

ANTIQUE ELECTRIC WAFFLE IRONS

1900-1960

A History of the Appliance Industry in 20th Century America



William F. George

With a collector's dating & value guide for over 1,100 models

**ANTIQUÉ ELECTRIC WAFFLE IRONS
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TRAFFORD

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents who taught their children that reading was one of the most valuable and enjoyable skills they could acquire. They were right. I wish they were here to read this.

About The Author

Bill was born in Philadelphia in 1943 but grew up in what was then rural southeast Pennsylvania. He attended Penn State University, acquiring a Bachelor of Science degree in secondary education before pursuing a career teaching science and math. A five year stint of junior high school classrooms in suburban Pennsylvania and rural Ohio, convinced him that a hands-on profession would be far less frustrating and much more mentally rewarding. Two years of specialized training led to a new career as a photo equipment service technician. Bill operated his own wholesale camera repair service in Maryland and Colorado for over 15 years before selling the business and working in industry as a precision scientific instrument-maker. Bill's hobbies reflect his love of tinkering with things old and mechanical. In his spare time, when not gardening or practicing photography, he restores antique pocket watches, vintage Ford cars (five so far dating from 1929 to 1950), antique cameras, and vintage appliances.

A poor quality modern-type waffle iron that failed miserably one Sunday morning led the author on a quest for an old-style, no-nonsense waffle iron just like he remembered his mother using back in the pre-Teflon "Good old days." One vintage waffle iron led to another and another until he had gathered and restored to like-new condition over three hundred of them. Bill's curiosity to know more about these little jewels and the companies that made them led to a four year research project. This book is the culmination of that research, the author's longtime writing avocation, and his love of teaching.



Maggie

(The author's advisor on rabbits & squirrels)

The author, with his wife Pat, lives in Colorado with “Maggie” a wonderfully loving and gentle dog recently acquired through the Springer Spaniel Rescue League. Bill welcomes any inquiries through the publisher or through his waffle iron web site www.WaffleIronCentral.com.

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- > Flat iron collector Jay Raymond of Jenkintown, PA. for supplying information and advertising materials about several appliance firms;
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- > Jeff Gordon, (another avid Porcelier collector/expert) for proofreading and making valuable additions and corrections to the Porcelier segment;
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www.toasterCentral.com.);

- > Georgia and Steve Johnson for giving me hours of computer instructions and programming support, making it possible for me to format this book digitally (My personal appliance collection has also been enlarged considerably with artifacts rescued by Georgia from flea markets and junk shops during her travels through America's heartland.);
- > To Ruth and Bob Cullison for a lifetime of friendship and for the many waffle recipes from their cookbook collection;
- > To my brother Bob and his wife Sue, a special thanks for the many neat old waffle irons you've added to my collection (You may recognize a few herein.);
- > To my sister Dorothy, for her moral support and artistic talents-It's always nice to know you're there;
- > To Victor Vale who, from the very beginning of this project, gave a great deal of much-appreciated moral support and more than a few very nice waffle irons (Victor is an avid appliance collector and part time actor/movie producer who resides outside of the Nation's capitol in suburban Maryland.);
- > Finally, without the constant support, patience and perseverance of my wife Pat, this book would still be just a dream. This most patient lady has endured many hours of being a computer widow, has devoted a great deal of her own time gathering research information and materials and holds the Guinness Record for test driving the greatest number of antique waffle irons. In addition, I have relied heavily on her magical ability to edit my writing, turning it from gibberish into something resembling Standard English. Pat, as with most things I've accomplished in the last thirty plus years, this wouldn't have happened without you. Thanks so much.

Preface

The history of the electric appliance industry began about a hundred years ago and mirrored that of a growing and confident America during the first half of the twentieth century. Appliance manufacturing in the United States, until the 1960s, was done by a few very large corporations and dozens of small family-owned businesses employing fewer than a hundred employees. Most of these small firms were founded by men who born in the Victorian age, who were instilled with a strong, sometimes all-consuming, work ethic. Most of them, even after years of financial success, were the first into their factory in the morning and last to leave at night. A surprising number were first generation Americans of German or Scandinavian ancestry.

The story of the appliance industry, it turns out, is mostly one of ordinary people from average backgrounds who had modest ambitions and obtained moderate success. Although the electric appliance industry was THE growth industry of the 1920s, much like the computer industry of the 1990s, it produced no titans, no Fords, Rockefellers, or Morgans. Even Edison and Westinghouse only dabbled in electric appliances, each making their fortunes elsewhere. Although the industry created no grand successes, it did support numerous families in middle class comfort and it funded college educations for second and third generation family members who interesting enough almost without fail chose career paths unrelated to appliances or manufacturing.

All of the early appliance pioneers have been gone for well over a quarter of a century. Many of the second-generation descendents have also passed on. With few exceptions, due to the extreme competitive nature of the housewares industry, of which appliances is a small part, the early manufacturers have been bought and sold numerous times or have disappeared entirely. In a 1970's interview, Al Bersted, one of the industry pioneers and one its great success stories, made the observation that over two hundred and fifty electric goods manufacturers, large and small had come and gone by that time.

The men who founded these companies did so not for some noble goal. None was determined to better civilization by creating new wondrous inventions. Each of them was in business simply to make a living. Some loved what they were doing and thrived on fourteen-hour days. Others grew to consider the whole matter a huge unrelenting burden. None had either the luxury of time or the inclination to archive their achievements for posterity. That was unfortunate since these men and their companies created many products that today we take for granted, but which make life for all of us easier, healthier, and just plain nicer to live.

Because so many appliance firms were small and family owned, the company itself became an important part of the family's history. Some were also the economic backbone of smaller communities. Through interviews with relatives of company founders, searches of museum archives, libraries and local historical societies, and by consulting with several very knowledgeable authors and appliance collectors, I've

tried to piece together as much of the electrical appliance story as still exists. Some of the stories I found are quite fascinating. I hope you enjoy them.

Introduction

My interest in the history of the electric appliance industry began some years ago when I became disillusioned with the performance of a Teflon coated waffle iron given to my wife and me as a wedding gift by a well meaning friend. The cantankerous little beast ended up in the trash one Sunday morning after one too many waffles stuck to it. I proceeded to go on a flea market search for a solid old-fashioned waffle iron like I remember my mom using so successfully in my youth. What struck me immediately on my quest was the abundance and diversity of nice inexpensive old waffle irons available nearly everywhere I looked.

I brought one home, cleaned it up and used it for awhile. Then I saw a fancier model, bought it, rebuilt it, and tried it out. After about half a dozen such adventures I became curious to know more about old waffle irons in general and eventually the companies that made them. Unlike my other hobbies of gardening, antique watch and vintage automobile restoration, where information abounds, I was unable to find much information published about any vintage appliances except toasters. I wasn't much interested in toasters (they just dry out bread don't they?) and in any case the toaster books on the market had precious little about the companies that manufactured them. So, I decided that it was about time someone should do some serious research on appliance makers and their waffle irons. This book is the result.

The information presented herein comes from a combination of sources including interviews with individuals directly involved in the appliance industry, family members of company founders, numerous historical societies, libraries, archives, and state government record repositories. In many cases the records are scattered and incomplete and sometimes missing entirely. In the latter situation, I have had to rely on knowledgeable collectors and my own intuition to piece together company information from circumstantial evidence gleaned from old literature, vintage advertising, and actual artifacts.

Certain information gathered from interviews cannot always be considered completely accurate since many events have been recalled from decades ago or are from a generation of family members sometimes twice removed from the events in question. Wherever possible in such situations I've tried to corroborate the information with actual documentation. Even then, the documents have sometimes been found to be in error.

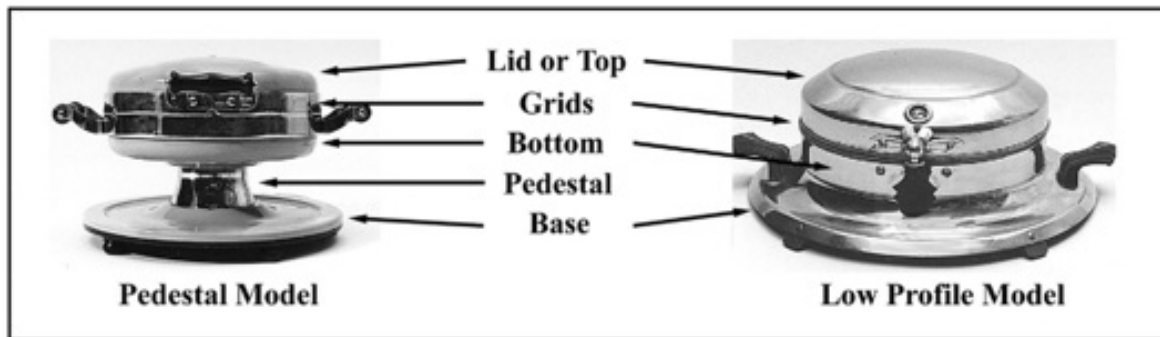
This book is being printed using a new technology called On Demand Publishing. Although compromises in photo quality must be accepted at the present time with this process, one great advantage to this method of publishing is that changes and updates to the book can be made on a timely basis. Unlike conventionally published books which may have price guides and other materials as much as several years old, new information, revisions, and corrections can be made and incorporated into this book almost as soon as it's received. Each new copy is as fresh as the first day of

publication. Because of my ability to revise this book easily, I welcome corrections, clarifications or any additional information the reader may have concerning vintage waffle irons or the companies that made them. The author can be reached through the publisher.

Using This Book

Nomenclature

Waffle iron construction changed over the years as technology and styling trends evolved. Terms such as “**Leg-mounted**” or “**Tray-mounted**” type refers to type of construction or style, and the connotation is obvious. Other less obvious designations are “**Twin**” models which are those that have two baking units attached to a common base. “**Stacked**” models are those with two cooking units placed one above the other. “**Pedestal**” and “**Low Profile**” types are the most common. The anatomy of these are labeled below.



Model Designations

Although a few companies didn't assign model numbers to their products, most devised a system of letters and/or numbers for differentiating products. These designations may appear on the product or in advertising as a “series number,” “catalog number,” “serial number,” or “article number.” In this book for the sake of simplicity, all product designations are referred to as “model numbers.” **Model numbers appearing in bold type in the text indicates that this particular model is pictured.**

Dates of Manufacture

Except for Manning Bowman products, which for years were stamped with a date of manufacture, determining the exact date of manufacture for most appliances is impossible. Dates mentioned are approximate based on observations of style, materials, technology, sales receipts, copyrights on directions, sequence of model numbers, advertising literature, and in a few worst cases, pure conjecture. Dates may be listed as “Early,” “Mid,” or “Late” something. “Early” would be the first third of a decade, “Mid” would be the middle third and “late” would be the last third.

Price Designations

Throughout the book the reader will find connotations such as “advertised price,” “list price,” or “price new.” These are derived from vintage advertisements, original price tags, vintage magazine articles, trade publications, and department store or

manufacturers' catalogs, or similar sources. Each is footnoted as to the specific source. If you would like to convert the old prices into today's dollars, see the piece which follows entitled "*What Did It Really Cost In The Good Ole'Days?*".

“What Did It Really Cost In The “Good Ole’ Days?”

or

“A nickel ain’t worth a dime any more!”... *Yogi Berra*

Throughout this book are the connotations “advertised price,” “list price,” or “price new.” These were derived from vintage advertisements, magazine articles, trade publications, and department store or manufacturers’ catalogs. These “old dollar” prices seem like real bargains until one considers what effect long-term inflation has had on the dollar. To convert old price listings into today’s inflated dollars, the reader must first find the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** for the year in question from the table below. Using the appropriate CPI and the old price in the following formula, the reader can arrive at an approximately equivalent price in modern dollars. In the example below, a waffle iron costing \$5.00 in 1930 turns out to cost nearly \$49.00 in modern dollars.

Conversion Formula

$$163\text{-f CPI} \times \text{Price} = \text{Cost in 1998 Dollars}$$

Example: What would a 1930 waffle iron priced at \$ 5.00 cost in today’s dollars? $163\text{-}16.7 \times 5.00 = \$ 49.00$

Consumer Price Index (CPI) by Year ¹

Year	CPI	Year	CPI	Year	CPI	Year	CPI	Year	CPI
1913	9.9	1923	17.1	1933	13.0	1943	17.3	1953	26.6
1914	10.0	1924	17.1	1934	13.4	1944	17.6	1954	26.9
1915	10.1	1925	17.5	1935	13.7	1945	18.0	1955	26.8
1916	10.9	1926	17.7	1936	13.9	1946	19.5	1956	27.2
1917	12.8	1927	17.4	1937	14.4	1947	22.3	1957	28.1
1918	15.1	1928	17.1	1938	14.1	1948	24.1	1958	28.9
1919	17.3	1929	17.1	1939	13.9	1949	23.8	1959	29.1
1920	20.0	1930	16.7	1940	14.0	1950	24.1	1960	29.6
1921	17.9	1931	15.2	1941	14.7	1951	26.0	1961	29.9
1922	16.8	1932	13.7	1942	16.3	1952	26.5	1962	30.2

The History Of The Electric Appliance Industry

or

What happened after Edison invented his light bulb



A turn of the century Commonwealth Edison Electric Company ad touts electric lighting as clean and safe. "The Pure Air Light." Before electric illumination, homes often reeked of oil or gas fumes and everything usually was covered with a thin film of sooty residue.

Until the 1880s activity slowed down considerably after sunset. The feeble lighting resources available to households made it difficult to do anything at night except perhaps trip over things in the dark. Edison and Westinghouse designed competing electrical systems in the 1880s for the sole purpose of better illuminating the world after dark. When electric illumination was introduced it was as though these inventors had lifted a dark curtain from life and extended the day.

This bright, flameless, smoke-free illumination was such a miraculous improvement over the way things had been for so long that no one thought to use electricity for anything other than lighting. In fact, until about 1900, there were few electrically operated gadgets since, if you wanted to use them during the day, there simply wasn't any electricity. For about twenty years, power companies generated electricity only for a few hours in the evenings to make light.

In 1903 electric household appliances were given an initial boost with the invention of a small electric laundry iron by Earl Richardson (see the Edison Electric story for the details about Richardson and his iron). Richardson, a plant supervisor for a small southern California power company, convinced his bosses that if they would generate electricity around the clock on Tuesdays, the traditional laundry ironing day, he could sell a great number of his irons to housewives. These women he thought would be only too eager to be rid of their heavy, cast iron, coal stove heated models. He also

reasoned that if he could build electric demand and if the utilities could justify generating around-the-clock power, both he and they would make money and everyone would be better off including his housewife customers. As it turned out, he was right on all counts.

By 1910 most electric companies had abandoned Edison's direct current power system for the more practical and efficient Westinghouse/Tesla 60 cycle alternating system we use today. By the teens, utilities in most major urban areas were providing twenty-four hour electrical service at voltages ranging from 95 to 130. However, it would take until the 1930s before a standard voltage was agreed upon and until the 1940s before direct current service disappeared entirely. With the availability of twenty-four hour electric service, urban hotels, restaurants, and clubs began to invest in labor-saving cooking and housekeeping equipment. Increased availability of electricity in homes prompted several commercial equipment manufacturers to modify some of their heavy-duty items for domestic use.

In the teens, electric vacuum cleaners came on the domestic market. Clumsy at first, they were still a major improvement over the old manually operated suction sweepers of the day. These motor powered cleaners all but eliminated the onerous spring ritual of hanging the carpets outdoors and hand beating the dirt from them. The electric cooking range became available for the home kitchen, liberating women from the heat, smoke, dirt, and drudgery of the coal or wood stove. For the first time in history women could cook meals without first lighting a fire. For those who couldn't afford an electric range, appliance makers offered a variety of at-the-table cooking devices such as electric percolators, hot plates, table stoves, toasters, electric grills, waffle irons, electric frying pans, chaffing dishes, and early slow cookers or crock pots called thermos cookers.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, demand for power skyrocketed. Electric motors, which had evolved to become strong, reliable, and relatively compact, were rapidly replacing steam engines and overhead belt and pulley systems as a safe and efficient power source for factory machines. Electric utilities increased their generating capacity and expanded their power grids to meet this new industrial demand. The availability of better paying factory jobs attracted women who had formerly worked as low paid housekeepers and maids. The resultant shortage of domestic help suddenly created a significant market for electrically operated household labor-saving or time-saving devices such as electric ranges, washing machines, sewing machines, food mixers, curling irons, and hairdryers.

With the end of hostilities in 1918 came a dramatic reduction in industrial demand for electricity. Suddenly power companies were saddled with excess generating capacity. Since electricity cannot be stored, the only way these utilities could protect their profits was to encourage electric consumption. To that end, many offered home wiring services, encouraged the major housewares manufacturers to develop and build more electrically operated gadgets, offered to underwrite advertising campaigns, and began to sell appliances from utility-owned show rooms.

"The Trade Mark Known In Every Home"

UNIVERSAL HOME NEEDS

PACK up your housework troubles and turn them over to UNIVERSAL Home Needs. Instead of worrying about work, the UNIVERSAL housewife plans for her pleasures. Her able UNIVERSAL assistants are always ready to lighten heavy burdens—shorten long tasks.

NO woman can afford to be a weary housekeeper when she can be a happy homemaker. UNIVERSAL helps do more than perform daily tasks quickly and well. They bring order out of chaos and create in the home an atmosphere of cheer and refinement.

THE woman who uses UNIVERSAL Home Needs lives long and keeps young. She does the necessary work without unnecessary toil and thereby keeps in radiant health and spirits.

WHAT you get out of your home depends upon what you put into it. The making of a better home will be in your own hands when you use UNIVERSAL Aluminum Cooking Utensils, Bread Makers, Food Choppers, Cutlery and UNIVERSAL Electric Appliances. The time they save is the time you'll have for rest and pleasure. The hard work you have done in the past is the work they will do in the future.

Write for
Booklet No. 105
"The Universalized
Home"

Landers, Frary & Clark
New Britain, Ct.

This 1921 Landers ad claims that owning "Universal assistants" will keep one "in radiant health and spirits". Many of the new electric appliances were created as a result