

OUR CENTURY

1948

AT A GLANCE

River fire damages railroad bridge

Flames from the burning Cuyahoga River leaped 100 feet in the air, halting traffic on the Clark Ave. Bridge and knocking out power to 12,000 Muni Light customers. A fireboat and 24 engines on the banks poured water into the river to keep the fire from moving downstream.

The Feb. 10 fire did only minor damage to the high-level bridge, but the low-level River Terminal Railroad Bridge sustained more than \$100,000 worth of damage. As usual, sparks from a passing train had ignited the oily scum that perpetually floats on the river. Angry officials of companies along the river demanded that the city halt the constant menace posed by river fires.

Returning veterans weren't the only college students who had become more serious. Members of the Ohio Association of Deans of Women, meeting at Hotel Statler, said coeds' choice had changed from "marriage or a career" to "marriage and a career."

Lucille Mowrey of Baldwin-Wallace College said women were preparing themselves for business "if they find in later years they have to work." Ada Hyatt of Kent State University said, "Girls are taking over many campus jobs once held by men. One of our girls, for example, headed the whole student government program."



Birns

Police corruption and "the rackets" were a running story. In July, police Lt. Ernest Molnar was convicted of taking \$80,000 in bribes. A month later, the homes of Buster H. Mathews and Charles V. Carr were bombed. Mathews was a "policy kingpin" believed to be behind the illegal lottery. Carr was a Central area councilman who had several times tried to repeal an ordinance making possession of policy slips illegal.

Police theorized the bomber was sending a "clam-up" message to keep the men from cooperating with Assistant Safety Director Alvin Sutton's investigation of rackets and bribery. They rounded up such "police characters" as Willie Hoge, Arthur "Little Brother" Drake and Alex "Shondor" Birns. An ex-convict named John Horvatin was arrested in the bombing but acquitted by a jury.

Les Cunningham had retired, but the Barons had Johnny Holota, Pete Leswick, Fred Thurier and Bob Solinger scoring goals, and goalies Roger Bessette and Johnny Bower preventing them.

They dominated the American Hockey League, finishing the season with a 27-game unbeaten streak. This time, they didn't fall apart in the playoffs. On April 11, they presented owner Al Sutphin with a birthday present: the Calder Cup.

The 1948 Browns were the first professional football team to go through a season undefeated since the 1942 Chicago Bears of the National Football League. The Browns won 14 games, including three in an eight-day stretch. They beat the San Francisco 49ers, 14-7, before a Stadium crowd of 82,769, the most ever to see a professional game. It came three Sundays after the Indians drew the largest crowd ever to see a baseball game.

The Browns won the Eastern Division of the All America Football Conference by beating the 49ers again, 31-28. Otto Graham, supposedly out with a knee injury, played the whole game. Then — just in case anybody didn't know who the best team in either league was — they walloped the 49ers, 49-7, for their third straight AAC title.

Cleveland was now a pro football town, but the annual Thanksgiving Day college game was still the play story in The Plain Dealer — especially since Case broke a 21-year losing streak against Reserve with a 15-7 win. Only 13,900 saw the game at League Park. That was a fraction of prewar crowds and a fraction of the 45,117 who saw Benedictine defeat South, 7-0, in The Plain Dealer Charity Game at the Stadium.

On Oct. 13, President Harry Truman told 10,000 cheering Democrats at Public Hall not to believe the polls showing him trailing Republican candidate Thomas E. Dewey. "These polls are like sleeping pills designed to lull the voters asleep on Election Day," he said. "You might call them sleeping polls."

The next night, a confident Dewey told a Public Hall audience of more than 13,000, "I hope I will be worthy of your trust." On Nov. 1, the Gallup Poll gave Dewey a lead of 5 percent. On Nov. 5, Americans, including Ohioans, gave the victory to Truman. Frank Lausche, the former mayor, reclaimed the governorship from Thomas Herbert, who had defeated him in 1946.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

The largest crowd in baseball history — 86,288 fans — filled the Stadium for the fifth game of the 1948 World Series. Joe Gordon was at bat in the bottom half of the first inning for the Indians with manager Lou Boudreau on first with a single on a line smash that caromed off the glove of Boston pitcher Nelson Potter. Ken Keltner was on deck. This picture was made from three negatives.

On top of the world again

Clevelanders cheer themselves, too, with Indians' Series win

By Fred McGunagle

It was V-J Day all over again, but now there were different heroes to cheer. Eight thousand people in the jam-packed Terminal screamed out their names as each one reached the top of the escalator from the tracks: "Doby!" "Keltner!" "Lemon!" "Boudreau!"

Thirty police somehow cleared a path through the cheering crowd to Public Square, where another 25,000 erupted in cheers. The players boarded convertibles behind a truck carrying the Parmadale Band. Mayor Thomas Burke rode in the front seat of the first car, with Bill Veeck and Lou and Della Boudreau waving from atop the rear seat.

The parade moved up Euclid Ave. with confetti and paper streamers floating down from office windows until the occupants of the cars looked like snowmen. Police estimated 200,000 to 500,000 people lined the route to University Circle.

Children, out of school for the day, shrieked. Fathers held up babies to see the players. People ran alongside the cars to shake the players' hands. Even the police trying to keep the spectators back reached toward the cars for a handshake. Streetcars stopped and crews got out to join the cheering thousands.

"This was not a crowd which had come merely to honor a triumphant group of athletes," Alvin Silverman observed in his Plain Dealer story. "This was a crowd which was, in a sense, cheering itself."

Baseball was a matter of life and death in Cleveland in the summer of 1948, and the last month of the season had plenty of both. Not since the war had one story so dominated the newspapers and, for that matter, daily life.

In the year of its own golden anniversary, The Plain Dealer recounted the Indians' season day by day:



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Winning pitcher Gene Bearden in the dressing room surrounded by reporters.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

A heroes' welcome: Indians owner Bill Veeck, seated in the car at right, and Lou and Della Boudreau rode together in the parade after the Indians won the 1948 World Series.

Veeck's attempt to trade Boudreau before the season; the "Big Three," Lemon, Feller and Bearden; Satchel Paige; a hobbling Boudreau's pinch hit with the bases loaded against the Yankees; trailing by a seemingly insurmountable 4½-game margin on Labor Day; the 8-3 victory over the Red Sox in the first American League pennant playoff.

That triumph over Boston brought a spontaneous civic celebration of its own. Downtown was jammed until midnight with revelers blowing horns, whistles and sirens, teenagers snake-dancing through streets and young men looking for pretty girls to kiss. In James E. Doyle's "The Sport Trail" the next morning, Egg Shelley poetically: "We waited 20 years and eight, and brethren, did we celebrate!"

With 75,000 out-of-towners expected for the World Series against the Boston Braves, Mayor Burke ordered a cleanup of downtown and told utilities to stop tearing up streets for the duration. The Convention Bureau

looked for residents willing to take in visitors who couldn't get hotel rooms.

Some scalpers were asking \$50 a ticket. Parking lots raised their rates. Stouffer's and Rohr's restaurants announced they would open on Sunday. Boston Mayor James Curley bet Burke 100 pots of baked beans against a wooden Indian that he planned to set up on his front lawn.

When the Tribe came back from Boston with a split in the first two games, Clevelanders camped out overnight to get 8,000, \$1 bleacher tickets. Most Clevelanders crowded around radios that Friday afternoon; Jimmy Dudley had joined Jack Graney in the broadcast booth at the beginning of the season. A lucky few watched flickering images on bluish-tinted black-and-white televisions.

At the Stadium, 70,000 fans saw Gene Bearden pitch a 2-0 shutout; the gate of \$345,000 — about \$5 a ticket on average — was a world record. Downtown taverns had their busiest night ever. On Saturday, more than 81,000 — the largest crowd ever to see a single game in the history of baseball — watched Steve Gromek defeat the Braves 4-1.

A victory on Sunday and the Indians would be world champions. If so, Mayor Burke announced, the parade would start at 8:30 a.m. Monday. It wasn't to be. Before a world record 86,288 fans, many standing behind the fence, the Braves knocked Feller out of the box in the seventh to win 11-5.

The parade was postponed. That night "a phalanx of humanity," estimated at 10,000 to 15,000, lined the Terminal concourse to see the team off to Boston for Game 6.

Little work was done in Cleveland that Monday afternoon; office workers gathered around radios. School principals put the radio broadcast on the PA system or broke in with frequent reports. It was late afternoon before the result was final: a 4-3 squeaker to make the Indians — after 28 years of disappointment — world champions.

Burke announced that, in deference to the wishes of the players, the reception would be simple and swift with no speeches. But he said he hoped it would make up in enthusiasm what it lacked in pomp.

He needn't have worried. Clevelanders were, as Silverman had written, cheering themselves. In the 1920s, when the "Fifth City" was America's boomtown, their pride was as high as the flag atop the new Terminal Tower. But in the 1930s, the city, dependent on steel and autos, was beaten down in poverty, population and psyche.

But after a decade of misery, America had won the war and achieved prosperity. And now Cleveland had reclaimed its rightful position as the best city in the nation. So Clevelanders cheered and they threw confetti and they ran alongside to shake their heroes' hands and they cheered some more.

The players were overwhelmed. "This is as good as being president," Feller said. An awe-struck rookie named Al Rosen said over and over, "Man, I never want to play baseball in any other city. This Cleveland is marvelous."

Now everybody knew it.

McGunagle is a Cleveland free-lance writer.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 30: Mahatma Gandhi is assassinated in India.

Feb. 2: President Harry Truman asks Congress to outlaw lynching and establish a federal commission on civil rights.

April 20: United Mine Workers

head John L. Lewis is fined \$200,000 for refusing to obey a court order to end a monthlong strike by coal mine workers.

May 14: The new state of Israel is officially created.

June 7: Dwight D. Eisenhower becomes president of Columbia Univer-

sity.

June 25: Republicans nominate Thomas Dewey to oppose Truman.

Aug. 23: Babe Ruth, the most legendary player in the history of baseball, dies in New York.

Nov. 2: Truman defeats a heavily favored Dewey.

Born: Andrew Lloyd Webber, Richard Dreyfuss, Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Died: Retired Chief Justice Charles Evan Hughes, World War I Gen. John Pershing, Orville Wright, former German Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch, Japanese former Prime Minister Hidecki Tojo.