

# OUR CENTURY

## 1936

### AT A GLANCE



Jesse Owens and presidential candidate Alf Landon in 1936.

### Owens dashes Hitler's hopes for Olympics

Adolf Hitler was riding high. He had forced Austria into union with Germany and signed treaties with his Italian wannabe, Benito Mussolini, and with the generals who had taken charge in Japan. Together, the "Axis Powers" were a new international force.

Hitler was counting on the Olympics in Berlin to show the superiority of the Aryan race over the rest of the world.

He didn't count on a 22-year-old from Cleveland's East Technical High School and Ohio State University. James Cleveland "Jesse" Owens won gold medals in the 100- and 200-meter sprints, the long jump and as part of the 400-meter relay team. Hitler, infuriated, left the stadium rather than congratulate Owens or the nine other black Americans who won medals.

Owens became a national hero, but that didn't translate into riches. To support himself, he ran exhibition races against horses and dogs, barnstormed with the Harlem Globetrotters, tap-danced with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and worked as a janitor. Later, he was named "director of Negro personnel" for Ford Motor Co. He died in 1980.

The 1924 Republican National Convention in Public Hall had produced a victorious presidential candidate, and the Republicans came back to Cleveland in 1936. The winner on the first ballot was Gov. Alfred Landon of Kansas, with Chicago newspaper publisher Frank Knox as his running mate. Landon sent a telegram accepting the nomination.

Billing himself as an "everyday American," Landon promised the widest radio campaign to date. Later in the month, Roosevelt appeared before thousands of cheering Democrats in Philadelphia's Franklin Field to accept renomination.

It looked as if voters were against him when Maine voted for Landon at its September presidential election. Landon drew an enthusiastic crowd of 17,000 when he finally appeared in Public Hall in October.

A July 6 exhibition against the St. Louis Cardinals gave the Indians a chance to see what their latest prospect, a 17-year-old Iowa farm boy, could do. Kicking his left leg high in the air, Bob Feller struck out eight Cardinals in three innings with blazing fastballs.

In his first American League start, as the youngest player to date in a Major League game, Feller struck out 15 St. Louis Browns. Three weeks later, he struck out 17 Philadelphia Athletics to tie Dizzy Dean's Major League record. He also walked nine, hit one and allowed nine stolen bases; opponents learned to stay loose in the batter's box.

Feller wound up with a 9-7 record and 150 strikeouts in 148 innings. The Indians had violated rules by signing a sandlot player to a Major League contract. He might have been declared a free agent, eligible to sign with the highest bidder. The Yankees, Red Sox and Tigers reportedly were willing to pay him \$250,000, but Feller's father announced he and his son would sue if their contract with the Indians was broken. Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis fined the team \$7,500, but let Feller stay.

His arrival made a good team better. First baseman Hal Trosky hit 43 home runs for a Tribe record and batted .343. Earl Averill hit .378, second in the league, with 28 homers. Outfielder Roy "Stormy" Weatherly hit .337. Johnny Allen, whose temper was as hot as his fastball, won 20 games. But a lack of other pitchers, a broken jaw that put catcher Frankie Pytlak out for the season and an inability to win on the road left the Indians in fourth place, 19 games behind the Yankees.

The Cleveland Women's Orchestra gave its debut performance at Severance Hall on Nov. 17, 1936. Its founder, Hyman Schandler, was a member of the Cleveland Orchestra and a teacher at the Cleveland Music Settlement.

# Cleveland hosts a big bash



At left, the crowd kept the barkers in front of the Streets of the World plenty busy, milling about in front of the International settlement in 1936. In the photo at right, Billy Rose, left, Eleanor Holm and Johnny Weismuller, right, cut up for the camera during the Great Lakes Exposition.

## 7 million pass through Great Lakes Exposition; gloom of Depression lifts

By Fred McGunagle

Shaking off seven years of gloom, on June 27, Cleveland kicked off what would come to be called "the biggest bash Cleveland ever threw."

At the stroke of noon, President Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed a button on his desk in Washington and the pylon gates at E. 6th St. and St. Clair Ave. swung open. Whistles blew throughout the city, while on the lakefront, fireworks exploded as planes roared overhead and flags in tiny parachutes descended on the thousands below.

The band struck up "Columbia, Gem of the Ocean," and hundreds of carrier pigeons rose, bearing word everywhere that the Great Lakes Exposition was open. The crowd surged toward the lakefront. "They were positively merry," Roeliff Loveland wrote in the next day's Plain Dealer. "Can you imagine a crowd of Clevelanders looking merry three years ago?"

Not that prosperity had returned. Employment was up 5 percent over 1935, but was still far short of the 1929 level. Only days earlier, county commissioners once more had warned they had nearly exhausted relief funds. Mayor Harold Burton wired Gov. Martin Davey to send either more funds or the National Guard.

But 61,000 people — the first of 7 million over two years — forgot their troubles for the day as they swarmed through exhibits and sideshows. Visitors included a boatload of 1,190 Chrysler employees from Detroit, the first of more than 2 million out-of-town visitors.

For 50 cents (10 cents for children) they could hear the Cleveland Orchestra on the Mall (temporarily called Sherwin-Williams Plaza), watch Col. Stoopnagel do his show from Public Hall (temporarily Radioland) and tour exhibitions that included the world's largest light bulb (50,000 watts) at the Hall of Progress, a display of steelmaking at the Romance of Iron and Steel, exotic flowers at the Horticulture Building and Gardens, an air-conditioned motorbus complete with a drinking fountain at the Automotive Building, and royal palms, orange trees and tropical bushes at the Florida Exhibit.

For a few dollars more, they could take speedboat, paddle boat or amphibious plane rides. For a dime or a quarter, they could ride the Loop-a-

Plane, Flying Scooter and other carnival rides or see 30-foot monsters, instruments of crime and violence, monkey auto races, a midget circus and a snake show. Then there was the "Nudist Colony" show, of which Loveland observed that although "something less than customers expect, it is probably more than they should see anyway."

Visitors could eat on the showboat S.S. Moses Cleveland or at the Alpine Gardens, Mammy's Cabin, Clark's, Chin's, the Syrian Coffee Shop, Swedish Tea Room, Slovak Village Cafe and dozens of stands. For 35 cents, they could watch a condensed version of Shakespeare plays at the Globe Theater ("As You Like It" ran 42 minutes). And they could applaud swimmers and divers in a water show — though the show would be bigger and better in 1937.

The exposition was the idea of Lincoln Dickey, who had been manager of Public Hall and who, by 1936, headed the New York Convention Bureau. It was to be a 100-day celebration of Cleveland's 100th anniversary as a municipality. Dickey sold the idea to philanthropist Dudley Blos-

son, who got 100 wealthy Clevelanders to contribute \$1 million in seed money. Dickey became general manager.

The site was what is today North Coast Harbor, including the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum and the Great Lakes Science Center. But at the time, as John Vacha noted in a 1996 article in Timeline Magazine, it "served the city as a dump and some of its least fortunate citizens as an address for their Hooverville." Three thousand workers, including Works Progress Administration crews, turned the 135 acres into a fantasy land in 80 days.

Roosevelt visited the expo on Aug. 14. The welcome for his motorcade was, The Plain Dealer said, "probably the biggest demonstration that anyone ever received in Cleveland — larger even than that given Col. Charles A. Lindbergh in 1927."

After the expo drew 125,000 people on Labor Day, backers extended it another eight days. When it closed, it had drawn nearly 4 million visitors, employed 11,000 Clevelanders and had broken even, so the committee announced it would be held over. The

1937 show lost a number of exhibits, but gained the one for which the expo was best remembered: Dickey signed impresario Billy Rose to stage an expanded water show featuring Eleanor Holm, who had been kicked off the 1936 U.S. Olympic team for drinking too many glasses of champagne, and Johnny Weismuller, the Olympic swimmer who had become "Tarzan" in the movies.

Seventy-five "Aquabelles" and "Aquadudes" put on a swimming, diving and water ballet show featuring Holm in a blue swimsuit with 10,000 sparkling sequins in a "love duet" with Weismuller. It was an immediate hit.

Bad weather hurt attendance, which was only 3 million for a two-year total of 7 million. But the expo was, as Vacha dubbed it, the city's "biggest bash." It made Clevelanders feel better about themselves and their city. As bad as things were, they could agree with what Roosevelt had said when he visited the expo: "Things are a lot better in the country than they have been for some years past."

McGunagle is Cleveland free-lance writer.



An aerial view of the Streets of the World with the stage of the International Circle in the center.

### LOOKING AT A YEAR

**Feb. 26:** Adolf Hitler receives the first edition of a new German car, the Volkswagen.

**April 28:** Prince Farouk becomes king of Egypt following the death of his father, King Fahd.

**June 18:** Mobster Charles "Lucky"

Luciano is found guilty of 62 criminal counts and sentenced to life in prison. Luciano eventually was deported to Italy, where he died in 1962.

**July 31:** Troops loyal to fascist leader Francisco Franco launch a civil war against the Spanish govern-

ment.

**Nov. 3:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt is elected to a second term, crushing the Republican nominee, Kansas Gov. Alf Landon.

**Nov. 25:** Germany and Japan form an axis dedicated to curbing the

threat of Soviet influence in Europe and Asia.

**Born:** Vaclav Havel, Glenda Jackson.

**Died:** English author Rudyard Kipling, American singer and actress Marilyn Miller.

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