Pioneers have been running the B. Hayman Company since 1876. More than once the company’s management has left comfortable businesses for more promising ones.

A true rags-to-riches Americana story unfolds as current chairman Ray McMicken describes the background of this major West Coast Jacobsen distributorship.

Sailing to a new frontier
Fourteen-year-old Benjamin Hayman, a blacksmith apprentice in Plymouth, England, left the Old World for the New Frontier in 1862.

Stories about the California Gold Rush and the cities it created encouraged him to sign on as shipsmith on a windjammer sailing to San Francisco. After establishing himself as a smithy in San Francisco, he moved 400 miles south to the growing Los Angeles area and became a wagon maker. Wagons and buggies became the stock and trade of the B. Hayman Carriage Repository in Los Angeles, CA, in 1888.

McMicken’s energy is evidenced as he voices his opinions on mechanics training for more complex turf machinery.

Part of the farm revolution
As the Los Angeles area began to develop into the nation’s largest agricultural supplier (in dollar volume), Hayman began concentrating on agricultural implements. His son Will and partner Thomas Osborn continued to expand the farm equipment business after Benjamin’s death in 1923.

After World War II, Signal Corps officer and instructor Ray McMicken found it difficult to find a radio engineer’s job in Los Angeles. McMicken had married Eleanor Osborn six months before Pearl Harbor. Her father Thomas Osborn and partner Will Hayman recognized McMicken’s drive. They invited him to work in the parts department until he could find a radio engineer’s job.

McMicken quickly gave up thoughts of becoming a radio engineer and started learning the equipment distribution business, working his way into sales and then management.

Early recognition of turf
As a member of the Los Angeles agricultural committee in the early 50’s, McMicken saw the value of land in Los Angeles County rise from $100/acre to more than $20,000/acre. He watched with interest the first golf courses springing up in the county and the swelling population which required more schools, parks and cemeteries. Although the agricultural potential of LA County had not peaked, McMicken told his in-laws it was time to change the business again.

“We have been in turf since its major inception in Southern California,” McMicken boasts. B. Hayman was also quick to establish a branch in the Hawaiian Islands in 1960, as they started to boom.

The conversion was modest at first as B. Hayman took on the Worthington and Jacobsen mower lines. In 1968, B. Hayman left agriculture altogether, expanding with National, Olathe, Turfco, Sodmaster, Smithco, Par-Aide, Standard and Heckendorn. B. Hayman tied its future to turf.

“When we started selling turf equipment, a greens mower sold for $385 and a turf tractor for under $10,000,” McMicken recalls. “Today a greens mower is more than $2,000 and turf tractors go for $25,000 to $50,000. But, the machines are much more complex. Unfortunately, very few in the industry have prepared them-
The greatest asset any equipment manufacturer has is a strong, dedicated distributor organization.

—McMicken

McMicken admits it hasn't always been easy. "Every Jacobsen distributor has gone through at least one hellish period in the last 15 years. Let's just say we were relieved in 1978 when Textron purchased Jacobsen and allowed Jacobsen management to rethink distributor relations. Today, the greatest asset any equipment manufacturer has is a strong, dedicated distributor organization.

To understand Jacobsen," McMicken explains, "you really have to understand Royal Little, the founder of Textron." His successes with Homelite, E-Z-Go, Bell Helicopters, and Jacobsen are based upon giving division managers authority to run their own show, compete against other division managers, and be well compensated by performance bonuses." Fortune magazine has published an in-depth profile of Little.

McMicken, after being president for 19 years, passed the title in June to Robert Henshaw, vice president and former Jacobsen manager. McMicken will serve as board chairman.

Henshaw sees the next frontier for B. Hayman to be landscape and people mover equipment.