

# OUR CENTURY

## 1935

### AT A GLANCE

## The rise and fall of the Van Sweringens

O.P. and M.J. Van Sweringen quit school after the eighth grade at Fairmount School on E. 107th St. They went into real estate while still in their teens, and soon saw the potential in the rural village of Shaker Heights.

Between 1919 and 1929, they sold an average of 3,000 expensive homes a year. Their search for a right of way for a rapid-transit line led them to buy the Nickel Plate Railroad, and by the late 1920s, they were the biggest railroad tycoons in America. Their search for a downtown terminal led to the grandest railroad station to date, the Union Terminal — topped by the 52-story Terminal Tower — and six other major buildings.

The "bashful bachelor brothers" shunned the limelight. They didn't even attend the grand opening of the terminal; O.P. said they took a walk in the woods instead. Few Clevelanders recognized them on the street, although by 1930, they controlled 150 corporations, including 23 railroads.

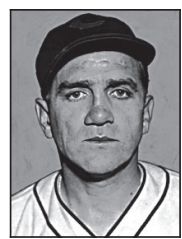
Their fall was even faster than their rise. Their holding companies were financed by loans supported by stock, which rose through the 1920s. When the market crashed in 1929, their empire fell apart. The Missouri Pacific and the Chicago & Eastern Illinois were forced into bankruptcy in 1933. The Vans were assailed in Congress as among the robber barons responsible for the Depression.

In 1935, they defaulted on \$50 million in loans to J.P. Morgan & Co. At the bankruptcy auction, investors who still believed in them put up \$2.8 billion to buy the assets of their company and turned control back to the Vans. It looked as if they might rebuild their empire, but in December, M.J. died of influenza at the age of 54. Ten months later, O.P. died in his sleep in his private railroad car. He was 57.

They were buried together at Lake View Cemetery under a common headstone:

VAN SWERINGEN  
ORRIS PAXTON MANTIS JAMES  
1879-1936 1881-1935 BROTHERS

Prospects looked promising for the 1935 Indians, as usual. Then in May, with the team struggling, as usual, manager



O'Neill

Walter Johnson announced that he had discovered an "anti-Johnson bloc" among the players. He released catcher Glenn Myatt and suspended third-baseman Willie Kamm. Two weeks later, 21 of the Indians took out an ad in all three newspapers. It declared, "We are not a team split wide

open by dissension, arrayed against our manager," but stopped short of endorsing Johnson. The fans already were down on Johnson. Club President Alva Bradley asked for his resignation and named coach Steve O'Neill manager, telling him, "I really can't understand why anyone would want to manage a ball club."

The team came together under O'Neill, who had been the catcher on the 1920 world champion Indians, and finished third. Mel Harder won 22 games and Joe Vosmik hit .348, missing the batting title by a fraction of a percentage point. Willis Hudlin set a record by pitching 15 scoreless innings against the Athletics; the Tribe won the game 1-0 on a home run by Earl Averill.

The city did have a championship team, however. The Cleveland Bloomer Girls, sponsored by the radio team of Gene and Glenn (Gene Carroll and Glenn Rowell) won the national women's softball title.

The National Amateur Golf Championship was held at the Country Club. Lawson Little defeated Walter Emery with an eagle on the 16th hole in match play (head-to-head competition counting holes won, not total strokes).

East Tech's Jesse Owens, now a freshman at Ohio State, set three world records at the Big Ten track meet in May — in the 220-yard dash, 220-yard low hurdles and running broad jump. He also tied the world 100-yard dash record of 9.4 seconds.

At the National Air Races over Labor Day weekend, Leland Hayward won the Los Angeles-to-Cleveland Bendix Trophy race, and 85,000 spectators watched Harold Neumann zip around the pylons to win the Thompson Trophy.



Neumann in 1985

# Crimefighter with a passion

## Eliot Ness cleans house in Police Department

By Fred McGunagle

"Six feet and 172 pounds of fight and vigor, an expert criminologist who looks like a collegian but can battle crime with the best of them, Eliot Ness is beginning his job of upholding law and order in Cleveland."

That lead introduced newspaper readers to their new safety director on Dec. 12, 1935. Ness had been named to the \$7,500-a-year job by Harold Hitz Burton, Cleveland's new reform mayor. Pledging to clean up the Police Department and establish civil service, Burton defeated Mayor Harry L. Davis and his machine in the Republican primary and six weeks later beat former Mayor Ray T. Miller, the Democratic nominee.

Burton went on to give Cleveland the kind of honest, efficient government it hadn't seen since the days of Tom L. Johnson and Newton D. Baker. He won three terms — the most since Johnson — then ran successfully for the U.S. Senate and



Ness

Police muttered about the "Boy Scout" and "College Cop" — at 33, he was the youngest safety director in history — but Ness kept up his crusade. He told the Advertising Club: "The dishonest public servant hiding behind a badge or political office is more detestable than any street criminal or mob boss."

The incident that made his Cleveland reputation came less than a month after he took office. With Prohibition over, mobsters had moved into gambling. Shimmy Patton's Harvard Club was running wide-open in Newburgh Heights, and Sheriff "Honest John" Sulzman had a "home-rule" policy, meaning he wouldn't step in unless local officials asked him to.

The evening of Jan. 10, 1936, County Prosecutor Frank Cullitan got a warrant to search the club and tried to serve it. The newspapers reported Patton's reply: "Anyone who goes in there gets their [expletive] head knocked off!" The lone village policeman stood by helplessly. The sheriff

## Ness helped in a raid on a brothel, only to find that it had been tipped off.

wound up his career on the U.S. Supreme Court.

But Burton couldn't compete in charisma with his dynamic young safety director, who, at 32, made the leap from leader of a small team of elite federal investigators, "The Untouchables" — smashing bootleg breweries in Chicago during the Roaring '20s — to being handed the resources of an entire city to crack down on crime and corruption. Ness found out what he was up against on his first night in office when he hitched a ride with officers patrolling the "Roaring Third" Precinct.

They pointed out gambling joints they were under orders to ignore. Ness helped in a 2 a.m. raid on a brothel, only to find that the management had been tipped off.

Ness wasted no time. Two days later, he fired two patrolmen for drinking on duty. The top police brass demanded their reinstatement, but Ness refused.

"Either we have a decent, law-abiding community or we don't," he said. "These men don't fit."

The day before Christmas, he announced a citywide shakeup and called police captains to his office to warn them that they were personally responsible for what went on in their precincts.



Mr. and Mrs. Harold Burton and their daughter, Barbara (center), at the voting booth Oct. 3, 1935.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

A 1936 Cleveland News photo shows Eliot Ness, left, training.

sent word that he would not help Cullitan.

Desperate, Cullitan called Ness and reached him in the middle of a City Council meeting. Though he had no jurisdiction, Ness drove to the police station and asked for volunteers. By the time they arrived in Newburgh Heights, a crowd of several hundred was watching the standoff.

The results were all over the front pages the next day. "At 10:20, with sirens screaming, the safety director and his men drove into sight," said the News. The Press said, "Behind that door thugs held machine guns. They strutted and preened themselves, promising to 'mow down' anyone who entered." The Plain Dealer said, "With Ness marching in front of them, 42 policemen and 20 constables armed with sawed-off shotguns, tear gas pistols and revolvers stormed the club at 10:30 p.m."

Actually, Patton let them in. They found the gambling equipment had been spirited out the back door during the standoff. The customers were gone, too; it later turned out one had been Alvin Karpis, a fugitive at the top of the FBI's "public enemies" list.

Ness told the Odovene Club about the raid a few days later: "About the time we got there, a newspaper man came bouncing out and told us the tough babies were ready for trouble. That was a welcome sound, because we were afraid we were missing something."

Clearly, Ness loved publicity. But there was nothing phony about his personal bravery or his ability as an administrator. He broke up a union racket that was shaking down merchants. He established an accident investigation unit that changed Cleveland's death rate from highest to lowest among big cities. He started a precursor of the Emergency Medical Service. He set up the first police juvenile unit and organized recreation programs to keep kids off the streets.

But while Ness basked in his reputation as Cleveland's new hero, something else was going on in the city — something that would come back to haunt him.

Two weeks after the Harvard Club raid, a woman found a bushel basket of what she took to be hams in an alley near E. 22nd St. and Central Ave. It turned out to be the neatly butchered body of a woman. Clevelanders, shuddering, recalled that four months earlier, the cut-up bodies of two men had been found on Jackass Hill in Kingsbury Run.

Months went by with no more bodies, and Clevelanders relaxed. So did Eliot Ness, unaware that his nemesis was afoot.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.

### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**Jan. 16:** Federal agents kill gangsters Kate "Ma" Barker and her son, Fred, during a fierce gun battle at their Florida hide-out.

**Feb. 13:** Bruno Hauptmann is found guilty of the kidnapping and murder of hero Charles Lindbergh's

baby. He is executed on April 3, 1936.

**Aug. 14:** President Theodore Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act into law.

**Sept. 10:** Louisiana Sen. Huey Long dies after being shot two days earlier in the Louisiana Statehouse.

**Oct. 28:** Mussolini's Italian army invades Ethiopia.

**Dec. 23:** Lindbergh and his wife, Anne, take up residence in England.

**Born:** Elvis Presley, Julie Andrews, Luciano Pavarotti, Woody Allen, Eldridge Cleaver, Sandy Koufax.

**Died:** Humorist Will Rogers, peace advocate Jane Addams, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, British desert fighter Thomas Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), French army officer Alfred Dreyfus.

## Teach history as it happens with the most up-to-date text in the world.

The Plain Dealer's Newspaper In Education (NIE) program is the perfect educational supplement to the learning process. You can use it to teach a variety of subjects at any grade level from kindergarten through adult education. With NIE, copies of The Plain Dealer are delivered to your classroom each morning. Plus all teacher aids are supplied by The Plain Dealer. When added to your students' overall curriculum, The Plain Dealer:

- Deals in reality and gets students interested in reading
- Examines history as it happens
- Provides news stories as models for clear, concise writing
- Helps prepare students for Statewide proficiency exams

For more information about The Plain Dealer's Newspaper In Education program, call (216) 999-4419 or 1-800-NIE-NEWS.

THE PLAIN DEALER  
**EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**

