

# OUR CENTURY

## 1951

### AT A GLANCE

#### Interest wanes as war drags on in Korea

With 180,000 Red Chinese storming into South Korea, a Korean War record 80 Clevelanders enlisted in the armed forces on Jan. 3. But as the Americans regrouped, the war turned into a stalemate close to the original border. When Civil Defense appealed for 70,000 volunteers in March, only 10,000 responded. Clevelanders were losing interest in the war — except for those with blue stars in their windows.

The war meant higher prices and strikes as workers tried to catch up with inflation. The Greater Cleveland Women's Club urged its 16,000 members to cut back on meat purchases. The government tightened controls: 5,000 retailers had to submit price data to the Office of Price Stabilization, headed by Ohioan and future Gov. Michael DiSalle.

But Clevelanders hadn't forgotten their servicemen: 100,000 turned out to watch the Armed Forces Day parade in May and 30,000 for the Memorial Day parade 11 days later. By year's end, the total of Clevelanders killed, wounded, captured or missing neared 800. Blue stars turned to gold.

Sen. Estes Kefauver brought his Crime Committee to Cleveland in January, and citizens were treated to the spectacle of gamblers and sheriffs squirming on camera. Arthur B. "Mickey" McBride, owner of the Yellow Cab Co. and the Browns, conceded that he also controlled Continental Press, a horse-racing news wire theoretically run by his son Edward.

McBride admitted doing business with people like Morris "Mushy" Wexler and "Big Al" Polizzi, but denied connections with Chicago hoods Murray "the Camel" Humphrey and Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik. On his way out, he shook hands with his questioners. "It's a good show," he told them.

It was a year of police scandals. Three high-ranking officers were demoted for lack of diligence in a raid on the W. 120th St. Social Club. Inspector Martin Blecke admitted he received \$8,000 to retire before the Civil Service list for his job ran out. Police officers were suspended for stealing and for shaking down citizens. The Plain Dealer found that Geauga County Sheriff Stuart Harland had been pampering a prisoner, George Gordon, owner of the defunct Pettibone Club. Harland was found guilty on 17 counts, was fined \$595 plus costs and resigned.

Mayor Thomas Burke seemed to be losing interest in his job. He had to issue a statement from his Florida vacation that he did not plan to resign. The police scandals, plus the city's ineptitude in the "Big Snow" of the year before, took a toll on his popularity.

Still, he defeated the Republican candidate, Judge William McDermott, to become Cleveland's second four-term mayor, after Tom L. Johnson. But he won by only 21,000 votes, a fraction of his previous victory margins.

Voters also passed a charter amendment removing the police chief from Civil Service. It was aimed at the honest but ineffective George Matowitz, but wasn't used; Matowitz died three weeks after the election. Burke named Inspector Frank D. Story to replace him.

With President Harry Truman's approval ratings dropping to record lows, Kefauver was a likely Democratic nominee in 1952. Truman didn't improve his popularity when he fired Gen. Douglas MacArthur for insubordination after the general complained about United Nations indecisiveness in Korea.

MacArthur received a hero's welcome across the nation. In Cleveland, 25,000 cheered him along his route from the airport to downtown. He toured three war plants, praising workers for "supplying the weapons to the front lines."



Gogan, in front of a portrait of his wife.

After a sensational seven-week trial, industrialist Joseph Gogan was acquitted of the murder of his wife in their Lakewood home. The key defense witness had four legs; the 10-pound dog had shown no ill effects from the cyanide gas that Coroner Samuel Gerber insisted had killed the 160-pound woman.

The Indians had a new manager, Al Lopez, and the first trio of pitchers to win 20 games in the majors since 1931 — Bob Feller, Mike Garcia and Early Wynn — plus Bob Lemon, who won 17. Feller pitched a record-tying third no-hitter and was voted the Pitcher of the Year by the Sporting News. But the team batted only .256 and finished second, five games behind the Yankees.

# A child disappears, a city searches



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTOS

The mystery of Beverly Potts continued: Detectives search for her body under a car in 1966. It is not specified where they are searching.



On top, an early photo of Beverly. Above, Patricia Swing, Beverly's neighbor who went with her to the carnival the night she disappeared.

## Beverly Potts went to see a carnival, but never returned and never was found

By Fred McGunagle

It was as though she were everybody's child. From the time 10-year-old Beverly Potts was first reported missing — at 10:30 p.m. on Aug. 24 — the whole city shared the cold fear that gripped her parents.

Beverly had left her house at 11304 Linnet Ave. after supper that Friday. With her next-door neighbor, 11-year-old Patricia Swing, she headed for nearby Halloran Park on W. 117th St., where the Showwagon, sponsored by the Cleveland Press and the city Recreation Department, was bringing its performers.

Patricia left the park at 8:50 so she could be home by dark, but Beverly had permission to stay until the show was over. When she wasn't home by 10, her worried parents called the Swings and discovered Patricia had been home for an hour. They went to the park and found it nearly deserted.

Even before police arrived, neighbors were cruising the neighborhood in their cars or searching on foot with flashlights. The Potts home filled with police, reporters and neighbors who came to offer support and bring food as the night wore on.

Robert Potts smoked cigarette after cigarette while Beverly's 22-year-old sister, Anita, fruitlessly called Beverly's friends one after another. Her mother, Elizabeth, cried softly. On a table in the living room, where she had left it, was Beverly's dollhouse, surrounded by her dolls.

On everybody's mind was 5-year-old Gail Ann Michel of Lakewood, who had been abducted and molested a few months earlier and, even worse, 8-year-old Sheila Ann Tukey, who had been fatally stabbed by a psychopath near her home on E. 124th St. in 1948.

When Beverly hadn't been found by daylight, Detective Chief James McArthur sent 20 detectives, 10 mounted police and 15 other officers to search West Park. Patrol cars circled the streets. Boy Scouts searched fields around Halloran Park.

Beverly's picture was on all three television stations and the front pages of all three newspapers. Her description was broadcast over and over: 4 feet 11 inches tall, 90 pounds, blond hair with bangs, blue poplin jacket, pink T-shirt and blue jeans. Across the city, parents had the same thought: "It could have been my child."

Railroad police searched empty boxcars. Civil Air Patrol planes cruised low over the fields that made up much of the far West Side. Police

checked tip after tip: Somebody had seen a girl who looked like Beverly hitch-hiking on Brookpark Rd., men in the neighborhood had been acting suspiciously, a shirt was found in the woods with what looked like blood on it.

On Monday, all Park Department personnel were pulled off regular duty to check every inch of parkland while waste collectors searched alleys and gulleys. Monday's Press carried a Page One editorial:

"Let's All Join Hunt for Missing Child."

Police questioned everyone on their long list of suspected sex offenders. Planes widened their search area, dropping to treetop level. The Stagehands Union, to which Robert Potts belonged, posted a \$1,500 reward.

Hope was fading, but police redoubled their efforts. McArthur turned his office into an operations center,

taking his meals at his desk and at one point working 35 straight hours. He appealed to every citizen of Northern Ohio to examine their property, front and back, top and bottom. "Maybe 999 tips will prove false leads," he said. "It's the next one that's surely going to lead us to Beverly Potts."

Civil Defense Director John Pokorny asked all auxiliary police and firemen to help. They swamped the 1st District Police Station. Firemen in hip boots waded through the foul water of a culvert by floodlight while a crowd estimated at several thousand watched. The FBI was following the case, but under the law at the time couldn't step in until Beverly had been missing for seven days.

Beverly's mother slept Monday for the first time since her daughter's disappearance. "As long as I don't know anything, I'm going to believe that Beverly is all right and will come

back to us," she said.

But hope was becoming harder to maintain. Mayor Thomas Burke went on the radio. As mayor and as a father and a grandfather, he urged "anyone who is within hearing distance of my voice" to come forward with any information that might shed light on the case.

Wild rumors spread that Beverly had been found, dead or alive. A West Side woman received a phone call saying, "This is Beverly Potts. Tell my mother I'm all right and will meet her at E. 13th St. and Chester Ave." Police raced to the scene and found nothing.

The rewards grew to \$5,800. Police picked up suspects from as far away as Columbus. Curious crowds lined Linnet Ave. near Beverly's home, forcing police to close off the block. The family's phone number was changed because of crank calls.

Tips were coming in at the rate of 1,500 a day. McArthur appealed to parents of young girls not to dress them in pink shirts and blue jeans because so many reports were coming in that Beverly had been seen. Police questioned all 400 pupils at Louis Agassiz School, where Beverly would have started the fourth grade.

On Saturday, eight days after her disappearance, the Potts family issued a statement: "We have finally come to the realization we will never see our Beverly alive again. We urge whoever did this terrible thing to write or telephone to us, or the police, the location of Beverly's body so that we can reclaim it and give her a decent Christian burial."

Police refused to give up. Burke went on the radio again. He appealed to everybody who had been at Halloran Park on Friday night — an estimated 1,500 people — to call police to arrange an interview. A strand of blond hair similar to Beverly's sent three dozen searchers beating through a Parma site described as a "hot-rodder playground." Amateur detectives prowled Halloran Park, looking for clues and surreptitiously eyeing each other.

Gradually, the case disappeared from the headlines, though parents continued to accompany their children to playgrounds and warn them to be home by dark. Years — even decades — later, tips still were coming in and police investigated them. But the greatest search in the city's history had failed.

Beverly Potts was never found.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



Mr. and Mrs. Potts, after Beverly was reported missing in 1951.

### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**Jan. 18:** French troops repel Vietnamese guerrillas attempting to capture Hanoi.

**March 30:** Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are found guilty of passing U.S. atomic bomb secrets to the Soviet Union. They are executed in June 1953.

**April 11:** President Harry Truman relieves Gen. Douglas MacArthur of his command of U.N. forces in Korea.

**May 2:** RCA begins broadcasting color television programs.

**May 12:** The United States successfully tests the first hydrogen bomb.

**Aug. 23:** Ninety West Point cadets

are expelled for cheating on examinations.

**Oct. 26:** The Conservative Party's victory in parliamentary elections leads to Winston Churchill's return as prime minister of Great Britain.

**Born:** Sally Ride, Sting (Gordon Sumner).

**Died:** American writer Sinclair Lewis, director and screenwriter Cecil B. DeMille, cereal entrepreneur Will K. Kellogg, actress Fanny Brice, publisher William Randolph Hearst, banker Charles Gates Dawes, German engineer and automobile designer Ferdinand Porsche.