

## **ALLSTEEL INC. – A COMPANY HISTORY**

The company that would become Allsteel Inc. started modestly in a small frame building in Aurora, IL in 1912 and was named Allsteequip Company. The original workforce of ten produced electrical cutout boxes, shop tote boxes, and other made-to-order metal items.

For nearly two decades, drawing modest salaries and taking no dividends, President John Knell and General Manager Charles H. Lembcke plowed all the profits back into the business.

During the years from 1920 to 1959, Allsteequip became a player in the electrical equipment supply industry. In 1929 the corporation revised its name to All-Steel-Equip Company. Gradually, the product line expanded to include water cooler cabinets, boiler jackets, kitchen cabinets, refrigerated food lockers, and custom-made sheet metal goods.

As customers purchasing All-Steel-Equip cabinets and lockers for their business offices began requesting filing cabinets, the company started buying them from an Aurora supplier. As the volume of those purchases grew, All-Steel-Equip decided to purchase the Aurora Metal Cabinet Company, and redesign manufacturing processes to its standards. In 1936 it became a serious competitor in filing cabinets.

**ALLSTEEL, INC.**  
**ADD ONE**

World War II delayed the move to desk manufacturing until 1947, when the company introduced its “knock-down” desk line with interchangeable components. Bookcases, telephone stands and credenzas followed. Meanwhile, the company’s Los Angeles showroom served as a set for the filming of the 1947 classic *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*.

But All-Steel-Equip was just one product category shy of a full office furniture inventory – chairs, so in 1953 it bought the Shepherd Chair Co. of Melrose Park, Illinois. As it had with other acquisitions, All-Steel-Equip revamped the designs and the manufacturing process. Months later, its newest division introduced a new line of office chairs. That set the stage for nationwide sales and distribution for office furniture, and the decision to pursue the architectural-design market.

In 1966 C.I.T. Financial Corp. bought the company, giving it a strong financial base for future growth. One of C.I.T.’s properties, B.K. Johl Inc. of Montreal, a major Canadian office furniture manufacturer, also became part of All-Steel-Equip.

In 1967, the company restructured into three divisions: office furniture, electrical products, and B.K. Johl. Six years later, the furniture divisions were renamed ALL-STEEL INC. and ALL-STEEL CANADA LTD., and simplified to Allsteel in 1986. Allsteel had several corporate parents, including RCA, before HNI acquired it in 1997.

**ALLSTEEL, INC.  
ADD TWO**

One of Allsteel's signature innovations, the lateral file, was developed in 1967 and rolled off the production line in 1969. Lateral files, modular desks, and panel systems – and a myriad of awards – are prime evidence of Allsteel's commitment to innovative design throughout the years, right down to its #19<sup>®</sup> and Sum<sup>™</sup> chairs, Terrace<sup>®</sup> and Concensys<sup>®</sup> workstations, Get Set<sup>™</sup> training products and its latest introduction, the Reach<sup>™</sup> integrated storage system.

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