pioneered the color process in movies, handed over its archives. These materials, dating from 1914 to 1974, include cameras, research drawings on

the three-strip process, beakers from laboratories and negatives for "The Wizard of Oz" and "Gone With the Wind." Where all of this will go and how its organization will be paid for has yet to be determined.

"A museum director is always running scenarios and contingencies," said Mr. Bannon, who is 69 years old and scheduled to retire in July. "Of course, I worry how we will continue to fulfill our strategic plan for this year. But I'm an optimist."

His successor, not yet named, will now have a vast and unique collection to oversee along with a new and permanent hole in the budget. The institution that invented film and photography conservation may be in need of some conservation of its own.

*Mr. Woodward is an arts critic in New York.*

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