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## The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon During the 1920s

Ben Bruce

Southern racists established the Ku Klux Klan after the civil war with the intention of reinstating black servitude in America. To achieve their goal, the original Klansmen used terrorism and operated in secret; lynchings and cross-burning ceremonies in dark forests became common practice. Total membership was too small to quantify, but the first Klan effectively subjugated African-Americans and imposed white supremacy throughout the South for a decade. Federal law enforcement eventually suppressed the group by the mid-1870s, but nationwide adoption of Jim Crow laws perpetuated the first Klan's ultimate mission for nearly a century. During its tenure, the first Klan was covert, unorganized, small, extremely violent, and shunned by the general public.<sup>1</sup>

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Klan experienced a major revival across the United States. By the early 1920's, nationwide membership had reached over two million. What came to be known as the "second Klan" was fundamentally different from its harbinger in several ways. First, the second Klan victimized a different population. With African-Americans dealt with by institutional segregation, the new Klan instead targeted Catholics, Jews, immigrants and social deviants, such as bootleggers and thieves. Furthermore, the second Klan was not secret like its predecessor. The new Klan publicly held events including parades, picnics and lectures. It openly recruited using newspaper ads and pamphlets. It also elected hundreds of its members to public office and controlled over one hundred newspapers, two colleges and a motion picture company.<sup>2</sup> Unlike its precursor, the new Klan officially repudiated violence, although numerous incidents suggested otherwise. Millions of white, native-born Americans saw the new Klan as a defender of conservative cultural values and American principles.

As the new Klan grew, recruiters began searching for new territory in the West to expand into. Being over ninety-five percent white, eighty-five percent native-born and mostly Protestant, the Oregon population was a perfect target for the Klan. Oregon soon became home to the largest KKK organization west of the Mississippi River with over 30,000 sworn members in fifty separate chapters across the state. The Oregon Klan also printed its own newspaper and had a massive influence on state politics. Despite all its success, the central chapter of the Klan in Oregon dissolved by 1925 and its presence was erased from the state entirely by 1930. This paper will discuss the key factors in the Oregon Klan's birth and eventual demise.

The Klan's expansion into Oregon was well-planned and methodically implemented. In June of 1921, national Klan headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia dispatched Bragg Calloway to scout Oregon's potential as a new Klan outpost in the West and to begin recruitment as soon as possible. The Klan wanted to keep their movements in Oregon covert until they felt powerful enough to reveal themselves. After living in southern Oregon for less than a month, Calloway was suddenly fired and excommunicated by the national Klan for tipping off a local newspaper

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold S. Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics* (New York: Haskell House, 1972): 367.

about his mission.<sup>3</sup> Calloway's termination showed the national Klan's commitment to their strategy of secrecy.

Calloway was soon replaced by a far more capable recruiter, Luther I. Powell, whose methods better aligned with the national Klan's strategy by being small-scale, personal, and spread by word of mouth. Powell began his crusade with great success in a small town near Oregon's southern border, Medford. Powell sold the Klan to potential followers not as a brotherhood of bigotry, but as a beacon of patriotism, cultural conservatism and social order. According to Powell, the Klan was there to uphold traditional American society against the threat of the roaring twenties. Specifically, Powell emphasized the Klan's support for the enforcement of prohibition. In a matter of weeks Powell had sworn over 100 men into the "Invisible Empire," most of who were policemen. Klan expert and author David Chalmers described the Klan under Powell as being "in the law-and-order business."<sup>4</sup>

Klan recruiters like Powell enlisted new members bureaucratically. The National Klan headquarters and burgeoning Oregon branch operated in conjunction with each other more like a national corporation than a hate group. The application process resembled that of a modern Human Resources department. Klan recruiters carried booklets of pre-printed application slips, referred to as "Form P-207's," and handed them out to all prospective Klansmen. Applicants signed their name under a paragraph ensuring they were a "native born true and loyal citizen of the United States... a white Gentile person of temperate habits... believer of the Christian religion, the maintenance of White Supremacy, the practice of honorable clannishness and the principles of a 'pure Americanism.'"<sup>5</sup> They then provided both a residence and business addresses as well as their occupation and returned the form to their recruiter who submitted it to national headquarters for review.

If a prospect was approved, he advanced to the next stage of the application process: an extensive questionnaire sent directly to the applicant from the Atlanta headquarters. This included twenty questions, many of which were basic inquiries: age, occupation, place of birth, marital status, height, weight, eye color and education. Other questions included: "Are you a Gentile or Jew? Were your parents born in the United States? Of what race (color)? Do you believe in the principles of PURE Americanism? Do you believe in White Supremacy? Of what religious faith are your parents?" And finally, "Do you owe ANY KIND of allegiance to any foreign nation, government, institution, sect, people, ruler or person?"<sup>6</sup> These questions revealed how exhaustive the Klan's application process was. They also reflected the Klan's overall commitment to its mantra of "pure Americanism;" essentially a semantic disguise for harsh bigotry and xenophobia. The questionnaire also prompted applicants to submit a hefty \$15 "donation" by either cash or check, a bill of about \$190 in 2019.

If an applicant's questionnaire was approved by national headquarters, the applicant reported to the nearest Klan chapter to recite the three-page, four section long "Oath of the

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992): 196-215.

<sup>4</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 21-45.

<sup>5</sup> Booklet of blank application slips, n/d, Oregon Historical Society.

<sup>6</sup> Ku Klux Klan applicant questionnaire, n/d, University of Oregon Special Collections and University Archives.

American Crusaders,” also referred to as “Form 103-J.F.H.” In Section I of the oath, applicants swore to never share or divulge Klan information and secrets to anyone who was not positively known to be a sworn member, thereby emphasizing the Klan’s extensive commitment to confidentiality. In Section II, applicants swore to faithfully uphold the constitution and laws of the Klan and to remain loyal to its chain of command. This demonstrated the Klan’s dedication to order. The Klan maintained strict organizational principles similar to those of a military body. In Sections III and IV, applicants swore to personally uphold the Klan’s defining principles of pure Americanism and chivalry and to never tarnish the Klan’s reputation.<sup>7</sup> Altogether, the oath required members to commit themselves fully to the organization and the word of its leaders, whatever they may ask. Once an applicant recited the oath, they were henceforth a full-fledged member of the Ku Klux Klan and as such were expected to pay annual dues, attend meetings and participate in Klan activities.

Luther Powell’s recruiting success in Medford cannot be quantified by lists of names on paper and membership dues alone. With his newfound support from local police officers, Powell accused Medford County of insufficient prohibition enforcement policies. He then spearheaded the successful recall of the county sheriff. Within a month, the mayor of Medford was dressed in white robes as well. Powell’s new Klan achieved this level of success in Medford not by blaring bigotry to the masses, but by forming personal connections and emphasizing the Klan’s dedication to civil society.

By July of 1921, Powell began recruiting in Oregon’s metropolitan center of Portland on a much larger scale. Exact numbers are impossible to verify, but within months Portland’s Klan membership reached the thousands.<sup>8</sup> National headquarters deemed the newly established Portland chapter as “Klan Number One,” the center of operations for the entire Oregon Klan.

By winter, the rising Oregon Klan felt strong enough to emerge from the shadows and make its intentions known to the greater Oregon public. On December 22, 1921, local pastor and Klan organizer, Rueben H. Sawyer, gave a speech entitled “The Truth About the Ku Klux Klan” at the Portland Municipal Auditorium in front of 6,000 people, including the mayor of Portland, George L. Baker. Local and state papers advertised the speech as the new Klan’s official introduction to the people of Oregon. To begin his lecture, Sawyer accused the American news media of gravely misrepresenting the Klan as “a wild dangerous mob, committing deeds of violence and lawlessness.” Sawyer assured the crowd that the Klan was truly “an institution of Chivalry, Humanity, Justice, and Patriotism.” Law-abiding citizens would be respected, “irrespective of race, religion or color so long as they make an honest effort to be Americans, and Americans only.”

Sawyer countered the national press’s negative depiction of the Klan by discussing the Klan’s many acts of charity. He mentioned the Portland Klan’s food drive for hundreds of needy families of many different races and religions. He also acknowledged an unnamed Klan chapter in the Midwest that loaned \$30,000 interest-free to build a local library, with the condition that it

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<sup>7</sup> “Oath of the American Crusaders,” n/d, University of Oregon Special Collections and University Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart Holbrook, “Is There Any History in Your Attic?” *The Oregonian*, 1960. Holbrook estimated Oregon Klan membership totaled 43,000 and Portland membership was at least 5,000 in January of 1923. The article was clipped and did not include a specific date of publication. MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

should stock Bibles and fly the American flag at all times. It is impossible to confirm or deny whether these events actually occurred, but Sawyer's mention of them showed how meticulously the Klan groomed its public image.

In another section of his lecture titled "What of the Jew?" Sawyer insisted that the Klan did not consider all Jews enemies, only those that rejected Jesus as their teacher or sought to maintain a "government within our government." According to its leaders, the Klan harshly persecuted individuals not because of religious intolerance, but because those individuals demonstrated disloyalty to American ideals. Catholics eventually became the Oregon Klan's primary target for this exact reason. The Klan did not intend to fight the Catholic Church, "only to stop Catholics, or any church for that matter, from injecting itself into the state."

The next section of Sawyer's lecture, titled "The Rising Tide of Color," discussed the Klan's attitude toward racial minorities, specifically African-Americans. Sawyer insisted that, like Jews or Catholics, "law abiding Negroes" had nothing to fear. In fact, according to Sawyer, some Negroes looked to the Klan for protection from "the lawless element of their own race." Klan leaders argued that Negroes were not the enemy, "just those who sow the seeds of racial hatred among negroes by teaching social equality." The second Klan believed the races of America could live in harmony, so long as the colored races recognized whites as the ruling race. This was the essence of White Supremacy as the Klan leadership described it.<sup>9</sup>

Sawyer and Powell's messages were well received. By fall of 1923 the Portland chapter reached 15,000 strong. The Oregon Klan as a whole grew to include fifty plus chapters across the state, hosting over 35,000 total members.<sup>10</sup> By then, Oregon had the highest Klan membership per capita, second only to Indiana. The Oregon Klan also had its own weekly newspaper, the *Western American*, distributed across the state from 1922 to 1923. The *Western American* was more of a propaganda conduit than a news source, but its editor, Lem A. Dever, was a well-respected publicist nonetheless. In 1923, the *Walla Walla Times* in Washington State sent a letter to Dever full of photographs from a recent Klan rally as well as a transcript of a Klan presentation for Dever to use in the *Western American's* next issue.<sup>11</sup> This showed that the Oregon Klan was now in full view of the general public and a force throughout the Pacific Northwest.

With its thousands of new members across Oregon, the new Klan held considerable influence over local and state politics for several years. The 1922 Oregon School Bill was the Klan's most infamous political escapade. As previously discussed, the Klan was strongly anti-Semitic and racist towards Asian and African-Americans. But having a predominantly white, native-born population, Oregon did not host many racial minorities to draw the Klan's ire. As a result, the Oregon Klan was primarily anti-Catholic. Klan leaders preached that, by worshipping the Pope in Rome, Catholic Americans' loyalty to the United States government was secondary to that of their religion, and thus violated the Klan's devotion to "100 percent Americanism."

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<sup>9</sup> Lecture given by Rueben H. Sawyer, "The Truth About the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan" at Portland Municipal Auditorium, Portland, OR, December 22, 1922.

<sup>10</sup> David A. Horowitz, "Social Morality and Personal Revitalization: Oregon's Ku Klux Klan in the 1920's," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 90 (Winter 1989), 365-84.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from *Walla Walla Times* to Lem A. Dever, April 6, 1923. MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

Based on this rationale, the Klan vehemently opposed Catholic-run schools for teaching children disloyalty to the United States.

In retaliation against papal influence, the Klan fully endorsed the “Oregon School Bill,” a measure that sought to outlaw all private schools in the state, including Catholic schools, and require all students to attend public school.<sup>12</sup> Such a bill was not uncommon, similar acts had already been introduced in Washington, California, Texas and Oklahoma. Although the Klan did not contribute to the bill’s creation, it was heavily involved in its promotion. The Klan printed and distributed pamphlets that contained messages like, “The Klan believes free public school... is the most essential of all American institutions... and the Catholic hierarchy opposes this.”<sup>13</sup> A newspaper advertisement for the bill featured similar language: “Ignorance of American ideals and institutions and language is the greatest menace to [our children].”<sup>14</sup> The ad was paid for by the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, a fraternal organization closely allied to the Klan. A front-page article in the Klan’s statewide newspaper praised the bill as “the greatest piece of constructive legislation enacted in any state in fifty years.”<sup>15</sup>

The bill’s promotional campaign appealed to the public’s patriotism while concealing the bill’s true anti-Catholic intentions. Oregon had one of the highest literacy rates in the country; a bill that “ensured the instruction of all Oregon children” and promised more funding for the state’s already exceptional school system was well received by the public.<sup>16</sup> The Klan advertised the bill as highly patriotic, promising to “promote American unity by teaching common language, common history and common ideals.” Many ads included the slogan, “One Flag—One School—One Language.” Pamphlets and newspaper advertisements often insisted that “the bill proposes no religious restrictions.”<sup>17</sup>

Although its promotional strategy was strong, the bill received harsh press criticism that attempted to reveal the bill’s underlying religious bigotry. A full-page advertisement in the *Oregonian* argued that the school bill’s “false appeals to patriotism” actually intended to deny “Oregon Mothers’ God-given right to choose how their children shall be educated.”<sup>18</sup> Another full-page advertisement revealed the bill’s patriotic hypocrisy as “a clear infringement of the constitutional freedoms guaranteed to all Americans.”<sup>19</sup> A *Capital Journal* article accused the Klan of sowing the seeds of intolerance with the Compulsory School Bill, claiming that it attempted to banish all Catholics, Lutherans and Adventists and “horsewhip those whose codes of purity and godliness are contrary to our own.”<sup>20</sup> The *Capital Journal* printed an anti-School Bill editorial cartoon, “Mixing the Devil’s Broth.” The cartoon featured an ironic depiction of the

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<sup>12</sup> Paul M. Holsinger, “The Oregon School Bill Controversy, 1922-1925. *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (August 1968), 327-340.

<sup>13</sup> Klan endorsement pamphlet of the Compulsory School Bill, no date given, MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>14</sup> Newspaper Advertisement for the Compulsory School Bill, October 1922, MSS 646, oregonhistoryproject.org.

<sup>15</sup> “Credit Masons for Great Victory in Adoption of Oregon School Law,” *The Western American*, November 30, 1922.

<sup>16</sup> David A. Horowitz, “The Klansman as Outsider: Ethnocultural Solidarity and Antielitism in the Oregon Ku Klux Klan of the 1920’s.” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 80 (January 1989), 12-20.

<sup>17</sup> Newspaper Advertisement for the Compulsory School Bill, October 1922, MSS 646, oregonhistoryproject.org.

<sup>18</sup> Advertisement against the Compulsory School Bill, *The Oregonian*, November 2, 1922.

<sup>19</sup> Advertisement against the Compulsory School Bill, *The Sunday Oregonian*, November 5, 1922.

<sup>20</sup> “An Ideal to Be Obtained,” *Capital Journal*, October 24, 1922.

American racial ‘melting pot’ motif; a giant cauldron is labeled “compulsory education bill” and is being filled by demons holding jugs labeled, “class hatred, bolshevism, persecution, spite and religious revenge.”<sup>21</sup>

In addition to bad press, presidents of the University of Chicago, Yale, Stanford, Columbia, Princeton, George Washington and Reed College all publicly condemned the bill. In 1922, two-hundred lawyers from the Portland area publicly speculated that the bill would be ruled unconstitutional if passed by a general referendum.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the forces working against it, the Oregon School Bill was put to a vote and passed on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1922 by a margin of 14,000 votes. Based on the evidence, the Klan’s anti-Catholic intentions were apparent to the public, but not enough Oregonians were troubled by their bigotry because the Catholic population in Oregon was so small to begin with.<sup>23</sup> Oregonians’ homogeneity, patriotism and support for public education blinded them to the bill’s underlying discrimination.

Unfortunately for the Klan, the bill was ruled unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in 1925 before it was put into law. The court ruled the bill a violation of parents’ rights to choose the means of their child’s education as well as an infringement on the Catholic Church’s freedom of religion.<sup>24</sup> A book titled, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* was published in 1924, two years after the Oregon School Bill was passed and a year before it was ruled unconstitutional. According to the author, John Moffatt Mecklin, many educated Oregonians, especially lawyers, knew the bill would be ruled unconstitutional before it could do any damage. Furthermore, Mecklin felt the Klan’s influence would wane because the public despised the Klan’s secrecy and exploitation of their communities. Mecklin criticized the Oregon school system for following the Klan as far as it did and for failing to teach its citizens how to think. States like Indiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Oregon all had relatively high literacy rates, but were still prone to hosting hate groups like the Klan.<sup>25</sup> In the end though, the Oregon School Bill never shut down a single school, Catholic or otherwise. The School Bill is often cited as the height of the Oregon Klan’s accomplishments, but evidence suggests that the bill was not influential after all. If anything, the bill brought the Klan’s bigotry to the attention of more educated segments of the Oregon population, who had sense enough to speak out against it. Although the bill passed, public resistance against the Klan only increased after 1922.

Another important political venture of the Oregon Klan was the 1922 gubernatorial election. The Republican incumbent, Ben Olcott, was an avid enemy of the Klan from the beginning. He issued a proclamation to the state, warning Oregonians of the Klan’s “fanaticism, race hatred, religious prejudice...” and the strife and civil terror the Klan would create.<sup>26</sup> Naturally, Klan leadership needed to ensure Olcott’s defeat in the governor’s race, but they required a champion of their own.

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<sup>21</sup> “Mixing the Devil’s Broth,” editorial cartoon, *Capital Journal*, November 1, 1922.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 207.

<sup>23</sup> Horowitz, “Social Morality”, 377.

<sup>24</sup> *Pierce, Governor of Oregon et al. v. Society of Sisters* (1925).

<sup>25</sup> John Moffatt Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1924), 83.

<sup>26</sup> Proclamation by Ben Olcott, May 15, 1922.

Several candidates from both parties tried to gain political favor by publicly supporting the Klan. In response to Olcott's anti-Klan proclamation, the *Morning Oregonian* asked five gubernatorial candidates their opinions regarding the new Klan in Oregon. Only one of the four denounced the Klan, calling it "a menace to both political freedom and public safety." The other three were mostly indifferent, but welcomed endorsements "from any good Americans, whatever their fraternal affiliations may be."<sup>27</sup>

One Democratic candidate, Walter Pierce, recognized the political potential of an alliance with the Klan. Pierce went a step further than the other candidates by structuring his campaign platform to reflect Klan principles. He publicly endorsed the Klan's mantra of "100 percent Americanism" at every opportunity. He also frequently used anti-Catholic rhetoric and spoke in favor of anti-alien land reform and public school reform. In a *Morning Oregonian* article, Pierce said he was a ninth-generation Protestant with six children who all attended public school. He supported the Compulsory School Bill and believed Americans would be free of snobbery and bigotry if all children were educated in sectarian institutions.<sup>28</sup>

The Klan threw its full support behind Pierce. Its public relations director, Lem A. Dever, endorsed Pierce in the *Western American*, requesting funds from rank and file members to help Pierce's campaign. Throughout the race, Pierce made sure his talking points always aligned with the Klan's agenda so as not to lose their favor. One of Pierce's campaign cards emphasized why Oregon needed an "American-born citizen" for governor. Pierce walked a thin line by publicly supporting Klan ideas, yet never declaring himself an actual member. No existing evidence definitively proved Pierce was ever a full-fledged Klansman. There are records of Pierce attending Klan meetings and rallies as a guest, but no official application bearing his name has been found. Historians David Horowitz, Gerald Schwartz and Robert McCoy argued that Pierce was a member based on letters that referred to Pierce as if he was a Klansman. Other historians like Arthur Bone and M. Paul Holsinger argue that Pierce was not a full member; he only allied himself with the Klan for his own political gain.<sup>29</sup>

Whether Pierce was a member or not, his relationship with the Klan paid off. Before the race, registered Republicans outnumbered registered Democrats 238,000 to 90,000. And yet, because of Klan influence Pierce was able to win the governorship as a Democrat by 31,000 votes.<sup>30</sup>

Despite its impact on the 1922 Governor race, the Klan had comparatively little influence on Pierce's actual administration. After the Klan propelled him to victory, Pierce no longer required their support. More importantly, Pierce recognized the public's resentment towards the Klan for its intrusion into the political realm. For these reasons, Pierce disassociated himself

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<sup>27</sup> "Five Candidates Answer on Klan," *Morning Oregonian*, May 16, 1922.

<sup>28</sup> "Pierce Comes Out for School Bill," *Morning Oregonian*, September 13, 1922, 11.

<sup>29</sup> David A. Horowitz's *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920's* (Chicago, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) and Robert R. McCoy's "The Paradox of Oregon's Progressive Politics: The Political Career of Walter Marcus Pierce," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 110 (Fall 2009), 390-419, discuss evidence that suggests Pierce was a full member. M. Paul Holsinger's "The Oregon School Bill Controversy, 1922-1925," *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (Summer 1968), 327-341 discuss the lack of solid evidence that proves Pierce was a full member.

<sup>30</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 220.



from the Klan during his term. All of which suggests that Pierce used the Klan more than the Klan used him.

Although their investment in the 1922 gubernatorial race did not pay off as expected, Klan leadership was not prepared to abandon their political activities. They allocated considerable Klan resources to the United States Senate race of 1924. When Portland mayor and longtime Klan supporter George Baker announced his candidacy, the Portland chapter endorsed him and encouraged all other Oregon chapters to do the same. However, another friend of the Klan's, Oregon House speaker K.K. Kubli, also announced his candidacy, forcing Klan leadership to endorse him as well. The Oregon Klan was soon divided on whom to support. Further complicating the matter, Senate incumbent Charles McNary began publicly supporting Klan efforts in order to gain the Klan's favor for himself. Because Klan leaders believed McNary had better odds, they switched their support from Baker to McNary. This made the Klan leadership appear indecisive, both to rank and file members and the rest of the state. Ultimately, McNary won with little help from the Klan's disorganized efforts. The Senate race of 1924 was another example of the Klan's waning influence.<sup>31</sup> Historian Lawrence Saalfeld argued that the Klan's many "political activities choked the life out of the Klan."<sup>32</sup>

When the Klan first arrived in the West, Oregon's population was extremely homogenous and thus harbored exceptionally bigoted attitudes. Oregon's original constitution declared, "No free negro or mulatto, not residing in this state at the time... shall ever come, reside, or be within this state..."<sup>33</sup> Knowing this, it becomes clear how the Klan achieved such success in Oregon. But despite its ability to grow from zero to nearly 40,000 in under three years, the Oregon Klan practically disappeared by 1930. The reasons for the Klan's fall from favor are far more nuanced than the reasons for its rise.

The first major contributing factor to the Klan's downfall was its relationship with the press. Most Oregon papers never covered the Klan, either because they did not believe the Klan's reappearance was newsworthy, or because they feared retaliation from its members.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, several newspapers across the state, including the *Corvallis Gazette*, *Capital Journal* and *Portland Telegram*, adamantly opposed the Klan from the beginning by publishing exposés on Klan corruption and even confessions from former Klansmen. Others, like the *Sunday Oregonian*, took a stand by refusing to print bigoted content sent in by Klan members. For example, in 1923, Klansman E.F. Baldwin sent a letter to the *Oregonian* in which he claimed all American press was under papal influence and argued the newspaper had the duty to expose the Catholic-led corruption. The *Oregonian's* editor responded to Baldwin by writing, "everything you claim is false, we will not print your letter."<sup>35</sup>

This bad press began to turn the Oregon public against the Klan. Some historians criticize the press for not joining the fight sooner, saying "Portland papers were cowards that only spoke

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<sup>31</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 154.

<sup>32</sup> Saalfeld, *Forces of Prejudice*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Oregon State Constitution, Art. 1, Sec. 34, 1859.

<sup>34</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Letter to E.F. Baldwin from the *Oregonian*, March 13, 1923, MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

out after the Klan began to decline.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the massive drop-off in the Klan’s public support caused by bad press directly contributed to the Klan’s overall collapse.

As discussed before, the second generation of the Ku Klux Klan was relatively nonviolent. Its leaders preached lawfulness and respect for “pure Americanism” above all else. Theoretically, those found in violation of these principles, like Catholics, Jews and immigrants, would be subject to full condemnation from the Klan, within the confines of the law. However, throughout the 1920s, dozens of incidents occurred across the country in which Klan members independently committed violent hate crimes. Such crimes were made public, prompting people to once again look at the Klan as a terrorist organization rather than a supporter of law and order, severely diminishing the Klan’s public reputation and overall strength.

A single event that irreversibly tarnished the new Oregon Klan’s reputation and contributed to its demise was a series of kidnappings and assaults that came to be known as the “Medford Outrage.” The first of the three attacks was reported on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1922 in the *Ashland Weekly Tidings*’ front page article, “Vigilantes Hang a Boy to Tree in Jacksonville.” The previous night, 22-year-old Medford resident Sam Johnson was manhandled from his home by a group of “men in black masks and flowing robes.” The kidnappers dragged Johnson into the forest about a mile from town and hung him by the neck from a tree, “not long enough to kill him, but sufficiently long to give him a glance into eternity.” Just before Johnson suffocated, the kidnappers let him back down. While Johnson lay on the ground gasping for air, the mob ordered him to leave town; if he was ever seen in Medford again, he would be killed. By the time the article appeared, no arrests had been made. The county Sheriff said Johnson was a “bad actor,” but had never done anything serious enough to get in trouble with the law. Reportedly, Johnson was a farmhand of Mexican heritage who had been suspected of bootlegging, but had never been formally charged. Johnson’s race and reputation, along with the nature of the crime, strongly suggested Klan involvement. However, the article never specifically mentioned the Klan.<sup>37</sup>

The *Medford Daily Tribune* reported another attack on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1922. The front page boldly headlined, “Local Citizen Victim of Ku Klux Klan: J.F. Hale is Given Neck Tie Party.” Middle-aged Catholic piano salesman J.F. Hale was assaulted in a nearly identical manner to Johnson. A group of nearly a dozen dark-robed men took Hale from his home at gunpoint into the woods and hanged him almost to death. Unlike the *Ashland Tidings*, the *Tribune* article immediately assumed a “Ku Klux Organization” was responsible. After stringing Hale up and releasing him, the mob ordered Hale to drop a lawsuit against another Medford man for an unpaid debt of \$150 and then leave town. If Hale did not abide, he would be killed. When asked about this particular attack, the Sheriff said the kidnapping was “of no local interest” and that “the papers would not hear of it for days.”<sup>38</sup> Whether the Sheriff made these comments because he sympathized with the Klan or because he feared the Klan’s reaction if he publicized the incident is unknown. But, given the Klan’s heavy recruitment within the Medford police between 1921 and 1922, either are tenable possibilities.

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<sup>36</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 210.

<sup>37</sup> “Vigilantes Hang a Boy to Tree in Jacksonville,” *Ashland Weekly Tidings*, April 12, 1922.

<sup>38</sup> “Local Citizen Victim of Ku Klux Klan: J.F. Hale is Given Neck Tie Party,” *Medford Daily Tribune*, March 18, 1922.

The *Medford Sun* reported the final attack on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1922 in a front-page article, “Negro Porter in Necktie Party on Siskiyou.” Over the previous weekend, an African-American railroad porter, who had just been released from jail for prohibition violations, was kidnapped, non-fatally hanged, then ordered to flee town under threat of death. Reportedly, while the victim sprinted through the forest toward the California border, he heard taunts like, ““Can you run, nigger?”” while the mob fired “revolver shots about his feet.”<sup>39</sup>

While the attacks were being reported and discussed around town, the Klan promptly responded on March 20<sup>th</sup> in a *Medford Mail Tribune* article, “Ku Klux Klan Denies Hand in Outrage.” Kleagle H.E. Griffith gave an official statement denying any prior knowledge of the aforementioned events as well as the Klan’s alleged involvement. Griffith accused the local papers of severely misrepresenting the facts. In the same article, Griffith endorsed the Klan as “a regular fraternal, patriotic, benevolent order that stands for Pure Americanism, protection of pure womanhood, free speech and press, free public schools, restricted immigration, white supremacy and law and order and consistently assists all law officers in the performance of their duties.” The article concluded with a story about two Klan members who made a large cash donation to a local Medford church while wearing full sets of white Klan robes.<sup>40</sup>

The *Ashland Weekly Tidings* published another article about the attacks on March 22<sup>nd</sup> entitled “K.K.K. Finger Print Expert Works on Threatening Notes.” In the article, Kleagle Griffith again denied all Klan involvement in the attacks. He also repudiated a claim made several days earlier by the *Medford Mail Tribune* and the *Medford Sun* that the Klan had sent notes to certain individuals in the county with instructions on how to carry out the “neck tie” attacks. Griffith insisted this was impossible because all official Klan correspondence used the official Klan letterhead. In fact, Griffith claimed that some of the notes in question had been turned over to the Klan and that their “finger print expert” was actively working on identifying the real culprit.<sup>41</sup>

The Klan never turned over these suspicious letters to the press, so their existence cannot be confirmed. Whether the Klan had a fingerprint expert or not is also unknown, but their claim to have one reveals the Klan’s attempt to disassociate itself from the Medford outrage. Even if the Klan did not orchestrate the attacks, their message of white supremacy and strict moral society were suspiciously well-aligned with the attackers’ motives. Additionally, the fact that these exceptionally brutal hate crimes occurred at the peak of the Klan’s power in Medford should not be taken as a coincidence.

The fact that the *Ashland Weekly Tidings* and the *Medford Mail Tribune* printed the Klan’s denials showed the papers’ relative indifference towards the Klan’s agenda, if not support. Most other papers stayed completely silent on issues related to the Klan. Only a select few condemned the organization altogether. Following the attacks in Medford, a national journal, *The Outlook*, wrote that because of the Klan “the peace-loving people of Oregon have suddenly lost their minds... and now believe in mob rule and lawlessness.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Negro Porter in Necktie Party on Siskiyou,” *Medford Sun*, April 2, 1922.

<sup>40</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Denies Hand in Outrage,” *Medford Mail Tribune*, March 20, 1922.

<sup>41</sup> “K.K.K. Finger Print Expert Works on Threatening Notes,” *Ashland Weekly Tidings*, March 22, 1922.

<sup>42</sup> Waldo Roberts, “The Ku-Kluxing of Oregon,” *The Outlook*, Vol. 133 (May, 1923): 490.

If the brutality of the attacks themselves was not enough to turn the greater Oregon public against the Klan, the prosecution of those accused might have. The trial for the “neck tie parties” began on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1923, nearly a year after the attacks took place. A February 28<sup>th</sup> article in the *Medford Mail Tribune*, “Klan Query Barred by the Court,” set the tone for how the trial would unfold. A minister, an orchardist, the former Medford police chief and sixteen other John Doe defendants were charged with riot, assault with a deadly weapon, and extortion. From the earliest moments of the trial, the defendants’ alleged Klan membership was at the forefront of debate. This is demonstrated by the prosecuting attorney’s first question for each prospective juror: “Are any of the members of your family, a member of the organization known as the Ku Klux Klan?” The defense attorneys insisted that such a question was irrelevant to the case. Conversely, assistant Attorney General Liljenquist explained, “the state expects to prove... the crime in question was propagandaed and carried out by members of the Ku Klux Klan, in regalia used by the Klan.” In spite of this argument, the court decided that the Klan membership question was immaterial to juror selection.<sup>43</sup> Meaning that, theoretically, the juries of the three hate crime cases could have been made up entirely of sworn Klan members.

On March 6<sup>th</sup>, the *Medford Tribune* reported Hale’s personal testimony of his attack. On the stand, Hale positively identified one of the kidnapers who had not worn a mask. Hale also confirmed that all his assailants were wearing the same black robes and hoods that the perpetrators of the other two attacks had worn. Hale then recalled how the mob forced him to drop the lawsuit he had against another Medford man who owed him \$150. The article then stated the same man had been rumored to be one of the town’s many Klan members. The most important part of Hale’s testimony was his recollection of what one of the attackers said after ordering him to leave town: “500 men in Jackson County have been watching you, and 10,000 will be watching you in Portland.”<sup>44</sup> This is clear proof that the kidnapers were at least associated with the Klan and potentially even that the Klan knew about the attack. At the time, Klan membership in Medford and Portland stood around 500 and 10,000 men respectively. The fact that the kidnapper’s threat referenced those exact figures was no coincidence and strongly implied that at least several of the attackers were full-fledged Klansmen.

On March 10<sup>th</sup> the *Medford Mail Tribune* reported that the case went to jury. Previously, the defense had argued the state’s case was flimsy because it rested entirely on Hale’s testimony, who the state admitted was “not a reputable citizen.” The defense called Hale a “moral leper” and “degenerate.” Although the *Tribune* did not explicitly mention why, the name-calling was most likely related to Hale’s son being born and raised out of wedlock. Moreover, Hale allegedly had relations with another unmarried woman who was not the boy’s mother.<sup>45</sup> These facts were clearly part of the reason Hale was targeted by the mob as an exemplar of un-American values. Furthermore, the rhetoric used in the courtroom against Hale, both by the state and defense, closely resemble the Klan’s central message of upholding a strict moral society.

On March 15th, before the jury could reach a consensus, the *Medford Mail Tribune* reported on its front page, “All Night Rider Cases Are Dismissed: State Holds Conviction Impossible.” Later that day, the court dropped all charges for the attacks against Hale and the

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<sup>43</sup> “Klan Query Barred by the Court,” *Medford Mail Tribune*, February 25, 1923.

<sup>44</sup> “Hale Tells Own Story of Hanging,” *Medford Mail Tribune*, March 6, 1923.

<sup>45</sup> “Hale Case Goes to Jury,” *Medford Mail Tribune*, March 10, 1923.

other two victims and dismissed every defendant. The Assistant Attorney General and lead prosecutor moved to dismiss all three cases based on lack of evidence needed for a proper conviction. Despite having three extensive eyewitness testimonies from the victims and questionable alibis from a majority of the defendants, the court upheld the prosecution's motion to dismiss the case. As such, the jury was not even allowed to render a decision.<sup>46</sup>

This verdict, or the lack thereof, made the Klan seem above the law, and because the people of Oregon were reasonable, they began to despise the Klan for it. A *Sunday Oregonian* article said the Oregon public is now beginning to see the light and what the Klan really stands for: violence and hate, not charity. In a statement released to the Oregon public in May of 1922, Governor Ben Olcott condemned the Klan as a "sinister organization under judicial inquiry as a result of felonious assaults and unspeakable outrages committed under the veil of darkness."<sup>47</sup> This was a direct reference to the "Medford Outrage."

As a result of the Medford assaults, not only did the Klan's influence over the general public begin to wane, but the commitment of some Klan members deteriorated as well. As historian Lawrence Saalfeld put it, "Things like the Medford outrages started reasonable men on their way out of the order."<sup>48</sup>

The most important factor in the Oregon Klan's downfall was its lack of capable leadership. Soon after establishing the Oregon Klan, Luther Powell appointed a charismatic and ambitious man named Fred L. Gifford as the Portland Klan's director. Although he seemed competent at first, Gifford eventually proved to be the single largest enemy to the Oregon Klan's success. Immediately after being handed the Portland chapter, Gifford grew dissatisfied with his level of power. He appointed himself Grand Dragon of the entire "realm of Oregon," thereby granting himself direct control over the fifty-three Klan chapters scattered across the state. As if that was not enough, Gifford consolidated his power further by excommunicating Powell over a series of disagreements the two had about Klan management.<sup>49</sup>

By taking control of the whole state, Gifford wedged the Portland Klan in between the National Klan in Atlanta and Oregon's smaller rural chapters. Previous to Gifford's takeover, all chapters dealt directly with national headquarters. In March of 1922, the national Klan sent the Oregon City chapter an official receipt for a \$71.50 payment for eleven sets of robes for newly inducted members.<sup>50</sup> This receipt showed how business was conducted during the Klan's first few years of operation in Oregon; all chapters paid the national Klan directly in exchange for official supplies like robes and pamphlets. By creating the new "Klan realm of Oregon," Gifford severed this connection. In December of 1922, Gifford sent a letter to the accountant of the

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<sup>46</sup> "All Night Rider Cases Are Dismissed: State Holds Conviction Impossible," *Medford Mail Tribune*, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1923.

<sup>47</sup> Proclamation by Ben Olcott, May 15, 1922.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence J. Saalfeld, *Forces of Prejudice in Oregon, 1920-1925* (Portland: Archdiocesan Historical Commission, 1984): 56.

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Chicago: Oxford University Press, 1967): 210.

<sup>50</sup> Receipt for Robes sent from Klan headquarters to Oregon City chapter, March 20, 1922, MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

Tillamook, Oregon chapter requesting a quarterly “per capita tax” of \$64.50.<sup>51</sup> Based on the evidence available, “per capita taxes” did not exist prior to Gifford’s administration. Gifford fabricated taxes and collected payments from Oregon chapters that were previously sent directly to the national Klan. No evidence suggested that Gifford paid any type of dues or taxes to Atlanta from his Portland chapter.

Despite Gifford’s intentions, the national Klan’s influence over Oregon was not completely dissolved. In 1923, the Portland Klan’s Public Relations director, Lem Dever, tried to form a new branch organization called the Junior Knights of the Invisible Empire. Dever promoted his new youth group as the Klan’s equivalent to the Boy Scouts; a way to teach Oregon’s impressionable male youth conservative values and prepare them to be exceptional future Klansmen. In reality, the program was simply another means for collecting dues by targeting a population that had previously gone untapped. In response, an administrator from the national Klan sent Dever a letter explaining to him that his proposed youth group directly violated the Klan Constitution. National headquarters threatened to excommunicate Dever if he did not immediately disband the program.<sup>52</sup> This showed that, no matter Gifford’s intentions, the national Klan always had some authority over the Oregon Klan’s affairs.

Most Oregon chapters supported the national Klan, so many Klansmen looked on in harsh disapproval as Gifford’s power-grabbing plans came to fruition. In 1922, the local chapter in Salem, Oregon accused Gifford of exploiting members and mishandling Klan funds. In January of the next year, representatives from thirty different chapters across the state met and held a vote to stop funding the Portland leadership until Gifford was removed as Grand Dragon.<sup>53</sup> The resolution failed to gather enough support to stop Gifford, but it demonstrated the rural chapters’ desire to push back against the Portland Klan’s poisonous leadership.

Another example of the rural chapters standing up against the Portland Klan’s corruption was in 1923, when Dever attempted to establish a statewide Klan lottery. The Klan’s newspaper, the *Western American*, instructed members to send in a couple dollars to the Portland chapter for a chance to win a new car. The raffle was another attempt by the Portland leadership to extort rank and file members. In response, a Klansman from Spokane, Washington, one Richard H. Eddy, sent a letter to Dever expressing his local chapter’s great displeasure with the promotion. Eddy explained that Dever’s proposed lottery was a form of gambling, and that gambling of any kind was strictly prohibited by the Klan Constitution.<sup>54</sup> Eddy’s letter, again, demonstrated the rural chapters’ ability to expose the Portland Klan’s hypocrisy and corruption. But even with their cooperation, the rural chapters could do little to slow Gifford and the Portland Klan leadership down in their pursuit of power.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Letter from Fred L. Gifford to F.F. Conover, December 19, 1922, Box 4, Folder 2. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from unnamed Imperial Kligrapp to Lem A. Dever, April 17, 1923. MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence J. Saalfeld, *Forces of Prejudice in Oregon, 1920-1925* (Portland: Archdiocesan Historical Commission, 1984): 56-60.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Richard H. Eddy to Lem A. Dever, April 18, 1923. MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>55</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 146.

While Gifford consolidated his power within the Klan, he also set his sights on capturing the influence of smaller fraternal, industrial, and political organizations throughout the state. Before naming himself Grand Dragon, Gifford had worked in Portland for thirty years as a telegraph operator for the Southern Pacific Railroad Company as well as a business agent for the Electrical Workers' Union.<sup>56</sup> In other words, Gifford was already well-established in the circles he planned to penetrate with his Klan influence. Using his prior business experience and natural charisma, Gifford successfully convinced several organizations like the Good Government League and the Public Service Commission to support the Klan and its principles.<sup>57</sup>

However, similar to how he consolidated power within the Klan, Gifford used shady strategies to accomplish his goals that eventually caught up to him. During local elections, labor and political organizations often gave out "tickets" to the public which they used to endorse certain candidates or issues. A *Morning Oregonian* article from 1922 accused Gifford of circulating fake tickets in the name of a real political organization called the Federation of Patriotic Societies. Gifford allegedly produced and distributed counterfeit yellow tickets that claimed members of the Federation running for office were affiliated with various churches. Secretary of the Federation, W.C. Elford, responded by saying one of the F.O.P.'s primary goals was fighting church influence in politics. Elford insisted that the yellow tickets were counterfeit and accused Gifford of fabricating information in an attempt to frame the Federation for hypocrisy.<sup>58</sup>

After several scandals of this ilk became public, Gifford and the Portland Klan's connections to non-governmental organizations like the Federation crumbled. Former Klansman Harry N. Crain went so far as to write an article in *The Capital Journal* warning all fraternal groups in Oregon that any affiliation with the Klan would certainly be a liability rather than an asset. Crain also admitted that because groups such as the Federation were made up of so many active Klansmen, Gifford's shadowy influence over such groups would continue "until the Klan itself was dead."<sup>59</sup>

Throughout his reign as Grand Dragon, Gifford faced a flurry of scandals and corruption accusations. One such charge was adultery; rumors circulated that Gifford was unfaithful to his wife, despite the Klan's commitment to strong family values. Gifford was also unofficially accused of violating prohibition laws, despite the Klan's demonization of bootleggers. A letter sent from a man identified as "B," who interviewed Gifford's wife in 1947, confirmed other rumors that she was from a Catholic family.<sup>60</sup> A *Capital Journal* article from 1922 accused Gifford of sending his two daughters to a Catholic-affiliated school. The same article also confirmed that Gifford's son attended a private military school, which was also scandalous because Gifford strongly advocated for the Oregon School Bill, a measure intended to outlaw all private schools in the state.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jackson, *KKK in the City*, 198.

<sup>57</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 25.

<sup>58</sup> "Ticket Fake is Charge," *The Morning Oregonian*, November 3, 1922.

<sup>59</sup> Harry N. Crain, "KKK Boss Federation," *Capital Journal*, August 26, 1922.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from "B." to Ed Larney, December 10, 1947. MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>61</sup> "Ku Klux Cyclops Sends His Own Son to Private School," *Capital Journal*, October 19, 1922.

The most important accusation against Gifford was his mishandling of Klan funds. Every speech Gifford gave in front of the Portland Klan began as expected, with fiery white supremacist rhetoric, but concluded with a request for donations to fund Gifford's various personal business pursuits. And more often than not, the money he raised was never seen again.<sup>62</sup> The most infamous of such cases was Gifford's "Skyline Corporation." Gifford asked the Klan for one million dollars with which he would build a skyscraper in downtown Portland as the Oregon Klan's new headquarters. For doing so, Gifford would only receive a three-percent commission. Gifford raised \$30,000, the project never broke ground, and the money was never accounted for.<sup>63</sup> Another example of Gifford's corruption appeared in a *Portland Journal* article, "Klan and Community Chest." The article alleged that Gifford discouraged members from donating to any charity unless it was through the Klan. Such a policy allowed Gifford to control more money going through the Klan and skim off the top.<sup>64</sup>

Gifford's incompetent leadership was best expressed in a twenty-three-page exposé written by ex-Klansman Ben Titus in 1925. Titus was initiated into the Portland chapter in 1924 with a class of nearly 100 other men and frequently attended Gifford's bimonthly rallies. In his exposé, Titus described Gifford's ability to captivate crowds of 3,000 men or more. Despite Gifford's charisma, Titus always left the rallies disappointed by Gifford's lack of guidance for rank and file members. Titus concluded that Gifford wished to stir up hatred rather than execute a mission. According to Titus, Gifford often "played both ends against the middle" and was never politically consistent. Titus also noticed a formula to the rallies: Gifford gave a provocatively vulgar and prejudiced speech, then ended by requesting donations for personal projects. Like many Klansmen before him, it became clear to Titus that Gifford was in it for the money.

Gifford did not advocate for "Klannishness" or 100 percent Americanism at all. When most other Oregon Klan chapters held meetings, they carefully read minutes, reviewed agendas and thoroughly discussed all Klan objectives. According to Titus, Gifford's Portland Klan meetings never indulged in such formalities. Gifford's one and only focus was inducting new members and collecting their dues, of which he got a cut. While other chapters carefully chose who they accepted, Gifford repeatedly told his chapter, "we want as big a class as we can get." Gifford himself never participated in traditional Klan rituals, and many members doubted Gifford had any real Klan knowledge at all. Some accused Gifford of breaking his Klan oath by forming the Royal Riders of the Red Robe, a fraternal group independent of the Klan that Gifford encouraged all Klan members to join. The individual membership charge was \$12.50. A letter sent from an administrator of the Pendleton chapter to Gifford in 1923 contained several R.R.R.R. applications and a receipt of membership dues. This letter confirmed that Gifford coerced Klansmen all over the state to join his money-making pseudo-Klan.<sup>65</sup> The R.R.R.R.'s existence was a blatant violation of the national Klan's oath. Furthermore, no evidence

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<sup>62</sup> Titus, "I Was a Klansman," *Portland Telegram*

<sup>63</sup> Jackson, *KKK in the City*, 223

<sup>64</sup> Lem A. Dever, "Klan and Community Chest," *The Spectator* Vol. 36 (November 29, 1924): 1. Box 4, Folder 2. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Pendleton Kligrapp to Fred L. Gifford, January 31, 1923, MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.



confirmed that the R.R.R.R. ever formally convened, but Gifford presumably kept all membership fees collected.

As his reign continued, Gifford used more hostile rhetoric in his rallies. He ordered Klansmen to boycott papers and businesses that offended him and even threatened to beat Klansmen that disobeyed his orders. Gifford sometimes excommunicated members that called out his hypocrisy, labeling them “Catholic hirelings.” Titus noticed that such rhetoric often excited the more unstable members, but for ordinary men like him, it was a huge turnoff.<sup>66</sup> As Lem Dever noted in a 1925 news article, “soon all the good, law abiding members left, only thugs remained.”<sup>67</sup>

Titus knew Gifford did not want to lead a fraternal order; he wanted “to become political dictator of Oregon.”<sup>68</sup> Gifford constantly double dealt, made false promises, lied, and disregarded both state and federal laws in order to further his own political gain. In his exposé, Titus accused Gifford of drinking with political figures. Gifford also ordered Klan members to infiltrate other fraternal organizations and work for the Klan from within. He raised money for the Oregon School Bill campaign that was never accounted for. In a private meeting among Klan leaders Gifford exclaimed, “To hell with the law! I am the law!” Given this crooked behavior, Klan members eventually came to understand that Gifford did not stand for anything except his own gain. As Titus proclaimed in the conclusion of his exposé, Gifford was “the ass in the lion’s skin.” Under his misguided leadership the Klan took advantage of good men’s patriotism and turned them into a “blind fanatic mob.”<sup>69</sup>

In addition to major corruption, the Klan’s day-to-day mishandling of funds significantly contributed to its downfall. During its rise to power, the Portland Klan donated to many Protestant churches and charity organizations in attempts to boost its reputation. Such ventures were worthwhile when the Klan constantly received dues from new members. But once recruitment slowed down, donations became even more necessary to keep up appearances. As a result, the Portland Klan’s coffers quickly drained. This downward spiral was not unique to Portland. Minutes from Klan meetings in La Grande, Oregon described a similarly high level of donations and extravagance unsupported by sufficient revenue.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, some other rural Oregon chapters, like those in Tillamook and Eugene, had exceptionally well-kept financial records. While most Oregon Klan chapters were dead by 1925, Tillamook’s chapter survived well into 1928.<sup>71</sup>

Another important factor contributing to the Oregon Klan’s demise was the deteriorating relationship between Klan leadership and its rank and file members. From the beginning, many Klansmen felt lied to and cheated by their leaders. Some even published their experiences to discourage others from falling victim to the scam. The first of such exposés was a 1922 *Capital Journal* article written by ex-Klansman Harry N. Crain, warning all other fraternal groups in

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<sup>66</sup> Titus, “I Was a Klansman,” *Portland Telegram*

<sup>67</sup> Lem A. Dever, “Limelight Turned on the Klan,” *Portland Journal*, 1925.

<sup>68</sup> Ben Titus, “I was a Klansman,” *Portland Telegram*, November 2, 1925.

<sup>69</sup> Ben Titus, “I was a Klansman,” *Portland Telegram*, November 2, 1925.

<sup>70</sup> David A. Horowitz, *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920's* (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) 45-104.

<sup>71</sup> Ledger book, F.F. Conover, accountant for Tillamook Klan chapter No. 8, Oregon Historical Society.

Oregon that any affiliation with the Klan would surely create a liability rather than an asset.<sup>72</sup> A former Klan recruiter named Henry P. Fry published a series of articles titled “The Modern Ku Klux Klan” in which he accused the Klan of using a medieval organizational structure and tactics. As a recruiter, Fry claimed to have inducted “no better, cleaner or finer lot of men” into the Klan. But it became clear to Fry and other members that the Klan’s propaganda was “vicious, un-American and evil,” meant to stir radical and religious hatred. Many also learned that the Oregon Klan was being run as a money-making scheme for a few insiders rather than as a civic-minded fraternal organization.<sup>73</sup>

Another explosive exposé by a former member was that of Lem A. Dever in his short book, *Confessions of an Imperial Klansman*, published in 1925. Dever served as the editor of the *Western American*, the Klan’s official newspaper in Oregon. He was also a part of the Klan’s upper echelon and a close friend of Gifford. In his book, Dever avoided making specific accusations against Klan leaders because he feared retaliation from their followers, which showed Oregonians that the Klan was not to be taken lightly. When weighing the historical evidence, Dever truly did not have much to fear; the Klan was in no position to silence people. Nevertheless, Dever’s book confirmed the sentiments raised by Fry and Crain; many men joined under the impression that the Klan was about comradeship, then were turned away by the racial hatred and religious intolerance.<sup>74</sup>

Former Klansman Ben Titus’s twenty-three-page confession told a story of deception that many other ex-Klansmen related to. When being recruited, Titus was drawn to the Klan’s devotion to patriotism and rule of law. Though Titus strongly supported the principle of separation of church and state, he was not anti-Catholic. Upon taking the oath, Titus was assured the Klan was neither anti-Semitic nor anti-Catholic, and that any reference to white supremacy did not mean the persecution of law-abiding minorities. Whether he was genuinely lied to or just being naïve, many other ex-Klansmen discussed similar false promises.

To best understand the new Klan in Oregon and the reasons for its rise and eventual collapse, one must interpret the dynamic between the Portland chapter and the dozens of rural chapters. The rural chapters of the Oregon Klan were much smaller than the Portland headquarters, but were generally better organized and lasted much longer. The klavern in Eugene was a good example. At its height, the Eugene chapter only had 140 members, compared to Portland’s 15,000. According to surviving membership applications, 60% of the Eugene chapter’s membership held middle-class occupations and only 10% were skilled or semi-skilled laborers. 80% of all members were married, most lived in stable homes and most were between thirty and fifty-five years old. Remarkably, 55% of Eugene’s members were business owners or managers.<sup>75</sup> Given that only 10,593 people lived in Eugene in 1920, a considerable number of business institutions in the city were being run by Klan members.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Harry N. Crain, “KKK Boss Federation,” *Capital Journal*, August 26, 1922.

<sup>73</sup> Henry P. Fry, “The Modern Ku Klux Klan,” *Capital Journal*, July 15 to August 8, 1922.

<sup>74</sup> Lem A. Dever, *Masks Off! Confessions of an Imperial Klansman* (Portland, 1925), 1-63. Accessed at the Multnomah County Library Special Collections Reading Room.

<sup>75</sup> Eckard V. Toy, “Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene, Oregon,” chapter from *The Invisible Empire in the West*, edited by Shawn Lay (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004):153-185.

<sup>76</sup> United States Census, Eugene, Oregon, 1920.

Although less than 2% of Eugene's total population were confirmed Klansmen, the Klan had a strong influence on school board elections; they dismissed three teachers solely because they were openly Catholic. Despite the Klan's grip on the school board, they never successfully infiltrated the University of Oregon, located in the center of Eugene, because the school's administration and student body were extremely outspoken against the Klan. A 1922 editorial column from the university's newspaper, the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, read, "The university is no more a place for the white-robed Ku Klux Klan than is the great state of Oregon... Such an organization as this must never be countenanced on a college campus."<sup>77</sup>

A collection of private correspondence from 1923 displayed the Eugene Klan's true capabilities. A member from the chapter in Albany, a small town near Eugene, sent a letter to an unidentified Klan official discussing the possible construction of a road connecting Albany, Eugene and Corvallis, another nearby town. Another letter mentioned a meeting that had taken place between Klansmen from the three towns discussing the project. The road was to be built entirely with Klan resources or be lobbied for in the state legislature by Klan members. No evidence suggested that the project ever broke ground, but the letters showed that the rural chapters in central Oregon were more than just fraternal organizations; they had functioning infrastructures with real objectives, such as building roads.<sup>78</sup>

Another prominent rural chapter was in La Grande, Oregon, a railroad hub in the Northeastern corner of the state. Its membership doubled that of the Eugene chapter with over 320 confirmed members in 1922. In contrast to Eugene, only 25% of La Grande's members were middle class, most were skilled or semi-skilled laborers and 37% of all members worked for the Union Pacific Railroad. The Klan offered a sense of dignity to white railroad workers. People joined the chapter in La Grande to "build networks against what they saw as deteriorating values brought about by the changing times."<sup>79</sup>

The La Grande chapter provided the most extensive collection of surviving meeting minutes of any Oregon Klan chapter; fully documented biweekly gatherings from late 1922 to late 1924. These minutes have been published by historian David A. Horowitz and reveal much about the La Grande chapter's message, organization, accomplishments, members' attitudes, and reasons for its eventual demise.

The La Grande chapter performed many common Klan spectacles, such as public cross burnings and military-style parades. According to the minutes, many members of the La Grande chapter participated in such activities because they appreciated the symbolism and extravagance. They viewed their white robes as symbols of their comradeship, not intimidation or anonymity. They burned crosses to signify their purpose and Christian sacrifice, not their religious intolerance. To be clear, the La Grande chapter certainly embraced white supremacy and racism;

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<sup>77</sup> "The Klan in Eugene," editorial, Box 32, Folder 1. Oregon Daily Emerald Records, 1920-2004, University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from W.E. Begg to F. W. Cameron discussing the Corvallis road, March 14, 1923, MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>79</sup> David A. Horowitz, "Order, Solidarity, and Vigilance: The Ku Klux Klan in La Grande, Oregon," chapter from *The Invisible Empire in the West*, edited by Shawn Lay (Champaign, IL; University of Illinois Press, 2004):185-217.

minutes of a chapter meeting in March of 1923 described the rejection of a man's membership application because rumors suggested the man was part Native American.<sup>80</sup>

While the La Grande chapter was openly prejudiced towards racial minorities, they also held their white members to a high standard. The minutes discussed the dismissal of six white male members for violations of the Klan's moral code of conduct. One man was found to be living with a woman he was not married to. Another was dismissed because he declared multiple bankruptcies. One was accused of violating prohibition laws. Three others were dismissed simply because they were guilty of "questionable character and affiliations."<sup>81</sup> The La Grande chapter's apparent dedication to strict moral conduct suggested it acted as more of a fraternal organization than a Ponzi scheme like the Portland chapter.

By holding members to a high moral standard, the La Grande chapter was able to actually accomplish political and social objectives. Meeting minutes discussed the chapter's support of local police in their fight to uphold prohibition. The La Grande chapter was also heavily involved in political races, both on the local and state level. Membership logs and roll calls confirmed that the chairman of the Health and Sanitation committee for La Grande's Chamber of Commerce was a Klan member. Since Klan membership accounted for approximately 4.5% of La Grande's total population, many more of the town's public officials were assumed to be friends of the Klan if not full-fledged members.<sup>82</sup> The minutes also discussed the chapter's plans to raise funds to update the city's water system. Similar to Eugene, the chapter in La Grande was small, but well-organized and heavily involved in local politics as well as civic projects.

The Klan chapter in La Grande was an exceptionally close-knit group. For example, whenever a La Grande Klansmen fell ill, the chapter addressed it in their weekly meetings and made sure to send visitors to his home. In some cases, the chapter even raised funds to help cover expensive hospital bills. Although Klan ideals centered on discrimination, the rural chapters like La Grande were exceptionally good-willed toward their own.<sup>83</sup>

Such close fraternity was in sharp contrast to the Portland chapter. In 1923, Reverend J.R. Johnson, a top official in the Portland Klan, received a letter notifying him that the Klan's head lecturer, R.H. Sawyer, had fallen deathly ill. The letter was signed, "Faithfully yours, 'I-t-s-u-b'", a Klan acronym meaning, "In the Sacred Unfailing Being;" a reference to God. The letter scolded Johnson and the Portland Klan for not supporting one of their own in his time of need. According to the letter, Sawyer was "discouraged and doubtful of his fellow-Klansmen" because "only one man had been out to see him." In an effort to repair relations, the letter suggested Johnson send "man after man- a score or more- to visit his home" and assure Sawyer of their

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<sup>80</sup> Meeting minutes published in David A. Horowitz's book, *Inside the Klavern* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999): 105.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-130.

<sup>82</sup> The 320 members figure is confirmed by membership applications and roll call records published in David A. Horowitz's book, *Inside the Klavern*, 143. The 4.5% figured is based on a conservative approximation of the La Grande population reported in the 1920 United States Census. The population in 1920 was 6,913 and grew to 8,050 in 1930. Therefore, the population in 1922 was approximately 7,000.

<sup>83</sup> Horowitz, "Order, Solidarity, and Vigilance: The Ku Klux Klan in La Grande, Oregon": 211.

loyalty to their cause.<sup>84</sup> R.H. Sawyer was a prominent figure in the Portland Klan's rise to power, but no evidence proved that the Portland Klan ever supported Sawyer while on his deathbed.

Another example of exceptional community outreach by rural chapters was demonstrated in a telegram sent to the small Klan chapter in the coastal town of Astoria, Oregon. The telegram included a brief note from a New York man, Vincent Astor, expressing his condolences on "the disaster in Astoria." Astor included no specifics regarding the incident, only a promise to send \$5,000 to the chairman of the Oregon Klan's Relief Committee "with the hope that it may be of some assistance to those who have suffered most."<sup>85</sup> Astor's sizable donation would have equaled about \$72,000 in 2019. It further demonstrated the rural chapters' dedication to community.

The difference in fraternity between the members of the Portland Klan and members of the rural chapters as represented by La Grande, Astoria, and Eugene was a major explanation for why the rural chapters outlived the Portland Klan, despite their more limited resources.

While the La Grande chapter was certainly superior in their fraternity, when compared to the Portland chapter they were not much better at managing their funds. By 1924, the meeting minutes showed the La Grande chapter was hemorrhaging money. During almost every biweekly meeting the chapter discussed donations to local organizations, usually Protestant churches. Furthermore, La Grande was one of few rural chapters that supported Gifford's personal business endeavors. Such policies were sustainable when the chapter gained dozens of new members every month. But by 1924, membership dues slowed and their spending policy did not change, causing the chapter to bleed funds. The last surviving minutes from the La Grande chapter were dated December 27<sup>th</sup> 1924.<sup>86</sup> It cannot be confirmed whether or not the Klan in La Grande completely dissolved after that, but it can be assumed that it operated at reduced capacity and likely folded within the next year.

In addition to poor financial management, rural chapters like Eugene and La Grande ultimately fell apart because their base members were turned away by the increasingly intense bigotry, primarily perpetuated by the Portland chapter. According to the leader of the Oregon City chapter's wife, men initially joined the Klan "because of politics, curiosity and boredom." But because of the increasing racial and religious hatred, most ex-Klansmen "were ashamed they were ever members."<sup>87</sup>

The small town of Tillamook, Oregon hosted another Klan chapter. Like the other rural chapters in La Grande and Eugene, Tillamook's was small. Records cannot confirm their exact membership; most likely no more than 250 members were active at one time, considerably less than the Portland chapter's 15,000. Only 1,964 people lived in Tillamook in 1920, meaning over

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<sup>84</sup> Letter from 'I-t-s-u-b' to Reverend J.R. Johnson, May 4, 1923, MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>85</sup> Telegram from Vincent Astor to Astoria Klan chapter, December 13, 1922. MSS 22, Ku Klux Klan Records, 1922-1971, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>86</sup> Ku Klux Klan La Grande, Oregon Chapter records, 1922-1923, MSS 2604, Davies Family Research Library, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Rosa Green, wife of Exalted Cyclops of Oregon City chapter, referenced in Toy's "Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene, Oregon": 185.

ten-percent of its total population were active Klan members throughout most of the decade.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the Tillamook Klan dominated local politics; the majority of municipal and county officials that served during the 1920s were Klansmen or former Klansmen.<sup>89</sup>

Tillamook's chapter was also one of the most racist in the Oregon Klan because practically no minorities lived in Tillamook. One member of the Tillamook chapter said that for many years the town "could brag that there were no Chinese, niggers, or Japs in the county." According to census data, the combined number of Tillamook citizens from Asian, African or Native American descent was less than one hundred, most of who lived on individual farms isolated from the town's main population. Many of Tillamook's white Protestant men joined the Klan to maintain the racist status quo.<sup>90</sup>

Determining the occupation and socio-economic background of every member in the Tillamook chapter is impossible, but a model can be approximated based on surviving membership records and questionnaires. A collection of twenty-two membership cards dated between 1924 and 1925 included: one store clerk, one house painter, four farmers, one salesman, two carpenters, four lumbermen, one hotel proprietor, one rancher, one time keeper, one cheese maker, two dairy workers and three day laborers.<sup>91</sup> Another set of five membership applications included: one rancher, one mechanic, one logger, one eighteen-year-old student and one seventy-three-year-old retiree. The only requirements for acceptance in Klan questionnaires were that applicants must be white, gentile, native born, innocent of any major crime, and a believer in white supremacy and 100 percent Americanism.<sup>92</sup> Otherwise, like all other chapters across the state, the Tillamook klavern consisted of members from all different age groups, occupation and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, Klansmen were generally well-educated, considering that Tillamook's white population had an illiteracy rate of only 0.3% in 1920.

Tillamook was similar to the Eugene and La Grande chapters in that they held their members to a high moral standard. In March of 1922 the Tillamook chapter's head accountant, F.F. Conover, made an official charge against another Klansman, James Q. Daily, for drunken disorderly conduct. So perturbed by his peer's misbehavior, Conover gave an official witness statement that was stamped and notarized. The attention to detail shown over such a relatively minor offense demonstrated the Tillamook Klan's strict code of conduct. Unlike the Portland Klan, the rural chapters practiced what they preached in terms of upholding civil society.<sup>93</sup>

Just because the Tillamook chapter had strict rules did not mean it was free of malfeasance. A correspondence between two Tillamook Klansmen in 1923 discussed search

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<sup>88</sup> United States Census, Tillamook, Oregon, 1920.

<sup>89</sup> Eckard V. Toy, Jr., "The Ku Klux Klan in Tillamook, Oregon," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 53 (April 1962): 60-64.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with unnamed former Tillamook Klansmen conducted by Eckard V. Toy and cited in "The Ku Klux Klan in Tillamook, Oregon."

<sup>91</sup> Collection of twenty-two Tillamook Klan membership cards, 1924-1925, Box 1, Folder 11. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>92</sup> Collection of five Tillamook Klan applicant questionnaires, no date, Box 1, Folder 9. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>93</sup> Charges of drunken disorderly conduct made by F.F. Conover against James Q. Daily, March 12, 1922, Box 1, Folder 3. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

efforts for an unidentified man who allegedly stole at least \$1,000 from the chapter and fled the county.<sup>94</sup> This proved that corruption and scandals were rampant throughout the entirety of the Oregon Klan, even among the most organized chapters.

Another similarity between the Tillamook Klan and other rural chapters was the camaraderie amongst their members. In May of 1925, Klansman F. Pankow's father died, and the Tillamook Klan administrators sent the family multiple letters expressing his condolences and promising to send members out to the family's home to show support.<sup>95</sup> In March of that year, the same unnamed administrators sent a similar, but personalized, letter to another Klansmen whose mother recently died.<sup>96</sup> This was in sharp contrast to the Portland Klan; when their top lecturer fell seriously ill his family expressed disappointment in the fact that they had not received so much as a letter from the Klan. The more pronounced fraternity in the Tillamook chapter compared to that of the Portland chapter is a major reason why the Tillamook chapter lasted well past 1928, while the Portland Klan nearly vanished after 1925.

The Tillamook Klan was set apart from other rural chapters by their exceptionally well-kept membership and financial records. From 1923 to 1925, the Tillamook chapter's accountant, F.F. Conover, maintained an incredibly organized ledger book that included every member's name, membership status, dues paid, and dues owed.<sup>97</sup> Conover kept an extensive collection of receipts, including one from a paint store in 1926 showing the purchase of "general office supplies and decorations" for \$13.<sup>98</sup> Another receipt from the Klan national headquarters in Atlanta showed the purchase of seven robes in April of 1921.<sup>99</sup>

Such detail-oriented accounting paid dividends for the Tillamook Klan in their early years of operation. Collections of surviving quarterly bank statements from 1923 and 1924 show Conover deposited more membership dues into the Klan's account than he withdrew for expenses.<sup>100</sup> A receipt from 1923 showed the Tillamook chapter had collected more than \$500 in dues in one quarter; a hefty sum for any Oregon Klan chapter, including Portland.<sup>101</sup> Until around 1926, the Tillamook chapter had high levels of revenue that were well-managed.

Once the Portland chapter and much of the rest of the Oregon Klan began to disintegrate in 1925, the Tillamook chapter showed signs that it would eventually follow suit. Bank

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<sup>94</sup> Letter from W.M. Peterson to J. Munro Wilson, February 18, 1923, Box 1, Folder 3. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from unnamed Tillamook Kligrapp to F. Pankow, May 22, 1925, Box 1, Folder 2. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from unnamed Tillamook Kligrapp to Victor L. White, March 30, 1925, Box 1, Folder 2. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>97</sup> F.F. Conover's Ledger book, 1923-1925, Box 4. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>98</sup> Receipt for office supplies and decorations, 1926, Box 1, Folder 27. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>99</sup> Receipt for Robes, April 16, 1921, Box 1, Folder 27. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>100</sup> Tillamook Klan bank statements, 1923-1926, Box 1, Folder 20. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>101</sup> Membership dues receipt, 1926, Box 1, Folder 11. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

statements from 1926 showed deposits less than half the size of those made in 1923 and 1924.<sup>102</sup> In a brief handwritten letter sent to his fellow Klansmen in 1927, the leader of the Tillamook chapter tendered his resignation “to take effect at once” without offering a specific reason.<sup>103</sup> This can be taken as evidence of the fact that the Tillamook Klan slowly crumbled over the span of several years.

The quarterly reports prepared by accountant F.F. Conover told the story best of the Tillamook Klan’s demise. A report from 1926 mentioned the suspension of thirty-eight members for failing to pay dues. Twenty-nine other members were reinstated after the chapter received late payments. The report also noted that average attendance at weekly meetings for the quarter was forty-five, gross membership was 233, and the chapter owed \$56 in state taxes. A quarterly report from 1928 told a much different story. At that point, gross membership had decreased to 105 in just two years. Average attendance at meetings was only twenty-five. Also, no members were suspended for non-payment while ninety-one were reinstated. The report failed to confirm if those reinstated had paid. In essence, the Tillamook chapter was bleeding funds. They could not afford to be as strict about dues payments as they were two years prior. In 1928, they needed to reinstate as many members as possible to continue base operations.<sup>104</sup>

A letter sent from the national Klan’s cashier in 1928 ordered the Tillamook chapter to immediately pay \$500 owed in interest.<sup>105</sup> This showed how Tillamook struggled to keep up on its expenses, even those it owed to the Klan itself. Handwritten minutes from 1928 discussed the reinstatement of two members who still had yet to pay their outstanding dues. The meeting also mentioned active members that had fallen ill; only twenty-seven members were present.<sup>106</sup> Though the Tillamook chapter had shrunk significantly, it still fulfilled all normal operations. Nonetheless, if its decline continued at the same rate indicated by surviving records, the Tillamook Klan was probably out of commission by 1930.

Due to Oregon’s favorable demographics and preexisting racist and xenophobic attitudes, the Ku Klux Klan was able to build a considerable force in a relatively short amount of time. However, poor leadership, corruption, political overreach, mismanagement and bigoted violence caused the Klan to collapse just as quickly as it came to prominence. In the words of Catholic historian Lawrence Saalfeld, “the death of the Klan was not brought about by its opponents. The Klan died at its own hand.”<sup>107</sup>

The case of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon is one of many examples in this country of how hate groups may briefly flourish because they offer a sense of community and united purpose to people during desperate times. But, as they always do, the defining characteristics of hate groups

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<sup>102</sup> Tillamook Klan bank statements, 1923-1926, Box 1, Folder 20. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>103</sup> Handwritten resignation letter from Exalted Cyclops of Tillamook, September 9, 1927, Box 1, Folder 2. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>104</sup> Quarterly reports from 1926 and 1928, Box 1, Folder 4. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from national Klan cashier to Tillamook chapter, October 1, 1928, Box 1, Folder 2. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>106</sup> Handwritten minutes, February 16, 1928, Box 1, Folder 8. Ku Klux Klan Tillamook, Oregon Chapter No. 8 records, 1922-1929, University of Oregon Libraries.

<sup>107</sup> Saalfeld, *Forces of Prejudice*, 4.



breed corruption and deception that eventually expose the group for what it is. Historian John Moffatt Mecklin summarized it best in 1924, saying “Oregon is finding out that the Klan as a social institution does not pay. The religious, political, business and social discord that follows in its train are inimical to the material as well as to the spiritual interests of the community.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John Moffatt Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1924), 83.

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