

Historical Spotlight: Tubbs Cordage Company

As we continue to celebrate the Cordage Institute's 100th anniversary, we have included an article on one of the Cordage Institute's earliest members, Tubbs Cordage Company, submitted by longtime industry professional, Michael Greenwood.

Tubbs Cordage Company began business as a ship chandlery in San Francisco in 1852 by the Tubbs brothers, Alfred and Hiram. Michael Greenwood is a descendent of one of Hiram's (5) daughters who married a "Greenwood" in the early 1900's. Tubbs Cordage Company became a rope manufacturing company in 1858 profiting from the immense American and Global migration to California; the Gold and Silver mines etc. Tubbs first manufacturing facility, (a rope walk), was at 611-613 Front Street in San Francisco.



and other rope makers around the world. When beginning employment at Tubbs, Mike first worked at one of the two rope manufacturing facilities in Orange, CA. At the oldest location, Tubbs still purchased spun fiber and "tarred" it there too! (what a mess that was!). The mills in Orange combined machinery from the older Portland Cordage Company that was not sent overseas to MANCO after WWII. Tubbs began the manufacture of "modern" synthetic fiber ropes at the end of WWII; polypropylene, nylon and polyester ropes. In 1974, both plants were moving completely to synthetics, both in twine, rope and braid-on-braid constructions.



Tubbs expanded rapidly and acquired several other rope manufacturing companies such as The Portland Cordage Company, (based in Seattle and Portland) and also Great Western Cordage in Orange, California. The key strategic acquisition for Tubbs was of the Manila Cordage Company in the Philippines; now known as MANCO. MANCO was in the 1900's, the largest manufacturer of abaca/hemp fiber and rope marketing their fiber and finished rope product through Tubbs



Tubbs was controlled as a private “family business” and has a long history of supporting the growth of the Pacific West Coast. In the mid 1900’s, Tubbs commissioned a company history which was published with the title Men of Rope.

The Tubbs brothers were also ensconced in the manufacturing/political “elite” of California. As an example, Alfred L. Tubbs was on the Board of Directors of the Southern Pacific Railroad in the late 1800’s. Alfred also founded the famous Napa Valley winery Chateau Montelena; which is still under operation though not family owned.

Unfortunately, import pricing pressure from Asia in the 1980’s and on, forced the family to exit the rope manufacturing business in 1986; (128) years after founding. Assets and brand names were sold to various companies and the MANCO company to Philippine investors.

Mike stayed in the Cordage Industry working for American Manufacturing who eventually purchased Samson Rope and changed their name to Samson. He finally retired from rope work this year after (44) years in the industry.

