

Seagate is what many consider the finest mansion on Sarasota Bay. It is across from the Sarasota/Bradenton Int'l. Airport at the end of Seagate Drive on the bayfront. It was built to be the winter home of Powel and Gwendolyn Crosley. Seagate certainly is a mansion, but it is quite commonplace to hear visitors exclaim "I love this place – it is a home", "I could live here". It conveys such warmth and charm that many weddings and other significant events are held here each year.

Powel Crosley, Jr. originally had a fishing camp on Siesta Key and was urged to build a mansion near his peers and friends on Sarasota Bay. Sixty acres of land were purchased that adjoined Ringling's complex and in 1929 construction was started. There was a full-page ad in the Sarasota Herald, dated October 6, 1929, naming the contractors who worked on the home and completed construction in 72-nine hour work days. This same edition said the Crosley family would furnish and occupy Seagate by January 1st ... 120 days.

In addition to the house, they built a garage with servant's quarters, laundry, swimming pool, a seawall extending across the waterfront and a yacht basin sixty feet wide and two hundred feet long. From this basin, a channel fifty feet wide was dredged to deep water in the bay for Crosley's yachts and seaplanes.

The house itself was considered to be fireproof as it is built with steel columns and hollow tile, stuccoed on the outside, and the trimming all being of pre-cast stone. The roof was covered with what was called Old Cuban tile.

The house's heating was a steam radiator system. The most up-to-date porcelain plumbing fixtures were used. The only wood floor in the house is in the Ship Room. The floors told a tale of where you were in the house; if it was a tile floor, you were in a family or guest area, and if it was a terrazzo floor, you were in servant's quarters or a work area.

An automatic refrigerating system was installed. All windows were steel casements provided with roll-up copper screens. A swimming pool, on the bayside of the house, was installed but has since been filled and covered. There was an extensive system of walkways, driveways, and landscaping. George Albree Freeman, of New York and Sarasota, was the architect of

record; and Paul W. Bregman of Sarasota was the general contractor and builder. All of this was built at a reputed cost of \$350,000...it was 1929.

Powel Crosley, Jr. was born on September 18, 1886. His father was an attorney and real estate investor. Powel Jr. was six feet four inches tall with sandy hair. He loved to tinker but was not an eminent student. In 1910, he married Gwendolyn B. Aiken. Her father, Walter Aiken, did not think highly of young Powel's prospects. He was thirty years old before he made more than \$20.00 a week.

In love with automobiles since childhood, Crosley had his first substantial success in mail-order marketing of auto gadgets to car owners.

In 1916, he started the American Automobile Accessories Company which, within a few years, was grossing more than a million dollars a year. It provided a springboard to his many other endeavors.

Next, he manufactured phonographs, then radios. After three years in the radio business, he was offered over six million dollars for Crosley Radio Corporation, but he turned the offer down. He operated station WLW in Cincinnati, which became the most powerful radio station ever operated in the United States.

It was heard in Canada, Mexico and many other parts of the world. It launched careers for many performers who went on to fame such as Doris Day, Rosemary Clooney, Red Skelton, the Mills Brothers, Fats Walker, and Durward Kirby.

To keep his listener's interest, Crosley developed what he called "continuing day time drama" and to pay its expenses, sold sponsorship to Proctor and Gamble. Today we call these daytime dramas "soap operas".

In 1934, Powel Crosley, Jr. bought the Cincinnati Reds baseball team. He questioned the small attendance at games and was told it was because people work during the day. Ever the innovator, he revamped the baseball park and had electric lights, for playing at night,

developed and installed. His team won two pennants in 1939 and 1940.

In the late 1930s, he introduced to the American market what are currently referred to as “compact cars”. He manufactured them from 1939 to 1941, was interrupted by World War II, and again from 1946 to 1952. He sold his interests in 1952. Today, there are very active Crosley Car Clubs. He also manufactured the Crosley Shelvador refrigerator. Years ago, if your refrigerator had shelves in the door, it was a Crosley or he was paid royalties, as he vigorously defended his patent rights to this product before its design became public domain.

Other products that Powel Crosley, Jr. brought to market were televisions, disc brakes, 35mm cameras, airplanes (4 of them). One product he took off the market because it was “before its time” ...was a fax machine! This fax machine was exhibited at the 1939 New York World’s Fair and worked by radio waves rather than telephone lines. One of these fax machines has been donated and is occasionally on display at “Seagate”.

Powel and Gwendolyn occupied Seagate during the 1930 – 1939 period. Gwendolyn passed away while in residence at Seagate in 1939. Powel died March 28, 1961 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

A grandson, Lewis Crosley, had lived in this mansion during his childhood. He passed away May 8, 2000.

Seagate was purchased by the Manatee County Commission in 1991 to prevent this historic structure being lost to the pressures of urban development. They retained the house and 16.5 bayfront acres. For rental information, please contact: (941) 722-3244 x0 ♦ Sales@BACVB.com ♦ www.PowelCrosleyEstate.com

The Crosley Estate Foundation, Inc. works to raise funds, secure grants, and donations of materials and services to assist in this restoration work.