

A PUBLICATION OF THE OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

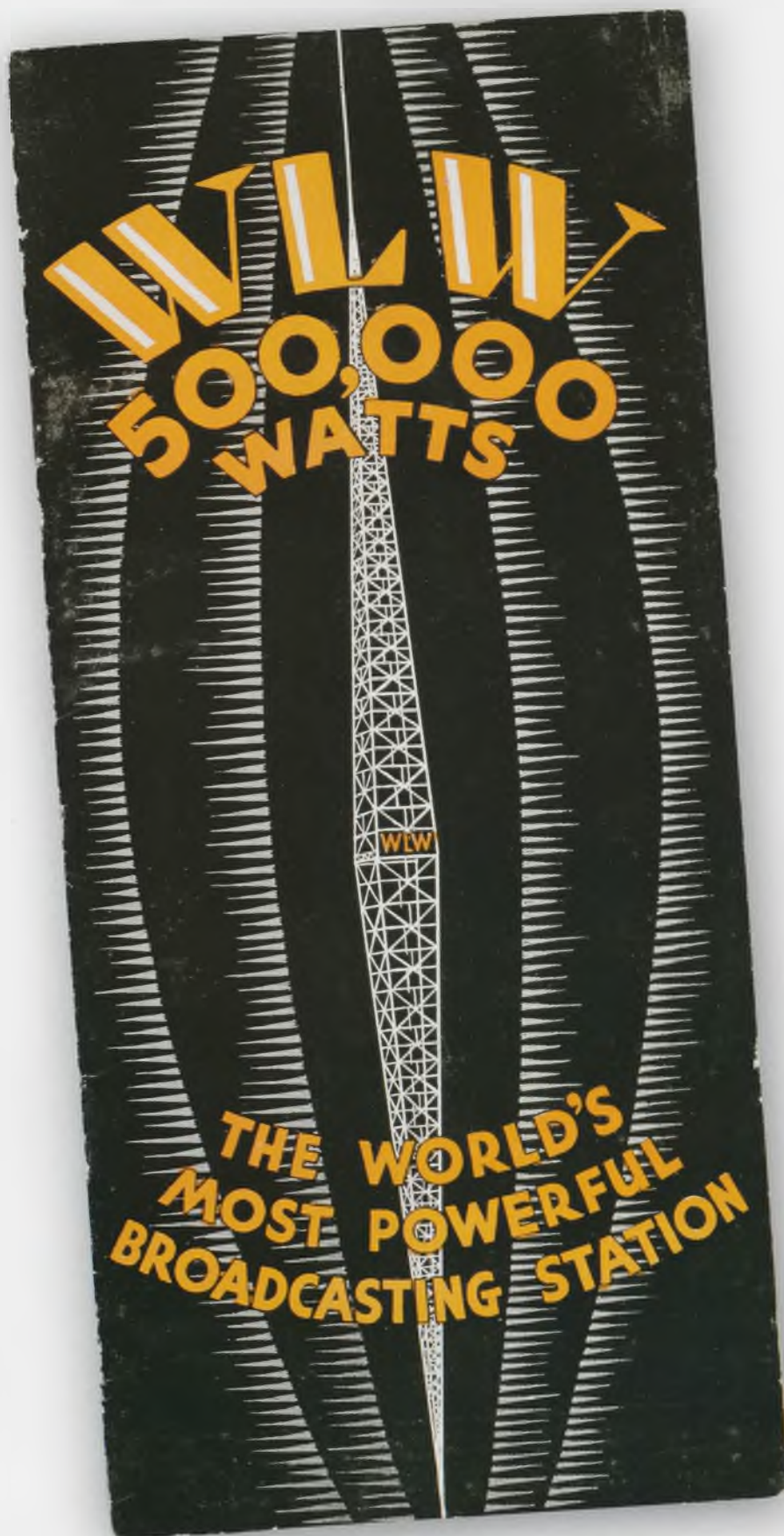
TIMELINE



January • March 2007



Twelve Dollars



FRONT COVER

While Cincinnati entrepreneur Powel Crosley Jr. built an empire of consumer products that ranged from radios to refrigerators, he also took time to experiment with airplane design.
Cincinnati Museum Center.

See: "Crosley Story"

LEFT

Few could predict that the station that began in Powel Crosley Jr.'s College Hill living room in 1921 would eventually become a force in the world of radio broadcasting.
Charles Stinger Collection

See: "Crosley Story"

David A. Simmons, Editor
Laura A. Russell, Associate Editor
Carolyn V. Platt, Contributing Editor
David R. Barker, Photographer

DESIGN

Design Communications, Inc.
Columbus, Ohio

PREPRESS

Slone Graphics, LLC
Columbus, Ohio

PRINTING

The Nielsen Company
Cincinnati, Ohio



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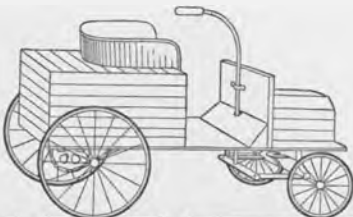
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TIMELINE (ISSN 0748-9579) (Vol. 24/No. 1) is published quarterly and distributed as a benefit of membership by the Ohio Historical Society; Editorial and Executive Offices, 1982 Velma Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43211-2497. Editorial offices 614-297-2360; membership offices 614-297-2315. Membership categories which include **TIMELINE** are Patriot \$175, History Lover \$75, History Reader \$55. Single copies are \$12 plus \$2 per order to cover handling and postage; Ohio residents please add sales tax.

Periodicals postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional entry offices; USPS Number 737-830.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to **TIMELINE**, 1982 Velma Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43211-2497.

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CROSLEY

STORY

AS THE NINETEENTH CENTURY drew toward a close, twelve-year-old Powel Crosley Jr. concluded that his future and his fortune were irrevocably tied to the emerging auto industry. With enough curiosity and creativity to offset his lack of engineering savvy, the boy decided to build a car of his own. He lacked working capital, but knew that his brother Lewis, two years his junior, had held onto some of his summer's earnings. Powel borrowed eight dollars from Lewis — not the last time he would rely on his brother's business sense through a lifelong partnership — then concocted a four-wheel motorized wagon. The boys scavenged an electric motor and Powel persuaded the electrician for the Pike's Opera House in downtown Cincinnati, which their father leased, to lend them small storage batteries to power the motor.

Young Powel had started tinkering with

by Don Bedwell

Above: In 1898, Powel Crosley Jr. responded to his father's challenge to build a working automobile. "It looked terrible," Crosley recalled, "but it ran." Case Western Reserve University Libraries

Crosley became a world-renowned manufacturer of radios, like this 1930s wood-case table model. Cincinnati Museum Center



All artifact photography by David R. Barker

electricity when his father introduced electric lighting at the opera building to prevent a repeat of the fast-spreading fire, ignited by a candle onstage, that leveled the earlier Pike's Opera House on the same site in 1866. The boy employed a water line in the family home to generate electricity for a few lights and an electric train, long before many in the city enjoyed electric power.

Crosley proudly unveiled his motorized wagon to his skeptical father, Powel Sr., a respected lawyer, real estate developer, and patron of the arts. The elder Crosley shook his head. "He thought so little of the contraption that he laughingly offered me ten dollars if it ran," Crosley recounted later. The boy recruited a blacksmith to help finish off his vehicle, then proceeded to drive it a block and collect from his father on the bet. "I repaid Lewis his eight dollars, plus one dollar as his share of the profits, and gloatingly pocketed my dollar," he said, "convinced that I had embarked on a great industrial career in the new mechanical age."



It would take Crosley half a century to actually launch his own line of automobiles, but few would quarrel with his self-assessment. With his inventive genius and ability to recruit the support of others, Crosley would grow into a pioneer in radio and appliance manufacturing, broadcasting, and even advanced weaponry. If he ultimately failed in his dream of building a car that every American could afford, he would instead give his nation night baseball, radio's Ma Perkins, the money-back guarantee, and a weapon that helped win World War II.

Powel Crosley Jr. was born September 18, 1886, in the upscale Walnut Hills section of Cincinnati, where the family would live until they moved to a more modest home in nearby College Hill when the boy was seven. His mother, Charlotte, studied at the Cincinnati School of Design and Cincinnati College of Music. She touched

From radio manufacturing, Crosley expanded into a wide assortment of home consumer products. Crosley washing machines, according to company advertising, showed "the way to new wash day ease." The production of radios naturally led into the world of broadcasting and Crosley assembled a group of entertainers and technicians that would make WLW a national leader.

Charles Stinger Collection

the family with a love of the arts that obviously influenced her husband's interest in the theatrical world. Deeply religious, she was active in the First Universalist Church of Walnut Hills, which her grandparents had founded.

Powel Sr. grew up on a farm in Lebanon, Ohio, teaching in nearby Clarksville before deciding to study law. After law school, he

quickly built a reputation in Hamilton County courtrooms as a lawyer and assistant city solicitor. A colleague praised him later as "one of the best lawyers in Cincinnati during the past half century." As his legal reputation grew, he also accumulated a modest fortune by real estate development. Just as quickly, he lost most of it in the Panic of 1893, which closed banks and wiped out investors across the country. "I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth," Powel Jr. wrote later, "but it was jerked out before

Crosley advertising bragged that its station wagon featured all-steel construction, with "no wood to rot, swell, shrink, or rattle." This model rolled off the line in 1946.

Ohio Historical Society



I could distinguish its taste from that of the common dime-store variety."

Brushing off that seeming misfortune, the younger Crosley acknowledged that it was probably to his advantage. "My father left me nothing in worldly things," he wrote in an October 1948 article for the *American* magazine. "I am much more grateful for his moral legacy: a philosophy of perseverance, a gratitude to a bountiful country, a knowledge that my future was my own to forge the way I would."

Powel Sr. did give his sons valuable access to the Pike's Opera House, on which he had taken a perpetual lease in 1890. The theater would be the boys' playground through the Gay Nineties, providing them up-front seats for performances of everything from vaudeville to Shakespeare. Others might

have gravitated toward theatrics or musical performance, but young Powel absorbed lessons of a different sort as he heard his father and his manager discussing which performances attracted customers, which did not, and why. With his insatiable curiosity, he soaked up and retained those lessons about giving customers what they want.

The opera-house venture ended for the Crosley family just as it had for other entrepreneurs in 1866. The rebuilt house was destroyed on February 25, 1903, by a blaze that took no lives but left much of a downtown block in ruins and rang down the curtain on Powel Sr.'s theatrical aspirations.

Captivated by the technological revolution at the turn of the century, young Powel was inspired in 1903 by Henry Ford's first automobiles and the Wright Brothers' historic flight. After graduating two years later from the Ohio Military Academy, he enrolled at the University of Cincinnati to study engineering. With more ambition than patience, he dropped out after two years to take a chauffeuring job that let him enjoy the power and smell the leather of the automobiles he loved.

By the time he was twenty-one, he borrowed ten thousand dollars to launch his own automobile, which he proudly labeled the Marathon Six. Inspired, like Ford, with the concept of building for the common man, he calculated he could sell his six-cylinder automobile for seventeen hundred dollars, less than others were charging for less powerful cars. Sadly, another financial panic in 1907 interrupted that project after a single prototype was built in Connersville, Indiana. Recounting that experience, Crosley described himself as the "twelve dollar a week president of a company that barely managed to turn out one car before it failed."

That setback couldn't keep him away from cars. He signed on as a shop worker with Carl G. Fisher's Fisher Automobile Company, a job that



Powel Crosley (right) was never a good student — his attention span was short and he was often restless — but he had a natural mechanical ability and no shortage of ideas. He formed a lifelong partnership with his brother Lewis (left), who would eventually become his business manager. *Dooley Collection, Media Heritage Inc., Cincinnati*

In 1910 Crosley married his childhood sweetheart, Gwendolyn Bakewell Aiken, the daughter of the superintendent of music instruction for the city schools. Her parents objected to the marriage, perhaps observing that the prospective son-in-law had a spotty employment history. *Cincinnati Museum Center*



Crosley's fascination with automobiles led to his purchase in 1917 of an aftermarket supply company on the north side of Cincinnati named the American Automobile Accessories Company. He was photographed in 1919 while testing an engine starter that the driver operated by pulling a handle on the floor. In the winter months, when sales for automotive supplies slowed, the firm began building wooden cabinets that Crosley marketed through an offshoot phonograph company. *Cincinnati Museum Center*

When he was about the age of this youth, Crosley's son acquired an interest in radios. The high cost of these battery-operated units left the senior Crosley flabbergasted and prompted his initial involvement in the medium. *Gray History of Wireless Museum, West Chester, Ohio*



ended when he broke his arm cranking a Model T. (He would later help develop a device that allowed a motorist to crank the engine from inside the car; it didn't guarantee that the engine would start, but minimized the risk of fractures.) Undeterred, he became an advertising man for another manufacturer and its racing team, even trying unsuccessfully to find a sponsor so he could drive at the new Indianapolis Motor Speedway. He returned to Cincinnati in 1910 to marry childhood sweetheart Gwendolyn Bakewell Aiken, daughter of the music superintendent of Cincinnati schools. They would have two children over the next five years, Powel III and Martha Page.

Despite his family responsibilities, the young man continued to job-hop, to the frustration of his new in-laws. By the time he was twenty-seven, he had worked at myriad jobs, from repairing telephones to selling bonds, sometimes for only a few weeks. An attempt to

build motorcycle sidecars proved unprofitable. After an illness left Crosley nearly broke, a relative called him aside and demanded, "When are you going to settle down and make something of yourself?" From Crosley's perspective it didn't matter how many jobs a person held as long as he learned everything possible at each job. He described his course as "like a bee buzzing from flower to flower, seemingly aimlessly, he extracts from each nectar to be stored away for future use." In his personal buzzing, Crosley learned finance from the bond business, salesmanship working for auto agencies, and engineering and mechanics experimenting with new products. In later years, he

would describe himself proudly as a "man who held fifty jobs in fifty years." Those jobs furnished skills that would serve him well.

After son Powel III was born in 1912, Crosley tried once again to launch a new car, but was again unsuccessful. He signed on with the small but ambitiously named American Automobile Accessories Company, where he conceived a mail-order plan for a fuel additive called "Gasotonic." Then he impressed the owner by developing a mail-order plan to sell tire re-liners through agents. Encouraged by his success, Crosley optimistically plunged into debt by buying out the owner for fifteen hundred dollars in notes. He found the

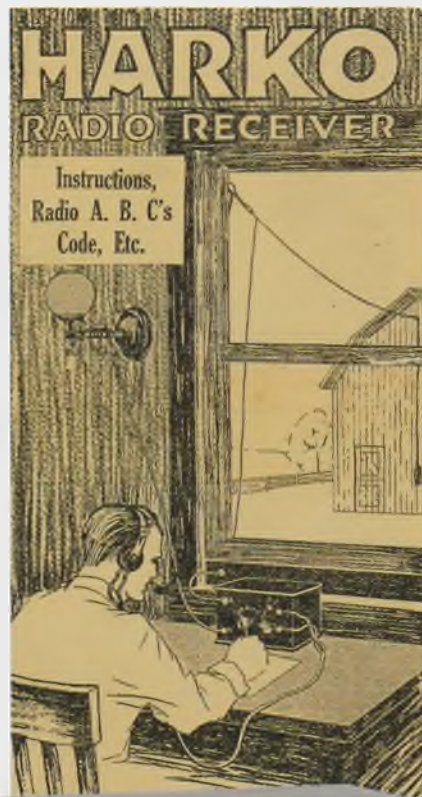
auto aftermarket business more hospitable than manufacturing. Capitalizing on the war-era surge in patriotism, he designed a flag holder that clamped to an auto radiator cap. "It sold like a cold drink in an arid desert," as he explained later. A shield that he devised to keep the wind out of drafty Model T Fords sold thousands more. The tendency of Model T's to veer crazily after striking a rock or rut promptly led to the "Litl Shofur," a gadget that steered reeling Fords back into a straight line. With newfound success, he called for the help of his brother Lewis, whose cool head for business made him a stabilizing influence.

Success producing inexpensive products designed for the "masses rather than the classes" had taught

The first Crosley radio receiver, produced in 1921 and brand-named Harko, used a galena crystal (lower right) to detect a signal. The "poor man's" fine tuner on the left side of the cabinet utilized a section of a hacksaw blade and a small, wire-wound nail to help locate the most sensitive, or "sweet," spot on the crystal. They were first produced by the men in Crosley's phonograph woodworking shop, but trouble with sloppy soldering and assembly soon led Crosley to hire women for these duties.

Charles Stinger Collection

Crosley a lesson he would honor the rest of his life. It permitted him to branch out into phonograph production and allied fields, and to ring up his first million-dollar gross in 1921. Relying on independent distributors across the country to market his products, he impressed upon them the need to give customers the best in parts, service, and satisfaction, including



one of retailing's first money-back guarantees. Like other marketing geniuses such as Sears & Roebuck cofounder Richard W. Sears, Crosley understood that a promise to return dissatisfied consumers' money could generate sales by winning the confidence of skeptical purchasers. Having enjoyed a taste of success, Crosley eagerly pursued new opportunities. When the auto accessory and phonograph businesses began slowing down, he sought other affordable products to mass produce. An unhappy venture into oil burners cost the company eighty thousand dollars. Experimentation with custom phonograph cabinets, specialty furniture, and even canoes failed to offer promise for expanding sales. Then, with the clarity of a static-free wireless signal, radio came into his life.

Crosley's nine-year-old son hurried home one day to tell the family breathlessly about a playmate's new wireless outfit. Crosley yielded to his son's pleas to buy one, thinking it would be an inexpensive toy. Instead, the Precision Equipment Company offered him a one-tube set for a pricey \$130. Declining, the avid tinkerer purchased a twenty-five-cent book called *The ABC's of Radio* and bought parts so that he and his son could assemble their own unit. For about thirty-five dollars, he purchased a tuning coil, crystal detector, and condenser and began to construct the set — and launch another remunerative career.

Although the crystal set produced only tinny music from local amateurs, Crosley was hooked. "I knew it had a future," he said. Back to another shop he went, paying two hundred dollars for a fancier three-tube set, which delighted him by bringing in broadcasts from





The step from selling radios to producing programming for them was a logical one for Crosley. His first broadcast site, authorized in the summer of 1921 by the Department of Commerce as a "special land station" under the call letters 8XAA, was his own living room in College Hill. Music was provided by his wind-up Victrola record player. Crosley later recreated the scene for a photographer. *Cincinnati Museum Center*

Pittsburgh. Losing interest in his other businesses, he recruited two students from the University of Cincinnati — one was Dorman Israel, a talented wireless operator who would become Crosley's chief engineer and later chairman of Emerson Radio and Phonograph. The students helped fashion the simple Harko Junior portable crystal set that Crosley could sell for just thirty-five dollars plus

antenna and headphones, crucial because early radios lacked speakers. Crosley was able to get the Harko on the market by Christmas 1921. With a price well below that of competitors' vacuum tube sets, it was an instant hit. Soon Crosley's phonograph plant was turning out thousands of the boxy little units. He built on that success by purchasing the Precision Equipment Company, primarily because it possessed a license to build patented circuits that improved the performance of vacuum tubes. He renamed the firm the Crosley Radio Corporation and began producing an expanded line, which would later carry the advertising slogan "You're There with Crosley."

Seemingly at the speed of light, Crosley Radio Corporation became the world's largest radio manufacturer, with nearly a thousand employees, mostly women, assembling five thousand radios a day on a two-mile-long conveyor belt. "Competitors rushed to meet the challenge," as Charles J. Stinger wrote in the *Antique Wireless Association's AWA Review*, but Crosley "had stolen the low-price market."

He continued his dominance in 1925 with a one-tube regenerative radio called the Crosley Pup that

sold for \$9.75, plus earphones, of course. More than fourteen thousand of those units sold within the first five weeks, as the company awarded pups — real, pedigreed ones — to owners who reported the results obtained with their new receivers. While David Sarnoff's Radio Corporation of America was advertising its phonographs with a mascot named "Nipper," Crosley introduced "Bonzo," a frisky terrier outfitted with headphones (Crosley would eliminate the need for earphones later that year by introducing his "Musicone," the first popular speaker).

Through the years, Crosley would introduce hundreds of improved radio models, including more expensive ones housed in fine cabinets from his woodworking shops. With his

In the early 1920s, Crosley devised a series of small, inexpensive radio units that consumers could combine in a variety of ways to enhance performance. Connecting the crystal receiver (left), which ordinarily could pick up only stations within twenty-five miles, with a radio-frequency-tuned-amplifier (RFTA) increased both range and volume at least ten times. The RFTA included Crosley's celebrated "book" condenser made of a pair of thin plywood plates that were surfaced with copper. The economy of the part — it sold for \$1.25 when similar parts cost as much as \$6 — helped to keep his radios affordable. *Charles Stinger Collection*





Growing sales led Crosley to purchase a brick factory building in 1924 to devote to radio manufacturing. The top floor of the new plant housed the engineering department.

Cincinnati Museum Center

company boasting net profits in the millions, the man who hadn't earned more than fifty dollars a week until he was thirty was hailed as the Henry Ford of Radio and the Man with the Midas Touch. Everything he touched, journalists noted, was transformed into a profitable enterprise.

While early radios were popular gimmicks, Crosley realized that the novelty would wear off quickly unless purchasers had more to hear. He obtained an experimental license from the Department of Commerce in March 1921 and began to broadcast from his home in College Hill with a twenty-watt transmitter. The station could operate every evening, but he had to compete with



The Crosley Pup, an exposed, single vacuum-tube receiver in a four-inch-square steel box (the first radio in a metal case), was specifically aimed, as Crosley phrased it, "at the masses rather than the classes." It sold for less than ten dollars, and was among the more popular of all the firm's early products. The name came from the claim that it was the "world's smallest radio set utilizing [a] vacuum tube." Five weeks after it went into production on September 1, 1925, fourteen thousand had already been delivered. *Charles Stinger Collection*

Crosley advertising for the Pup included a canine theme. *Bob Hoke's Attic*



**Watch for the
Crosley PUP!**
"It's a Sky Terrier"

THE CROSLEY RADIO CORPORATION
CINCINNATI, OHIO
POWEL CROSLEY, Jr., President
DISTRIBUTED IN MICHIGAN BY
CONDORAL ELECTRIC SUPPLY CO. HENRY & WALLACE COMPANY
131 E. Congress St. Detroit, Mich. 48201
A. T. ENGLISH COMPANY WOLLEY BROTHERS
214 E. Congress St. Detroit, Mich. 48201
DETROIT ELECTRIC COMPANY
Detroit, Lansing, Pontiac, Warren, Ypsilanti

Crosley never forgot that his radio business started as an effort by a father to provide an inexpensive toy for his son. This junior crystal receiver, which required no batteries, was directed at that market. *Charles Stinger Collection*



others for his spot on the dial. His programming largely consisted of playing his own records from a wind-up Victrola, with Rimsky-Korsakov's "Song of India" leading his hit parade. Every so often, it is said, he would lean into the morning-glory-shaped bell and shout the equivalent of "Can you hear me now?"

From a contemporary perspective, it seems unbelievable that early stations had to stop broadcasting every fifteen minutes to listen for distress calls from ships. Crosley led in persuading regulators that few vessels were cruising within the inland station's transmitting area.

Although Crosley's news releases identified his station as 8CR, the

Department of Commerce listed it as 8XAA. It made little difference, for by September 1922 he had relocated his station to a new manufacturing plant alongside Mill Creek and dedicated it as WLW. Never at a loss for a catchy phrase, he dubbed it "the station with a

soul." In *Not Just a Sound, the Story of WLW*, Dick Perry describes how Crosley would broadcast music and announcements into an eight-foot-long horn on the microphone. Sharing that chore was the station's first director, Fred Smith, who would help guide the station until he left to write for the weekly news dramatization, *The March of Time*. Occasionally, broadcasts would be interrupted by a train rolling down the industrialized Mill Creek Valley, whistle blowing. When that happened, broadcasting would halt until the train had tooted its way beyond hearing.

Early in his broadcasting career, Crosley concluded that



By 1926, when Crosley sat down with his father and son for a three-generation portrait, he had finally become a successful businessman. *Cincinnati Museum Center*

J. Anthony Bill, Photographer



Although he employed a station manager, Crosley still handled many of the early on-site technical and announcer duties.
Cincinnati Museum Center

he needed more wattage to help purchasers of his low-cost radios capture the signals. He launched a six-year campaign that made him, in the words of a modern blogger, "the champion photon-slinger of American broadcasting." Souped-up transmitting equipment boosted broadcast power from three hundred to five thousand watts in 1925, reaching new listeners across the nation and even in several foreign countries. To Crosley's delight, many that responded to his surveys said they were listening on his radio equipment. WLW strengthened that bond with frequent plugs for the company's products, although systematic commercial radio advertising was still years away. WLW

gained exclusive use of the seven hundred-kilocycle frequency in 1927 when two other stations agreed to move, freeing it of interference from competitors to become the nation's first "clear channel" station.

Increasingly influential with Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, "High Power" Crosley soon cranked up his own voltage in Washington, urging federal regulators to let him boost WLW to fifty thousand watts. When compliant officials approved, he ordered a more powerful Western Electric transmitter in May 1928. Acquiring competing local station WSAI, which he would continue to operate under those call letters until he sold it to Marshall Field in 1944, provided not only additional professional

The Musicone, retailing for a mere \$9.75 in 1925, was radio's first popularly priced loudspeaker. The Dynacone model, shown here, followed shortly after. In a Crosley-inspired publicity stunt, a Cincinnati Reds game was interrupted between innings while a Reds player, who was a Crosley dealer, sold a radio and the new loudspeaker to a member of the Chicago Cubs.

Cincinnati Museum Center



staff but a better positioned transmitting site in Mason, Ohio. By 1934, WLW would erect an 831-foot tower, taller than the Washington Monument, on the site.

That tower would be sending out a signal backed by five hundred thousand watts, as WLW became the nation's first station with that power. The inaugural broadcast was noteworthy enough to enlist Franklin D. Roosevelt to press a gold-plated telegraph key on his White House desk to unleash that lightning bolt to eager listeners — or at least to celebrate the occasion. Since Crosley's maze of transmitters, turbines, and meters required half an hour to warm up, not even a president could rush the mighty complex. Once it was warmed up, neighbors of the WLW antenna farm complained they could hear the station's programming without even turning on their radios. Music, they claimed, sometimes hummed from their milking machines and barbed-wire fences.

The stock market crash of 1929 wiped out many businesses. Fortunately for Crosley, he had invested profits in boosting power and improving quality rather than in the stock market. But with the nation slipping into the Depression even as competitors decimated his share of the home radio market, he set out to diversify into other affordable products that could help his company survive. Even before the market failed, Crosley had created such products as the Icyball, an early refrigeration unit that employed an evaporative cycle to keep food and drinks cool for those living beyond the reach of electrical power. A year after the crash, he introduced the Roamio, a forerunner of modern car radios. Despite its complexity, it permitted Model T and Model A owners to enjoy a Stutz luxury and helped

Crosley keep more employees on the job.

In 1930 he boldly diversified into major appliances, including washers, stoves, and especially freezers. He invited suggestions with his willingness to listen, as he said, to "every crackpot inventor, even those with perpetual-motion machines." That open-door policy struck gold when he welcomed a visitor with a patent for designing shelves into freezer doors. Other manufacturers had rejected the inventor's "tacky" idea, but Crosley and his managers recognized that shelves would not only provide more storage space inside the freezer but make items easier to reach. Crosley offered a royalty of twenty-five cents per unit sold, but the inventor wouldn't hear of it. "I want \$15,000 cash," he insisted. It was an unfortunate choice for the inventor; within a year, a Crosley plant was working three shifts to meet the demand for the new Shelvador.

Crosley workers also turned out products as diverse as Go Bi-Bi, a combination tricycle and stroller; Savamaid washers; and Koolrest, a system that kept canopied beds cool before air conditioning. One of his less successful gadgets was Xervac, a mechanical scalp stimulator

that the Federal Trade Commission disparaged, although Crosley claimed it helped save what little hair still grew on his head.

If the Depression prompted Crosley's diversification in many areas, it squelched his aspirations to branch into aviation. (See *TIMELINE* October 2006). In 1928 he had created the Crosley Aircraft Company to manufacture aviation radio equipment. His plants also built several aircraft dubbed Crosley Moonbeams, but sales were essentially grounded by the

market collapse. That didn't cause Crosley to lose his passion for flying. After he and his wife, Gwendolyn, built the twenty-one-room "Seagate" mansion in Florida, they transported guests by amphibious aircraft between Sarasota Bay and their own Crosley Field in suburban Cincinnati.

Recognizing the potential of aerial advertising, he entered a Lockheed Vega monoplane in the 1930 National Air Race between Los Angeles and Chicago, with a WLW announcer delivering



Gay History of Wueless Museum, West Chester, Ohio



Carl A. Koenig, Photographer

In 1928 Crosley purchased radio station WSAI and its transmission facilities at Mason, north of Cincinnati, and applied to the newly formed Federal Radio Commission for permission to expand WLW's power to fifty thousand watts. Following authorization in the spring of that year, Crosley presided over a groundbreaking ceremony, which was broadcast live.

Cincinnati Museum Center

This can't happen with a Crosley

GRILLE-FRONT COMPARTMENTS KEEP ALL FOODS SECURELY IN PLACE
...and everything is visible in sight, easy reach!

Just look at the way these 3 huge ROLL-OUT BASKETS bring the food right to you!

PAST FREEZER compartments freeze food in three sections with no refrigerated shelf, so it is guaranteed to keep in all weather before freezing. Because it is a constant temperature, you will get the best food from these baskets. They keep food fresh longer than any other freezer.

FOODS IN JAR DISPENSER is the only one of its kind. It is a built-in dispenser for jars of food. The jars are held in place by the dispenser and are easy to reach. The jars are held in place by the dispenser and are easy to reach.

SHRIMP BASKET is a new addition to the line. It is a built-in basket for shrimp. The baskets are made of wire and are easy to reach. The baskets are made of wire and are easy to reach.

FASTEST BASKET is a new addition to the line. It is a built-in basket for fast food. The baskets are made of wire and are easy to reach. The baskets are made of wire and are easy to reach.

The Crosley Shelvador freezers, with their "select-o-trays" that "practically hand the packages to you," were among the company's more popular appliances. Cincinnati Museum Center



All New **CROSLEY**
"Self-Serving"
SHELVADOR® FREEZERS

Preserve food
Protect health
Provide goodie.



An Amazing New Type
Mechanical Refrigerator

As small as the first ones and smooth
the outside of other types of Refrigerators!

Simple! Noiseless! Economical!

CROSLEY

CROSLEY
ICYBALL
Refrigerator

Does Not Use Electricity

All THE MOST
DESIRABLE FEATURES



DELUXE MODEL ME16

Fully insulated range featuring large capacity clear-
view high speed oven with 54,000 B.T.U. burner, and
thermostat control; extra large broiler drawer with
smokeless grill; full bearing drop front door. Full power
twin enamel inside and out. One piece 10" stainless top
with new one piece burners, M.L.O. valves, automatic
lighters. One burner is super-sized, giant size. A thor-
oughly modern and fully equipped range with Lamp
Timer, and Condiment Set, two large utensil drawers.



BRILLIANT, eye-compelling beauty with a
great array of the latest most desirable
features of modern gas ranges. Designed for
the utmost in efficiency and convenience mak-
ing meal preparation simpler, considerably
more economical and without the old fashioned
drudgery. Crosley Gas Ranges feature the
one piece and resisting top with the new
Exclusive Crosley burners, super insulated
high speed ovens of large capacity, smokeless
broiler drawers, and lots of handy space for
utensils. Welded one piece construction.



The Standard ICYBALL Model No. 151
for the Average Size Family

\$90
Complete

CROSLEY ICYBALL Refrigerator

Model No. 152
Large Families, Boarding Houses,
Restaurants and Stores

\$140
Complete



The Crosley Icyball was a thermal-type refrigerator for homes and commercial establishments without electrical service. It required only the heating — estimated to cost about two cents' worth of kerosene — of a metal ball to drive a refrigerant into another connected ball. Once the latter was placed inside the cabinet, it cooled the device for about a day's duration as the refrigerant slowly evaporated back into the outer ball, whereupon the process would be repeated. *Charles Stinger Collection*

Crosley offered consumers five different stove models as well as an assortment of accessories, including a range-top griddle and a deep-well electric cooker. *Charles Stinger Collection*

the nation's first aerial news broadcast along the way. The *New Cincinnati* finished fourth (Wiley Post won), not bad considering the extra 765 pounds it carried. The next year Crosley loaned the Vega to record-breaking aviatrix Ruth Nichols, who was forced to crash-land in New Brunswick on a planned transatlantic flight; she escaped with injuries and the aircraft was salvaged.

As his enterprises grew, Powel increasingly turned production over to brother Lewis so he could focus on broadcasting. His interests now included stations in Columbus and Dayton, as well as short-wave operations aimed at foreign listeners. He was intent on making WLW not only the nation's most powerful station but its most popular. In building WLW into

"the Nation's Station," the industrialist didn't divert from catering to the masses. His flagship station transmitted a mix of homespun programming that included farm news, weather forecasts, country music, and some of the earliest soap operas.

By the time the station expanded to fifty thousand watts in 1927, it was able to celebrate in elaborate new facilities with five studios, one large enough to accommodate a symphony orchestra. Besides a fifteen-piece orchestra, Crosley celebrated the wattage increase with a six-hour broadcast involving two hundred participants. Conservatory student Rose Boden sang two operatic numbers, becoming the first of many singers broadcast by the station. In Miss Boden's footsteps would come such superstar vocalists as Cincinnati's own Doris Day, Rosemary and

Betty Clooney from across the river in Kentucky, Jane Froman, and the McGuire sisters. Andy Williams would get his start on the *Cradle of the Stars* with his singing brothers. Comedian Red Skelton's *Avalon Time* was aired from Crosley's station. Piano legend Fats Waller also starred, although, according to one apocryphal story, parted company with Crosley after Powel heard him jazzing "Ain't Misbehavin'" on the cherished studio organ dedicated to Crosley's mother.

WLW's growing schedule also included some of the first radio dramas, which Crosley called "Radario." Based in Procter & Gamble's hometown, WLW developed the soap opera as a staple for stay-at-home moms — which at the time numbered almost all of them. The most enduring soaper, *Ma Perkins*, recounted the everyday trials of the folks in Rushville Center.



In the early 1930s, as Crosley attempted to further increase WLW's broadcast wattage, he also began work to expand coverage by completely revamping the station's antenna. The new WLW antenna-tower was designed and erected by the Blaw-Knox Steel Company of Pittsburgh. The 136-ton steel tower rested on a pair of oversized porcelain insulators with flexible connections that permitted the structure to respond to wind pressure. Crosley (left) and WLW's chief engineer Joe Chambers (right) joined the Blaw-Knox crew during the placement of the two insulator halves. *Charles Stinger Collection*

After WLW's 831-foot tower was completed and put in service in 1933, a serious signal blackout was observed about a hundred miles from the antenna, including heavily populated areas such as Columbus, Ohio, and Louisville, Kentucky. Engineers discovered the solution was to remove the upper mast, or "flagpole," reducing the antenna's height to 708 feet. *Charles Stinger Collection*



Its tear-jerking episodes were scripted by talented writers including Rod Serling. "Ma" Virginia Payne and her colleagues broadcast 7,065 episodes (some after moving to the network center in New York) before producers pulled the plug in November 1960.

As the networks grew, WLW became a key outlet for the Mutual Broadcasting System in 1934 and also fed many programs

to NBC. Given Powel Crosley's emphasis on public service, it is not surprising that the station had a strong news team — one that would peak after Pearl Harbor, with programs like *World Front*. Since it reached much of rural America, it broadcast hayloads of country music through shows including the *National Barn Dance*, *Trail Blazers*, and *Happy Valley Girls*. Red Foley, Cowboy

Copas, and Whitey Ford, the "Duke of Paducah," all received regular airtime. The station even purchased what it dubbed "Everybody's Farm" in Mason, Ohio, from which it broadcast country-oriented programs. *Moon River*, a late-hours music and romantic poetry tour de force, made announcer Peter Grant's sonorous voice famous to a generation of cuddling couples.

Ruth Lyons joined the station in 1942, beginning a twenty-five-year career during which her radio and (later) TV shows would become a model for later daytime stalwarts such as Phil Donahue, another WLW star.

If WLW was "the Nation's Station," smaller broadcasters grumbled that it could also be an airways hog. A Canadian station protested to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that WLW's half-million-watt signal was interfering with its own. Crosley technicians solved that problem, but couldn't overcome the furor when other major stations began to demand the right to broadcast at five hundred thousand watts. Worried, Congress resolved that allowing more such superstations hurt local broadcasting and thus was contrary to the public interest. An FCC hearing over WLW's license turned ugly, with some witnesses claiming Crosley had squelched coverage of Ohio strikes and other anti-business news. When the FCC ultimately restricted WLW's normal broadcasting power to fifty



WLW's chief engineer Joe Chambers (left) and Crosley heft one of the hundred-kilowatt modulator tubes required to operate WLW's unprecedented five-hundred-kilowatt transmitter. Each of the twenty tubes weighed thirty pounds and cost \$1,625. During the formal dedication and initiation of WLW's new high-powered broadcast in May 1934, a quintet of radio starlets stood on the catwalk of the transmitter, providing human-scale comparisons for the oversized modulator tubes. A total of sixty tubes were used throughout the station.

Charles Stinger Collection



Announcing **STARTLING, NEW** **CROSLEY STATION WAGON**

See it now at your Crosley Dealer's—also
new Pickup and Panel Delivery models



"The fine CROSLEY car is a fact—not a dream. Over 25,000 enthusiastic owners already, and production is still climbing."

Pavel Crosley, Jr.

President, Crosley Motors, Inc.



What do you want most in a car?

Size?—CROSLEY has it where you want it—not with bulging bumpers or flaring fenders, but plenty inside—where roominess counts.

Easy Driving?—Even timid drivers lose their fear of traffic in a CROSLEY. So light and easy to handle, and parks "on a dime." It's 20 inches narrower and weighs only about a third as much as other so-called light cars.

Economy?—35 to 50 miles per gallon. That's because Crosley has so little needless weight to move around.

Value?—Lots of cars are called "low cost," but CROSLEY really IS! Whichever model you choose, you'll be amazed at the low price.

Safety?—It's all steel. Has the lowest center of gravity of any car, so it's almost impossible for a CROSLEY to turn over. CROSLEY'S narrow width makes your side of the road 20 inches wider.

Power?—The startling CROSLEY COBRA (Copper BRAzed) 4-cylinder valve-in-head-steel engine weighs only 59 pounds yet gives you sustained performance—flashing pickup—eager speed.

Crosley Station Wagon—

New! Smart! Practical! Seats four with plenty of luggage space. Rear seat removable. Entire rear end opens for easy loading. All steel—no wood to rot, swell, shrink or rattle. Well balanced on the road. Variety of striking color combinations.



Crosley Sedan—Needs no introduction. Over 15,000 on the road. Constantly improved in both beauty and mechanical performance. Styled with an "aircraft flavor." 4 passenger. For all around use.



Crosley Pickup—Full quarter ton capacity. Drop tail gate. Roomy, comfortable cab. Amazingly economical. Cuts operating, service and delivery costs. Perfect for all service men, farms, city and country places.



Crosley Convertible—

Smartest thing on wheels! Like the sedan and station wagon, it carries four big passengers plus baggage. Easy to manage laminated cloth top snaps into place in a jiffy.



Crosley Panel Delivery—Want to save money on light deliveries? Grocers, druggists, dry cleaners—appliance, hardware and other service stores report sensationally low operating costs. Plenty of space for your traveling advertisement on sides.

CROSLEY
a *FINE* car

See it at your local dealer's—or write for our new color catalog and full description: Crosley Motors, 2532 Spring Grove Ave., Cincinnati 14, Ohio.
P. S. TO DEALERS—A few choice dealerships are still available.
Write me personally. Pavel Crosley, Jr., President.



One of Crosley's undeniably oddball inventions was the Xervac, a mechanically controlled vacuum cap intended to stimulate hair growth on balding men. The fact that pranksters delighted in slipping up behind users to crank up the pressure indicated the failure of the general public to take the device seriously. *Charles Stinger Collection*

thousand watts on February 28, 1939, just two days after his wife, Gwendolyn, died, Crosley was disheartened. He lost interest in broadcasting after that setback, according to biographer Charles Stinger, although he continued to test the expanded wattage during the early morning hours. With war looming, the government was happy to see that capability maintained as a key to a national warning system.

After Pearl Harbor, federal officials discovered they also needed Crosley's capabilities to counter German propaganda broadcasts.

LEFT: Crosley's ads insisted his car's narrowness was an advantage, making "your side of the road 20 inches wider." *Charles Stinger Collection*

They enlisted WLW's help to create the Voice of America (VOA), with the WLW staff building and operating shortwave transmitters to spread messages developed by the government. The Bethany Relay Station near Mason began sending the American message abroad twenty hours a day, in as many as twenty-six languages and eleven dialects, from 1944 until the end of the Cold War.

The VOA project wasn't Crosley's only contribution to the war effort. Unfailingly patriotic, he agreed to donate his yacht, *Sea Owl*, to the Coast Guard and threw his Florida mansion

open to Army Air Corps trainees. Many of his plants shifted into defense production. But his most significant contribution would be carried out under a veil of secrecy.

The navy contracted with the company in December 1941 to build newly developed proximity fuses. Unlike traditional shells, which are preset to explode at a certain time or else explode on impact, VT (variable time) fuses incorporate a tiny radio

transmitter to detonate the shell near elusive targets such as attacking aircraft. Although the fuse was conceptualized by a team at Johns Hopkins University, the military needed the Crosley organization's electronic wizardry to make the complex projectiles work. Soon the company, one of five producing the fuses, had ten thousand employees working round the clock, seven days a week. Its first kill was scored in January 1943 by the U.S. cruiser *Helena*, which destroyed an attacking Japanese dive-bomber off Guadalcanal. The weapon proved invaluable not only in defending ships against air attack but against V-1 buzz bombs targeting British cities and U.S. troops moving toward Berlin. General George S. Patton said, with his usual bluntness, "The funny fuse won the Battle of the Bulge for us." Many rate the weapon behind only the atomic

Crosley developed the first Moonbeam airplane in the 1920s as a personal venture unaffiliated with the Crosley Radio Corporation. It was, reportedly, "an exceedingly quiet machine." Three other prototypes of the Moonbeam followed. Crosley was also responsible for two other aircraft, a power glider and a diminutive plane called the American Flea. None went into commercial production. *Cincinnati Museum Center*



bomb and radar in deciding the war.

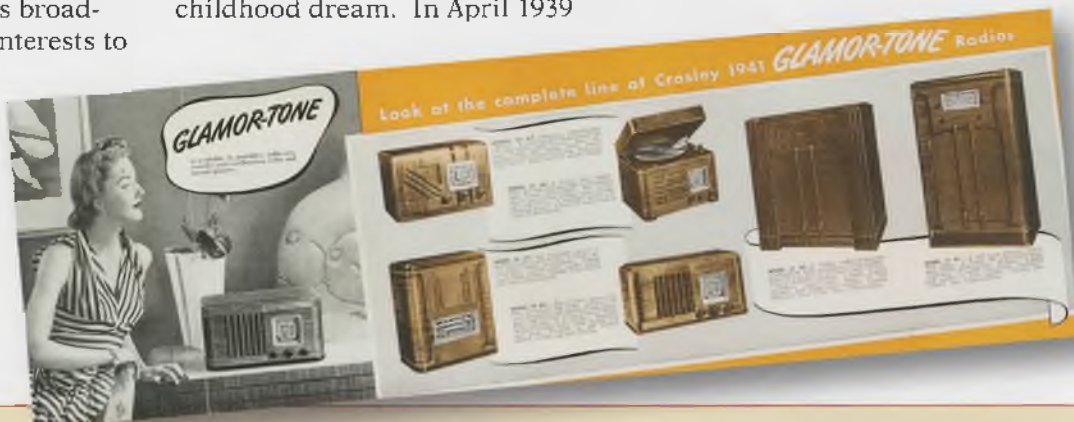
Meanwhile, the war brought to a halt WLW's experimental work, dating to 1937, toward launching television broadcasting. The station's WLWT would become one of the nation's leading TV stations after the war. By then, however, Powel Crosley Jr. was out of the picture. With the end of the war in 1945, he sold both his broadcasting and appliance interests to Victor Emanuel's New York-based Aviation Corporation, or Avco. Avco, which under a previous management had founded American Airlines in 1930, would operate WLW and TV stations in

Columbus, Dayton, and other cities until it sold both the broadcasting and manufacturing interests by the 1970s. (A group of independent distributors acquired rights to the Crosley name in 1977 and continue selling appliances with that label.)

Powel Crosley, approaching the age of sixty, had turned his attention to fulfilling a childhood dream. In April 1939

he confirmed that he would build a new automobile that everyone could afford. "I've been dreaming of this for twenty-eight years," he told reporters. He contended that anyone could afford the car

As World War II approached, Crosley was still manufacturing radios with solid wooden cabinets in both console and table models. *Charles Stinger Collection*



CROSLEY AND THE REDS

Although Powel Crosley Jr. became a Cincinnati Reds fan as a boy attending baseball games with his father, he never imagined himself owning the team. Even as a wealthy industrialist and community leader, he hesitated to step in when the Reds' creditors appealed to him to buy the bankrupt club in 1934. However, faced with the team's threatened departure from his hometown, Crosley agreed to get involved. He would remain the owner until he died, twenty-seven years later.

Larry McPhail, respected owner of a minor league team in Columbus, had been recruited by receivers to save the Reds after the Depression forced Sidney Weil to surrender control. (See *TIMELINE*, August 1992) McPhail appealed to Crosley's community spirit to buy the team, oldest in the major leagues, to prevent its sale to out-of-town investors. Despite its baseball heritage, Cincinnati was the nation's smallest major-league city, drawing some of the smallest crowds. Its Redland Field had become a deteriorating relic in a sea of aging, grimy West Side industrial plants.

Nonetheless, Crosley agreed to purchase the team for two hundred thousand dollars. "I do have sufficient civic pride in my makeup," he explained later, "to not want to see Cincinnati, the birthplace of major league baseball, become a minor league town." He initiated repairs to the stadium, renamed Crosley Field, then set out with McPhail to establish a farm system that could make the team competitive again. But to sustain a competitive team, they needed to generate new revenues, and do it quickly.

McPhail explained to Crosley how his Columbus team had improved attendance by installing arc lights for nighttime games. Crosley embraced the idea and proposed

At the time of Powel Crosley Jr.'s death of a heart attack in March 1961, it was his long career as owner of the Reds — and what that meant for the club's future — that was in the minds of many Cincinnatians.

Cincinnati Museum Center

it to other owners. Conservative baseball executives were appalled by the idea, which the Philadelphia Athletics' Connie Mack denounced as a circus. Given the Reds' desperate financial situation, though, they agreed to let the team play seven night games during the 1935 season — one with each National League team.

Just as he had thrown the switch to activate Crosley's five hundred thousand-watt WLW transmitter, President Franklin Roosevelt threw the switch that lighted 632 lamps illuminating the field. That first night game in major league history on May 24, 1935, drew a crowd of 20,422 fans, far exceeding the usual afternoon turnout. The Reds beat the Philadelphia Phillies 2-1, and the lights proved to be winners as well. Other owners quickly recognized the value of nighttime baseball, with Mack being the first to introduce lights in the American League.

Crosley may have been a reluctant owner, but he turned out to be a generous one. Determined to make the team a winner for the betterment of Cincinnati — and of course for WLW, which broadcast its games — he supported business



(at just \$325 for the coupe, \$25 more for the sedan), although not everyone could necessarily fit into it. The model rolled out at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway had a wheelbase of just eighty inches and weighed less than a thousand pounds. It boasted as much as fifty miles to a gallon of gasoline, but lacked such enhancements as a universal joint and conventional windshield wipers (wipers had to be operated by hand). And, as Joseph M. Rice discovered, its Waukesha air-cooled, two-cylinder engine left something to be desired.

Rice, then working in Crosley's radio plant, was invited by a local distributor to pick up one of the sporty little cars at the Devou Park orphanage across the



Crosley's most important World War II effort involved the proximity fuse. Even years after the war when its technology had become passé, employees who had worked on it were reluctant to discuss its features, a residual of its extremely tight wartime security. The fuse housed a radio transmitter that triggered a shell's explosives as reflected radio waves indicated a nearby target, such as an approaching aircraft. Crosley's contract with the navy called for the production of five hundred fuses per day, and the War Production Board gave the firm a priority for obtaining material that was second only to that of the Manhattan Project. While the initial concept was developed elsewhere, one of the refinements worked out by Crosley engineers was the coordination with a local plastics company to devise an early form of teflon for the nose cones. The fuse's effectiveness was widely praised by both the navy and the army.

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manager McPhail (and later Warren Giles) and team manager Bill McKechnie in acquiring needed talent. After Crosley readily approved a 1938 deal that gave the Phillies seventy-five thousand dollars and a player to obtain pitcher Bucky Walters and his sinking fastball, a surprised and pleased McKechnie told Giles, "I never knew an owner to let it go that easy." It was money well spent, for Walters was a valuable addition to a Cincinnati team that included catcher Ernie Lombardi, the league's Most Valuable Player in 1938; All-Star first baseman Frank McCormick; and pitchers Paul Derringer and Johnny Vander Meer, who in 1938 became the only major league pitcher to post two

consecutive no-hitters. (See *TIMELINE*, March 1999) The team won the National League pennant in 1939, with Walters compiling a 27-11 record, but lost to the New York Yankees in the World Series. The following year, the team swept through the league for a second season and then defeated the Detroit Tigers in the World Series. It was the team's first World Series victory since its 1919 victory over Chicago's infamous "Black Sox." (See *TIMELINE*, October 1991.)

Crosley's team never repeated that performance after World War II. It brought forth stars such as Joe Nuxhall, who at the age of fifteen became the youngest person ever to play in a major league game, and slugger Ted Kluszewski. Nonetheless, it resided in the second division through the 1950s. Powell himself remained an enthusiastic fan, often seen cheering at games. Through the years he sometimes intervened on behalf of the club, as when he threatened to move the franchise if the city didn't make needed improvements to the stadium (city officials grudgingly complied).

Despite that threat, Crosley's objective was always to make the team a credit to the city. When he died in March 1961, his will bequeathed the team to a foundation controlled by family members and associates. It made clear that the Reds were to remain a Cincinnati institution, as they have to this day.

Don Bedwell



Ohio River in hilly northern Kentucky and take some of the children for a spin. In his book about the industrialist, Rice explains that he invited "six or seven" little boys to pile into the canary yellow vehicle with red wheels, and they went rolling happily down the steep hill. They cruised through downtown Cincinnati, enjoying the stares of onlookers, before returning to Kentucky and heading up the hill to the orphanage. "I had barely started up when I knew I was in trouble," Rice wrote. "I could not return to the home without taking the boys up two at a time."

Despite the car's deficient power, the Crosley Corporation (Powel had dropped "Radio" from its name in 1939) managed to sell 5,757 before Pearl Harbor. Shunning auto dealerships, he sold the vehicles through independent Crosley dealers and even department stores, including Macy's in New York. Never a follower, he insisted on marketing the car through small ads, rather than the splashy layouts urged by advertising consultants. "Small car, small ads," he said, ending the discussion.

The war effort, of course, suspended all auto manufacturing. By the time it ended, Crosley was ready to resume manufacturing in Richmond (and later Marion), Indiana, with the help of millions earned from the sale of his radio and manufacturing interests. His engineers had been refining the prewar model and in 1946 produced a slightly larger, more advanced car with a wider choice of styles. The slightly



Much of WLW's radio programming was cultural fare, but the station also touched on everyday life. Mrs. Judith Auch (left) hosted "Kroger's Cooking Chats," and she cheerfully shared one of the show's byproducts with Crosley. *Cincinnati Museum Center*

Concerns over potential conflicts between the secrecy required for Crosley's wartime contract work and its broadcasting arm led WLW to move downtown. In 1942 it took over a former Elk's lodge east of Cincinnati's city hall (tower in background), converting it into "Crosley Square." *Cincinnati Museum Center*





His 1939 automobile was a tight fit, but Crosley took every opportunity to squeeze into one — frequently recruiting an additional trio to join him — just to prove it could be done.

Cincinnati Museum Center

enlarged car still favored smaller passengers, although Powel was known to limbo his six-foot-four-inch frame behind the wheel in attempting to disprove the obvious limitation. The prewar two-cylinder engine had given way to a revolutionary four-cylinder, water-cooled “Cobra” engine with an overhead camshaft, made of sheet metal to reduce weight. The novel engines could produce 26.5 horsepower, twice that of the original. Unfortunately, they soon began rusting out and had to be replaced by conventional cast-iron blocks in 1949. In that same year, the company surprised competitors by introducing hydraulic disc brakes, a first for American industry. In a more exciting move, it added the sleek little Crosley Hotshot, America’s first mass-produced postwar sports car.

Crosley sales peaked near thirty thousand in 1948, but that was

the beginning of the end. The founder and his dream machine were caught between the past and the future. He had introduced his car at the end of the Depression, when economy and low cost were all-important. Although his postwar models were upgraded, they failed to appeal to an optimistic public that wanted bigger, flashier, and more powerful automobiles. Even the car’s stingy fuel consumption wasn’t an inducement when gas could be purchased for fifteen or twenty cents a gallon. Its eight hundred-to nine hundred-dollar selling price was somewhat expensive when basic full-size autos cost only about twelve-hundred dollars. Besides,

driving a Crosley did nothing for the owner’s image. Bernard Ryan Jr. remembered how he and two six-foot-five brothers twisted their way out of his Crosley outside Manhattan’s Museum of Modern Art. Pedestrians gawked as they jackknifed out of the car, and one explained, “We thought you were a circus act.”

Crosley’s vision of a more affordable auto was three decades ahead of its time. However, his foresight did nothing to generate sales in the 1950s. As the Korean War forced up labor costs, the company was losing a million dollars a year. Powel admitted defeat in 1952, bracing his prized assembly line and selling the plants to the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. of Akron. Assessing the experience later, Lewis Crosley said it broke his brother’s heart: “It was the first thing he failed on, really.”

Nonetheless, Powel remained active, devoting his attention to running the Cincinnati Reds baseball team that he had purchased in 1934, breeding horses, and hunting at his farm in Indiana. A heart attack took

his life on March 28, 1961, at his estate near College Hill. He was seventy-four.

Crosley is remembered for far more than his failed automobile. His Seagate estate in Florida is now a public museum, his Indiana farm the Crosley State Fish and Wildlife Area. WLW radio and television remain leading broadcast outlets, and his foundation has helped perpetuate public radio in Cincinnati. The money-back guarantee policy he pressed on distributors is standard for major retailers today. Besides helping the nation win World War II, he helped Cincinnati retain his beloved Reds, who continue to call the city home — often playing under the lights that he introduced. His list of successes makes his failure with a miniature automobile seem very small indeed. **TL**

Crosley’s postwar auto engine, named “Cobra” for its copper brazing, weighed a mere fifty-nine pounds — the same as a standard typewriter, one ad said — and could get fifty miles per gallon at thirty miles an hour. Efficiency dropped to thirty-five miles per gallon if driven at fifty-five miles an hour.

Cincinnati Museum Center

