

WLWO

Secret Agent Revealed Octavio Bermudez

The year of COVID lockdown, 2020, provided an exceptional opportunity to perform a deep dive into the history for Powel Crosley, Jr. shortwave radio station WLWO. Secrets were rumored but details were scarce.

That research produced an article you may have read, "[Lies, Spies and Secrets-The Hidden History of Cincinnati Radio.](#)"

While the explanation given to the public was WLWO rebroadcast content from the public AM mediumwave station, WLW, which it did, the station served several secret operations. It served as the main American spy transmitter beginning in 1940, as the first official Voice of America Broadcast transmitter on February 1, 1942, and later as a beacon transmitter for "Over The Horizon Radar" experiments. The OTHR project "Bart" ran from about Oct 1959 to Jan 1960 and was Co-ordinated by the Rome Air Development Center. In coordination with the UK, the project looked for rocket launches from Cape Canaveral.

The most prominent use of WLWO was in May of 1940 when President Roosevelt decided he needed faster intelligence information than previously available leading up to USA's involvement in WWII.

As a result, WLWO was secretly taken over and funded by Nelson Rockefeller's CIAA (Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs) and by President Roosevelt. In August 1941, money also came from the government's Coordinator of Information (COI), forerunner of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services).


Broadcast content was 100% controlled by the government, and, using the station's six specially designed reentrant rhombic directional antennas, the information was aimed at South America in English, Portuguese, and Spanish and eventually targeted Europe, as well.

With government funding, it was reported that Crosley established a chain of local radio stations in 10 Latin American countries to rebroadcast WLWO programs. The locations were: Argentina; Bello Horizonte, Brazil; Talcahuano, Chile; Quito, Ecuador; Montevideo, Uruguay, Bogota, Colombia; Ciudad Trujillo, Dominican Republic; Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico; Callao, Peru; Puerto Cabello, Venezuela; and Miami, Florida. Source

AMERICAN EXPORTER
PAGE 103

To Visit Crosley Distributors in South America.

Octavio Bermudez, assistant to C. J. Hopkins, manager of the foreign department of The Crosley Radio Corporation, is making a trip to South America, visiting the company's distributors in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.



OCTAVIO BERMUDEZ
Assistant Manager, Foreign Department of The Crosley Radio Corporation, who is making a business tour of South America.

Mr. Bermudez has been with the foreign department of The Crosley Radio Corporation for about two years, prior to which he was in the foreign department of the Music Master Corporation. His South American trip is for the purpose of establishing closer relations with the company's distributors in the various countries he is visiting.

This appeared to be a perfectly normal business expansion by an aggressive person like Powel Crosley, but it was secretly an enhancement to the U.S. communications network for spies.

In fact, Crosley did not setup those 10 radio stations. Instead, they were setup by a committee charged with designing a program to cope with clandestine radio stations in Latin America. The committee included representatives of the Signal Corps, the Army Air Force, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the FCC, the State Department, and the Director of Inter-American Affairs.

The program was administered by an interdepartmental board composed of representatives from State, FCC, CIAA, and the Navy, under the general direction of the War Department's MID.

Powel Crosley and WLWO's involvement was a cover story allowing the government to counter heavy German movement into South America. Octavio Bermudez was the secret agent that helped coordinate WLWO's participation in the program.

In addition to other government sponsored content, the 10 stations rebroadcast content from WLWO.

Government-written, produced, and hand-delivered songs, jingles and advertisements were broadcast on WLWO at a specific UTC (Universal Coordinated Time). A special agent flew from Washington, D.C., to secretly deliver ads and musical broadcasts to a secret agent at the station. The secret agent at the WLWO Mason station ensured specific information was aired at pre-arranged UTC times.

To facilitate Octavio's free movement around Latin America, and because Octavio was a Spanish language performer on WLW, Crosley asked Octavio to seek Spanish talent for use on the WLW radio station. Again, this provided again the perfect story for Octavio's travels.

Prior to employment by the Crosley Radio Corp. Octavio was employed as a bookkeeper (a typical occupation used by secret agents) for the Music Master Corp. in Philadelphia, PA.



At the museum look in the *Innovation 100 Room* and you will find this Music Master Radio.



The company failed as a manufacture of radios and went into receivership in 1926.



In addition to making radios Music Master imported tubes made by Loewe Inc., Berlin, Germany and marked them with the Music Master brand. Radio tubes were a convenient method for receiving secret information. Note the Loewe's tube on the left has a silver coating to hide inside contents.

When Hitler came to power in Germany, Siegmund Loewe was forced to emigrate to the US in 1938, where he developed a friendship with yet another forced emigrant, Albert Einstein. Funkabwehr agents obtained radio detection-finders vans from the Loewe-Opta-Radio Company to be used against espionage in Belgium. The Funkabwehr was a Radio Defense Corps counter intelligence organization created in 1940 by Hans Kopp of the German Nazi Party High Command.

Who were those secret agents and how did they carry out their operations without being noticed by other station personnel? How do you hide a spy inside WLW/WLWO? **Answer: in plain sight!**

Fast forward to 2020 when that same question was asked by the granddaughter for one of the secret agents, Cristina Purdum.

Her quest to learn more about her grandfather is an amazing journey beginning when she was a small child and continues today at age 60, and goes like this.

Suppose you grew up not knowing your grandfather, Octavio Bermudez, because he died when you were three years old. When asking your mother, who grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio about him, she said, "He had the first Latin radio show on WLWO radio and I don't know what he did, stop asking!"

Suppose your mother worked for the Voice of America in Washington DC as a bi-lingual secretary and your father was a working for the NSA, National Security Agency.

Your lifelong curiosity continues, and you keep asking about your grandfather's life in addition to details about your father's life at the NSA. Your research reveals your grandfather's life details are secret

inside government agencies which evolved over the course of his career.

You have fond memories of your father but to your disappointment, you find his life's work also remain classified and hidden from view. Realizing he left nothing behind, his life's career and lifetime of silence remains a mystery. As you grew up, your father and mother never disclosed where or what they did for work.

Cristina has two graduate degrees from the University of New Hampshire and is well qualified as a researcher, but that expertise has yet to reveal complete details about the secret careers of the 80 years her family dedicated to the well-being of the country.

To honor her family's life work Cristina volunteers at the National Cryptologic Foundation, a partner of NSA and the National Cryptologic Museum. After filing numerous FOIA requests, *Freedom of Information Act*, which remain outstanding, she learned little about her father or grandfather.

However, one big surprise awaits her. Looking through the stacks at the National Cryptologic Museum she found the paper, "[Lies, Spies and Secrets-The Hidden History of Cincinnati Radio](#)." Reading that account of Cincinnati radio is when she realized how WLWO played into this story. But then she wonders why was that open-source paper in the stacks at the National Cryptologic Museum?

Cristina eventually discovered, through years of research, her grandfather was multilingual, and her father started his career in the Army and trained as a linguist. It turned out his training in Albanian, the root of all Indo-European languages, would result in being a human language tree of about 50 languages and teach fourteen. To Cristina's great surprise she discovered her father was a hyperpolyglot, a word that didn't exist at the time.

What did Octavio Bermudez do for a life carer?

Cristina's quest was to find someone that doesn't exist. Secret agents' oath a lifetime of silence and have most of their life redacted. She learned firsthand how extensive the erasure had been.

In short, she used memories, family stories and photos paired with time and place, available online declassified documents, research, and more.

Here is a brief timeline for **Octavio Bermudez**:

Born 1892 in Spain

Lived in Argentina in his youth

Arrived NY, NY 1921

Under Cover: Traveling Agent for:

- State Department - Stateside/Foreign Intelligence- Diplomacy
- Commerce - 1928 Toured with President Hoover
- War Department (Army)- counter radio propaganda
- Inter-American Affairs - WWII

1921-1953 - Cincinnati WLWO Assigned Secret Agent

1921- Philadelphia, Music Master Corp., Bookkeeper/Data Collector for the State Department

1924 Municipal WORLDWIDE Broadcasting, WNYC AM, (Radio New York Worldwide)

1926-WLW Cincinnati

1928- Hoover's Latin America Tour with Powel Crosley, Jr.

1932-Latin Radio Show *Los Amigos* (The Friends) on WLW

1937-Latin Radio Show, WLW, Master of Ceremonies

1940-1942- Family lived in NY, NY

WWII Latin America Problem

1942-1946 Special Assignment in Quito, Ecuador (WWII)

1946-1953- Family returned to Cincinnati

1953- 1960 Information Agency, Arlington, Virginia

Octavio's Daughter, Consuelo Eloisa Bermudez, born in Cincinnati, Ohio, married Albert (Al) Dorsey Purdum, Jr. in 1957

Albert (Al) Dorsey Purdum

Born 1936 , Baltimore, Maryland

Attended Private Preparatory School, Calvert Hall College High School

1955, Selected into Army, Arlington Hall Station

Monterey, California, Foreign Language School -

Albanian

Grew to become a 'Human Language Tree', Hyperpolyglot

"Genius", said the former NSA Director

From the scrapbook of Cristina Purdam,
a peek into the process of discovery.

Recognition for Octavio from WLW performers.



RADIO PROGRAMS

428.3—WLW Cincinnati—700.

6:00—Orchestra (45 minutes).
 7:00—Orchestra: Scrap Book.
 7:30—Singers: Dog Club: Perkinsville.
 8:30—Troupers.
 10:00—The Hall: Fillmore's Band.
 11:00—Adventures: Los Amigos.
 12:00—Dance: Mansfield and Lee.



"To Octavio Bermudez with whom I had the pleasure of working with on Los Amigos. A fine fellow in Spanish or English. Sincerely, Don Gordray"



"To my good friend Octavio Bermudez. Flora Blackshaw"



"To my good friend, Octavio Bermudez, in memory of many pleasant program associations. Peter Grant"



Octavio Bermudez, my grandfather, radio producer, & host of Los Amigos, which aired on WLW 700, the Nation's Station, in the 30s and 40s.

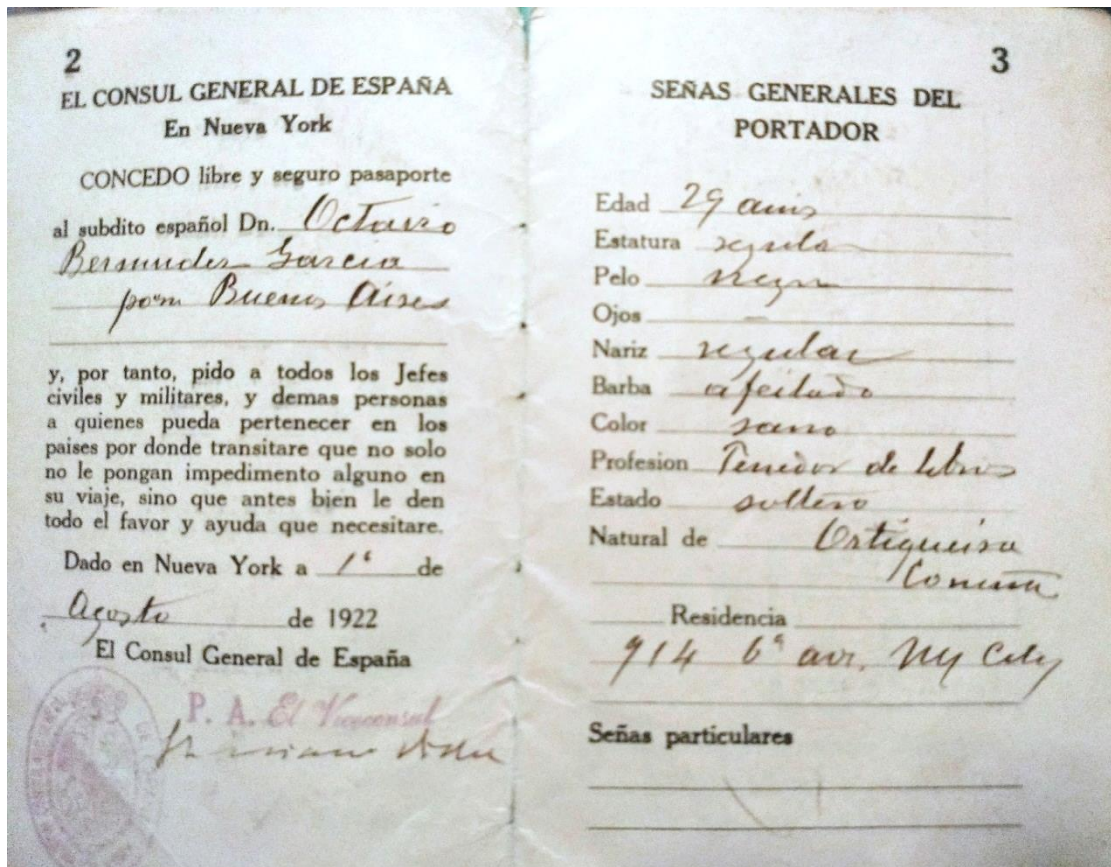
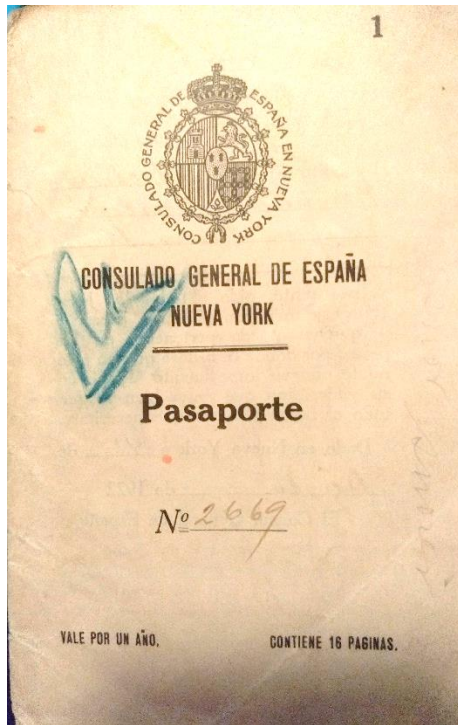


Octavio announcing the Los Amigos Latin program.

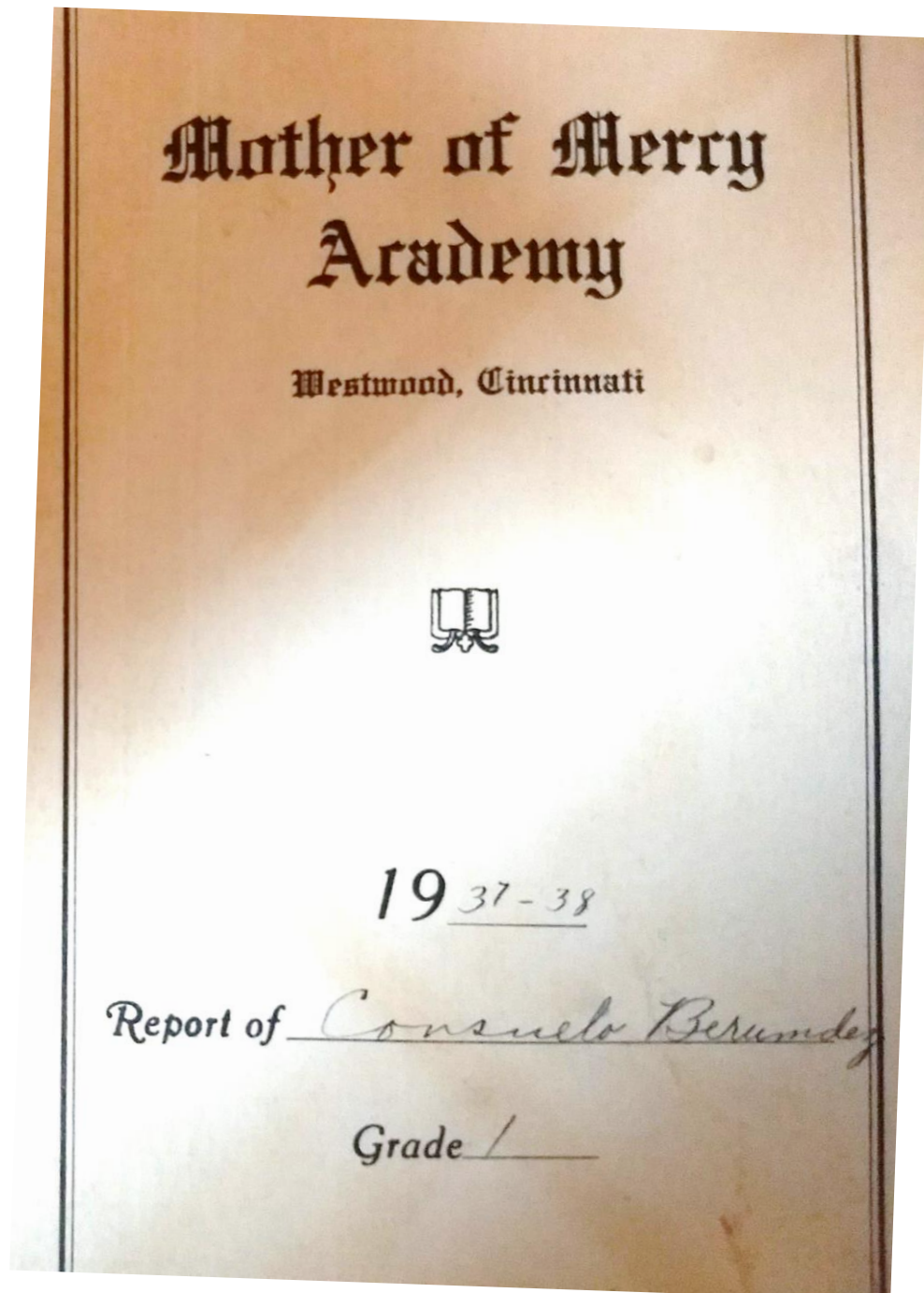
The Crosley Radio Corp. buildings during
the great flood in Cincinnati – 1937



Octavio's Passport






Cristina's mother, Consuelo Eloisa Bermudez, began her education at the Mother of Mercy Academy in Westwood, Cincinnati, which ended as a school on October 15, 1988.





OCTAVIO BERMUDEZ announces in Spanish the Los Amigos program broadcast by WLW each week for its Latin-American listeners. Bermudez was an Argentine gaucho (cowboy) before he came to the United States. He also sings songs of the Pampas.



newspapers.com/clip/5
2


Biography for Octavio Bermudez (Aged 73)

Deaths And Funerals^N

Octavio Bermudez, 73; Served Crosley Motors

Enquirer Bureau Special

WASHINGTON — Octavio Bermudez, 73, former export division head of the old Crosley Motors Co., died here Monday. Since 1956, Mr. Bermudez has been a Spanish-language writer for the U. S. Information Agency.

Born in Spain and a resident of Argentina, in his youth, Mr. Bermudez came to Cincinnati in 1926 and was manager of the export division of Crosley Radio Corp. when he left to head a radio service in 1942 in Quito, Ecuador. In 1946, he returned to Cincinnati to join Crosley Motors.

He left Cincinnati in 1953 to become a Spanish-language news writer for Worldwide Broadcasting Co., New York.

A daughter, Mrs. Albert Purdum, Lanham, Md., survives. Service and burial will be in Washington.

Clifton-Mitchell

Grade Removal