

THE HISTORY OF THE ASBESTOS TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED STATES

Chapter XVI: Southern Asbestos Manufacturing Company
(now Charlotte Works, Thermoid Division,
H. K. Porter Company, Inc.)

By: John A. Bettles, Jr.

As edited by the Staff of ASBESTOS

In order to begin the history of the Southern Asbestos Company it is first necessary to identify two men—W. H. Truesdale and C. H. Carrough. In 1914 Bill Truesdale came from a cotton mill in Lincolnton, North Carolina, to become Superintendent of Manufacture of the General Asbestos & Rubber Company at North Charleston, South Carolina. Herb Carrough had already entered the employ of Garco as a clerk in 1912. Bill Truesdale was a business-generation older than Herb Carrough.

In June 1919 Bill Truesdale left Garco and founded Southern Asbestos Manufacturing Company at Charlotte, North Carolina, incorporated with a capital stock of \$300,000. The first President of the company was Capt. C. E. Childs (Bill Truesdale's father-in-law).

The original manufacturing staff at Southern Asbestos was drawn from Garco and included Herb Carrough, Hurd Knox, Charles Marshall, Pete Vehue and Walter K. Meder-nael (Bill Truesdale's brother-in-law).

Southern Asbestos Mfg. produced a limited line of asbestos textile products. The company sold roving, yarn, cloth and tape to a variety of industries. From 1919 until about 1926 automobiles and trucks were equipped with two-wheel external contracting brakes. This type of brake required a woven asbestos brake lining. And, in those days, all cars used multiple clutch discs with a woven asbestos facing on each steel disc. Friction materials, therefore, represented by far the largest usage for asbestos textiles during that period of time. Southern's two largest accounts were the Thermoid Rubber Company of Trenton, New Jersey, and the Russell Manufacturing Company of Middletown, Connecticut. Thermoid purchased untreated brake lining tape in carload lots.

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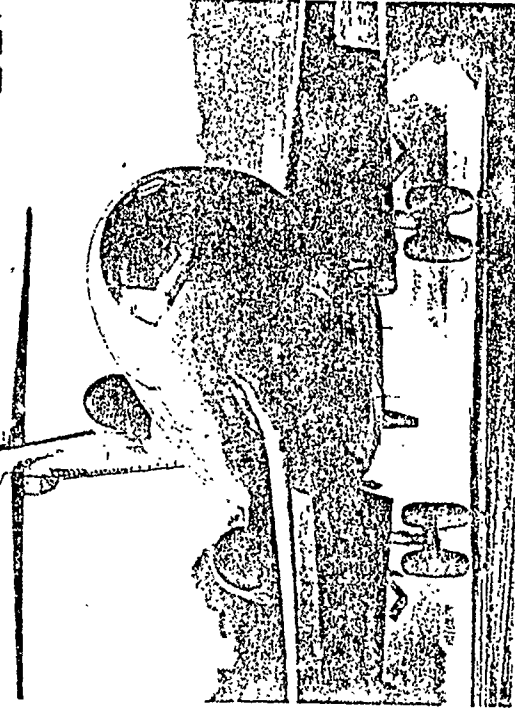
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Russell bought metallic yarns in like quantity and wove its own brake linings, which were sold under the RUSCO brand name.

The year 1926 saw the introduction of the internal expanding brake for trucks and automobiles—and the start of the four-wheel brake. It was soon demonstrated that a molded brake lining was at least equal to a woven lining for use with the four-wheel brake. Size for size, a molded lining is substantially cheaper to manufacture than is a woven lining. Bill Truesdale could see the "handwriting on the wall" and became concerned about the future market for his products.

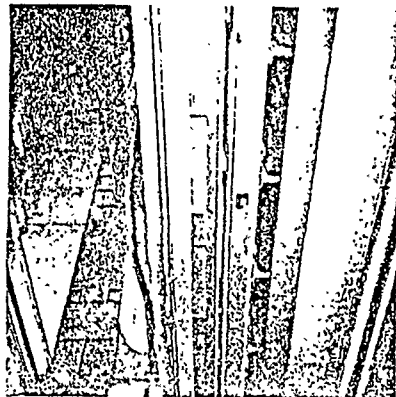
In 1927 Southern's mill was sold to Schluter & Company, investment bankers, and Bill Truesdale, Herb Carlough and staff continued to operate the plant. The name of the company was changed at that time to Southern Asbestos Company.

In 1929 Schluter purchased a controlling interest in the Thermoid Rubber Co. from the Stokes family of Trenton. Frederick Schluter, President of Schluter & Co., wanted Southern Asbestos to purchase 10,000 shares of Thermoid stock at \$34.00 per share. Bill Truesdale did not consider this a good deal and declined the offer. Disagreement resulted, causing a serious rift between the two executives. Fred Schluter pushed the deal through anyway and Southern Asbestos Co. became, in effect, a part of the Thermoid organization.

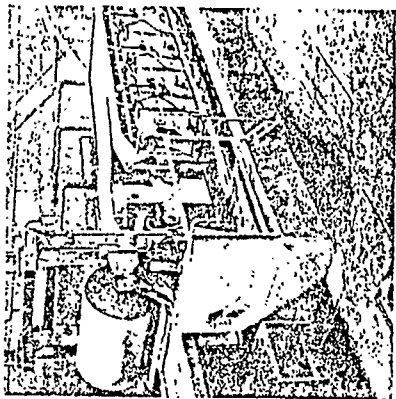
Matters went from bad to worse and by January 1930 Bill Truesdale and Herb Carlough decided to leave Southern. They purchased a small asbestos textile mill in the neighboring town of Davidson, N.C., known as the Kular Manufacturing Company. Bill Truesdale was Chairman of the Board and Herb Carlough was President and the active head of the firm. This was the start of Carolina Asbestos Company. (The history of Carolina Asbestos will be covered in Chapter XXX.)

The two mills, Southern and Carolina, produced similar lines of products and were designed to service essentially the same market. Since Charlotte and Davidson are only 18 miles apart, the mills drew on almost the same labor market. In the early days of the industry there was considerable pirating of personnel and under these circumstances it is not difficult to see why an intense rivalry developed between the two companies.

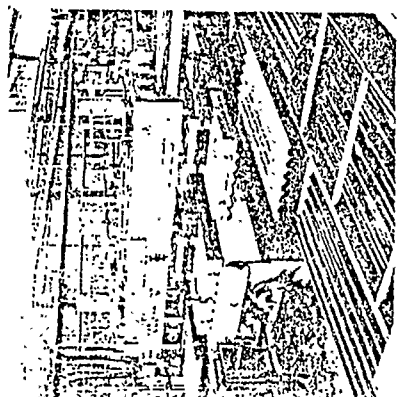
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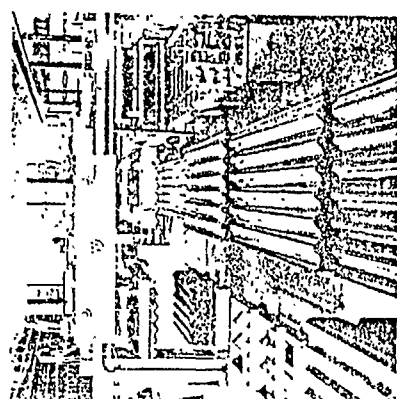
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The situation was worsened by the great stock-market crash that had occurred in 1929. By January 1930 business activity in general was slowing down at an alarming rate and the normal tempo of competition in all lines of business sharpened considerably. As might be expected, a bitter conflict developed between Southern and Carolina resulting in the prices of asbestos textile products being driven to loss levels, affecting the entire industry.

When Bill Truesdale and Herb Carrough left Southern in January 1930, Thermoid did not have a textile executive to manage the business, although the manufacturing staff was still largely intact. Thermoid, therefore, sent one of its most seasoned, all-around executives to Charlotte to supervise as General Manager, George S. Fabel had had years of experience in the friction materials industry and in mechanical rubber goods. His most ardent detractor would have to admit that George Fabel was one of the greatest salesmen ever to operate in this industry. He set about at once to build up a sales organization to market asbestos textiles from coast to coast.

Jesse T. Griffin supervised the Order Department at Charlotte and handled most of the sales correspondence. George J. Harris, operating out of Stamford, Connecticut, was responsible for the territory encompassing New York and New England. Oscar Ferens, formerly with Keesbey & Mattison, covered New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Robert Snyder had offices in Cleveland and handled Ohio and Michigan. John A. Bettes worked out of Chicago and highspotted the Midwest. His territory was outlined by Duluth, Chicago and Detroit on the North and by Kansas City, St. Louis and Louisville on the South.

Many members of the industry will recognize that since that time the members of this small sales team have been very much a part of the industry. George Fabel was the third President of the Asbestos Textile Institute in 1942-50 and for several years was a member of the Board of Governors. Jack Bettes served ATI as President in 1957-58. Jesse Griffin took his turn in the same chair in 1950-60. George Harris has served as Chairman of the Institute's Sales Promotion Committee. He also capably represented the industry for many years as a member of ASTM Committee D-13 for Textile Materials.

The sales team at Southern, hired and trained by George

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Fabril, succeeded in lessening the dependence of the mill on the friction materials industry. A line of specialty fabrics was developed for the safety-garment industry; the laminated plastics industry and for thermal insulation contractors. Yarn, roving, lap and cable filler were sold to a long list of wire and cable accounts and several styles and grades of asbestos yarn were sold to a large number of asbestos packing manufacturers.

By 1941 Southern Asbestos had developed a very comprehensive line of asbestos textiles. It was only natural, therefore, that Southern was called upon to furnish large tonnages of many products during World War II. Southern wove vast yardages of all the Navy specification bagging cloths. The enormous ship-building program undertaken during the war called for prodigious footages of shipboard cable. Southern furnished lap, roving and cable filler used to insulate Navy specification cables. Brake lining tape went to Thermoid Rubber, the parent company, at Trenton for conversion into brake lining and brake blocks for Army trucks.

Post-war, Southern embarked on a program of replacement and modernization. Under the direction of Factory Manager J. L. (Jerry) Mitchell, the mill was brought to peak efficiency. Unfortunately, however, this was not the case with the parent company. Thermoid's main plant at Trenton was a hodgepodge of old buildings and was unavoidably inefficient. The business fell upon difficult times. To protect his heavy investment, Fred Schluter took over the Presidency of Thermoid in 1931. Effective December 11, 1958, The Thermoid Company merged into H. K. Porter Company and thus became an integral part of Porter's new Thermoid Division, headed by Warren E. Hill, former Thermoid President. Southern, as a part of Thermoid, automatically became an H. K. Porter property.

Jesse Griffin was Manager of the Charlotte Works from January 1964 to April 1965, during which time he hired Lawrence E. Moody to work on product development. Larry Moody had been assistant to Walter C. Atkinson, Manager of Johns-Manville Corporation's textile manufacture. In short order Larry Moody was promoted to Manager of Manufacturing and then to Manager of the Charlotte Works. As Works Manager at the Charlotte Works of Porter's Thermoid Division, he currently has the responsibility for all of Porter's textile operations. Larry Moody represents his com-

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pany as an active member of ATI. He currently serves as President and a member of the Board of Governors, and has been re-elected for the 1971-72 term.

And so it was that Southern Asbestos Company, for 36 years a respected name in asbestos textiles, faded from the industry's roster.

Chapter XVII: Asbestos Spinning & Weaving Corporation

Asbestos Spinning & Weaving Corporation, Waterford, New York, was started in the early 1920's by Edward Shade. It was founded primarily to exploit the potential of a patented asbestos fabric—the warp consisted entirely of .008" brass wire; the filling was asbestos roving twisted with brass wire to provide a soft yarn which would be readily saturable.

The firm's original plant was an old woolen mill that had five sets of 48" cards, ring twisters, 40" looms, and so forth. Power was generated by a water wheel, turned by water from a canal originating from the Mohawk River.

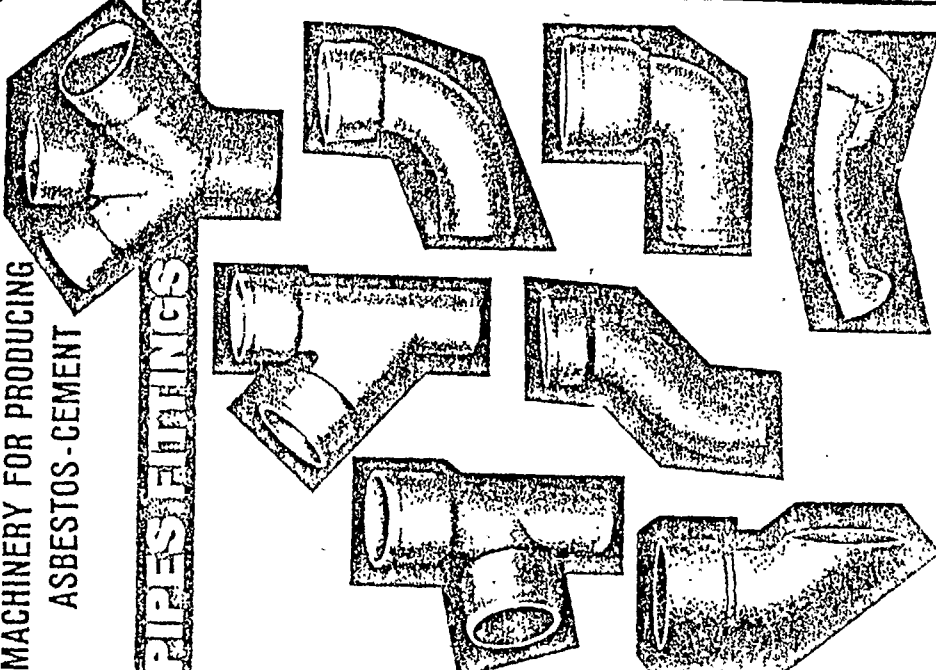
The major market for the patented fabric was the Glendinning Brake Lining Company, Billerica, Massachusetts. Glendinning saturated the fabric with an asphalt-base brake lining compound. The fabric was then slit to tape widths, folded and stitched with brass staples into standard-sized brake lining tapes. This was a popular type of brake lining used prior to 1926 when automobiles and trucks had external contracting brakes only on the rear wheels.

ASAWCO is remembered in the trade principally because of the association with some of the noted veterans of the asbestos textile industry. O. H. Cilley, formerly with U.S. Asbestos Company, joined Asbestos Spinning in December 1923 as Factory Manager. [During this period R. M. Bryan was President of ASAWCO with offices at 16 Beaver Street, New York City. His letterhead identified the company as a manufacturer of filter and theater curtain cloth as well as of ASAWCO brake lining.] Mr. Cilley later became General Manager of the U.S. Asbestos Division of Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc., and a Vice President of the Corporation.

In 1927 Herbert E. Sunbury accepted the position of Factory Manager with Asbestos Spinning & Weaving. During his tenure the plant was equipped to handle its own im-

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