

From the GARCO Muldrow Report: GARCO, in present day North Charleston, was a significant employer in the Charleston vicinity for many years. They made a wide array of products for industry including rollers for paper production, many automobile and airplane parts, fire resistant fabrics which combined asbestos and cotton, and even the soles of the shoes worn by the first astronauts that landed on the Moon. At the time it was constructed, it was the largest asbestos plant under one roof in the world, and it remained so for some time. At its height during World War II, the number of employees exceeded 1,000. GARCO was the first company to purchase a site in a newly planned industrial site in the north area of Charleston in 1914. In 1915, GARCO built two villages, Garco Village and Dewey Hill.

The company also built infill housing in neighborhoods near the factory which fit in well with the prevailing "Craftsman" style of the surrounding community. GARCO also built a large boarding house, athletic fields and a hospital. Two hundred forty-five houses were built near East Montague Avenue. There was a trolley which ran from a nearby convenience store down to the College of Charleston on the lower peninsula (there was a turn-around at O'Hear Avenue near Montague Avenue) and a frequently used bus as well. There was also a train called "The Boll Weevil" that ran between Florence, South Carolina and Downtown Charleston with a stop on Montague Avenue.

Sports were a big part of the GARCO community. GARCO sponsored American Legion Baseball along with sports facilities and other teams, including Little League baseball. In 1948, the Little League went to the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. "The Asbestos Men" was the company-sponsored semi-pro baseball team, and they were champions in 1946. The sports events were well attended and were a cohesive force in the community. Other sports included women's basketball and a bowling team that played in a city league.

Asbestosis did occur, albeit very infrequently, according to a former GARCO employee. There are many types of asbestos, and evidently the asbestos processed by GARCO was not as great a health threat as others. The employee recalled that the card room, where roving (fabric) was wound onto spools, had little problem with freed asbestos fibers, but that the weaving room had some of the white fibers floating around the room. In later years, water was misted from pipes to dampen these fibers and cause them to settle. In 1969, the Novatax process of making yarns through precipitation further eliminated exposure to airborne fibers. GARCO set up its own company hospital to provide health care and monitoring for the workers; still, some former employees have contracted lung disease which appears to be directly related to their exposure to airborne particles of the asbestos in the factory.

Pleasant memories of the company include those of a large Christmas tree and candy treats, fried chicken dinners on Friday evenings and dancing at the GARCO employee clubhouse, which was a membership club located behind the Mill facing Chateau Avenue.

It was a venue for family activities, a teen club, Bingo and for Saturday night dancing to a live band.

There was a separate boarding house with a large dining room. The company provided a hut for the Boy Scouts and a company owned medical treatment center which had a doctor and a nurse.

Much more than just another company, GARCO was in many ways the facilitator for a whole community -- one in which the participants enjoyed an era of productivity and pride in their work. Almost in unison, oral history participants recalled that people wept when they were all told that the company was closed for good. Without an industry to support it, the site needed a new purpose. After all the history that had unfolded at the GARCO site, The Beach Company took on the task of restoring the site for modern use. Now, at the site that was once the

nucleus of Charleston industrial production, is a new thriving professional and residential community.