George Dempster Biography

George Dempster

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Biography

George Dempster revolutionized refuse collection with his invention of a loading mechanism which allows a truck to maneuver a covered trash bin over a receptacle, empty it, and replace the container for later use.

Born September 12, 1887, in Knoxville, Tennessee, Dempster was the third of eleven children. At 14, he worked as a day laborer on the C & O Railroad. Two years later, he traveled with the W. J. Oliver Construction Company and worked as a track laborer in Elkwood, Virginia, and a locomotive fireman in Guilford, Indiana. He graduated from high school in 1906 and studied until l907 at Knoxville's John R. Neal Law School. He failed the bar exam and worked in construction, on a fruit farm, and as a stable hand.

Dempster was employed as a heavy equipment operator and engineer on the Panama Canal for five years. He returned to Knoxville in 1912, when the city became the headquarters for the TennesseeValley Authority and a center for experiments on the atomic power industry. He joined his four brothers in a contracting partnership called Dempster Construction Company and constructed railroads, highways, dams, and bridges during a flurry of highway construction in the Southern states.

At the age of 39, Dempster made his contribution to American technology by inventing the Dempster-Dumpster, a multi-purpose storage device capable of holding liquids or solids that could be emptied by movable lifts into a truck manned by a single operator. The machine was applied to over 3,000 types of containers, although it was originally intended to load stone from quarries. Dempster patented his device and sales of the Dempster-Dumpster soared.

Dempster gave up construction work to develop an equipment line which included a hydraulic press for baling scrap metal, hydraulic scoop and front-end loader suitable for road construction and coal mining, and compactor. He developed the 500-employee Dempster Motor Company in Knoxville, which produced Maxwell and Chalmers automobiles and trucks.