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# Dover Corp.

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## Introduction

In the vast landscape of American industry, certain companies have not only shaped the manufacturing sector but have also reflected the spirit of innovation, resilience, and adaptability that define the nation's economic heritage. Dover Corporation stands among these distinguished entities, having evolved from a modest set of manufacturing firms into a multinational conglomerate known for its diversity, operational autonomy, and strategic foresight. This book, "Dover Corp.: The Story of An American Company," chronicles the journey of a corporation whose narrative is deeply interwoven with the broader trends and transformations that have marked American enterprise since the mid-twentieth century.

Founded officially in 1955, with its roots stretching even further back to the 1930s and 1940s, Dover's story begins with the vision and entrepreneurial drive of George Ohrstrom Sr. What started as an aggregation of four manufacturing companies soon crystalized into a cohesive entity—one that championed the values of operational independence, lean management, and calculated growth through acquisitions. Under the stewardship of leaders like Fred D. Durham, Dover fostered a unique culture characterized by decentralized management, empowering its operating companies to innovate and react swiftly to market demands.

Throughout its history, Dover has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation. Its early decades were shaped by targeted acquisitions that expanded its reach in elevators, petroleum equipment, and food service. The company's ability to identify and integrate successful niche businesses not only fueled its growth but also laid the foundation for enduring market leadership. As technological shifts emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, Dover exhibited prescience in entering and expanding within the electronics industry, later reorganizing its business segments in response to changing global priorities.

Today, Dover operates as a diversified industrial manufacturer with a global footprint, spanning sectors as varied as engineered products, clean energy and fueling, imaging and identification, pumps and process solutions, and climate and sustainability technologies. Its corporate culture, deeply influenced by its founders, remains committed to autonomy, ethical conduct, customer-centricity, and sustainable innovation. Financially robust and strategically nimble, Dover has maintained consistent shareholder returns, outperformed its peers, and carved out a reputation for stability amidst market volatility.

This book is intended not only as a detailed account of Dover's past but also as an exploration of its present and future. It examines how the company continues to thrive

in a rapidly changing industrial landscape, embracing digital transformation, prioritizing sustainability, and investing in solutions that address evolving customer needs. Through the prisms of leadership, cultural values, and a commitment to environmental stewardship, Dover's story offers insights into the enduring ingredients of corporate success.

As we proceed through the chapters, readers will encounter the foundational decisions, pivotal innovations, and transformative milestones that have defined Dover Corporation. The story of Dover is ultimately one of purposeful growth—a chronicle of how vision, strategy, and execution can combine to create an American industrial icon with global reach and enduring impact.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: The Seeds of Dover: Pre-Founding Years and Early Vision**

The story of Dover Corporation, a global industrial powerhouse, does not begin with a grand pronouncement or a single, momentous founding event in 1955. Instead, its genesis is found in a series of strategic maneuvers undertaken by a keen-eyed New York City stockbroker, George Ohrstrom Sr., decades earlier. In the tumultuous economic landscape of the 1930s and 1940s, a period marked by both the Great Depression and the burgeoning demands of World War II, Ohrstrom began quietly assembling a portfolio of diverse manufacturing companies. These seemingly disparate acquisitions would eventually form the fundamental building blocks of what would become Dover Corporation.

Ohrstrom's vision was not to create a monolithic corporation from scratch but rather to acquire established, profitable businesses that manufactured essential industrial products. He sought out financially sound companies, often family-owned or closely held, whose owners were not only looking to monetize their assets but also desired a secure future for their employees and wished to remain involved in their operations. This shrewd approach ensured that the acquired companies brought with them not just their product lines and customer bases, but also experienced management teams with deep knowledge of their respective industries.

Among Ohrstrom's earliest and most significant acquisitions was the C. Lee Cook Company. Founded in 1888 by Charles Lee Cook in Louisville, Kentucky, the company had built its reputation on manufacturing seals and piston rings for compressors. Charles Lee Cook, an inventor with multiple patents, had revolutionized the industry with his metallic packing for piston rods, used in everything from locomotives to steamships. The company had thrived, particularly during World War I, due to the demand for its piston ring designs. Following Cook's death in 1928, the company was acquired by Fred D. Durham, a metallurgist who had joined C. Lee Cook in 1923 and had been instrumental in developing more durable metal composites. Durham's leadership saw C. Lee Cook Company continue to flourish, making it a highly attractive prospect for Ohrstrom.

Another foundational piece of Ohrstrom's growing collection was Rotary Lift. This company's origins trace back to Peter J. Lunati, a car mechanic in Memphis, Tennessee, who, inspired by a barber's chair in the 1920s, developed the world's first hydraulic lift for automobiles. Patented in 1925, Lunati's "Lifting Device for Motor Vehicles" spurred the creation of the Rotary Lift Co., dedicated to producing these innovative vehicle lifts. The hydraulic lift, which could rotate a vehicle 360 degrees,

was a simple yet effective solution for mechanics, dramatically improving efficiency in service garages. Rotary Lift gradually expanded its product line throughout the 1940s to include a broader range of lifts and elevators.

The third company brought into Ohrstrom's fold was C. Norris. While less detailed information is readily available about its specific origins prior to its acquisition by Ohrstrom, it was known as a manufacturer of oil-well pump-sucker rods, crucial components for the burgeoning petroleum industry. This acquisition demonstrated Ohrstrom's early recognition of the importance of the energy sector and its supporting industries, a focus that would continue to shape Dover's portfolio for decades.

Finally, Peerless, a manufacturer of space heaters, rounded out the initial quartet of companies that Ohrstrom assembled. Heating technology, though often overlooked in modern industrial narratives, was a vital and evolving sector in the mid-20th century, with companies like Peerless providing essential products for both residential and commercial applications. The acquisition of Peerless further diversified Ohrstrom's interests, laying a broad foundation that minimized dependence on any single industry.

These four companies—C. Lee Cook Company, Rotary Lift, C. Norris, and Peerless—represented the strategic foresight of George Ohrstrom Sr. Each was a leader in its niche, characterized by a straightforward approach to manufacturing and strong profitability with robust cash flow. Ohrstrom's model was to allow these companies to retain their management teams and a high degree of operational autonomy, a philosophy that would become a defining characteristic of Dover Corporation. While Dover Corporation was formally incorporated in 1947, the pivotal moment that truly cemented its identity and set it on its course as a unified entity came in 1955. This was the year that Ohrstrom brought in a seasoned leader to manage these four diverse businesses and unify his disparate holdings under a single, cohesive corporate umbrella.

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