

OUR CENTURY

1912

AT A GLANCE

Clevelanders mourn thousands lost in wreck of Titanic

Clevelanders and newspaper readers around the world were mesmerized.

“People Take to Boats As Liner Goes Down in Sea; Passengers are afloat in open ocean with three vessels hurrying to assistance after ship hits iceberg,” was The Plain Dealer headline on Sunday, May 15.

By Monday morning, the story filled all of Page One and many inside pages. “1,500 PERISH WHEN TITANIC GOES TO BOTTOM,” was the headline describing “the greatest catastrophe in maritime history.”

The story continued to fill page after page throughout the week: Dispatches told of anguished crowds blocking streets around New York newspapers, waiting for the extra editions that came out with every bulletin. Some people stood in sunshine and pouring rain for two days, hoping for some news.

Then came the heart-rending stories transmitted by wireless from the steamer Carpathia as it rushed back to New York with survivors.

“Women in Evening Gowns Lowered Into Lifeboats as Steamship Sinks,” said one headline. Of Ohioans aboard, 11 were reported lost, nine of them men; 24 Ohioans were saved, of whom 22 were women or children.

Readers shook their heads in awe. Eighty-six years later, the story still mesmerizes their great-grandchildren.

On Feb. 22, Cleveland’s Johnny Kilbane defeated Abe Attell



Fighter Johnny Kilbane about 1912, and in 1951.

until his death in 1957.

The Naps players liked George Stovall, the first baseman who had become playing manager during the 1911 season. They didn’t like Harry Davis, who became manager when Stovall was traded to St. Louis early in 1912.

“Shoeless Joe” Jackson batted .395, shortstop Ray Chapman hit .321 after being brought up in August and Vean Gregg won 20 games. But the team slumped and, in August, Davis was replaced by center fielder Joe Birmingham. The team finished fifth, 30½ games out of first.

The city’s growth and a three-way presidential race led to a record voter registration of 93,686. Woodrow Wilson became the first Democrat to carry Ohio since before the Civil War, defeating Republican President William H. Taft and former President Theodore Roosevelt, who tried a comeback with the Bull Moose Party.

Cleveland’s population now was more than 600,000, but three-quarters of adults were ineligible to vote because they were women or noncitizens.

Ohio proficiency tests aren’t an invention of the 1990s. Here are two questions from the Boxwell-Patterson examination administered to all eighth-graders in 1912:

- ✓ “Seventeen barrels of sugar weigh 2T, 6cwt., 34lb., 8 oz. What is the weight of one barrel?”
 - ✓ “How often should baths be taken and when should the water be warm and when cold?”
- (Answers below)

On April 29, the government gave Cleveland something to remember the Maine by: It was a 6,700-pound section of a mast from the battleship, which exploded in Havana harbor in 1898. It is now mounted on a rock in Washington Park as a Spanish-American War memorial.

The 500-foot-long Seeandbee could hold 1,500 passengers on its four decks, making it the largest and most costly inland steamer. Beginning in 1913, it operated regularly between Cleveland and Buffalo (the C and B of its name). It ran until 1942, when it was acquired by the Navy and turned into the USS Wolverine, an aircraft carrier training ship.

New in 1912: Workers’ compensation, Cleveland Municipal Court, the West Side Market, the Cleveland branch of the NAACP, Weinberger Drugs (later Gray’s, now part of Rite Aid Corp.), the Euclid Avenue Temple (now Liberty Hill Baptist Church), Cleveland Music School Settlement, the Leader-News Building (now the Leader Building), the second Press Building (now part of BancOhio Building), the Riverside Plant of the Otis Steel Co. (later part of Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp. and now part of LTV Steel Co.), the Junior League, the City Club, the Central YMCA Building.

Answers to test: 272 pounds 10 ounces; Timeline Magazine, which told of the test in 1993, couldn’t find the answer, but if those studnets want a hot bath, they probably had to boil the water on the stove.

Reformist mayor takes over

Small in stature, Baker demanded big changes

By Fred McGunagle

He was 5 foot 6, 125 pounds. But from the neck up, Newton D. Baker was Cleveland’s biggest mayor.

And, as he freely acknowledged, he stood on the shoulders of former Mayor Tom L. Johnson.

Baker’s administration as mayor from 1912 to 1916 was a model of honesty and efficiency. He led the statewide battle that gave cities home rule and Cleveland the first city charter in Ohio. His terms as mayor coincided with the high point of what historians would call the Progressive Era.

He was a brilliant orator. In national politics, his speech at the 1912 Democratic National Convention was pivotal in the nomination of Woodrow Wilson. He rebuffed efforts to draft him as Wilson’s vice president, but when Baker’s second term ended, Wilson named him secretary of war, putting him in charge of U.S. troops during World War I.

As mayor, Baker not only achieved Johnson’s dream of a 3-cent streetcar fare, but got tickets down to two for 5 cents. He expanded Muny Light and brought rates down to 3 cents per kilowatt-hour. When dance halls were charging 5 cents for a three-minute dance, he opened municipal halls that charged 3 cents for five minutes.

He even arranged for a Park Department boat to fish in the lake and sell its catch for 3 cents a pound. U.S. Rep. Robert Bulkley introduced a bill in Congress for a 3-cent coin, saying it would be useful in Cleveland.

Baker’s support of municipalization led to a debate with the president of the Illuminating Co., held in the auditorium of the Chamber of Commerce. Baker declared: “I am in the house of have. I appeal on behalf of the house of want — for justice.”

The thrifty Baker kept a shoeshine kit in his office so he could shine his own shoes. He built a new city hall without graft or scandal and for half the cost of the similar county courthouse. Yet, over conservatives’ protests, he persuaded City Council to contribute \$10,000 to the new Municipal Symphony Orchestra.

He returned a season pass sent to him by the Naps. He appointed the first woman Cabinet member, Health Director Mildred Chadsey. He made ap-

pointments strictly on merit, which cost him support from fellow Democrats; Republicans helped re-elect him in 1913.

The high point of the political reform movement in Ohio was the Constitutional Convention of 1912. The 1851 Ohio Constitution called for a vote every 20 years on whether to hold another constitutional convention. In 1911, reformers campaigned for a “yes” vote under the leadership of Homer Bigelow, a Cincinnati Congregational minister who declared himself a disciple of Tom L. Johnson.

At the time, the legislature controlled what cities could and could not do. As the first president of the Ohio Municipal League, Baker led city officials seeking “home rule.” They succeeded in winning a vote for a



PLAIN DEALER FILE

Newton D. Baker: brilliant orator, reformer, honest and efficient mayor.

Meanwhile, Baker’s efforts weren’t limited to Cleveland and Ohio. He was elected a delegate to the 1912 Democratic National Convention, pledged to Woodrow Wilson; the state party belatedly adopted a unit rule binding all delegates to vote for Gov. Judson Harmon, a “favorite son.”

would not spend four years in a job where “propriety forbids one speaking his mind.”

Back in Ohio, 42 amendments proposed by the state Constitutional Convention went before Ohio voters; 34 passed, including home rule. Those rejected included women’s suffrage, which lost in rural areas and among city dwellers who feared women would vote for Prohibition.

Also defeated were regulation of outdoor advertising, legalization of voting machines, abolition of capital punishment and repeal of a dead-letter provision limiting the right to vote to whites. The last had been made meaningless by the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but prejudice died hard in rural counties.

In November, Clevelanders elected a 15-member commission, all Reform supporters, to draft a city charter. On July 1, 1913, Cleveland citizens passed a plan that, in essence, still governs the city.

Hoyt Landon Warner summed up the vote — and the triumph of reform in Ohio — in “Progressivism in Ohio, 1897-1917.” He wrote: “It was the triumph of Tom Johnson transmitted through his disciples, especially Newton Baker, that had produced the victory.”

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The thrifty Baker kept a shoeshine kit in his office so he could shine his own shoes.

convention and electing a mix of reform-minded Democrats and Republicans as delegates.

The convention submitted amendments establishing the rights of voters to initiate legislation through petitions and repeal legislation through referendums. It called for women’s suffrage, direct election of U.S. senators, election of delegates to party conventions, strict Civil Service laws, a minimum wage and the right to sue the state.

Baker’s speech at the convention not only persuaded the convention to overturn the state party’s action, but touched off a wild half-hour demonstration for Wilson that set the stage for his nomination. William Jennings Bryan, no mean orator himself, was so impressed by Baker’s eloquence that he led a movement to nominate Baker for vice president. Baker demurred on the grounds that he

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 1: Revolutionaries depose the imperialist Chinese government, replacing it with a republic headed by Sun Yat-sen.

May 17: Ty Cobb is suspended after climbing into the stands in New York and pummeling a man who had been taunting him. Cobb’s Detroit Tigers threaten to strike unless their star hitter is reinstated.

Aug. 13: A French doctor discovers, isolates and grows a microbe of cancer, prompting speculation that there soon will be a vaccine against the deadly disease.

Oct. 31: War breaks out in the Balkans as 2,000 Turks are killed by soldiers from Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro.

Born: Archibald Cox, Gene Kelly, John Cheever, Woody Guthrie, Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I), Milton Friedman, Ben Hogan, Barbara Tuchman, Wernher von Braun.

Died: Wilbur Wright, Red Cross founder Clara Barton, renowned British surgeon Joseph Lister, Salvation Army founder William Booth



Barton



Kelly

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