

At the turn of the century, a Connecticut engineer and entrepreneur, Sylvanus D. Locke, developed a process for making stamped-steel drive chains more efficiently than the conventional cast-link chains which were then available.

He established the Locke Steel Chain Company in 1912 in Bridgeport, CT, to produce his invention. Its quick success soon made him a wealthy man, the owner of a large estate in central Connecticut.

The estate grounds were extensive and necessitated the finest of care to keep up appearances. But Locke was dissatisfied with the quality and performance of the mowers he had purchased. He wanted his lawn mowed properly for once.

Being a great believer in self-reliance, he drew up his own set of plans for an "ideal" mower and had the factory manufacture a prototype in 1924. He personally tested the quality of the prototype on his own estate's turf—and the results pleased him greatly.

Friends and acquaintances admired the quality of the cut, and asked Locke to build machines for them, too. In 1928, after several years of research, 11 production prototypes were sold. The Locke power mower was born.

This year Locke Manufacturing, Inc., will celebrate 60 years of continuous production of its mower. During those years, management has changed hands six times, but the production line goes on at a facility in downtown Bridgeport, CT, not far from the site of the company's original plant. The current factory is located in an old Remington Arms complex which the city has renovated.

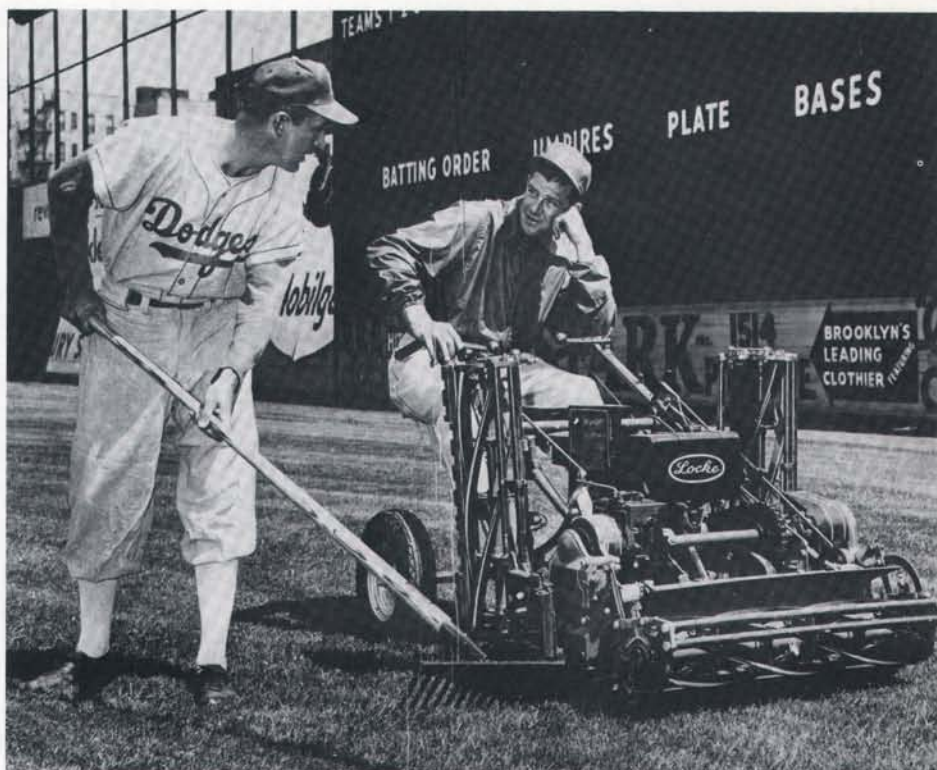
The factory exudes old-time industrial traditions, and one might imagine that Locke's original production workers would find themselves at home in today's 25,000-square-foot facility. Just up the stairs from the assembly floor, President Tom Herrmann keeps watch on quality control while he does business in his glass-sided office overlooking the production line.

Herrmann bought the company in 1986, six months after visiting the factory to pick up some parts for his own Locke mower. That mower had been one of the first to come off the original production line back in 1929, as Serial Number 210. It turns out that Herrmann's is the oldest Locke known to be in existence. Longevity is not an unusual attribute for these machines. In fact, according to records kept by the company, it's not unusual to find customers whose mowers are still running after 30 or 40 years.

Herrmann observes, "The mower is still made according to Sylvanus Locke's original design with the emphasis on performance and durability."

Bob Smith, director of stadium operations for the Los Angeles Dodgers for the past 20 years, is one of the company's customers with a story of long life to tell.

"We're using the same Locke mower in Dodger Stadium today that had been cutting the grass at the old Ebbets Field in Brooklyn over 30 years ago," Smith notes.



Brooklyn Dodgers Carl Erskine (left) and Karl Spooner with original mower at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, NY.

Locke Mowers: Still Making the Cut After 60 Years

Apparently, he's been pleased enough with the performance of that veteran machine to come back for more, after 30 years. Smith recently ordered two new Lockes: a 25-inch Single and a 70-inch Triplex with reverse and sulky, to maintain the new playing field installed last December at Dodger Stadium.

Smith is not the only "big name" on the company's honor roll of customers. The mowers have been used at a world's fair; the past five Summer Olympics; in Yankee

Stadium; at the White House (There's a color photo in the factory lobby at Bridgeport of a mower appearing right at home on the Executive Mansion's front lawn); and, long before *Glasnost* was "in," a Locke kept lawns groomed at the Kremlin.

The mower's outward appearance has changed little over the past 60 years. However, under Herrmann's direction, the company now offers an option to the traditional Briggs and Stratton engine. It's a Honda engine—which may surprise some, since it powers such a traditional, made-in-America machine.

What other changes or improvements are on the horizon for Locke Manufacturing during the next 60 years? Judging from the past 60, which saw a continuous evolution of the original design, you might expect the company to have a similar production line in the same factory on Boston Avenue in Bridgeport. Perhaps... but Herrmann is considering alternatives.

"We're experimenting with some very sophisticated technologies right now," he reveals. "We've yet to determine if it will be economically practical, but the Locke of the future might very well incorporate a laser that is selective to certain types of materials, like grass.."



Two new mowers purchased by Los Angeles Dodgers at Dodger Stadium.