

# OUR CENTURY

## 1901

### AT A GLANCE



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An early version of the roller coaster at Euclid Beach Park.

## Here's toasting rosy year and century

The Cleveland Chamber of Commerce welcomed in the new century with a grand buffet and a toast to the city's future, which, at the time, was nothing but rosy. A Plain Dealer editorial predicted "a year of big things, a record-breaker in all lines of manufacturing." By May, that prediction already had come true, even as a real estate boom prompted investors to pour their money into property in the city instead of stocks.

The Humphrey family acquired a small amusement park opened with the promise to make it one of the premier fun parks in the country. Enlisting the support of the clergy, newspapers and streetcar lines, popcorn maker D.S. Humphrey leased even more lake-front land to expand his dream project, Euclid Beach Park.

Funding the project with revenues from his 150-acre popcorn farm, Humphrey began the installation of new rides and amusements, and opened a campground at his "fairylane with a free gate." Almost immediately, the 90-acre park was a huge success, and it remained one of Cleveland's most popular places to visit for more than a half-century.

Humphrey died in 1932, but the business remained in the family until declining revenues forced Euclid Beach Park's closing in 1969. Today, only the archway entrance survives at the Lakeshore Blvd. property. The rest of what once was the park is occupied by three high-rises for the elderly, a nursing home, a state park, a trailer park and a few retail outlets.



Carnegie

Andrew Carnegie agreed to pay for the construction of seven branch libraries in the city. In return, the Cleveland Public Library Board agreed to spend a total of \$25,000 annually to support the new libraries.

The White Motor Corp. moved into its new office complex on St. Clair Ave. and E. 79th St., the same location that later would house the company's huge plant. A year earlier, White Motor had unveiled a steam-powered automobile. The company would grow over the years to become Cleveland's largest manufacturer and a global leader in the making of trucks and buses.

On Sept. 1, the worst rainstorm since the Civil War hit the city. The eight-hour downpour ruined many homes and some families had to be rescued by boat. Damage was estimated at \$1 million.

*Editor's note: On Feb. 1, this page began a weekly look back at each year of the 1900s. In chronological order and with an emphasis on Greater Cleveland, "Our Century" examines the events that made news and attempts to give a sense of what life was like in times long past. Although many sources were drawn upon, special note should be made of two important works: "Cleveland: The Making of a City," by William Ganson Rose, and "The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History," compiled and edited by David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski.*

# Cleveland elects greatest mayor

### Tom L. Johnson listens to residents, sets up parks and starts city building code

The man widely regarded as the greatest mayor in Cleveland's history also was the first of this century.

Tom L. Johnson already was wealthy when he moved to Cleveland in about 1880. Although only in his mid-20s at the time, Johnson had parlayed more than \$20,000 earned from his invention of the see-through, glass farebox into a streetcar empire that included holdings in a handful of major cities.

In Cleveland, Johnson immediately clashed with his lifelong nemesis, Marcus A. Hanna, over rights to rail lines in the city. Although eventually they arrived at an arrangement that would allow them to co-exist, Johnson and Hanna would be political and business rivals for the next 30 years. Ironically, it was from Hanna that Johnson learned the pivotal role that political influence played in the success of business interests.

"Mr. Hanna regarded politics as merely a business asset," Johnson would write years later of the national Republican Party kingpin in his autobiography, "My Story." "In the early days, I cared nothing for the political side of the game. . . . Indeed, it was a case of playing politics or getting out of the business."

Sometime in the 1880s, Johnson began reading the works of Henry George, the renowned populist and advocate of a single tax, and municipal ownership of utilities. The readings had a profound impact on Johnson and dramatically altered his views on the role of government.

In 1890 and again two years later, Johnson was elected to Congress as a Democrat from what then was the 21st District. Then, in early 1901, Democrats drafted Johnson as their candidate for mayor to replace the outgoing "Honest John" Farley, who was not seeking re-election. In the resulting campaign against Republican W.J. Akers, Johnson criss-crossed the city, holding popular tent meetings, listening to citizens' views of the role of municipal government and cham-



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Mayor Tom L. Johnson meets with young fans, surrounded by staff and lieutenants.

pioning municipal utilities, women's suffrage, just taxation, home rule for Ohio cities and the elimination of political corruption.

On May 1, Johnson was elected mayor, defeating Akers by about 6,000 votes. He immediately recruited a Cabinet of outstanding talent, including the brilliant legal adviser Newton D. Baker and, in Police Chief Fred Kohler, a man later referred to by Theodore Roosevelt as the best police chief in the nation.

To this day, Johnson's record as mayor stands as nothing short of remarkable. One of his first acts was to remove the "Keep Off the Grass" signs from the city's parks. He proceeded to build more playgrounds

and parks throughout the city. He sponsored Sunday concerts in the parks, added baseball diamonds and basketball courts, and built public bathhouses in the city's poor neighborhoods.

Reformer Lincoln Steffens would come to refer to Johnson as "the best mayor of the best-governed city in America." Among Johnson's many mayoral accomplishments, he:

- ✓ challenged the streetcar monopoly he once sought to control;
- ✓ proposed building a municipal light plant, which would come to fruition in 1914, after he had left office;
- ✓ supported construction of a West Side Market, which would open in 1912;
- ✓ helped develop the Mall plan to



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Johnson rides one of his railcars.

house all government buildings, a plan that is followed to this day;

- ✓ oversaw the drafting of the city's first comprehensive building code;
- ✓ made wholesale police reforms that were copied in cities everywhere.

Johnson was re-elected in 1903, 1905 and 1907. But in 1909, he was defeated by Republican Herman Baehr, who proved to be a barely mediocre mayor. Ironically, it was speculated that the cause of Johnson's defeat was, in large part, public weariness of the many political battles he had waged — on the public's behalf.

In early February 1911, Johnson contracted an infectious disease of the kidneys, acute nephritis. He died on April 10.

More than 200,000 people turned out when Johnson's funeral procession wound its way through downtown. Of that day, the Cleveland Leader wrote, in part, "The heart of the city stopped for two hours while the simple cortege passed through the lines of silent, grief-stricken men and women. Tears flowed down the cheeks of many men who made no effort to wipe them away, but gazed with streaming eyes on the carriage containing their friend."

Johnson was buried in Brooklyn, N.Y., next to his friend and mentor, Henry George.

## Assassin shoots President McKinley

It was a small group that met at the downtown train station on Sept. 5 to see President William McKinley. He was on his way to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, N.Y., and was to return to Cleveland in a few days for a parade of more than 15,000 Civil War veterans.

After the Republican president shook a few hands and met privately for about 20 minutes with his political adviser, U.S. Sen. Marcus Hanna, the train departed.

The next day, McKinley was attending a reception at the exposition in Buffalo when anarchist Leon Czolgosz, a handkerchief covering a gun in his right hand, fired two bullets at the president. One ricocheted off McKinley's jacket button. The other pierced his stomach.

Ironically, Czolgosz later confessed that he was motivated to murder the president after attending a lecture in Cleveland given by another anarchist, Emma Goldman.

McKinley was rushed to a nearby hospital for surgery, but gangrene and infection eventually over-

whelmed him. Eight days later, on the morning of Sept. 14, McKinley died.

The president's body was returned to Canton for burial. Six years later, it was moved to the McKinley National Memorial in that city.

Although McKinley called Canton home, he was born in Niles and moved to Canton to practice law after serving with distinction in the Civil War. After serving as Stark County prosecutor, McKinley served seven terms in Congress and two as Ohio's governor before Hanna engineered his presidential election in 1896.

During McKinley's presidency, the United States emerged as a real international power, primarily due to a quick and convincing victory in the Spanish-American War.

McKinley's assassination elevated Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency. Ironically, Roosevelt's inclusion on the Republican ticket had been opposed vigorously by Hanna, who saw his influence wane with Roosevelt in the White House.



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Public Square decked out for a procession for President William McKinley in 1901.

### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**Jan. 10:** The greatest oil strike ever in the United States was made in Beaumont, Texas, spewing a tower of oil 200 feet in the air. The Spindletop well would produce 75,000 barrels of oil a day.

**Feb. 15:** Carrie Nation went on a saloon-smashing binge in Topeka, Kan., hurling her hatchet through bar windows and enlisting an army of 500 men and women to join her rampage

through the town.

**March 13:** Steel baron Andrew Carnegie announced his retirement, promising to spend the rest of his days giving away his \$300 million fortune.

**June 24:** Paris got its first look at the works of a struggling young Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso. The paintings earned rave reviews from French art critics.

**Nov. 3:** The 2-year-old Boer War continued, even though the British army now controlled all South African cities. The Boers again rejected British settlement terms.

**Dec. 10:** Sweden awards the first Nobel Prizes. The award in physics goes to Germany's Wilhelm Roentgen for his discovery of X-rays.

**Dec. 12:** Italian physicist Guglielmo Marconi sends the first wire-

less telegraphic messages across the Atlantic Ocean. The message, which traveled 2,232 miles, was sent from Cornwall, England, to St. John's, Newfoundland.

**Born:** Linus Pauling, Louis Armstrong, Marlene Dietrich, Gary Cooper, Irene Dunn, Roy Wilkins, George Gallup, Margaret Mead, Walt Disney.

**Died:** Queen Victoria of England; former President Benjamin Harrison.

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