

OUR CENTURY

1919

AT A GLANCE

Prohibition starts run on saloons

Saturday, May 24, was the busiest day in the history of Ohio saloons and liquor stores. Drinkers lined up three and four deep at bars. Others trudged home with cases of liquor. National Prohibition would not take effect until 1920, but the amendment to the Ohio Constitution passed in November 1918 took effect May 27, 1919. Only a handful of saloons bought a special license allowing them to open on the final Monday, the 26th.

The law closed 6,000 saloons statewide, of which 1,200 were in Cleveland, as were 13 breweries. About half of the saloons planned to reopen serving food and soft drinks and about half of the breweries continued to make “near beer.” Still, nearly 3,000 Clevelanders were thrown out of work.

But another industry sprang into being — bootlegging. Contrary to popular mythology, it never was illegal to drink in Ohio. State law, like the federal Volstead Act, banned only sale and manufacture of spirituous liquor (federal law added transportation).

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One thing led to another: Orris P. and Mantis J. Van Sweringen, reclusive bachelor brothers, needed a streetcar line to serve their popular Shaker Heights real estate development. In seeking a right of way through Kingsbury Run, they bought the Nickel Plate Railroad and soon added other railroad properties.



PD FILE

Now they needed a downtown railroad-Rapid Transit terminal. In January 1919, Cleveland voters approved a Union Terminal under an office-retail-hotel complex, including a 14-story tower topped by a 50-foot cupola. When the Terminal Tower opened in 1930, it was 38 stories taller.

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On Sept. 15, pioneering air-mail pilot Eddie Gardner landed his biplane to refuel at Cleveland’s “postage stamp” airport in Woodland Hills Park.

When he tried to take off, he suddenly realized he would not clear the houses on Parkhill Ave. The plane hit the roof of one house; its engine came loose and went through the roof of another house, where it exploded, setting fire to both houses and blowing out windows on the street.

Gardner was only slightly bruised. He gathered up what was left of his 350- pound mailbag, regaled reporters in interviews and walked back to the airport to get another plane. He wasn’t as lucky the following year. While performing stunts before a crowd of 10,000 in Holdredge, Neb., he failed to pull out of a tailspin and crashed for the last time. He was 32 years old.

But his 1919 crash had after-effects in Cleveland. That night, it started a discussion on City Council, which led to the opening in 1925 of what is now Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.

Most plane flights didn’t end in crashes, however. The first nonstop flight from Cleveland to Washington ended safely after two hours, 58 minutes, for an average speed of 117.5 mph. The plane was made by Cleveland’s Glenn L. Martin Co., which was to move to Baltimore in 1929.

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Babe Ruth cost a manager his job in 1919. It was July 18, and the Indians had taken a 7-3 lead over the Boston Red Sox in the eighth inning at League Park. But the Red Sox loaded the bases with pitcher-outfielder Ruth next at bat. Manager Lee Fohl looked out to his captain, center fielder Tris Speaker, who gestured with his right arm. To Speaker’s obvious distress, Fohl waved to the bullpen for the left-handed Fritz Coumbe.

Coumbe gave Ruth a big, slow curve. Ruth swung mightily — and missed. Catcher Steve O’Neill went to the mound and told Coumbe to keep the ball low. Again, Coumbe threw a big, slow curve, right over the plate.

The dispirited Indians lost in the 10th inning. Afterward, owner Jim Dunn called Fohl to his office and fired him. Speaker reluctantly agreed to become manager. He led the team to a second-place finish, 3½ games behind the White Sox — or, as they were to be called after the World Series with the Cincinnati Reds, the Black Sox.

City fights Socialists

Cleveland not immune to Red Scare of 1919

By Fred McGunagle

Europe was in chaos and the turmoil was spreading to America.

In Russia, Communists had seized control of St. Petersburg as the war was ending, but elsewhere they still battled remnants of the “white” army. The countryside was lawless, plundered by marauders such as “God’s Army.”

In Versailles, the victorious Allies were redrawing the map of Europe — and demanding harsh German reparations that would lead to another war in 20 years. In Hungary, Bela Kun’s Communist government was besieged by “Cech, Roumanian and Serbo-French” troops. In Munich, “Bolshevik” murdered hostages and quickly were executed themselves. In Latvia, the “Lettish” provisional government was overthrown by Balto-German troops.

In New York, postal authorities intercepted 16 bombs mailed to government officials and bankers. And in Cleveland, Charles Ruthenberg announced a mammoth Socialist-Communist parade for May 1, 1919 — May Day.

In part, the parade would protest the 10-year sentence given in Cleveland’s Federal District Court to Eugene Debs, the Socialist presidential candidate, for an anti-draft speech in Canton the previous year. Four groups of marchers would converge on Public Square, where they would be addressed by Ruthenberg, a perennial Socialist candidate for mayor and other offices who had thrown in with the Bolshevik wing of the party. He only recently was out of jail for anti-war activities.

Police estimated there were 5,000 people in the four parade groups, all led by marchers carrying American

and red flags. The main column, led by Ruthenberg, left Socialist headquarters at 1222 Prospect Ave., and marched along Prospect and E. 9th St. It had just turned east on Euclid Ave. — the band was playing “The Stars and Stripes Forever” — when a group of soldiers and ex-soldiers charged the group and tried to grab the red flags.

Police waded in, using nightsticks on the marchers and their attackers. The vanguard of the parade continued to Public Square, where a Liberty Bond rally was scheduled for later in the afternoon, and was attacked by the crowd when marchers tried to put red flags on the dais. Police broke up the fighting with horses and Army tanks that had been brought in for the Liberty Bond rally.

Fights also were breaking out along all the parade route and in other parts of the city. A crowd stormed Socialist headquarters and wrecked it; police made no arrests. At E. 9th St. and Woodland Ave., a policeman shot and killed 17-year-old Samuel Pearlman.

More violence broke out in the evening. Onlookers and police broke up a May Day parade at W. 25th St. and Lorain Ave., injuring six. A crowd stormed a Socialist meeting at 2115 Lorain Ave. and, The Plain Dealer reported, “routed the reds and then flew an American flag from one of the windows while the crowd below cheered.” At E. 89th St. and Buckeye Rd., a police lieutenant suffered a fractured skull; police fired into a mob and killed Joseph Ivanyi, 38.

When the day ended, two were dead, 200 were injured and 120 were in jail.

In Police Court the next day, it turned out that nearly all of the arrestees were foreign-born, and many could not speak English. Most were



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Eugene Debs, second from left, with his wife, at left, Mrs. Theodore Debs, Theodore Debs and Catherine Debs. This photo was taken about 1921.



An illustration, probably from 1917, of Charles Ruthenberg in the Cleveland Leader.

Police estimated there were 5,000 people in the four parade groups, all led by marchers carrying American and red flags.

sentenced to 30 days in the workhouse and told they would be deported upon their release if they were not citizens.

Police Chief Frank Smith immediately announced a ban on open-air meetings by Socialists, and City Council passed an ordinance banning the display of red flags, even though the U.S. Justice Department warned that cities no longer had wartime powers to suppress dissent.

Chief Smith announced that the city was looking into purchasing some tanks of its own. “Tanks cut so wide a swath and strike such terror that they scatter a crowd quicker than a policeman on horseback swinging a club,” he said.

A Plain Dealer editorial said the ban on open-air meetings “is applauded by every law-respecting citizen,” but added that the “revolutionists” had done one service: “They exposed the deadly fangs of bolshevism and put the city on its guard.”

Some readers agreed. One wrote that “if the red flag stands for anarchy and revolution, the police should have prohibited its display in public Thursday, law or no law.”

Gradually, calm returned. But on June 3, a bomb exploded at the home of Mayor Harry L. Davis, who had been receiving threatening letters.

Police used autos borrowed from the Loyal Americans League to follow up clues. They were told to arrest anybody found around “haunts of radicals” who could not give an account of his business in Cleveland.

“If there is no way of securing a conviction against these radicals,” the mayor said, “there are other ways of making them realize that Cleveland is not a healthy place for such people.”

The same night Davis’ house was bombed, a bomb damaged the home of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer in Washington. The attorney general immediately ordered that “haunts of the anarchists, radical revolutionists and their sympathizers are to be combed from end to end of the country.” It was the beginning of what would go down in history as the Red Scare.

When Warren G. Harding became president in 1921, he released Debs from prison. Debs denounced the Communists who had split his Socialist Party. Ruthenberg became executive secretary of the American Communist Party. He, journalist John Reed and activist Bill Haywood are the only Americans interred in the walls of the Kremlin.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

March 4: Vladimir Lenin forms the Communist Party in Russia, with the goal of launching a revolution against the socialist government.

March 23: With Italy facing monumental postwar problems, fascist Benito Mussolini launches a new political movement to fight liberal and Communist influence in the country.

March 29: American physics pro-

fessor Robert Goddard predicts that one day it will be possible for man to fly to the moon. Newspapers ridicule Goddard, labeling him the “moon man.”

July 4: Jack Dempsey becomes heavyweight boxing champion of the world, defeating Jess Willard during a match in the Toledo Arena.

Oct. 9: Cincinnati wins the World

Series, defeating the Chicago White Sox in the eighth game of what was a best-of-nine series. The next year, Chicago’s team becomes forever known as the Black Sox when it is revealed that as many as eight players conspired with gamblers to lose the series.

Nov. 28: Lady Astor becomes the first woman member of Parliament.

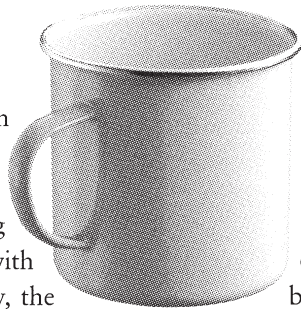
Dec. 24: John D. Rockefeller gives \$100 million to charitable causes, the largest philanthropic gift in world history.

Born: Eva Peron, J.D. Salinger, Jackie Robinson, Pete Seeger.

Died: Theodore Roosevelt, Andrew Carnegie, Boer War Gen. Louis Botha.

Starting with a Strong Finish.

Familiar with that tough porcelain enamel finish found on mugs, cookware, ovens and other goods? That’s how The Ferro Enameling Company started here in 1919 with an investment of just \$1,000. Today, the company is Ferro Corporation. Still in Cleveland.



And still growing. We’re now a global producer of performance materials, including specialty coatings, colors, ceramics, chemicals and plastics. With 6,800 employees and 1997 sales of \$1.38 billion, we’re off to a pretty good start. Call 216/641-8580 for an annual report.

