

THE KU KLUX KLAN IN TRUMBULL COUNTY, OHIO, 1923-1925

by

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ABSTRACT

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As a study of a local chapter of a national phenomenon during the 1920's, this thesis seeks to interpret the local movement against the background of the social environment of the era. The Ku Klux Klan during the twenties was much more than an organization of embittered haters. It was a product of the social and economic climate of the times, composed of people who banded together in local tribe-like groups out of reaction to changes in the general American society and in defense of their own particular customs and values.

The Mahoning Valley including Trumbull County had undergone immense changes in the forty years preceding the Klan era of the early twenties. In this relatively short period of time it had changed from predominantly agrarian pursuits into one of the largest iron and steel producing and processing areas in the world. With this rapid industrialization came the need for workers, a need only partially filled by migration from the surrounding countryside. As a result thousands of immigrants, mostly from

southern and eastern Europe were attracted to the open hearths and blast furnaces of Youngstown and Warren.

Previous to the arrival of these "new" immigrants Trumbull County was predominantly inhabited by the decedents of New England Yankees and Scotch-Irish farmers. Throughout the county there existed a strong identification of Americanism as Protestantism and the Anglo-Saxon American culture was dominant.

Of course such ethnic patterns were not limited to Trumbull County or the Mahoning Valley--they existed across the industrializing sections of the country. What was exceptional was the degree of success the Klan enjoyed in recruiting the members of the older cultural groups. Traditionally the Klan has not been thought of as an urban phenomenon. In Trumbull County however its strength was concentrated around the urban areas. Also the Klan was noted for its strong talk but relative non-militance. Trumbull County was an exception again in that it was the site of one of the most violent confrontations between the Klan and an organized anti-Klan group.

In examining the exceptional Klan experience in Trumbull County it was necessary to probe the intellectual antecedents of the national nativist resurgence of the twenties Klan vis à vis the Klan in Trumbull County.

It is the contention of this thesis that the Klan in Trumbull County was based on fear, not hate. These

fears of ethnic, religious and racial change were well founded American traditions. The very real problems of the local society--prohibition enforcement, lack of municipal services, crowded educational facilities and others--were blamed on the newest members of the society. The Klan lecturers in Trumbull County--particularly Colonel Evan Watkins--lost little time identifying the foreign born Catholic population as the culprits. The Klan offered group solidarity as a simplistic solution to the problems of the society. This led to a polarization of the society which in turn resulted in the violent climax of tensions in the Niles Riot of November 1924. In the aftermath of the riot the power of the Klan declined and a new balance resulted among the cultures within the society.

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study of the Klan experience in a "backwoods" county during the 1920's to evolve such prejudicial bias and to attempt to explain an exceptionally high level of Klan activity in what has been characterized as a most unlikely area for Klan growth, an urban industrial area.¹ A sound rationale for viewing the Klan of Trumbull County as that it produced one of the most violent Klan associated riots of the 1920's Klan era, which was again the exception to the rule is being that one of a few areas where Klan activity ultimately led to violence.

This thesis is the account of this very period, of an exceptional Klan and the three basic factors of conditions behind the establishment of the local Klavern—cultural conflict, a fundamentalist reform impulse and the strong

¹Thomas J. Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan", (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1934), p. 233.

PREFACE

Few subjects in American history lend themselves better to biased or emotional treatment than that of the Ku Klux Klan. The very term, Ku Klux Klan, elicits for most people today a keen and durable distaste for a dark movement out of the past perceived as a bigoted and brutal enemy of individual freedom. It is the intent of this localized study of the Klan experience in a Midwestern county during the 1920's to avoid such prejudicial bias and to attempt to explain an exceptionally high level of Klan activity in what has been characterized as a most unlikely area for Klan growth, an urban industrial area.¹ A second rationale for studying the Klan of Trumbull County is that it produced one of the most violent Klan associated riots of the 1920's Klan era, which was again the exception to the rule in being but one of a few areas where Klan activity ultimately led to violence.

This thesis is the account of this very active, exceptional Klan and the three basic factors of causation behind the establishment of the local Klavern--cultural conflict, a fundamentalist reform impulse and the strong

¹Norman F. Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan", (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1954), p. 238.

personal influence of a particular Klan leader who as an immigrant ironically could not belong to the group whose cause he championed.

The cultural conflicts present in the county were a product of the intense industrial urban growth of the early twentieth century. Much of the conflict was between the rural and urban cultures, but the main feature was the religious nativist polarization of the county between the established Protestant decedents of the "old" immigrant groups from the British Isles and Northwestern Europe and the recently arrived mainly Catholic immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. In many ways the Klan--Anti-Klan struggle in Trumbull County reflected the attempts of the established society to preserve the moral and social status quo, while the newer more insecure groups showed the attitudes, aggressions and resentments of an inferior social position.

The polarization and confrontation centered around the Klan riot in the Trumbull County city of Niles in 1924 and led to a redefinition of the limits of power each cultural group exercised and represented a coming of age of new groups within the county communities. This is not to say that tensions between the cultural elements in Trumbull County lessened to any great degree, but that the various groups realized that each had the right to exist and that each was interested in the preservation of balance and order if not the same societal mores.

The reform impulse primarily represented a defense of the values of the older Protestant society through such tactics as prohibition enforcement and Bible reading in the schools. These tactics were already in evidence in the parallel resurgence of religious fundamentalism and municipal reform both of which antedated the arrival of the Klan. But specifically in Trumbull County the reform effort centered on the generally lawless condition of Niles in regard to vice in general and prohibition in particular. A combination of cultural factors resulted in a conflict of values and opinions over the question of prohibition enforcement. In regard to the Klan's formation, the organizers of the Klan were quick to indict the more dissimilar (foreign and Catholic) and least understood cultures for the evils and problems of the society.

The third factor, which in many ways served as a catalyst around which the first two factors combined in forming the Trumbull Klan, was the personality of the most effective Klan leader in the county, "Colonel" Evan A. Watkins. As the preeminent Klan lecturer and advisor, his personality provided the cement which held the local Klan together and prodded the Klan into direct action and confrontation with the Klan's enemies. A Welshman by birth, he became a most effective speaker for a cause he could not directly join. On over three hundred occasions he presented nativistic diatribes based on an anti-Catholic bias and a vigilante

approach to listeners who followed his exhortations and joined the Invisible Empire in great numbers.

Several problems were encountered in analyzing this emotionally charged era. The lack of reliable primary information, such as membership lists and reports, because of the Klan's secretive nature, makes a good definitive study of the Klan structural organization difficult. Therefore, the thrust of this thesis is not so much on the organization itself as on the way it was perceived by the society. The best available sources for such information were the newspapers of the early twenties, some of which displayed a remarkable degree of objectivity. In the early twentieth century, it has been observed that newspaper reporters who were eyewitnesses to newsworthy events gave the reading public very descriptive accounts of what they observed, in contrast to the flavor of personal interpretation that reporting has acquired in later times.² This is not to say that they did not express a general like or dislike of the Klan at times, but that they seemed to be fair in their dealing most of the time. I was fortunate to find information in several county weekly papers as well as the larger dailies in Niles and Warren. In addition, since the Youngstown papers carried much news of southern Trumbull County and the Klan was also active in Mahoning County, the two Youngstown dailies and

²Thomas H. Smith, ed., An Ohio Reader--Reconstruction to the Present, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdman, 1975), p. 11.

the official Youngstown Klan paper, The Citizen, provided much help in research.

Of special note in considering the social climate of the times was the inordinate amount of space devoted to the discussion of crime in the county and especially Niles by the papers in Niles (there were three between 1922 and 1925). Indeed the newspaper competition in Niles centered around the issue of law and order.

Personal interviews were also of some help but were generally limited by fading memories or a desire for dissociation from the Klan. Such a reluctance to identify one's youth with the Klan or its members tells much about the undefined nature of the Klan membership. Many people joined the Klan because they thought it to be a sincerely patriotic society with an emphasis on preservation of Americanism. Many more were in at least partial sympathy with some of the Klan objectives such as law enforcement and a general maintenance of morals. The explicit anti-Catholicism and anti-foreignism were from much larger cultural precedents and therefore elicited little concern among a large group of citizens at that time. Later in life some would become aware of the ugly side of the prejudice that the Klan symbolized.

CHAPTER ONE

THE KLAN AND OHIO IN THE 1920's

A close examination of a local chapter of a national movement such as the, Ku Klux Klan, serves several beneficial functions. First, as a case study, such an inquiry provides evidence to support or refute the general explanations of the Klan phenomenon that have been advanced by students of the social history of the early twenties. At a closer level it gives us information as to the local society in which it operated. Certainly each chapter of the Klan had its own special problems and objectives in addition to the aims of the national Klan. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the intellectual antecedents of the nativist resurgence of the twenties, as well as the primary historical interpretations of the Klan in the same era. Rounding out the chapter is a description of the national and Ohio Klan organizations. In this way the stage will be set for closer examination of similarities and dissimilarities the Klan in Trumbull County maintained with the Klan experience in the state and nation.

Three patterns of nativist thinking had developed in American thought by the Klan era of the Twenties. One of the oldest and strongest of the patterns was that of anti-Catholicism. The rise in number of United States Catholics

was phenomenal during the thirty years before 1920. This rise was perceived by old stock, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants as a threat to such vital institutions as the public schools, the Bible, and the Constitution. To these Protestants, Catholics seemed to threaten the American system of church-state separation by their allegiance to a foreign potentate, the Pope. Equally upsetting was the Catholic predilection for parochial schools, and their greater emphasis on dogma rather than on the Bible.³

The second nativist pattern was that of anti-radicalism. By the twenties, the radical element had been identified as the Bolshevick conspiracy bent on destroying the American way of life through strikes and riots. Because foreign born workers were the most visible participants in such activities as strikes, they were branded as radicals. This feeling had reached a climax of sorts in 1919 with the general steel strike which employers blamed on radicals, and the Palmer raids of the Red Scare which identified and deported radicals.⁴ The same general steel strike also saw the eruption of violence in the Mahoning Valley. The city of East Youngstown (now Campbell, Ohio) experienced riots which resulted in the destruction of much of the Central Business District.⁵ Such an identification with lawlessness and dis-

³John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925, (New York: Atheneum, 1975), p. 1.

⁴Ibid., p. 233.

⁵"Telegraph Operator Experienced 1919 Riot", Youngstown Vindicator, June 13, 1976, p. B-3.

order singled these groups out for special attacks by Klan lectures. The fact that the economic depression and the institution of prohibition probably aggravated normal lawlessness was treated only lightly if at all in the Klan lectures.⁶

The most recent intellectual trend in nativist thinking during the twenties was that of an Anglo-Saxon racism based on allegedly scientific evidence. This genre of racism was based not only on the premise of white over black superiority but on tenets of Nordic superiority over the so-called Alpine, Mediterranean, and Jewish races. Such an appeal to racism at the same time denied the basic Christian ideal of the brotherhood of man as well as the traditional American faith in the assimilatory powers of the nation.⁷

The aforementioned intellectual themes plus several other historical factors served to make the twenties a peak era of racism. In the early twenties the United States experienced a fairly strong economic depression. Added to this most unsettling factor were the unused emotions of World War I with their attendant emphasis on 100 per cent Americanism. The failure of the war and especially the peace talks to reform the world in Americas' image led to a degree of disillusionment. Further disillusionment came with the difficulties in enforcing prohibition. In many cases the lawlessness normally found in a growing industrial area was

⁶See Youngstown Citizen, 1923-1925, passim.

⁷Higham, Strangers, pp. 156-157.

compounded by this attempt at legislated moral conformity. The failures of the society were blamed on foreign influence and the trend was toward isolation from Europe and Europeans. It was no coincidence that stringent new immigration restrictions totally unfavorable to the "new" immigration were enacted in the early twenties. Even as we isolated ourselves in order to save the last best hope on earth, some members of the society felt the call to purify America to insure the survival of such a hope. To many this meant a turn toward an evangelistic fundamentalism in religion and a retreat from modernism and the social gospel. Yet to some the times seemed ripe for a more militant defense. Such people were ready for the ministrations of the Klan lecturer and Kleagle as they came to places like Trumbull County, disseminating a blend of nativism, defensive Protestantism, and racial and social conformity.

The predominant form of racism during the twenties was pro-Anglo-Saxonism, based on the studies of Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, and the left over effects of Anglophile war propaganda. Grant and Stoddard's thinking was borrowed freely by Klan lecturers such as Evan Watkins in Trumbull County.⁸ Their racial theories revolved around primitive eugenic studies and early forms of psychological testing. The conclusions, (but not the discussions within the

⁸ Jeremiah Baird, personal interview, 1280 Prindle-Boothe Road, Niles, Ohio, May 31, 1976; "E.A. Watkins Leaves The Citizen," The Citizen, October 9, 1924, p. 4.

scientific community concerning the validity of such works) were widely published by popular magazines of the time. In this manner the conclusions became known not only in intellectual circles but among the untrained general population.⁹ As often was the case with such scientific studies, they were erroneously cited as evidence confirming the fears of the society. For example, not only did the most widely read periodical of the times begin to quote and comment on the work of Madison Grant, but highly respected men like Henry Ford launched racial attacks on the Jews using the line of logic established by Grant and Stoddard.¹⁰ As one student of American nativism has commented, the twenties should be known as "the tribal twenties".¹¹ This convergence of intellectual and popular notions of racism along with the legacy of wartime Americanism gave the Klan the necessary element of intellectual appeal to represent one tribe of Americans to be found in Trumbull County.

Almost from its inception, observers of the Klan in the twenties have advanced theories concerning the sources of Klan strength and the motivation of its adherents. Certainly the rural thesis of John Moffat Mecklin, a contemporary sociologist-student of the Klan, has been most widely

⁹Higham, Strangers, p. 272.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 273.

¹¹Ibid., p. 265.

accepted and eagerly applied by more recent scholarship.¹² This thesis presents the movement as a grassroots defense of rural and small town life in the face of a rising urban society. Exponents of such a view see the Klan as a last ditch effort by embattled agrarians against the irreversible forces of change and modernism. The agents of this change were identified as those groups in the society most dissimilar to the majority, whose formal mores and values were those preached from Protestant pulpits.¹³ Usually the groups identified were Catholic or Jewish. This tribal tendency in American ethnocultural relations was not new to the twenties by any means, but staged a resurgence as part of a general retreat from the secular world of modernism to the older fundamentals of the dominant culture. By such an emphasis on nativistic Americanism, the Klan was drawing on well defined cultural antecedents which have been evident throughout our history.

Another emphasis the Klan stressed in its rise to national prominence was maintenance of the status quo. In addition to the underlying attitudes concerning racism, anti-radicalism and anti-Catholicism, the clear and present dangers of dope, bootlegging, graft, night clubs and road houses,

¹²David M. Chalmers, Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865-1965, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), passim.

¹³John Moffat Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1924), p. 19.

prostitution, violation of the Sabbath, alleged unfair business practices, sex, and scandalous behavior were added to the pantheon of threats against the survival of the 100 per cent American life.¹⁴ Historian Charles Alexander views this defense of a well defined, rural, fundamentalist moral code as one basis for Klan appeal.¹⁵ Activity in this area was first centered on reform of personal conduct rather than institutional change. Indeed, most of the required legislation was already on the law books--a legacy of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant antecedents of most American communities. The arrival of the Klan in a community coincided with the increase in public demand for enforcement of laws concerning prohibition, prostitution, and gambling.

Alexander's moral defense thesis is but one of three modern interpretations of the Klan of the twenties. The others are Kenneth T. Jackson's urban causation thesis and David Chalmers' refinement and extension of Mecklin's rural defense argument. While David Chalmers stresses the fundamental Protestant anti-Catholicism as it was found either in the towns and villages of America or in the population of the cities which came from the rural areas within the previous generation, and Charles Alexander presents the same ethnographic pattern, but emphasizes the puritanical

¹⁴Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 32.

¹⁵Charles C. Alexander, Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 20.

reformism of the Klan, Jackson's appealing work presents the Klan as an urban movement both in absolute numbers and in percentages of the Klan members in metropolitan areas. Jackson points out that urban Klaverns (local Klans) exerted a disproportionate influence in leadership, revenue and most especially in Klan newspapers.¹⁶ Jackson maintains that the explanation of this urban support can be best explained in economic terms. An urban crisis was developing in what he defines as the "zone of emergence". This zone consisted of the territory around the poorer area of a city into which the socially and economically climbing Negroes and foreign born were moving, while the lower middle class whites already residing in the area were entrapped because of their stagnant economic position. Accordingly, Jackson feels that the greatest numbers of Klansmen came from rank and file non-union blue collar workers already living in the urban area because they were experiencing increased competition from other groups moving into their economic class.¹⁷

With the intellectual and social mood of the era established and the various interpretations concerning Klan activity introduced, a historical account of the national and state Klan experience will complete the necessary background to an analysis of the local experience.

¹⁶Kenneth T. Jackson, The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 236 and 238.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 244-245.

Nationally, the Klan was organized in 1915 by "Colonel" William Simmons, a professional fraternalist from Atlanta, Georgia. Conceived as a narrow Southern fraternal order, it used the symbolism of the white knights of the legendary reconstruction Ku Klux Klan to identify the new order. It seemed destined to follow a moderately successful path of acceptance and growth within the tradition of southern society when a number of factors combined to propel it into nationwide prominence by 1924 with its center of strength and influence not in the still provincial South but in the conservative heartland of the United States, the Midwest.

Prior to 1920 the Klan was limited to a few thousand members centralized in the deep South and almost unknown north of the Ohio River. The national appeal of the Klan was enhanced by the combination of the sensational character of its name, its Protestantism, its concept of racial superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon peoples, and the promotional tactics of two professional fund raisers, Edward Young Clarke and Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor. Hired by Simmons in 1920, they organized a recruitment system which facilitated the growth of the movement and concurrently lined their pockets. They dispatched professional organizers or Kleagles with instruction to organize local bands of 100 per cent Americans. After ascertaining the character and problems of the local community, the Kleagle had only to emphasize the Klan position on whatever local problem he viewed as the strongest

with which to gain recruits. To aid him, his Grand Goblin or regional salesmanager sent out Klan lecturers with a repertory of rhetorical addresses tailored to the audience. This process was called "kluxing" and each initiate into Simmon's Invisible Empire paid a ten dollar "Klectoken" as an initiation fee. Out of each fee, four dollars went to the local Kleagle, one dollar to the state King Kleagle, fifty cents to the Grand Goblin and, back in Atlanta, Clarke and Taylor collected two dollars and fifty-cents, while Simmons received two dollars. Only once the Kleagle felt that he had gleaned the area well did the national office grant state and local charters with control, and much of the money from new members then reverted to the local organizations.¹⁸

The Kleagles were aided by events not directly of their own making. First was the emotional and intellectual climate previously discussed. Then there was the fresh awareness that 36 per cent of America was Catholic.¹⁹ But the most helpful were the New York World and Journal-American expose's emphasizing the Klan threat and violence. The result was a Congressional investigation which propelled Simmons and his rather small regional organization into headline prominence across the country for one week in 1921. The publicity was exactly what the Klan needed. Apparently

¹⁸Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, pp. 33-34.

¹⁹U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies, 1916, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927), pp. 298-299.

willing to overlook violence, many people saw in the Klan an organization which might give power to their thoughts and solve their frustrations. In addition, many people outside of the Klan's southern homeland were favorably disposed to an organization the Eastern press had so wholeheartedly condemned.²⁰

What were the frustrations and aspirations of the country which spawned the Klan? Students of the era point to an almost universal desire for protection from change and cite a desire for fundamentalism or conservatism in economics, foreign policy, and religion. The religious beliefs of the Klan, as well as its social conservatism and defense of traditional mores, indicate that it was indeed in tune with the times.

It has been indicated earlier that the Klan was pro-Protestant and thus inherently anti-Catholic. At its inception in Georgia, the Klan was a Protestant organization inasmuch as it reflected the overwhelmingly Protestant nature of the South. In its original context it was not anti-Catholic as much as it was a quasi-religious Protestant lodge. To be sure, its explicit Protestantism facilitated its acceptance in other areas, but the conversion of the Klan to an anti-Catholic stance reflected the beliefs of those who joined it as it expanded nationally into states like Ohio. The anti-Catholic feeling which the Klan stumbled

²⁰Jackson, Klan in the City, p. 12.

across was much stronger than the original organizers of the Klan had imagined, and was part of a much larger religious trend which transcended denominations.²¹

The rise in anti-Catholic sentiments correlated with the growth of fundamentalism in the post war society. In fact the Klan and fundamentalist movements drew their life from the same intellectual environment. John M. Mecklin saw striking similarities, chiefly the impassioned attack by both groups upon ideologies and agents hostile to traditional beliefs and customs. He concluded: "The orthodox tenets of Evangelicalism from Blood Atonement to Verbal Inspiration are all there, by implication at least. A fundamentalist would have found himself thoroughly at home in the atmosphere of the Klan ceremonies."²²

The emotional aftermath of the war was seen as the spawning ground for both movements, especially fundamentalism. Fundamentalism can in this case be defined as the reaction of rural minded Protestantism to the disillusionment following America's intended war to make the world safe for democracy. These shattered wartime hopes indicated that the nation had

²¹Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 108.

²²Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 19; Norman F. Furniss, The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 13 and 37. Furniss identifies the five points of Fundamentalism in the post-war era. They are: 1. The infallibility of the Bible. 2. Christ's Virgin Birth. 3. Christ's substitutionary atonement. 4. The Resurrection. 5. Christ's second coming.

produced crime, moral unrest, and selfishness by misplacing its faith. The faith the Social Gospel and secularized culture had placed in mankind's rational abilities was proven to be folly by the increase in the evils of society. Many rejected the optimism that had been inspired by the evolutionary concept of man's inevitable advance. To them the only way to rescue society was to convince the rest of the country to get back to basics, like Biblical legalism and literalism, and to renounce modernism and innovation by returning to the moral absolutism and theological conservatism of an earlier era. By turning their backs on the Social Gospel they emphasized the five major points of fundamentalism, and especially tied their hopes to the central focus of fundamentalist theology, the second coming of Christ.²³

This return to a literal Biblical Christianity rekindled the omnipresent Protestant-Catholic cleavage in American society once more. The movement with its emphasis on the purification of Protestantism might be called a movement calling for 100 percent Protestantism. As such, it emphasized the same reactions, conformities and isolationism as did the wartime and post-war call to 100 percent Americanism. Because the Klan was a pseudo-religious version of postwar nationalism it received much of its vital energy from this fundamentalist zeitgeist. In the

²³Furniss, Fundamentalist Controversy, p. 28.

final analysis, the fundamentalist crusade and the Ku Klux Klan were parallel but independent occurrences in American history.²⁴

The average Klansman was apt to be a member of the more fundamental and evangelical Protestant denominations, which viewed the dogmatic Roman Catholics as anathema. Ministers of these denominations, including the Disciples of Christ, the various Baptist sects, and Methodist Episcopal Churches, were actively involved in Klancraft both as Kludds (Chaplains) and lecturers.²⁵

Part of the Klan's reform impetus came from this amalgamation of fundamentalist and anti-Catholic forces. The state Klans pushed for public school Bible reading bills, and Klansmen had the habit of visiting churches on Sunday morning by surprise, and of emphasizing their bonds with the various Protestant churches. However, an important thing to remember about this push for moral conformity was that it was directed against all recalcitrants, Protestant as well as Catholic. Because fundamentalism fueled the Klan's spirit, the emphasis on moral regulation was larger than the xenophobias of strictly anti-Catholic nativist

²⁴Higham, Strangers, p. 293; Furniss, Fundamentalist Controversy, p. 38.

²⁵Ronald E. Marec, "The Fiery Cross; A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Ohio, 1920-1930", (unpublished Masters thesis, Kent State University, 1967), p. 109. Colonel Evan A. Watkins, a flamboyant Welsh immigrant who was the pre-eminent Klan lecturer in Trumbull County as well as the editor of the Youngstown Citizen, the official Klan newspaper in the Mahoning Valley, was the minister at the small, fundamentalist Calvary Baptist Church in Girard, Ohio.

thinking. The Klan watched everybody. One historian has suggested that the white-robed Klansman should stand as the Last Puritan.²⁶

It was natural that the Klan as a reform movement would follow the progressive tradition of action through political means. The Klan usually had the support of some of the best people in town who were determined to improve local conditions. Before the war this impulse had been concentrated on Progressive national politics as well as on municipal reform. Then the war directed it toward the international crusade with its attendant zeal for conformity at home. With the post war disillusionment in respect to the lack of success of international and progressive idealism, the only real direction remaining for this reforming spirit was to turn inward, to purify and preserve the values of the community against outside influence and change.²⁷

Presented as a benevolent and patriotic society with emphasis on the positive, constructive aspects of Klancraft, the Klan was well suited to the needs of potential members, especially in the Midwest. Although the image of the un-American hate monger remains, the greatest period of Klan growth and activity in the Midwest coincided with a new emphasis on positive reforms in

²⁶Higham, Strangers, p. 293.

²⁷Ibid., p. 295.

education, law enforcement (especially prohibition), charity, and community functions such as Klan Karnivals, not on hate. In this respect the Klan moved in concert with progressivism.²⁸

The people attracted to the Klan have been generally described as middle-class, rural or small town in background and usually skilled and lower eschelon white collar workers as well as fringe professionals.²⁹ The exceptions usually held high Klan offices, such as established lawyers like Ohio Klan leader, Clyde Osborne of Youngstown, a self-admitted political opportunist.³⁰

Out of the various socio-economic backgrounds, four main types of joiners can be identified. The smallest number but most likely to be the last to leave the movement were the radical fringe of fanatic racist, religious bigot and other type of haters. The leadership group consisted of self-interested opportunists like Osborne. The rank and file of the Invisible Empire in the Midwest was formed by two other groups, compulsive joiners and moral reformers. A contemporary student of the Klan phenomenon felt that the fanatics comprised five percent, the opportunists five percent, the joiners twenty percent, and the reform group seventy percent.³¹

²⁸Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 166.

²⁹Marec, "Fiery Cross", p. 15; Jackson, Klan in the City, p. 240.

³⁰Jackson, Klan in the City, pp. 240-241.

³¹Stanley Frost, "The Lure of the White", Outlook, CXXXVI, (January 30, 1924), pp. 184-185.

Investigation of the motives of each type points to the flexible character and unclarified objectives of the Klan. Haters joined because such people need the strength that numbers deliver. As the hottest political pressure group in the era, the opportunists were sure to sense the untapped source of power the Klan offered. It was within the rank and file that the Klan's numerical success was founded. Why did these men join? To the joiner the Klan offered a low-cost nationally recognized fraternal order with the robes, titles, secret signs and languages that were common to American lodge life. Lodges in Protestant America filled a "spiritual diet-deficiency" because of the lack of mysticism and ritual in American Protestant church life.³² Many people who were ambivalent to the tactics and militancy of the Klan joined the Klan because they did not disagree with many of the Klan arguments about Americanism or Protestantism and "it was the thing to do".³³

The reform element reflected the frustration of people with the inability of government to enforce the moral and legal status quo. These people would be among the first to become disillusioned with the Klan when politicians who received Klan support either failed to move fast enough or out of ordinary administrative necessities (such as lack of funds) showed a willingness to compromise Klan

³²Marec, "Fiery Cross", p. 58.

³³Jerimiah Baird, personal interview, May 31, 1976.

principles once in office. It was this group, probably the most numerous, which provided the mercurial rise of the Klan and contributed to its precipitous decline by the end of 1925 when the millenium was still far from being established. These men, plus the joiners, were upset by the movement of the Klan toward a more radical posture and also by the un-democratic methods by which the Klan functioned. Emotion and oratory held sway over deliberation and debate, and the obvious opportunism of some Klan leaders made the Klan less than attractive on the inside.³⁴

The Klan did have a well established set of fraternal concepts and ceremony (Klanecraft) which served to promote a certain degree of brotherhood (Klanishness). The mass initiations, regalia, parades, picnics, karnivals, field days and other functions, as well as its well remembered cross burnings, furnished much excitement throughout the Midwest and Ohio and provided the ostensible cause of the confrontation at Niles. The individual Klansman was part of a ritual that brought conformity through obedience, secrecy, fidelity, and klanishness. As a secret member of the Invisible Empire he was pledged to silence regarding the behavior of fellow Klansmen, and required to uphold the Klan Kreed.

The creed of the Klan required each initiate to uphold the American flag, Constitution, and just laws and

³⁴Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 181.

liberty. The Klansman stated his belief in God, a moral and just church, separation of church and state, freedom of the press, law and order, protection of "pure womanhood", the limitation of foreign immigration, and that he as a native born American had rights superior to those of a foreigner. In concluding, he stated his willingness to support the free public school as "the cornerstone of good government" and condemned those who did not support such schools as "enemies of the Republic and...unworthy of citizenship." An indication of the economic position and defensive stance of the Klan against foreign born organizations was found in two points of the creed which called for the Klansmen to believe in a "closer relationship of capital and labor," and "the preservation of unwanted strikes by foreign agitators."³⁵

If he agreed to this creed, the initiate was now a Knight of the Invisible Empire, with a hierarchy, auxiliary organizations and strange names based on the letters Kl. The new member now had access to ceremonies and campgrounds with his freshly attained knowledge of greeting, responses and other phrases. Two Klansmen could quickly establish their brotherhood.

³⁵"A Klansman's Creed", Youngstown Citizen, July 19, 1924, p. 4.

AYAK?	(Are <u>Y</u> ou <u>A</u> <u>K</u> lansman?)
AKIA	(<u>A</u> <u>K</u> lansman <u>I</u> <u>A</u> m)
KIGY!	(<u>K</u> lansman, <u>I</u> <u>G</u> reet <u>Y</u> ou!)
CLASP	(<u>C</u> lannish <u>L</u> oyalty <u>A</u> <u>S</u> acred Principle)
CA BARK	(<u>C</u> onstantly <u>A</u> ppplied <u>B</u> y <u>A</u> ll Real <u>K</u> lansmen)
ITSUB	(<u>I</u> n <u>T</u> he <u>S</u> acred <u>U</u> nfailing Bond)
SAN BOG	(<u>S</u> trangers <u>A</u> re <u>N</u> ear, <u>B</u> e <u>O</u> n <u>G</u> uard) ³⁶

With the attractions discussed and the national publicity the Klan received in 1921, the years 1922 through 1925 became the most active for the Klan in America. The rapid national expansion brought a group of ambitious men on the make into regional leadership of the organization. The two most outstanding in terms of their eventual influence were Douglas C. Stephenson of Indiana and Hiram Wesley Evans of Texas. Starting in 1922 and continuing through 1923, control of the national organization of the Klan was wrested from its founder, Colonel Simmons. Evans became the new Imperial Wizard and by 1924 Simmons and his disciples, Clarke and Taylor, had departed the movement. This fight for control had generally weakened the Klan's national reputation, but despite the law suits and countersuits between the national leaders with their allegations of illegality, immorality and profiteering, the Klan in the Midwest was just entering its period of greatest growth. Just as they had been willing to overlook the violence the Klan perpetrated in other regions, Midwestern Klansmen brushed aside the improprieties of the national leadership

³⁶Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, pp. 117-118.

because the desire for an organization such as the Klan with its unabashed Americanism and Protestantism was so strong. By 1924, the North Central Region of the Klan (Indiana, Ohio, Illinois) contained 40.2 per cent of all Klan members, whereas two years before these states accounted for only a meager 6.4 percent.³⁷

There were advantages in the change of leadership. The Klan under Evans was transformed into a political movement and away from vigilantism. This was part of the Klan method of choosing the right appeal for the right group. The pattern that worked in the Midwest was the establishment of a military type of organizational structure with power concentrated in the top of the hierarchy and trickling down through the ranks. The pattern of activities consisted of regular meetings. Social auxiliaries included the member's family. Usually Klan action took the form of rallies, parades, semi-public initiations, lectures, cooperation with local law-enforcement in the oversight of community moral standards, and political action in state and local politics.³⁸

The Klan hierarchy and pyramidal organization was established in the Ohio Realm in 1924 as a self governing realm within the Invisible Empire. Prior to this it was

³⁷ Jackson, Klan in the City, p. 15.

³⁸ Norman F. Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", p. 238.

under the control of D.C. Stephenson of Indiana. With exclusive original rights to Ohio and Indiana, Stephenson, a consummate salesman, shaped the political tactics of the Klan in the Midwest as he concentrated on using the Klan as a foundation for political power. As his concentration on his political fortunes increased, the organization of Ohio was relegated to his subordinates. Finally when Stephenson and Imperial Wizard Evans parted ways, the Ohio organization passed back to the national headquarters and Brown Harwood took over as organizer. Concentrating on gathering members and fees, Harwood passed up building a power structure of his own and deferred decision making to the various higher potentates, and the local Klans. This period from October 1923 to September 1924 with Harwood as King Kleagle proved to be the Ohio Klan's time of greatest growth with a reported membership of 350,000 by 1925.³⁹

As a self-governing realm, the Kleagles and King Kleagles were replaced by the Exalted Cyclops as leaders of the individual local Klans. Usually in Ohio the Klans were organized on a countywide basis and several of the county Klans were joined into a Province ruled by a Grand Titan. The state organization was the realm presided over by the Grand Dragon, who answered to the Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire. In addition, there were the ancillary

³⁹Ibid., pp. 78-79; Marec, "Fiery Cross", pp. 78-79.

offices like that of the Kludd (Chaplain), and an organization of naturalized right thinking "Canadians, Englishmen, and other White, Gentile, Protestants" called the Royal Riders of the Red Robe (later the American Crusaders)⁴⁰ and auxiliaries such as the Junior Klan, Women of the Ku Klux Klan, and Klavaliers. Other previously established groups also became identified under Klan aegis: Daughters of America, Knights of Malta, the Orangemen and J.O.U.A.M. (Junior Order United American Mechanics).⁴¹

Politically, the Ohio Klan followed a select set of goals--the election of friendly law makers, legislation that would aid the public schools and protect and require reading of the King James Bible in the public schools, and the opposition to Catholics in the various professions, especially education.⁴²

Emphasizing Americanism, the Klan Grand Dragons and Kleagles in Ohio found a sympathetic audience when they identified Protestantism with Patriotism, and painted the Roman Catholic Church as an alien threat. Indeed such nativism in Ohio was much larger than the Klan. An example of post war anti-foreignism was the Ake Law of 1919. Under the provisions of this statute, all foreign language in-

⁴⁰Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 217.

⁴¹"Klan and Kindred at Idora", Youngstown Citizen, July 19, 1924, p. 4.

⁴²Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", pp. 223-224.

struction, specifically German, was forbidden below the eighth grade.⁴³

Students of the Midwest Klan have repeated the Mecklin thesis that it was predominately a rural-small-town phenomenon, with slight variations from state to state. The largest variation was Ohio. The eastern portion of Ohio contained the most active elements of the Klan and was not rural nor predominantly Protestant. However, the heaviest membership of the Klan in Ohio was situated in those parts of the state where the enemies of the Klan were least concentrated.⁴⁴

⁴³Marec, "Fiery Cross", p. 13.

⁴⁴Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", p. 224; Marec, "Fiery Cross", p. 77.

CHAPTER TWO

TRUMBULL COUNTY AND THE RISE OF KLAN NUMBER SEVENTY

Why was the Mahoning Valley, which included Trumbull County, an exception to the rural-small-town pattern? To answer this question it is necessary to explore the multiplicity of Klan motivation in the Valley and thence Trumbull County. The story of the Klan that forced itself and its enemies to the point of violent civil strife provided an exception to the general trends of Klan activity in the Midwest. As a rule, the Klan verbally lashed out at their enemies at a safe distance from a safe territory. In Ohio in general, violence was limited to individual acts and more often than not was directed against members of the same ethnic and social class as their own. In Trumbull County, however, the Klan was face to face with recent immigrants who lived in closely knit communities in the rapidly expanding urban areas of the county. The urban industrialized communities had changed and older residents blamed the problems of urban life on the most recent and significantly least Anglo-Saxon groups.⁴⁵ Because the people of the still rural and primarily agrarian communities in Trumbull County like Cortland and Kinsman shared a common heritage with the older established, but appre-

⁴⁵Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", pp. 241-242.

hensive and troubled urban groups, the Klan had a county wide constituency. The principles they defended were those of the homogeneous communities of the nineteenth century and were well defined by custom and law.

What made the Klan in Trumbull County coalesce was the indomitable spirit of Evan Watkins, who made it his crusade to keep the fires burning under the cauldron of moral reform and law enforcement programs with their thinly veiled anti-foreignism.

Trumbull County had a combination of characteristics: geographic, economic, and demographic, which contributed to the rise of Klan Number Seventy. Geographically the county was divided into two portions; economically, one of the areas was urban-industrial, the other agrarian. Demographically, the urban area exhibited a new ethnic multiplicity, while the rural areas, an ethnic homogeneity.

The main geographic divisions of the county were the Mahoning Valley in the south and the rest of the county which consisted of rolling farmland drained by the Grand and Shenango Rivers and Mosquito Creek. The Mahoning Valley was the industrialized portion of the county, and in the twenties the expansion of industry in the valley was at its all time peak. The remainder of the county was given over to agriculturally related pursuits. What had developed was the existence of two ways of life with

different needs and life styles, both of which had exhibited vitality during the World War I era boom. It was, however, the industrial Mahoning Valley which provided the county with its economic growth during the twenties. By then, the valley, which included all the cities along the Mahoning from Lowellville, south of Youngstown, in Mahoning County to Newton Falls, beyond Warren in Trumbull County, was the second largest steel producing area in the country, ranking behind only the Pittsburgh district.⁴⁶

Because of economic opportunity, the valley experienced heavy in-migration of the so called new-immigrant groups, and further numbers of older ethnic groups drawn to the factories from the surrounding countryside. The major areas of population concentration in the Trumbull County portion of the valley were the rapidly growing cities of Girard, Niles, and Warren, plus the villages of Mineral Ridge, McDonald and Newton Falls.⁴⁷ Situated outside the Mahoning Valley itself, but in close proximity with both the Youngstown and Sharon, Pennsylvania, steel areas, the city of Hubbard was also a growing industrial area. These areas in the south of the county became industrial because they were the source of minerals that were essential

⁴⁶The Federal Writer's Project of Ohio, Works Progress Administration, compiler, Warren and Trumbull County, (Warren: Western Reserve Historical Celebration Committee, 1938), p. 1.

⁴⁷Ella A. Woodward, History of Newton Falls, (Newton Falls, Ohio: Newton Falls Public Library, 1942), p. 115.

to the production of iron and steel. By the time of the war the infant industries of the nineteenth century founded on the mineral deposits had matured.

Previous to the arrival of the so-called new immigrants (Italians, Poles, Slovaks, and Hungarians), the majority of the settlers in the valley were of Welsh and English nationality with a significant number of Irish and a few Germans. The dominant group in the agrarian sections of the county consisted of the decedents of old Connecticut Yankee New Englanders and Scotch-Irish farmers with whom the Welsh and English immigrants easily identified. Both the British immigrants and the older residents could be identified by a common overwhelming Protestantism and an anti-Irish Catholic sentiment. Therefore, there existed throughout the county a strong identification of Americanism as Protestantism and the Anglo-Saxon American culture because of the traditional dominance of these ethnic groups.⁴⁸

By the twenties the ethnic patterns in the valley had been well established. Save for a continuous influx of blacks into Warren, the Immigration Restriction Acts of the early twenties worked to freeze the proportions of ethnic population. One striking characteristic of the pattern was the growth of ethnic ghettos in the industrialized cities and villages. Close proximity to the dirt, smoke and filth of the mills seemed to be a major characteristic of

⁴⁸The Federal Writers Project, Warren and Trumbull County, p. 45.

the ghettos of foreign born. In Warren they inhabited the Mahoning River flats area. This region was closest to the blast furnaces and open hearths of Thomas Steel, and was the area that flooded first when the Mahoning rose above its banks. In Niles, the foreign area was known as Russia-fields, because of the manufacture there of a type of iron called Russia Iron. In Girard these new immigrant groups were more scattered, but generally lived close to their jobs in the mills.

The territorial distribution of these groups depended on another factor, that of ethnic cohesion. Niles and Girard became home to large numbers of Italians, and while Warren was more mixed in its composition and included increasing numbers of rural to city migrants as well, it also had distinct ethnic sections within the foreign born areas of the city. Even the older immigrant groups had exhibited this cohesiveness. For example, the side of Niles south of the Mahoning River was called Welshfield for many years because of its large number of Welsh inhabitants.⁴⁹

The area out of the valley to the north of Warren and composed of roughly the northern two tiers of townships was (and is today) devoted to agriculture. The two major farming centers were Cortland and Kinsman. Of them the most important in Klan activity was Cortland because

⁴⁹Ibid.

of its proximity to Warren. The Cortland area and its lifestyle represented the good old days to many who were susceptible to the Klan robe, and it was but fitting that the Klan in Trumbull County bought a Cortland farm with the intention of making it a Klan resort.⁵⁰

While the economic lifeblood of Trumbull County in the south was steel production, only in Warren was steel making the primary industry. The other Mahoning Valley communities in Trumbull County produced finished and semi-finished steel products, or provided support industries much as the Niles Fire Brick. The first years of the decade of the twenties were marked by a downturn in the steel business with resultant unemployment and declining wages. By 1923, however, the economic picture had improved markedly, and the newspapers frequently mentioned the rise in mill activity and periodic wage increases.⁵¹ As a result all the ethnic groups were doing better economically than they had for several years.

The most important feature of the county's demographic and economic makeup in relation to the rise of the Ku Klux Klan was the number of "unamerican" foreigners, or those of the new immigration before the restriction of the twenties. With the improvement in the economic

⁵⁰Jeremiah Baird, personal interview.

⁵¹"City Growing", Warren Tribune, June 28, 1923, p. 1.

condition in the steel industry, these newer groups began to grow more affluent. This was the beginning of their rise above their former second class status in the local society. Such signs as the proliferation of ethnic merchants and their staunch opposition to the accusations of the Klan pointed to their increased sense of belonging.

In 1920, the census ranked the East North Central Region consisting of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin as second in total population and second in population of foreign white stock.⁵² The census definition of foreign stock is the foreign born and their children for two generations. In 1920, Ohio had a total population of 5,759,394, of which 63.7 per cent was of native white stock and 33 per cent foreign white stock. Of the foreign stock, two thirds was native born.⁵³ The dominant foreign stock group in Ohio was the German followed by the Italian. An important factor to remember, however, in considering Klan activity was not the absolute numbers of foreign born, but the origin of the foreign born. To illustrate, a closer look at the ethnic population of the cities and towns of Trumbull County is warranted.

⁵²U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census Monographs, Vol. III, Immigrants and Their Children, 1920, by Niles Carpenter, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927), p. 12, Table 6.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 306-307, Table 135. An interesting note is that this 33 per cent marked a drop of one per cent from the 1910 census for the state.

In the 14th census Warren had a population of 27,050 of which 80.1 per cent was native born white, 17.3 per cent was foreign born white and 2.6 per cent was black. Of the native whites about one quarter were of foreign born parentage.⁵⁵ For Trumbull County on the whole, 14.8 per cent of the total population of 83,920 was foreign born white while 82 per cent was native white. The largest individual ethnic group among the foreign born in Warren was the Italian with 751 of the total 4,677. Almost as numerous were the Romanians and all together the Southern and Eastern European nationalities accounted for 58 per cent of the foreign born population.⁵⁶

There was another, often overlooked, group of immigrants that were involved in Klan related activities. They consisted of a significant number of immigrants from Great Britain who comprised the second largest group of foreign born residents in Warren, exceeded only by the Italians.⁵⁷ The same was true of the county as a whole and undoubtedly was a result of the economic opportunities in the steel mills which offered occupations the British groups had been familiar with in Great Britain. This seg-

⁵⁵U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920, Vol. III, Population, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 785, Table 10.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 783, Table 9.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 794-796.

ment of immigrants was often overlooked because it was most assimilable into the dominant native groups, and yet at the same time was in close direct economic competition with immigrants from other countries. Because of their experience and more assimilable backgrounds they occupied more of the supervisory positions, which led to a certain amount of ethnic conflict. It is enlightening to an understanding of this conflict that the most able Klan lecturer and organizer, Evan Watkins of Girard, was a Welsh immigrant. Even though he was unable to join the Klan because of his foreign birth, he proved to be a spell binding lecturer for the cause, convincing hundreds of the imminent perils to the future of the Anglo-Saxon race, Protestantism and democracy.⁵⁸

The unity of the Mahoning Valley area was another important factor in Trumbull County society. The valley communities had common problems and interests which concerned mostly the difficulties brought on by increased population and industrialism. Housing shortages, school room shortages, lack of sufficient city services, as well as a failure of the law enforcement officials to enforce the added burden of prohibition, contributed to an almost universal desire for action throughout the valley. In the early twenties, for most valley communities the answer was the Klan. It is relevant to this point that in addition

⁵⁸Jeremiah Baird, personal interview; Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", p. 243.

to calling for closer police cooperation, the valley Klan mayors, elected in 1923, sought as one of their first objectives, the establishment of a regional water system which would free them from dependence on the polluted Mahoning River.⁵⁹ These types of problems were unique to the valley towns and were of little concern to the rural areas of the county. Such an emphasis by the Klan mayors on urban problems and the later campaign to "clean up" Niles points to the urban nature of Trumbull County Klan activity. In addition, most of the influential leaders of the Klan in Trumbull County were from Warren or parts of the southern urbanized area of the county such as Evan Watkins of Girard. Furthermore, the news of the Trumbull Klan as well as that of the Youngstown and Mahoning County Klan, was carried by the official Klan organ, The Youngstown Citizen, a clearly urban based newspaper in advertising content.⁶⁰

The relationship of industrial and urban growth, the correlation between urban areas and concentrations of foreign born and the dual personality of the native white population, all provided the backdrop for the dramatic rise

⁵⁹"Klan Mayors Want Adequate Water Supply", Warren Tribune, November 9, 1923, p. 1.

⁶⁰The Youngstown Citizen, (later just the Citizen, then finally the Ohio Citizen) was prior to becoming the Klan organ the official newspaper of the Youngstown Auto Club and the Board of Trade, from 1915 to 1923, and interestingly maintained the same nucleus of staff under Web Brown until publication ceased in 1925.

of the Trumbull Klan. The differences that had evolved in the society had the earmarks of an ethnic conflict in which the least assimilable ethnic elements were identified with the problems attendant upon the urbanization and industrialization of the southern part of the county. Because of such a conflict the reformism of the era took on an anti-foreign and anti-Catholic slant--a slant aided by the voice of the Klan and Klan lecturers like Evan Watkins. It was as if the symptoms of the problems of an urban area, such as dry law enforcement versus the bootleggers and speakeasys, had deteriorated into a problem itself and then polarized into a struggle between the Klan as an agent of reform versus the Catholic foreign born.⁶¹ The Catholic groups were of a diverse nature and tended to exhibit a strong degree of ethnic cohesiveness, which led to a fear of their numbers. In cities such as Niles one group--the Italians--resided in sufficient numbers to effectively influence the whole social organization. On the other hand, the traditionally dominant Anglo-Saxon groups exhibited a triple personality, being at the same time urban, rural and foreign born. These groups were of the same basic ethnic and cultural milieu throughout the county and for two years presented a united front in the Klan and--at least in their own eyes--became the only Americans in Trumbull County.

⁶¹"May Call Gunder to Niles", Youngstown Vindicator, November 3, 1924, p. 1.

Against this social and economic background, the Klan first came on the scene in Trumbull County in 1923, amid reports of increased lawlessness in Niles, renewed economic prosperity in the mills, and booming population growth.⁶² County newspapers in 1923 displayed their nativist thinking by issuing a warning to Americans to be on guard against "pink patriots", equating foreign language publication with the reds, and in general exhibiting blatant anti-foreignism in reporting vice squad crackdowns.⁶³

Evan A. Watkins was the type of man who was well equipped to capitalize on such conditions. The Klan had already been organized in the winter of 1922-23 in Mahoning County, and the movement naturally spread up the valley spurred by Trumbull Klan Kleagle, Doyle B. Glossner, and the lectures of Watkins. Prior to the arrival

⁶²"City Growing", Warren Tribune, June 28, 1923, p. 1. The article estimated that Warren was growing at the rate of 11 per cent per year.

⁶³"We Have With Us One Million Reds", Warren Tribune, May 17, 1923, p. 6; "Governor Hears of Law Violations", Niles Daily News, June 9, 1923, p. 1. An example of the biased reporting by the largest Trumbull County paper, the Warren Tribune, concerns a fight at the Thomas Steel mill in Warren and exhibits the strong anti-foreignism present at the time the Kleagle was starting to move in the county. Even though the police had not placed any blame in the altercation between two steelworkers, the paper shows its bias by giving detailed information about the alleged victim and describes him as a hard working American family man while it says little about the worker the reporter called the attacker, except that he was Romanian. "Steelworker Feared Dying After Brutal Attack," Warren Tribune, May 18, 1923, p. 1.

of the Kleagle, Watkins had been in great demand as a church lecturer on the Holy Land. He claimed to have been with General Allenby in S-2 (Intelligence) during World War I, serving almost exclusively in the Middle East. Through such activities, Watkins gained easy acceptance into the dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant Society.⁶⁴ His authoritative style and commanding rhetorical presence lent an air of great plausibility to his lectures. On May 7th he was listed as the primary speaker for a gathering of "100 per cent Americans" as he had been the previous Monday, April 30. The Tribune learned from a man who attended the meeting "that a Dr. Watkins spoke in a fiery manner about '100 per cent Americanism' and that at the end of the lecture asked those who wished to be identified with an organization of 100 per cent Americans, '. . . to step into a side room on the way out.', there it is presumed names were taken and an organization begun."⁶⁵ April 30th, 1923, therefore, marks the birthday of the Trumbull County Klan.

Four days previous to this first meeting in the county seat of Warren, three crosses were burned by the Klansmen around Niles and Mineral Ridge.⁶⁶ The May 7th

⁶⁴"Dr. E.A. Watkins, Church Lecturer", Niles Daily News, April 28, 1923, p. 2.; "News at Niles", Warren Tribune, May 18, 1923, p. 14.

⁶⁵"100 Per Cent American Meet is Scheduled Here", Warren Tribune, May 7, 1923, p. 1.

⁶⁶"Three Fiery Crosses Burned by Klan", Niles Daily News, April 26, 1923, p. 1.

meeting of the Klan was marked by a burning tree on Newton Falls road in Leavittsburg. Previous to this night the Warren Tribune reported the activities of Kleagle Glossner.

A man said to be the organizer of the Klan has been in Warren for some time quietly going to local citizens, talking with them about Americanism, honesty, and political and religious matters. ⁶⁷

In this manner the organization of the Trumbull Klan was gaining momentum. On May 11th there occurred a dramatic, coordinated display of burning crosses throughout the county and especially surrounding Warren. Crosses burned in Champion, Cortland, Churchill, Brookfield, and Leavittsburg as well as nine places in the city of Warren. The organization behind the cross burnings was unidentified by any Klan insignia except the fiery crosses, but they were all that were needed. ⁶⁸

With such publicity and dramatics, the Klan became grist for the editor of the Tribune as he struck out at Klan secrecy and scare tactics, such as the cross burnings. ⁶⁹ In the small industrial village of Newton Falls the local paper ran a front page story concerning the first cross burning in that town. In a factual account, which neither praised

⁶⁷ "Flaming Tree Marks Spot for Alleged K.K.K. Meet", Warren Tribune, May 9, 1923, p. 1.

⁶⁸ "Fiery Crosses Burned in Many Places", Warren Tribune, May 14, 1923, p. 1.

⁶⁹ T.H. Deming, "A Talk With the Ku Kluxers", Warren Tribune, May 15, 1923, p. 1.

nor condemned the Klan, it was reported that one of the perpetrators of the cross burning on May 11th had accidentally blown off his left hand while igniting a bomb to draw attention to the fiery cross. The paper claimed that the cross burning meant that the Klan had attained 100 members in Newton Falls.⁷⁰

By mid-May, the Klan was being organized openly, and at their first big semi-public initiation, May 14th, newspaper reporters were invited to observe the ceremonies. The initiation was held on a farm four miles north of Warren on Cortland Road, and there were few secrecy or security precautions in effect. From 1500 to 2000 Klansmen attended this meeting in which over 100 were inducted into the Invisible Empire. By this time the Klan claimed to have a county wide membership of 3,500.⁷¹

The Klan's penchant for the dramatic, which ranged from Evan Watkin's fiery speeches to the bombs and fiery crosses, quickened the atmosphere in the sleepy little towns of the county as well as the burgeoning urban areas and guaranteed that the Klan was the foremost topic of conversation. The Newton Falls Herald recorded such reaction.

⁷⁰ "Man Has Left Hand Blown Off", Newton Falls Herald, May 17, 1923, p. 1.

⁷¹ "Big K.K.K. Initiation Last Night", Warren Tribune, May 15, 1923, p. 1.

Another sign of the Ku Klux Klan and its activities in and around the village was witnessed Friday nights. About 9:15 the explosion of three bombs, one following the other, caused people to leave their homes to investigate its cause, only to see a large burning cross standing erect upon the dummy at the intersection of Broad and Center Streets.

No sign of how it came there, or from whence the bombs came was discovered. People stood at a distance to watch the cross burn to the ground and then dispersed. Many prominent men of the town assert that they personally know that the Klan has a following here of more than a hundred members, although they refuse to admit membership themselves or to give any proof of their assertion.⁷²

A village such as Newton Falls presented the situation of the times most succinctly. At the same time that the Klan was forming, the growing number of Catholic citizens of the village were starting to build the first Roman Catholic parish church after years of being on mission church status.⁷³ The Monday after the Bishop of Cleveland assisted in laying the cornerstone on the new church and conferring parish status on the congregation, the Klan held its largest initiation in the county up to that time on a knoll west of Newton Falls on Charlestown Road. This ceremony was attended by 3000 Klansmen and a class of 300 was initiated. One remarkable feature of the ceremony

⁷²"Bomb and Fiery Cross Point to K.K.K.", Newton Falls Herald, May 31, 1923, p. 1.

⁷³"Catholics to Have Gala Day", Newton Falls Herald, June 7, 1923, p. 1.

was the fact that none of the Klansmen wore robes or masks, and they made no public displays, such as cross burning, bombs, or parades. In this respect the Klan in Trumbull County was not consistent throughout and showed a considerable degree of adaptation to local circumstances.⁷⁴

Eight miles to the east of Newton Falls in the village of Mineral Ridge, a former mining center of predominantly Welsh ancestry, an early July initiation was held, this time in full regalia and formal ceremony. This initiation was held in an area called Cleveland's Woods south of the village on the border between Trumbull and Mahoning Counties and it was complete with masks, secrecy, and cross burnings.⁷⁵

One reason for such diversity in Klan activity was the proximity of towns like Mineral Ridge to Niles, the city viewed by Klansmen as the most sinful and evil place in the Mahoning Valley. As one keen observer of the social climate in Trumbull County during the twenties remembers, Niles was identified with vice to such a degree that among the class of people from which the Klan emerged, the mention of a young man expressing a desire to go to Niles evoked a strong set of negative impressions as to the youth's moral character.⁷⁶

⁷⁴"K.K.K. Holds Big Meeting Monday Night," Newton Falls Herald, June 7, 1923, p. 1.

⁷⁵"K.K.K. Meeting Held at Mineral Ridge", Warren Tribune, July 14, 1923, p. 1.

⁷⁶Jeremiah Baird, personal interview.

A rapidly expanding manufacturing center, Niles in 1920 had a total population of 13,080 of which 75 per cent was native white, 24.9 per cent foreign white and less than 0.1 per cent black.⁷⁷ Niles had some of the most pressing problems of any Trumbull County city, and the newspapers and city administration fought over who was to blame. The crux of this conflict was enforcement of the Crabb Act which made it illegal to violate the 18th Amendment in Ohio,⁷⁸ and the symptoms of the conflict were increased illegal activity, centered in the "foreign wards" of the city, and resultant polarization of the population.

The publisher of the Niles Daily News, E.R. Smith, along with county probate Judge Smith, continuously attacked the administration of Mayor Charles Crow from early spring 1923 until the Niles Daily News went bankrupt in July of 1923. Judge Smith ascertained the condition of Niles in 1923 as such that "the bootlegger, gambler, and resort keepers had the call at City Hall rather than the lawful element."⁷⁹

In reply to such accusations Mayor Crow claimed that publisher Smith's editorial policies were directed by the "Trusts" who were identified by the Mayor as Youngstown Sheet

⁷⁷ Fourteenth Census, Population, Vol. III, p. 788, Table 10.

⁷⁸ "Raps Mayors", Warren Tribune, May 11, 1923, p. 15.

⁷⁹ "City Administration Arraigned in No Uncertain Manner", Niles Daily News, March 8, 1923, p. 1.

and Tube and the Anti-Saloon League, while he spoke for the people.⁸⁰ In addition Crow claimed that publisher Smith was out to ruin him because Crow had declined to help Smith's financially troubled newspaper.⁸¹

The result of this disagreement over effective law enforcement in Niles was the establishment of a "Crusade", as the News called it, to clean up Niles by direct action, not just words.⁸² Niles had a significant dry majority in the fall 1922 referendum on light wine and beer, beverages acknowledged as the biggest "bootleg" violations in the city.⁸³ As a result a significant number of the citizens of Niles viewed the prevalent condition of open violation as a flagrant abuse of majority opinion, and a growing ethnic cleavage was revealed between the voting members of the society and the large numbers of foreign born light wine and beer drinkers, some of whom were not naturalized citizens and therefore did not vote. The crusade the News envisioned, while begun ostensibly against only the lawless element of Niles, provided the germ of the movement which blossomed into

⁸⁰"Mayor Resumes Attack on Publisher Smith", Niles Daily News, March 19, 1923, p. 1.

⁸¹"Niles News and Judge Smith Attacked by the Mayor in Hot Address Before Our City Council", Niles Daily News, March 12, 1923, p. 1.

⁸²"A Challenge to the Law Abiding Citizens of Niles", Niles Daily News, February 5, 1923, p. 1.

⁸³"Who's Responsible For the Bootlegger in Niles?", Niles Daily News, January 29, 1923, p. 4.

the 100 per cent Americanism of the Klan. The pre-prohibition elements in Niles may or may not have harkened to the Klan as a means of enforcement, but true to the established pattern of Klan salesmanship it is certain that the Klan Kleagle borrowed freely from the fervor of this desire to clean up Niles in organizing not only Niles, but the whole county.⁸⁴

By May 1923, the condition of Niles was a topic of debate throughout the county. The county's largest newspaper, the Warren Tribune, followed the Niles situation closely and cast doubt as to whether the city or county administrations could clean Niles up. It cited the numerous "houses of ill repute, gambling dens, and speakeasies" to be found in the city.⁸⁵

The result of the agitation by the News and Dr. John Wean, pastor of the Niles First Methodist Church, was ultimately a state investigation and an informal hearing of Mayor Crow's alleged negligence before Governor Vic Donahey. Under Ohio law in the 1920's, the Governor had it within his power to remove any mayor he determined to be negligent

⁸⁴"K.K.K.", Niles Daily News, January 26, 1923, p. 6. Although Editor and Publisher Smith came out in opposition to the Klan, it was not their goals he disagreed with in this editorial cited above. Smith deplored only the secrecy of the Klan which he labeled cowardice.

⁸⁵"Clean-up in Niles May Be Up to State", Warren Tribune, May 4, 1923, p. 1.

in enforcing state laws.⁸⁶ Governor Donahey launched a probe into this situation and determined that there were indeed 21 places engaged in either selling liquor, prostitution, gambling, or engaging in all three vices. In addition, during the months of the state investigation, 134 liquor law violations had been recorded. The most inflammatory part of the report was that it intimated (in the words of the Niles Daily News) "that the women of the underworld coming to Niles to ply their nefarious business, preferred to go to the houses controlled by Italian proprietors, claiming that they were able to get better protection at such places thru some unknown and invisible power."⁸⁷ Such statements did little to stave off the increased societal polarization in Niles.

It should be emphasized that the Law Enforcement League founded by Publisher Smith which initiated the 1923 reform movement in Niles was entirely legal and public and

⁸⁶Ibid. Mayor Herbert Vogt of Massillon was removed in such a manner and the request for such a recall was a favorite tactic of opponents of a particular administration during the twenties.

⁸⁷"Governor Hears of Law Violations", Niles Daily News, June 9, 1923, p. 1. The Italian element in Niles received much attention as the group most closely related to the unlawful events in the city. The Italians themselves were well aware of this. As a result the American Fascisti Order, patterned after Mussolini's legions which were cleaning up Italy itself, established a branch in Niles during 1923 in an intra-ethnic attempt to stop what was termed "vendetta" conditions among Mahoning Valley Italians. Such an organization was seen as a "good" movement by the valley newspapers. "Fascisti Order Has Branch in Niles", Warren Tribune, March 20, 1923, p. 1.

was not openly associated with the Klan then starting to organize in the county. As a member of the League, Dr. Wean stated that "he had no apology to make to anyone for doing what he thought was his Christian duty, although he was not the promoter, but that he was glad to be associated with a number of blooded men of Niles who wanted to see a clean moral city."⁸⁸ Such a statement with its allusions to religion and "blooded" citizens, while not from a Klansman, was similar in content to what the lectures of Evan Watkins said in support of the Klan's organizing efforts. The mayor was not removed by the Governor due to insufficient evidence,⁸⁹ but the real significance of this reform effort to the Klan was not only its failure to affect the vice situation in the city, but also in preparing the potential Klan members for the kind of direct action on which the Klan thrived. The controversy in Niles eventually became the most significant part of Klan activity in the county and ultimately decided its fate.

Another county community in which the Klan found members was Girard, a city of 6,556 in 1920, approximately one half native white population and one half foreign or foreign of mixed parents.⁹⁰ Because vice conditions in

⁸⁸ "Dr. Wean Explains His Action on Crow Case", Niles Daily News, June 9, 1923, p. 1.

⁸⁹ "Governor Gives His Decision", Niles Daily News, June 15, 1923, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Fourteenth Census, Population, Vol. III, p. 790, Table 11.

Girard were not as prevalent as Niles and therefore not open to crusades, most Klan activity in Girard was limited to an occasional burning cross, small parades or later participation in the Niles confrontation. This is not to say that ethnic tension and distrust did not occur as a side effect, but such emotions were not translated into the type of polarization and violence that characterized the Kluxing of Niles.

Conditions in Girard were strikingly different from most places in the Mahoning Valley, and it was said to be the "only place in this section where you can't get a drink."⁹¹ Part of the reason for such a low level of lawlessness was the practice of the Girard Court in giving ten per cent kickbacks to arresting Prohibition Officers for liquor law convictions.⁹² Also its close proximity to Niles with its well developed vice district mitigated the need for such an area in Girard. Evidently such a city with its near equal split in populations between older and newer ethnic groups and lack of a clearly controversial subject suited for the use of the Klan Kleagle was not likely to receive the intense Klan attention such as that focused on the adjacent city of Niles.

⁹¹"Girard Wages War on Bootleggers and Speeders", Youngstown Citizen, June 10, 1922, p. 1. This article appeared in the Citizen previous to its editorial takeover by the Klan and Colonel Watkins.

⁹²"Niles Chief Makes Sizzling Retort", Niles Evening Register, November 15, 1923, p. 1.

The summer and fall of 1923 were a time of steady Klan growth, not only in the cities but throughout the county. In July Trumbull Klansmen were reported among the 75,000 at the first Ohio Konklave at Buckeye Lake, Ohio.⁹³ Back home in the county, in Newton Falls, Rev. L. Ross Ellett made the Christian Church a center for "patriotic movies" and preached on the Ku Klux Klan and its principles.⁹⁴ This type of development on the local level led to an intricate involvement of the Klan with the local society. For example, the Rev. Mr. Ellett's youth work merged with the Junior Klan, with the young people being called on to perform a play in honor of the W.C.T.U. on the occasion of the anniversary of the 18th Amendment.⁹⁵

Inevitably the invectives of Klan propaganda started to prompt responses from groups under attack. The Knights of Columbus in particular strongly condemned the Klan accusation that the Knights of Columbus was un-American and vehemently denied the validity of the oath that had been publicly presented by the Klan as evidence of such unpatriotic proclivities. The success of the Klan in propagating such a subterfuge was to a degree documented by the appear-

⁹³"State Klan", Warren Tribune, July 13, 1923, p. 2.

⁹⁴"Reverend Ellett Will Preach on K.K.K.", Newton Falls Herald, October 25, 1923, p. 1.

⁹⁵"W.T.C.U. Has Services Next Sunday Night", Newton Falls Herald, November 1, 1923, p. 1.

ance of an advertisement placed in the Warren paper by the Knights of Columbus which claimed that, "This bogus 'oath' is but one of the many fabrications that certain enemies of our constitution have invented in order to enrich themselves by hoodwinking credulous people into subscribing funds to fight evils that do not exist."⁹⁶ Such a response was mild compared to the opposition later posed by the militant Knights of the Flaming Circle, a group whose only reason for existence was opposition to the Klan. Not satisfied with the polite debates of the local editorial columns, they took the challenge the Klan presented into the streets of Niles during the summer and fall of 1924.

But 1923 was the year of the Klan in the county, and the sudden and tremendous gain in the Klan's popularity during it almost certainly guaranteed that effective opposition to such a mass movement would have to wait until the initial euphoria and emotion of the Klan organizational drive had worn off. Indicative of such emotions and of considerable use in gauging the acceptance of the Klan were the huge public Warren Konklave and parade in October and the following municipal elections in November which resulted in victory for many Klan candidates.

The first time the Trumbull Klan became totally "visible" to the county was at the huge Klan Konklave on

⁹⁶Advertisement by Knights of Columbus, Warren Tribune, August 18, 1923, p. 10.

October 6, 1923.⁹⁷ This gathering was the first open air, public, daylight meeting of the Klan in the county and featured an open initiation ceremony.⁹⁸ The Konklave featured a general afternoon meeting, twilight parade, Klan ceremonies and initiation at the race track of the county fair grounds and a naturalization of citizens into the Invisible Empire before the excitement of the activities of the day wore off. An estimated thirty thousand Klansmen were present, and they gathered in Warren from all over Northeastern Ohio. It was noted that no violence or disorders of any kind resulted from the Konklave and that at least twenty-five thousand spectators watched the Klansmen parading in their robes, but with their masks thrown back because of an anti-mask provision of their parade permit. Even city traffic that day was directed by robed Klansmen.⁹⁹

The parade set the stage for the high point of the day--at least as far as the Klan Kleagle was concerned--the initiation and naturalization of new citizens into the

⁹⁷ "City Agog at First Big Klan Meet", Warren Tribune, October 8, 1923, p. 1.

⁹⁸ "Klan Announces Open Invitation", Niles Evening Register, September 28, 1923, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Because of this anti-mask requirement it was not true that the Trumbull Klan became totally visible. Many local Klansmen felt it necessary to protect their identity, and watched the proceedings from the crowds of spectators. Apparently they did not have the confidence of their leaders that the Konklave would be as well accepted as it was. "City Agog at First Big Klan Meet", Warren Tribune, October 8, 1923, p. 1.

Invisible Empire. That night while an electric cross gleamed from one end of the oval race track at the fair grounds and ground displays of fireworks presented facsimiles of the Klan slogan, "One flag, one school, one Bible", and formed a picture of Doyle Glossner, the Klan Kleagle, speakers explained Klan principles and creed, and other organizers signed up new citizens for the coming initiation. This hyperactive scene was followed by the initiation ceremony complete with blazing crosses and many American flags flying. As the crowd dispersed after the ceremonies, the Kleagle counted his Klectokens, and the City of Warren and Trumbull County were surely left "agog" with the impression that remained of Klan power and appeal.¹⁰⁰

Such a meeting was a fairly common Klan tactic to gain the membership of some of the meeker members of a community. Usually these "Konklaves" were successful because they waited until the particular local Klan to be helped had achieved a moderate level of strength and activity. Such events became so common that many Klans had special parade units formed for just such occasions. After the Warren Konklave had injected new vitality into the Trumbull Klan and demonstrated to the local politicians the value of the Klan's popular support or at the least sympathy, a body of 600 Klansmen from Trumbull County--including Warren and Niles--traveled to other communities on successive Saturdays

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

the rest of the fall in order to help publicize the Klan throughout the state, and entice sympathetic citizens onto the membership rolls.¹⁰¹

A good part of the rationale behind such a Klan Konklave was to influence local politics. Trumbull County (in 1923) had two Klan related mayoral campaigns under way in its two largest cities, Warren and Niles. The statewide Konklave season was in October and the Warren election provided a sample of such a program of events. In Warren the Klan showed very good organizational capabilities in helping to elect John H. Marshall, the Republican candidate, over a field of four opponents.¹⁰² The incumbent mayor was Walter McBride, a Democrat, who tried to please all the elements of the community, while Marshall, having seen the success of the Konklave, read the political winds more accurately and cast his lot exclusively with the county Klan organization, even to the detriment of the rest of the Republican party slate. While McBride had permitted the Klan to parade during the Konklave, he had demanded the no-mask provision and in no way identified himself with the Klan. In fact, he had been active in participating in various ethnic parades and celebrations in the "foreign wards" of the

¹⁰¹"Klansmen From Warren", Warren Tribune, October 15, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁰²"Marshall Wins in Exciting Contest", Warren Tribune, August 15, 1923, p. 1.

city.¹⁰³ This was hardly the 100 per cent American thing to do.

In general, the emergence of the Klan candidates in Warren came in the aftermath of the Konklave. Marshall, the duly elected Republican party candidate, broke with the Republican committee, some of whom opposed the Klan, and ran both as a Republican (since the Warren Republican Committee failed to come up with another candidate) and Klan candidate. Marshall had printed sample ballots which did not include all the endorsed Republican candidates, just those endorsed by the Klan.¹⁰⁴ This split in the party took the election out of traditional party lines and made it a clear cut one of pro-Klan and anti-Klan. More evidence of this new factionalism in Warren was exhibited by the appearance of the Warren Good Government Committee, which was a foe of the Klan and included some prominent Republicans. In an open campaign to the public this group called for an end of the Klan so that the "present intolerable conditions of hate, persecution, proscription, boycott and enmity will end."¹⁰⁵ By the first of November the election was totally defined in pro-Klan versus anti-Klan terms as the Democratic party called for a rebuttal of the Klan by way of voting for

¹⁰³"Roumanians Celebrate Anniversary", Warren Tribune, May 21, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴"Marshall Breaks with Party", Warren Tribune, October 31, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵Political advertisement by the Warren Good Government Committee, Warren Tribune, November 1, 1923, p. 12.

McBride, thus alienating any support he may have had from Democratic Klansmen.¹⁰⁶

Election day proved that Marshall had chosen the right bandwagon. The editor of Warren's largest newspaper summed up the election: "The Ku Klux Klan is largely in the majority among the voters of Warren. The fact is fully attested by Tuesday's election. The issue was clean cut and well defined."¹⁰⁷

With his election Marshall joined the ranks of Ohio Klan mayors in Youngstown, Akron, East Liverpool, Portsmouth, Hamilton, Struthers, and Ravenna.¹⁰⁸ The vote cast in Warren was the largest in the city's history, pointing to the interest the Klan issue raised. As further evidence of Klan strength, all the endorsed Klan candidates won their posts except three, the council at large post and two school board seats.¹⁰⁹

After the election, the four Mahoning Valley Klan mayors, Marshall, Scheible (Youngstown), Cunningham (Girard), and Johnson (Struthers) periodically released information through the Mahoning County Klan Kleagle,

¹⁰⁶ Political advertisement by the Democratic Committee, Warren Tribune, November 1, 1923, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Editorial, Warren Tribune, November 7, 1923, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ "List of Ohio Mayors Elected", Warren Tribune, November 7, 1923, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ "Largest Vote in Warren's History", Warren Tribune, November 7, 1923, p. 1.

C.A. Gunder. In particular one of their first announcements concerned a solution to the water supply problems of the urban areas as well as the expected foundation of a joint police bureau to crack down on vice.¹¹⁰ In Warren itself, the police force was completely reorganized and by January, 1924, Marshall claimed that bootlegging was eliminated in Warren.¹¹¹

Whether or not this claim was true, the moral tone enforced in Warren changed under the new administration. The police force was placed on a strict conduct code which even extended into their off duty hours, and the mayor went so far as to ban public dancing for money in coffee houses.¹¹² Moral standards were strict and the ever vigilant eyes of the Invisible Empire were ready to come to the aid of the fellow Klansman who as mayor endeavored to protect the City of Warren against the forces of un-Americanism.¹¹³

In Niles with its already developing ethnic cleavages, the mayoral election of 1923 was paradoxically not as well defined along pro-Klan, anti-Klan lines. Charles Crow, the incumbent, although having beaten the attempted recall,

¹¹⁰"Klan Mayors Want Adequate Water Supply", Warren Tribune, November 9, 1923, p. 1.

¹¹¹"Police Ordered to Begin Cleanup", Warren Tribune, January 16, 1924, p. 1.

¹¹²"Mayor Stops Cafe Dances After Probe", Warren Tribune, January 28, 1924, p. 1.

¹¹³"W.C.T.U. Met", Warren Tribune, January 23, 1924, p.1.

was opposed on the grounds of lax law enforcement by a Democrat, Harvey Kistler. In a "spirited contest" Crow was defeated in his try for a fifth term. He was the only member of the Republican ticket defeated in the city, which came largely as a result of his involvement in the controversy over law and order.¹¹⁴ On a ward for ward basis Crow did much better in the Italian and Irish areas, especially the Russia Fields Third Ward.¹¹⁵ One result of the campaign was the disruption of the established balance of political accomodation between the Welsh-English, the Irish and the Italians. While not a Klan candidate, per se, Kistler had run on much the same type of moral reform, law enforcement program as Marshall had in Warren, but unlike Marshall he could ill afford to attempt such a program without the support of all the segments of Niles. As soon as it became apparent that without strong support by the whole city, he was not going to be able to make his program work, he and other law and order, reform-minded citizens became more and more identified with the Klan, and predictably the Klan began to focus its activities on Niles.

The Trumbull Klan rounded out its activities in 1923 by becoming a chartered self-governing unit within the Ohio realm and by continuing to foster acts of 100 per cent

¹¹⁴"Democratic Candidate Defeats Mayor Crow in Spirited Contest", Niles Evening Register, November 7, 1923, p. 1.

¹¹⁵"Election Results", Niles Evening Register, November 7, 1923, p. 1.

Americanism. The patriotic function of Klankraft ranged from the presentation of Bibles and flags to public schools to extending aid to a Leavittsburg family, whose breadwinner had been in the hospital.¹¹⁶ The organization itself in Trumbull County, Klan Number Seventy, centered around activities at the Edgewood Dance Hall in Cortland.¹¹⁷ At a meeting in this hall on December 10th, 1923, the Trumbull Klan received its charter, and was declared free of the control of the Kleagle, Doyle Glossner.¹¹⁸ All new candidates for membership until this night were considered charter members, and the Klan was still actively organizing men for this honor, especially in Niles and Girard where some six months after the first crosses lit up the summer sky of Trumbull County, the fiery emblems of the Klan still caused much debate and furor.¹¹⁹

Over the next ten months the Trumbull Klan evolved a pattern of action which narrowed its focus until it concentrated all its efforts on the reform of Niles. This crusade, whipped on by the indefatigable Colonel Watkins, led to a series of events which resulted in the precipi-

¹¹⁶ "Hoist Flag on School Building", Newton Falls Herald, September 20, 1923, p. 1.; "K.K.K. Members Present Purse of Money to Sufferer", Warren Tribune, October 30, 1923, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ "Accepted Charter Last Night", Warren Tribune, December 4, 1923, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ "Prepare For Election of Klan's Head", Warren Tribune, December 11, 1923, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ "Burning Crosses Cause Two Alarms", Niles Evening Register, November 30, 1923, p. 1.

tous confrontation at Niles in November, 1924. But before discussing this riot and its ramifications for the Klan, a brief description of Klan Number Seventy and its activities will serve to elucidate the foundations of Klan solidarity in the county.

As a duly chartered Klavern, Klan Number Seventy was now free to elect its own governing officers and to keep a good portion of the Klectoken received from future members. Under the new leadership of Dr. B.A. Hart, Exalted Cyclops, the Klan branched out to embrace as many potential Knights as possible. He used the proven Klan methods of parades and local ministerial involvement. At a meeting in January, 1924, the Trumbull Klan outlined its plans for the coming year before two to three thousand Klansmen. The call to action came from local and out of town speakers--including the ubiquitous Evan Watkins--and ministers from Niles, Girard, and Warren present on the dias. Essential to their plans was the organization and "reform" of Niles and to a lesser degree the future proselytization of Girard.¹²⁰

Ministers active in Klankraft at this time emphasized the Klan as "militant Protestantism" and admonished their congregations that Klan ideals were completely compatible with Christianity and Americanism.¹²¹ In return many ministers

¹²⁰"County Klan Has Largest Indoor Meet", Warren Tribune, January 31, 1924, p. 1.

¹²¹"Klan Ideals Are Outlined in Sermon", Warren Tribune, November 12, 1923, p. 1. The sermon was delivered by Reverend C.C. Rich of the Warren First Baptist Church.

received the support and praise of the Klan through public demonstration, such as occurred in Newton Falls when before a capacity Christmas season congregation, Rev. L. Ross Ellett received a Bible and flag from a delegation of the Junior Klan as a token of appreciation for his "youth work."¹²²

One of the most popular publicity tactics of the Klan was the presentation of an American Flag to public schools during school hours. Often, as happened in Girard, the superintendent felt that it was his duty to comply with the requests of the hooded visitors and called the students out to attention while the flag was raised to the strains of "America".¹²³ Many times such overt actions were followed by covert nocturnal cross burnings and a fresh deluge of Klan literature. Klan Number Seventy must have invested a good portion of its share of the Klectoken in the purchase of American flags and Bibles--of the suitable King James Version--which were also presented to various schools.¹²⁴

Such publicity gave the Klan an unprecedented growth rate during the first half of 1924. One student of the Klan estimated that by the fall of 1924 the Youngstown-Warren metropolitan area (roughly the Mahoning Valley) was home

¹²²"Junior Klan Gives Pastor Bible and Flag", Newton Falls Herald, December 20, 1923, p. 1.

¹²³"Klansmen Present School With Flag", Niles Evening Register, December 8, 1923, p. 6.

¹²⁴"Minister Will Preach on K.K.K. Subject", Newton Falls Herald, March 13, 1924, p. 1.

to approximately seven thousand Klansmen and Klanswomen.¹²⁵ In raw numbers this equalled the very strong Akron-Summit County Klan, and proportionally the Klan was stronger in the Mahoning Valley than elsewhere in the state.

The Klan was so successful in Warren that a group of sharp flim-flam artists attempted to cash in by selling bogus Klan memberships door to door. Their success prompted the Trumbull Klan to issue a warning that fake agents were working the area.¹²⁶ The good fortune of these con men illustrated the social climate of the county in general. The Klan was a hot item, as salesmen say, and at the slightest prodding many citizens of Trumbull County were willing to part with their ten dollars to the cause of Protestantism and Americanism.

Two communities were not that easily persuaded. It was no coincidence that Girard and Niles with their high proportion of foreign born were selected in January as prime targets for Klan organizing efforts. Despite the fact that Evan Watkins was from Girard and the mayor was a Klansman, the Klan did not always get its way in Girard. The Klan did successfully stage a parade in Girard¹²⁷--
something they never accomplished in Niles--but a contro-

¹²⁵Jackson, Klan in the City, p. 238.

¹²⁶"K.K.K. Officials Warn Fake Agents Are Working Here", Warren Tribune, February 9, 1924, p. 1.

¹²⁷"Klan Parades in Girard," Youngstown Citizen, June 14, 1924, p. 1.

versy developed concerning the construction of the Girard High School, which showed that the Klan did not exercise that much authority in that city. The preservation of the public school was one of the cornerstones of Klan principles and when the Klan was denied participation in the cornerstone laying ceremonies for the new High School building, they were miffed to the point that they tried but failed to obstruct its construction.¹²⁸

As the Klan increased in strength in Trumbull County, it exerted more pressure on the political structure of the county to "clean up" the cities and the county in general. This being their thrust, they showed a degree of success in being identified with the mayors of Girard, Niles and Warren by 1924, all of whom promised more strict law enforcement. By his willingness to join the Klan, the individual Klansman was identifying himself in a direct and personal manner with a type of reform movement. As the politicians the Klan had supported inevitably were frustrated by the same problems as their predecessors and conditions were not that much changed in a rapid fashion, Klan activity came to be centered, in 1924, around a tactic of concentration of Klan demonstrations in areas such as Niles, which were perceived by the Klansmen as most dangerous to the welfare of the general society.

¹²⁸"Klan Petitions State to Probe Construction of Girard High School", Youngstown Citizen, July 26, 1924, p. 1.

The summer of 1924 saw the heightening of tensions as the Klan tried to parade and recruit in Niles. With their spirits lifted by such stunning Klan events as the huge Youngstown to Canfield Klan parade in June and the spirit of Klannishness emanating from festivals such as Klan Day at Idora Park, a Youngstown amusement park, the Klan was emboldened to extend their realm into Niles.¹²⁹

The Klan in Niles was not alone in its political ambitions. In the surrounding area, the Klan was active in various ways. In the town of Idora, the Klan had a long history of political involvement. The Grand Dragon of the Klan in Ohio was Clyde C. Cramer, an ambitious politician who had aspirations toward the Governor's seat. Under the leadership of this "Iron Horse" of the Klan, the Klan reached its political zenith in 1924. The Klan had fielded an obscure candidate in the spring 1924 Republican primary who was close to defeating an established politician and former Governor. While this Klan candidate, Joseph W. Leiby, did not run for Governor in the general election, the Klan had clearly demonstrated that it was not to be denied any political hopes for political office. In addition, the Klans were active in the state fielding an impressive number of candidates for state

¹²⁹"Klan and Kindred at Idora", Youngstown Citizen, July 19, 1924, p. 4.

CHAPTER THREE

RIOT AT NILES

Niles, Ohio, held great significance for the Klan in the summer of 1924. Not only did the Klan feel the need to fight for the preservation of "Americanism" in Trumbull County by "saving" this notorious city, but because of the impending fall elections in 1924 the success of the Klan in places of confrontation like Niles gained the added dimension of statewide political significance. The Grand Dragon of the Klan in Ohio was Clyde Osborne, an ambitious Youngstown lawyer with aspirations toward the Governor's mansion. Under the leadership of this Mahoning Valley man, the Klan reached its political zenith in 1924. The Klan had fielded an unknown candidate in the spring 1924 Republican primary who came close to defeating an established politician and former Governor. While this Klan candidate, Joseph L. Seiber, did not run for Governor in the general election, the Klan had clearly demonstrated that it was not to be denied any political hopes for statewide elective office. In addition, the Klaverns across the state fielded an unprecedented number of candidates for state legislative offices who were pledged to the Klan's political platform, the primary objective of which was passage

of a law requiring Bible reading in the public schools.¹³⁰

The Klan crusade in the Mahoning Valley, stemming back to the 1923 election vow of the Mahoning Valley Klan mayors to "clean up" the valley, began to focus more and more on Niles. It was incumbent upon the Klan leadership in the state as well as Trumbull County to make an all out effort to demonstrate the power of the Klan in the face of the strident opposition in Niles. The Mahoning Valley was a strong Klan area and the home of the Grand Dragon. Surely the Klansmen of Ohio could put down the challenge to the Klan in Niles and add to the image of growing Klan invincibility and righteousness throughout the state. Therefore, it was no coincidence that the situation reached its climax in Niles in November, 1924, three days before the general election.

Niles, located midway between the largest Mahoning Valley cities, developed a unique set of conditions which served to make it the focal point for a clash that to many seemed inevitable. In addition to its notoriety for illegal activities, the social structure of Niles was under great stress. As noted in Chapter Two, a significant portion of Niles was foreign born in 1924. Specifically, this small manufacturing center was balanced between three ethnic groups; the Italian, the Irish, and older stock Welsh-

¹³⁰Weaver, "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", pp. 234-236.

English, with none achieving dominance. In addition, these groups were segregated into tight communities on opposite sides of town and thus knew little of the everyday life of the other.¹³¹ Yet the cultural conflict in Niles was possibly no greater than that in many other American cities at that time which were experiencing the same conditions. What was different about Niles was its location in a hotbed of Klan activity. It was the external stimulus of the Klan that united the two Catholic factions against the demonstrations and rhetoric of the Klan and Colonel Watkins and propelled Niles into the national news.

Klan activities in Niles had not been strong until the Trumbull Klan had gained membership and strength elsewhere in the county. The first of the by now familiar Klan recruiting type parades in Niles in June, 1924, had resulted in trouble. During the parade one police officer, said to be a Klan sympathizer, was beaten badly and several persons were injured by the anti-Klan element in the city.¹³² This parade marked the first public emergence in the county of an organization which existed in Ohio during the Klan era

¹³¹In an interview with Colonel Wade Christy of the Ohio National Guard by Norman R. Weaver, Colonel Christy noted that the feelings between the ethnic groups in Niles was "very rabid". He told Weaver that during the twenties, the feelings were so strong, the spirit so partisan that opposing baseball teams were afraid to play there. Norman F. Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", p. 246.

¹³²"Klan Trouble in Niles", Youngstown Vindicator, June 25, 1924, p. 1.

for the purpose of militantly opposing the Klan. These foes of the Klan had formed a Klan-like organization composed of mainly Catholic immigrants and were known as the Knights of the Flaming Circle.¹³³ To rally members to their side, they relied on the inflammatory anti-Catholic rhetoric of the Klan speakers. The Klan's tactic of exploiting the latent anti-Catholic sentiment in the county thus added to the increased polarization and radicalization of the county, especially Niles.

Following the initial attempt in June to parade in Niles, the Klan launched an even more intensive campaign to gather public support for their crusade in Niles. They pointed to not only the well known public reputation of Niles as an open city, but to the open physical attacks on Klansmen and their families as proof that Niles was a town possessed by "Blackguards".¹³⁴ To the Klan and their sympathizers, Niles was indeed lawless.

¹³³"Flaming Circle", Warren Tribune, September 27, 1923, p. 2. Dr. W.F. McGuigan, a Steubenville dentist, was Grand Supreme Monarch of the Central Division which included Ohio. The Knights of the Flaming Circle (so called because their symbol was a flaming tire) claimed to be nonsectarian, anti-mask foes of religious, racial (ethnic) and political intolerance. In practice it was composed almost entirely of Roman Catholics and often centered around a Knights of Columbus Chapter.

The Niles' Flaming Circle was loosely connected with the original group in Steubenville and throughout the Klan attempts to parade in Niles, the Klan repeatedly pointed to this connection with outsiders. "Murderous Attack on Klansmen at Niles, Ohio", Youngstown Citizen, June 28, 1924, p. 1-3.

¹³⁴"The Disgrace of Niles, Ohio", Youngstown Citizen, June 28, 1924, p. 1.

To intensify the anti-Catholic sentiment in the county during the crusade on Niles, the Klan brought in one of the more popular public speakers of the twenties, Helen Jackson, a Toledo, Ohio, woman who purported to be an "escaped nun". Her sensational revelations of the immoral captivity of innocent Protestant girls in Catholic convents for sinful purposes and the story of her personal experience as such an unfortunate served to titillate county Klan rallies that summer with a type of anti-Catholic, soft-core pornography that many Protestant residents seemed all too willing to believe.¹³⁵

Late in the summer, during a Konklave at Idora Park in Youngstown, the former Mahoning County Kleagle, C.A. Gunder, urged fellow Klansmen to shoot to kill in the next Klan attempt to parade in Niles.¹³⁶ Such an escalation of emotions made it clear that the next confrontation between the two sides would be violent. These and several other incidents which occurred regularly during the summer and early fall were the prelude and build-up to an almost inevitable clash.¹³⁷

¹³⁵"Charge Woman Incited Riot", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, January 19, 1925, p. 1.

¹³⁶"May Call Gunder to Niles", Youngstown Vindicator, November 3, 1924, p. 1.

¹³⁷"More Blackguardism in Niles", Youngstown Citizen, August 9, 1924, p. 4. During the summer and fall, several forays were made by robed Klansmen into the foreign sections of Niles. Such provocative actions by the Klan, added to periodic attacks by those identified as Knights of the Flaming Circle on citizens and Niles policemen who defended the Klan, tightened the tension which gripped Niles until broken by the psycho-

The Niles Riot of November 1, 1924, was the resultant confrontation, and although the principle participants were residents of the Mahoning Valley, the riot was the climax of Klan and anti-Klan friction in the larger area of Eastern Ohio, Western Pennsylvania, and Northern West Virginia. A situation similar to Niles had developed in Steubenville (the home of the Knights of the Flaming Circle). For several reasons the Klan chose to confront its enemies in Niles rather than in Steubenville. The main reasons for this were the superior organization and strength of the Flaming Circle in Steubenville and the promotion by Colonel Watkins of the Mahoning Valley where the Klan appeared superior.

Poised between these two factions, who were at the same time local and yet part of the larger conflict in the tri-state area, stood the Constitutional Defense League of Niles, a combination of neutrals who called on city officials to stop the planned parade of the Klan which was to take place in conjunction with a Konklave the Klan had scheduled in Niles for November first. This inter-religious Constitutional Defense League saw this "peaceful" parade for what it was, an intended confrontation with the Knights of the Flaming Circle to underscore Klan political aspirations in the upcoming state-wide

logical relief of the riot. "Attempt to Kill Police Officer in Niles", Youngstown Citizen, July 26, 1924, p. 1.; "The Disgrace of Niles, Ohio", Youngstown Citizen, June 23, 1924, p. 1.

elections. These neutral citizens were not gratified to see their city become the battle ground between the increasingly antagonistic forces. But because of the political overtones and larger factors involved, both the Klan and the militant anti-Klan forces had too much prestige at stake to back down and listen to such reasoning. The larger factors, such as statewide Klan prestige were evident when Klan sympathizer, Mayor Harvey Kistler, issued a parade permit to the Klan despite the almost certain violence to follow. The mayor issued the permit heedless of the League's argument that few of the Klan paraders would be from Niles and that, despite its legality, the impending violence would bring additional notoriety to the city and endanger innocent citizens.¹³⁸

As the day of the parade drew closer, the tension between the factions mushroomed. On October 24th, a flaming circle was found burning on the grounds of the old Central School in downtown Niles. Another group of Niles citizens was forced to remove the effigy of a "prominent local Klansman" from the front of their car.¹³⁹

¹³⁸"Effort to Stop Klan Parade Futile", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, October 23, 1924, p. 1.

¹³⁹"Niles Report", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, October 24, 1924, p. 3.

The weekend before the parade was to take place brought the announcement that the Knights of the Flaming Circle were also calling a tri-state meeting for Saturday, November 1st, and since no one expected the Klansmen and the Circlers to march side by side, the Klan and others immediately pointed to this development as an open declaration of war. They cited the Flaming Circle posters which read: "Flaming Circle Tri-State meeting, Niles, Ohio, November 1st. All eligible are welcome. Come and give the Steubenville delegation a rousing welcome. Please avoid bringing the women and children."¹⁴⁰ Klan officials predicted that as many as 25,000 Klansmen and their families would be present. On the other side, the Flaming Circle expected at least 19,000 without their families. These estimates placed the expected crowd at over twice the population of Niles.

Mayor Kistler added to the furor by refusing to issue a permit to the Circlers. In addition, Chief of Police L.J. Rounds publicly admitted that the Niles Police Force was inadequate in the developing situation. It then fell to the county officials to find a method for maintaining order, and the responsibility for keeping the peace was placed in the hands of the Trumbull County sheriff, John Thomas. All involved officials expressed the hope that the forces of the sheriff would be sufficient and declined to request the

¹⁴⁰ "Klan Parade to Have Opposition", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, October 27, 1924, p. 1.

State militia unless trouble developed.¹⁴¹

On Tuesday, the twenty-eighth of October, Sheriff Thomas called a meeting of prominent Niles citizens. He stated that he believed these people could succeed in calming the situation and preventing trouble.¹⁴² He erred in his assumption primarily because most of the participants in the Konklave were not from Niles and he failed to see the Niles tension in the larger context of the regional struggle between the Klan and its militant foes against the backdrop of the upcoming political elections.

Overnight new developments instantly dashed the hopes of even the most incurable optimists that peace could be maintained. Mayor Kistler's house on West Park Avenue in Niles was dynamited early on the morning of the twenty-ninth. As the mayor showed newspaper reporters through the wreckage of the porch and front room of his home, he told them that he had received threats and a message which stated, "If you do not call off the parade, your home will be bombed before the parade day."¹⁴³ He declined to say by whom or in what manner the message had been delivered.

In response to this event, investigators were sent by Governor Vic Donahey to aid in solving the dynamiting

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² "Sheriff Moves to Avert Trouble", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, October 28, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁴³ "Bombing of Niles Mayor's House Increases Tension", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, October 29, 1924, p. 1.

mystery. Concerned parties saw in this action a chance to convince these representatives of the state administration that safety demanded the presence of national guard troops in Niles on the coming Saturday. Mayor Kistler and Chief Rounds both stated they would make such a request if county officials did not.¹⁴⁴

Also from Columbus, the Grand Dragon of the Klan, Clyde Osborne, issued strict orders for the conduct of the Klan parade. These orders called for no Klan regalia except in the parade. Klansmen were further prohibited from bearing arms, acting as policemen, or marching with arms folded or their masks on. Furthermore, unless attacked, all Klansmen were to ignore all remarks or other provocative actions. The one order that Osborne could have given that would have prevented trouble in Niles, the cancellation of the parade by the Klan, would have shattered the image that the state-wide Klan had presented as a resolute and strong crusade. Indeed, Osborne, in keeping with his strategy of confrontation, ended his message to the people of Niles with a veiled threat that thousands of plain-clothes Klansmen would be on the scene to assist in maintaining order if trouble ensued.¹⁴⁵

Previous to the arrival of the state investigators, the mayor attended a meeting of the Klan, Flaming Circle,

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

and neutral citizens, under the auspices of the Constitutional Defense League. With the Klan refusing to call off the parade, this effort to avert trouble was also doomed to failure when the Circlers proved equally stubborn. In this meeting, Dr. B.A. Hart, Trumbull County Klan Cyclops, promised that the marchers would obey the Grand Dragon's marching orders as a concession, but this was greeted by jeers from the anti-Klan groups. With this outburst, the mayor adamantly refused to revoke the parade permit, and, because of the abusive language to which he and Sheriff Thomas were subjected, stated that he was through with all such meetings.¹⁴⁶

The mayor exhibited the frustrations of a public official in the middle during an increasingly extremist confrontation. He was at least somewhat sympathetic to the Klan especially in regards to reform and law enforcement in Niles. After all he was elected the previous November on his strong desire to "clean up" Niles. If he revoked the Klan's parade permit, he would be accused of bowing to the Circlers and denying the Klan their legally sanctioned constitutional right of assembly. Such a denial would leave him open to charges that he was indeed confirming the Klan claim that the "foreign" Catholic element, as they called it, ran Niles.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

The last attempt to head off the impending crisis came on Thursday night, October 30th. A mass meeting was called at four o'clock, a.m., by Sheriff Thomas in the McKinley Memorial.¹⁴⁷ This meeting was strongly anti-parade, but not so strongly anti-Klan. Among the five hundred to five hundred-fifty present at the meeting, there were acknowledged ruling leaders in the Klan, the Knights of the Flaming Circle, a large number of citizens who, because of race or religion, were barred from the Klan and the smallest group of all, those opposed to the Klan parade and the Flaming Circle. The spirit of the meeting, while serious, was not grim. Many were jovial, and many were there out of curiosity. Those who were unaligned seemed to be the most worried.¹⁴⁸

The presiding officer of the meeting tried to stop demonstrations after each speech presented before the body, but to no avail. The demonstrations did remain at a safe level, however, as the gravity of the situation began to penetrate the participants. Out of all those who spoke, only one said he foresaw little likelihood of trouble as long as the Klansmen were unmasked. Others used the words

¹⁴⁷Niles is the birthplace of William McKinley, 25th president of the United States.

¹⁴⁸"Klan Will Parade at Niles", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, October 31, 1924, p. 1.

riot and murder to describe what they felt would happen.¹⁴⁹

John McDermott, a former state senator from Niles and chairman of the meeting's resolution committee, led a fight for adoption of the committee's minority report calling on the mayor to revoke the Klan's parade permit. He claimed that it was foolish not to expect trouble with both sides issuing ultimatums. The matter was further complicated, he said, because people can't be expected to stay home when there is a big gathering, and this leads to the formation of a mob. He called it the civic duty of the mayor to prevent the parade. McDermott went on to explain what he felt the effects were of such events of the social climate of Niles. He said:

Years ago, Niles people were friendly Englishmen, Welshmen, Irish, Italian, and what-not, they lived together as citizens. After the trouble at the Klan parade in the spring, there have been many enmities. Men, long friends, have ceased to speak to one another. We were just getting back to normal. Hatreds were beginning to heal. We don't want to start these things up again.¹⁵⁰

Another member of the meeting stated that if the same slogans and songs such as, "We'll get a rope, we'll hang the Pope," and, "To Hell with the Wops", were sung by the Klan as in the previous parade, there would be wholesale mass murder.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Rev. W.H. McClain, pastor of the First Christian Church, brought a motion to the floor to table McDermott's resolution. He felt that since the Klan was not in full attendance, the resolution could do no good. To this, McDermott argued that it was the Klan's fault if they were opposed to his resolution and were not there to voice their opposition. Rev. McClain's motion was defeated by a five-to-one vote and the whole meeting voted to present McDermott's resolution to the mayor by the same margin. The delegation sent to inform the mayor of the resolution was comprised of a mixture of the various elements. The men included William Hall, Edward Doran, D.S. Perry, John Casey, and Carmine DeChristofaro.¹⁵²

The significance of this meeting was that it was anti-parade, not anti-Klan in mood. This mood was even more revealing because it existed in the absence of the Klan. Such a mood also indicated that the general consensus in Niles tolerated the existence of the Klan but resented the use of Niles as a pawn in the Klan's state-wide power struggle.

Mayor Kistler deliberated all night on the question of the parade permit with Dr. Hart and Sheriff Thomas. They decided to let the parade go on as planned because the permit was legal and the Klan promised to abide by the Grand Dragon's

¹⁵²"Niles Prepares for Trouble-Donahey Refuses Troops", Youngstown Vindicator, October 31, 1924, p. 3.

orders. On Friday, Mayor Kistler revealed that he, along with Sheriff Thomas, had already requested troops but had been bluntly refused by Governor Donahey. The governor stated that the sending of state troops in anticipation of trouble was without precedent in Ohio, and he revealed his message to Kistler and Thomas of October 27th, holding the mayor of Niles and the sheriff responsible for the safety of all citizens in the face of any emergency. Sheriff Thomas then revealed that he had deputized over fifty men, while Police Chief Rounds again admitted he could not possibly cope with any large disturbances.¹⁵³

From Klan circles came the news that the leadership was having problems maintaining unity. An internal struggle began which lasted until National Guard troops came on the scene Saturday afternoon. Klan Cyclops, Dr. Hart, issued a statement which gave each individual Klansman the right to decide if he would march. He promised those who did not parade that the organization would not censure them. Other leaders of the Klan, particularly Colonel Watkins, were opposed to such a release and saw in it the loss of their proclaimed crusade to exercise their legal right to parade. The organ of the Klan in the Mahoning Valley, the Youngstown Citizen, issued a statement to this effect on the previous Thursday. It said:

¹⁵³"Klan Will Parade at Niles", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, October 31, 1924, p. 1.

The Ku Klux Klan will insist that they, as loyal Americans, enjoy the privileges of American citizenship in Niles, Ohio, and demand the enforcement of law governing the right of peaceful assembly.¹⁵⁴

They further lamented what they felt to be a breakdown in the American way of life and presented their fundamental philosophy behind their stubborn refusal to concede, stating:

It is, indeed, a pity that in this great state of Ohio, a pack of foreigners who by virtue of our laws are permitted to enjoy the rights and privileges of this, the greatest of Nations, should take the law in their own hands and say who shall march the streets of Niles, or of any other city within the borders of America.¹⁵⁵

Thus by their own admission, the Klan was little concerned for the welfare of the citizens of Niles, or for that matter the Klansmen of Trumbull County. The statements in the Citizen (whose editor was Colonel Watkins) showed a distinct deference to the defense of principles which served the larger cause of the Klan in Ohio.

Halloween night in 1924 saw the Ku Klux Klan and Knights of the Flaming Circle begin their "trick or treat" with the peace of the city of Niles. Throughout the night there was intense quiet as both sides waited out the night to see who would give in first. During the night, Circlers prowled the city, searching all strangers for weapons and

¹⁵⁴"Shall Rome Dictate?", The Younstown Citizen, October 30, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

warning all who would listen of the intransigence of the Flaming Circle's position. Although the police dispersed knots of men from the downtown street corners from time to time, they had little trouble keeping order until midnight. Several men were arrested for carrying guns, knives, black-jacks, and other concealed weapons.¹⁵⁶

This action by the police indirectly led to the first confrontation between the Klan and the Circlers. Colonel Watkins was seen by members of the Flaming Circle in Niles riding in the side car of a motorcycle. Reportedly, he had just come from the Niles Police Station where he had tried to arrange bail for two Klansmen who had been picked up on concealed weapons charges. The Circlers overtook Colonel Watkin's party and searched him and the two others with him. After guns were found on his two bodyguards, they were all taken back to the police station, where the bodyguards were immediately arrested. Colonel Watkins was put in one of the sheriff's cars and escorted back to Youngstown.¹⁵⁷

The activities of the night reached a climax at three a.m., the morning of November first. Frank McDermott, son of John McDermott, was shot four times while participating in the Flaming Circle patrol of the city. Three of the shots lodged in his left shoulder and one grazed his temple. Thus, the first blood had been spilled, and although it was unclear

¹⁵⁶"Four Killed, Many Injured-Martial Law in Niles", Youngstown Vindicator, November 1, 1924, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

whose fault the shooting had been, the foes of the Klan had gained a martyr.¹⁵⁸

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear to find many businessmen in Niles boarding up their storefronts. Indeed, everyone had come to expect more trouble as both sides gained numerical strength. Mayor Kistler swore in fifty special police officers, equipped with simply a lapel ribbon bearing the word "police".¹⁵⁹ Rumors were running rampant in the city. The sheriff was reported to have given "shoot to kill" orders. Some citizens claimed that all that was needed to stop the parade was an injunction in county court.¹⁶⁰ Many of the Italian members of the community were gripped with terror by the rumor that thousands of Klansmen were coming to Niles to murder them.¹⁶¹ The confusion and misinformation on the day of the parade were indicative of the types of talk which can fan a misinformed and apprehensive populace into mass riot.

The strategy of each side was simple. The Knights of the Flaming Circle wished to show their hatred of the

¹⁵⁸"Frank McDermott Shot", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 1, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹"Troops Ordered Out", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 1, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰"No Injunction Against Klan Parade", and "'Shoot to Kill' Story is Denied by Sheriff", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 1, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁶¹"Says Italians Were Told Klan Would Destroy Them", Youngstown Vindicator, November 3, 1924, p. 3. This rumor was based on the speech made by former Mahoning County Klan Kleagle, C.A. Gunder, the previous summer.

Klan's doctrine by preventing at all costs the parade planned for the afternoon. To do this, they stationed men on all roads leading into Niles in order to prevent the passage of any Klansmen to the Klan's meeting place. The Circlers set up their main lines at the newly finished park across from the General Electric Glassworks at the corner of Main and Federal Streets. From here they could watch the arrivals at the street car barn on Federal Street and block the Klan parade as it moved south down Main Street. They were determined not to let the Klan pass the Federal Street intersection on Main and enter downtown Niles. This intersection became the focal point for the trouble which ensued.¹⁶²

The Ku Klux Klan had gathered on a farm on the outskirts of the north side of Niles on North Road. The route of the Klan's parade was well known and proceeded directly down Main Street into downtown Niles. All along Main Street, bets were being taken at five-to-one odds that the parade would not reach the Allison Hotel at the corner of Park Avenue and Main Street in downtown Niles. As the crowd began to grow larger at the corner of Federal and Main Streets, many wagered it would never get onto Main Street.¹⁶³

Throughout the day, cars were stopped as they approached Niles for the Konklave. Along Robbins Avenue and spread over

¹⁶²Jeremiah Baird, personal interview.

¹⁶³"Seek to Fix Niles Riot Blame", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 1.

a considerable portion of the East Side, and at all leading roads, the Knights of the Flaming Circle stopped cars and turned back Klansmen. When some offered resistance, they were dragged from their cars and beaten. Many had their robes cut from their backs, and for the most part the attackers were cruel and brutal. Sometimes pistols were used, but the Circlers performed their feats remarkably well without them. By 11:00 a.m. only 400 people were on the Klan field.¹⁶⁴

At the corner of Federal and Main Streets the pace of action picked up. The composition of this crowd showed that the Circlers involved in the blockade were mostly Niles residents. A newspaper reporter stated that only one-quarter of the crowd consisted of outsiders, mostly from surrounding communities with a few from Steubenville. When asked his position on the parade, the leader of the Circlers replied that he and his 500 man and woman "army" would fight to the end to prevent it.¹⁶⁵

By 12:30, the Circlers had put up a blockade which stopped all traffic on Main Street, the primary access route to the Klan field.¹⁶⁶ Most of the cars were stopped by rifle fire and several times Klansmen were pursued, captured,

¹⁶⁴"Frank McDermott Shot", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 1, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵"Reporters Story", Youngstown Vindicator, November 2, 1924, p. 4-A.

¹⁶⁶"Troops Ordered Out", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 1, 1924, p. 2.

beaten and left bloodied on the side of the road. Most of this action stemmed from attempts by the Circlers to identify the Klansmen who had fired a volley of shots into the crowd at the Circle Field. It had happened so fast the Circlers did not have a chance to fire a good shot at the fleeing truck. This incident left three Circlers wounded, one seriously. They were further angered by the fact that no one recognized the Klansmen in the truck as local residents.¹⁶⁷

A second similar incident was more to the liking of the Circlers. This time when two men in a small car opened fire on the crowd, the Circlers were ready. They riddled the car with bullets, then gave chase toward downtown. The Circlers stopped the car at Park Avenue and Main Street and forced the men to go back and face the crowd they had just fired upon. Both were severely beaten by the crowd although no attempts were made to heed the cry of "lynch them", which could be heard from a great number of the crowd. This incident showed to a great extent the control the leaders of the Knights of the Flaming Circle initially had over their adherents. Indeed their control early in the day proved to be better than that of the Klan leadership, which had promised that all the Klansmen would obey the Grand Dragon's orders. When sheriff's deputies arrived at the Circler's field, they

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 1.

met no resistance and the two victims were taken to the Warren hospital.¹⁶⁸

During the height of the pitched battle on Main Street that Saturday afternoon, it appeared as though Klansmen were re-enacting the "Charge of the Light Brigade" into the valley of death at Federal and Main. Klansmen continued to try to reach the Klan meeting field about one mile distant to the north for the parade that was scheduled to start at 2:30 p.m.

Meanwhile, many of Mayor Kistler's beribboned "special police" were rounded up by Sheriff Thomas for carrying guns without permits. He did so primarily for their own protection from the crowd. Neutral citizens and anti-Klan factions corraled even more and turned them over to the regular Niles police. It seemed that the mayor harbored a fondness for Klansmen on his special police force.¹⁶⁹

Sheriff Thomas was working under many liabilities. The Niles Police force was practically useless because of its miniscule size. Mayor Kistler had shown by his allowance of the parade and by his curious "special police" that he was more than just sympathetic to the Klan. The sheriff was forced to try to keep order alone. In fact during the trouble on the first of November, the good mayor of Niles was not to be found in the city.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

It was up to the sheriff to maintain the peace while still under the obligation to protect a legal procession of Klansmen. He knew he could not do both. First, he tried to break the blockade at Main and Federal. Twice the Circlers repulsed these attempts by the armed deputies to break their line in order to make way for the Klan parade. After the second assault, a little old Italian lady was left still lying in the street clutching a meat cleaver in her hand. Her head had been grazed by a stray bullet. Upon coming to, her first words were, "Me fight, too."¹⁷⁰ It appeared that the sheriff's and Niles' only hope was either acquiescence by the Klan or rescue by the Ohio National Guard.¹⁷¹

John McDermott, who was respected by the Circlers, went into their midst with his hands raised and delivered a plea to listen to the sheriff's truce plan. He led the way to the center of a small park where he started to tell them the sheriff's plan when suddenly shots were again fired from a speeding car into the crowd and at McDermott. Again the car was pursued and stopped at the Allison Hotel, down-

¹⁷⁰"Reporter's Story", Youngstown Vindicator, November 2, 1924, p. 4-A.

¹⁷¹Colonel Christy, who was then commander of the Youngstown unit of the Ohio National Guard, was in Niles during the week preceding the riot as Governor Donahey's special investigator. When the riot broke out, he reported it to the governor and subsequently commanded a portion of the troops that were placed in Niles. "Text of Niles Riot Report", Youngstown Vindicator, November 3, 1924, p. 1.; Norman F. Weaver, "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan", p. 240.

town, but this time when the men were brought back to the Circler's field they were, despite any arguments, shot.¹⁷² According to one report, the bodies of the men were spirited away.¹⁷³ Such an incident pointed to the increasing lack of control at the Circler's field.

Sheriff Thomas next attempted a direct appeal to the crowd. By this time there was little else he could do, because over half of his deputies had resigned rather than be agent to the attempts to permit the parade into the downtown and cause unrestrained warfare.¹⁷⁴ The sheriff was completely rebuffed, but his actions can be seen as an attempt to quiet the crowd in the hope that the Ohio National Guard would arrive in time to prevent the mass confrontation. The crowd of Circlers sensed this and quieted to some extent. There had been some agitation to move up Main Street and confront the Klan before they reached the Niles city limits. The sheriff's appeal apparently squelched this. It now appeared that the Circle leaders viewed the arrival of the National Guard as being consistent with their strategy. They knew that under martial law no parade would be permitted.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷²"Reporter's Story", Youngstown Vindicator, November 2, 1924, p. 4-A.

¹⁷³"Soldiers Drag Creek For Bodies", Youngstown Vindicator, November 4, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴"Deputies Resign", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵"Seek to Fix Niles Riot Blame", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 2.

At 2:30 p.m., Governor Donahey placed Niles under "qualified martial law" virtually at the moment the parade was to have begun.¹⁷⁶ With the governor's order in his hand, Sheriff Thomas went to the Klan field. Catcalls and booing accompanied his entrance past the armed guards onto the field. He mounted an improvised platform and read the text of the governor's order which brought an even greater demonstration of ill feeling. As Sheriff Thomas left the platform, one man leveled a high powered rifle at him while others drew pistols. The sheriff then entered a tent to ask Colonel Watkins to provide a guard to escort him off the field. He noted that their roles had been reversed the previous night when he gave Colonel Watkins an escort back to Youngstown.¹⁷⁷

The Klan grounds were now in a state of disorganization. Many Klansmen took the platform and denounced Governor Donahey, despite Colonel Watkins' defense of the governor. William Kline, one of the Trumbull County Klan leaders, stated: "If I had my way we'd parade, troops or no troops!"¹⁷⁸ Colonel Watkins, the consummate public relations expert, knew that such an unlawful act would remove the cloak of legality the Klan had used to justify

¹⁷⁶The qualification was that the general election on the 4th would be permitted.

¹⁷⁷"Seek to Fix Niles Riot Blame", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

the organization of that Saturday's Konklave. It was in the best interest of the Klan to play the role of victim, especially in light of the upcoming elections. Many Klansmen who were questioned later stated that the parade had been near collapse even before martial law was ordered, and the Klan crowd was in reality relieved by the decision. The argument over the right of each individual Klansman to parade or not had continued to cause friction between Colonel Watkins and Dr. Hart. By Saturday afternoon the Klan was divided into two camps centered around an argument over which Klan leader, Colonel Watkins of Youngstown or Dr. Hart of Warren, should lead the parade.¹⁷⁹

The procession actually did organize around the Trumbull County leader and had moved a short distance from the camp when the first troops--Headquarters Company, 145th Infantry of Warren--arrived, cutting their line of march at the intersection of Main Street and North Road. As the Troops went by Federal and Main Streets, the crowd there shouted, "Here come the troops--we've won!"¹⁸⁰ As the company proceeded through the downtown to Niles City Hall, the cheers of those who lined the sidewalks greeted them. As the guardsmen moved back out to the "battlefield" at Federal and Main, many men fled the scene, some even

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰"More About Niles Trouble", Youngstown Vindicator, November 2, 1924, p. 4-A.

dropping guns as they dispersed. The feeling of the men in this crowd was mainly that of happy satisfaction.¹⁸¹

Military control of Niles increased as the day turned into evening. About a half an hour after the Warren troops arrived, a machine gun company from Youngstown was on the scene. By 6:00 p.m. units from Akron, Canton and Cleveland were also in Niles. Among the troops arriving there were Klansmen who had to rush back to Akron from Niles to face the muster.¹⁸²

Niles remained under "qualified martial law" until Wednesday, November 5th. The military also took charge of an investigation to fix blame for the riot. Colonel L.S. Connelly, the commander of the 145th Infantry, O.N.G., appointed Major Benton Hough to investigate the incident. The result of this investigation was that the anti-Klan elements in Niles were found to have been acting in self defense stemming from the threat, made by former Klan Kleagle C.A. Gunder, to invade Niles and shoot to kill.¹⁸³

A subsequent investigation by Trumbull County Prosecutor, Harvery Burgess, led to the calling of a county Grand Jury to investigate the riot. Governor Donahey, who had been re-elected, declined, however, to commit the state to an investigation and again placed all responsibility on

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 178.

¹⁸³May 6all Gunder to Niles", Youngstown Vindicator, November 3, 1924, p. 1.

the Trumbull County government. The report of the Grand Jury did little more than recount the events and actions of elected officials. On these grounds the Grand Jury did recommend the removal of Mayor Kistler and Chief Rounds from office, but the jury returned no indictments for riot, nor did it determine the actual list of casualties.¹⁸⁴

The effect of the Grand Jury report was, therefore, minimal, Mayor Kistler and Chief Rounds remained in office until the end of Kistler's term in 1925.¹⁸⁵ Sheriff Thomas, who had performed his duties as impartially as possible and to the best of his capabilities, was defeated in the general election the Tuesday after the riot.¹⁸⁶ Eventually the only cases which were brought to trial were those dealing with illegal possession of firearms and the shooting of Frank McDermott.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴"Text of the Niles Riot Report", Youngstown Vindicator, December 4, 1924, p. 1. In all, nine men were known to have been seriously wounded, three of them critically. All eventually did recover in Warren hospitals. However, due to the tight organization of the Knights of the Flaming Circle, most wounded Circlers were attended to in private homes on the East side of Niles. This prevented an accurate total of the number of persons who were casualties. "Seek to Fix Riot Blame", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵"Governor Acts on Niles Officials", Youngstown Vindicator, November 14, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶The Klan organ, the Youngstown Citizen, commented after the election that Sheriff Thomas received 298 votes in the "foreign ward" of Niles to his opponents' 24. "Niles", The Youngstown Citizen, November 13, 1924, p. 4.

¹⁸⁷"Greco Convicted in Niles Case," Youngstown Citizen, March 19, 1925, p. 1.

Immediately following the riot, the Klan began to vindicate its position. Clyde Osborne, Grand Dragon of the Ohio Realm, stated he was, "...loath to believe that today's November 1 attack on the Klansmen had its origin in religious differences....On the contrary, the responsibility rested with the confessed enemies of the Republic, with the hidden forces of Sovietism and anarchy which acknowledge no God."¹⁸⁸ The local Klan, however, blamed the Irish Catholics of Niles as leaders of the anti-Klan mobs, and derided the Irish for foisting the blame on the Niles Italian community.¹⁸⁹

The Knights of the Flaming Circle maintained from the beginning that they intended to hold off the parade by any means possible. Charges and counter charges were thrown back and forth, citing various excesses, atrocities, and violations of the law, but it was plain that neither side was innocent.

The fall of 1924 represented the high water mark of the Ku Klux Klan in Ohio. Defeat at the polls in the election of state officials and extremist confrontations such as Niles diminished the appeal of the Invisible Empire in the eyes of many more moderate persons. While the riot at Niles proved for some the validity of Klan alleg-

¹⁸⁸"State Klan Leader's Statement", New York Times, November 3, 1924, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹"How Big Yet How Weak", Youngstown Citizen, November 13, 1924, p. 4.

ations about the "foreigners", many more who formerly had been favorable to Klan aims now saw the more negative aspects of Klannishness. It can be said that the events in Niles did help the Klan in the immediately following local elections, but at the same time it marked the beginning of an era when popular support for the Klan started to decline. The public deserted the Klan in reaction to the negative effects of its militance. The law enforcement and morals problems of cities like Niles were not helped by the temporary lapse into the extra-legal action the Klan attempted to use. What remained after the Niles riot was a city rent by ethnic enmities that took generations to heal. Sociologist John M. Mecklin, a contemporary student on the Klan, states that, "...the Klan is essentially a defense mechanism against evils which are more often imaginary than real. It is for this reason negative rather than constructive in its influence."¹⁹⁰ The riot at Niles demonstrated the ramifications of such a negative influence.

¹⁹⁰ John Moffatt Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 33.

CHAPTER FOUR

DECLINE AND CONCLUSION

The placing of Niles under qualified martial law both harmed and helped the Trumbull Klan. As noted in the previous chapter, the citizens of the county reacted to the situation with an initial anti-foreign behavior as shown by the defeat of Sheriff Thomas at the polls. But in the long run, it was the Klan that suffered the most because of this confrontation. The public realized that the confrontation tactics the Klan pursued had resulted in the first application of martial law since 1865.¹⁹¹ In short order, the Klan began a precipitous decline which, by mid-1925, left it but a mere shell. This decline, of course, was not just in Trumbull County but throughout the Buckeye State as Ohioans seemed to be repelled by its extremism and political factionalism.¹⁹²

Klan Number Seventy did not hold another mass meeting until Monday, November 19th, in Cortland. This was the first meeting since the aborted parade in Niles. At this meeting, and in subsequent issues of The Citizen, pleas were made to the membership for continued support. The

¹⁹¹Lindley, Harlow, compiler, Ohio in the Twentieth Century: 1900-1938, (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1942), p. 41.

¹⁹²Marec, "Fiery Cross", p. 171.

Citizen exerted a great effort until January, 1925, to stress the harmony and size of the Klan and repeatedly made attempts to tie the local Klans in Mahoning and Trumbull Counties to the numerically strongest Klan in Summit County centered in Akron. But the forces tearing the Klan apart were unaffected by such rhetorical exercises.

The reasons for the demise of the Trumbull Klan stem from local and general causes. In addition to the backing away from Klan confrontation-style extremism, the leadership of the Klan showed signs of schism. This, in addition to the failure of the Klan to affect the Niles situation, resulted in a feeling of impotence among the rebel crusaders.

During the summer of 1924 the Klan maintained a delicate balance in Trumbull County between protest group and extremist vigilantism. An example of a Klan attempt at vigilantism made its appearance as the "State Police" under the command of the ubiquitous Colonel Watkins. This organization, which evolved into a Klan police force, was founded in 1900 as a duly chartered local constabulary of Kinsman, Ohio, for the purpose of thwarting horse thefts. Having accomplished its original goal of ridding Northeastern Trumbull County of most of its felonious citizens, the organization survived into the machine age as little more than a social organization until Colonel Watkins obtained an invitation

to speak at one of the society's dinner meetings in mid-1924. Drawing on his knowledge of Klan success with similar organizations in Indiana, the eloquent and persuasive Colonel Watkins lost no time in revitalizing the group to function as Klan Police.¹⁹³

Because it was ostensibly legal, many Klansmen recruited into the "State Police" thought they were deputized and permitted to arm themselves. Such an armed force gave the rank and file Klansmen a feeling of security, but subsequent events at Niles proved that this sense of security was ill founded and placed the label of outlaw on the Klansman who participated in the "State Police." First the Sheriff, then the Ohio National Guard, rounded up these "policemen" during the riot weekend. By the latter part of November the Governor promised an all out campaign to disarm all the remaining "State Police".¹⁹⁴

The vacillating position of the Governor with regards to the Klan further diminished the Klan's respectability. Prior to election day, Donahey followed a course of action distinctly in deference to Klan Grand Dragon Osborne. The mood of the Governor was most assuredly determined by his desire to preserve Osborne's "highly secret"

¹⁹³"Missing State Police Charter Found", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, December 17, 1924, p. 1.; "State Police", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, December 18, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁹⁴"Will Disarm the So-called 'State Police'", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 24, 1924, p. 1.

instructions to Klansmen endorsing Donahey's campaign.¹⁹⁵ As many irate neutral factions pointed out, the riot laws in the Ohio Code did allow for the calling out of the State Militia "...if there is reasonable apprehension of trouble."¹⁹⁶ Indeed, considerable apprehension was expressed before the Niles riot to the Governor by Sheriff Thomas, Mayor Kistler, and the state bombing investigators, but Donahey waited until serious trouble was reported and he had little other choice but to send in the Guard.

Clearly from a political point of view, Donahey was presented with a no win situation. The Klan was upset because he did not use the National Guard to clear the line of march for their parade. The Flaming Circle considered the arrival of the Guard as contributing to their victory, but resented the vigorous prosecution of martial law by the Militia. But it was significantly the neutrals who were most perturbed, mainly by the realization that wholesale riot and murder were only avoided by a margin of about twenty minutes. If the Guard had not arrived at the time they did and the Klan had turned down Main Street in Niles and proceeded south to the lines of the Flaming Circle, the Governor would have had the blood of many Ohioans on his hands just four days prior to the election. To be sure,

¹⁹⁵"Donahey Is Endorsed by State Klan", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶"Law Shows Donahey Could Have Given Niles Protection", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 1.

the Governor was legally justified in his order to Sheriff Thomas that he, along with his approximately fifty deputies, disarm the some five hundred Flaming Circlers, but such an order was hardly reasonable or even possible and it was amazing that he had kept order as well as he had.¹⁹⁷

Governor Donahey's tightrope walk between riot and law and order (aided by Sheriff Thomas' assistance out of an extraordinary sense of duty) paid off for the Governor as he bucked a Republican sweep in Ohio and Trumbull County. No doubt the Klan endorsement delivered the office to him and there was also no doubt that Sheriff Thomas' sense of duty brought him defeat throughout the county as he was identified as anti-Klan and accused of submission to the "foreigners." Thomas was tellingly the only local Republican defeated in Trumbull County, and he lost in 110 of 127 precincts by a total margin of over 6,000 votes.¹⁹⁸

After the election, however, the political pendulum began to swing away from the Klan. An example of this political movement away from Klan extremism, which showed the importance of the moderates and neutrals, was the case of

¹⁹⁷"Both Factions Score Donahey", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 1. Col. Connelly of the Ohio National Guard later reported that Sheriff Thomas did indeed try to intervene and at great personal risk placed himself between the armed Circlers and the armed Klan "State Police" in an effort to calm the mob, an effort which had at least temporary effect and bought the Governor time to act. "Colonel Connelly Bares Early Incident of Niles Warfare", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 24, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁹⁸"The Majority Has Spoken", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 6, 1924, p. 1.; "Judge Smith Wins Probate Contest", November 6, 1924, p. 1.; "Niles", Youngstown Citizen, November 13, 1924, p. 4.

the attempted removal of Niles' Mayor Kistler, a man who had been openly identified in the county's largest newspaper as the "Klan Mayor of Niles" and had been sympathetic with Klan elements before the attempted parade.¹⁹⁹ With the recommendation of the special Grand Jury on the Niles riot that the Mayor be removed by the Governor, many citizens of Niles, representing more than Klan factions, circulated petitions backing Kistler. The main participants in this defense were merchants and businessmen who (on the whole) made up the more moderate factions in the city and had initially supported Kistler as the law and order candidate in 1923.²⁰⁰ Such a development shows the trend away from the rabid anti-foreign, anti-Catholicism of the Klan as developed by Colonel Watkins, back to the more moderate reform impulse that was already present when the Klan came to the county. The net effect for Mayor Kistler was that Governor Donahey endorsed the mayor's administration and he served out his term in office.²⁰¹

Such support of the mayor may have been founded on the Governor's obligations to Osborne, but other events showed this to be doubtful. As early as two weeks after the election, the Governor and the Grand Dragon started to

¹⁹⁹"To Fairminded Voters of Trumbull County", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 1.

²⁰⁰"Niles Meet Stands Back of Kistler", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, December 8, 1924, p. 1.

²⁰¹"Governor Donahey", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, December 11, 1924, p. 1.

disagree. Osborne wanted a special state investigation of the Niles Riot, no doubt to keep the subject in the news throughout the state as long as possible. Ostensibly the need was claimed because Trumbull County Prosecutor Burgess was hostile to the Klan and unable to exercise impartiality. It was therefore illustrative of Klan political power that despite Klan claims to a majority in the Ohio House and Senate and Donahey's supposed debt to the Klan, such a special investigation was overruled by Donahey.²⁰²

Evidently as Donahey and other politicians perceived a decline in Klan power, they became bolder in their movement away from the recommendations of Grand Dragon Osborne. The failure of the Klan legislative program in 1925 was further illustrative of this point. This program included such pet plans as mandatory Bible reading in the public schools, a ban on interracial marriages, and a requirement that all public school teachers had to have received at least part of their own educations in the public schools. Osborne acknowledged that the Bible Bill was the most desired part and admitted that it would be the first real test. It was indicative of the rapid decline of Klan political influence that although the Buchanan-Clark Bible Bill was passed by the Legislature, the Governor who had

²⁰²"Pierson to Assist in Investigation", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 19, 1924, p. 1.; "K.K.K. Warns its Winners to Be Good", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 12, 1924, p. 1.

been elected with Klan support felt emboldened to veto it.²⁰³

The decline of Klan political influence was founded on the deterioration in esteem of the local Klan units and leaders. On the local level the leadership abilities and charisma of the local potentates and lecturers were the cement that held the Klan together as an organization. The first cracks in the cement in the Trumbull Klan came during the prelude to the Niles parade. Colonel Watkins, the Klan lecturer, leader of the "State Police" and the chief figure in the Klan auxiliary for right thinking white Protestant foreign born, engaged in heated disagreement with Dr. B.A. Hart, the Trumbull Klan Cyclops over Klan solidarity in the face of the Niles challenge.²⁰⁴

This was but the first fissure in the Klan wall of strength. The stumble and fall of Colonel Watkins himself in public respect proved even more costly to the Klan than all the Anti-Klan speeches and actions combined. Specifically, Colonel Watkins was assailed as a philanderer, accused of misleading the members of the "State Police", and exposed as having falsified his "distinguished" war record. He further compounded the case against himself by dis-

²⁰³Lindley, Ohio, p. 47; cf. "Klan Support", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, February 6, 1925, p. 1. As written and passed by the legislature, the Buchanan-Clark Bible Bill required all public school teachers to read ten verses of scriptures to the pupils per day and made the memorization of the ten commandments mandatory for all above the 4th grade.

²⁰⁴"Seek to Fix Niles Riot Blame", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 3, 1924, p. 2.

appearing from Youngstown and Trumbull County without notice and without a trace, not even notifying the Calvary Baptist Church in Girard where he had supplied the pulpit for over a year.²⁰⁵ The following Monday after his Saturday night flight, his "niece", a Mrs. Montague who lived in a downtown Youngstown hotel, withdrew his money and collected his belongings and also left town.²⁰⁶ In addition to this damaging circumstantial evidence, neither Colonel Watkins nor other organizers of the revitalized "State Police" could account for the membership fees of \$17.35 collected from each member throughout the state.²⁰⁷ Colonel Watkins was eventually tracked down by a reporter from the Youngstown Vindicator in Worcester, Massachusetts. The Colonel denied the accusations as nothing more than slander, but did admit to being a lady's man. Still it really mattered not whether the charges were slanderous, as Colonel Watkins chose not to fight them legally and was convicted by the type of extra-legal innuendo he so adroitly developed as the Klan lecturer and editor of The Citizen. Colonel Watkins had been the catalyst around which the Trumbull and Mahoning Klans congealed, and his sudden withdrawal and discrediting was a major factor in the rapid

²⁰⁵"Col. Watkins", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, December 8, 1924, p. 1.

²⁰⁶"Col. Watkins Left 'For Good of Cause' Friends Say", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, December 10, 1924, p. 1.

²⁰⁷"Klansmen in 'State Police' Misled", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, November 13, 1924, p. 1.

demise of the Klan. The discrediting of this most enigmatic and important local leader on the pages of the local and national press left many local Klansmen looking foolish and hard pressed to find rational excuses for his actions. If nothing else, such a collapse based on the singular misconduct of one man proved the degree to which the local Klan was indebted to the eloquence and oratorical capabilities of Colonel Watkins.

While the Klan floundered in Youngstown and Trumbull County, Colonel Watkins joined C.A. Gunder, the former Klan Kleagle of Youngstown in mining the lodes of anti-Catholic prejudice on the East Coast. These two made a complementary pair. Gunder was the Klan speaker who had called for action to end the Catholic domination of Niles in the 1924 Klan picnic, and Watkins had continually railed against Catholics in speeches.²⁰⁸

The further decline of Klan power and influence was demonstrated when the crowd entering the Klan New Years' Eve Dance in Niles was fired upon by a group of men standing in a dark alley. The assailants disappeared into the darkness and were never identified. Since the demise of the "State Police", the Klan was unprotected by any force other than the normal police patrols and open to such attacks. The net effect of such attacks and the leadership crisis was to shift the Klan away from the urban areas,

²⁰⁸"Col. Watkins Replies to His 'Slanderers'", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, December 19, 1924, p. 1.

out into the rural area around Cortland and away from open confrontation and urban activism such as the type Colonel Watkins fostered so well in Niles the preceding summer and fall.²⁰⁹

In fact the failure of the Klan to affect the situation in Niles was another cause of Klan decline. The Klan was for the enforcement of prohibition, but it seems that the only time since their campaign in Niles began that it was dry was the day of the riot. It was dry not because of any fear of the Klan but rather because the speakeasy operators closed down to make sure their Flaming Circle patrons were sober enough to fight the Klan. The New Years' Dance incident showed the rural elements that Niles was beyond their help. Furthermore, the eloquent and moralistic leader of the campaign against the nightclubs and brothels of Niles, Colonel Watkins, had been known to have indulged in his share of similar vices. By late January the Trumbull Klan could be summed up as defeated, decimated and disillusioned.

The Klan leadership made repeated last ditch attempts to tie the Mahoning Valley Klans to the still large and active Summit County Klan in Akron by the promotion of Klonverses to "cement the Ohio Klan."²¹⁰ The editor of the

²⁰⁹"Klan Dance in Niles is Fired Upon", Warren Tribune-Chronicle, January 1, 1924, p. 1.

²¹⁰"Big Province Klonverses Cement Ohio Ku Klux Klan", Ohio Citizen, January 22, 1925, p. 1.

Ohio Citizen, the Klan successor to the Youngstown Citizen, specifically stressed that all was in complete harmony in the Klan. To most observers of the Klan, the attempt to widen the scope of the Mahoning Valley Klans as reflected by the Klonverses, the change in the newspaper and the repeated assertions that all was in order within the Klan were sure signs that the Mahoning Valley Klans were in deep trouble.²¹¹

The Klan in Trumbull County had been founded on local causes, including a distinct vein of anti-Catholicism, and a desire for reform exploited and fine-tuned by organizers like Colonel Watkins. All attempts to wean the Trumbull Klan away from such localism, such as the last ditch effort of the Klonverses, were doomed to failure. In early 1925, the Ohio Citizen ceased to publish and for all practical purposes the effective era of the Klan in the Mahoning Valley was over.

The evaluation of such an explosive and yet short lived social phenomenon centers around the state of flux found in the social structure in Trumbull County in the years after World War I. The Klan experience in Trumbull County was focused on urban areas and the confrontations were urban clashes. In addition to the economic motivation noted by Kenneth Jackson's "zone of emergence" theory,²¹²

²¹¹"Attend Your Klonverse", Ohio Citizen, January 15, 1925, p. 4.

²¹²Jackson, Klan in the City, pp. 244-245

the close proximity of widely divergent cultures also contributed to Klan success. Klan fears of ethnic, religious and racial changes were well founded on solidly American traditions. The Trumbull Klan offered group solidarity, not in the face of the process of urbanization of the county but against certain elements within the cities. Trumbull County with its strong and well organized Catholic immigrant groups provided an example of the strength of the cultures which were rising in importance. The Niles riot was the violent climax to tension within the social order and marked the establishment of a new balance among the cultures within the society.

So while the Jackson Thesis seems to hold a significant degree of validity for the Trumbull County Klan, especially in Niles, it must be remembered that Trumbull County in the twenties was just beginning to really urbanize and in the words of one historian of a small industrial Trumbull County community, "It was an odd combination of rural village and manufacturing city."²¹³ This dualism was present to a varied degree throughout the more populous areas of the county, areas where the Klan was most active. It might be concluded that Trumbull County's Klan was a combination of Jackson's threatened urban dwellers from the "zone of emergence" and the ruralist moralism and

²¹³Ella A. Woodward, History of Newton Falls, p. 115.

religious fundamentalism found among Alexander's and Chalmer's small town burghers.

One element in common to all these interpretations is that certain elements of each applied to the experience in Trumbull County of the Klan. Each of the students of the Klan, while making generalized statements of motivation, cited the large degree of individuality apparent between each local Klan. In other words the community shaped the Klan and not vice versa. To be sure, the public statements of Klan lecturers and leaders had much the same tone as in other areas of the country, but Trumbull County was different in that it became not only a place for verbal haranging of a rather anonymous enemy but a place of confrontation with a specific group that identified itself as the enemy. This occurred because the Klan was so flexible and fitted easily into the role of a defender of a particular segment of the community. Originally the degree of malleability was a part of the general scheme of the national salesmen of the Klan to make the memberships more desirable in the varied parts of the country with their divergent prejudices.

Trumbull County in 1923 was ripe for such a sales pitch. The blame for conditions in Niles with its large numbers of foreign born Catholics was easily foisted on such groups by masterful manipulation of public sentiment by an articulate lecturer and organizer such as Colonel Evan Watkins. His proficient exploitation of the anti-Catholic

and anti-foreign sentiment in Trumbull County and his offer of the simplistic solution of group solidarity made the job of the Klan Kleagle simple. Indeed without Colonel Watkins the Klan might not have existed in Trumbull County and would have certainly not taken the path of confrontation down which his exhortations prodded it.

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