

# OUR CENTURY

## 1914

### AT A GLANCE

#### Immigrants worry about war in their homelands

The tinder had been piling up in Europe for years. On June 28, the spark was struck in Sarajevo, Bosnia. A 19-year-old Serbian, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A month later, the empire declared war on Serbia, and alliances quickly brought in nation after nation.

Two-thirds of Clevelanders were immigrants or children of immigrants, and many of the recent arrivals had left their homeland because they saw the war coming. They shuddered for their relatives back home.

Loyalties were divided: Germans and Hungarians supported the Central Powers; so did the Irish, who had fled the British occupation of their island.

Clevelanders felt few effects at first, although nickelodeon prices went up to a dime because the war halted imports of chemicals used to make film.

Patriotism stirred: The school system decreed that every school must fly the flag daily.

Cleveland baseball fans had two professional baseball teams to watch in 1914, but neither was worth watching. Fearful that the “outlaw” Federal League would field a team in the city, Naps owner Charley Somers decided to offer daily baseball. He moved his American Association team from Toledo, where it wasn’t drawing, to League Park.

Players shuttled back and forth between the two teams. The AA team finished fifth. The Naps finished last at 51-102. The 102 losses were a Cleveland record which, though matched in 1971, stood until the 1991 Indians lost 105 in a 162-game season. The 1914 percentage of .333 remains an all-time low.

In June, the Naps were defeated by a Red Sox rookie left-handed pitcher making his first start. Fans agreed that George Herman “Babe” Ruth had a bright future as a pitcher. At the end of the season, the Naps released Napoleon Lajoie, after whom the team was named. He played two more seasons with the Athletics before retiring with a lifetime batting average of .338. He was named to the Hall of Fame in 1937.

Adapting to changing times, City Council required that all vehicles — even baby buggies — have tail lights. Another ordinance set a penalty up to 30 days in the workhouse for jaywalking, although police said it would not be enforced until citizens got used to crosswalks. The speed limit was 15 mph in residential areas, 8 mph in congested areas.

The lily fountain on the northwest quadrant of Public Square was removed to make room for a statue of Tom L. Johnson, and the quadrant was dedicated forever to free speech. Soapbox orators took full advantage.

Culture was bursting out all over. Leopold Stokowski brought the Philadelphia Orchestra to Grays Armory. Singer Bernard Landino appeared at the Miles Theater. He had been known as Barney Landesman when he sold newspapers in Cleveland before going off to study in Italy. Madame Namara-Toye, fresh from a European tour, gave a recital. She had been Marguerite Banks when she was growing up in Cleveland. There were even rival productions of “Sappho” simultaneously at the Cleveland Theater and Grand Theater.

Headliners at the Hippodrome included Scottish singer-comedian Harry Lauder and dancers Vernon and Irene Castle. The new Metropolitan Theater opened with “The Man Who Owns Broadway.” The production of “Ben Hur” at the Opera House featured a spectacular special effect: an on-stage chariot race, using a treadmill.

In June, the city offered a bounty of 10 cents per 100 for flies, but they had to be fresh-caught. The “swat-the-fly” campaign failed to exterminate the enemy.

New this year: The Federal Reserve Bank, the Municipal Light Plant on the lakefront, the villages of Brook Park and Independence, the Cleveland Boxing Commission, the Cuyahoga County Board of Education, the Building Owners and Managers Association.

# Flames engulf the Flats



PLAIN DEALER FILE

At left, shown about 1907 before the disastrous Flats fire, stacked lumber awaits shipment on the Cuyahoga River and in freight cars, under the Central Viaduct. At right, after the fire of 1914, the Viaduct is broken up by a gaping hole, and debris litters the ground below. After the fire, the City Council decreed that there could be no lumberyards under bridges.

## Central Viaduct collapses, downtown threatened

By Fred McGunagle

The flames, visible for miles, brought as many as 250,000 Clevelanders to line the hills along the Cuyahoga River. As they watched in fascination, the flames in the Flats crept closer and closer to downtown, engulfing lumberyards and bridges in their path.

To the consternation of firefighters, fire was falling from the sky on offices and homes as far away as E. 40th St.

“Fires were breaking out continuously in the Haymarket district from flying brands,” The Plain Dealer re-

ported on May 26, 1914. “Companies were switched from one end of the city to another and when they arrived at their new quarters received orders to go to another fire.”

Frank Hogen, the school superintendent, called in a volunteer squad of 50 school custodians to Brownell and Eagle schools, where they formed bucket brigades and saved a score of houses near E. 14th St. and Central Ave. City refuse crews battled for three hours to save 150 horses in the city stables.

Seven firefighters were overcome by smoke, but recovered. Six others were trapped on the Central Viaduct, and escaped by dashing through the

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The Plain Dealer, May 26, 1914.

flames to the east end. Soon after, the viaduct collapsed and a 250-foot section of twisted metal crashed down on the Nickel Plate Railroad bridge below.

While the city’s two fireboats

played their hoses on the flames, tugs scurried to push ships into the lake before the flames caught them. Around midnight, the wind providentially changed and began blowing the flames back toward the burned-out areas. Still, it was the next afternoon before exhausted firefighters packed up their hoses and cleanup crews moved into the debris-filled Flats.

There were, almost miraculously, no deaths. The Ringling Brothers Circus had pitched its Big Top near the Fisher-Wilson lumberyard, where the fire broke out, but panic was prevented by the quick action of roustabouts, who strong-armed men shouting “fire” outside the tent and forcibly hustled them away, allowing the crowd to file out safely.

Twenty-five of the 45 circus cars were destroyed, but manager Al Ringling quickly called in replacements to keep the show on the road.

The Flats fire did \$1.5 million in damage, destroying 15 to 20 million board feet of lumber. It left a huge gap in the viaduct, one of the two major bridges across the river from downtown, and forced rerouting of trains. Belatedly, city officials questioned the wisdom of allowing lumberyards beneath bridges.

Bankers quickly agreed to lend the city \$125,000 for repairs to the viaduct, but it was a year before it reopened. Meanwhile, autos, wagons and streetcars were limited to low-level bridges or the Superior Viaduct, where they periodically were halted when the span swung open for ships.

*McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.*



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Two lumberyards were destroyed and a third sustained heavy losses during the Flats fire on May 25, 1914. Here, the Central Viaduct is lit up with flames.

### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**Jan. 5:** Henry Ford stuns the business world by announcing he will pay his auto workers \$5 a day and give them profit-sharing. The company also announces its plants will begin operating around the clock.

**June 28:** Archduke Ferdinand is assassinated in Sarajevo.

**Aug. 1:** The first shots of World War I are fired as Germany declares war on Russia.

**Aug. 4:** Germany invades Belgium. England declares war on Germany.

**Aug. 23:** The emperor of Japan declares war on Germany.

**Sept. 3:** Giacomo della Chiesa is

elected Pope Benoit XV.

**Sept. 15:** Germany scores a huge victory over Russian troops in the battle of the Masurian Lakes.

**Dec. 24:** Allied forces end a 10-day assault on German troops in France and Belgium. After five months of war, casualties on both sides are ap-

proaching 1 million.

**Born:** Jonas Salk, Alec Guinness, Babe Didrickson-Zaharias, Joe Louis, Yuri Andropov.

**Died:** Pope Pius X (Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto), nature writer John Muir, home appliances inventor George Westinghouse.

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