

OUR CENTURY

1950

The Big Snow buries area



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Big Marion Motley (76) picked up 12 yards and a first down before being tackled by the Rams' Paul Younger. The Cleveland Browns won the National Football League championship against the Los Angeles Rams in 1950.

AT A GLANCE

Cleveland kicks into gear for Korea action

America was at war again — or rather, at “police action,” since there never was a declaration of war. The soldiers dug into the freezing mud of Korea couldn't tell the difference.

Because the war came on gradually — and because it was a United Nations action, even though primarily American — Cleveland didn't get the “home front” feeling of 1917 or 1941.

But once more, young Cleveland men marched off to induction stations. Once more, Civil Defense reorganized. Once more, defense plants boomed, bringing labor shortages. Ford announced a \$70 million foundry and engine plant in Brook Park. Republic Steel Corp. started a \$75 million expansion. The Illuminating Co. built a \$100 million power plant in Eastlake.

More jobs meant more people moving to Cleveland from the South. Price increases triggered cost-of-living pay raises, which triggered more price increases.

Still, there were few government controls or shortages. Men were dying in the snows of Korea, but it was only a semi-war in Cleveland.

Greater Cleveland was growing again. The 1950 census showed 914,808 people, up 36,000 from 1940 and the most ever. The big growth was in the suburbs, which added 126,000 people. Euclid's population soared to 41,447.

The National Football League had refused to let its champion Philadelphia Eagles meet the All America Conference champion Browns at the end of 1949. But now, with the leagues merged, the confrontation was scheduled for the first game of 1950.

The Browns left no doubt about the better team. Otto Graham passed for three touchdowns and scored another as the Browns humiliated the Eagles, 35-10, before 71,000 in Philadelphia. But the Browns couldn't solve New York's “umbrella” pass defense and lost both games to the Giants. Both teams wound up 10-2 to tie for the Eastern Conference championship.

When the two teams met again in the playoffs, the Browns won, 8-3, on two Lou Groza field goals and a safety. The outcome would have been different had linebacker Bill Willis not turned in the defensive play of the game, catching the Giants' “Choo Choo” Roberts from behind after a 47-yard gain.

Only 29,751 were at the Stadium for one of the most thrilling title games in football history on Dec. 24 against the Los Angeles — formerly Cleveland — Rams. The Rams held a 28-27 lead with 1:50 left and the Browns on their own 34. Graham passed and ran the ball to the Rams' 9 yard line with 20 seconds left, and Groza kicked a 16-yard field goal to give the Browns a 30-28 victory and the NFL title in their first year in the league.

The Indians' new president, Ellis Ryan, named Hank Greenberg, the former Tigers slugger, general manager. Greenberg believed in pitching and the long ball. His “Big Three” of Bob Lemon, Early Wynn and Bob Feller won 57 games — 23 by Lemon, who led the league in wins, complete games, innings pitched and strikeouts. The long ball was supplied by Al Rosen, who led the league with 37 homers; first baseman Luke Easter with 28; Larry Doby with 25; and Joe Gordon with 19. But the team finished fourth, although only six games out of first, and attendance fell to 1.7 million.

In November, Greenberg fired Lou Boudreau as manager and named Al Lopez to replace him.

Alex “Shondor” Birns was convicted of attempting to bribe a juror in his recent bombing-blackmail trial. Then Safety Director Alvin Sutton accused him of bribing a second juror with the aid of “a beautiful blonde.” He was released on a record \$120,000 bond. Birns was acquitted, but sent to jail for six months for contempt of court.

A grand jury accused unnamed “prominent citizens” of aiding crime. In the nationally televised hearings of Sen. Estes Kefauver's committee investigating crime, Moe Davis, Maurice Kleinman and Lou Rothkopf were named as the powers behind a powerful Cleveland gambling syndicate. Sutton ripped out Western Union “race-wire drops” in 52 locations named by the committee.

Mayor Burke announced the city would put on an additional 100 police to combat attacks on women and children.



PLAIN DEALER FILE

About 70 male residents of W. 136th St. north of Lorain Ave. held a “block party” after the storm, taking 3½ hours to clear their street.

Thanksgiving storm stops city in its tracks

By Fred McGunagle

“A tinkling of sleigh bells was included in the forecast,” The Plain Dealer said poetically in its weather story for the Friday after Thanksgiving.

Sleighs and Army tanks were about the only vehicles that moved in Cleveland for the next week.

The precipitation and the thermometer both started down on the holiday. The temperature fell from 27 degrees at midnight Thursday to 8 degrees by 8 a.m. Friday. What started as freezing rain turned to sleet and then snow. Clevelanders awoke to chilly homes as the East Ohio Gas Co. didn't have enough gas.

Thousands were late for work as icy streets and blinding snow sent their cars skidding into drifts. Many became stuck and abandoned their cars, blocking buses, streetcars and other autos. The city took garbage collectors off their routes to clear snow, but the evening rush hour was worse; cars that had broken down in the morning were still on the streets, and drivers trying to get around them got stuck themselves.

By Saturday morning, streets were impassable. Only the W. 25th St.-State Rd. streetcar line was running, though a lone Madison Ave.-Bridgeway car ran back and forth between W. 41st St. and W. 117th St. Snowplows and tow trucks were breaking down.

Some dedicated people got to work anyway. The manager of a Lakewood supermarket walked from his home in Bay Village so his customers could buy food. One Illuminating Co. worker walked to Public Square headquarters from Euclid and another from Fairview Park. A Cleveland Heights firefighter walked 12 miles from Chester Township.

Stores ran out of bread and milk. The president of the Telling-Belle Vernon Co. urged that any milk available be saved for babies and sick people. Some hardy milkmen took their trucks as far as they could on main streets and made deliveries on foot.



A National Guard tank tows a truck from lower Payne Ave. on Nov. 26, 1950.

Wiser ones called radio stations, which broadcast their locations so residents could wade through the snow to them. WERE announcer Bill Randle, at the mike all day and night, estimated his station had handled 3,000 to 4,000 emergency announcements about called-off meetings, open food stores and missing relatives.

Saturday's snowfall of 20.2 inches was a record (and still is). Mayor Thomas Burke announced a ban on nonemergency travel and appealed to Gov. Frank Lausche, who sent 650 members of the National Guard to prevent looting and rescue stranded drivers. The 112th Combat Engineers used a Sherman tank to rescue 50 people trapped on the East Shoreway. Another tank towed a stranded bus on Lorain Ave. all the way to Berea so passengers could get home.

Two groups of Boy Scouts had chosen the wrong weekend to go camping. On Sunday, tanks and Army

trucks rescued 25 of them from the Hinckley Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks and 29 from the Chagrin Reservation.

Downtown hotels were jammed, but their staffers couldn't get to work. Guests made their own beds. A lone waitress tried to serve breakfast at the Hotel Carter with the help of a room clerk.

City snow crews, aided by private contractors, struggled to open streets over the weekend, but snowplows and tow trucks kept breaking down. By Monday morning, only 18 of 64 Cleveland Transit System lines were operating, and many main streets had only a single lane open.

Burke continued the ban on non-emergency travel, but it wasn't enforced. Thousands of drivers tried to get to work even though an estimated 10,000 abandoned cars still clogged the streets. Hundreds of workers waited at bus stops only to be passed up by buses packed with standees.

Euclid Ave. from downtown to E. 107th St. was a “no-man's land” in which nothing moved. On the two lanes of Carnegie Ave. that were open, vehicles moved a few inches at a time; many stalled, creating worse jams. Drivers who did reach downtown found no place to park: The parking lots were piled high with snow.

By midweek, the snow had let up, but the streets were still a mess. National Guard trucks towed 200 abandoned cars from E. 55th St. in one day, pulling each on to the nearest side street so crews could clear at least the streetcar tracks. Informed that as many as 40 percent of Street Department employees were AWOL, an angry Burke relieved Service Director Sam David and put Law Director Lee Howley in charge of the cleanup.

Passable streets or not, babies still were being born — in ambulances, police cars, suburban city halls and in homes. Neighbors carried a woman from E. 53rd St. to St. Ann Hospital on a stretcher; another was pulled to Glenville Hospital on a sled. Still another arrived at Huron Road Hospital in a weapons carrier.

Guard vehicles were sent to pick up dead bodies, including one reported on a porch on Cedar Ave. The clanking of a tank awoke the “corpse,” who looked up into the muzzle of the tank's cannon and ran off screaming.

Many factories remained closed, and the Chamber of Commerce predicted losses up to \$30 million. But many Clevelanders welcomed an unexpected vacation — especially the children who sledged down every hill.

By Thursday, Burke finally could announce that all CTS lines would be in operation by nightfall. Bumper-to-bumper traffic still held travel to a crawl, and most side streets had not been plowed. South Euclid police ordered a 20 mph speed limit because of pedestrians walking in the streets.

To the dismay of children, schools announced they would reopen on Monday. Mountains of snow remained — 23 people died shoveling — but the worst was over.

Old-timers scoffed that the storm couldn't hold a candle to the four-day blizzard of November 1913. That one took a toll of 32 ships and tugs, and 277 lives. But the deepest the snow reached in 1913 was 17 inches. On Nov. 27, 1950, there were 27 inches on the ground, a record that still stands.

It was the “Big Snow,” and it would get deeper with the retelling as the years went by.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.

At left, Elaine Sippola and Alice Horton, her Richards Ave. neighbor in Euclid, lend a hand at clearing the snow. Above, Dr. William “Snowshoes” Schultz of Maple Rd. in Cleveland Heights, uses a broom to try to dig his car out of a drift.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 31: President Harry Truman orders the Atomic Energy Commission to begin production of a hydrogen bomb.

Feb. 15: Russia's Josef Stalin and China's Mao Tse-tung sign a mutual-defense treaty.

March 29: RCA announces the successful demonstration of a 3-inch color picture tube for televisions.

June 25: North Korean forces cross the 38th parallel and begin an invasion of South Korea. Five days later, Truman announces that U.S. ground

troops will be used to repel the invasion.

Aug. 21: Althea Gibson becomes the first black to play in the U.S. Open Tennis Championship.

Sept. 29: United Nations troops, headed by General Douglas MacArthur, drive North Korean troops from

the South Korean capital of Seoul.

Nov. 9: Chinese troops enter the war in Korea.

Born: Stevie Wonder.

Died: Author George Orwell, Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, English playwright George Bernard Shaw, entertainer Al Jolson.