Time Capsule 1921

Take a "Fond Flashback" as we look at the people, places and events that made headlines in 1921.

The Year in Review: Defeated in WWI, Germany agrees to pay reparations of nearly $10 billion over 42 years.

The British government signs a treaty creating the Irish Free State, a British dominion of 26 Irish counties. Six other Irish counties, in northern Ireland, remain part of the United Kingdom.

In the U.S., Gen. Billy Mitchell, a distinguished combat airman, has never believed that WWI was the "war to end all wars." While naval authorities concentrate on building enormous battleships, or dreadnaughts, Mitchell argues that 1,000 bomber aircraft could be built for the same cost as a dreadnaught and that the bombers could sink it.

The Navy takes the bait and orders tests, setting guidelines to ensure Mitchell's failure. Mitchell then stacks the deck in his own favor by using larger bombs than the tests allow. After destroying several smaller ships, Mitchell's pilots set their sights on the captured German dreadnaught Ostfriesland, considered unsinkable.

Twenty-one minutes later, the Ostfriesland goes down, marking the beginning of modern airpower in naval warfare and the end of surface fleets as the ultimate weapon.

Anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti are convicted of a Massachusetts factory robbery in which two employees were fatally shot. Later, they are executed, despite protests that the evidence failed to support the verdicts and claims that they were persecuted as victims of anticommunist hysteria.

In medicine, for the first time, heart disease becomes the leading

cause of death in the U.S., surpassing tuberculosis. Canadian researchers isolate insulin, an important hormone in metabolism. The discovery leads to the mass production of insulin for use by diabetics, whose bodies cannot produce enough insulin naturally.

Names in the News: Former assistant secretary of the Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 39, is stricken with poliomyelitis, or polio, while at his vacation home on Campobello Island, New Brunswick. The spinal-cord disease weakens his leg muscles, causing him to rely on leg braces or a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Albert Einstein wins the Nobel Prize in physics. Former President William Howard Taft is appointed chief justice of the United States.

Music: Many of the popular songs are show tunes, including the title song from the hit musical Shuffle Along—the first Broadway musical entirely written, directed and performed by African-Americans. Other big songs from the show include I'm Just Wild About Harry, recorded by Marion Harris, and Bandana Days, sung by Eubie Blake.

April Showers and Don't Send Your Wife to the Country, both performed by Al Jolson in the musical Bombo, become hit songs, as does Second Hand Rose by Fanny Brice in Ziegfeld Follies of 1921.

Other popular show tunes include Ma! (He's Making Eyes at Me), performed by Eddie Cantor in The Midnight Rounders of 1921, as well as Whip-Poor-Will and Look for the Silver Lining, both sung by Marilyn Miller and Irving Fisher in the musical Sally.

Also popular are I'm Nobody's Baby by Ruth Etting, Ain't We Got Fun by Van and Schenck, The Sheik of Araby by The Club Royal Orchestra, When Buddha Smiles by Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra, Wabash Blues by Isham Jones and His Orchestra, Aunt Hagar's Blues by Ted Lewis and His Orchestra and Zez Confrey's jazzy piano tune Kitten on the Keys, popularized by Vincent Lopez and His Orchestra.

Movies: Silent-film heartthrob Rudolph Valentino rises to fame by starring in The Sheik and The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

The Kid is Charlie Chaplin's first feature-length portrayal of his "Tramp" character, the little man with the bowler hat, cane and baggy pants. The film also launches Jackie Coogan as a major child star, and he goes on to star in Peck's Bad Boy later in the year.

Immensely popular actress Mary Pickford is a smash again in Little Lord Fauntleroy. Norma Talmadge stars in Passion Flower, Love's Redemption and The Sign on the Door, and her sister Constance is also among the year's popular stars, who include Douglas Fairbanks, Wallace Reid, Dorothy Gish and Gloria Swanson. Reid stars in seven films released this year.

Other films include Dream Street, starring Carol Dempster and Ralph Graves, and Tol'able David, with Richard Barthelmess.

Radio: Westinghouse's establishment of well-financed stations sparks what will become a broadcasting boom. Westinghouse also produces the first popular-priced home receiver, priced at $60.

Broadcast firsts include a boxing match between Johnny Ray and Johnny Dundee, farm news from Sioux City, Iowa and a stock report from New York City.

RCA makes its broadcast debut with a championship heavyweight boxing match in which Jack Dempsey defeats Georges Carpentier. A transcript of the fight is telegraphed from a temporary long-wave station, WJY, to KDKA in Pittsburgh for rebroadcast.

The year's matchup between the Yankees and the Giants of New York becomes the focus of the first World Series broadcast. Thomas Cowan at Westinghouse's WJZ in New Jersey re-creates the game via phoned-in reports from New York's Polo Grounds stadium.

Sports: Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis is appointed commissioner of major-league baseball, with a mandate to maintain the integrity of the game. Eight Chicago White Sox players are cleared of charges of throwing the 1919 World Series amid gambling allegations—the "Black Sox Scandal." However, the day after the trial, Landis bans them from baseball.

In an all-New York World Series, the Giants topple the Yankees, 5 games to 3, in the final year of baseball's experimental best-of-nine series. In the regular season, the Yankees' Babe Ruth hits 59 home runs. With a .397 average, Rogers Hornsby of the St. Louis Cardinals edges Harry Heilmann of the Detroit Tigers by three points for the major-league batting title.

The American Pro Football Association's membership increases to 22 teams, including the Green Bay Packers, awarded to John Clair of the Acme Packing Company. George Halas buys the Decatur Staleys, the team that will become the Chicago Bears, and wins the APFA championship.

College champions include Cornell in football and Pennsylvania in men's basketball. Defending their U.S. Open singles tennis titles are Bill Tilden and Molla Bjurstedt Mallory, and boxer Jack Dempsey wins his fourth straight world championship heavyweight fight.

Driver Tommy Milton takes the checkered flag in the Indianapolis 500, jockey Charles Thompson rides "Behave Yourself" to victory in the Kentucky Derby and Ottawa holds on to pro hockey's Stanley Cup.

New in 1921

- Eskimo Pie
- Wise potato chips
- Van Heusen starchless, stiff shirt collars
- Tillie the Toiler
- Chanel No. 5 perfume

A Few Prices

- Annual wage, $1,233
- Dining room suite, $198
- Six-piece breakfast room suite, $76
- Floor lamp, $12.98
- Child's coat, $5
- Woman's wool skirt, $3.93
- Electric toaster, $3.75
- Snow shovel, 75¢
- Man's silk necktie, 55¢
- Eggs, 47¢ a dozen
- Butter, 45¢ a pound
- Roasting chickens, 30¢ a pound
- Beef chuck, 16¢ a pound
- Peanut butter, 15¢ a pound
- A&P bread, 6¢ a loaf
- First-class stamp, 2¢

Popular Books

Fiction

- The Brimming Cup, Dorothy Canfield
- The Mysterious Rider, Zane Grey
- The Age of Innocence, Edith Wharton
- Main Street, Sinclair Lewis
- The Sisters-in-Law, Gertrude Atherton
- The Kingdom Round the Corner, Coningsby Dawson

Nonfiction

- The Outline of History, H.G. Wells
- White Shadows in the South Seas, Frederick O'Brien
- The Mirrors of Downing Street, A Gentleman with a Duster (pseudonym for Harold Begbie)
- The Autobiography of Margot Asquith, Margot Asquith
- Peace Negotiations, Robert Lansing

Lindy's, a Slice of History

VISITING New York's Broadway in 1921, the most popular place for a nosh quickly becomes Lindy's, a Times Square restaurant, deli and gathering spot known for its cheesecake and stacked sandwiches.

Regulars over the years include performers Al Jolson, Jack Benny and Eddie Cantor; newspaper and radio commentator Walter Winchell; and political figures such as Bernard Baruch and J. Edgar Hoover. It also is across the street from Tin Pan Alley, where popular songwriters toil. One not-so- popular fixture is organized-crime kingpin Arnold Rothstein, widely alleged to have been lead "fixer" of the 1919 World Series.

Newspaperman and writer Damon Runyon immortalizes the establishment with references to "Mindy's" in "Little Miss Marker" and a proposed bet over the sale of "Mindy's" strudel versus cheesecake in "Guys and Dolls," a later musical based on several of Runyon's writings.

Another Broadway connection that helps fuel the restaurant's early success is Eugene O'Neill's play "Strange Interlude." The play is so long that it includes a dinner break instead of a brief intermission; Lindy's is just blocks away.

Ironically, Sardi's Restaurant, a nearby competing watering hole of the famous, known for its celebrity caricatures, also opens during 1921. It quickly becomes the place where theater people gather to await opening-night reviews.