

OUR CENTURY

1976

AT A GLANCE

Desegregation ruling rocks city

It wasn't a surprise, but it still came as a shock. Federal Judge Frank Battisti ruled that the Cleveland and State school boards had assigned students and built schools "to create or maintain racial segregation."

There was, he said, "essentially a dual system under which there were lower operating standards for many black schools by virtues of such conditions as overcrowding." Under the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, that was a violation of the black students' constitutional right to equal protection under the law.

Battisti ordered both sides to recommend remedies. Everybody knew that meant busing. Business and religious leaders urged calm. Appeals would delay the start of busing until February 1979, but by then many white families with children had transferred them to private schools or moved to the suburbs.

In 30 years as Cuyahoga County engineer, Albert S. Porter had used his sharp tongue on public officials and such highway obstacles as public transit and the Shaker Lakes ("a two-bit duck pond"). In May, he picked the wrong target.

Beth Ann Louis, a 12-year-old Olmsted Falls girl, wrote Porter as part of a school assignment. She asked him not to replace the Bagley Rd. Bridge because it would "scare away wildlife and ruen (sic) the beauty there." Porter wrote back disparaging her spelling and saying Olmsted Falls residents were "moochers, scroungers, chiselers and parasites." He misspelled several words himself.

The public was outraged. Then, in September, some of Porter's employees came forward to complain that he had forced them to kick back 2 percent of their pay for years. In November, Porter was defeated by Republican Ronald Stackhouse. In February, he pleaded guilty or no contest to 22 counts of theft in office. He was forced to return \$154,000 to employees but escaped prison on grounds of poor health.

Cleveland Heights police got a tip that, as it turned out, solved two famous murders. They were told a man named Richard Robbins had killed folk singer Tedd Browne in 1968, shooting him in his car at the top of Cedar Hill simply because he was black.

Police found Robbins' handprint on Browne's car. Serving a life sentence in the penitentiary, Robbins sought a deal. He revealed that he and brothers Owen and Martin Kilbane had killed Marlene Steele in 1969. They had been hired to do it by her husband, Euclid Municipal Judge Robert Steele.

Over protests from blacks, Robbins was given his freedom in return for his testimony. Steele and the Kilbanes were convicted; the ex-judge died in prison in 1996.

The Cavaliers had a record of 6-11 when Coach and General Manager Bill Fitch traded for Nate Thurmond, a Future Hall of Famer but, at 34, near the end of his career. With Thurmond backing up center Jim Chones, the lineup jelled — Jim Brewer and Bobby "Bingo" Smith at forward, Austin Carr and Dick Snyder at guard. They won 43 of their last 65 games for the Central Division championship and their first trip to the playoffs.

But just before the regular season ended, Chones broke his foot. With Thurmond taking his place, the Cavs went to the deciding seventh game of the series with the Baltimore Bullets — and won it when Snyder hit a 12-footer with four seconds left. The Coliseum went crazy.

The Cavs split the first four games with the Boston Celtics, but lost the last two. The "Miracle of Richfield" was over.

The 1975-76 season was the Crusaders' last. Jay Moore, who had bought the World Hockey Association club from Nick Mileti, moved it to St. Paul, Minn., where it folded the next season. The WHA struggled on until 1982.

But 1976-77 was the first year for the new Cleveland Barons. Mel Swig moved his California Seals, finally giving Cleveland a team in the National Hockey League.

With Brian Sipe replacing Mike Phipps at quarterback, Forrest Gregg's Browns rebounded from their 3-11 record in 1975 to win nine games. But once again, they missed the playoffs.

Ashby Leach dropped his wife off at work in Huntington, W.Va., the evening of Aug. 25. At 9:30 the next morning, he appeared in the offices of the Chessie System on the 36th floor of the Terminal Tower. Pulling a sawed-off shotgun from under his raincoat, he demanded that the receptionist summon her superiors. He fired a shot into the ceiling to punctuate the demand, and then expressed disappointment that Cyrus Eaton, Chessie's chairman-emeritus, was in Nova Scotia.

Leach wrote out a statement calling for jobs for Vietnam veterans and demanded that it be read over radio and television. "I've seen death and I'm not afraid of it. I fought for my country and I can't get a job," he said.

He surrendered after nine hours. "Every member of Congress made me do it," he shouted as he was led away. "I love America."

Leach was charged with extortion, kidnapping and assault, but to the frustration of Chessie officials won sympathy from the public. He was sentenced to three to 15 years.

By Fred McGunagle

What had happened? What was wrong with Cleveland?

If Census Bureau estimates were to be believed, the city had lost 112,000 people between 1970 and 1975. That was one-seventh of its 1970 population.

Even the suburbs were losing. Cuyahoga County was down 128,000 people — one of every 14 residents. The metropolitan area — Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake and Medina counties — was down 97,000, or 4.7 percent. No other metropolitan area in the United States showed such a decrease.

"It is clear," said Edric Weld, a Cleveland State University economist, "that this is not a movement from city to suburbs but a general exodus of persons from the Cleveland area as well as from the state as a whole."

Clevelanders were shaken. This was the city that as recently as 1960 had been the eighth-largest in the country. Now it was No. 18 and dropping. This was the city whose chamber of commerce was called the Growth Association, the city that billed itself as the Best Location in the Nation.

And this was the county for which, as recently as 1970, the Regional Planning Commission had forecast continued growth — to 1,920,000 by 1980 — with surrounding counties growing even faster. What had gone wrong?

One answer seemed to be jobs — the plants that had closed or moved south in the 1970-71 and 1974-75 recessions. Yet unemployment consistently had been below the national average. Although Cleveland had lost 85,000 manufacturing jobs in a decade, it had added more than that in service industries. Employment was at a record high.

If people were moving to the South and West — the "sun belt" — maybe it was the weather. But Cleveland had been among the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the 1950s, and the climate hadn't changed in the meantime.

Gov. James Rhodes thought the problem was the subsidies other states offered industries. After Ohio lost a bid for a Volkswagen plant to Pennsylvania, he called for tax abatement, though only for central cities.

Sports fans thought the exodus might have had to do with the pitiful record of the Indians and the Browns in the 1970s. Advertising agencies blamed the city's "image" — the river fire, the mayor's hair catching fire. Cleveland needed an advertising campaign.

Business leaders said there must be a mistake. Construction was booming. Downtown was adding office space at the rate of a Terminal Tower a year. High-priced housing was going up in the suburbs. The four-county area was adding 10,000 households a year. Per-capita income remained among the highest in the nation.

But at the same time, rubble-filled vacant lots were all that remained of streets in the West Central area. Vandalized houses awaited wreckers in the area that once had been crowded, riotous Hough. In 10 years, the city had torn down 12,000 dwellings, the equivalent of tearing down North Olmsted or Garfield Heights.

Now leaders had to take seriously the warnings of economist Weld. He had been trying to call attention to the trend since 1974, but his reports succeeded only in making him a pariah to the establishment. After all, Cleveland's growth was an article of faith. If people were leaving, there must be something wrong with us.

The news didn't get any better. A closer look at the figures showed people had been leaving Cleveland steadily for decades, but nobody had noticed: In the 1950s there were so many moving in, and in the 1960s there were so many births.

The nation's population increased 18.5 percent in the '50s, but the four-county Cleveland area grew by 24.6 percent. Coal miners and sharecroppers flocked north to work in the booming auto plants and their supply industries. Most were of childbearing age at a time when Americans were bearing children in record numbers.

Tricycles lined suburban side-



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTOS

One of many empty lots, this one on Chester Ave.



Signing up for jobs at the Ford plant in Dearborn, Mich.

walks. Schools were on half-day and split sessions. The new arrivals thinned out in the mid-1950s, but the baby boom continued for another 10 years.

Then the Vietnam War kept Cleveland's factories booming. But the 1970-71 recession hit Cleveland hard. The factories were old, the wages high. The interstate highway system had made it possible to open efficient new plants in low-cost areas like Lordstown or Alabama. The Vietnam veterans found "No Help Wanted" signs everywhere.

The baby boom had met the post-industrial age. The 1960 census had shown 22,000 18-year-olds in the county. In 1970, there were 34,000, and by 1975 more than 40,000. They entered a work force that had averaged only 40,000 openings a year and had 100,000 more working women than 10 years earlier.

College graduates' job offers came from other cities. Laid-off workers

with skills found that the "help wanted" ads were from other states. A study of postal change-of-address forms in the '70s showed that 50,000 people a year were moving out of Cuyahoga County. That wasn't many more than in the past, only 3 percent a year — far from a mass migration.

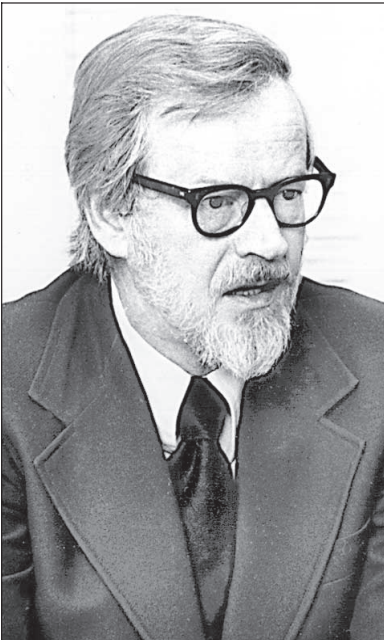
But only 20,000 a year were moving in, a fraction of the 1950s influx. The net loss was 30,000 a year. At first that was offset by births, but county births fell from 30,000 in 1970 to 19,000 in 1975. The number of households was still growing because youngsters were growing up and moving to their own "pads."

It was the predictable effect of a recession and loss of young people, and the births still outnumbered deaths. But the arithmetic added up to a five-year net loss of 128,000 people.

If anything, the situation was the result of Cleveland's impressive growth in the 1950s. A generation later, there weren't enough jobs for the sons and daughters of coal miners



A sign of population loss.



Edric Weld: The economist saw a "general exodus."

and sharecroppers, let alone their cousins in the South. Cleveland had escaped high unemployment at the expense of population loss.

It was a normal, natural phenomenon, the predictable result of economic trends. But a generation earlier, Clevelanders had taken pride in the region's growth: Ours was indeed the best location in the nation. Now, as the tide flowed the other way, Clevelanders had a sickening feeling: *There's something wrong with us. We're inferior.*

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LOOKING AT A YEAR

March 26: A bloodless coup in Argentina ousts Isabel Martinez de Peron from the presidency.

April 20: ABC offers Barbara Walters a five-year, \$1 million-a-year contract to co-host the nightly news.

July 4: The United States celebrates its 200th birthday. Meanwhile,

Israeli commandos stage a daring, late-night raid, freeing 105 hostages at Entebbe Airport in Uganda.

July 20: The Viking I spacecraft lands on Mars and begins sending detailed photographs of the planet's surface.

Aug. 21: Former men's tennis

player Renee Richards wins her first women's tennis match since undergoing a sex-change operation.

Aug. 26: In Philadelphia, the death toll climbs to 28 from what becomes known as Legionnaire's disease, whose flu-like symptoms first broke out during an American Legion convention.

Nov. 2: Democrat Jimmy Carter is elected president, defeating incumbent Republican Gerald Ford.

Died: Richard Daley, Mao Zedong, Gen. Bernard Montgomery, Paul Robeson, Agatha Christie, Howard Hughes, J. Paul Getty.