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Harris Corporation

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Introduction

Harris Corporation stands as a testament to American ingenuity and adaptability across more than a century of rapid technological and industrial change. Founded in 1895 in Niles, Ohio, the company began with a humble yet inventive goal: to revolutionize the printing process. From these modest origins, Harris Corporation charted a remarkable journey—spanning printing presses, broadcast and communications technology, advanced electronics, and space systems—becoming a linchpin in both the American manufacturing sector and the global defense industry. Throughout its history, Harris embodied a restless spirit of innovation, constantly evolving to meet the demands of a changing world.

The roots of Harris were planted by Alfred S. Harris and his brother Charles, whose early improvements to lithography and mechanized sheet feeding sparked a revolution in commercial printing. By combining technological vision with savvy business acumen, they set the template for decades of expansion, marked by strategic acquisitions and name changes that reflected the company's expanding reach. From the outset, Harris's core identity was tied to solving complex, high-impact problems—whether in publishing, electronics, or government communications.

World events and evolving markets continually challenged Harris to pivot and adapt. The mid-twentieth century brought the company face-to-face with the burgeoning world of electronics, and Harris responded with bold acquisitions and new capabilities. The merger with Radiation, Inc. in the 1960s opened the door to space-age communications technology, a move that would define the company's trajectory for decades to come. As Harris shifted its focus away from traditional printing and deeper into the world of defense, aerospace, and advanced communications, it redefined what it meant to be a truly American technology leader.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw Harris accelerate its transformation through robust research and development, high-profile acquisitions, and decisive entries into emerging markets. With each strategic choice, the company broadened its portfolio—from semiconductors and government IT to critical communications and space systems. Alongside business growth, Harris cultivated a progressive corporate culture, one that valued its workforce, encouraged innovation, and took pride in its global citizenship. As a result, Harris has not only been a supplier of critical systems to government and commercial clients worldwide, but also a model of corporate stewardship.

Among Harris's most significant chapters is its 2019 merger with L3 Technologies—a union that forged a new industry giant, L3Harris Technologies. In doing so, Harris's

legacy was not only preserved but amplified, as decades of knowledge, infrastructure, and innovation combined with fresh perspectives and capabilities. This pivotal moment positioned the company as a top-tier defense contractor and ensured its continued influence on technology, security, and communications on a planetary scale.

This book tells the story of Harris Corporation in all its dimensions: as a pioneer in industry, a driver of technological progress, and a case study in corporate reinvention. It charts Harris's journey from a small Ohio machine shop to a linchpin of American defense and communications technology, exploring the company's landmark innovations, the people and cultures that shaped it, and the indispensable role it continues to play in defining both America's industrial past and its technological future.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Founding of Harris Automatic Press Company (1895)

The story of Harris Corporation, a company that would eventually become a titan in defense and communications technology, begins not in a gleaming modern research facility, but in the unassuming setting of a jewelry store in Niles, Ohio, in the year 1890. Here, two brothers, Alfred S. Harris and Charles G. Harris, tinkered with more than just watches and precious metals. Their inventive minds were captivated by a far more industrious pursuit: the automation of the printing press. This humble beginning set the stage for a century of innovation and transformation.

The printing industry at the close of the 19th century, while vital, was still largely a manual endeavor. Presses required human hands to feed sheets of paper, a laborious and time-consuming process that bottlenecked productivity. It was this inefficiency that spurred the Harris brothers to action. Driven by a desire to revolutionize the printing process, they began to conceptualize and develop an automatic sheet feeder. This endeavor was not without its challenges, involving years of dedicated effort, experimentation, and likely, a fair share of frustration.

Their breakthrough came in the form of a crude, yet functional, feeding device. The initial iteration was promising enough to warrant further development, leading them to engage a local machine shop in Niles to construct the device out of iron, transforming their concept into a tangible prototype. Charles, with an eye for practical application, even took on another job to help fund their expensive inventive habits, as the jewelry shop alone couldn't support their ambitious project.

By 1893, the brothers had saved enough to send Charles to the Columbian World's Fair in Chicago, Illinois. This grand exposition was a melting pot of technological advancements, and Charles returned invigorated, convinced that their invention could outshine anything currently on display. Alfred, the more methodical of the two, also visited the fair, returning with detailed notes and sketches. It was at this point that they made a pivotal decision: not only would they refine their automatic feeder, but they would also design an entirely new, fast printing press to complement it.

The fruit of their labor was a truly revolutionary printing press, capable of delivering nearly ten times the output of presses fed manually. This was not merely an incremental improvement; it was a significant leap forward for the printing industry, poised to dramatically increase productivity and efficiency for commercial printers. The success of their invention led to the formal establishment of the "Harris Automatic Press Company," which was officially incorporated on December 23, 1895, in Niles,

Ohio.

Their very first factory was established in a rather historically significant location: two rooms within the clapboard house where President William McKinley had been born. This humble birthplace of a future industrial giant provided a stark contrast to the sprawling facilities Harris Corporation would eventually occupy. The fledgling company wasted no time in demonstrating the efficacy of their creation.

On a spring night in 1896, with a group of onlookers gathered, Charles Harris threw the drive belt onto a pulley of their new contraption. The machine sprang to life, and the automatic feeder performed as intended, marking a tangible triumph for the brothers and validating their years of perseverance. This moment cemented the Harris Automatic Press Company's position as a pioneer in commercial printing press technology.

In its early years, the Harris Automatic Press Company quickly established itself as a leader, particularly excelling in the nascent field of offset lithography. This innovative printing method, which involves transferring an inked image from a plate to a rubber blanket and then to the printing surface, was still in its infancy, and Harris was at the forefront of its development and commercial application. Their dedication to this technology would define their initial decades.

The company's rapid growth and increasing demand for their groundbreaking printing presses soon outstripped the capacity of their Niles facility. Recognizing the need for expansion and more robust manufacturing capabilities, the Harris Automatic Press Company made a strategic move. In 1917, the company relocated its factory to Cleveland, Ohio, setting up operations at 4510 East 71st Street. This move marked the end of an era in Niles and the beginning of a new chapter in a larger industrial hub, providing the necessary infrastructure for Harris to continue its ascent in the printing press industry.

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