

# OUR CENTURY

## 1926

### AT A GLANCE

#### Gardens honor early Cleveland ethnic groups

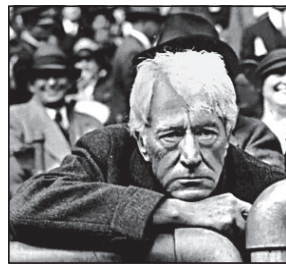
It was Leo Weidenthal, The Plain Dealer's City Hall reporter, who first suggested honoring the ethnic groups that built Cleveland with a series of gardens. That was in 1916, at the dedication of the Shakespeare Garden in Rockefeller Park.

There was a backlash against "foreigners" during World War I and the "Red Scare" that followed, but by 1926, passions had calmed and the Cultural Garden League (now Federation) was formed "to encourage friendly intercourse, to beautify our civic parks, to memorialize our culture heroes and to inculcate appreciation of other cultures."

On May 5, Chaim Nachman Bialik planted three cedars of Lebanon at a site designated for a Hebrew cultural garden. It quickly was followed by German, Italian, Lithuanian, Slovak and Ukrainian gardens.

Most of the heroes of the 1920 World Series were gone, and the Indians had fallen into the second division in 1925. But they came roaring back in 1926. First baseman George Burns batted .358 with a major-league record 64 doubles and was named the American League's most valuable player. George Uhle had a record of 27-11 with a 2.83 ERA. Dutch Levenson won 16, including complete-game victories in both ends of a doubleheader with the Red Sox, something no other pitcher has done.

In mid-September, the Indians trailed the Yankees — loaded with six future Hall-of-



Landis

Famers — by only five games with a six-game series coming up at Dunn Field. The Yankees beat Uhle in the opener, but in the next day's doubleheader, Levenson and Garland Buckeye pitched back-to-back two-

hitters. The pitching of Joe Shaute and Uhle shut down the Yankees the next two days.

Now the Indians were only one game back, but Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig homered against Levenson and the Yankees won the final game, 8-3. The Indians finished second, three games behind.

A month later, Tris Speaker announced his retirement as a player and resigned as manager. A month later, Ty Cobb resigned as player-manager of the Detroit Tigers. It turned out that both had been accused of conspiring to fix a Detroit-Cleveland game in 1919.

Judge Kennesaw Mountain Landis, who had been appointed baseball's first commissioner in the wake of the Black Sox scandal, eventually cleared them. Speaker played the next year with Washington and Cobb with Philadelphia. Both were named to the Hall of Fame, Cobb in 1936 and Speaker in 1937.

Prohibition enforcement was as controversial in the suburbs as in Cleveland. In Euclid, Mayor Charles Ely summoned the Village Council to a midnight meeting to fire Police Chief Elmer Hill. Without telling Ely, Hill had brought in state prohibition agent Martin Bruder and University Heights police to help him raid three homes in which he believed speakeasies were operating.

He said he took the step because every time he tried to execute a search warrant issued in Euclid, the suspects had been tipped off about the raid. He picked the University Heights squad because it seemed to be "free of taint." Nevertheless, the raids failed — the three places raided appeared to have been tipped off.

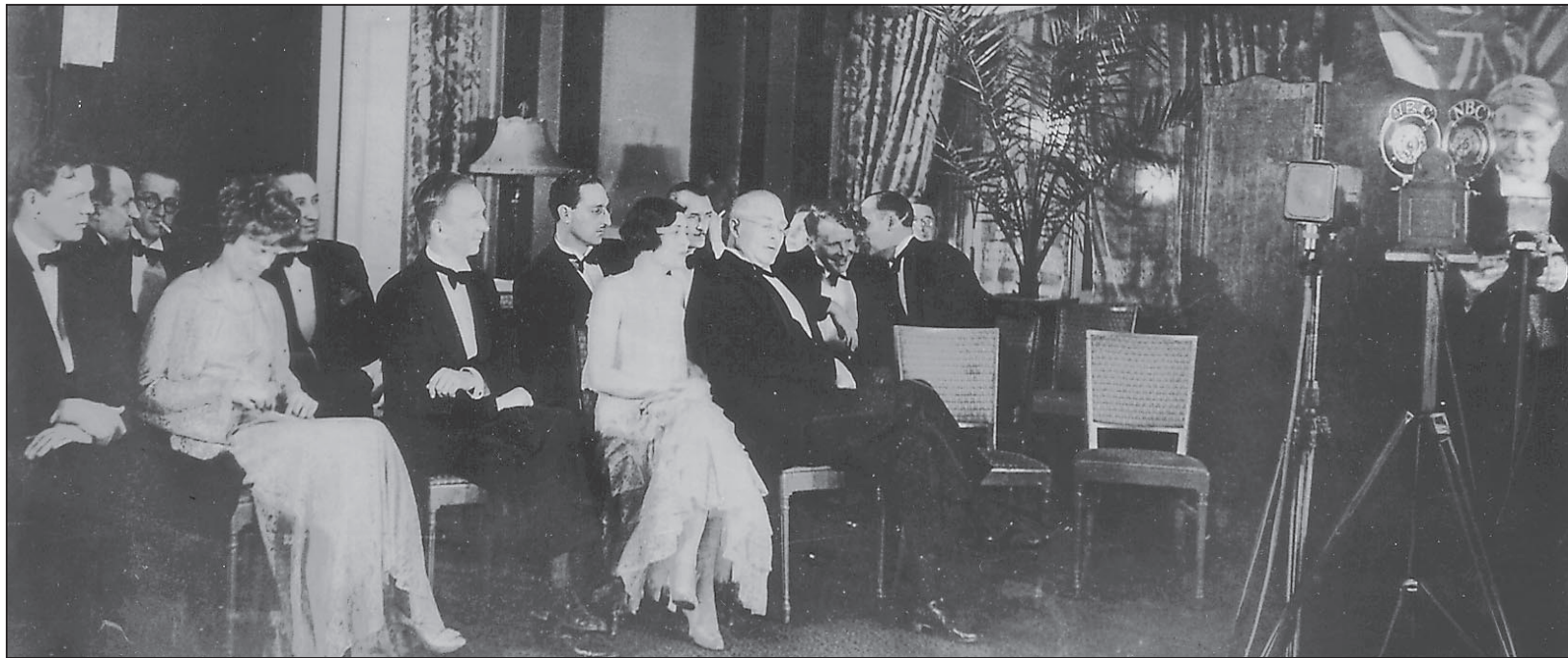
Cleveland no longer had the National Football League Bulldogs, but it had a team in the new American Football League. The Cleveland Panthers started well, defeating Red Grange and his New York All-Americans, 10-0, before 22,000 fans at Luna Park, and winning two of the next three games.

Only 1,000 Clevelanders turned out for the Panthers' Oct. 31 game. Stearns Advertising sued the team for \$1,000; a judge placed the Panthers in receivership. The team disbanded, stranding the players in Philadelphia.

The YMCA had been offering engineering courses as the Cleveland School of Technology since 1921. In 1926, Sereno P. Fenn, a Sherwin-Williams Co. executive and former YMCA president, donated \$100,000 for a new building.

The school changed its name to Fenn College in 1930. In 1965, it became the backbone of Cleveland State University.

# On the air and in our homes



PLAIN DEALER FILE

The first NBC Radio broadcast took place on Nov. 15, 1926, from the Grand Ballroom of the original Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, now the site of the Empire State Building. One-thousand guests turned out for the broadcast, including (far left) Charles A. Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, and about 2 million people tuned in. The program, which featured Will Rogers and the vaudeville team of Weber and Fields, was carried by 25 stations in 21 cities.

## Radio captures Cleveland's fancy; everyone tries to cash in on novelty

By Fred McGunagle

Americans had a new entertainment medium, one that came right into their living rooms. It created a hot, new industry to drive the booming economy. Naturally, Cleveland — "the Fifth City," as it proudly called itself — was at the forefront both artistically and economically.

Radio sales had amounted to less than \$2 million in 1920, the year that an announcer at KDKA in Pittsburgh read presidential vote totals over the air. By 1922, when WEF in New York carried the first commercial — a 10-minute, \$50 pitch for a real estate development — sales were \$60 million, mainly to hobbyists who moved up from homemade crystal sets and whose earphones were now able to pick up distant cities.

By 1926, sales topped \$500 million, and Cleveland trailed only New York and Chicago in production. There were 20 local manufacturers whose business was confined to radios. Companies in other industries, such as Willard Storage Battery Co., Na-



PLAIN DEALER FILE

WTAM announcers during a Christmas fund-raising broadcast in 1931.

tional Electric Lamp Association and National Carbon Co. also were making radios. H. Lesser & Co. advertised a Freshman 5-Tube Model "in beautiful mahogany console" for \$99.50, the equivalent of more than \$1,000 today.

One improvement that spurred sales was the "loud speaker," a horn up to 30 inches wide that allowed more than one person to listen to a set. Entire families gathered around the new purchase, which held a place of honor in the living room. The man of the house usually had the task of minding the contraption's many knobs, battling static, fade-out and strange whistles.

WTAM had by far the most programs of the three local stations, starting with a special weather report for aviators at 12:30 p.m., and then an hour of Ernest H. Hunter at the State Theater organ. The station came back on the air with a brief rundown of baseball scores at 4:05 p.m., and then from 6:30 to 11:30 p.m., hotel orchestras, talk and organ recitals. WEAR listed market reports, weather forecasts and time signals, while the featured presentation of WHK, Cleveland's oldest station, was the International Bible Students Association Program. (A fourth station, WJAY, came on the air Jan. 1, 1927.)

On March 28, 1926, WTAM broadcast the largest production created for radio to date. "The Battle of Gettysburg," written and directed by William Ganson Rose, was an hour-long show staged in Public Hall with hundreds of extras from the Cleveland Stunt Club loudly marching, beating bass drums to simulate cannon fire and hitting leather upholstery with rattan sticks for rifle fire. Also involved were three companies of the 145th Infantry, three military bands and buglers.

More typical of WTAM's specials, however, was the broadcast of the cattle auction at the Junior Live Stock Show and Meat Exposition in Public Hall — to be conducted, the station announced, by "Col. Fred Ruppert, famous auctioneer."

David Sarnoff recognized that it would take better programming if he wanted to boost sales of the Radiola radios made by his company, the Radio Corp. of America. RCA already



PLAIN DEALER FILE

A gypsy group broadcasting from WHK in 1923. An ancient horn microphone is at right.

had created one of the two national showcase stations in New York, WJZ. The other was WEAF, owned by American Telephone & Telegraph Co., which saw radio as a natural extension of its business.

Sarnoff proposed a deal: If AT&T got out of the radio business, RCA promised to use its lines exclusively for a national network Sarnoff proposed to start. AT&T accepted, and in September 1926, Sarnoff formed the National Broadcasting Co.

It went on the air Nov. 15, with 3,600 miles of AT&T wire. Millions of Americans listened for four hours as Graham McNamee, from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, introduced stars from around the country. In Independence, Kansas, Will Rogers did a monologue. Ben Bernie, Vincent Lopez and B.A. Rolfe led their orchestras.

The cost was an unheard-of \$50,000, including more than \$35,000 to performers. The Associated Press reported that the network soon would reach "from coast to coast and from the gulf to the Canadian forests," and it all would be free to listeners: "Advertisers are expected to foot the costs with a margin of profits to the broadcasting companies."

It worked. Radio sales boomed to \$842 million by 1929, though still only

30 percent of households had radios. RCA — the market called it "Radio" — was the hottest stock on the New York Exchange. Sarnoff built another network around the stations he bought from AT&T. He called the first group the "Red Network," forerunner of NBC. The second group was the "Blue Network," which in the 1950s became the American Broadcasting Co. In 1928, William S. Paley formed the Columbia Broadcasting System, with WHK as an affiliate.

Early network programs reflected their sponsors: the Clicquot Club Eskimos, A&P Gypsies, Ipana Troubadors. Rapt families listened around expensive consoles. Critics bemoaned the dying art of conversation. Record sales fell. Radio became America's most popular form of entertainment.

Radio changed the country in other ways, too. Regional dialects started to merge into the "middle American" favored by announcers. Trends spread rapidly across the country. Politicians had a new way to reach voters, as Franklin Roosevelt was quick to appreciate. Instantaneous coast-to-coast communication became commonplace. For the first time, the nation was truly becoming *e pluribus unum* — one out of many.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.

### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**Jan. 27:** Scottish inventor M. John Baird demonstrates a new machine capable of wireless transmissions of pictures, calling his invention a "television."

**April 25:** The American Association of University Professors issues a report saying college football promotes

drinking, dishonesty and neglect of academics.

**July 2:** The House Judiciary Committee hears testimony and evidence that Prohibition is responsible for an increase in crime.

**Aug. 6:** New Yorker Gertrude Ederle becomes the first woman to swim the English Channel.

**Sept. 23:** Gene Tunney defeats Jack Dempsey to win the world heavyweight boxing crown before a crowd of 130,000 in Philadelphia.

**Dec. 14:** Missing for nine days, mystery writer Agatha Christie is found alive and well, but suffering from amnesia.

**Born:** Queen Elizabeth II, Fidel

Castro, Bob Haldeman, Lloyd Bentsen, Marilyn Monroe, Ralph Abernathy.

**Died:** Labor leader Eugene Debs, French artist Claude Monet, film star Rudolph Valentino, sharpshooter Annie Oakley, escape artist Harry Houdini.

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