

## THE HISTORY OF THE ASBESTOS TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED STATES

### Chapter XX: Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc.

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As edited by the Staff of ASEESTOS

The history of three of the major manufacturing divisions of Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc., has been covered in individual chapters of this History of the U.S. Asbestos Textile Industry. It will no doubt be of interest to the reader to learn why these several companies banded together to form Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc.

The company was incorporated July 5, 1929. The four original manufacturing units were: The Raybestos Company, Bridgeport, Connecticut; General Asbestos & Rubber Company, Charleston, South Carolina; The Manhattan Rubber Manufacturing Company, Passaic, New Jersey; and United States Asbestos Company, Manheim, Pennsylvania.

Sumner S. Simpson was President of The Raybestos Co. in 1929. It was largely his executive ability which had built Raybestos during the prior 20 years. Sumner Simpson was the prime mover in working out the mutual arrangements which led to the formation of R/M, Inc.

General Asbestos & Rubber was founded July 18, 1895. Raybestos purchased controlling interest in Garco in August 1921 to assure a continuing supply of asbestos yarn for its brake lining looms. Complete control was purchased in April 1924. Garco, therefore, entered the corporation as a subsidiary of Raybestos.

Manhattan Rubber was by far the largest of the original R/M units. The business was incorporated October 28, 1893. Prior to 1924 the company made a folded and stitched brake lining that was marketed under the CARDINAL brand name. It consisted of two layers of red rubberized asbestos cloth and a back-up layer of cotton duck. The product was manufactured in Manhattan's Belting Department, of which John Harry Matthews was Manager. (Later, Matty Matthews was elected Executive Vice President of R/M). Buick Motor Company was a major user of CARDINAL brake lining in 1919.



In 1920 the U.S. Post Office Department invited all friction materials manufacturers to a conference in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the meeting was to establish brake lining standards that could be used as a purchasing department specification. Johns-Manville Corporation used the PRONY brake at the conference to demonstrate that meaningful test results could be developed as a basis for a specification. As Manager of the Belting Department, Matty Matthews represented Manhattan Rubber at the conference. He returned to Passaic and convinced General Manager Arthur F. Townsend that Manhattan needed to embark on a brake lining development program. A dynamometer and other essential equipment were procured and a development program was initiated. The end result was HYCOE brake lining, a frictioned asbestos cloth, folded to size and stitched.

HYCOE brake lining was introduced to the trade in 1924. In the following five years it captured a large portion of the original equipment brake lining business, a field that had been dominated by The Raybestos Co. for some years. HYCOE brake lining, therefore, was an important reason for the formation of Raybestos-Manhattan.

U.S. Asbestos was a major supplier of asbestos cloth to Manhattan Rubber and of asbestos yarn to Raybestos. It was this long-established buyer-seller relationship which prompted the formation of the corporation. George R. Weber was President of U.S. Asbestos in 1929 and S. R. Zimmerman, a corporation lawyer and a former President of U.S. Asbestos, was a Director.

Both U.S. Asbestos and Garco produced a complete line of asbestos packings in 1929. Manhattan Rubber made many styles of rubber packings. The eventual consolidation of these three lines was a third reason for the merger of the four mills.

The executive heads of the several mills which joined together to form Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc., logically became the executives of the new corporation. The original slate of officers consisted of: Chairman—Arthur Farragut Townsend (Manhattan), President—Sumner S. Simpson (Raybestos), Vice Presidents—Henderson M. Green (Manhattan), George R. Weber (U.S. Asbestos) and S. R. Zimmerman (U.S. Asbestos), Secretary—Morton F. Judd (Raybestos), Treasurer—Fred L. Curtis (Manhattan), and Assistant Treasurer

—William H. Dunn (Manhattan).

The original officers managed the company very successfully until 1939. Sumner Simpson had been in poor health and wished to be relieved of the burdens of the Presidency. None of the other officers wished to take over as they were all approaching retirement age. It was, therefore, mutually agreed to bring in John F. D. Rohrbach as Vice President. He already had a broad knowledge of R/M affairs when he accepted the offer in 1939, as he had been President of Lee Nicholson & Company, auditors for R/M, since 1916. Mr. Rohrbach served as President of Raybestos-Manhattan for 19 of the company's most successful years—from 1948 until 1967. In 1967 Mr. Rohrbach became Chairman of the Board of Directors. At that time, William S. Simpson, son of the founder, was elected President and Chief Executive Officer. Mr. Simpson is presently Chairman of the Board and President of Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc. Company headquarters are located at Bridgeport, Connecticut.

#### Chapter XXI: Carolina Asbestos Company

The Carolina Asbestos Company, Davidson, North Carolina, was founded in January 1930 with Clarence Herbert Carlough as President and principal stockholder. W. H. Truesdale, although Chairman of the Board, was never active in the day-to-day management of the company.

Carolina Asbestos was an offshoot of Southern Asbestos Company which, in turn, was an offshoot of General Asbestos & Rubber Company. The reader is requested to consider the accompanying history of Southern Asbestos in order to have a better understanding of the history of Carolina Asbestos and of the life-long relationship between Herb Carlough and his mentor, Bill Truesdale—a relationship much closer than just that of employer/employee. Through most of his business career Bill Truesdale depended on Herb Carlough as his principal assistant.

It would be difficult to find a less propitious year than 1930 in which to start a new business. The wheels of industry were slowly grinding to a halt. The period 1930-33 saw one of the most bitter depressions the United States has ever survived. These were the years of the bread lines and the

soup kitchens. Hundreds of thousands of capable men could not find employment of any kind. The fellow with a job was a lucky man and he worked diligently to remain on the payroll. Most businesses that did manage to keep going drastically reduced salaries. It was not unusual to hear of worthy employees who had taken five 10% cuts in salary between 1930-32.

In 1933 a frightened nation voted President Herbert Hoover out of office and installed Franklin Delano Roosevelt as President. This was the start of the days of the "New Deal." Make-work programs and pump-priming were the order of the day. Men with college degrees were glad to cut tree limbs and rake leaves in the city park for 35c per hour. In the asbestos textile industry, experienced spinners earned 30c an hour and expert weavers worked for 40c per hour.

The price level in most industries had reached break-even or loss levels, causing the U.S. Government to take official action that was unprecedented in American history. President Roosevelt created the National Recovery Administration and appointed General Hugh Johnson, a greatly respected World War I hero, as Administrator. NRA established what was called the "Blue Eagle Program" encouraging all companies to cooperate by setting minimum price levels and agreeing not to sell below their established price schedules. Manufacturers who agreed to participate proudly pasted the "blue eagle" emblem at the lower left-hand corner of their letterheads. General Johnson proved to be a tough and resourceful Administrator. His Department deserves much of the credit for getting business in general back on the track and helping industry rise above loss levels.

Younger men who cannot recall the depression years will no doubt wonder how a new enterprise like Carolina Asbestos managed to survive at all. The fact that it did survive is a tribute to the manufacturing and sales ability of Herb Carlough. He not only supervised the plant but was largely his own one-man Sales Department. It should be remembered that by 1932 Herb Carlough had had 20 years of experience in the asbestos textile industry and was well known throughout the trade.

By 1934 the wheels of industry again began to turn and business in general improved rapidly. There was a pent-up demand for goods and services of every kind and description.

By 1941 Carolina's business had outgrown the little plant at Davidson and, rather than expand at that location, an additional 30,000 square foot plant was acquired at Marshville, North Carolina. (Davidson and Marshville are both near Charlotte). The new facility was principally a weave shed and the plant at Davidson become primarily a yarn mill.

Carolina achieved a balanced operation just in time to participate in the bottomless demand for asbestos textiles created by World War II. The vast Naval and maritime ship-building programs demanded unprecedented tonnages of asbestos textiles, particularly cloth. As was explained in a prior chapter, the production of the industry was placed under 100% allocation by the War Production Board. Asbestos textiles were not bought and sold in the normal sense. All members of the industry operated at maximum capacity, turning out products assigned to each mill by the WPB. There were two limiting factors in the output of most mills: availability of spinning fiber and an extreme shortage of available labor.

Just prior to World War II the glass textile industry, most notably Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation, began making serious inroads into the traditional markets for asbestos textiles. The inability of the asbestos textile industry to meet the critical war-time needs for its products created a bonanza for the glass textile industry. The basic raw material, sand, was not in short supply. Manufacturers who were unable to purchase asbestos textiles for their war-time needs logically turned to glass textiles as the only other suitable and available material. Naturally the situation was of great concern to all executives in the asbestos textile industry, including Herb Carlough.

By 1944 the asbestos textile producers decided that rather than work against each other it would be more advantageous to set their sights toward competing with the makers of glass textiles. This realization led to the formation of the industry's trade association, the Asbestos Textile Institute. C. H. Carlough was elected the first President of ATI and served in 1945 and 1946. (The history of ATI will be published as the final chapter of this History.)

By January 1947 Carolina's two mills at Davidson and Marshville were going strong under Herb Carlough's direction. The great wave of corporate consolidations had not yet

begin but Herb Carlough could see that the days of the individualist in industry were about over. He was, therefore, receptive to an offer from L. Lewis Cohen, President of Union Asbestos & Rubber Company, Chicago, Illinois. Union's asbestos textile mill was at Cicero, Illinois, which is not a textile manufacturing center. To make a long story short, Lou Cohen persuaded Herb Carlough to sell his mills to Union Asbestos and to join the company as Vice President in charge of Textile Operations. Following the consolidation, the Cicero plant was phased out. Some of the equipment went to Davidson and some was transferred to Union's newly-acquired plant at Bloomington, Illinois.

The marriage with Unarco was not a happy one. In 1950 Herb Carlough sued Union Asbestos for breach of contract. In settlement of the litigation Herb Carlough re-acquired the Davidson facility. He again operated the business as Carolina Asbestos Company with himself as President and Thomas Sadler as Vice President and Factory Manager. The Marshville plant remained a Unarco property until it was sold to Johns-Manville Corporation in 1963.

As stated previously, the Davidson plant was a carding and spinning mill, while Marshville was largely a weaving mill. To balance the operation, it was necessary to add a weave shed to the Davidson plant.

In 1958 a building was added to the Davidson plant to manufacture asbestos shingles. The added facility had no bearing on textile operations except to add to the total value of the property.

By 1963 Herb Carlough was 65 years old. He had by then been a part of the asbestos textile industry for more than 50 years and decided that was long enough. He sold the Davidson plant to H. K. Porter Company, Inc. The Davidson facility thereafter became a feeder plant to Porter's Charlotte Works (the former Southern Asbestos Company). Herb Carlough passed away June 17, 1968, and Carolina Asbestos became just another of the long list of company names which have faded from the industry's roster.

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