OUR CENTURY
1921

AT A GLANCE

PD FILE

The Ohio Theatre grand foyer.

Theaters take center stage

It was developer Joseph Laronge who came up with the idea of creating one of the finest theater districts in the world on Euclid Ave. between E. 14th and E. 17th streets. He convinced theater magnate Marcus Loew, and in February 1921, the Loew's syndicate opened the State and Ohio Theaters east of its 5-year-old Stillman movie theater.

The two theaters were on a single lot, 85 by 500 feet. The 3,400-seat State, intended for movies and concerts, had an Italian Renaissance lobby that, at 45 by 180 feet, was the largest in the world. The 1,400-seat Ohio was for "legitimate" theater, meaning plays. The following month, the Hanna Theater opened in the annex of the new 16-story Hanna Building. It seated 1,535 for plays. The month after that came the Allen Theater on the ground floor of the new eight-story Bulkley Building, which included something new — an attached parking garage.

The crown jewel came in November 1922 on the ground floor of Cleveland's tallest skyscraper, the 22-story Keith Building, which was topped by an electric sign proclaiming "B.F. Keith's Vaudeville." The 3,100-seat Palace Theater cost $3.5 million to build. Its ivory and gold lobby, with crystal chandeliers lighting brocaded walls, led to two marble staircases. Behind its seven-story-high stage were 48 dressing rooms with baths.

Another grand theater had opened two weeks before the State and Ohio — the majestic, 3,600-seat Park at E. 102nd St. and Euclid Ave. It soon was joined by the Circle, University and Alhambra movie theaters and the E. 105th-Euclid area became an entertainment and shopping district to rival downtown.

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The 1921 Indians' uniforms said "World Champions" on the front, but now the breaks the team got in 1920 went the other way — like the breaks to the arms of Bill Wambsganss and then his backup at second base, Harry Lunte. And to catcher Steve O'Neill's finger and then the leg of his backup, Les Nunamaker. Then in September, Tris Speaker tore knee ligaments.

Yet the Indians were only two percentage points behind the Yankees when they arrived in New York on Sept. 23. Babe Ruth, who had hit 54 home runs in 1920 to nearly triple his 1919 record of 19, already had hit 56. In the first game, he rattled three doubles off the right-field wall of the Polo Grounds, leading the Yankees to a 4-2 victory. The Tribe's George Uhle shut out the Yanks, 9-0, the next day, but then the Yankees slaughtered the Indians, 21-7.

The Indians still could return home in a virtual tie if they won the last game, but Ruth slugged his 57th and 58th homers and a double. With the Indians trailing, 8-7, in the ninth, the tying run on second, two out and darkness falling, Carl Mays struck out Steve O'Neill. The Indians were 4½ games out of first place. Ruth had 59 homers.

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When Fred Kohler was fired as police chief in 1915, he declared: "I'll be leading the Police Department down Euclid Ave. again someday." In 1921, he set the stage to make good his vow, finishing first in a seven-way race for mayor. Mayor William Fitzgerald, who had succeeded to the office when Harry L. Davis became governor, finished second; he had been tarnished by the crime wave and a critical Crime Commission report in the wake of the trials of Chief Justice William McGannon.

But in the same election at which they voted Kohler in, Clevelanders voted the office of mayor out, at least as it had been constituted. They adopted a charter amendment establishing a city manager plan, effective in January 1923. Kohler was a lame duck before he took office.

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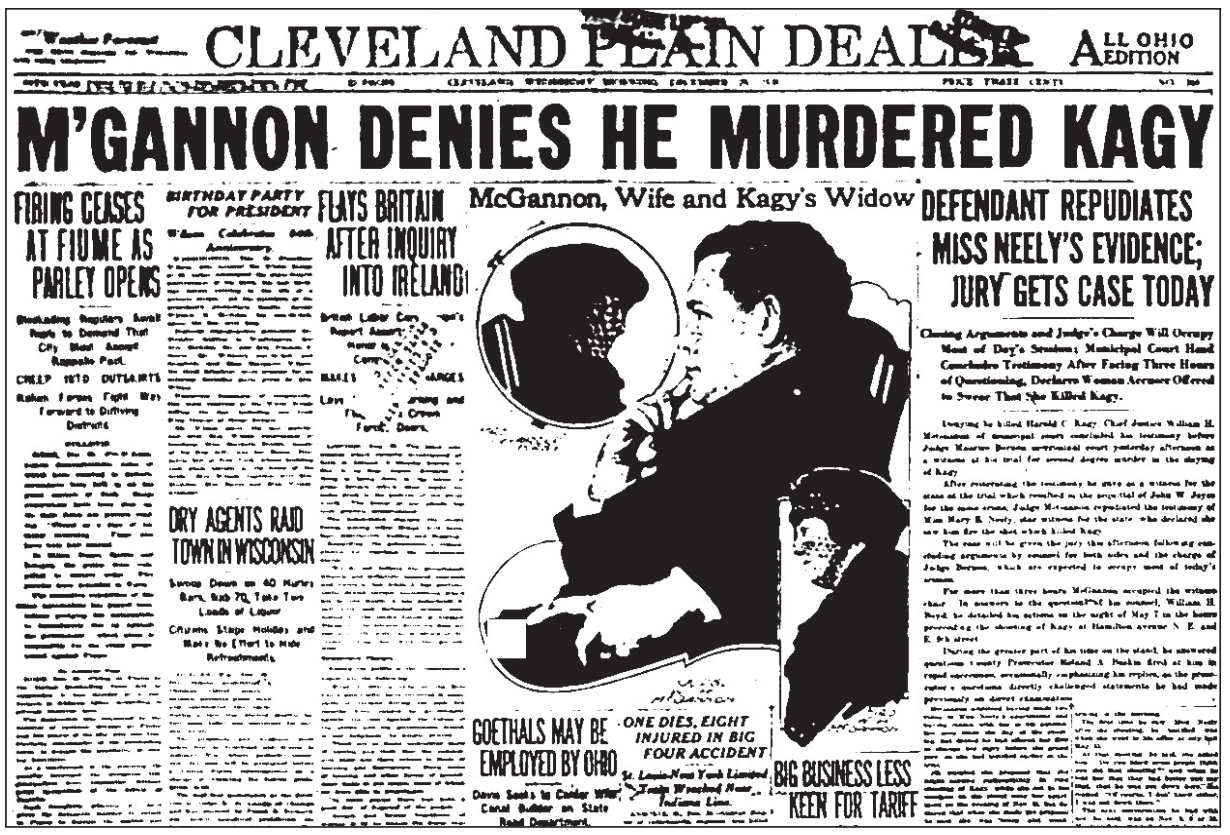
An economic downturn that began in 1920 worsened: Steel plants were operating at less than 20 percent of capacity. Political leaders preferred the term "depression" to the old one, "panic." Business was merely "depressed," they said. To Clevelanders, it made no difference. They were out of work and there was no such thing as unemployment compensation.

Courtroom drama rivets city



CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER — ALL OHIO EDITION

M'GANNON DENIES HE MURDERED KAGY

FIRING CEASES AT FIUME AS PARLEY OPENS

BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR PRESIDENT

FLAYS BRITAIN AFTER INQUIRY INTO IRELAND

McGannon, Wife and Kagy's Widow

DEFENDANT REPUDIATES MISS NEELY'S EVIDENCE; JURY GETS CASE TODAY

Closing Arguments and Judge's Charge Will Occupy Most of Day's Session; Municipal Court Head Contradicts Testimony After Facing Three Hours of Questioning, Declares Woman Accuser Offered to Swear That She Killed Kagy.

DRY AGENTS RAID TOWN IN WISCONSIN

GOETHALS MAY BE EMPLOYED BY OHIO

ONE DIES, EIGHT INJURED IN BIG FOUR ACCIDENT

BIG BUSINESS LESS KEEN FOR TARIFF

A Plain Dealer headline from December 1920 on Judge William McGannon's murder trial grabbed the Cleveland public's attention.

Municipal judge implicated in murder; 'mystery witness' testifies

By Fred McGunagle

As Cleveland moved into the Roaring '20s, law and order seemed to break down. Robberies and murders filled the headlines.

The sensational crimes produced sensational trials, with the most sensational of all a series of four climaxing in 1921. All involved William McGannon, chief justice of Cleveland Municipal Court — the first as a witness, the last three as defendant.

At 54, McGannon had built a national reputation as a jurist, and he was regarded as the man to beat in the 1921 mayoral election. So police were shocked on a Saturday night in May 1920 when they found his black Cadillac abandoned at E. 9th St. and Hamilton Ave., where a garage owner named Harold Kagy had just been shot. The corner, now part of the Galleria shopping center site, was then a galleria of speakeasies.

When police asked Kagy who shot him, he gasped out "Johnny Joyce," the name of a bail bondsman with a record of petty crimes. When police came to McGannon's home, he greeted them in his bathrobe and told a story of driving around with his friend Kagy to check out a problem with his car. On the East Side, he said, they encountered a drunken Joyce, who insisted that they drive him downtown. McGannon said he got out at E. 9th St. and Euclid Ave. to catch a streetcar home while Kagy took the car to his garage.

Joyce turned himself in the next morning. When Kagy identified him from his hospital bed, Joyce insisted, "I didn't do it, Kagy. Why don't you tell them who it really was?" Kagy continued to maintain it was Joyce, and two weeks later, he died.

As Joyce told the story on the stand at his murder trial, he, McGannon and Kagy all had been drinking and McGannon and Kagy had argued about money. When the three got out of McGannon's car at 9th and Hamilton Ave., Joyce said, he staggered off to sleep in a nearby basement. He maintained he did not shoot Kagy and didn't know who did.

Several witnesses testified that a man who had been seen hurrying away from the shooting scene was McGannon, and one said he saw McGannon fire the shot. McGannon insisted he was not there, but the jury, after five hours' deliberation, found Joyce not guilty. The prosecutor promptly indicted McGannon.

The courtroom at McGannon's murder trial was so crowded that those left standing could hardly breathe. The word had spread that the state had a "mystery witness." It turned out to be Mary Neely, a prim, 39-year-old practical nurse wearing a fur coat and a sailor-style hat.

"For more than two hours," The Plain Dealer reported, "the crowd which filled the courtroom almost to suffocation stood motionless while Miss Neely told of how she stood, two blocks away, and saw Judge McGannon pull something from his pocket. Simultaneously, a shot rang out. Then Harold Kagy lurched forward."

It turned out that she had been following McGannon since 9:10 a.m. the day of the shooting, when she saw him and Kagy leave an apartment building on E. 85th St. She had known McGannon for 16 years, she said.

In the early years, she had seen him almost daily, but in recent years, only rarely. The trial judge would not allow questions about what went on at their meetings.

McGannon, however, produced a string of witnesses who testified that they saw him on Euclid Ave. at the time of the shooting. None had come forward before. "All of a sudden, they spring up like mushrooms," the prosecutor scoffed.

The jury took 53 ballots before reporting that it was hopelessly deadlocked. A new trial was set immediately. Once again, Mary Neely, in the same sailor hat and fur coat, was the star witness. Once more, she shocked the spectators crowded into the courtroom. Asked to describe the murder night, she said over and over, "I don't remember."

Finally, asked if she had seen McGannon that night, she started to answer, hesitated, then lapsed into a long silence. Told by the judge that she must answer, she blurted, "I refuse to answer because in doing so, I might disgrace or incriminate myself — Judge McGannon is not guilty of the murder of Harold Kagy."

The judge called her to the bench, where she whispered her reason to him. He ruled that she need not answer the question.

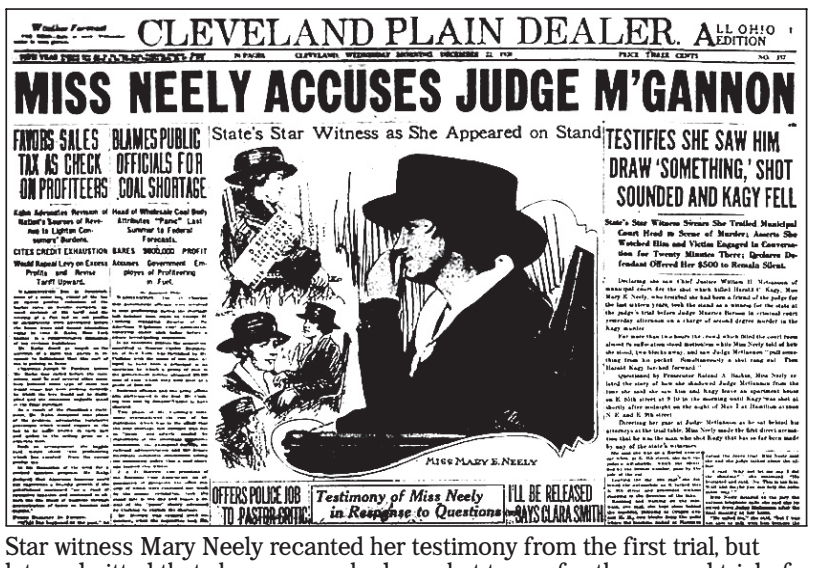
This time, the jury took eight ballots more than 20 hours before coming up with a verdict: not guilty. McGannon walked out a free man — but not for long. The prosecutor obtained indictments for perjury against McGannon, Neely and six of McGannon's witnesses, not to mention two witnesses in the Joyce trial.

The fourth trial was an anticlimax. Neely repeated her testimony from the first trial that she had seen McGannon shoot Kagy, and added that McGannon had coached her on her answers for his second trial. She agreed to recant, she said, for $110 and the promise McGannon was to "give up a certain friend, to be more attentive to his wife, to go to church and to be a better man."

The jury at first said it could not reach a decision. Sent back, it returned with a guilty verdict. McGannon stood. "I told the truth when I sat on that witness stand," he insisted. "Almighty God knows I told the truth." As he left the courtroom, he raised his hand over his head and declared, "As there is a Jesus Christ in heaven, he will make these people suffer as I have suffered!"

Because of his previous acquittal, McGannon could not be retried for murder. He served 19 months on the perjury charge. On his release, he moved to Chicago, where he clerked for a law firm until his death in 1928. Mary Neely died the year after the trial.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



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MISS NEELY ACCUSES JUDGE M'GANNON

State's Star Witness as She Appeared on Stand

FAVORS SALES TAX AS CHECK ON PROFITEERS

BLAMES PUBLIC OFFICIALS FOR COAL SHORTAGE

TESTIFIES SHE SAW HIM DRAW 'SOMETHING,' SHOT SOUNDED AND KAGY FELL

MISS MARY E. NEELY

OFFERS POLICE JOB TO PASTOR-CRITIC

Testimony of Miss Neely in Response to Questions

I'LL BE RELEASED SAYS CLARA SMITH

Star witness Mary Neely recanted her testimony from the first trial, but later admitted that she was coached on what to say for the second trial of Judge William McGannon.

LOOKING AT A YEAR

March 8: Allied troops occupy Germany after the German government refuses to pay reparations of $56 billion over a 42-year period.

April 15: A two-week strike by miners in Britain paralyzes industry. The strike does not end until late June.

June 1: 85 people die during a race riot in Tulsa, Okla.

July 24: Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti are found guilty of murdering a shoe factory guard in Massachusetts.

Sept. 19: Hollywood's big three — Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford — are met by huge and adoring crowds as they arrive in Paris as part of a two-week publicity tour of Europe to promote their latest films.

Nov. 7: Benito Mussolini takes control of Italy's National Facist Party.

Nov. 11: America's unknown soldier from World War I lies in state in the Capitol rotunda.

Dec. 1: French "gentleman" Henri Desire Landru, nicknamed "Bluebeard," is sentenced to death after being convicted of murdering numerous women after they agreed to marry him.

Born: John Glenn, Daniel Berrigan, Alex Haley, Betty Friedan, Louis Harris, Andrei Sakharov.

Died: Italian opera star Enrico Caruso, British feminist Emily Davies; Lady Randolph Churchill, mother of Winston.