

OUR CENTURY

1918

The flu and the Huns

AT A GLANCE



PD FILE

Flower girls welcome returning troops with the 331st Infantry, home to Cleveland after the war.

Cleveland grows; men come home from war

The Census Bureau announced in November that the estimated population of Cleveland, as of July 1, 1918, was 810,306 — 250,000 more than the actual count in 1910. Even more astoundingly, it was 119,000 more than the estimate for July 1, 1917.

While immigration had continued through 1914, the later gain mainly was migrants from the South coming to work in booming Cleveland war industries. Some apparently returned home after the war; the 1920 count showed a population of 796,841.

The population of blacks grew from 8,448 in 1910 to 34,441, and they found it even more difficult than the white newcomers to find housing. Boarding and rooming houses were packed, and the Chamber of Commerce reported that blacks were paying 65 percent more than whites for comparable housing.

As the war ended, there was a pent-up demand for consumer products. The state announced a \$150 million program to catch up on public improvements. But officials worried whether, with no more war contracts, employers could absorb the 41,000 men returning from the war.

The transit system announced it would lay off its “conductorettes.” The Women’s Committee of the state Defense Council urged that more jobs be opened to women.

By 15,000 votes, Ohioans passed a Prohibition amendment requiring closing of all saloons by May 26, 1919, nine months ahead of national Prohibition. Some of the 1,300 saloons in Cuyahoga County said they would close immediately. The amendment had lost in all major cities but had overwhelming rural support.

Indians fans felt the Tribe might have won the 1918 pennant if not for the “work or fight” order issued by Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. The secretary announced that any players who were not in essential work after Sept. 1 would face the draft, so the major league ended its season on that date.

The Indians were 2½ games behind the foundering Red Sox and moving up rapidly when the season came to its premature end.

“The greatest football contest in the history of Cleveland is scheduled for tomorrow at League Park,” The Plain Dealer reported on Nov. 8.

The Cleveland Naval Reserve, by far the city’s best team, thanks to the war, was to play another national power, a Naval Reserve team from Chicago. Local reservists had planned to tune up against Western Reserve the previous week, but that game was canceled because of a flu quarantine at Reserve. At the last minute, a team from Detroit was brought in. Behind closed gates, the locals won 83-0.

On Nov. 8, the local unit lost a hard-fought 6-0 battle to Chicago.

Archibald M. Willard personally directed a tableau of his famous painting “The Spirit of ‘76” as a highlight of a Flag Day pageant that drew 150,000 people to Wade Park on June 14. Five months later, the Bedford-born artist died at age 82. A version of Willard’s masterpiece is on display in the lobby of City Hall.

The Hipp offered summer vaudeville for 10 and 20 cents at matinees, 20 to 35 cents in the evening. Nora Bayes opened the renamed Shubert-Colonial Theater in “Look Who’s Here.” On Dec. 11, the Cleveland Orchestra presented its first concert at Grays Armory under director Nikolai Sokoloff.

The war had been over for five days when the touring Allied War Exposition arrived in Cleveland for a nine-day stay that drew 650,000 people. They watched soldiers and sailors re-enact a battle with tanks, observation balloons and bombers. The battlefield included three miles of trenches dug on the lakefront between W. 9th and E. 9th streets.



As Cleveland boys fought in Europe, those back home fought illness

By Fred McGunagle

It may have been the most exciting six weeks in Cleveland history.

By the beginning of October 1918, the newspaper World War I “honor rolls” were showing two or three Clevelanders killed in action every day, with a half-dozen others wounded, missing or dead of disease or accidents. But the “Hun” was on the run all over Europe, sending out desperate peace feelers while the Central Powers’ smaller allies surrendered one by one.

Suddenly, a new menace appeared on the home front — a deadly new variety of influenza called the Spanish flu. The death toll soon reached 100 a day.

Nearly everyone in the area was touched by death — if not of a family member, then of a friend or neighbor. For a brief period, the area knew the terror of the plagues that swept medieval Europe.

Scarily, thrillingly, mill hands and shop girls seemed to share the dangers of their doughboys in France. The flu germ and the Hun seemed to blur together in headlines and in life as the thrill of danger and the scent of impending victory raised the city to a paroxysm of excitement.

The first Plain Dealer stories on the

epidemic, at the beginning of October, recount the outbreak at Camp Sherman near Chillicothe. The flu quickly spread across Ohio and the nation. Cleveland police announced they would arrest anyone spitting in a public place; there was an appeal for nurses to go to Camp Sherman.

Then a strange thing happened: After Oct. 12, Cleveland stories about the flu virtually disappeared from the pages of The Plain Dealer, though the Akron correspondent still reported conversion of the armory into an emergency hospital, and the sports pages reported wholesale cancellation of football games.

Apparently, the editors were trying to avoid alarming Clevelanders, though only a recluse could have been unaware of the epidemic. Here is a sampling of war and flu headlines and stories from the Cleveland Press. With ads for flavor, they bring the time vividly to life:

“1,200 NEW CASES OF FLU; 34 More Deaths Are Reported.” (Vote Ohio Dry — Vote Yes on Prohibition Nov. 5.)

“NEW ATROCITIES REVEALED.” (Read what Peruna has done for me — I had catarrh of the stomach, bowels and liver.)

“RUMORS OF REVOLUTION COME FROM GERMANY.” The “Bulgars” were abandoning the Germans.

“ALL OHIO HIT BY DRASTIC FLU ORDER. Schools and Meeting Places to be Closed Wherever Epidemic Appears.” (Be Better Looking — Take Olive Tablets.)

“CASKETS SHORT IN EPIDEMIC; Draft Deferment Asked for Casket-Makers.”

“FOE OUTFLANKED IN VALIENCIENNES.” Stores, offices and saloons were ordered to close early; courts shut down. Signs on the doors of St. John Cathedral urged the faithful to stay away. (Mothers, look at his tongue! Give him Cascaret — quick!)

“YANKS SMASH GERMAN STRONGHOLD.” The Musicians Union said members were losing more than \$20,000 a week in pay. Hollywood studios shut down because two-thirds of the theaters in the nation were closed. (Feeble Old People. Vinoli is What You Need.)

The deaths continued to mount: 76 on Oct. 26, 108 on Oct. 27.

“ALLIES TAKE 300 IN ITALY DRIVE.” Flu-masked passengers on streetcars warily eyed their fellow riders; a soup kitchen opened for children of the sick; Babies Dispensary and Hospital opened an outdoor ward so young patients could get more fresh air. (Beecham’s Pills Make Pure Blood.)

“PRESIDENT REFUSES TRUCE TO AUSTRIA.” (Carter’s Little Liver Pills for Constipation.)



The Plain Dealer headlines in October 1918 held more than just news on the impending end of World War I: An outbreak of influenza was killing thousands.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Jan. 8: President Woodrow Wilson outlines his 14 points for a post-war settlement in Europe.

Feb. 20: German troops launch a ferocious assault on Russia, hoping to force the Russians into signing a peace treaty. Three weeks later, Russia agrees to peace terms.

Mar. 31: Germany turns its atten-

tion to the West with a massive attack on British lines stationed in France. After some initial advances, the Allied line holds and German troops are forced to retreat.

June 30: The Germans begin yet another offensive in the West, but are defeated by American troops. By month’s end, the Germans were in full retreat.

Sept. 30: With German manpower dwindling, Allied forces score a series of major victories in France.

Oct. 20: Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker downs his 22d German aircraft.

Nov. 9: His army in ruins, Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates.

Nov. 11: Germany surrenders.

Born: Ingmar Bergman, Alexander

Solzhenitsyn, Ella Fitzgerald, Leonard Bernstein, William Holden, Alan Lerner, Rita Hayworth, Robert Preston, Susan Hayward, Billy Graham, Anwar Sadat, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Spiro Agnew.

Died: American poet Joyce Kilmer, French composer Claude Debussy, Austrian artist Gustav Klimt, British poet William Owen.

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