

## The Dexters Who Led Their Company by Mel Montemerlo

This is a brief review of the sequence of members of the Dexter family who presided over their company during its more than two centuries of existence.

In 1767, Seth Dexter II and his brother-in-law, Jabez Haskell moved from Rochester, Mass. to the area which is now Windsor Locks, Connecticut. In 1770, Seth Dexter II and his brother in law, Jabez Haskell acquired 160 acres of timberland and a saw mill. That was the beginning of the Dexter company. In 1784, Seth partnered with his brother in law, Jabez Haskell, to build a second business, a grist mill. Seth had learned the clothier trade from his father, and he set up a "clothier works" on his property.

Seth Dexter II's son, Seth Dexter III inherited his fathers businesses. He continued them and expanded them. For example, he built a gin distillery.



*Haskell & Dexter grist mill, built in 1819. 1910 photo.*

Seth Dexter III's son, Charles Haskell Dexter or "C.H.," as he was called, joined his father's company. He experimented with processes of making paper in the basement of the grist mill. This foreshadowed the future of the company. Later "C.H." took over his father's company. He brought his brother-in-law, Edwin Douglas, and his son-in-law, Herbert R. Coffin Sr into the company. Edwin Douglas was also the "on-site engineer" for the building of the Windsor Locks Canal. There was a reorganization and the name of the company was changed to "C.H. Dexter and Company" in 1847. When Edwin Douglas left Windsor Locks to build another canal in Pennsylvania, "C.H." took control of the entire company.

In 1867, "C.H." brought his son, Edwin Dexter and his two sons-in-law, Herbert R. Coffin Jr and Arthur Dexter Coffin into the company. The company's name was changed to "C.H.Dexter and Sons".

When Edwin Dexter died in 1886, leadership of the company went to Herbert R. Coffin, Sr, who greatly increased the size and capacity of the mills and began the manufacture of high grade tissues and various paper specialties.

When Herbert R. Coffin died in 1901, leadership of the company pass to his two sons, Arthur Dexter Coffin and Herbert R. Coffin, Jr who managed the company as a partnership. Following incorporation in 1914, Arthur Dexter Coffin became president and Herbert R. Coffin Jr became vice-president. In the 1930s, the company began manufacturing a new type of paper that was excellent for tea bags and for wrapping processed meat. Herbert R. Coffin Jr turned paper manufacturing into a significant part of the company.

In 1936, Arthur Dexter Coffin's son, Dexter Drake Coffin, took over as president. Under his leadership, the company focussed completely on its "long fiber paper" products.

David L. Coffin took over as president in 1958. He modernized the entire organization. He hired young professional managers from outside the family, and organized the executive board to include outsiders. He focussed the company on acquiring other companies in the field of specialized chemicals.

In 1988, after 200 years of being under the leadership of someone from the Dexter/Haskell/Coffin family, K. Graham Walker was named to succeed David L. Coffin as company president.

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