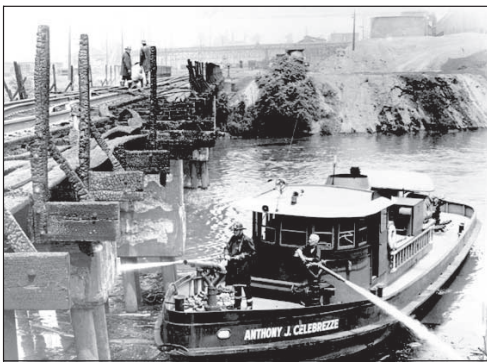


OUR CENTURY

1969

AT A GLANCE



PLAIN DEALER FILE

A Cleveland fireboat hoses down a charred railroad trestle after the June 22 fire on the Cuyahoga River.

A fire followed by a lot of bad jokes

It wasn't a big story at the time. The Plain Dealer gave it six paragraphs. Oil-soaked debris drifted down the Cuyahoga River and lodged against two railroad bridges at the foot of Campbell Rd. Apparently "hot box" sparks from a passing train set off a fire that did \$50,000 damage on June 22.

The same bridges had burned in 1949, and far more damaging river fires burned in 1948 and 1952. Hundreds of thousands of Clevelanders lined the banks to watch a 1914 fire that consumed bridges and lumberyards. Only a providential shift in the wind stopped that one short of downtown.

The growth of the 1969 fire into a legend began when Mayor Carl Stokes called a press conference at the bridges two days later. He said, "There may be some wry humor in the phrase 'The river is a fire hazard,' but it's a terrible reflection on the city around it if it does indeed become one."

Stokes made similar statements when Interior Secretary Walter Hickel brought one of his "clean water" conferences to Cleveland, and later before a congressional committee with the national media covering. Clevelanders quickly forgot the fire, but it began to show up in national publications as a horrible example of water pollution.

The Glenville shoot-out and the bitterness of the Police Department haunted Stokes. Robert Kelly, who had been Mayor Ralph Locher's service director but had never before run for office, made that the main issue in the Democratic mayoral primary. Stokes, showing impressive strength among whites, defeated him 92,000 to 60,000.

In November, Stokes defeated Republican Ralph Perk, Cuyahoga County auditor, by 3,451 votes out of 239,000.

Among seven new council members was a brash 23-year-old from Tremont, Dennis Kucinich.

It was a gruesome murder — a judge's wife shot to death in her own bedroom. Euclid Municipal Judge Robert Steele told police he was working in his den in the early hours of Jan. 9. His wife, Marlene, was sleeping nearby, his sons upstairs.

He thought he heard a noise upstairs, he said. He went up to check on the boys and heard a "pop! pop!" downstairs, then the front door slamming. He ran down and found Marlene bleeding from bullet wounds to her head.

Some of the circumstances were similar to Marilyn Sheppard's murder 15 years earlier. Steele had been carrying on an affair with Barbara Swartz, a court employee. Police were suspicious of him, but a paraffin test showed he had not fired a gun and a lie-detector test did not show he was lying when he denied involvement.

Three months later, Steele and Swartz married. Police kept the case open.

An era ended on Sept. 28 when Euclid Beach closed for the last time. It had opened in 1896 and had been run by the Humphrey family since 1901. It was done in, according to the "Encyclopedia of Cleveland History," by "changing lifestyles, lake pollution, rising industrial costs and racial incidents."

To Clevelanders growing up in the postwar years, the Indians had been the mellifluous voice of Jimmy Dudley, who had been in the broadcast booth since the pennant year of 1948. The front office decided it was time to replace him. His successor: one-time south-paw fireballer Herb Score.

Manager Alvin Dark had brought the Indians back to a winning record in 1968. Hopes were dashed, as usual. The team lost 99 games to finish last in the six-team East Division.

A rivalry between Dark and Gabe Paul came to a climax in July when principal owner Vernon Stouffer relieved Paul of general manager duties, though he remained as president. Dark and Paul had clashed when Dark pushed through a trade for Ken Harrelson, who hit 27 home runs but batted only .222.

The Browns won the Century Division with a 10-3-1 record, then defeated the Dallas Cowboys, 38-14, for the Eastern Conference title. Despite a cold rain, Bill Nelsen completed 18 of 27 passes, eight of them to Paul Warfield. The opponent for the National Football League championship was the Minnesota Vikings, who outmuscled the Browns, 27-7.

A new "sports magnate" arrived on the scene — an energetic young go-getter named Nick Mileti, who led a group that bought the Barons and the Arena. Mileti delighted in welcoming hockey fans to games in a full-length fur coat.

Holiday storm kills 51

By Fred McGunagle

It was so sudden. I remember a barbershop quartet was singing. Then it was rain. Then sleet. Then hail. Then the wind.

— Kenneth Nieberling, waiting for the fireworks at Lakewood Park.

At 7:55, everything went still. The flags dropped. Then, suddenly, the wind reversed itself and blew from the north. In a matter of moments, the storm struck.

— Frank Chokel, director of the Festival of Freedom in Edgewater Park.

Some people — kids mostly — were lying down right on the midway. Older people, like parents, were running all over.

— Lonnie Lett, at the Mardi Gras in Fairport Harbor.

We saw this wall of water — not rain but a wall of water — coming up the lake seven minutes before it hit us. I thought the body of the lake had been raised skyward and was coming at us.

— John Frankel, 29th-floor resident of Winton Place in Lakewood

It couldn't have hit at a worse time — a Friday night when 20,000 people were in Edgewater Park for a Fourth of July celebration, thousands more in Lakewood Park. Hundreds of boats were offshore, waiting for the fireworks. Tens of thousands of Greater Clevelanders were at events like the Mardi Gras or picnicking or playing ball in parks.

Then came the deluge. Kenneth Rogers, a sailor home on leave, and Debbie Bianchi, his fiancée, were running from Edgewater when a tree crashed down, killing both. Another tree killed Joanne Geneva. Greta Schwartz and Dagmar Dolejs were killed by trees at Lakewood Park. Elmer Wachhaus and Sam Butler were electrocuted by downed wires. Karen Maciel was killed when her car struck a fallen tree in Ravenna.

A tornado struck Perry Township, blowing one house from its foundation; the Lake County sheriff's office sent all of its men to evacuate residents. Sixty families were forced to leave their homes in Willoughby when a gas main broke. The wind ripped the tent at Musicarnival, where 2,500 were watching Ann Corio in "This Was Burlesque."

Part of the roof of the Normandy Towers in Euclid was ripped off, landing in the parking lot. The roof gave way at Westbrook Village Apartments in Brooklyn, flooding the top floors. Windows were blown out across the area.

Parents frantically searched for children. The injured filled emergency rooms, where doctors and nurses worked with emergency power. Intersections were hubcap-deep in water. Street lights and traffic lights were out. Fallen trees, downed wires and broken glass made streets impassable. Burglar alarms were ringing.

The damage was greatest in Lakewood. Service Department workers called off a strike and returned to start the cleanup. They were joined by 125 National Guardsmen. Gov. James Rhodes flew in to tour the city with Mayor Robert Lawther.

Some of the boaters off Edgewater had seen the storm coming and crashed their craft through a temporary breakwater set up to protect swimmers. Others were adrift on the lake amid 10-foot waves. The Coast Guard sent eight cutters, eight helicopters and an airplane to search for them, while frantic relatives phoned to report them missing. Electric utility companies from three states sent crews to help the Illuminating Co. restore service to 185,000 custom-



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Charles Carpenter of Lakewood pulls boaters from a cabin cruiser battered by the sudden July 4 storm. Below, flooding in Vermilion, and neighbors gather around a car smashed by a fallen tree near the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Willoughby. Bottom, a state highway patrolman surveys damage to a house in Perry.

ers. Telephones were out in many areas.

The damage was statewide. With no roads open, thousands of vacationers were stranded in Sandusky. Some slept atop washers and dryers in a Laundromat. Police in boats cruised the streets of Perkins Township to rescue residents trapped in their homes. Five people were plucked by a helicopter from their roof in Vermilion.

From the air, Norwalk looked like "an ocean with trees." A reservoir had collapsed, dumping hundreds of thousands of gallons of water into the city. Sheriff's deputies worked by candlelight in a makeshift headquarters.

Thunder and lightning continued through the night. By 6 a.m., when the Coast Guard resumed its search, 200 boats were still missing. Gov. Rhodes said 20 percent of the state was under water.

A 17-year-old went swimming in a flooded intersection in Canton and was swept into a storm sewer. He drowned. So did his 20-year-old brother, who tried to save him. Two police officers in a boat rescued six people in Wayne County, but the boat overturned and all eight drowned. Flood waters covered cars in Fremont. The Vermilion River was 13 feet over flood stage. Huron was without light and water — at least drinkable water.

By Tuesday, electricity had been restored in the CEI area, but 5,000 Ohio Bell customers were still without phone service. The guardsmen in Lakewood were dismissed. Guardsmen stayed until Friday in Bellevue, where 150 residents were still homeless and the mayor said it would take another week to get rid of flood waters and backed-up sewage.

It was "the most devastating summer flooding in Ohio history," according to Thom Schmidlin's "Thunder in the Heartland: A Chronicle of Outstanding Weather Events in Ohio." Rainfall the night of July 4 was 10-14 inches in a 100-mile band from Ottawa County to Wayne County.

Damage totaled \$65 million, with 32 homes destroyed and 10,000 damaged. More than 300 mobile homes and 180 farm buildings were destroyed. So were nearly 700 boats; 7,000 cars were destroyed or damaged. Rhodes asked for federal aid for the worst-hit cities and for farmers in 14 counties whose fields were submerged.

The death toll was 51, mostly by drowning. Miraculously, only three people died on the lake — two swept from a rubber raft off Geneva-on-the-Lake and a boater killed by lightning in Maumee Bay.

Kenneth Rogers and Debbie Bianchi, who were among the first victims, were buried wearing the wedding bands they had purchased for their marriage ceremony.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



LOOKING AT A YEAR

Feb. 3: Yasser Arafat becomes leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mar. 17: Golda Meir is sworn in as Israel's fourth premier.

Mar. 28: Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower dies of chronic coronary disease.

Apr. 4: CBS cancels the controversial "Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour."

July 20: Astronaut Neil A. Armstrong walks on the moon.

July 30: Mary Jo Kopechne drowns when a car driven by Sen. Edward Kennedy plunges off a bridge at Chappaquiddick, Mass.

Aug. 17: More than 400,000 people attend a music festival in Woodstock, N.Y.

Oct. 16: The "miracle" New York Mets win baseball's World Series.

Nov. 15: More than 250,000 anti-war protesters march on Washington.

Born: Ken Griffey Jr., Steffi Graf, Yahoo co-founder Jerry Yang.

Died: Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh, actress and singer Judy Garland, British actor Boris Karloff, American film star Robert Taylor, United Mine Workers President John L. Lewis, Joseph Kennedy.