

OUR CENTURY

1949

AT A GLANCE

Topsy-turvy weather marks 1949

It was the wildest weather year Clevelanders could remember, with a green Christmas and a white St. Patrick's Day. The temperature was 63 on Jan. 18, zero on Jan. 30 and back to 61 on Feb. 15. March saw more than half of the winter's snowfall, but was above average in temperature. The summer was the hottest on record, with the temperature at or above 90 for 15 straight days in July. August saw a record high of 96 and record-tying lows in the 40s. That was followed by the third-coldest September and the fifth-warmest October on record. November was, as The Plain Dealer put it, "warm and snowy" with 14 inches of snow in the last five days of autumn. December was one of the warmest and rainiest ever.

The coaxial cable carrying television network programming from the East Coast reached Cleveland in January, just in time for the lucky handful of set owners to see President Harry Truman sworn in for a four-year term. They also could watch Milton Berle on "Texaco Star Theater," Ed Sullivan's "Toast of the Town," Ted Mack's "Original Amateur Hour," "Howdy Doody," "Meet the Press" and "It Pays to Be Ignorant." When the cable reached Chicago, they could see Dave Garroway and "Kukla, Fran and Ollie." Locally, Bob Dale and Linn Sheldon were the big stars, with Dorothy Fuldheim interviewing celebrities nightly. Programming didn't start until late afternoon, but until then, owners of new sets stared in fascination at the test pattern.

Television had not yet cut into movie attendance. Among features at the 89 neighborhood theaters advertising in The Plain Dealer were Howard Duff in "Calamity Jane" at the Royal on Madison Ave. in Lakewood, Bob Hope in "Sorrowful Jones" at the Uptown at St. Clair Ave. and E. 105th St., George Raft in "Johnny Allegro" at the Stork on Lorain Ave., and Betty Grable in "Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend" at the Imperial on Kinsman Rd.

The American Hockey League champion Barons were aging. They finished third in the Western Division and were eliminated in the playoffs by their nemesis, the Hershey Bears. The Indians didn't look like last year's world champions as they lost 17 of their first 29 games. After they were shut out in a double-header in Chicago, White Sox General Manager Frank Lane sent Bill Veck the Comiskey Park home plate with a note: "We thought you might like to know what this looks like." The team eventually got as close as second, but finished third, eight games out. Bob Lemon won 22 games, and left fielder Dale Mitchell batted .317, but the star of the year was a fan, Charley Lupica. On May 31, he climbed a 65-foot flagpole above his Wade Park Ave. store and vowed to stay there until the Indians reached first place.

He came down after 117 days — at the Stadium, where Veck had had his pole trucked with Lupica still atop it. Veck buried the 1948 pennant beneath the Stadium home plate. Then he buried an era: He sold the team to a syndicate headed by Ellis Ryan.

At least Cleveland still had one winner: the Browns ran their victory string to 29 before losing to the San Francisco 49ers in midseason. But attendance was down. Only 17,000 saw the Browns beat the Buffalo Bills 31-21 in the first round of the playoffs. Five days later, the National Football League and the All America Conference announced they would merge in 1950, with the Browns, 49ers and Baltimore Colts joining the NFL; the other four AAC teams folded. Two days later, the Browns beat the 49ers, 21-7, for their fourth title in the four years the AAC existed. But they drew only 22,000; 30,000 had seen St. Ignatius defeat East Tech, 13-0, in The Plain Dealer Charity Game.



Charley Lupica and his pole.

Plane crash ends lives, air races



Above, pilot Bill Odom's body is removed by police and neighbors from the wreckage of a burned house in Berea on Sept. 5, 1949. The veteran 'round-the-world flier's plane went out of control on the second lap of the Thompson Trophy race at Cleveland airport and smashed into the house. At left, part of a radiator from Odom's plane lies in a side yard of the home where the plane crashed. "He never cut the throttle or anything," one witness said.



Pilot, mother and child killed in fiery tragedy

By Fred McGunagle

It was an idyllic Labor Day afternoon, with the temperature near 80 degrees. Perfect for watching the National Air Races. Or for cooking out while switching between the Indians and Browns games on the radio. Or, if you lived on the west side of Berea, for doing both.

But at 429 West St., Bradley Laird's family was working to fix up the brand-new \$16,000 ranch home they had moved into four days earlier. Laird was washing windows with the aid of his father-in-law, Benjamin Hoffman, while occasionally playfully squirting 5-year-old David with the hose. Thirteen-month-old Craig was in his playpen in the driveway.

Jeanne Craig was working in the house. Her husband called to her to come out and see the planes roaring past at 400 mph less than 200 feet off the ground. She said she could see them out the window.

The races had been a great success: 76,000 people at Municipal Airport and an estimated 150,000 more parked for miles around had been thrilled by stunt pilots, helicopter aerobatics, parachutists and midget racers. Now, at 4:40 p.m., came the main event. Ten planes roared off in pursuit of the Thompson Trophy and \$40,000 in prizes.

Co-favorites were Clevelander Cook Cleland, the 1948 winner, and

man pulled him out, burning himself severely. A neighbor rushed them to Berea Community Hospital.

Neighbors came running. "There were pieces of wreckage all over, but nothing big enough to show an airplane had crashed unless you knew it," said one. "There was a man in the yard. He was almost hysterical. He said his wife and son were in there."

The neighbors ran to the back of the house, but it was too hot for them to go in. They carried out as much furniture as they could from the front.

A wheel and a piece of the engine had flown across the street and lodged on the porch of a house there. Burning fragments went through an open window and into the living room, setting it afire. The owner managed to put it out with a garden hose.

When only nine planes sped past the airport for the third lap, a murmur ran through the grandstand. A distraught Cochrane jumped into a car to look for Odom. She quickly spotted a plume of smoke rising to the south.

The fire drove him back. Flaming gasoline had showered the baby's crib, setting his clothes afire. Hoff-

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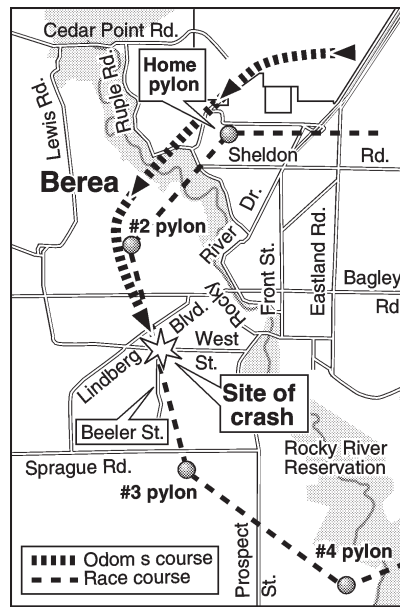
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Firemen found the body of Jeanne



Laird in her bathroom. Bradley Laird was notified at 6 p.m. in the hospital, where he had gone to check on his son. Two hours later, the boy died of his burns.

"The world ended for me with that crash," Laird said over and over the next day. "We were all wrapped up in our new place. Jeanne was such a good mother. We were so completely happy. Why did this awful thing have to happen?"

That's what the whole community was asking. The suburbs over which the planes flew — where, before the war, farmers charged a dime to park in their fields — now were filled with subdivisions. In the 1947 Thompson race, a woman in Brook Park had been injured by a cockpit cover when a pilot bailed out.

The Berea Progressive Citizens League began circulating petitions to ban air races. "The citizens of Berea don't want these flying hot rods overhead," said its chairman.

Since 1929, 12 of the 15 National Air Races had been held in Cleveland (there were no races during the war). They were a major tourist attraction. But the handwriting was on the wall, even before Berea and nearby suburbs passed ordinances banning air racing above their communities.

The national committee decided to skip the 1950 races. Between 1951 and 1963, there were air shows with races in several different cities. Beginning in 1964, the annual Cleveland Air Show brought the latest in aviation to Burke Lakefront Airport — but without pylon racing.

Bill Odom's body was found beneath the concrete floor of the Laird house, where the crash had driven it. He had wiped out himself, a young mother, a baby and Cleveland's air races.



The Laird family home burns as neighbors and others try to save items inside the home after pilot Bill Odom crashed during the National Air Races.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 22: Communist forces seize control of Peking from troops loyal to nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek.

Feb. 5: The Internal Revenue Service releases a list of Americans who made \$75,000 or more the previous year. Among those in the entertainment industry, Humphrey Bogart

tops the list at \$467,361.

March 2: An American B-50 bomber completes the first nonstop flight around the world.

March 18: The United States and nations of Western Europe form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Sept. 15: Konrad Adenauer, a

staunch critic of the Nazi regime, is chosen to head the Federal Republic of Germany.

Sept. 23: President Harry Truman tells his Cabinet the Russians have successfully tested an atomic bomb.

Oct. 1: Victorious Communists establish the People's Republic of

China and appoint Chou En-lai to head a new government.

Born: Bruce Springsteen, Meryl Streep.

Died: Author Margaret Mitchell, dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, psychiatrist Harry Stagg Sullivan, industrialist Solomon Guggenheim.