

OUR CENTURY

1916

AT A GLANCE

Naturalization efforts step up with war

The war was bringing death to tens of thousands of young men in the muddy, bloody trenches of Europe. But in Cleveland, it was bringing prosperity. Local industries were supplying weapons, uniforms, chemicals, autos and trucks for U.S. "preparedness" and for the Allies with whom America's interests were becoming more and more connected.

The war also brought suspicion of the loyalties of about 60,000 unnaturalized immigrants. The schools stepped up their "Americanization" program and evening citizenship classes.

The Cleveland Grays, the volunteer militia that got its name from the color of its uniforms when it organized in 1837, was drilling regularly in Grays Armory. It was called into action with the National Guard when trouble flared on the Mexican border, and helped Gen. John J. Pershing chase Pancho Villa's insurrectionists deep into Mexico.

In March, President Woodrow Wilson named Newton D. Baker, who had left office as mayor in January, secretary of war. Baker was trying a case in court when the announcement came, and the judge stopped the trial to congratulate him.

Two of the city's finest examples of architecture opened: the Greek Revival City Hall on the Mall, designed by J. Milton Dyer, and the Georgian marble art museum in Wade Park, designed by Hubbell & Benes.

Downtown was booming. The new Union National Bank Building, 308 Euclid Ave., was a towering 17 stories.

This was a year of changes for the Indians. They lost an owner and gained a Hall of Famer.



Speaker

Charley Somers had run into trouble in his coal mining and real estate firms, and the Indians' dreadful record in the previous two years didn't help. His bankers forced him to give up the team. The American League had to find a new owner.

League President Ban Johnson asked James Dunn, a partner in a railroad construction firm, to be president and said the league would lend him \$100,000. Charles

Comiskey, owner of the Chicago White Sox, lent another \$100,000 and Dunn rounded up enough partners to meet the \$500,000 purchase price.

Meanwhile, Tristram "Tris" Speaker, the star center fielder of the Boston Red Sox, had a different financial problem. He wanted \$15,000 to play in 1916 and the Red Sox stood firm at \$9,000. Speaker threatened to sit out the season. The Indians got him for a record \$55,000 and two players.

Speaker hit a league-leading .386, breaking Ty Cobb's string of nine straight batting championships. The Indians led the league in the spring but faded to a 77-77 record, still 20 games better than in 1915.

On July 28, a large Polish-American delegation came to what was then called Dunn Field to honor pitcher Stan Coveleski. A band from St. Stanislaus Church was so loud that Umpire "Silk" O'Laughlin's calls could not be heard and he ordered the band to stop.

A Cleveland Foundation report on the school system contradicted the rosy public statements of its leaders. The foundation found that two-thirds of students left school before the legally allowed age of 16 for girls and 15 for boys.

The Shaker Heights allotment was opened for sale on July 31 by agents for the Van Swearingen Co. Other developing subdivisions: Tuxedo Heights in Parma, Waterbury and Richland Heights in Lakewood, Coventry-Mayfield and Meadowbrook in Cleveland Heights.

Also new this year: the Women's City Club, the Stillman Theater (closed in 1963), Mt. Sinai Medical Center, the Olmsted Hotel (razed in 1996), the Shakespeare Garden (first of the Cultural Gardens), the first East Ohio Building (now the Investment Insurance Building), the Austin Co., Cathedral Latin School (closed in 1979, revived in a 1988 merger with Notre Dame Academy), Western Reserve Academy, the Austin Co., the F-P Screw Co. (later the Cleveland Cap Screw Co., now TRW Inc.).

All for clean water

'Sandhogs' die in explosion; rescue efforts a mess

By Fred McGunagle

It was a tale of blunders and heroism. Ten men died in an explosion 40 feet below Lake Erie and 11 others were asphyxiated trying to save them.

Three of the heroes won Carnegie Medals. A fourth was denied credit for his heroism — and for his many other accomplishments — for decades. That's because Garrett Morgan was black.

By 1916, clean water had left only the memory of the epidemics that once carried off young and old alike. Others had paid the price. Thirty-seven "sandhogs" tunneling beneath the floor of the lake had died in explosions and fires before 1916.

The newest tunnel had been a model of safety for two years, however. Workers had sunk an underwater crib 2,600 feet offshore to feed the Division Ave. Water Plant under construction on the lakefront. (It is west of the "Five Mile Crib," the only one of Cleveland's four water intakes that is visible.) Above it, a temporary structure on the surface housed three shifts of miners who daily descended to extend a 10-foot-diameter tunnel back toward shore.

On Saturday, July 22, the tunnel floor suddenly ruptured and natural gas poured in, but the crew was able to flee back to the elevator shaft. The water commissioner ordered work stopped until a broken air compressor was fixed and the tunnel tested



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Officials bringing in the dead from the crib tunnel explosion in 1916.

safe. But through a series of miscommunications, Harry Vokes led a crew back into the tunnel on Sunday night.

The explosion occurred at 9:22 p.m. "It was so powerful that it smashed and hurled the heavy construction tunnel sections around, killing and burying the Vokes crew in a fiery holocaust of flame and dirt," John Stark Bellamy II later wrote.

Six would-be rescuers who immediately went in were overcome by gas. Gus Van Duzer, the tunnel chief, heard about the disaster at his home and hurried out to lead another rescue effort. At a hearing afterward, Van Duzer described what happened. "We came across three bodies, then my men started dropping one at a time and then a whole bunch went down like a lot of sheep." Then he himself lost consciousness.

Veteran sandhog "Scotty" Jamieson later told of finding the victims. "They died crawling in lime to the foot of the shaft," he said. Bellamy used "They Died Crawling" as the title of his 1995 book about Cleveland disasters and murders.

The men at the surface sounded their distress whistle and shot off flares, but nobody ashore noticed for some time. Finally, a Coast Guard

boat arrived, but without equipment for entering the tunnel. Bellamy tells of the anguished shouts from the platform: "Helmets! Pulmotors! Oh God! My God! Is there anyone on this boat who knows anything?"

Thomas Clancy, Van Duzer's stepson, heard about the accident and caught a boat to the crib with his friend Thomas Keating. They went into the tunnel protected only by wet towels around their heads and returned dragging three bodies.

It was nearly 5 a.m. when a fireboat arrived with smoke helmets and oxygen tanks. Fireman Richard Kistenmaker and Keating donned helmets and went back in, as did Clancy, who was unprotected. Kistenmaker and Keating came back with two bodies and the unconscious Clancy.

Somebody recalled that a black man named Garrett Morgan had invented a gas mask and a call was placed to him. He arrived at dawn with his brother Frank, but only a revived Clancy and Thomas Castelbery were willing to go in with them. They found a man still breathing — Van Duzer, Clancy's stepfather. The Morgans made three more trips into the tunnel, coming out with bodies and five men who were still alive, though four of them failed to survive.

Morgan got virtually no credit, though the Cleveland News did note that "G.A. and F.F. Morgan, negroes, led the third rescue party." He and his brother were ignored when the awards for heroism were passed out.

Morgan knew why. When he demonstrated his gas mask to fire departments, he was forced to let a white man pretend to be his boss, and when the mask won an award from the International Association of Fire Chiefs, a white man accepted it for him. Still, the rescue did call attention to the mask, and it was used by U.S. soldiers in World War II.

It was one of many Morgan inventions, as Peter Jedick notes in a chapter on "Cleveland's Black Edison" in "Cleveland: Where the East Coast Meets the Midwest." In 1923, Morgan came up with the first traffic light with an intermediate caution signal.



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The interior of the first section of the new crib water tunnel, taken in 1914 before the deadly explosion.

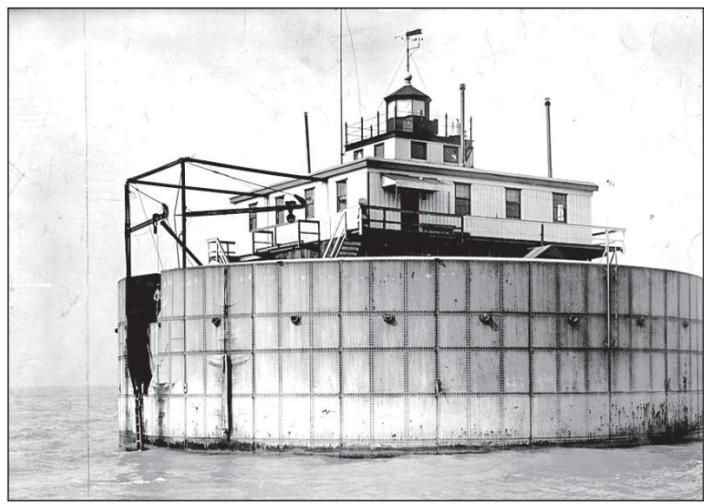
Refused permission to test it in Cleveland, he took it to Willoughby and impressed General Electric Corp. enough to pay him \$40,000 for the invention. In 1925, Morgan's signals were installed along Euclid Ave.

Morgan insisted on recognition for his 1916 heroism, and in 1929, City Council voted 18-7 to give him a \$2,000 award. Others sued to block it, including Clancy; Mayo Fesler, director of the Citizens League, testified that his investigation failed to back Morgan's claim. But in 1930, the Court of Appeals ruled that Morgan was entitled to the hero's reward.

Even then, he got little public attention, which embittered him until his death in 1963. In 1991, he got some belated credit when the Division plant was renamed the Garrett A. Morgan Water Treatment Plant.

The 10,000 blacks in Cleveland on the eve of World War I undoubtedly made other contributions to the city. We don't know about them. They weren't recorded.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



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The water intake crib in 1916.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 16: Eighteen U.S. citizens are taken off a train headed for a mining town in Mexico, lined up and shot dead by troops loyal to Pancho Villa.

Feb. 26: Seven German Army corps launch a major offensive against the French fortresses at Verdun. After two weeks of intense fighting, French troops hold their position.

March 31: Troops led by Gen. John

J. Pershing rout Villa's army in Mexico.

May 27: President Woodrow Wilson calls for the formation of a league of nations dedicated to peacekeeping after the end of the war in Europe.

July 1: British troops suffer 60,000 casualties during a single day of fighting near the Somme River in France.

Aug. 27: The Kaiser appoints Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg chief of the German army.

Sept. 8: Wilson announces support for voting rights for women.

Nov. 7: Jeannette Rankin, a Montana Republican, becomes the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress.

Dec. 30: The hated Siberian monk Gregory Rasputin is assassinated by two members of the Russian nobility

because of Rasputin's support of Germany's war effort.

Born: Walter Cronkite, Francois Mitterrand, P.W. Botha, Harold Wilson, Eugene McCarthy, Trevor Howard.

Died: Percival Lowell, the American astronomer who predicted the existence of Pluto; American novelist Henry James, railroad magnate James Jerome Hill.



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