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# Becton Dickinson

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## Introduction

Becton, Dickinson and Company—known more simply as BD—is one of America’s most enduring and influential corporations. Founded in 1897 by Maxwell W. Becton and Fairleigh S. Dickinson, the company’s journey from a humble partnership selling thermometers and glass syringes in New York City to a global powerhouse in healthcare technology is both an emblem of American innovation and a testament to the transformative power of vision and perseverance. Over the span of more than a century, BD has grown through a combination of pioneering product development, thoughtful leadership, and an unwavering commitment to advancing health around the globe.

This book tells the full story of BD. It traces the company’s beginnings in a rapidly industrializing America, through its pivotal role in the development of essential medical devices, and on to its expansive growth as a publicly traded leader in the S&P 500. Along the way, BD faced world wars, market upheavals, evolving medical needs, and seismic shifts in how healthcare is delivered. Each era presented challenges and opportunities, prompting the company to adapt, restructure, and innovate—often leading the charge with technological breakthroughs that redefined medicine.

Equally important is BD’s ongoing impact on society and its mission to improve healthcare outcomes worldwide. At the heart of the company’s success lie key values: safety, accessibility, and responsibility. BD’s products touch millions of lives—from the hospitals and clinics that rely on its injection devices, sample collection systems, and automation solutions, to the researchers unlocking new scientific discoveries using its advanced instruments. Its commitment to sustainable practices and corporate citizenship continues to shape its decisions and define its contributions on the world stage.

Yet, like many corporations of scale and ambition, BD’s history is not without controversy or challenge. Regulatory hurdles, product recalls, and legal disputes have tested the company’s resilience and integrity. Recent years have seen BD responding to demands for greater transparency, ethical business practices, and climate action. Its evolution in governance and sustainability reflects a broader transformation within the healthcare industry—a movement toward holistic, responsible, and future-focused growth.

As we look to the present and future, BD stands at a crossroads of rapid technological change and increasing global health demands. Its leadership has articulated bold strategies for growth, simplification, and empowerment, even as the company continues to face an ever-changing landscape of medical, social, and ethical

complexities. How BD navigates these currents in the years ahead will not only shape its own destiny but potentially influence the very future of healthcare technology.

The story of Becton Dickinson is, ultimately, the story of American enterprise—the drive to innovate, the willingness to confront adversity, and the enduring belief in the ability to make a difference. Through this book, we will explore not just the milestones and achievements, but also the values, people, and decisions that have enabled BD to become a linchpin in the world of medical science and care.

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## CHAPTER ONE: The Founding of Becton Dickinson

The year is 1897. America is a nation on the cusp of a new century, brimming with industrial fervor and scientific promise. The landscape of medicine, while still rudimentary by modern standards, was undergoing a quiet revolution. Breakthroughs in understanding disease, coupled with advancements in manufacturing, were setting the stage for an era of unprecedented progress in healthcare. It was into this fertile ground that two ambitious and enterprising men, Maxwell W. Becton and Fairleigh S. Dickinson, decided to cast their lot together, laying the cornerstone of what would become a global medical technology giant.

Maxwell W. Becton, born in Kinston, North Carolina, in 1868, was a man of diverse experiences. Having attended Rutherford College for two years before it burned down, he sought his fortune first as a salesman in New York, then in real estate in Montana. By 1895, he found himself in Boston, where he co-founded Randall and Becton, a company focused on selling medical thermometers. It was during a sales trip to Texas that fate intervened.

In a Texarkana train station, Becton spotted another gentleman struggling to read his morning newspaper due to a glaring sunbeam. A thoughtful individual, Becton simply rose and adjusted the blinds. This small act of kindness led to an introduction, a shared breakfast, and the discovery of a remarkable coincidence: both men, Maxwell Becton and Fairleigh S. Dickinson, hailed from North Carolina and, even more astonishingly, shared the same August 22nd birthday.

Fairleigh S. Dickinson, born in Core Creek, North Carolina, in 1866, was equally driven, though perhaps with a more disciplined and competitive edge. His early life saw him as a sailor on a square-rigger before he settled in Elizabeth, New Jersey. There, he balanced a day job at the vast Singer Sewing Machine Co. factory with night school, immersing himself in mechanical engineering. By his late twenties, Dickinson had become a top salesman for Baker Paper Company. The chance encounter with Becton in Texas sparked an immediate connection, cementing a friendship that would soon blossom into a formidable business partnership.

Their shared background and entrepreneurial spirit were undeniable. Becton, the pharmacist, and Dickinson, the engineer, recognized a burgeoning need for improved medical devices and supplies in America. At the close of the 19th century, the medical device market was largely unregulated, with many instruments produced by individual doctors or small workshops. However, the scientific breakthroughs of the era, such as the identification of germs by Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch, were ushering in an age of modern medicine, increasing the demand for reliable and standardized medical

tools.

On the heels of this realization, in 1897, Maxwell W. Becton and Fairleigh S. Dickinson officially formed their partnership in New York City. Their initial venture was straightforward: importing and selling essential medical instruments. They started with medical thermometers and syringes, foundational items in any medical practice of the time. This modest beginning belied the grand ambitions that would soon propel their company forward.

The prevailing medical practices of the late 19th century still involved many procedures that would seem primitive today, from bloodletting to amputations performed with basic tools. However, the period also saw the introduction of instruments that laid the groundwork for modern medical diagnostics and treatment. The stethoscope, developed by René Laennec in 1816, was revolutionizing the ability to diagnose heart and lung conditions. The hypodermic syringe, while not a new invention, was becoming increasingly crucial for precise medication delivery. The sphygmomanometer, a device to measure blood pressure, emerged in the late 1800s, and X-ray technology was discovered in 1895, promising new insights into the human body without invasive surgery.

It was within this context of evolving medical science and a growing awareness of hygiene that Becton and Dickinson saw their opportunity. The need for consistent quality and availability of medical instruments was clear. The duo understood that reliable, mass-produced medical supplies would be vital for the burgeoning healthcare sector. Their focus on thermometers and syringes, though seemingly simple, addressed immediate and widespread needs in patient care.

Their partnership was rooted in a complementary set of skills. Becton brought his experience in medical sales and an understanding of the product landscape, while Dickinson contributed his engineering acumen and a knack for mechanical processes. This combination proved potent, allowing them to not only sell existing products but also to envision and develop improvements. Their early success indicated a keen understanding of the market and a willingness to innovate right from the start.

The company's initial operations in New York City were lean, reflecting the typical startup environment of the time. They were, in essence, brokers of essential medical goods, bridging the gap between manufacturers and the growing number of doctors and clinics. This hands-on approach to distribution allowed them to gain valuable insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by healthcare professionals, information that would prove invaluable as they transitioned from simply selling to actually manufacturing their own products.

The fledgling company quickly distinguished itself through a commitment to quality. In an era where medical devices often lacked standardization and rigorous oversight,

Becton and Dickinson aimed to provide reliable instruments. This emphasis on quality, even in their early days as importers, would become a hallmark of their future endeavors. It was a foundational principle that would guide their product development and manufacturing processes for decades to come, setting them apart in a market that was still finding its footing.

Their vision extended beyond simply meeting existing demand; they aimed to shape the future of medical technology. They recognized that the true potential lay in innovation and in bringing new, more effective tools to the medical community. This forward-looking perspective, combined with their practical business sense, would soon propel Becton, Dickinson and Company beyond its humble origins and onto a path of significant expansion and influence. The stage was set for a journey that would see them revolutionize various aspects of healthcare, one medical device at a time.

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