

OUR CENTURY

1939

AT A GLANCE

Devastation of war felt at home, too

Declaring, "The Polish state has rejected my efforts to establish neighborly relations," Adolf Hitler sent tanks across the border and bombers over Polish cities on Sept. 1. Britain and France responded to the invasion of Poland by declaring war on Germany. Italy stayed neutral; Hitler had sent dictator Benito Mussolini a telegram saying he didn't need Italy's help.

Clevelanders shuddered, especially the hundreds of thousands with relatives in the "old country." The price of sugar shot up from \$1.19 to \$1.75 per pound as hoarders cleared out supplies. A number of prominent Clevelanders were stranded abroad, including Catholic Bishop Joseph Schrembs in Italy, Rabbi Barnett Brickner in Switzerland and former Law Director Ezra Shapiro in France.

On the fourth day of the war, the British liner Athenia was torpedoed off Scotland with 1,400 passengers aboard, including at least 100 Americans. Two were from Cleveland. WHK, WCLE, WTAM and WGAR all cleared their schedules for news flashes and network correspondents reporting by short wave.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered an immediate 30 percent increase in the armed forces — 150,000 more men. The Navy raised its upper age limit on enlistees to 31 and dropped the passing score on its mental test from 85 to 50 percent. After 10 years, Americans saw full employment quickly returning.

The Indians returned to the Stadium for 30 games in 1939, including their first seven under the lights. But the brightest light of all was



Feller

young Bob Feller. At the age of 20, he recorded 24 wins, 24 complete games, 296 innings and 246 strikeouts along with 142 walks — all league-leading figures. He also pitched two one-hitters.

Hal Trosky hit .335 with 25 homers. But the Indians had traded Earl Averill in the midst of a salary dispute and the team got off to a slow start. Then, in August, the Tribe brought up a rookie keystone combination from Buffalo — shortstop Lou Boudreau and second baseman Ray Mack. They helped the team to rally and finish third.

It looked like a sure pennant for 1940, despite manager Oscar Vitt's worsening squabbles with the writers and his own players.

The Rams struggled on the football field and at the gate, but Notre Dame and Navy drew 81,000 fans to the Stadium. Cleveland was still a college football town.

Led by Phil Hergesheimer and Les Cunningham, the 1938-39 Barons finished third in the Eastern Division of the American Hockey League. Nobody gave them much chance in the playoffs, but with goalie Moe Roberts making save after save they went all the way, defeating the Philadelphia Ramblers in the finals for the Calder Cup.

Labor violence continued. Police Chief George Matowitz put his entire 1,400-officer force on 12-hour days and canceled days off to combat bombing of Weinberger, Marshall and Standard drugstores by roving bands. Four AFL unions were organizing the chains.

Meanwhile, a grand jury was called to investigate a \$5 million-a-year "policy racket" — an illegal lottery that operated mainly in black neighborhoods. Police said it was run by "the old Lonardo bootleg gang," which "took control of the policy and clearinghouse racket about seven years ago."

Among those indicted: Solly Hart, "suspected of being the trigger man in many of Cleveland's gangland killings"; Albert "Chuck" Polizzi, "perennial gangland figure"; Nick Satulla, "all-around hoodlum and muscleman"; and Alex "Shondor" Birns, "a perennial public enemy who has one of the longest arrest records of anyone out of captivity."

Clevelanders held a Public Square celebration to mark the city's 143rd birthday, but Mayor Harold Burton was at another birthday celebration in New York: It was Cleveland Day at the New York World's Fair.

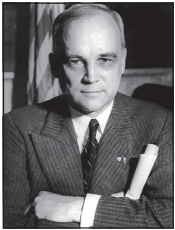
Eight days later, 35,000 people from 47 countries turned out for the mass dedication of the 35-acre Cultural Gardens in Rockefeller Park. The new American garden included trees planted in earth from 28 nations.

City takes control of lakefront

Main Avenue Bridge connects East and West sides

By Fred McGunagle

Four planes swooped out of the night sky to rake the marchers with machine gun fire. Down on the river, a Coast Guard cutter turned its powerful searchlight on the attacking planes. Soldiers returned fire from mounted machine guns. And, on the bridge and the river banks, 110,000 Clevelanders applauded.



Burton

In Europe for the last month, the shooting had been real, but Cleveland chose the mock battle as part of one of its biggest celebrations ever — the opening of the new Main Avenue Bridge on Oct. 6, 1939. (The old Main Avenue Bridge was a swing bridge 100 feet below, since demolished.)

The proud workers who had built the new bridge led the parade across the \$7 million, 8,000-foot structure. Behind them walked veterans, fraternal and civic organizations and others who wanted to see "in the soft glow of sodium lights, the most efficient highway illumination yet devised."

They were celebrating a link between East and West sides that would ease the traffic jams on the Detroit-Superior (now Veterans Memorial) high-level bridge. But the event also symbolized Cleveland's victory in the "100-year war" to regain control of its heritage, the lakefront.

At the west end was Bulkley Blvd., a narrow roadway through Edgewater Park that over the next several years would be turned into an expressway reaching West Blvd. On the east was what was called the lakefront highway, gradually being extended toward Gordon Park. The en-

tire route, Cleveland's first freeway, would, in time, carry the name Cleveland Memorial Shoreway, honoring servicemen killed in World War II.

The bridge itself would be rededicated in 1986 as the Harold H. Burton Bridge, a name that goes unused but fittingly honors the mayor whose gamble made the Shoreway possible.

Early Clevelanders gave little thought to preserving lakeshore property, instead letting commercial interests claim most of it. An exception was John Stockley, who had built the first pier. Historian William Ganson Rose records that when the Cleveland & Pittsburgh Railroad built its track along the lake in 1851, Stockley warned: "You're letting the railroad ruin the most beautiful thing we have."

William J. Gordon gave the city Gordon Park in 1892, and two years later, the city bought the estate of Jacob Perkins to create Edgewater Park. Elsewhere, railroads and businesses moved in. In 1926, City Manager William R. Hopkins declared: "An area suited by nature to be the location of great public conveniences and advantages has been allowed to become for the most part an eyesore and a melancholy witness to the city's failure to utilize its greatest natural asset."

Hopkins suggested a roadway along the Edgewater Park shoreline. Others suggested taking it farther west, filling in land at the foot of the cliffs of Lakewood and Rocky River to create recreation as well as transportation opportunities. As the years went by, committee after committee came up with plan after forgotten plan. The area north of downtown turned into a dump and, in the 1930s, a "Hooverville." The Great Lakes Exposition brought it to life in 1936 and 1937, but it gradually turned back into a dump.

When he became mayor in late



PLAIN DEALER FILE

April 25, 1939: Bringing East and West together, workers shake over the gold ceremonial spike in the new Main Avenue Bridge.

1935, Burton won an \$8 million WPA project to fill in land for a lakefront highway. In a "damn-the-torpedoes, full-speed-ahead" decision, he went ahead with construction despite lawsuits from railroads and others claiming title to the land. The first section ran from E. 9th to E. 21st Sts. Companies claiming ownership quickly put up billboards and gas stations along the route.

In 1936, Metropolitan Parks Director William Stinchcomb proposed the

biggest WPA project in America — a \$16.3 million highway along the cliffs from Edgewater Park and the Rocky River, which would also create new beaches and boating lagoons. Lakewood, the state and WPA officials reacted enthusiastically, but high costs — and eventually World War II — doomed the project.

Meanwhile, the suits went forward. The main issue was whether the new land in the lake was created naturally by sediment, in which case it belonged to owners of the lakefront property, or man-made, in which case it belonged to the state. The decision, in May 1938, was that the land on which the highway was built belonged to the state. But the decision said one property holder was entitled to payment, thus failing to set a clear-cut precedent.

Burton said the decision vindicated the controversial decision to "build first and litigate afterwards."

In November, running — as usual — as an independent, Burton was re-elected to become the first three-term mayor since Tom L. Johnson. In addition to building the highway and the Main Avenue Bridge, he had led the fight to establish Civil Service and expand Muny Light, which had been throttled under administrations favorable to the Illuminating Co. His safety director, Eliot Ness, had fired crooked cops and convicted the racketeers who thrived under previous mayors. In 1940, Burton was elected to the U.S. Senate as a Republican.

In 1945, Democratic President Harry Truman appointed him to the U.S. Supreme Court over the bitter objections of Democratic County Chairman Ray T. Miller. Burton retired in 1958, and died in 1964, leaving a legacy of the Shoreway, the lakefront and honest government.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

The first cars roll down the new highway, looking east on Bulkley Blvd.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Feb. 22: More than 22,000 Nazi supporters gather for a rally at Madison Square Garden.

March 28: Troops loyal to Gen. Francisco Franco capture Madrid, winning the 32-month Spanish Civil War.

May 22: Germany and Italy sign a 10-year Pact of Steel that binds them economically and militarily.

Aug. 18: "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" premieres in Hollywood.

Sept. 30: Nazi troops invade Poland.

Sept. 31: Britain and France declare war on Germany.

Nov. 8: Adolf Hitler escapes a plot against his life during the bombing of a Munich beer hall.

Dec. 15: "Gone with the Wind" opens at Atlanta movie houses.

Born: Francis Ford Coppola, Judy Collins, Jane Alexander, Marian Wright Edelman.

Died: Psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, Irish poet William Yates, film star Douglas Fairbanks, Pope Pius XI, industrialist Charles Schwab, western writer Zane Grey.



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