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OHIO'S OWN

By ELBERT J. BOEBINGER

Editor's Note: This is the first of a series of articles about WLW that have been written by Mr. Boebinger. Because of the wealth of material that Mr. Boebinger has collected about the internationally famous broadcasting station near Cincinnati, it has been thought best to publish the articles serially.

“THIS is WLW, the nation's station of the Crosley Radio Corporation, Cincinnati.” Everyone is familiar with this phrase because this station broadcasts with enough power to be heard all over the country. What is back of this wonderful engineering achievement? Has it happened by chance or good fortune?

Chance and fortune do not enter the case. WLW has come to be the powerful station that it is today because of the untiring efforts and keen foresight of Powel Crosley, Jr., president of the Crosley Radio Corporation. WLW did not originate from the many successes in Mr. Crosley's life, but from the lessons he learned from his failures in several attempts to own his own manufacturing plant. Let us direct our attentions to Mr. Crosley's life and its connection with the world's most powerful broadcasting station.

Powel Crosley, Jr., was born in Cincinnati in 1886 and he received his education in the Cincinnati schools. He got his college training at the University of Cincinnati, taking a year of mechanical engineering and a two-year course in law. He was always interested in mechanics, especially in that branch dealing with automobiles. He was so fascinated by automobiles that he accepted a job as chauffeur for a private family during one of his summer vacations so that he could be around them.

Upon leaving law school he sold municipal bonds and other securities for a year; but his fondness for automobiles remained. Not attracted by a business career, he quit his job as bond salesman and organized a company for the manufacture of an inexpensive car. A large market awaited the car as was evidenced by the first one built; but Mr. Crosley was short of funds and the company failed. This was 1909.

After his failure he went to Indianapolis and worked for several automobile companies. In 1910 he accepted a job in Muncie, Indiana, as manager of an automobile distributing firm. The job was not what he had expected it to be, so he returned to Cincinnati. While in Muncie, however, he married Miss Gwendolyn Aiken, who like himself, was a native of Cincinnati.

Upon returning to Cincinnati he took a position representing several firms manufacturing advertis-



Mr. Crosley and WLW, 1921

ing specialties; still his attraction for automobiles remained.

In 1912 he again made an attempt to organize a new automobile manufacturing company, but once again failure loomed because of insufficient working capital. Another attempt to organize his own company was made in 1913, only this time it was to manufacture motorcycles. Lack of capital was again the cause of failure and he decided that this would be his last attempt to create a business on other people's money.

After his failure in the manufacture of motorcycles he had two more jobs in the advertising line. In 1916 he started a mail order business for one of the clients of the firm for which he, himself, was working. The client was selling automobile specialties. In 1917 Mr. Crosley bought him out. The business grew rapidly under his management; its growth necessitated larger quarters.

Mr. Crosley bought a label company in Cincinnati and printed his own advertising matter. This was followed by the purchase of another building, which he converted into a woodworking factory where phonographs were made.

In 1921 Mr. Crosley became interested in radio through the childish wishes of his nine-year-old son, Powel III. He decided to buy his son a set but the prices seemed prohibitive. He was offered a small one tube set for \$130. Here he conceived the idea which, later, was to make him world known. Why couldn't he build radio sets that could be afforded by everyone?

With this thought in mind he purchased several

sets and began to study their construction and their operation. He experimented with radio parts and found ways of making them simpler yet producing the required and even better results. He developed the fact that the performance of elaborate outfits costing \$200 or more, could be duplicated with an assemblage of equipment and yet be retailed at about \$35.

The demand for phonographs was curtailed so he decided to build radio apparatus in his woodworking plant where once he had built phonograph cabinets. Mr. Crosley's decision to change from the manufacture of phonographs to that of radios has proven to be a very wise one. Today he is one of the foremost manufacturers of radio receiving sets in the world, with the production capacity of the Crosley factory amounting to 5,000 receivers daily.

Upon entering the radio manufacturing field Mr. Crosley realized that if people bought radio sets they would naturally want to listen to high-class entertainment. In the spring of 1921 he constructed an experimental broadcasting station in his own home. It was only a small 20 watt affair, and was operated under the call letters CR. In March of the following year the first license under the call letters of WLW was issued. The original WLW operated on only 50 watts from March until September at which time the future "Nation's Station" made its initial broadcast with 500 watts.

In 1923, Crosley acquired station WMH, one of the first two broadcasting stations in America to operate on a regular schedule. The operation of WMH was discontinued and attention was concentrated on the rapidly growing WLW.

Mr. Crosley was the first to vision the excellent results obtained by locating the broadcasting transmitter in a place of minimum interference. He built the first remote control transmitter to be used in

radios, and in 1925 WLW was opened with a power of 5,000 watts. The transmitter was located at Harrison, Ohio, twenty-two miles from Cincinnati.

In 1927 The Federal Communications Commission granted WLW a cleared channel on a frequency of 700 kilocycles.

In October of the following year the 50,000 watt WLW was officially opened. A new transmitter was built at Mason, Ohio, a distance of twenty-five miles from the Cincinnati studios.

WLW was the first 50,000 watt commercial broadcasting station to operate on a regular schedule and it has become America's first really nationally heard station. Thus the title of "The Nation's Station."

At the present time WLW is still the most powerful radio station in the world, operating with a power of 500,000 watts.

Today, as has been the case during most of the life of WLW, it is operating on a temporary license. Mr. Crosley has pioneered each successive stage of more powerful broadcasting and all the licenses that were issued were for experimental purposes.

The main broadcasting studios of the world's most powerful station are located on the eighth floor of the Crosley Radio Corporation plant. There are also several downtown studios and many remote pickup points throughout the city. Crosley also operates station WSAI and short wave station W8XAL.

Although WLW is the most outstanding station in the world, Mr. Crosley is not satisfied to sit back and wait for other stations to catch up with his. Plans are now made by the Crosley Corporation to erect a large broadcasting center for Cincinnati. This building will contain the studios for both WLW and WSAI. Surely this new achievement by Mr. Crosley could be called "Ohio's Radio City."

