

A Toast to Toasters

Did you ever wonder who first thought of toasting bread? I hadn't until I decided to write an article on toasters. The idea goes all the way back to the Romans! Who would ever

ting it on a fork and holding it over the fire, and some designed hinged bread holders attached to the fireplace on an arm that swung in over the fire. Early America was filled with ad-

that the first successful electric toaster was produced. It was the D-12 developed by Frank Shailor of General Electric. Porcelain bases were available for the D-12 in white or decorated, and the toasters sold for about \$3 for plain, \$4 for decorated. Two redesigns of the D-12 came later, each one with some improvement over the former.

The next major step in the toaster industry came with an automatic toaster in 1914. Lloyd Copeman was a Flint, Michigan entrepreneur who's business was inventing. Copeman patented his automatic toaster with an automatic bread turner. Later Westinghouse purchased his Copeman Electric Stove Company and manufactured automatic toasters under the Westinghouse name. In addition to the automatic toaster, Copeman was responsible for the development of the thermostat, the electric stove, the flexible rubber ice cube tray, and he filed nearly 700 other patents. In the years following the invention of the



Copeman auto (Courtesy Toaster Museum)

have thought that the idea would be

venturous people. Most of them yearned to find an easier way of doing things. So when electricity began permeating the United States in the late 1800s, American inventors scurried to come up with ways to harness this new power. An electric kitchen was one of the exciting new ideas displayed at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. But there were no toasters on display.

Thomas Edison had worked long and hard to develop a light bulb with a filament that would burn in a vacuum. But even when electricity was available to American homes, the toaster was not feasible, because the filaments had not been discovered that would produce the amount of heat (310 + degrees) to toast bread and not burn up or catch fire.

In 1905 a young engineer named Albert Marsh patented his alloy of nickel and chromium called Nichrome, but it was not until 1909

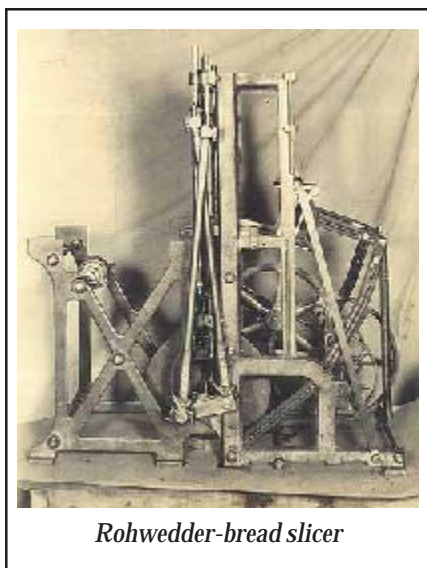
that old? Over the years lots of people had lots of ways to toast their bread ... using the fireplace hearthstone, put-



*D-12
(Courtesy Smithsonian Institute)*

toaster, hundreds of toaster varieties were produced. Companies either had to pay royalties to Copeman, or to develop their own method of turning the toast. Some swung the toast around in baskets, and the famous Toast-O-Lator carried the toast from one side on a conveyor past the coils to the opposite side.

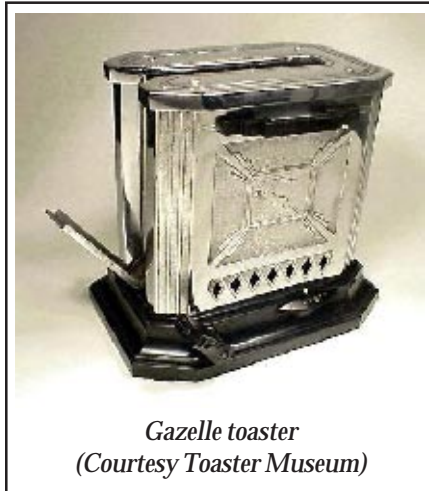
During WW I, Charles Strite, a mechanic in Stillwater, MN, developed



Rohwedder-bread slicer

his "pop-up" toaster. He used springs and a variable timer to accomplish his task. Strite received his patent in 1921 and that same year formed the Waters Genter Company to manufacture them. The first few years of production were sold to restaurants.

In 1926 Strite sold his first automatic



*Gazelle toaster
(Courtesy Toaster Museum)*

pop-up toasters for home use under the "Toastmaster" name. The model 1-A-1 held a single slice. One of the levers was to wind the spring operating the clockwork mechanism, the other to lower the bread and start the current. Until 1928 bakeries sold bread only in loaves. Otto Rohwedder changed history by perfecting the pre-sliced loaf. Originally bakeries scoffed at him feeling that the bread would dry out too quickly, so he perfected the sealed bag process too. In 1930 the Continental Baking Company introduced pre-sliced Wonder Bread. Although slow to gain popularity, by 1933 bakeries were selling more sliced than unsliced breads.

Although there were literally thousands of toasters made in America, some of the classics warrant a mention. The 'Universal' name is a famous for its bread makers, food choppers, and percolators, but the company that produced the Universal brand, Landers, Frary & Clark of New Britain, CT, also made toasters. One of their classics, the Universal model E9410 push-button, called the Sweet-heart Toaster, could even be called

beautiful. The push buttons swung the bread basket out perpendicular to the toaster for insertion/removal of the bread/toast. The 1928 model cost about \$10 then and today goes for about ten times that. In August of 1930 McGraw Electric (McGraw had purchased Waters Genter of Minneapolis in 1929) introduced a series of Toastmaster brand toasters, two slice automatic pop-up models. The series, called 1B2, 1B3, and 1B5, had an architectural design, clockwork timers, and settings from light to dark. They were chrome and heavy, and although popular, each model was manufactured for only a couple years. You can tell what year they were made because each toaster had a number assigned to it.

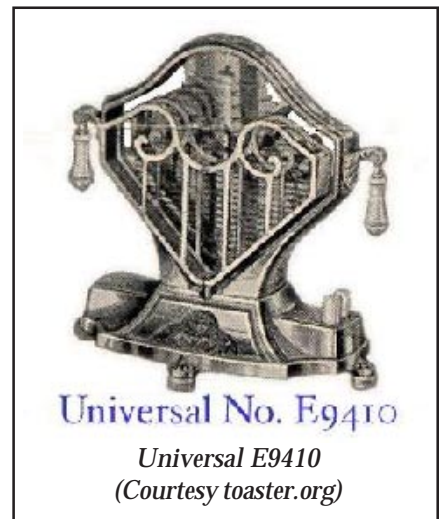
President Harry Truman, usually noted for his good taste, was photographed using his Toastmaster 1B3.

Raymond Patten, an industrial engineer hired by Edison General Electric in 1928 to supervise appearance design, was responsible for the extreme art deco toaster, the Gazelle, released under the Hotpoint name in 1932. It too could be called beautiful and sells for hundreds of dollars today.

Another 1930s model is the fabulous Toast-O-Lator! Manufactured from 1936 through 1952, this most unusual toaster brings the assembly line to the breakfast table. When you turn on the Toast-O-Lator a row of teeth begin rotating in a circular motion. Bread is placed in one side of the toaster and is walked through the unit while being toasted, coming out the opposite side. You can watch the bread toasting through the round viewing window. Most collectors would give their eyeteeth to get their hands on a Toast-O-Lator, usually paying upwards of \$ 200.

Sunbeam produced one of the most popular toasters of all times – the Model T-9. It was introduced at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Designed by renowned industrial designer Alfonso Iannelli, it had a symbolic World's Fair logo inscribed on the housing. There was also a tray that went with it to glamorize it on the din-

ner table. The combination was called a Presentation Set, and was given as wedding and anniversary gifts. Norman Rockwell immortalized the T-9 on the cover of the Oct. 30, 1948 of The Saturday Evening Post. The T-9 was manufactured from the late 1930's through 1951, and has become known as the King of the Toasters. When Kellogg introduced Pop-Tarts, they used an animated Sunbeam T-9 in their advertisements. The T-9 was popular while it was being sold new,



Universal No. E9410

*Universal E9410
(Courtesy toaster.org)*

and remains popular among collectors today. There were thousands of toasters manufactured in the United States. One rarely enters an antique shop or mall, but he finds one or more toasters. Clearly they can't all be mentioned here. So if you find one you like, it works and you can afford it, buy it and start your collection.

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