

THE KU KLUX KLAN IN NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

THE KLAN COMES TO NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN

There appeared on the American scene during the decade of the twenties a new phenomenon bent on making the United States safe for Americans. Reorganized by William J. Simmons in 1915, the Ku Klux Klan made little headway until after the First World War.¹ A factor in the affairs of many states of the Union, few communities went unscathed as a result of the Klan's preachments of hatred and bigotry. Wisconsin was no exception in seeing many of its communities suffer a rending of the social fabric. What follows, then, is the story of what happened to several localities in northwestern Wisconsin when the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan first made its appearance in that section of the state.

Desiring to maintain a veneer of legitimacy, the Ku Klux Klan made its first attempt at incorporating itself in early 1925.² The then State Attorney General of Wisconsin,

¹Frank Bohn, "The Ku Klux Klan Interpreted," The American Journal of Sociology, XXX (January, 1925), 385, 390.

²Letter of Herman L. Ekern to Fred R. Zimmerman, April 20, 1925, as found in the Walker D. Wyman Papers, Mss, P, The Area Research Center, Wisconsin State University, River Falls, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Wyman Papers, Box 10. It should be noted that the Klan was operating in Wisconsin several years prior to incorporation. The earliest established date for Klan activity in northwestern Wisconsin would be the Spring of 1924.)

Herman L. Ekern denied the Klan's application for incorporation.³ Several important reasons were given for this. For one thing, the Klan's constitution was so arranged that control of the Wisconsin branch would come under Klan officials in Georgia. This was contrary to the Wisconsin Statutes in that corporations of a non-stock issuing nature were to be controlled from Wisconsin. Also, the first Klan constitution was illegal in that Wisconsin members would, in effect, be denied a voice in the organization's business.⁴

However, the Klan was successful in a latter attempt at incorporation. On November 27, 1925, with the acceptance of its constitution by Secretary of State Fred R. Zimmerman, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan became a legal corporation in the State of Wisconsin.⁵ Article Six stipulated that

an applicant for membership must be white male Gentile person, a native born citizen of the United States of America who owes no allegiance of any nature whatever to any

³Ekern to Zimmerman, April 20, 1925, Wyman Papers, Box 10.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Letter of John W. Reynolds to Walker D. Wyman, January 26, 1960, Wyman Papers, Box 10. See also the original cover sheet to the Klan's Articles of Incorporation as signed by Secretary of State Zimmerman. The cover sheet is dated November 27, 1925. Of additional interest is that a Ray C. Twining, a Milwaukee attorney, was one of the three individuals who affixed their signatures to the Articles. Twining would later be involved in the Klan tent burning affair near Hudson. See Chapter Six for details.

foreign government, nation, institution, sect, ruler, prince, potentate, person or people; he must have attained the age of eighteen years, be of sound mind, good character, of commendable reputation and respectful vocation, a believer in the tenets of the Christian Religion, and one whose allegiance, loyalty and devotion to the Government of the United States of America is in all things unquestioned, and shall have been a resident within the jurisdiction of the Klan to which he applied for membership at least twelve months.⁶

In regard to the Klan's organization in the State of Wisconsin, Article Five stipulated that the "....state of Wisconsin shall constitute a Realm in this organization, and shall be subdivided into Provinces and Klans; a Province being a major division of said Realm, and a Klan being a local subordinate lodge or organization within a Province."⁷

It is Province Number Four that this study is concerned with.⁸ Situated in northwestern Wisconsin, the Province consisted of twenty-one counties.⁹ Insofar as information was available, the study centers about Klan activities in Chippewa, Polk, Barron, St. Croix and Pierce Counties. However, a caveat should be entered. At the time the study was made, sufficient information regarding the first three

⁶Article Six, Articles of Incorporation of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Wisconsin, p. 4., as found in Wyman Papers, Box 10.

⁷Article Five, Articles of Incorporation of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, p. 2, as found in Wyman Papers, Box 10.

⁸See testimony of J. H. Neff, Klan organizer for Province Number Four, in Chapter Six.

⁹Again, see Neff's testimony in Chapter Six.

counties was available for Cornell (Chippewa County), Clear Lake (Polk County) and Chetek (Barron County) only.¹⁰ As there was a more appreciable amount of material available for St. Croix and Pierce Counties, a more detailed study of these areas was possible.¹¹ Additionally, there were two incidents in St. Croix County and one in Pierce County which lent themselves to treatment as separate chapters.¹² The content of the foregoing will be discussed briefly at a later point in this introduction.

Insofar as the evidence indicates, the Ku Klux Klan entered northwestern Wisconsin in early 1924.¹³ The first areas to be affected were Clear Lake, Cornell and Chetek. As such, the study of Klan activities in northwestern Wisconsin commences with the year 1924 and the above mentioned municipalities. The Fall of 1925 saw the Ku Klux Klan attempting to make inroads in St. Croix and Pierce Counties with 1926 being the year of peak activity. There

¹⁰See Chapters Two, Three and Four.

¹¹See Chapters Five and Eight.

¹²See Chapters Six, Seven and Nine.

¹³Father Minwegan mentions in his Memoirs that the Klan was involved in Cornell affairs as early as 1922. A J. H. Neff was named as one of the Cornell organizers of the local Klan. However, Neff testified at a preliminary hearing at Hudson that he did not enter Wisconsin until 1924. He went directly to Chippewa Falls from Brownsburg, Indiana where he first affiliated with the Klan. For this reason, the Klan's first appearance in Cornell is dated 1924. See Chapters Three and Six for further details.

was no news of Klan activities after 1926 and it is with the closing of this year that the study concludes.¹⁴

Basically, this study concerns itself with the Ku Klux Klan as a grass roots movement in the aforementioned areas of northwestern Wisconsin. Investigation was made with a view toward establishing the degree of the Klan's involvement and influence vis-a-vis the various facets of community life in these localities. Three particular facets which evidenced Klan involvement were government, education and religion. An attempt was also made to determine the Klan's operations and membership.

Before proceeding to a discussion of this study's thesis, a word is in order with regard to source material and the manner of investigation. Several difficulties were encountered which prevented a more thorough investigation of the problem. For one thing, no extant Klan records were discovered. A basic source of this study was the weekly newspaper. Though seventeen journals were utilized, a good many were not available for the following reasons. Several communities such as Somerset had no newspaper published during the period investigated. Newspaper files for Elmwood and Prescott were not on microfilm at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin or available elsewhere. Other newspapers such as those located at Balsam Lake, Amery,

¹⁴The one exception to this concerns the Klan tent burning affair near Hudson. This matter was settled out of court in May of 1927.

and Glenwood City printed little--if any--information that was of value. There were several possibilities here. Either the Klan was not active in that particular community or the editors desired to leave well enough alone.

Inquiries were made of local Catholic as well as Protestant churches with a view toward getting a particular Pastor's stand on the hooded order. No records were available. Several Wisconsin Protestant publications (of the Baptist, Congregational and Presbyterian communions) were looked into, but these revealed nothing. Inquiries were also made of the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Superior and La Crosse. Again, the results were negative.

A number of local and county government agencies were consulted (city councils, county boards, county courts and county sheriff offices). Though there were a good many negative replies, the search on this level did prove to be more fruitful. Three court cases were turned up which led to a greater understanding of not only what the Klan and its representatives were about, but also the reaction within the particular community where the Klan operated. This was particularly true of Klan activities in Hudson.¹⁵

Other than local newspapers and the court cases, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin was able to provide a goodly amount of information. The Papers of John J. Blaine, former Wisconsin Governor and United States Senator, were

¹⁵See Chapter Six and the introductory overview in this chapter.

invaluable in filling in the chinks of this study. Blaine was Governor of Wisconsin during the period of this study and his correspondence reveals reaction to Klan activities in St. Croix and Pierce Counties which might otherwise be lost.¹⁶ Also located at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin are investigations made by various Governors in the matter of civil unrest. Two items were of particular importance here. The first deals with alleged Klan involvement in St. Croix County politics.¹⁷ The second deals with the Pierce County Sheriff's involvement--as a member of the Klan--in a yellow-fringed flag dispute.¹⁸ Newspapers, court records, personal correspondence and investigations into civil unrest, then, are the threads with which the fabric of this study is woven.

The Ku Klux Klan claimed to be a brotherhood united

....under a common oath to cultivate and promote patriotism towards our national government; to practice an honorable cleanliness towards each other; to exemplify a practical benevolence; to shield the sanctity of the home and the chastity of womanhood; to teach and inculcate a high spiritual philosophy; and by a practical devotion to conserve, protect and maintain the distinctive institutions, rights, privileges, principles, traditions and ideals of a pure Americanism.¹⁹

¹⁶See Chapter Six and the introductory overview in this chapter.

¹⁷See Chapter Seven and the introductory overview in this chapter.

¹⁸See Chapter Nine and the introductory overview in this chapter

¹⁹Article One, Articles of Incorporation of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, p.1, as found in Wyman Papers, Box 10.

In practice, however, the Klan was anything but benevolent in its influences on a particular community. By way of a thesis, then, this study proposes to demonstrate that, operating on a program of bigotry and intolerance---thereby appealing to the baser instincts of particular individuals---the Klan made inroads into various communities by playing on their fears and prejudices---all under the guise of one hundred percent Americanism. This, in turn, served to cause social disruption for the duration that the Klan was present in a particular community. Antagonism toward educators and religious figures was utilized in the pursuit of the Klan's goals. In northwestern Wisconsin, a chief object of the Klan's vitriol was the Catholic sector of the populace. It was urgent that the nation be made safe for Americans inasmuch as America was in dire danger of succumbing to a Papal invasion. Politically, there was one instance in which the Klan was alleged to have distributed spurious sample ballots in order to throw the 1926 election (this occurred in St. Croix County) its way. As part of its modus operandi, the Klan employed professional agitators to insure the success of the hooded order's objectives. In isolating objectionable elements for villification, the organizers served only to rend asunder the social fabric of the affected community. Finally, insofar as can be ascertained, there were four incidents of a serious nature which illustrate measurable reaction to Klan activities.

Yet the Klan expired as an influential movement almost

as quickly as it arose. Though the Klan cannot be faulted for not making a concerted effort, its political efforts proved futile. Adverse court actions served to discredit it. Too, money was a problem--there never seemed to be enough of it. Also, membership interest lagged after a time. Interestingly enough, no news was heard about Klan activities in a given area once the Kluxers had completed their campaign. Finally, the peak of Klan activity was the Spring, Summer and early Fall of 1926 (particularly in relation to St. Croix and Pierce Counties)--after which Klan activities experienced a rapid decline. By 1927, the Klan was no longer a viable factor in the life of northwestern Wisconsin. In short, the long range effect of the Klan's influence was practically nil. However, the Klan did have a serious short term effect on those communities its program had touched--community discord. Only time could heal the wounds of social disruption.

The thesis of this study is illustrated and supported by the following evidence. Province Number Four, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Realm of Wisconsin, was operative no earlier than February of 1924. One of the first areas to be organized was Clear Lake. The Klan's Clear Lake operation is illustrative of the order's sense of Americanism. Couched in a slick veneer of idealism, prospective members failed to grasp the more dangerous elements of Klan philosophy. Broadly speaking, America would be remade in the image of

the Klan; that the real and only truth was the Klan's truth. Catholics were railed against because they represented a danger to the United States insofar as they supposedly owed their allegiance to the Pope.

Cornell, Wisconsin was the scene of some rather bitter anti-Catholic attacks by the Klan. Here, the Klan had the added advantage of a large Protestant population--many with preconceived ideas. Cornell is a good example of how, through the medium of secrecy, various Protestant community leaders were duped into believing the Catholics to be an imminent threat. This was accomplished through the distribution by the agitators of a spurious Knights of Columbus oath labled as "The Menace." This claimed that, upon the signal of the Pope, all Catholics were conscience bound to murder off their Protestant neighbors.²⁰

²⁰ See Chapter Three. Cornell was not an isolated case in this regard. A Maiden Rock (Pierce County) resident who well remembers the Klan era writes that: "Many of the real emotional took things so seriously that they considered it necessary to have firearms handy at home. One member got so excited he knew the Catholics had an arsenal of weapons and were going to massacre the Protestants. He probably had many like believers." (Personal letter of Ralph B. White to John A. Turcheneske, Jr., December 17, 1970). Interestingly enough, this "Menace" idea was not indigenous to the rejuvenated Klan of the twenties. John Higham, in his Strangers In The Land,^{states} that the "Menace" idea was originated by Wilbur Franklin Phelps who was also the founder of a "patriotic" weekly known as The Menace in 1911. In his citation, Higham noted that the "Menace" idea was first broached in January of 1912. States Higham: "Nothing Interested The Menace very much except a Roman one....The paper's most notorious sally was against the Knights of Columbus, who, according to an oath The Menace helped to publicize, pledged their fourth degree members to a war of extermination and mutilation against all heretics." (John Higham, "The Loss of Confidence," Strangers In The Land

A prime ingredient of Klan philosophy was the idea that the public school was to be the bulwark of American democracy. However, the education offered in the public schools was to conform to the Klan's vision of what education should be. Were the schools not offering the "proper" education, howls of protest and accusations would be made by the Kluxers against certain school administrators. Chetek, in early 1926, was such an area in northwestern Wisconsin where the Klan engaged in activities of this nature.²¹

Though the Klan was working with a view toward gaining a foothold in St. Croix County in the Fall of 1925, the height of Kluxer activity here was during the Spring, Summer and Fall of 1926. There were two incidents of serious dimensions here. The first was a direct outgrowth of Klan attacks on the Catholic Church. In this instance,

Patterns Of American Nativism 1860-1925 (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 180.

²¹By no means was Chetek an isolated instance. Pat Malone was the agitator involved in the Chetek education incident. Just prior to one of his Chetek lectures, Malone was addressing a rally at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. "In his address Tuesday evening Mr. Malone dealt principally with the text of history books used in the public schools, claiming that they did not truthfully represent facts, and that the text was influenced to the extent that emphasis was placed on certain religious teachings. He scored the Protestant public for their indifference in matters of this kind." (The Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth, February 24, 1926, p. 1, as enclosed in personal letter of Albert J. Nevins to John A. Turcheneske, Jr., January 27, 1971--hereafter cited as Nevins Letter.) Shortly thereafter, Chetek's education controversy became public knowledge.

a Klan tent was burned to the ground near Hudson--an act alleged to have been perpetrated by Catholics. The second incident was of a political nature. A New Richmond Assemblyman alleged that he lost the primary and general elections due to a spurious sample ballot published by the Klan in support of a **Roberts** area resident. The Assemblyman, Ethan B. Minier, was unsuccessful in petitioning Governor John J. Blaine for an investigation into the matter.

Klan activities of a bigoted nature in Pierce County were responsible for one of its own members--the Pierce County Sheriff--nearly being removed from office. Setting themselves up as super patriots and experts as to what was proper to the national emblem, the Kluxers attacked a yellow-fringed American flag as being, in reality, the Pope's ensign. As far as the Klan was concerned, it was another attempt by the Catholics to take over the country. The Ellsworth American Legion had displayed a yellow-fringed flag at the 1926 Pierce County Fair. The yellow-fringe, standard on regimental colors and authorized for Legion use by an Act of Congress in 1920, had no meaning of itself. It was purely decorative in nature. As it was alleged to be the Pope's colors, the Legion was requested to remove the flag. The Legion refused and later petitioned Governor Blaine to remove the Sheriff from office. The Sheriff was present during the incident and was among those who wanted the flag struck. This episode is illustrative of the effects of Klan propaganda against the Catholic minority--

propaganda which backfired in an unexpected manner.

The one individual who hovers continuously over this account of social disruption as a specter among the shadows went about his work of hatred and bigotry under the alias of Pat Malone. There was many a northwestern Wisconsin community which was not the same after the agitator left. Not a member of the Klan, but lecturing for it, Pat Malone was notorious for polarizing communities by twisting facts to fit the Klan's objectives. The following is an account of the Klan lecturer based on available evidence.

Born in Oscaloosa, Iowa (circa 1886), Arthur William Malone--alias "Pat" Malone--succeeded in rocking northwestern Wisconsin with his preachments of hatred and bigotry--particularly in relation to the Roman Catholic Church.²² Malone claimed to have received part of his training at Drake University. A self-proclaimed evangelist, Malone advertised himself as a graduate (1908) of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute.²³ As far as can be ascertained, Pat

²²Testimony of Pat Malone, State of Wisconsin v. Pat Malone, November 15-17, 1926, Oconto County Court House, Oconto, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Malone Trial), p.98.

²³Ibid., p.99. However, Malone's veracity in this instance is questionable. Both Drake University and Moody Bible Institute have no records of an Arthur William Malone being in attendance. (Personal letters of Robert C. Sheetz, Registrar, Drake University, January 21, 1971 and Roy Shewy, Registrar, Moody Bible Institute, January 8, 1971, to John A. Turcheneske, Jr.)

Malone affiliated with the Klan as a lecturer sometime during the early twenties.

Pat Malone, however, had a long history of self-styled evangelistic work prior to lecturing on behalf of the Klan. One source had it that Malone was engaged in this type of work for nearly twenty years--utilizing the Scriptures to substantiate his interpretations of current events.²⁴ Wisconsin was not the only victim of his rabble rousing invective. Such diverse areas as Elm Creek, Nebraska and Oakland, California were scenes of social disruption after a Malone visit.²⁵

²⁴Barron County News-Shield, October 9, 1925, p. 1.

²⁵Testimony of Pat Malone, Malone Trial, pp. 99-100. A number of Oakland's citizens must have been upset with Malone's ravings inasmuch as Malone made note of the fact that a group came to one of his meetings with the intention of lynching him. The earliest ascertainable date of Malone's evangelistic activities was August 18, 1914 at Elm Creek, Nebraska. The following account illustrates the social disruption following a Malone visit. Though the year is 1914, the situation aptly describes what took place during the twenties. Wrote the Rev. F. R. Wedge, an Elm Creek, Nebraska Protestant minister: "Just a word about that professional agitator, Pat Malone, the anti-Catholic lecturer, who has been holding a campaign of villification in our community for several days and after he has raised all the hell he can here, will go to another Nebraska town to create some more of the brimstone variety....Pat Malone came to our little town and found the people here enjoying industrial peace, industrial fraternity and religious tolerance and when he leaves tomorrow there will be conditions which will take years to remedy. This is a sample of his methods: Arriving in town, he rallies a few of his followers who have already been worked up to a high key of excitement by blood curdling stories of the "Menace." Malone then tells them that there is great danger of somebody shooting him while he is delivering his lecture. Guards are stationed in front of and in the rear of the hall where he speaks and then when the stage setting is just right the Malone fireworks come off and the lecturer begins

While engaging in this work, Pat Malone claimed on several occasions that he was an ex-Catholic priest. Additionally, prior to his Klan work of the twenties, Pat Malone was also engaged in anti-Americanism. A Cornell missionary, Father Peter Minwegen recorded this aspect of Malone's career as follows.

The career of the ex-priest, Pat Malone, suddenly came to an inglorious end, owing to the vigilant eye of Rev. Fr. Schuster, O.M.I. Pat Malone had just reached the lowest depth of infamous insults against the Catholic Church at a pageant he had staged in Niellsville, Wisconsin.²⁶ At that pageant he was leading a procession, carrying a huge cross, while flirting with a bevy of young women who were dressed as nuns while he wore the garb of a Catholic priest. On that occasion he proved from the pages of the Bible that the

to hurl his verbal filth to a crowd of men who have been easy enough to allow the agitator to separate them from their coin. The character of noble women who are living their lives in the hospitals and schools of our land are assailed; men whose lives are consecrated to the work of leading millions to higher ideals and a better understanding of the purpose of life are attacked, and even the Protestant ministers, who will not stoop to throw mud, come in for their share of the muckraking....Men who have been life long friends have become enemies, people of different religious faith have begun to boycott each other in business, little children on the street hurl vile epithets at each other, and all because Pat Malone, the professional agitator has come to town. (Rev. F. R. Wedge to Editor, the Omaha World-Herald, August 18, 1914, as enclosed in Nevins Letter, January 26, 1971.)

²⁶ Fr. Peter Minwegen, O.M.I. "The K.K.K.," Memoirs of Father Peter Minwegen, O.M.I., Unpublished, p. 73. Pat Malone himself testified at his Oconto trial that he had previously operated in Niellsville. (Testimony of Pat Malone, Malone Trial, pp. 95-96.)

allies Great Britain and the United States would lose the war. Fr. Schuster reported him to the authorities. He was arrested, accused of making unpatriotic speeches and giving comfort to the enemy. It was established in court that he had never been a priest, not even a seminarian, that he was not and never had been a Catholic.²⁷

²⁷Minwegen, "The K.K.K.," Memoirs, p. 73. Father Minwegen also stated that Pat Malone's actual name was "...not Irish, nor Pat Malone, but that he was a German Lutheran named Schulz. He was sentenced to two years in penitentiary...."

That Malone's real name was Schulz and was sentenced to two years imprisonment remains open to question. However, an extant document from the pen of the priest who exposed the agitator for what he was--Father R. J. Schuster, O.M.I.--does shed additional light on this problem. Writing from Sisseton, South Dakota in October of 1925, Fr. Schuster remarked that: "Concerning this man: 'Pat Malone' whose real name is Arthur Malone I have sufficient information on hand to put him out again as I did before if the people and clergy down there at Wisconsin will give me a chance to meet him. But all the things I can put out against him in any audience are of such a nature that they have to be handled carefully and according to the circumstances. This man even though he has bills against his honesty in a number of places and has been affiliated with several abortion Doctors in Fake-Hospital stunts and had insinuating pictures taken of himself dressed as a priest and a young lady as a sister in positions of real immorality; and was the driving power behind the famous refusal of the Krueger boys at Withee to enlist in the army and all the trouble caused there and the bloodshed resulting, this man who never passed even the 8th grade and does not know how to spell the word priest this man who was with Spurgeon in Iowa under the auspices of the Knights of Luther and got in a dirty mess, this man I say is held too high by the Menace crowd...." (Letter of Fr. R. J. Schuster to Robert R. Hull, October 27, 1925, as enclosed in Nevins Letter. Hull was the director of the National Catholic Bureau of Information located at Huntington, Indiana.)

In regard to Malone and the matter of abortion, it is interesting to note that, at his Oconto slander trial, he was asked whether he "...read off the names and affidavit of some doctor that had taken care of girls...." Malone replied in the negative. (Testimony of Pat Malone, Malone Trial, pp. 105-106.) Regarding the "Menace" crowd and The Knights of Luther, the possibility exists that Malone could

Embracing the Klan's ideology of one hundred percent Americanism, Pat Malone, on several occasions during the twenties reiterated his claim of being a former Catholic priest. For example, during September of 1926 at Virginia, Minnesota, it was said that "Mr. Malone claims to be the last of 17 young preachers who, following their ordination, dedicated their lives to uncovering the alleged evils of the Roman system."²⁸ It was claimed that Malone read out of a Catholic Bible, stating that it was as good as the Protestant Bible.²⁹ Malone claimed to be fighting the Roman system and not the religion.³⁰

have been affiliated with one or both of these groups prior to lecturing for the Klan. John Higham, in his Strangers In The Land, notes that, along with The Menace, there grew "....a large publishing plant which employed 135 people, did a rousing mail-order business printing anti-Catholic books, and arranged engagements for anti-Catholic lecturers." According to Higham, the Knights of Luther (which also utilized the services of anti-Catholic lecturers) was one of several nativist Protestant political secret societies founded sometime after 1911. Higham's citation would seem to suggest that 1915 might be the year in which this group materialized. (Higham, Strangers In The Land, pp. 180 and 182. As for the documents relating to the Kruger matter at Withee (Chippewa County, Wisconsin), Father Schuster explained that "I handed all my documents over to Judge Parker of Madison, Wisconsin at the time of the Krueger trial at Withee and he told me that it was not wise to publish any of them but that if I ever would get another chance at Mr. Arthur Malone they would be only too glad if they could be of any service to settle his long account." (Schuster to Hull, October 27, 1925, as enclosed in Nevins Letter.)

²⁸ Queen City Sun (Virginia, Minnesota), September 10, 1926, as enclosed in Nevins Letter.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. A Virginia City resident was moved to remark that "A renegade Irishman--at least, he claims to be Irish--

For all of Pat Malone's vituperation against the Catholics, the question might well be raised as to why the agitator escaped many a potential libel and slander suit. Part of the answer lies in the idea of accusation by insinuation. Thus a lecturer such as Malone was able to make disparaging comments about a particular priest's conduct by indirect implication. So long as a particular priest's name was not mentioned, or the lecturer explained that he was describing a situation as it was told him, he remained within the bounds of the libel laws. The following

has just completed a number of public meetings in this City, and the burden of his talks was the vilification and slandering of everything Catholic. His line was the same as it has been for centuries by his kind, viz, the supposed immorality of the Catholic priests and sisters, the allegiance of Catholic to the Pope rather than to their country in all matters--in temporal as well as in things spiritual, the KC oath, etc., etc.," (Letter of S. A. McInnis to the Sunday Visitor Publishing Company, September 13, 1926, as enclosed in Nevins Letter.)

Earlier allusions to Malone's having been an ex-priest and the effects of Malone's diatribes can be seen in the following comments of a Menomonie, Wisconsin resident. "In attempting to get some information on one Pat Malone, Klan organizer, who claims to be an ex-priest, I sent to you for "The Defamers of the Church." I have received the eighteenth revised edition and I am unable to find anything that seems to fit him. Last fall he gave a series of lectures in a tent about eight miles west of Menomonie, Wisconsin. At the present time he is doing the same between Menomonie and Menomonie Jct. As conditions are becoming almost unliveable for Catholics in this community. I would be very glad to get some definite information on him." (Letter of John H. Trayler to Our Sunday Visitor, June 23, 1926, as enclosed in Nevins Letter.)

is an explanation.

....Klan lecturers are sent out after their speeches have been over by crafty lawyers, who carefully twist them around so as to retain all their filth but evade the libel laws. The libel laws, in fact, are rather loose in most states. Newspapers and lecturers soon become accustomed to the tricks that enable one to evade them. For instance, if a man is accused of gross immorality and no court action against him is under way, you would be guilty of libel if you said outright that he was guilty; but if you were a ~~tricky~~ reporter and wanted to print the news, you could go to him, ask him about the rumor, and print his angry denial of it. This would give all the information to the public and still would save you from libel.³¹

Pat Malone, however, soon fell into a trap of his own making. In early December of 1925, Malone journeyed from Chetek to Oconto Falls for the purpose of holding a week long Klan revival (December 7-14, 1925). On December thirteenth, Malone accused Father Peter Grosnick (Pastor of St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church, Oconto Falls) of being the father of eight or nine illegitimate children while holding the Pastorate of the Manawa, Wisconsin Catholic Church. Malone was brought before the bars of justice in a preliminary hearing on July 26, 1926. The Oconto County

³¹ Denver Catholic Register, November 25, 1926, as enclosed in Nevins Letter. This was published by way reaction to the conviction of Pat Malone by the Circuit Court at Oconto, Wisconsin on the charge of criminal slander. Father Schuster noted that it would be difficult to get Malone arraigned on charges of this nature as Malone was "....advised by pretty good attorneys. It would be dangerous to publish anything I have on hand as it might in a round about way lead to court and then they could get their chances to force me to bring stronger proofs than I can produce." (Schuster to Hull, October 27, 1925, as enclosed in Nevins Letter.)

Court decided that there was reason to believe that the crime of criminal slander had been committed. Thus Malone was bound over for the Fall term of the Circuit Court at Oconto. On November 17, 1926, Malone was found guilty with the result that the agitator was sentenced to a year of hard labor at the Oconto County Jail. However, a writ of error was filed with the Wisconsin Supreme Court in December. The case was heard in February of 1927 with a March decision ordering the Circuit Court to retry the case.³²

The Malone slander trial not only served to discredit Malone, but also revealed the Klan for what it was--an organization espousing a program of hatred and bigotry so that the gullible could be won to its ranks in order that the nation might be remade in the Klan's image.³³ So far as

³²State of Wisconsin v. Pat Malone, Criminal Record C, Case number 10729, Circuit Court, Oconto County Court House Oconto, Wisconsin, p. 197; Pat Malone v. State of Wisconsin, 192 Wis. 379. One source noted that "Malone, after being convicted and sentenced to prison, was granted a new trial by the state supreme court on a technicality. He was to be tried again at the June term of court here, but last Saturday he voluntarily appeared in court at Marinette and entered a plea of nolo contendere. He was found guilty and fined \$100 and all costs of the previous trial. The fine and costs were paid and Malone was released." (The Milwaukee Catholic Herald, June 12, 1927 (circa), as enclosed in Nevins Letter.)

³³ Of special interest here is the fact that virtually every local western Wisconsin newspaper carried news of the Malone slander trial. Also of interest is the following item under the headline "Public Apology To A Priest Ends Klan Episode in Wisconsin." "A public apology to Rev. Peter Grosnick, pastor of St. Anthony Church, Oconto Falls, made by Roland Rice, a Klansman was accepted by the priest and a Klan episode was ended in Oconto County....Rice, accused of repeating statements like those of Malone, was awaiting trial, but when Father Grosnick accepted his apology, the

could be ascertained, no Klan news was published in the journals of western Wisconsin after December of 1926. The hooded order's star attraction was no longer affiliated with that organization. In May of 1927, Pat Malone was seen evangelizing on his own at Boyceville.³⁴ Ironically, in June of that year, Pat Malone made the pronouncement that he was the goat for the Klan and promised to make startling revelations about Wisconsin Klan activities.³⁵ This, then, completes the saga of Pat Malone. What follows is, in several ways, the story of Pat Malone's involvement with the Klan in northwestern Wisconsin as the Klan itself.

case was dropped. In his apology, Rice admits that the slanderous statements he made were false, and declares his desire to do all in his power to right the wrong which his statements caused Father Grosnick. (Catholic Telegram, July 14 1927, as enclosed in Nevins Letter.)

³⁴Clear Lake Star, May 4, 1927, p. 1. Malone's next engagement was to be at Ellsworth, but a check of the Ellsworth Record and the Pierce County Herald for that period revealed nothing along that line.

³⁵The Milwaukee Catholic Herald, June 12, 1927 (circa). as enclosed in Nevins Letter.

Chapter 2

KLANITOR FROM CLEAR LAKE

One of the earliest scenes of Klan activity in northwestern Wisconsin was the Clear Lake area of Polk County. As gleaned from the local newspaper, the Clear Lake Star, Klan organizers first appeared in early February of 1924. What information there was of Klan activity in Clear Lake was to be found only in the Star. However, this journal was unique in that there was published in five consecutive issues a column specially reserved by the Klan called the "Klan Komment Korner." Contained in these columns was Klan news, commentary, statement of objectives and an explanation of why it was necessary for every true American to be affiliated with the Invisible Empire. Interestingly enough, the Star's editor, Fred L. Rothgeber came out in support of the organization. However, by June of 1924, the Star ceased to publish news about the Klan as it related to the area. The organizers had moved on. True, Klan news was published sporadically until the Spring of 1927, but this related to Klan happenings in other areas.

On February 6, 1924, the citizens of Clear Lake were informed that the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were commencing a membership drive in the state of Wisconsin.¹

¹Clear Lake Star, February 6, 1924, p. 1.

The organizers had already arrived in Clear Lake after a rather rousing experience at Spooner. "There they were ordered to leave town within an allotted time but for some reason they failed to fulfill the order...."² However, apologies were later extended with the result that an organizer was still located there.³

There had not as yet been any evidence of disturbances in Clear Lake arising out of the organizer's presence-- though the Klansmen had been in the locale for only a week. No trouble was looked for. The sentiment was expressed that "....before any effort is made to run him out of town, that the people are willing to give him a hearing to determine whether or not they have a right to do so."⁴ What information the people of Clear Lake received about the Klan was through the daily press, and "....everyone will agree that an opinion formed upon that information could be nothing but against the organization...."⁵ It was obvious, therefore, that people would continue to have adverse opinions about the Klan until such time as they could be convinced otherwise.⁶

The basic problem in this regard was that individuals

²Clear Lake Star, February 6, 1924, p. 1.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

were placing too great a reliance on rumor. For example, one rumor had it that the Ku Klux Klan already had a large organization in that sector of Wisconsin. However, there was no Klan membership inasmuch as membership applications had yet to be accepted. The comment was also made that "....if we are to believe rumors, ye editor is not only a member, but the head of the organization. At this time we do not glory in this 'honor' which has been bestowed upon us by Old Dame Rumor. Our hide is thick and our shoulders fairly broad, but in spite of this we do get riled up at some things."⁷ The suggestion was proffered that no one implicate one another unless he had the facts in hand. Were the principles of the Klan deemed worthy of personal participation, then one should by all means join. Otherwise, it would be better to ignore the organization.⁸

That Clear Lake saw a great amount of discussion as to the merits of the Klan is evidenced by the following. "For the past few weeks the Ku Klux Klan has been the subject of cussing and discussing here, but in spite of this, the movement has already gained a foothold and is making progress in this community as well as others in the country."⁹ Just prior to the publication of this announcement, the organizers staged a public meeting and

⁷Clear Lake Star, February 6, 1924, p. 1.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Clear Lake Star, February 27, 1924, p. 1.

secured the services of a national speaker to explain the Klan's principles.¹⁰ A large crowd was in attendance and appeared to be well satisfied with what information they received. Besides attending to Klan principles, the speaker explained the need for such an organization and what had already been accomplished in those states and communities where the Klan was already active. It was noted that "the Klan is rapidly growing in the state of Wisconsin and in most of the principal cities, and already civic conditions are being improved."¹¹ Clear Lake residents were admonished to acquaint themselves with Klan principles from first hand evidence and not just by hearsay.¹³

On Wednesday, March 5, 1924, Clear Lake was treated to its first exhibition of the fiery cross.¹³ The cross, located by Mud lake, startled the community as the alarm was sent forth. This emblem was so situated "....that a good view could be had from Main Street."¹⁴ An attempt was made to secure information as to the significance of the fiery cross, but so far attempts in this direction proved futile.¹⁵

Clear Lake residents were soon treated to a discussion

¹⁰ Clear Lake Star, February 27, 1924, p. 1. Just who the national speaker was, the Star did not reveal.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p.1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

of the Klan's objectives. The source of this information was the keynote address of a recent state meeting of the Klan. It was being published in Clear Lake not as an advertisement to join the organization, but as a source of information whereby individuals could ascertain the real facts of the matter.¹⁶ The article in itself is valuable as it clearly demonstrates the rationale behind the organization and no doubt was the subject of discussion at many a Klan meeting in northwestern Wisconsin.

The first point to be made was that the Klan was not a lodge but rather a movement. The difference between the two was that a movement was operative, that it functioned in a concrete manner. In this context, the Klan as "....great American Protestant Order....is organized mindful of the necessity for a citizenship that is awakened, alert and ever on guard. The Klan as a movement is an instrument of action, impelled by worthy motives and high ideals."¹⁷ Simply, the Klan would operate on a militant basis. As the Klan professed to accept and understand all great American ideals and principles, it labored "....to reach something definite by actually uniting individuals for the accomplishment of truly American objectives, which all consecrated Klansmen understand."¹⁸ Because the Klan was

¹⁶ Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

an operative organization, it was to be expected that Klancraft would be featured in the Press. The Klan received such forceful attention because of what it was able to accomplish. In the constant battle of establishing righteousness, the Klan was in the position of a man who, though praised by his friends, continued to fall prey to the excoriations of his enemies. As far as the Klan was concerned, those who reveled in theories were the ".... frowsy ne'er do wells of our day...." The Klan, considering itself a benefactor of society, was not satisfied with theories, but insisted on "....weaving established truths and fundamental principles into the body fabric of our social, political and commercial life."¹⁹

In making the body politic once again conscious of these fundamental truths, the Klan established for itself four clearly defined objectives. The Kluxers were to achieve the fruition of their program through legislation of the appropriate kind would correct many of the evil conditions which confronted America and thereby safeguard American civilization in the process. Education, as a powerful instrument of good, was to be applied to old and young alike. Through education, the plastic mind of the child would be molded with the proper conceptions of right

¹⁹Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p. 1.

²⁰Ibid., p. 4.

and duty so that he might turn out as the right kind of citizen.²¹ Adults were to be re-educated in order that those concepts which were alien to true Americanism might be corrected. Individuals with a destructive bent were to be converted with a view toward constructive involvement in the national life. To accomplish these goals, there was need for the element of unity. Organization was necessary to present the Klan as a united front. A well organized minority wielded far more power than a disorganized majority. Thus organization was necessary to combat those sinister forces lurking within the social fabric of the nation. Any real American worth his salt knew that a strong movement was needed to do battle with the obvious menace.²² In crusading for the uplifting of the nation, the Klan defied anyone to prove that it was not using legitimate techniques.

The Klan's objectives were then enumerated. The public schools were to be upheld as the bulwark of American civilization. Law and order were to be reestablished upon the foundation stone of old fashioned American tradition. The Klan stood upon the eternal separation of church and state. In regard to the Klan's belief in white supremacy, it was stated that God made the black man black and the white man white. Each was to remain within its racial

²¹Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p. 1.

²²Ibid. The "obvious menance" was not decribed.

bounds.²³ The Constitution was to be kept vital and recognized for what it was. Mob violence was to be eliminated. A closer relation between capital and labor was desired. Immigration was to be restricted so as to prevent the United States from becoming the dumping ground of the world.²⁴ The moral double standard was to be eradicated. Though there was to be freedom of the press, it was to be so adjusted as to acquaint the citizenry with the dangers confronting the nation and a proper appreciation of what truth really was.²⁵ There was also to be freedom of speech without intimidation.²⁶

The state organizer emphasized that the Klan's goals were in line with the nation's interests. All real Americans not only believed in the Klan's principles but also believed these ideals to be essential to the country's welfare. But not all citizens fully realized how weak the individual defense of America was. There was too much indifference. Things were not as they ought to be. The Klan simply sought a revival of the nation and the destruction of the hairy monster of foreignness.²⁷ It was never proven that the Klan did not measure up to American

²³Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p. 4.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

ideals. This organization was determined to perpetuate what was good and therefore needed men of like mind, and purpose and vision.²⁸

The state organizer insisted that the Klan was not "....built on the seething sands of hatred."²⁹ Rather, it was built on the 'Rock of Ages:' love--love of what was good."³⁰ The Klan as an organization was not anti-Jew, anti-Catholic or anti-Negro. It was pro-American, pro-Protestant and upheld all things constructive. That the Klan restricted its membership to Protestant white Gentiles did not, ipso facto, prove that it was an organization of hatred. Nor was the Klan plotting to array one class, creed or race against another. But it was to be remembered that America was the handiwork of Protestantism. The Klan did not seek to crush the Negro, but was determined to insure that this race had equal opportunities. Yet the organization was against the amalgamation of the white with the black because of the threat of mongrelization. No objection was raised against a church as a church. However, opposition was expressed in regard to those churches involving themselves in political affairs.³² It was denied that the Klan was an instrument of

²⁸ Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p. 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

terror. As for the mask, it was part of the Klan's ritual as used in a Klavern. The significance behind the mask was that the candidate entered the order with his eyes closed, so to speak, only to be opened by being educated with the appropriate knowledge. The mask was unveiled at the naturalization ceremony signifying that, having seen the light, the initiate could now partake of the mysteries of Klancraft.³³

Furthermore, there was nothing secret about the Ku Klux Klan except its membership. The members of the hooded order remained incognito because every Kluxer was in reality a secret service agent working for the reestablishment of law and order. A Klansman took an oath to that effect. What information proved to be salient would be turned over to the proper authorities. What was needed were men who dared to be right. This was so because, human nature being the peculiar element it was, there were those individuals who, for fear of adverse reactions, refused to be self sacrificing. Thus the only thing that mattered was whether the individual wished to participate in the great remaking of America.³⁴

It was said in mid-March that Fred Rothgeber claimed to be censored for his stand on the Ku Klux Klan.³⁵ This came about because of the Klan articles that were recently

³³Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p. 4.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid. Clear Lake Star, March 6, 1924, p. 1.

published. Rothgeber explained that the articles were published with a view toward giving Clear Lake citizens facts and information about the Klan as an organization. Publication did not necessarily signify agreement with Klan objectives.³⁶ It was then conjectured that, though the public complained of a "kept press," the same public, in reality, did not desire the truth after all. Therefore, the editor would publicly air his personal views on the Klan for the first time. Not only was the organization heartily endorsed, but the editor urged that "every red blooded American citizen should not hesitate to make application."³⁷ If Rothgeber erred in his judgement, then eight million other Americans did the same.³⁸

Commencing with the March nineteenth issue of the Clear Lake Star, there appeared a column specially reserved by Ku Klux Klan. The column, under the heading "Klan Komment Korner," was the mouthpiece for the organization's propaganda. Interestingly enough, there appeared the following below the column heading: "non silba sed anthar" --"not for self but for others."³⁹

Though the prime purpose of the Ku Klux Klan was to save America for Americans, the hooded order was not a political organization per se. A third party was not

³⁶Clear Lake Star, March 12, 1924, p. 1.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid " The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, March 19, 1924, p. 4.

necessary. True, Klansmen were active politically, but that was because the organization stood for the clean sweep in politics. As such, the Klan was interested in the man, not the party.⁴⁰

The Klan was certain that, if the right men were in a position of authority, there would be justice for all. Though it denied the charge of being engaged in night riding expeditions due to their illegality, the Klan maintained that, since it believed so strongly in law enforcement, it could not tolerate lawlessness in any form. Only when the bootleggers were apprehended and the moonshiners surrendered their stills, would the world no longer need the Klan. Until that millenium arrived, the Ku Klux Klan would continue to effectively do its work despite howls of intolerance.⁴¹

A primary tenet of the Klansman's creed was the belief in God and the teachings of Christianity. Godless individuals were doomed to failure. Those churches not resting upon a strong moral foundation were a mockery to God and unworthy of a people's participation. The separation of church and state was mandatory. The Klan held no allegiance to a foreign government--Especially the Pope.⁵⁰ A Klansman's first allegiance was to God alone and then the Stars and Stripes. The free public school was the

⁴⁰ "The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, March 19, 1924, p. 4.

⁴¹ Ibid.

cornerstone of good government. Anyone who desired to destroy these schools was not only unworthy of his American citizenship, but, in addition, was an enemy of the United States.⁴² The Klan stood for the protection of a pure womanhood. Rights of native born Americans were far superior to those of aliens who had yet to be naturalized.⁴³

Reiterating, it was the Klansman's duty to further the Christian religion. Indeed, God himself had guided the Knights to this end. Still, the Klan was not intended to be a church. Politically, the Klan intended to make all citizens lay down their political prejudices upon the altar of Americanism in the name of God, country and home. Citizens would be urged to cast their ballots for decent men--men who would administer their office for the people.⁴⁴

Beneath the "Klan Komment Korner" of that week appeared a Kluxer item in the nature of an inquiry. The question was asked whether individuals wanted to make application to join Kluxer's. Were they found worthy, the door was opened to those deciding to stand with the Klan. The suggestion was made that one enquire of his neighbor as one who might be capable of showing the way.⁴⁵ A later edition of the "Klan Komment Korner" urged more Polk County men and women to

⁴²"The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, March 19, 1924. p. 4.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

interest themselves in the order. The Klan needed people with ready hands and true faith to join in the task of making Americans fit for America and maintaining America for Americans.⁴⁶

There were seven symbols of Kluxism. Each had an important role in the sublime ceremonies of Klancraft. All symbols, each an object lesson in itself, were illustrative of the Klan's body of principles. The seven symbols were the Bible, Cross, Flag, Sword, Water, Robe and Mask. Several symbols are described below.⁴⁷

The significance of the Bible was that God existed. With righteousness as its aim, the Bible became the proverbial "lamp unto one's feet" and, as such, the only guide to right living. For the Klan, the Bible's principal guiding light or rationale for its existence came from Romans 12.⁴⁸

The cross symbolized the "....sad sweet story of the rugged Cross of Calvary."⁴⁹ As a sign of the Christian religion, it stood in every Klavern. The precepts it symbolized were the Klan's criterion of character. The

⁴⁶"The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, March 26, 1924, p. 4.

⁴⁷"The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, April 2, 1924, p. 4.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

Cross was to used as a rallying device to combat the anti-Christ and protect the principles of pure Americanism. The element of fire was added to signify that Christ was the light of the world. Too, it symbolized the dispelling of ignorance, the destruction of the cross and the purification and cleansing of virtues by burning out the vice with the fire of His word. Concluding in this vein, the point was made that "In this sign we conquer."⁵⁰

There were three aspects inherent in the symbolism of the United States flag. The white in the Flag stood for the purity of American womanhood and the sanctity of American homes. Red symbolized the blood of heroes. The blue field signified the unclouded skies of the United States. The stars were symbolic of an aggregate of undefeated states bound together in inseparable union. No one could stand before the Stars and Stripes without a feeling of sublime patriotism.⁵¹

The unsheathed sword was symbolic of law enforcement. It signified that the Klan was behind every law enforcement officer in the land and was ever ready to aid in the execution of the law. The Klan stood for impartial law enforcement. Regardless of race, the protection of all citizens' rights was to be insured.⁵²

⁵⁰ "The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, April 2, 1924, p. 4.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

One of the Klansman's principal obligations was to make America safe for Americans. Patriotism, therefore, was the prime and sacred duty of every Klansman before God and country. The first axiom of this duty was the necessity for cleaning up politics. The day of the political party was over. In the future, the criterion for election to public office would be the measure of one's Americanism. The second axiom in this regard was the necessity for education in American civilization in the public schools. The Klan was to lead the public on the path to the dissolution of the dregs of alienism in the melting pot.⁵³

The sanctity of the home was another special preserve of the Klan. "As the public school is the citadel of American liberty, so is the American home the keystone of the American government."⁵⁴ A broken home simply meant the abandonment of all pretext of government--the way would be left open for the forces of evil to attack and strike at the life of the nation. It was with these ideas in mind that the Klan strove to "....protect and preserve American institutions as God gives us to see the right."⁵⁵

The Klan was opposed to bolshevism, anarchy and

⁵³"The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, April 16, 1924, p. 4. (Note: The April ninth issue was missing from this microfilm series.)

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵"The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, April 23, 1924, p. 4.

communism--all which had as its object the overthrow of the government of the United States. Anyone who dared to oppose the government had ^{no} rights whatsoever. Those who did show opposition should either be deported or placed behind bars.⁵⁶

In relation to those groups outside the pale of Protestant Christianity, the Klan explained that it was not against Catholics or Jews, but that they were for Protestantism first last and always. A Roman Catholic could not be a Klansman because he owed his allegiance to a foreign government. Thus, anyone who owed his allegiance to the Pope could not be one hundred percent American. Jews were excluded from Klan membership because they did not accept the Christian tradition. Besides, the Jew was an unassimilable alien whose ethics, business or otherwise, did not correspond to Christian ideals.⁵⁷

The Klan had no fight to make with the American Negro. However, it was an inferior race. Klansmen were sworn to protect him and his rights and property. The Negro was to be assisted by Klansmen in the elevation of his moral and spiritual being. In addition, the integrity and purity of the Negro race was to be preserved.⁵⁸

⁵⁶"The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, April 23, 1924, p. 4.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

America was at a crossroads. Every "....lawbreaker... moonshiner, libertine, prostitute and black legged gambler...." was waging a relentless war against the Klan's program of remaking America. All believed the Klan must be put out of business so they might survive. In addition, it was charged that "....Roman Catholics, Jews, Negro preachers, certain politicians and honest but misguided Gentiles are trying to suppress the Ku Klux Klan."⁵⁹ But the Klan would triumph. No citizen could afford to remain neutral--particularly any self respecting American Protestant worthy of the name. It was "....either join the Klan and throw your influence on the side of decency, Christianity and law enforcement or join the lawbreakers, negro preachers, Roman Catholics,...Jews... and reprobates...." whose first allegiance was not to the United States.⁶⁰ The Klan was not interested in creating racial discord. In affiliating with the Klan, one would be joining in the great task of upholding law and order, uplifting mankind, perpetuating brotherly love, assisting the downtrodden and preserving American ideals. This particular article concluded with "God give us men, sun crowned and strong with their heads above the fog." Simply, men were needed whose hearts beat true to the rhythm of personal decency and whose souls were filled with

⁵⁹ "The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, April 23, 1924, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the light, love and life of Jesus Christ.⁶¹

Several weeks later, the residents of Clear Lake were treated to a full text publication of the "Ku Klux Klan Oath of Allegiance."⁶² The "Oath " read as follows:

I most solemnly pledge, promise and swear that I will never slander, defraud, deceive or in any manner wrong the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, a Klansman or a Klansman's family nor will I suffer the same to be done if I can prevent it.

I swear that I will be faithful in defending and protecting the home, reputation and business interests of a Klansman and that of a Klansman's family.

I swear that I will at any time without hesitating go to the assistance or rescue of a Klansman in any way, that his call I will answer, that I will be truly Klannish toward Klansmen in all things honorable.

I swear that I will never allow any animosity, or ill will to arise between myself and a Klansman, but will be constant in my efforts to promote real Klannishness among the members of this order.

I swear that I will secure to myself the secret of a Klansman when the same is committed to me in the sacred bond of Klanship, the crime of violating this solemn oath, treason against the United States of America, rape and malicious murder alone excepted.

I most solemnly assert and affirm that to the government of the United States of America and any state thereof which I may become a resident, I sacredly swear an unqualified allegiance above any other and every kind

⁶¹"The Klan Komment Korner," The Clear Lake Star, April 23, 1924, p. 4.

⁶²Clear Lake Star, May 7, 1924, p. 4.

government in the whole world. I here and now pledge my life, my property, my vote and my sacred honor to uphold its flag, its constitution and constitutional laws and will protect, defend and enforce the same unto death.

I most solemnly promise and swear that I will always at all times and in all places help, aid and assist the duly constituted officers of the law in the proper performance of their legal duties.

I swear that I will most zealously and valiantly shield and preserve by all justifiable means and methods the sacred constitutional rights and privileges of free public schools, free speech, free press, separation of church and state, liberty, white supremacy, just laws and the pursuit of happiness against any encroachment of any nature by any person, persons, political party or parties, religious sect, native, naturalized or foreign of any race, color, creed, religion or tongue whatsoever.

All to which I have sworn by this oath I will seal with my blood. Be Thou my witness, Almighty God, Amen.⁶³

Several questions were then aired before Clear Lake citizens. The first was whether any native born American could object to any part of the "Oath." If an individual truly believed in the laws and government of the United States then he would not hesitate to make application. As such, the Ku Klux Klan was the organization for him. The Klan had to have the cooperation of all true Americans so that it could perform its duties to advantage. Surely the local citizenry had sufficient information with which to make a decision. Certainly there were those Clear Lake

⁶³ Clear Lake Star, May 7, 1924, p. 4.

citizens who should join--real men who would take a stand for God and country.⁶⁴

The foregoing was the last time Klan propaganda appeared in the Clear Lake Star. It was a neat attempt at presenting a philosophy of righteousness so that the residents of Clear Lake might be convinced that they too could have a part in the grand design of remaking America. But the Klan's philosophy, wolf-like in its apotheosis of intolerance, was clothed in the sheepskin of Americanism. To the undiscerning eye, Klan membership meant the opportunity to do something great for America.

The Klan was never heard from again as a factor in Clear Lake community life after May, 1924. Editor Rothgeber left the Star after May and did not return until late Autumn of 1924. However, on several occasions between 1924 and the end of 1926, there did appear several snatches of news relating to Klan activities in several northwestern Wisconsin communities.⁶⁵ These news items revealed all too well the social upheaval as perpetrated by the Kluxers. The foregoing chapter reveals bigotry cloaked in a supposedly benign philosophy of Americanism. What follows reveals that where the Ku Klux Klan was active, bigotry and hatred ruled the day.

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Clear Lake Star, May 7, 1924. p. 4.

⁶⁵Of particular interest here are the November 18, and 25, 1925 issues of the Clear Lake Star.

Chapter 3

FATHER MINWEGEN FIGHTS THE KLAN

The Cornell Klan problem, as elsewhere in northwestern Wisconsin, was one of no mean dimension. The majority of this community's population was composed of Protestant communicants. Prior to the Klan's appearance in Cornell, there existed within the Protestant community a strong element of anti-Catholic feeling. The Klan only served to embolden this faction. However, there was no end to the Klan's frustration when the resident Catholic priest (an Oblate missionary), standing his ground, refused to be intimidated. What follows is an account of that priest's fight against the Ku Klux Klan of Cornell, Wisconsin.

Peter Minewegen was born in Germany, circa 1882. Showing a predilection for matters both spiritual and intellectual, the would-be priest went to the seminary seeking fulfillment of his vocation. Desiring to be a missionary priest, Peter joined the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a religious missionary order of the Roman Catholic Church. After the required years of theological and philosophical study at the Oblate scholasticate, Peter Minwegan was ordained a priest in 1908.¹ It was not long

¹Peter Minewegen, O.M.I., "The First Assignment Under the Vow of Obedience," Memoirs of Father Peter Minwegen, O.M.I., Unpublished (hereafter cited as Memoirs), pp. 7.

before Father Minwegen received his first assignment.

It was on July 18, 1908, that Father Minwegen was assigned to his first post. He was to proceed quam primum to the Vicariate of Alberta-Saskatchewan which was located at Edmonton, Alberta. Later transferred to Fish Creek, Saskatchewan, the missionary spent approximately seven years engaged in fruitful work with the Metis Indians.² The year 1915 (circa) saw Father Minwegen enter the United States where he was received by Bishop Schwebach into the Diocese of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. In time, Father Minwegen was duly assigned to Cornell--which at the time was considered prime mission territory.³

According to the missionary's account, Cornell was a rather irreligious place. The town had a Presbyterian, Methodist and a Lutheran church. Because Cornell owed its existence to the Cornell Wood Products Company, the contributions of Protestant parishoners were anything but substantial.⁴ The Presbyterian minister managed to remain in Cornell because he received direct support from the Company president. Other ministers usually lasted no more than six months at a time. Even so the Protestant

²Minwegen, "The First Assignment Under the Vow of Obedience, " Memoirs, p, 10.

³Minwegen, "To Cornell," Memoirs, p. 36.

⁴Ibid., pp. 39-40. Cornell was basically a lumbering town with the Cornell Wood Products Company serving as the city's only industry.

community found time to vent its anti-Catholic spleen.

Though the Klan was not active in Cornell until 1924, Father Minwegen had to confront anti-Catholic feeling as early as 1916. That the priest was a native born German and would not receive his naturalization papers for some time did not ameliorate the situation. Many Protestants became alarmed over the slowly growing Catholic congregation. Deciding that something had to be done to end the Catholic invasion, the Protestant attack was concentrated on the meeting place for Sunday Mass.⁵ A Mr. Noyes, who owned the Lyric Theater, permitted the congregation to have Mass said at his establishment. It was not long before Noyes was intimidated. The Protestants demanded that the Sunday services be stopped. "Though we carefully cleaned the hall after Mass, there was too much of Romish incense. It smelled too much of Catholics. The people would boycott the show if he permitted the Catholics to have services in his theater...."⁶

The congregation then moved to the second floor of a drugstore owned by a Mr. Odlaug. After a time, membership had increased to the point that the hall was soon filled to capacity. It was at this time that the Cornell City Council stepped in and prohibited further services on the grounds

⁵Minwegen, "To Cornell," Memoirs, p. 39.

⁶Ibid.

that "....it was too risky to have such an enormous crowd on the second floor without strong steel pillars to prop it up."⁷ Fortunately for the fledgling parish, another hall was soon found for services until such time as the congregation's chapel was completed.

Another instance of pre-Klan prejudice was described by Father Minwegen as follows. One of the priest's more faithful parishoners was approached by a leading non-Catholic with the question: "'Isn't it true that you Catholics have to pay an immense sum when you go to confession?'"⁸ The Pastor recorded that

old Jim Kelly, who had an Irish sense of humor, promptly replied: 'Sure, man, it is true. Last Saturday I went to confession and I had to give a mortgage on me farm, and next Saturday when I go again he may be wanting a second mortgage on all that I have and own.'⁹

A week later, Kelly explained to the priest that the "....'story about me paying with a mortgage went through the entire county. I never in my life dreamed that a man could be fool enough to believe such a thing.'¹⁰ Jim Kelly then apologized. But for the time being, the missionary confined his money raising activities to the giving of missions since the least mention of money only served to activate the

⁷ Minwegen, "To Cornell," Memoirs, p. 39.

⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

gossip mills.¹¹

Despite all his precautions, Father Minwegen continued to be a thorn in flesh of the Protestant community.¹² The period during the First World War was a particularly rough time. Father noted that a number of Protestants were determined to rid the community of him. The missionary recorded that

My worst crime was that I dared to organize a Catholic parish in an entirely Protestant community. At the time of my arrival, I had been finger-printed like the rest of the Fathers and was obliged to report once a month to the Postmaster for identification, At that time they wanted to avoid an open religious persecution, but they might get me on some other issue. I was still a foreigner. Thus my weakness was that I still was technically an alien enemy. I might be a German spy.¹³

Still, the intrepid priest continued to hold his ground.

In 1924, the Klan entered Cornell.

Cornell was indeed fertile ground for Klan activities. It was Father Minwegen's observation that the Klan chose areas off the main highways and away from large urban centers in which to instigate their terrorizing activities.¹⁴ Small and isolated villages such as Cornell were considered

¹¹Minwegen, "To Cornell," Memoirs, p. 41.

¹²Minwegen, "Narrow Escape No. I, " Memoirs, p. 62.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Minwegen, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 65/

to be ideal. Though Cornell lacked Negroes and had only one Jewish family, there was a continuously growing Catholic congregation which had to be stamped out. The Catholics, after all, did not fit into the American picture.¹⁵

Klan organizers such as Neff and a Methodist preacher named White soon came to Cornell. The organizers found it an easy matter to attract those Protestants who were already in agreement that the Romish presence was indeed a menace to America. Neff and White managed to get acquainted with Protestants prejudiced against the Catholic Church. These particular individuals held key positions in the community. They were then indoctrinated with "....the noble objectives of this patriotic society which was trying to save the country from an imminent invasion of the Roman hordes led by the Pope to destroy the liberties of this country."¹⁶

Father Minwegen observed that it was only a matter of months before the Klan was well enough organized to hold their first secret conclaves. During these conclaves, the Klan met with Cornell's leaders. Discussion centered about the manner in which Klan objectives were to be implemented.

Soon they had the foremen of the Mill, the editor of the Chippewa Courier published by the C.W.P. Co., and the superintendent on their side. Most of the town officials were Mill people. The teachers at the grade and the local high school followed

¹⁵Minwegen, "The K.K.K...", "Memoirs", p. 65.

¹⁶Ibid.

suit and became rabid members. Like termites they worked in the dark at first. When they had won over all the persons of influence in key positions, and the latter assured the leaders that by this time the great majority of the population had become prospective members, they came out into the open.¹⁷

Soon enough, the Klan announced a public meeting on the main street. However, rumors were spread that the Catholics, armed to the teeth, would come with the intention of disrupting the meeting. The Klan's objective was to provoke the Catholics into making the first move. Though the Kluxers were well prepared and appeared at the appointed time, the plan fizzled as no Catholics showed up.¹⁸ In another attempt to provoke violence on the part of the Catholics, the Klan distributed an alleged Knights of Columbus oath "....telling the people that as soon as the Pope in Rome would give the signal every Roman Catholic was in conscience bound to strangle, stab, and kill all their Protestant neighbors, men, women, and children without exception."¹⁹

Using the alleged Knights of Columbus oath as an illustration, the missionary proceeded to demonstrate the gullibility and ignorance of the Church's enemies. Hearing that a fallen away Catholic had joined the Klan, Father

¹⁷Minwegen, "The K. K. K., "Memoirs, p. 66.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

Minwegen went to ascertain the facts of the matter. The individual's wife, Mrs. B., answered the door and gave the priest an affirmative answer. She also challenged the priest to answer for the blood curdling oath.²⁰ In the meantime, the woman's ten year old daughter appeared and then suddenly screamed "'Don't talk to that man. He is going to kill you.'"²¹ Instantly, three women rushed out from another room in what was described as a moment of dramatic appeal to their ignorance and stupidity.²² Dramatic in its own way was Father Minwegen's reply.

Ladies, do you realize what you did to this innocent child? You told her about this horrid K. of C. oath, a fraudulent document which is a dirty lie. You are stupid enough to believe such fraud? Look at the title above this infamous so-called oath. Do you see the word "alleged" over it? We who have attended the parochial school know what it means. You either do not know it, or maliciously ignore. The word "alleged" means it is a fake. The K. Kluxers hoped you could be fooled readily and not understand its meaning. Leave out the "alleged", and you will be arrested for libel and slander at once. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to explain matters to you. The Ku Klux Klan evidently thought you were dumb enough not to understand the word and could be fooled easily. Please don't be fooled again, May the Lord bless you. Good, bye.'²³

²⁰Minwegen, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 67.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., pp. 67-68.

²³Ibid., p. 68

Through a cross burning incident, Father Minwegen discovered that a Catholic by the name of Christopherson had joined the Kluxers. Christopherson, a Cornell garage owner, had used some "....fine tubing which connects the gas tank and the carburetor in a Ford runabout...." to tie the cotton around the cross.²⁴ It was this copper tubing which betrayed the man. Father Minwegen had informed him of this. The garage owner now feared a Catholic boycott. This was indeed an ironic situation inasmuch as Christopherson was forced to join the Klan out of business considerations.²⁵ Thus did the missionary chronicle another instance of Klan intimidation.

There were other instances of Klan harrassment which had to be contended with by the Catholics of Cornell. Postcards were circulated by the Klan which carried a "....picture of the Three Things That do Not Marry: a dog, a hog and a bull with a ring in his nose and a priest's biretta on his head and literature marking the Pope in Rome as the Anti-Christ."²⁶ In addition, there were circulated speeches by Pat Malone--an alleged ex-priest.²⁷ Father

²⁴Minwegen, "Free Masons," Memoirs, p. 60.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Minwegen, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 68.

²⁷Ibid. Father Minwegen's discussion of Pat Malone as an alleged ex-priest will be found in the introductory chapter. Of particular interest in this regard is the revelation that, prior to affiliating with the Klan, Malone was espousing anti-American as well as anti-Catholic sentiments.

Minwegen counselled his parishoners to practice the virtues of fortitude and patience and to avoid violence. The Catholics of Cornell were content to quietly distribute pamphlets which refuted the ravings of Pat Malone.²⁸

Passive resistance on the part of the Catholics only served to increase Klan provocations. There followed several incidents which prompted Father Minwegen to embark on a course of action against the Klan. The first of these involved Sever Solie who was an employee of the Cornell Wood Products Company. A distraught parishoner by now, Solie reported to his Pastor the incessant insults received from many of his fellow mill employees. It was bad enough to have to endure them during the lunch hour, but to have to sit out the taunts during the working hours was simply too much to bear for"....any man with red blood in his vein's."²⁹ Describing for the priest several of the barbs which had to be endured, Solie explained that the mill employees

....'tell us we are dupes and slaves of the "dago-pope", call the Blessed Virgin by a blasphemous name I don't care to repeat. They call the Pope a son of a b. and the anti-Christ, etc. Today I felt like seizing the sledgehammer and knocking out the brains of the fellow who insulted me and my religion with his vile talk, But I remembered your warning, "No violence," and I had to take it, but I do not know how

²⁸Minwegen, "The K. K. K., "Memoirs, p. 68. None of these pamphlets are available.

²⁹Ibid.

long I shall be able to take it. Something ought to be done to stop their dirty mugs."³⁰

Another incident pointed to the direction of the Cornell public schools. Many of the instructors had become Klan members. One day a

....daughter of the Parent family, freshman in the high school, came home crying...and told her parents she was not going back to that high school anymore. In the presence of the class, the principal had explained why nuns have such wide garments. "If they have been abused by the priests they can easily conceal their disgrace and shame." All eyes of the class were fixed on her, the only student who was Catholic, and laughed. Her little sister, first grade pupil, was taken into a woodshed, stripped of her clothes and when crying, was told that is what a priest had to do with every girl once a month, etc.³¹

Indeed, something had to be done.

The president of the Cornell Wood Products Company was a Mr. Osborne whose offices were located in Chicago. Inasmuch as many of the Klan agitators were employees and officials of this company, Father Minwegen went to Chicago and approached Osborne on the matter. After a frigid reception by Osborne's secretary, the company president found time for an interview. Father Minwegen then explained that Osborne's employees were the ringleaders of the Klan in Cornell. The priest mentioned that, on the upcoming Fourth of July, the Klan was supposed to initiate five thousand new

³⁰Minwegen, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 70.

³¹Ibid.

members,³² Osborne volunteered to go up to Cornell and investigate the situation, but the missionary suggested that this would put the Klan on its guard. Instead, Osborne agreed to send two detectives to Cornell. The detectives would make their investigation and give Osborne a detailed report on the matter.³³ Satisfied, the priest returned to Cornell.

The Fourth of July soon arrived. Rather than several thousand, there were only a few hundred new initiates received into the Klan. After staging a parade in Cornell, "....they went to a clearing deep in the wooded country-side across the river."³⁴ Cars belonging to the Kluxers were left parked on the highway. As it was not until midnight when the Klansmen returned to their vehicles, Father Minwegen made good use of this time by recording the license numbers. The next day, the priest got the names which corresponded to the license numbers from an official at the Chippewa County Court House at Chippewa Falls.³⁵

Father Minwegen then relates that all

....the businessmen of Cornell among my so-called best friends had joined the hooded brotherhood. Of course when I went to see them, they all denied membership as they

³²Minwegen, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 71. Circa 1924.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 72.

are obliged to do when interrogated. The banker whose number and name I had received, when asked, denied emphatically that he had been there. I expressed my gratification to hear it and added: "You know, we Catholics are not obliged in conscience to deal with anybody who is an open enemy of our religion."

When I went across the street to ask the barber whether he had been at the initiation, he likewise denied any membership. While I was talking to the guilty and lying barber, Mr. Violet, the banker, made a beeline to another store to tell the owner that Catholics have decided to boycott anybody who is a member of the K. K. Klan.³⁶

Results were soon forthcoming. It was only a matter of two days before the editor of the Chippewa Valley Courier was fired. The editor had printed a great amount of Klan propaganda.³⁷ Also laid off were the foremen, night superintendent, and those employees of the mill who were Klansmen.³⁸ The business community felt that it was boycotted.

The results, however, nearly proved to be disastrous for the missionary. Nobody in Cornell who was a part of the Klan had any idea of what was behind the mill firings. This state of bewilderment remained so until one of the Catholic parishoners indiscreetly mentioned to a non-Catholic friend

³⁶Minwegen, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 72.

³⁷Ibid. Copies of the Chippewa Valley Courier are not available on microfilm. See the introductory chapter for a discussion on the availability of source materials.

³⁸Ibid.

his Pastor's part in the matter.³⁹ Incensed, several Protestants embarked upon a scheme to rid Cornell of its Catholic priest. One of the instigators let it be known that a Protestant friend of Cardinal Mundelein's had informed His Eminence that a certain priest in Cornell was causing community dissension.⁴⁰ Father Minwegen was soon called to Chicago to explain matters. Had it not been for the intervention of the Bishop of LaCrosse, matters might have taken a more serious turn.⁴¹ Cardinal Mundelein had informed Father Minwegen's Oblate superiors. However, one of the superiors explained to the missionary that Bishop McGavick of LaCrosse

...."sent us the report about the situation in Cornell, the doings of the K.K.K., and the noble defense you put up against them. He advised us to keep hands off in your case as Father Minwegen is an Oblate who has done excellent work in my diocese and in Cornell in particular. He deserves unstinted credit for the fine work he did in the Cornell community"⁴²

³⁹Minwegen, "Narrow Escape No. 11," Memoirs, p. 78.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 76 and 80. Father Minwegen noted that this was the only pretext they could use as he received his citizenship papers by then. Cardinal Mundelein was the Archbishop of Chicago.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 78. As it was, Cardinal Mundelein would have had no authority over Father Minwegen since the priest was working for the Diocese of LaCrosse--thus being under the legal jurisdiction of the local Ordinary. Accordingly, the Cardinal had no legal grounds for the interference with the work of the missionary.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 78-79.

Father Minwegan returned to Cornell a vindicated man

One other incident relating to Father Minwegan's struggle against Cornell's Klan is worthy of mention. On a certain Sunday evening, fifty Ku Kluxers assembled in front of the missionary's temporary residence duly regaled in Klan costume. After calling the priest a "....blackrobed devil...." the Klan proceeded to burn a cross on the opposite side of the street.⁴³ The next day, the priest journeyed to Eau Claire "....to find out who owned the property...." upon which the nefarious cross was burned.⁴⁴ Father Minwegan learned from the appropriate real estate agency that the Cornell school district had an option on the property which expired during the previous week. The priest made a down payment of fifty dollars and the ten acre plot became the property of the Catholic Church.⁴⁵ In his Memoirs, Father Minwegan relates the following anecdote.

Great was the surprise and the shock of Mr. Hanson, Town Treasurer, to take the 10 acres off the tax roll, as it was now church property. The Klan had suggested it. Where they had burned a fiery cross at the end of Main Street, on the most beautiful spot of the town site, Holy Cross Catholic Church was to be erected in time.⁴⁶

⁴³Minwegan, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 74.
the following anecdote are substantiated by Father E. L. Kuouf, presently Pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church at Prescott. (Personal letter of Fr. E. L. Kuouf to John A. Turcheneske, Jr., December 22, 1970.)

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Indeed, this was poetic justice of a most fitting nature.

Though it would be a while before Catholic-Protestant relations returned to a more reasonable state, there were those individuals in Cornell who regretted ever having any truck with the Ku Klux Klan. Without notice, the Klan organizers, under cover of night, abandoned Cornell without leaving a forwarding address. However, they did leave behind them outstanding loans, obtained from once enthusiastic members, ranging from twenty-five to two hundred dollars. This was an eyeopener that helped to cure the victims of all involvement in Kluxism. Thereafter, Klan activity in Cornell began to diminish appreciably.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Minwegen, "The K. K. K.," Memoirs, p. 73.

Chapter 4

CHETEK: A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN

The Ku Klux Klan made one of its first appearances in Barron County as early as March of 1924. There was already a district Klan organizer in the Chetek area.¹ At a Klan organization rally that month, there appeared an audience composed of all creeds and nationalities. Chetek's Grand Opera House was filled to capacity with many not being able to gain admittance at all. As far as could be ascertained, nothing of an offensive nature was discussed. The orderly and well conducted meeting was handled in such a manner as to prevent the least bit of friction among the people of Chetek. It was noted that there was "...no real reason in this community for any antagonism between...Catholic and Protestant friends, or among friends and neighbors of the various nationalities."² All of Chetek's citizens were considered to be good Americans.

Chetek residents received the following news in relation to a recent cross burning.

Residents of Chetek and the near vicinity were somewhat startled last Friday night between 7 and 8 o'clock when they saw the Fiery Cross of

¹Chetek Alert, March 21, 1924, p. 1.

²Ibid.

the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan burning in all its brilliancy on Dunsmoor's hill, southwest of the city. An organizer of the Klan had been in the city that same day, and it was said that the Fiery Cross was raised and burned by new members which he had secured in Chetek. It was otherwise rumored that a group of young men on mischief bent built the Fiery Cross and lighted it as a joke. At any rate, it was there on the occasion mentioned.³

However, there did not appear to be any reason for a disturbance over the activities of the Chetek's Klan organizers.

Information as to Chetek Klan activities did not again appear until May. On Thursday evening of May second, there was a large gathering in attendance at the local Klan meeting. Many of those present were visitors from the Cameron area. The organizer and speaker at this meeting was a Mr. Dague.⁴ Dague was said to have discussed many important events occurring in American history. Though there were four Klansmen in full regalia at the meeting--with a large fiery cross illuminating the grounds--there were no demonstrations. The meeting concluded in a peaceful manner. Organizer Dague said that he would be resigning his position and would return to Michigan.⁵

Chetek residents were advised by their local newspaper that religious issues would not be argued in that journal. The editor, L. P. Charles, told an anecdote about a certain

³Chetek Alert, March 21, 1924, p. 1.

⁴Chetek Alert, May 9, 1924, p. 1.

⁵Ibid.

Father Slattery, an ex-priest, who went down to Memphis, Tennessee with the intention of railing against the priests and nuns of that city. The Mayor of Memphis met this individual explaining that, in a recent epidemic, the sisters and priests gave unstintingly of themselves. The "priest" was then counseled to keep silence. After the conversation, he left town on the next train.⁶ Editor Charles said the incident was mentioned in Our Sunday Visitor, a Catholic publication.⁷ The editor made it a point to note that the anecdote was not printed at the request of the Visitor.⁸

Editor Charles then proceeded to explain why the Alert would not carry any discussion of religious matters.

We think it only just to people of all denominations to refrain from encouraging any form of religious discussion in this paper. We can say unhesitatingly that we do not approve of slanderous statements made about the membership, the priesthood or the ministry of any church, whether Catholic or Protestant. The Church is the foundation of civilization and all sincere members in it are doing what they can to serve God and humanity according to the light as they see it.⁹

The Klan speaker, explained Charles, stated that all Klansmen were obliged to declare themselves to be in support

⁶Editorial, The Chetek Alert, May 9, 1924, p. 2.

⁷Ibid. The Visitor was and continues to be a national Catholic weekly.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

of the principles of the Constitution and the Christian Church. The editor stated that he approved of these principles but thought it a good idea that those Klansmen who were not as yet affiliated with any church exercise initiative and promptly join any one of the several existing denominations. It was also remembered that, from the earliest days of the Republic, both Catholics and Protestants fought together in defense of the nation.¹⁰

In the late war, many boys of both denominations volunteered and gave their lives for the flag, and while each of us should remain true and loyal to his own church, we must bury our prejudices one against the other, and live together as neighborly, patriotic, Christian Americans.¹¹

This was the last piece of news and commentary on the Klan until 1925.

Chetek residents received their first news of Klan activities for the year on July third. There was to be a gathering of the Klan in Ladysmith. "The largest gathering of people ever to visit Ladysmith--50,000 or more--is expected July 18 to attend the north state 'Klonvocation' of the Ku Klux Klan, the Women of the Klan, and the Junior American Crusaders."¹² An elaborate entertainment schedule was to include fireworks, a Klan wedding, public naturalization, addresses and band music.¹³

¹⁰Chetek Alert, May 9, 1924, p. 2.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Chetek Alert, July 3, 1925, p.1.

¹³Ibid.

The gathering was to be held at the Rusk County Klan grounds which was a short distance north and east of the County Fair Grounds. In addition to the previously mentioned activities, the day was to be capped by a mammoth street parade in the evening. Two hundred robed horsemen were to be major participants in the parade.¹⁴

The Klan placed the following advertisement in mid-August:

"COME
PROTESTANT PICNIC
BASKET DINNER
SUNDAY, August 16, 1925
Given by the
KU KLUX KLAN
Every Protestant Invited
Program
Church Service 11 A.M..
Basket Dinner 12 Noon
A Klan Quartette
A Klan Lecture 2 P.M..
By Rev. J. W. Leonard
LOCATION

1 Mile East of Chetek on C.T. 'D'. Robed Men Will Direct You. Ample Parking Space. Cars Guarded. Lunch Sold on the Grounds. Come."¹⁵

¹⁴Chetek Alert, July 3, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁵Chetek Alert, August 14, 1925, p. 4.

¹⁵Chetek Alert, August 14, 1925, p. 4.

Pat Malone and Organizer J. H. Neff, who were in the Chetek area conducting Klan meetings during the Fall of 1925, were involved in a serious automobile accident. Enroute from Cameron to Chetek around midnight, October twenty-second, the Klan workers attempted to miss a parked car but, instead swerved into a ditch. The car landed standing on its radiator with its occupants being thrown through the windshield. A passer-by picked up Neff and the unconscious Malone and took them to a Dr. Prill. Malone suffered a broken nose and serious cuts about the eyes. Neff sustained a deep gash on his forehead. Numerous stitches were necessary to repair the damage. It was noted that Malone would more than likely be out of circulation for a few days.¹⁶

In early December, Chetek citizens were informed that Pat Malone was to speak at the Chetek Opera House on Sunday, December sixth. Though the meetings were to be held under the auspices of the Ku Klux Klan, an invitation was extended to people of all creeds and opinions.¹⁷ The belief was expressed that there was no need

....for anyone to get excited over the Klan coming to Chetek. They are not a law unto themselves and they are not out to harm any person no matter what his religious belief may be. We should all strive for peace and unity in the community. Catholics and Protestants who are now friends should

¹⁶Chetek Alert, October 30, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁷Chetek Alert, December 4, 1925, p. 1.

remain friends, so don't let us get excited.¹⁸

The suggestion was again ventured that those Klansmen without a church join one. Aside from that, the Klan was to get credit where it was due. All persons, regardless of religious affiliation should support the Klan in its attempts to rid Chetek of "....bootleggers, gamblers, thieves...lewd men and women...." and other undesireables.¹⁹

Chetek locals soon received a full report of Pat Malone's lecture. Malone announced that the Klan would soon embark upon the construction of a large tabernacle to be located in the southeast section of that city. Negotiations were already pending for the purchase of the land. The tabernacle was to be large enough to accommodate two thousand people and would be built so that it could be comfortably heated. Malone was to return to Chetek around January fifteenth on which day he would commence a six week campaign for that part of Barron County.²⁰

As to the meeting itself, the Opera House was well filled. The new district organizer for the Klan, J. H. Neff, introduced Malone. "The meeting was opened with prayer followed by singing 'America,' 'Stand Up For Jesus,' 'Hail,

¹⁸Chetek Alert, December 4, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Chetek Alert, December 11, 1925, p. 1.

Hail the Klan's All Here. ' and 'Klux, Wisconsin. '"²¹ It was noted that Malone said nothing which might alarm the law abiding citizen.²²

He did not condemn good Catholic people because of their religion, but rather commended them for faithful adherence to their faith and said it was the desire of the Klan ~~that~~ all Catholics and all Protestants who are now friends should remain friends. He did speak disparagingly of the priesthood, but he did the same for the Protestant minister, pointing out the black sheep in each group.

Malone went after the bootleggers, gamblers, houses of ill fame, and all law violaters with bare hands and warned them that if they had any of their dirty rotten moonshine on hand they had better get rid of it; for when he comes back they are going to have a cleanup and all the crooks will be put where Governor Blaine can't pardon them.²³

Pat Malone then announced his intention of making Chetek his home. It was his belief that Chetek was the most beautiful area in all Wisconsin and that the city was an ideal place for quiet and contented home life.²⁴ Returning to more important matters, Malone said that

²¹Chetek Alert, December 11, 1925, p. 1. The Alert noted that there was to be an evening meeting, but it was cancelled owing to the fact that Malone had an appointment at Oconto Falls, Wisconsin--an appointment that would eventually land him in the Oconto County Jail and end his affiliation with the Klan. See Chapter One for the details relating to this episode.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

....the Klan is willing to join hands with all church organizations in the effort to clean up the damnable crime wave that is now sweeping over this country. He severely condemned Governor Blaine for appointing officers who were not in sympathy with enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment.²⁵

The Governor and his aides could not be depended upon in this matter. Instead, reliance would have to be placed upon those agents of the federal government assigned to clean up the matter.²⁶

The Alert's attitude toward the Klan was to be the same as that toward any other organization. But if the Klan could

....put the fear of God and the law into moonshiners, crooks, and gamblers, more power to their aim. And in doing this they will have stronger community support if the speakers refrain from abusing people of any religious faith, or making statements unsupported by proper evidence or by making threats of violence other than through proper legal procedure.²⁷

Still, the Alert desired to do its best to maintain peace and friendship among all Chetek citizens.²⁸

Returning to Chetek just prior to the turn of the new year, Pat Malone stated that the construction of the tabernacle would soon commence. The building was to be a

²⁵Chetek Alert, December 11, 1925, p. 1.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

temporary affair. A large force was expected to work on the project with the building being completed in the matter of a day. Upon the completion of the forthcoming campaign, the tabernacle would be disassembled and moved to a new location. Rice Lake was to be the next target of Klan activities.²⁹

The Klan tabernacle was erected in a matter of five and one half hours on Monday, January 12, 1926. That the building was completed in sub-zero weather only made the feat more remarkable. "The initial bomb, notifying the town that the workers had begun on the building was set off about 10:00 O'clock in the forenoon, and likewise at 3:30 in the afternoon another bomb signalled the completion of the work."³⁰ It was noted that fifty men participated in the construction. They came from such Barron County communities as Rice Lake, Barron, Cameron, Hillsdale and Sioux Creek.³¹ During the middle part of the week, the tabernacle interior was completed in addition to the installation of seats, electric lights, and six heating stoves. Wood shavings were used to cover the floor. The tabernacle measured forty-four by eighty-four feet with a seating capacity of nearly nine hundred. The first of the Klan meetings in the new

²⁹ Chetek Alert, January 1, 1926, p. 1. Of interest here is that the Rice Lake Chronicle did not report any news of a Klan campaign in 1926.

³⁰ Chetek Alert, January 15, 1926, p. 1.

³¹ Ibid.

building was to be held on January fifteenth.³²

On January seventeenth, the Women's Christian Temperance Union held a meeting in the newly constructed Klan tabernacle. The occasion was the celebration of the sixth anniversary of the Eighteenth Amendment. Pat Malone spoke before a large audience. Malone's presentation was considered to be clear, convincing, and entertaining.³³

In a contributed article alluding to the Klan's future program of religious education, the Chetek Alert published the following under the headline "Somebody Suggests: "Smell of this One. '"

Every "medium," every leader of new ISM or cult or mysterious religion, makes money.

Millions chase the astrologer, necromancer, voodoo, the high priestess, the sun worshiper, the sandeater, the fake doctor, the wonder worker.

We don't wish to attract a shower of stones, but we regret that people will not do some good horse sense thinking for themselves and reject the impossible and foolish

This fad religion and new cult business means we impoverish ourselves and enrich the teachers.

The time is coming when the false teacher will be given the kibosh, and the teacher

³² Chetek Alert, January 15, 1926, p. 1.. Also to be found in this particular issue was a news item detailing the resignation of several New Haven, Connecticut Klan leaders. The reason given was that the Klan was considered to be not only un-American but anti-American.

³³ Chetek Alert, January 22, 1926, p. 1.

of common sense will no longer be reviled and persecuted while alive, and respected after he is dead.

What is natural and right is a pretty good text to start thinking on. Think.³⁴

Matters soon came to a boil within the Chetek community. The manager of the local Farmer's Store, a Mr. Van Gelder, began receiving a series of notes threatening a boycott of his business if certain conditions were not complied with.³⁵ The manager had not taken any action in the matter. Chetek residents were told that threats of this nature were contrary to both state and federal laws and could be ".....punished by fine and imprisonment if turned

³⁴Chetek Alert, February 5, 1926, p. 1. This item is particularly noteworthy in that it appeared after the following contributed article which was published in the January twenty-ninth Alert. This particular article reads as follows: "Edward Young Clarke, whose advertising genius introduced the modern Ku Klux Klan to the American people five years ago Monday, headed a new movement designed to bring back the 'honesty and simplicity of the religion of our forefathers.' Local organizations will be set up in every town and city of the country and bureaus will be established in Canada, England, and Australia all under the jurisdiction of the Atlanta headquarters. An educational center will be located at Indianapolis and twelve motion pictures portraying the life of Christ will be made there and distributed throughout the world." In light of this, it would appear that the February fifth article was a veiled attack on the Catholic Church.

³⁵Chetek Alert, February 12, 1926, p.1. No mention was made as to the nature of the conditions.

over to the district attorney and the Post Office Department,"³⁶ Though several of the letters were signed K. K. K., it was doubtful that any of them were sanctioned by the Klan.³⁷

Manager Van Gelder was not the only Chetek citizen to receive such tidings. Several members of the Chetek School board were also recipients of similar communications.

Carl Whitaker, Byron Carter and Christ Brusen have also received some letters asking that certain histories be removed from the schools on grounds that they 'teach religion.' We hardly think that three better men could be chosen to represent us on the school board. They will investigate and take such action as the requests merit.³⁸

Charges were also made that several Chetek High School instructors taught their students to play cards and gamble at a recent sophomore party staged at the Edward Solum farm in Chetek Township.

Upon inquiry members of the class declared that the teachers had not done anything of the kind. Mr. Solum, the driver, and several of the boys had joined in an innocent game. That was all. We don't know of a family who are more interested in their children and whose home is better conducted--than that of Mr. and Mrs. Solum, so the matter should be passed without further notice.³⁹

Chetek residents were urged to remain calm. It was

³⁶ Chetek Alert, February 12, 1926, p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

again suggested that individuals should not become excited over any organization's activities. Those people who believed their rights to be infringed upon had recourse to the courts--the injured party could sue for damages.

Slander was still punishable by fine and imprisonment.⁴⁰

Parents were to exercise restraint in the matter of attacks made against the school administration. "The best rule to follow always is to look into objectionable matters carefully and report your findings to the school board and teachers who will respond to your suggestions."⁴¹ It was to be remembered that action of an unduly hasty nature meant the weakening of morale and discipline.⁴²

The Chetek Alert noted that

Things are getting rather warm in the community as a result of the Klan meetings. There is much talk. People in the country and city whether they are Klan members, Catholics or Protestants are pledged to keep their actions within the bounds of reason to avoid community trouble. Chetek is a pretty good little town and there are hundreds of good, sensible Christian families in the country who will guard against going to extremes or being led into difficulties for which they will be sorry afterward.⁴³

Again appealing to a sense of community harmony, the Alert reminded Chetek's citizens that they lived together peacefully before the advent of the Klan and that the town

⁴⁰ Chetek Alert, February 12, 1926, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

ought to be sensible enough to continue to do so. Everyone had the right to think and believe as he chose, but it was suspected that "....the effect of a program like the present will only make the Catholics stronger...."⁴⁴ Indeed, an element of dissension might arise within the Protestant camp. As such, all Chetek churches and fraternal and civic organizations were urged to unite on a program of common sense.⁴⁵

Matters, however, did not abate any. During a ruckus at the local high school,

....several boys had engaged in fisticuffs and one of the boys was quite painfully injured. Principal De Guire took the matter in hand and disciplined the lads as he thought the circumstances demanded. Later in the day, Print Glaze, father of one of the boys, came to the school and asked for an explanation. There was some argument and then some, in the course of which the Klan was mentioned, but nothing was said as to the merits or demerits of the organization.⁴⁶

Glaze was said to have later threatened the Principal with physical harm were De Guire to remove his glasses. The principal removed them, but the incident did not proceed to the next extreme.⁴⁷

The Alert was not publishing this item because it smacked of sensationalism. "We are doing it solely to help

⁴⁴Chetek Alert, February 12, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Chetek Alert, February 19, 1926. p. 1.

⁴⁷Ibid.

all the people in this community to understand that they must keep their passions and prejudices within due bounds or we are going to have a riot here."⁴⁸ The Principal and teachers had to be supported without any interference. Those who had grievances were to take them to the School Board. Though the Alert maintained that it was not arguing for De Guire, it was to be remembered that the principal was a man of mature judgement. Earnest in his profession, De Guire was considered to be doing his very best for the school children of Chetek. Besides, he was the best community worker that Chetek had in relation to civic, church and social activities.⁴⁹

Concluding its remarks, the Alert printed the following.

Now a little further for the benefit of the schools and our children. If any more meetings are held by the Klan 'for men only' or 'for women only,' we hope the speakers will use language and tell stories that a teacher or preacher would dare tell to his school or congregation. We were at one meeting, and honestly, we certainly would not dare to print the stuff we heard, the vulgar stories or anything else, and it wasn't sex hygiene either.⁵⁰

As far as the Alert was concerned, Chetek's Klan was on trial. Despite the fact that the Klan was assured, at the

⁴⁸ Chetek Alert, February 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

outset, of fair treatment, that organization had yet to demonstrate any constructive tendencies.⁵¹

The Parent-Teacher Association of Chetek on February fifteenth, in a resolution offered by Mrs. W. G. Malcolm, denounced Klan interference in the affairs of the school administration and School Board. Passed without discussion and without a single dissenting vote, the resolution read as follows.

"1. We, THE PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATION of Chetek Public Schools take advantage of this opportunity to express our complete confidence in our present school board and we place ourselves on record as being opposed to interference in our school affairs by people coming from outside the school district.

"2 We are convinced that much of the language used by the men who conduct the meetings in the temporary building on Second Street is coarse and vulgar, unfit for boys and girls to hear. We know that many of the statements made about our school are false, that they are intended to arouse prejudice and hatred among the pupils, and disrespect and disobedience of teachers. Our school is being demoralized and the academic progress of the children is being retarded.

"3 In order to show our allegiance to our school, to our community and our country, we pledge ourselves not to attend any of the aforesaid meetings, not to allow our children to attend them, and to do everything possible to combat their sinister influence.⁵²

⁵¹Chetek Alert, February 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁵²Ibid.

Another item related to disturbances arising out of Klan activities concerned the yellow fringed flag belonging to Chetek's Campbell Post of the American Legion. Seeking to forestall any untoward incidents arising out of disagreement as to the fringe's exact meaning, the Post Commander contacted the National Headquarters for a full explanation. The Commander's letter was referred to the Legion's Americanism Commission.⁵³

By way of reply, an Allan Waters of the Community Service Bureau made the following points. After a careful investigation, it was determined that "...no significance whatever attached to the use of the fringe except for decorative purposes."⁵⁴ There were precedents for regimental colors rimmed with fringe. Organizations such as the "...G.A.R., The Spanish War Veterans, and many other patriotic and fraternal societies, as well as the general practice of flag and banner manufacturers...." were responsible for its use.⁵⁵ Furthermore

As to the question of there being any connection with papal colors, I think we may cite you to the fact that in many instances the flag of the Knights of Columbus does not have a fringe, while catalogs of Masonic and militant Protestant organizations like the Knights of Malta advertise fringe on parade flags, both of the societies and on the National Emblem.⁵⁶

⁵³ Chetek Alert, February 19 1926, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

As a prelude to its latest comments on the Klan, the Alert reiterated its position of being on the side of clean morals and good government. This journal reminded its readers that it continuously upheld the Sabbath and led in the crusade for Prohibition. The best things in Chetek's community life had always been supported by this paper. There was no quarrel with a single citizen of the community whether he reside in town or country. Everyone had the right to his own opinions in the areas of politics and religion. But "....we charge all of you to manifest a spirit of fairness, tolerance and truth toward your neighbors."⁵⁷

It was noted that, at the meetings held in the Klan tabernacle, Pat Malone made various remarks about certain court cases involving a number of individuals in various communities.⁵⁸ Malone claimed to have "'sworn affidavits' covering the details of these cases."⁵⁹ The suggestion was made that Malone produce the so-called affidavits and other evidence he might have. In turn, the Alert would produce the certified copies of the court records. Both sets of documents would be placed into the hands of an unbiased committee to determine the veracity of Malone's statements. The appropriate records were ready to be produced at any time. Right was right everywhere. The time had come for

⁵⁷ Chetek Alert, February 26, 1926, p.1.

⁵⁸

Ibid. It was not divulged as to what the nature and details of the cases were.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the truth to prevail.⁶⁰

The Klan campaign had concluded by the first of March. Taking upon itself the mantle of peacemaker, the Alert noted that, in the wake of the late Klan convocations, Chetek was left with a good deal of ill feeling among the town's citizens. When the Klan meetings commenced

....we asked that the organization be given a fair chance to demonstrate its work, and if good would come of it, that is what we wanted. We expected them not to play upon the passions of the people either in political or religious matters. We expected a demonstration of 100 percent Americanism and Christian enthusiasm, neither condemning or berating any form of worship or religious belief. We expected orderly procedure in correcting wrongs and we expected that promises and pledges made would be carried out; we expected truth from the platform,--clean language, inspiring pronouncements, statements of facts:--not vulgar preachments, nor hate-inspired challenges.

We expected the Klan tabernacle to stand as a safe retreat and a lasting defense against any attack upon our constitutional rights. In fact we expected everything would be for the best, and maybe that is so.⁶¹

However, it was up to the participants themselves to decide how much they received for their ten dollars. Whether any satisfaction was obtained was their affair. Though the Klan organizers treated this money as a donation, the possibility existed that this might not be true. Were this so, the contributor had a right to know what the money

⁶⁰Chetek Alert, February 26, 1926, p.1. It might be noted that Pat Malone did not accept this challenge.

⁶¹Editorial, The Chetek Alert, March 5, 1926, p. 4.

was used for. Pat Malone claimed that he received nothing from the Klan for his services--that he lived entirely on income from his insurance interests.⁶²

The best thing that Chetek could do in the interests of peace and harmony was for its citizens to put aside recent animosities. It was time for past friends to become so once again. The following was submitted as an example of recent fence mending as being suggestive of how Chetek might cleanse itself of all acrimony.

Byron Carter and Fred Ziesensis got into a little argument the other day, which almost developed into a pugilistic encounter, but do you know what they have done,--they laughed over it together, made it all up and went on talking 'potatoes,' the way they have been doing for thirty-five years or more. Now isn't that fine? We think a lot of Mr. Ziesensis and Mr. Carter for finishing the argument that way. That is the way we are going to do it. No matter who you are or what you believe, if you are a good, patriotic American citizen, and come in the spirit of good fellowship, you will receive a glad welcome and the right kind of treatment from us.⁶³

Concluding, the Alert pointed out that it did not have a mean thing to say about anyone.

We are just talking things over with you and we hope those who have been our good friends in the past will think of it in that way. We are not pleading for personal or financial support; we are not afraid of the consequences. People have told us that we would suffer if we ventured to discuss

⁶² Editorial, The Chetek Alert, March 5, 1926, p. 4.

⁶³ Ibid.

the Klan, but that is neither here nor there. We are pleading for community peace and good will, Chetek is an orderly, patriotic, friendly place. Let us keep it that way.⁶⁴

With that said, the Alert's discussion of the Klan was closed.⁶⁵

Thereafter, little was heard about the Klan in Chetek. In September, however, the hooded order was decried for utilizing masks at one of its parades. If the cause was right, it did not "...have to travel under cover, especially beneath the American flag."⁶⁶ As to Klan influence in the primary election, the question was never satisfactorily answered as to why Governor John Blaine received the nomination for United States Senator-- especially as the Klan considered Blaine a primary opponent. No more was heard about the Klan in Chetek after the primary. Indeed, the Ku Klux Klan in Chetek was a dying issue.

⁶⁴Editorial, The Chetek Alert, March 5, 1926, p. 4.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Chetek Alert, September 10, 1926, p. 1.

Chapter 5

KLAN HAPPENINGS IN ST. CROIX COUNTY

One of the more difficult areas in which to ascertain Klan involvement is in St. Croix County. Except for two incidents which will be treated as separate chapters, the dearth of materials mitigates against a more thorough assessment of Klan activities in this area.¹ In December of 1926, the New Richmond News noted that the population of this city was partially composed of a strong Catholic element. Little was published about Klan activities there. Journals such as the Baldwin Bulletin, Glenwood City Tribune, Hammond News, and the Hudson Star Observer filled few columns with news relating to this organization. Newspapers were not available for Emerald, Somerset, Roberts, and Wilson.

One journal which extensively covered Klan activities in eastern St. Croix County was the Woodville Times. Klan activities were first reported in May of 1925. In a letter to the editor, John L. Roberts wrote that, on the twelfth of May, another emblem of Christianity was burned between Wilson and Hersey. Dubbing the Klansmen as shirt tail

¹See Chapters Six and Seven. The New Richmond News gave excellent coverage of the events described in Chapter Six.

rangers, Roberts stated that, as on most other occasions, "....the 'Brave' Knights disappeared after the cross was lighted."² Were the cause of the Klan as honorable and just as the organization claimed it to be, Roberts saw no reason why "....at least one Klansman wouldn't have nerve enough to stay by the cross after it was lighted. Cowards and criminals run away with cause after they do something they shouldn't, but of course 'True Americans' shouldn't. Brave men and True Americans have nothing to be ashamed of."³ Consequently, it was not necessary for the individuals involved to hide behind masks and shirts. Roberts did not blame some of them for covering their faces if they were as "....sneaky looking as those that have been pointed out to me as belonging to Klansmen. I have often believed that their bodies were of black fur with a white stripe up the back, but it's barely possible they are not skunks."⁴ In conclusion, Roberts suggested the Klansmen tell their "....Kleagle, Imperial Wizard, Grand Kackler or whatever you call him...." that it was he who cut the wires which held the cross up and that he was not afraid or ashamed to admit it.⁵

²John L. Roberts, "The Forum," The Woodville Times, May 15, 1925, p.1.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

There appeared an anonymous reply to Robert's letter in the May twenty-second issue of the Times. The writer, marveling at Robert's braveness, said that the principal ought to sweep his own door first before commencing to sweep for others.

Mr. Principal does not remember a few weeks ago, when he was to a dance at Centerville and was intoxicated. He could not be a true American then by violating the dry law and the Eighteenth Amendment. I think men of that kind (who were) supposed to be a leader for a good cause in the School District ought not to be a law breaker against the U.S.A., so I don't believe a man of that kind should say much about others before he purifies himself first and be a good example for Community.⁶

W.R. Lanxon, writing in the same issue, said that he felt rather sorry for the children of the Hersey public school. This was especially so as Roberts stooped "....to write such a brainless and unprovoked article...about the Klan."⁷ Lanxon said he would not be surprised if it were a case of the students themselves playing a joke on the principal. Even so, ".... if the cross was an 'emblem' of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, then Mr. John Roberts should have fallen down and worshipped, instead of boasting of destroying it, as was done long, long ago on Calvary. It would have made him a better man, surely a better educator."⁸

⁶ Anonymous, "The Forum," The Woodville Times, May 22, 1925, p. 1. Roberts was principal of the Hersey Public School.

⁷ W. R. Lanxon, "The Forum," The Woodville Times, May 22, 1925, p. 1.

⁸ Ibid.

In the near future, said Lanxon, the students and their Christian parents would have the opportunity of hearing and seeing a genuine Klan meeting at Hersey. At that time it could be judged as to whether Klansmen were wolves rather than sheep.⁹

There appeared in an August issue of the Times an advertisement placed by a Klan committee. The advertisement, which concerned a Klan picnic, stated that "there will be a Klan picnic Sunday, Aug. 23, 1925, three miles south of Baldwin. A national speaker. Free coffee--bring your own lunch."¹⁰ All Protestants were cordially invited.¹¹

Charles Lowater, in a September editorial under the heading "The Klan Tries the Camp Meeting," asked his readers whether they ever attended an old fashioned shouting Methodist revival. Those who had--particularly those who remained through the week--would remember

....the skillful building up of emotional interest from day to day and from night to night by the exhorters, the trained choirs, the stage setting --and more than all by what is called by the psychologists the 'mob mind'--that strange influence which makes a gathering of people, under the hypnotic urgings do as a body what few of them would do as individuals.¹²

⁹W. R. Lanxon, "The Forum," The Woodville Times, May 22, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰Woodville Times, August 21, 1925, p. 1.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Editorial, The Woodville Times, September 18, 1925, p. 4. Charles Lowater was also the editor of the Spring Valley Sun.

Meetings of this kind, said Lowater, did a world of good "....in spite of the evanescent quality of many of their 'conversions'...."¹³ The editor said that he personally knew of more than one individual who was changed for the better. No one turned out the worse for the experience. Of late, however, the churches were placing greater reliance on the use of reason. The utilization of raw emotion in the implementation of their message was becoming a thing of the past.¹⁴

Yet somebody persuaded the Ku Klux Klan to utilize the technique of the camp meeting in its campaign for members. That the Klan had closed a recent series of such meetings near Knapp was evidence enough. A number of individuals from the Woodville area were in attendance.¹⁵

The Klan's adaptation of the Methodist technique paled by comparison. The Kluxer's might have been more successful had they been able to secure the services of the Methodist organizers. "Had Elder Holt, with a good choir, been in charge of that meeting at Knapp, we'll bet that instead of a dozen or two being 'saved,' half the big audience or more would have been fighting to get on the Klan rolls."¹⁶

¹³Editorial, The Woodville Times, September 18, 1925, p. 4.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

Lowater then mentioned that the Klan would hold a week's camp meeting at Ellsworth. Catholics as well as Protestants were urged to attend at least one meeting.

After hearing it once you'll know whether you want to go again. But alas, 'Pat' Malone will not be there, as he dated up in more favored localities till Thanksgiving. 'Pat' so announced, that is, unless he is in jail--he has been in jail in every state of the union, and is proud of the record.¹⁷

Despite this, Lowater suggested that everyone attend regardless of whether Malone showed up.

Lowater, in an October editorial captioned "He Should Be Quarantined," stated that "Woodville was lucky this week when Pat Malone, who was scheduled to speak here for the Ku Klux Klan, could not come."¹⁸ Instead, a young man from Menominee kept the speaking engagement. From the accounts of those in attendance, the speech was of honest, temperate and patriotic content. As to the previously scheduled speaker, "the editor of the Times has heard Malone--once. Once was enough."¹⁹ Malone was simply out for the money. He would stop at nothing to collect his ten-dollar lecture fee--even if this meant disrupting a community's tranquility.²⁰ Malone did not care "....That the decent

¹⁷ Editorial, The Woodville Times, September 18, 1925, p. 4..

¹⁸ Editorial, The Woodville Times, October 30, 1925, p. 4. Lowater may have exaggerated here. However, Malone was known to conflict with the law. See the introductory chapter for details in this regard.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

members of the Klan must stay and hear the odium of his blackguardism."²¹ Editor Lowater admitted that his remarks were rather strong but Malone needed it. "We hope the citizens of Woodville may never have Malone inflicted on them, for he is a calamity to any community."²² Simply put, Malone should be quarantined like any other bad disease germ.²³

According to a mid-November issue of the Times, Baldwin was a recent scene of heavy participation in Klan activities. Concluding a series of meetings there, the Kluxers were scheduled to make Woodville their next meeting place. Pat Malone was to be the speaker. "Everybody, Catholic as well as Protestant, should hear Pat--once."²⁴

The Times published no additional news concerning Klan activities in the Woodville area until summer of 1926. In July of that year, Editor Lowater observed that, like it or not, the Klan problem was with Woodville. It was sure to enter as a factor in the Fall political picture, Many localities, said Lowater, were already afflicted with

²¹ Editorial, The Woodville Times, October 30, 1925, p. 4.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Woodville Times, November 13, 1925, p. 1.

disruptions of business and social relations.²⁵

The Times, declared the editor, belonged to neither faction. Indeed, it was hoped the journal had good friends in both camps. Also, the editor did not intend to take sides on the issue. On the other hand, it was not the intention of the Times to imitate other newspapers by refusing to publish any news which related to the Klan. The same policy would be applied with regard to the Knights of Columbus.²⁶

The Klan question, said Lowater, was one that could not be argued. This was so

....because when our prejudices are touched most of us cease to become reasoning beings; we think that we reason and that we choose our lines of action, but in most cases those lines of action were settled for us before we were born, by the opinions of our forefathers, which combined to give us our early training and environment."²⁷

Lowater believed that were the strongest Catholic born of Protestant parentage, he would be as sincere a Protestant as any Klansman. By the same token, a Klansman would be as staunch a supporter of the Knights of Columbus were his heritage Catholic. Thus the Times would remain friendly, fair, and impartial. In conclusion, Lowater expressed the hope that the attitude of his journal would be appreciated

²⁵ Editorial, The Woodville Times, July 25, 1926, p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

by all fair minded men and women.²⁸

Editor Lowater, in an October editorial headlined "The Poison of Malonism," stated that

Pat Malone was given only the expected at Oconto last week--conviction on a charge of criminal slander with a sentence of a year in jail. He has a long time avoided such conviction by means of insinuation in place of direct accusation, and by denial when faced with proof. He denied on the stand that he had said what he was charged with at Oconto.²⁹

The spirit in which Malone preached, said Lowater, only served to discredit the Klan's cause. Malone's gospel of misrepresentation and hatred might win recruits for a short time. In the long run, however, it carried within itself "....the seeds of its own death at a not far distant period."³⁰ Despite Malone, the Klan could not

....justly be blamed for setting up its own standards as to membership every order and every society on earth does this. It is only when men like Malone are allowed to inject the poison of race and religious hatred in place of these truly American principles that the Klan fails--and there it must always fail.³¹

No further news of Woodville area Klan activities was

²⁸ Editorial, The Woodville Times, July 25, 1926, p. 3.

²⁹ Editorial, The Woodville Times, October 24, 1926, p. 4. See the introductory chapter for a more complete discussion of the problem of accusation by insinuation. The Oconto situation is a case in point.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

was published by the Times.³²

Appearing in the Baldwin Bulletin of November 12, 1925, was the only entry relating to Klan activities in that area. Noting that the Klan meetings were attracting a large following, the Bulletin observed that crowds which rivaled "...any previous gathering of any kind (even the free movies) have been in attendance at the Klan meetings in the village hall this week."³³ Indeed, many were turned away because the meeting place was taxed beyond capacity.³⁴

The speaker at these meetings was billed as the famous Pat Malone. The Bulletin observed that Malone was a "...remarkable one, with a voice of iron and a wonderful command of the English language,"³⁵ Later in the week, Malone was to speak in Woodville. It was understood that a large class would be initiated that Saturday.³⁶

The earliest known incidence of Klan related violence in St. Croix County occurred on October 2, 1924, in the Town of Springfield. On that day Earl Brandt murdered Lee Kerr-a murder which was alleged to have developed out of a

³²Editorial, The Woodville Times, October 24, 1926, p. 4.

³³Baldwin Bulletin, November 13, 1925, p. 1.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

quarrel over the Klan.³⁷ Trial was held at Hudson Court House in January of 1925. Brandt was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment at the State penitentiary. Yet there was a question as to whether the argument over the Klan was the real motive for the murder. Whatever the motive, it would forever remain a mystery.³⁸

One other incident was mentioned in relation to Klan activities around New Richmond. This concerned the Reverend Doctor Heber St. Clair Mahood's views on the organization. Dr. Mahood, the Pastor of the First Congregational Church, in an address given in May of 1926, issued a ringing denunciation of the Ku Klux Klan. Similar organizations also came under attack. Mahood particularly attacked the Klan for shielding itself under the guise of Americanism and proceeding "...to graft upon the unsuspecting public and for their own nefarious ends bleed illiterate dupes of their coin."³⁹

The foregoing was all that the New Richmond News carried about Klan activities in its area. In the summer of 1926, the News, Times and Bulletin covered several

³⁷New Richmond News, January 14, 1925, p. 1. The Town of Springfield is near New Richmond.

³⁸New Richmond News, January 17, 1925, p. 1.

³⁹New Richmond News, May 12, 1926, p.1. Unfortunately, no extant copies of Dr. Mahood's address are available.

important events arising out of Klan activities. All three papers covered, in varying degree, the Klan tent burning incident near Hudson. This will be treated in the next chapter. To a lesser degree, the News and Bulletin covered the Ethan B. Minier political episode. An account of this affair is the subject of Chapter Seven. This, then, was the known extent of the Ku Klux Klan's involvement in the life of St. Croix County.

INCIDENT AT NORTHLINE

During the second week of June, 1926, there were rumblings within the Hudson, Wisconsin Catholic community to the extent that some kind of protest was to be registered against the Ku Klux Klan's Northline meetings. Northline, approximately three miles northeast of Hudson, was a way station on the old Omaha Railroad. This location was also the junction at which the branch line veered north for Superior bound trains. The Klan tent, located about one mile east of this junction, was pitched on a rented plot of ground. It was a clear salubrious June evening, the night the Catholics chose to make their stand. At approximately eight o'clock on the evening of June 14, 1926, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan began to assemble for their meeting. The Catholic delegation, marching enmasse as a body, soon arrived. Arguments ensued and, to the dismay of the Klansmen, the Catholics managed to gain access to the tent. Father Peter Rice, Pastor of St. Patrick's Catholic Church at Hudson, arrived soon thereafter. The priest approached the stage with the purpose of proving false the Klan attacks on the Catholic Church. Father Rice failed in his attempt to prove the falsity of the Klan's attacks and

general disruption ensued. Klan speakers soon fled the scene. Under what appeared to be suspicious circumstances and as a final climax to the evening's proceedings, the Klan tent, with its appurtenances, burned to the ground. It was an incident which achieved instant notoriety and which resulted in acrimonious feelings for all involved.

The St. Paul Dispatch described the incident as follows. The Klan tent was alleged to have been burned after the meeting ended in a near riot. Several hundred men were said to have protested against statements of an anti-Catholic nature made by a Klan speaker. One thousand persons had gathered to hear Alfred Brown. Father Rice was said to have gone to the platform protesting that the meetings, held at Northline for the past week, were anti-Catholic in nature. However, the lecturer attempted to continue. This was futile as there was then raised a great deal of commotion. The meeting ended with several encounters between opposing factions though none was serious. It was at this point that the Klan tent was burned.¹

¹St. Paul Dispatch, June 15, 1926, p. 1. In a postscript to the article, the Dispatch noted that Brown's remarks had been resented. Several days prior to the incident, a delegation of twenty-five women went to the place where Brown was rooming with the demand that the landlady evict him. However, Brown volunteered to move to a different residence.

The New Richmond News, in its version of the incident, noted that the Klan tent was destroyed by fire of an unknown origin ".....together with the piano, seats and everything."² Prior to the fire a rather boisterous meeting was held. "There was no storm during the night, so the tent evidently was not struck by lightning."² The Spring Valley Sun said that 1000 were gathered to hear Alfred Brown. Brown was said to have challenged a Catholic priest to answer him. Father Rice appeared with several hundred supporters. The priest proceeded to the platform after which a row developed.³

Warrants were soon sworn out for the fourteen individuals suspected of being involved in the Klan tent burning. The warrants, charging the suspects with disturbing a public meeting, were sworn out on the complaint of J. H. Neff who was said to be the Ku Klux Klan organizer at the meetings. On Saturday, June nineteenth, eleven of the defendants were arraigned before Judge Otto A. Arnquist at Hudson Court House. All concerned pleaded not guilty. They were released on a one hundred dollar bond with their cases being adjourned until June twenty-eighth. Attorney William T. Doar appeared for the defense.⁴

²New Richmond News, June 16, 1926, p. 1.

³Spring Valley Sun, June 17, 1926, p. 1.

⁴New Richmond News, June 23, 1926, p. 1.

In an editorial entitled "He Who Casts the First Stone," the Spring Valley Sun stated that the burning of the tent was to be regretted particularly because of the effects the incident would produce. No one, said this journal, believed that the Klan would fail to retaliate. It was now time for cooler heads to prevail else serious consequences follow. Violence would beget violence. The hatreds created as a result of this incident would last a lifetime.⁵

Mrs. Mark Kinney of River Falls had a letter published in the same issue of the Sun. It was her intention to correct this journal's statements with regard to the Klan tent fire. There was no fight as the Sun had stated. "The Klansmen and Klanswomen and a few loyal citizens had to stand by and see the Stars and Stripes of Old Glory tramped in the dirt by the mob and were not able to lift a finger to protect it...." as the mob outnumbered the Klansmen twenty to one. "We had no arms, while they had guns, knives and clubs."⁶ There were only two hundred Klansmen who had gathered to hear Alfred Brown.

The disgruntled Klanswoman charged that the riot was planned by Father Rice. In addition, said Mrs. Kinney, there were "....representatives from nearly every parish

⁵Editorial, The Spring Valley Sun, June 24, 1926, p. 6.

⁶Mrs. Mark Kinney, "The Forum," The Spring Valley Sun, June 24, 1926, p. 1.

in this section of Wisconsin numbering about three thousand Roman Catholics and a few Protestants."⁷ The mob gathered at Hudson and drove to Northline. Later, they proceeded to encircle the tent. The cars were all ".... armed to take any or all who tried to escape should the word from their leader be given."⁸ Led by the priest, they tried to enter the gate. The Klansmen told the crowd that entrance was forbidden. The mob only laughed. They tore two American flags by the entry way and finally took possession of the tent.

Then, charged Mrs. Kinney, the mob "....smoked, cursed; and made the most vulgar speeches I ever heard uttered by human people. They made fun of the song 'America' and the Lord's prayer. In the midst of all the jeers some of the mob rose and shouted 'Down with the banner of the Klan and up with the Flag of the Pope!'"⁹ The Klan's banner was considered to be the Flag of the United States. The ruckus went on for an hour after which Father Rice went up to the platform in an attempt to make Brown prove his statements made about the Catholic Church. However, Brown was not there. A Mr. Neff attempted to talk to the crowd,

⁷Mrs. Mark Kinney, "The Forum," The Spring Valley Sun; June 23, 1926, p. 1.

⁸Ibid., p. 1.

⁹Ibid.

remarks in the interest of truth.¹²

The appointed time for the preliminary hearing soon arrived. On the morning of June twenty-eighth, Judge Otto W. Arnquist opened the proceedings. The St. Paul Dispatch thus described the setting. The fourteen defendants were said to be under an armed guard of ten deputy sheriffs. One half hour before the commencement of the hearing, five hundred persons had jammed the court room. "Hudson is filled with automobiles of farmers and persons from neighboring cities and towns. They began arriving early today and were still coming at noon."¹³ Excitement was said to be at fever pitch. Not only was the court room filled to capacity, but hundreds were said to be milling about the halls and the grounds of the Court House. There was jeering from the crowd when Organizer Neff testified. Judge Arnquist issued a severe rebuke. "Later in the morning Judge Arnquist announced that due to wide interest in the proceedings he would allow 'wide latitude in the testimony in order that the truth about the Klan might be made known and to discourage and set right some of the rumors that have been circulated.'"¹⁴

¹²Mrs. Mark Kinney, "The Forum," The Spring Valley Sun, June 24, 1926, p. 8.

¹³St. Paul Dispatch, June 28, 1926, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press noted that five hundred persons braved the heat and jammed the court room to overflowing. "Two girls in the crowded court room fainted from heat in the forenoon session and several others succumbed to the heat in the afternoon."¹⁵ Hudson was said to be sharply divided on the matter. Due to a manifestation of partisanship during the hearing, St. Croix County Sheriff M. C. Emerson was ordered to clear the court room at the next display of such action. "This order was issued after repeated cautionings and rebukes from the bench."¹⁶

Further tension was added, said the Pioneer Press, when Ray C. Twining, an attorney from Milwaukee arrived on the scene. The purpose of the attorney's visit was soon evident. It was Twining's intention to sue fifty Hudson businessmen for the sum of two thousand dollars in damages in connection with the tent burning affair. However, "the intention to sue for damages was made in letters received by the businessmen a week ago but was not taken seriously until late today when Twining arrived to gather evidence for his case."¹⁷ The attorney said he definitely intended to go on with the suit.

The St. Paul Dispatch noted that the excitement which was evident during the first day of the hearing had

¹⁵St. Paul Pioneer Press, June 29, 1926, p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

disappeared by the second day of the proceedings, Hudson had returned to an orderly condition.¹⁸ The New Richmond News story paralleled the Dispatch's in this regard. The interest in the proceedings appeared to have waned materially as "the morbid curiosity seekers concluded the day before that there wasn't going to be anything doing in their line."¹⁹ The day was described as sweltering and torrid with the court room packed to the suffocating point. As to disorder in the court room, the News remarked that there was no foundation to the stories appearing in a certain St. Paul paper. The article was to be chalked up to the excitement and imagination of the young reporter.²⁰ What fever pitch existed was due to the torrid temperatures and lack of ventilation. The day was exceedingly sultry. People were standing in the aisles along the sides and in the rear--with others standing on chairs or were perched on window sills, radiators and tables. Still others stood within the rail. The hearing itself was not only devoid of thrills but rather tedious. "The court room was a sort of a Turkish bath on a large scale. People perspired gallons and gallons and everybody 'reduced' very materially."²¹

¹⁸St. Paul Dispatch, June 29, 1926, p. 1.

¹⁹New Richmond News, June 30, 1926, p. 1.

²⁰Ibid., p. 3.

²¹Ibid.

As to the matter of the armed guard, "'Why, there's absolutely nothing to the "ten deputies" story," said Sheriff M. C. Emerson to your correspondent. 'There was on duty but one deputy and myself and nothing for us to do in the way of maintaining order. There was no disorder of any sort. I never saw a crowd of that size more orderly despite the lack of chairs and despite the torrid heat.'"²² Whatever violence there was, said the News. "....was confined entirely to the vigorous use of fans...." and whatever else could be converted into such.²³ Still, the Hudson Star Observer noted that "considerable partisanship was manifested and on two occasions Judge Arnquist threatened to have the court room cleared by Sheriff Emerson unless better order prevailed."²⁴

The New Richmond News also noted the appearance of Attorney Twining from Milwaukee. Twining told a News correspondent that he represented the state organization of the Ku Klux Klan and was keenly interested in the proceedings. A civil suit would be brought against fifty Hudson businessmen to recover damages for the Klan tent destruction. The News noted that the businessmen involved had the received the following letter:

²²New Richmond News, June 30, 1926, p. 3.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Hudson Star Observer, July 1, 1926, p. 1.

Neff stated that he was the Grand Titan of the Fourth Province, Realm of Wisconsin, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.²⁸ Klan meetings had been held one week prior to the events of June fourteenth. Advertisements for these meetings consisted of handbills being displayed in that part of the state.

The tent itself was forty by one hundred twenty feet with plank seating and a platform twelve by twenty feet in size. Decorations consisted of American flags and bunting. There was also a player piano and Klan paraphernalia such as robes, signs and handbills.²⁹

The Klan meeting was to begin at eight thirty that evening. However, said Neff, at eight fifteen, a large mob gathered at the gate and demanded to be admitted. The crowd was told that it could not do so because the meeting was for Protestants only and, as the grounds were rented, it would be illegal to do so. But the crowd entered in a boisterous manner "....stating that they were there to commit violence, stating to me that fact."³⁰

The crowd was excited, said Neff, "....and naturally

²⁸Testimony of J. H. Neff, State of Wisconsin v. Alex Lomnes, et al, June 28-29, 1926, File No. 9506, St. Croix County Court House, Hudson, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Preliminary Hearing), p. 1.

²⁹Ibid., p. 2.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 2-3.

they cursed me; they God-damned me, if that is admissable. I hate to say it, yet I must; I was called other names.... the tent was filled up....to its full capacity of a howling, cursing,--you couldn't hardly call it an audience--call it a mob."³¹ The Klansmen, said Neff, tried to defend themselves. Dr. Brown was taken to shelter. Neff said he then went to the platform and attempted to ameliorate the situation by a recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the singing of "America." This was met by jeers, cursing and general disturbance by the anti-Klan element. Neff explained that, after telling the mob it was acting illegally, an attempt was made to explain the principles of the Klan "....but I was told that they did not want to hear anything about the Klan. They knew it all, but they wanted to know about those damn lies that had been told about the Roman Catholic Church."³² Neff, seeing that all was futile, said he was about to dismiss the meeting when Father Rice walked to the platform. Rice said he was representing several local priests and the Catholic people with the intention of protesting the meeting and driving the Klansmen out.³³

³¹Testimony of J. H. Neff, Preliminary Hearing, p. 3.

³²Ibid., p. 4. Neff's testimony that Brown was taken to shelter contradicts Kinney's contention that Brown had to hide in the woods.

³³Ibid. Father Rice was present on behalf of Father Fassbender of River Falls and Father Shanaghy of Ellsworth.

Neff testified that he finally dismissed the meeting but immediately saw several guns pointing at him. Neff then went to the back of the tent to the yells of "....'kill him,' 'lynch him,' 'mob him,' 'we want Pat Malone; where is he? Where is Dr. Brown? we want him; we want Neff.'"³⁴ Neff said he managed to escape through the side of the tent to his car--after managing to hastily rebuke the crowd for its destruction. The organizer and several of his men drove to the Fillbach house where his wife and family were located.³⁵ Neff said he remained at the house until he saw the tent in flames at which point he drove to River Falls.³⁶

Under questioning by Attorney Doar, Neff maintained that he was never arrested. The organizer said that he was connected with the Ku Klux Klan since 1922 when he joined the organization in Indiana.³⁷ Neff said that he

³⁴ Testimony of J. H. Neff, Preliminary Hearing, p. 5.

³⁵ The Fillbach's were the people who rented part of their acreage to the Klan.

³⁶ Testimony J. H. Neff, Preliminary Hearing, p. 5.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 7. This is particularly interesting in view of the fact that Indiana was having a Klan problem of disastrous proportions. Neff said that he had been in Brownsburg, Indiana from January of 1922 to January of 1924 as an executive of the Big Four Railroad. Interestingly enough, the local Brownsburg newspaper, in a personal letter, stated that their files contained no information on the Klan or Neff. In January of 1924, Neff had removed himself to Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, where he was engaged as a fieldman for the Klan. It was while residing at Ladysmith, Wisconsin, (November 1924-December 1925) that he became the Grand Titan of the local Province. Since December of 1925, Neff had been residing at Chetek--which, incidentally, was also Pat Malone's headquarters.

earned his living by working for them. At first, Neff refused to divulge information about his wages and other interests in the Ku Klux Klan. Later, however, he did state that his income was four dollars per man enrolled. The four dollars came out of an initiation fee. As to whether his living depended on enrolling as many members as possible, Neff said that this was not the case since he was interested in building the Ku Klux Klan out of the best timber he could get--regardless of the commission he received. Still, it was his living.³⁸

Neff said that he had been connected with the entire province of the Ku Klux Klan--which included the St. Croix Valley--for one year. Meetings had been conducted in the Valley only during the two previous weeks and these had been at North Line. Prior to that, he had been in River Falls for a month. As the Grand Titan of Province Number Four, it was his job to supervise Klan activities in twenty-one counties--Pierce and St. Croix Counties included.³⁹

Pat Malone's affiliation with the Klan was just as a lecturer. This also applied to Dr. Brown. Everybody but Protestants was excluded from the meetings because the meetings were of a private, Protestant and invitational

³⁸Testimony of J. H. Neff, Preliminary Hearing, pp. 7-8.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 8-9

nature. Hence not all American citizens were permitted to attend.

Neff insisted that the uninvited crowd poured through the gate. As to Father Rice being recognized as a Catholic priest, the organizer stated that Rice introduced himself explaining that he was there on behalf of his colleagues and people. Neff said that Rice had not been given permission to speak, nor did the priest tell the crowd to act in a courteous manner. Neff said that he had no knowledge of an invitation being issued to a priest; that no charges were leveled against the priesthood; and that he never heard about any reflections being made against the Catholic Church, its priests, sisters and faithful--at least not at Northline. Neff admitted to hearing these accusations at River Falls. But the challenge to debate was issued to Father Fassbender by Pat Malone. Neff insisted that Father Rice was never challenged at Hudson.⁴⁰

The first witness for the defense was Father Peter Rice. Answering Attorney Doar, Father Rice testified that he knew of the Klan meetings at Northline through the Klan placards he had seen displayed. In addition, Father Rice said he had received anonymous letters from several places in the country--letters which had Pat Malone's picture on them. Contained in the letters were charges made against

⁴⁰Testimony of J. H. Neff, Preliminary Hearing, pp. 13-15.

the morality of every Catholic priest in the county. The letters arrived after the first of the River Falls meetings.⁴¹

Father Rice testified that the substance of his sermon was that "...our Catholic people should protest, not by way of violence or physical force, but by pamphlets in writing and by requested permission to attend meetings and ask them if we could get a chance to refute their statements as to the moral character of the Catholic priesthood in general and the priests of the county in particular." As to the remarks made at the Catholic Guild meeting that Sunday afternoon, Father Rice told the ladies that they should defend the sisters' and their honor by protesting in a dignified manner against individuals who saw fit to admit anti-Catholic lecturers within their home. The Catholic sisters were charged with being "...the mistresses of of Catholic Priests." These statements were made at River Falls and at Northline--only with more innuendo.⁴²

Father Rice admitted to attending the Klan meeting, but that it was more of a spur of the moment type of thing. He had no intention of doing so while at the Elks meeting. The priest expected that, if there were to be a debate, the

⁴¹Testimony of Father Peter Rice, Preliminary Hearing, p. 78.

⁴²Ibid., pp.79-80

confrontation would take place at Hudson. Father Rice went to the meetings at the request of Joe O'Connell and James McMahon. Also, the Klan had issued an invitation. "That was the sole reason I went, because I was a man and wouldn't back down where challenge was made."⁴³ Father Rice said he went into the tent, quieted the people down, and asked Neff if he could say a few words. Neff said "'certainly.'" Father Rice told Neff that "I had come out here in response to repeated challenges brought to me, conveyed to me, to refute or ask for proof of any charges against the morality of any Catholic priest in this county, any sister, or his housekeeper."⁴⁴ The priest then told the people to keep quiet. Rice told Neff that "....I wanted proof given of any statement that any of the Klan members had to make against any Catholic priest in the county, to make it now."⁴⁵ Neff, in a low tone, replied that none had been made. Neff seemed to be a little excited at this juncture.⁴⁶ Father Rice then testified "I said, as a Catholic priest I protest against being slandered or my

⁴³Testimony of Father Peter Rice, Preliminary Hearing, p. 80.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 81.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

brother priests being slandered. I did not say that they must be driven out....No incitement or violence was either literally or intent in my talk...I deny any literal expression that can be interperated...legally...with intent toward physical force or disrupting their...."meeting."⁴⁷ Father Rice said that after his speech he immediately went home.⁴⁸

As to the matter of the challenge, Father Rice testified that it was direct inasmuch as the placard issued at the River Falls meetings challenged Father Fassbender and other priests. It did not matter who authorized the placard as it was still the same organization. Besides "....they would be alike in their dirty methods."⁴⁹ In regard to the statements made at Northline, the Pastor testified that he was informed "....they were asking for the Catholic priest out there, people in Klan uniform and several people called, 'why don't you bring out your old priest.'⁵⁰ Father Rice said that he ignored previous challenges because he believed it not to be the opportune time to go out"....but I thought I would back down before no man when he challenged my character."⁵¹ Kirk then asked if Father Rice was directly attacked. The priest explained that a general attack was

⁴⁷Testimony of Father Peter Rice, Preliminary Hearing, pp. 81-82

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 83

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 84.

⁵¹Ibid.

against all Catholic priests in the county and "....the fact that I was a priest in the county was a specific attack, because there are only five priests in the county."⁵²

Father Rice had no prior knowledge that there was to be a crowd of several hundred parishoners at Northline-- though he had heard rumors that a Catholic crowd would be there. Even so, the purpose in going out was to defend the character of the Catholic priesthood and sisterhood. Father Rice also testified that he did not believe that his concern over the statements of the Ku Klux Klan would serve to influence his parishoners.⁵³ Father Rice did not advocate physical violence. He testified that "I did not...my Catholic people were instructed in church to avoid physical violence with anybody, but I said to my people that when your Catholic priesthood is attacked and the honor of Catholic women and sisterhood, that you should answer back and ask for proof of the statements they were making."⁵⁴ As to instructing the Ladies Guild to go down to Disney's, Father Rice said that "I did,--Pardon me, that is incomplete. On Sunday afternoon the 13th I think I suggested to the

⁵²Testimony of Father Peter Rice, Preliminary Bearing. p. 85.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 85-86.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 86.

ladies that they see Mr. and Mrs. Disney and ask them if it was their intent to insult their Catholic neighbors by keeping anti-Catholic lecturers in their home."⁵⁵ But the priest did not know that this was the Disney's only source of income. Father Rice did not want to have anyone put out. It was just to be a protest.⁵⁶ Regarding the question of whether harboring the Klan lecturers indicated the Disney's true feelings in the matter, Father Rice replied that "....under the circumstances it would indicate at least a sympathy."⁵⁷ The Pastor testified that it was his belief that there was no connection between the action of the Ladies Guild and the Klan tent burning.⁵⁸ Under additional questioning, Father Rice explained that he did not rile up the Catholic men, but did impress upon them the necessity of upholding the honor of their women.⁵⁹

The prosecutor then asked the Pastor whether he gave advance notice to the effect that he would engage Klan leaders in debate. Father Rice explained that "I mentioned in a lecture given in the church to the Catholics and non-

⁵⁵Testimony of Father Peter Rice, Preliminary hearing, p. 87

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

Catholics earlier in the year, that I stood ready to meet any place, any time, any anti-Catholic lecturer as long as I was given a fair show and fair hearing for debate. That was sometime in March, and I believe you were present in the Catholic church the same night Mr. Kirk, because I saw you."⁶⁰

Replying to defense Attorney's Doar's question on a printed challenge, Father Rice said that he had one in his possession which read as follows. "....'as a rule I debate only with priests but due to the fact that Father Fassbender is too big a coward to meet me in open debate, I will be glad to meet your man Emil E. Holms....'"⁶¹ As to the Pastor's feelings toward Hudson's Protestant community, Rice testified that "....my experience generally is the Protestant people are as fine people as there is in America; I want no religious bigotry."⁶² Thus was concluded the priest's testimony in the matter.

In his summation for the State, Kirk demanded that all defendants be bound over to the Circuit Court for trial. Father Rice was said to be morally responsible.

⁶⁰Testimony of Father Peter Rice, Preliminary Hearing, p. 88.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 89.

for the riot.⁶³ Defense Attorney Doar, in a complete and total condemnation of the Klan, demanded that the cases be dismissed.⁶⁴ As County Judge, Arnquist was only empowered to determine whether the defendants should be turned over to the Circuit Court for trial.⁶⁵ Judge Arnquist in arriving at his decision, issued a ringing denunciation of the Klan.

Said the Judge:

"It is regrettable that any such organization should have come here....There is no question but that it tends to make bitterness, strife and violence. There have been a number of such movements in the past, and many of them created violence....One cannot blame Fr. Rice for being indignant at the charges of immorality made against him and the Catholic priesthood in Klan meetings and hence cannot condemn him for going to the Klan tent when told, through bad judgement, that he was invited there to defend himself against them.

The doctrines for which the Klan stand are well known, and are antagonistic to those of the Catholic Church. Because of this, and the charges made against him, Fr. Rice was naturally against Klan.

⁶³Baldwin Bulletin, July 2, 1926, p. 1.

⁶⁴St. Paul Pioneer Press, June 30, 1926, p. 1.

⁶⁵St. Paul Dispatch, June 29, 1926, p. 1. William T. Doar, Jr., in a personal letter, said that "I remember my father talking about the Fr. Rice-Ku Klux Klan case. It was one of the highlight cases of his legal career." As to his father's summation. "We do not still have files that go back that far....and therefore cannot provide you with a transcript of my father's argument to the jury." (Personal letter of William T. Doar, Jr. to John A. Turcheneske, Jr., January 12, 1971.)

Because of this he said in his church that a protest should be made against the charges. He had no violence in his mind, only protection of the Church and himself from the charges. From this, the District Attorney has deduced a moral responsibility of Fr. Rice for the riot. There is no legal responsibility attaching to him, and that is what we are examining here. Therefore, it is my duty to discharge Father Rice.⁶⁶

Tony Lombard and George Hennesy were acquitted.⁶⁷ The remaining eleven defendants were bound over for the Fall term of the Circuit Court.⁶⁸

In the aftermath of the trial, the Hammond News noted that a great deal of feeling was being created over the incident. Many different stories were said to be circulating. These had gotten to be so out of proportion that it was getting rather difficult to obtain any accurate information on the happenings.⁶⁹ The Baldwin Bulletin noted that feeling was running rather high in Hudson. Sheriff Emerson was said to be taking precautions to prevent any reprisals that might occur. After the hearing was concluded, Klan members and sympathizers gathered to discuss Arnquist's decision. Those who sympathized with the defendants did the same.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Baldwin Bulletin, July 2, 1926, p. 1.

⁶⁷ New Richmond News, June 30, 1926, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Hudson Star Observer, July 1, 1926, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Hammond News, July 1, 1926, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Baldwin Bulletin, July 2, 1926, p. 1.

The New Richmond News noted that Hudson was indeed getting plenty of publicity. Most of it, however, was of an undesirable nature. The Kluxer rumpus managed to push the town right onto the front page. Said the News of the publicity, "It reminds one of what the manager of a 10-20-30 show once said to this writer: 'I don't care whether you write us up or write us down, but great Scott, don't ignore us any longer!'"⁷¹ Still, the ending of the Klan tent affair had yet to be written.

The Woodville Times noted in October that the Klan riot case was scheduled for the fall term of the Circuit Court. However, there was some talk that this case might not be called. District Attorney Kirk, though, insisted that, if at all possible, he would bring the matter to trial.⁷² In a succeeding issue, the Times said that the Klan riot case was not to be tried that Fall after all. Indeed it was exceedingly doubtful that the case would even come to trial. This was particularly so because "....with the present evidence (or lack of evidence) no conviction could be secured, and District Attorney Kirk does not want to make a fizzle of it."⁷³ Even so, the case was

⁷¹New Richmond News, June 30, 1926, p. 3.

⁷²Woodville Times, October, 1, 1926, p. 1.

⁷³Woodville Times, October 8, 1926, p. 1.

put over to the March term.

In November, the County Claims Commission was approached with a claim of \$1987 for the loss of the Klan tent. This was said to be the biggest item before the Claims Commission.⁷⁴ The Commission, composed of N. E. Fraher, J. W. Hanley and Elmer Afdahl, dissallowed the claim. As to the rationale behind its action, the Commission stated that it was a matter for the courts to handle.⁷⁵

The Klan riot case did not reach the Circuit Court for the Spring Term of 1927. In the interest of a peaceful settlement of the case, Spencer Haven put in an appearance before the St. Croix County Board which convened a special session on Saturday, May seventh. Haven said that the Catholics had subscribed five hundred dollars to this end. Various Hudson businessmen contributed a total of four hundred dollars. It was Haven's belief that, if the County were to contribute five hundred dollars, the case would be settled out of court.⁷⁶

The County Board acceded to this request with the claim being charged to the next year's tax receipts. One

⁷⁴Baldwin Bulletin, November 26, 1926, p. 1.

⁷⁵New Richmond News, November 26, 1926, p. 1.

⁷⁶Hudson Star Observer, May 12, 1927, p. 1.

source noted that "the Klan will accept the \$1400 in full for all damages and drop the suit, which was bothering a number of people quite badly."⁷⁷ As to the individuals who instigated the incident at Northline, the identity of the participants would remain a mystery. The Klan riot case was closed.

⁷⁷St. Croix County Board Proceedings, Special Session, Hudson, Wisconsin, May 7, 1927, 055/1/2, Area Research Center, Wisconsin State University, River Falls, Wisconsin, VII, p. 66.; The Woodville Times, May 11, 1926, p. 1.

Chapter 7

ONE MAN'S VENDETTA

The election year of 1926 did not see the state legislative campaign in St. Croix County come to a close without any politically acrimonious repercussions. Involved in the one recorded instance of a political fracas was one Ethan B. Minier who was running on the Republican ticket in his bid for reelection to the Wisconsin State Assembly. Assemblyman Minier, a resident of the Town of Stanton, came out of the September seventh primary a narrow loser--- his oppononet, Robert M. Graham, of the Town of Warren, being the victor. Election returns showed Graham the winner by a mere 114 votes with a total vote of 2732 as opposed to 2618 for Minier.¹

For Minier, the tale had yet to be told. On October sixteenth, the determined candidate filed as an independent at the Hudson Court House for the general election to be held on November second.² In an open political advertisement, Assemblyman Minier made it known that he was still very much in the running.³ Minier explained that it

¹New Richmond News, September 11, 1926, p. 1.

²Ibid., October 16, 1926, p. 1.

³Ibid., October 27, 1926, p. 1.

was "at the urgent request of my friends in all parts of St. Croix County...."that he continue his campaign for reelection.⁴

Continuing, the candidate stated that his friends believed he was not beaten fairly in the preceding primary. There was a reason for this. In the Assemblyman's opinion, there was the circulation of what Minier deemed to be an illegal ballot. Minier further charged that this ballot--alleged to have been distributed by his opponent and other individuals--was responsible for his being denied a berth on the general election ballot.⁵ The illegal ballot was supposed to have been "....secretly placed in nearly every polling place and in some instances even in the voting booths, all contrary to the criminal law."⁶ Minier went on to say that he would "....endeavor to make the Corrupt Practices Act mean and do what it purports to mean and do and to make it enforceable with even more drastic penalties; to curtail if not make impossible political activities by secret and anonymous political organizations which work in the dark, stab in the back...." and blatantly violated the law as it then stood.⁷

For the second time in as many months, the electorate of St. Croix County mandated that Ethan B. Minier be turned

⁴New Richmond News, October 27, 1926, p. 1.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

out to political pasture. Graham won handily over the now lame-duck Assemblyman. The Assemblyman elect's margin was 1328 votes for a total of 3547 ballots as opposed to Minier's 2219.⁸ Minier refused to concede defeat. The defeated candidate cried foul and immediately proceeded to invoke the Corrupt Practices Act.

A week after the general election, petition was made to Governor John J. Blaine that an investigation of the recent election be made pursuant to the appropriate provisions of the Corrupt Practices Act.⁹ Minier's position was that the sample ballot circulated prior to and during the election was of dubious origin and that this ballot was circulated by the victor of the late contest, among others, Robert M. Graham. The ballot which supported Graham for the post of Assemblyman was of questionable origin because it was sponsored by the Law Enforcement League of St. Croix County.¹⁰ But more importantly, it was Minier's belief that the Law Enforcement League was composed of members of the

⁸New Richmond News, October 27, p. 1.

⁹Petition of Ethan B. Minier to Governor John J. Blaine, November 11, 1926, Correspondence Relative to Request that Investigation be had to determine whether or not Corrupt Practice law of this State was violated by R. M. Graham of St. Croix County, Corrupt Practice Act Violations Investigation, Executive Department, Administration, Investigation of Charges, Surveys, Relief, Disasters and Social Unrest, 1926-1927, Series No. 1/1/8-1, Box No. 30, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Archives Division, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as CPL), p. 1. Minier based his arguments on Sections 12.22 and 12.24 of the Wisconsin Statutes for 1923.

¹⁰Ibid.

Ku Klux Klan of St. Croix County and "....that the candidates endorsed by said so-called Law Enforcement League were members of or favorable to the principles of the Ku Klux Klan."¹¹

It was then charged that Graham was a member of the Klan. Not only had Klan members circulated the ticket, stated Minier, but a good many of the spurious ballots had found their way into nearly every polling booth in the county on the morning of the election.¹² Minier continued to the effect that Graham and several individuals unknown to the petitioner were in complete charge of procuring and circulating the ballots.

Moreover, Minier's opponent was alleged to have personally delivered one of the ballots to a W. A. Lamb at the Glenwood City Fair in August, explaining to Lamb that "'You may be surprised to see the name of Norman Larson on this ticket, but he is all right now.'"¹³ Continuing, the defeated Assemblyman alleged that his opponent owed his election to the circulation of the ballot in question. Minier then noted that, during the primary campaign, he had resolutely denounced the principles of the Klan.¹⁴

¹¹Petition of Ethan B. Minier to Governor John J. Blaine, November 11, 1926, CPI, p. 2.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

As to the printing and circulation of the ballots, it was believed that these actions were in violation of the Corrupt Practice Act because the tickets failed to show both the name and address of the author and publisher. Reiterating a previous charge, Minier stated that "....in truth and in fact, the Law Enforcement League and the Ku Klux Klan are identical but that the Ku Klux Klan and its officers did not dare to show their true colors."¹⁵ The Law Enforcement League was supposedly derelict in its duty for its failure to file with the St. Croix County Clerk a statement totaling its disbursements expended during the course of the late campaign.

Immediately following the primary, stated Minier, the matter of the counterfeit ballot was brought to the attention of William R. Kirk, District Attorney for St. Croix County. The Assemblyman claimed that he demanded Kirk take immediate action on the matter to determine whether the Corrupt Practices Act had been violated. Kirk was said to have refused this request. It was then noted that the District Attorney's name had appeared on the ballot.¹⁶ Evidence of a sufficient nature, said Minier, would be available to show that Graham was present at the meeting held in Roberts wherein the candidates shown on the ticket

¹⁵Petition of Ethan B. Minier to Governor John J. Blaine, November 11, 1926, CPI, p. 3.

¹⁶Ibid.

were endorsed by the Klan.¹⁷ The remainder of the petition was a repetition of previous charges.

The petition to Blaine requesting permission to commence court action against the Klan was enclosed in an additional communication to the Governor. In his letter, Minier stated that in addition to what was alleged in the petition, he had proof positive that many Klansmen in his part of St. Croix County were involved in the distribution of the spurious ballot. Furthermore, the Assemblyman knew "....where they had the meeting where they framed up this ticket. It was in Roberts, Graham's own town."¹⁸ It was the petitioners's belief that once the electorate was cognizant of what he was attempting to accomplish, further light would be shed on the matter.

The affiant further contended that the ticket's sponsors were as bitter toward the Governor as they were to him. Nothing would "....tend to discredit them more than a successful prosecution of this case."¹⁹ Minier also related that he knew where the ticket had been printed. It was asserted that an individual by the name of Chinnoek, who had a print shop in River Falls, not only printed the ballot,

¹⁷Petition of Ethan B. Minier to Governor John J. Blaine, November 11, 1926, CPL, p. 3.

¹⁸Letter of Ethan B. Minier to John J. Blaine, November 11, 1926, John J. Blaine Papers, Wis., Mss. Fl, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Blaine Papers), Box 59.

¹⁹Ibid.

but was engaged by the Klan to do all of its print work.²⁰

Should the Governor deign to permit a commencement of the suit, Minier stated that a Dan Grady would be his first choice for counsel. Were Grady not able to act on behalf of the plaintiff, Ferris White, an attorney at River Falls, would be the other alternative.²¹ Minier believed that this case would make an excellent testing ground as to the viability of the Corrupt Practices Act. In a postscript, the Assemblyman exclaimed that "I love the Klan as the devil loves holy water."²²

Governor Blaine replied that action could be initiated through application to the County Judge, the Attorney General, or the Governor. However, the law provided that there must be sufficient evidence ".....to show that there is probable cause to believe that such proceeding may be successfully maintained...."²³ Furthermore, it was pointed out that the court proceedings would be only of an investigatory nature. If the Court found that the Corrupt Practices Act had indeed been violated, it was to certify such findings to the Secretary of State who in turn was to notify the proper legislative body. The Court, said Blaine, did not have the power to render a binding decision and

²¹Minier to Blaine, November 11, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

²²Ibid.

²³Letter of John J. Blaine to Ethan B. Minier November 19, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59

declare the election void.²⁴ Blaine then proceeded to explain that the Wisconsin constitution "....provided that each house shall be the judge of the election, returns and qualifications of its own members."²⁵ In previous cases of a similar nature, the courts had consistently upheld this provision of Wisconsin's constitution.

In his concluding remarks, the Governor explained that initiation of court action in Minier's case would be futile, particularly so as "....such special proceedings would present purely a moot question and the court's findings would be purely advisory."²⁶ The court, in all probability, would not deign to undertake jurisdiction in this matter. It was the Governor's belief that such proceeding would not be successfully maintained against Graham especially as the charges were brought forth after the election. The nature of the question involved would have been different had the charges been raised prior to the placing of the individual's name upon the ballot. It would then have been a matter of deciding whether the candidate was entitled to have his name placed on the ballot prior to the election. "I am...."said the Governor, "....compelled, as a matter of law, and in the belief that such proceeding cannot be successfully

²⁴Blaine to Minier, November 19, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59..

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

maintained, to deny the application."²⁷ Upon a momentary change of mind, the Governor sent Minier a telegram to the effect that reconsideration of the denial might be in order.²⁸

In expressing pleasure over Blaine's change of mind, the defeated candidate remarked that he could "....certainly raise hell with that Klan....I am sure I can make it hot for the outfit."²⁹ Minier requested anew that Dan Grady be appointed as counsel. Ferris White was again mentioned as second choice in this regard.

The choice for counsel fell upon Ferris White of River Falls.³⁰ Explaining the circumstances surrounding Minier's petition, the Governor stated that it was his desire to appoint a competent attorney in Western Wisconsin to act on this matter. Blaine wanted to know whether White wished to act on this matter. Upon receipt of Blaine's communication, White telegraphed the Governor that he would "....act as requested if appointment necessary."³¹

Upon being advised that Attorney White would accept

²⁷ Blaine to Minier, November 19, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

²⁸ Telegram of John J. Blaine to Ethan B. Minier, November 20, 1926, CPI.

²⁹ Letter of Ethan B. Minier to John J. Blaine, November 20, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

³⁰ Letter of John J. Blaine to Ferris White, November 22, 1926, CPI.

³¹ Telegram of Ferris M. White to John J. Blaine, November 23, 1926, CPL.

the appointment were he requested to, Governor Blaine enclosed Minier's petition in a letter which detailed more fully his position in the matter. Explaining that he did not "...want to shunt this over to you until you have considered some legal propositions which I think are very important", the Governor delimited the Court's course of action.³² The case of "State v. Board of Canvasser's, 36 Wis. 498" was cited as a prime example of the Court upholding the constitutional provision that "...each house shall be the judge of the election, returns and qualifications of its own members."³³

Repeating earlier forebodings, Blaine remarked that the case involved a moot question and that, under the circumstances, any litigation engaged in might prove to be futile.³⁴ The problem here was that Graham had been duly

³²Letter of John J. Blaine to Ferris H. White, November 24, 1926, CPL.

³³Ibid. The provision referred to is Section 7 of Article IV of the Wisconsin Constitution.

³⁴Ibid. Blaine further contended that "some states, among them Massachusetts, have authorized courts to give the legislature an advisory opinion with respect to some particular legislation, involving its validity or invalidity. This is not analogous to that situation, however, as the Legislative body that has the special power to determine the qualification of its own members hasn't asked the court for an advisory opinion, nor has it given the court any authority to render to it an advisory opinion. Our law is a general law, but under the constitutional provision cited, the question is, would the court take jurisdiction?"

elected. As was explained to Minier, the real question involved surrounded the validity of the ballot. Had the complaint been made prior to the placing of Graham's name on the ballot, the probability of making a case would have been high as the question would then be whether Graham was entitled to have his name on the ballot.³⁵

Blaine noted that he did not desire to request an attorney to undertake such litigation unless he was convinced that the court not only had jurisdiction but that it could exercise that jurisdiction.³⁶ The Governor frankly admitted that there was grave doubt in his mind as to the validity of Minier's claim.³⁷ No opinion was asked of the Attorney General as it was his policy to "....presume an act valid unless it is clearly held to be invalid."³⁸ All the Attorney General could advise, said Blaine, was that the Governor "....ought not to authorize an extraordinary proceeding" if it were his belief that the petition could not be upheld because of the probable invalidity of the appropriate section of the Corrupt Practices Act as it

³⁵Blaine to White, November 24, 1926, CPL.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

pertained to this issue.³⁹

The rationale behind Blaine's presentation was that he desired White to get the Governor's view of the problem "....before getting you into something where you might feel the prospects of success were extremely doubtful."⁴⁰ Before Blaine rendered a final decision, he wanted White's opinion of the prospects for success in the Minier matter. In conclusion, the Governor said that "I might add that I haven't examined the details of the petition from the standpoint of whether or not it presents facts which, if true, would constitute a violation of the law. It probably does."⁴¹

Ferris White concurred with the Governor's opinion that the court was without jurisdiction. The key to this was Section 7, Article IV of the Wisconsin constitution which provided that "....'each house shall be the judge of the elections, returns and qualifications of its own members.'"⁴² Furthermore, Section 8 of Article VIII provided that "'the circuit courts shall have jurisdiction in all matters civil and criminal within this state, not excepted in the constitution.'"⁴³ This meant that the

³⁹Blaine to White, November 24, 1926, CPI.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Letter of Ferris M. White to John J. Blaine, November 27, 1926, CPI.

⁴³Ibid.

courts could not exercise jurisdiction in a case such as Minier's. White noted that the State of Montana had a corrupt practice law similar to Wisconsin's vis-a-vis Sections 12.22 to 12.24 inclusive. By way of citing precedent, White stated that in a case similar to Minier's, a Montana court, in a clear cut opinion, held that state's corrupt practice law to be of no effect and unconstitutional.⁴⁴ White also agreed with the Governor that had "...the petitioner...proceeded in the proper jurisdiction before the election to restrain the placing of Graham's name on the ballot the court would have had jurisdiction."⁴⁵ Blaine agreed that White was correct in his opinion, thus giving the Governor no basis on which to initiate a full scale investigation into Minier's complaint.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Minier was getting rather anxious. Time was getting short and if a case were to be made it would have to be done quickly else all would be lost. In an early December letter to the Governor, the Assemblyman let it be known that he had submitted a copy of the petition to Attorney Dan H. Grady. According to Minier, Grady

⁴⁴White to Blaine, November 27, 1926, CPI. The case cited was State ex rel Smith y District Court 50 Montana 134.

⁴⁵Ibid. The precedent cited in this case was State ex rel McAvoy y Gilliam 60 Wash. 420.

⁴⁶Letter of John J. Blaine to Ferris M. White, November 30, 1926, CPI.

"....knew of no reason why he could not give the matter his personal attention."⁴⁷ Minier was convinced that Grady would act as counsel. Furthermore, said Minier, "I am also convinced that Mr. Grady, from reading the petition, believes I have a good case or he would not have suggested he would give the matter his personal attention if anything developed."⁴⁸ As far as Minier was concerned, he and the Governor were in the same political boat with regard to political affairs in St. Croix County. As such, there was everything to gain by the initiation of such a suit.

A note of opportunism, however, comes through in Minier's letter. "The way I read the law...." said the Assemblyman,

is that if the court finds Graham guilty of violating the Corrupt Practice Act he so reports to the secy of state, the secretary of state then reports the findings to the chief clerk of the Assembly and then the Assembly may seat or unseat Graham. If he is unseated and a special election is ordered I will again be a candidate and can win. Graham would be disqualified from running at a special election.⁴⁹

Minier again urged the Governor to act quickly and favorably stating that he had inferred from Blaine's telegram that his previous opinion would be reversed.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Letter of Ethan B. Minier to John J. Blaine, December 1, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 60.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

Unfortunately for Minier, the Governor's decision was not of a welcome nature. Noting that copy of White's opinion was enclosed, Blaine stated that no action could be taken.⁵¹ Launching into a discussion of the provisions of Sections 12.22 and 12.24 of the Corrupt Practices Act and the appropriate provisions of Wisconsin's constitution--to the effect that the courts had no jurisdiction in the matter--Blaine noted that court action would be futile as the matter was of a non-juridical nature.⁵² What Minier should have done was to contest Graham's name being placed on the ballot prior to the election. Under the present legal circumstances, the Governor had no choice but to deny Minier's petition.⁵³

To say the least, Minier was rather surprised by the Governor's reply. This is evidenced by the rather bitter remarks in Minier's reply. The Assemblyman complained to the extent that if it was too late to file the complaint, just when was the appropriate time? If this was the case, said Minier, then the Corrupt Practices Act was, for all intents and purposes, meaningless. Pointing an accusing finger at the Governor, the defeated candidate reminded Blaine that "as a member of the state senate in 1911 when

⁵¹Letter of John J. Blaine to Ethan B. Minier, November 30, 1926, CPI.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

this law was enacted you should have discovered that such a law would violate the provision of the constitution regarding legislative bodies being the sole judge of its members."⁵⁴ Still, it was Minier's belief that the law did not infringe on the constitutional rights of the legislative bodies particularly because the court would not hand down a decision which would serve to oust a member-elect. Nothing prevented the Governor from initiating such proceedings as the final decision making power rested with the Assembly. "That...." said Minier, "....is what the law plainly states and to argue anything else seems to me to be pure subterfuge."⁵⁵ In closing, Minier insisted that Attorney Grady's decision would have been the reverse of White's. Minier then requested the Governor to submit the petition to Grady stating that he would be satisfied if it were Grady's belief that a case could not be made.⁵⁶

Blaine's reply was not long in coming. "Replying to your favor of December 11th, beg to state that during my six years as Governor it has not been my purpose to attempt to satisfy any individual's personal grievances. I am, therefore, not concerned whether an individual is satisfied or not."⁵⁷ Blaine stated that it had been consistently his

⁵⁴Letter of Ethan B. Minier to John J. Blaine, December 11, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 60.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Letter of John J. Blaine to Ethan B. Minier, December 14, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 60.

policy to fulfill the requirements.

As to the matter of that part of the Corrupt Practices Act dealing with election of members to the legislature being invalid, this was not a recent discovery. Referring to Grady's position on the matter, Blaine stated that "I am very happy to know that Mr. Grady on December 10th last wrote me as follows: 'I agree with your conclusions as to the unconstitutionality of the provisions of the Corrupt Practice Act insofar as it affects legislative offices.'"⁵⁸

Blaine further contended that "if a Legislative body in all cases discovered that an act violated the inhibitions of the Constitution, and then eliminated the unconstitutional provisions, such Legislative body would have reached close to the ideal of perfection."⁵⁹ And: "Legislative bodies not having reached that ideal of perfection, executive officers and courts in the execution of the law are not warranted in attempting to execute a law that is clearly invalid."⁶⁰ As far as John J. Blaine was concerned, the Ethan Minier affair was closed.

There is however, a short postscript to the affair. The erstwhile Assemblyman presented a petition to the State Assembly in which the expulsion of Graham was requested.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Elaine to Minier, December 24, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 60.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Milwaukee Journal as appeared in the Baldwin Bulletin, February 4, 1927, p. 1.

In spite of this, Graham was seated and served out his entire term.⁶² Viewing this affair, one journalist was moved to remark that "every knock is a boost for Graham--especially from a defeated political opponent. The affair would undoubtedly be cheap and valuable publicity for Graham. If Gov. Blaine refused to act it is a sure bet Minier's arguments will last about like a snow storm in June."⁶³

As to the Ku Klux Klan having any lasting influence in the political fortunes of St. Croix County, the following can be noted. By the end of 1926, the Klan was well on the wane as an activist force. The election of 1926 may have seen Klan influence on the local political level in St. Croix County, but the election of 1928 was another story. Neither Robert M. Graham nor Ethan B. Minier were to appear again as state legislators from St. Croix County.⁶⁴

⁶²"Biographical," The Wisconsin Blue Book, 1927 (Madison: State Printing Board, 1927), p. 721.

⁶³"Editor's Notes," The Baldwin Bulletin, op. cit., p. 10.

⁶⁴Subsequent inspection of The Wisconsin Blue Book reveals that neither Graham nor Minier held the office of State Senator or Assemblyman. According to the Legislative Reference Bureau (in a personal letter dated January 13, 1971). "...we can find no record of the action you mention in your correspondence. The 'Bulletin of Proceedings of the 1927 Wisconsin Legislature' contains no proposals regarding Mr. Minier's claim, and consequently, the matter did not formally come before the Assembly. Also, in checking our newspaper collection for that year, we can find no mention of such action."

Chapter 8

PIERCE COUNTY KLONCAVES

River Falls and Ellsworth were two of the more important areas of Klan activity in Pierce County. News items relating to the Klan first appeared in September of 1925. Taking a winter hiatus, the Klan reemerged in the Spring of 1926 as a factor in the life of both communities. Campaigning briefly in River Falls, the main focus of Klan activities was centered in Ellsworth for the duration of the summer. Polarization over the organization was particularly evident in Ellsworth. This divisiveness resulted in the sensational yellow fringe controversy.¹ Community disruption was primarily actuated during the Klan's presence. However, the Klan ceased to be news after 1926 for several reasons. The more important consideration to be noted is that the Klan was somewhat discredited by the flag controversy. Also, the Klan organizers removed themselves from the scene after the Fall of 1926.²

¹The yellow fringe flag controversy refers to the confrontation which resulted out of the Klan's objection to the standard regimental flag of the United States. The details of the Klan-Ellsworth American Legion affair at the 1926 Pierce County Fair are related in Chapter Nine.

²Letter of Father J. F. Shanaghy to John J. Blaine, November 5, 1926, John J. Blaine Papers, Wis., Mss., PI, The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Blaine Papers), Box 59. The Klan tabernacle was removed to the Town of El Paso.

Residents of Ellsworth and environs were informed that a Dr. T. J. Connors would discuss the Ku Klux Klan in that village on September 15, 1925.³ Dr. Connors, an optometrist practicing in Plum City, came to Wisconsin from Texas where he had the opportunity of viewing the activities of the Ku Klux Klan on a first hand basis.⁴ Explaining that Connors would discuss the Klan as it really was, an invitation was extended to "...come whether you are Jew, Gentile, Protestant or Catholic. Nothing but the facts will be stated."⁵

At the appointed time, there assembled a large crowd in front of the Court House. Speaking on the Court House Square, Connors, a Protestant, lashed out against the Kluxers.⁶ There were many sympathizers in attendance. One Klansman, after several cries for a debate, also addressed the crowd. That the meeting aroused a great deal of interest was demonstrated by a number of groups discussing the matter until eleven o'clock that night.⁷

The Ben Maynard farm was the site of the early Klan meetings in the Ellsworth area. Pat Malone was billed as a feature attraction.⁸ Large numbers were attracted to the

³Pierce County Herald, September 10, 1925, p. 1.

⁴Pierce County Herald, September 24, 1925, p. 1.

⁵Pierce County Herald, September 19, 1925, p. 1.

⁶Pierce County Herald, September 24, 1925, p. 1.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ellsworth Record, September, 24, 1925. p. 1.

Klan's last September meeting--so much so that the capacity of the tent was taxed to the limit.⁹ Though Organizer C. P. Gaede refused to divulge the number of new initiates, spectators gave the count at 150 men and women. Those Klan meetings held in October were open only to members and new candidates.¹⁰

The final Ellsworth Klan conclave for 1925 was held on Monday, October fifth. At this meeting, there was initiated a large class and officers were elected for the Pierce County Klavern. There would, however, be a future meeting convened at Beldenville. A speaker of national prominence would be present. Though the Klan meetings were officially at an end in Ellsworth, the organizer said he would remain in the territory until the Klan was recruited to full strength.¹¹

Klan meetings commenced at River Falls in October of 1925 and were to continue for a period of two weeks. Held at the River Falls Armory, the meetings were under the direction of Organizer Gaede. Pat Malone was scheduled to make an appearance sometime during this period.¹² In the meantime, the Wisconsin Adjutant General ordered the Klan out of the National Guard Armory. The Kluxers were barred

⁹River Falls Journal, October 1, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰Pierce County Herald, October 1, 1925, p. 1.

¹¹Ellsworth Record, October 8, 1925, p. 1.

¹²Pierce County Herald, October 22, 1925, p. 1.

from future use of this facility. Transferring its activities to the Odd Fellows Hall, the Klan published and circulated a poster which charged the denial of free speech.¹³ This was the last of the River Falls Klan activities for the year 1925.

River Falls experienced a heavy snowfall during the first half of March 1926. Despite the fact that the city received twelve inches on Saturday, March sixth, a crew of fifty Kluxers embarked upon the construction of a Klan tabernacle in the Brooklyn Heights section of the town. The majority of the construction crew was said to have come from Ellsworth. Completion of the building was being rushed inasmuch as the Klan revival meetings were scheduled to begin the following week. Circulars billing Pat Malone as a leading Klan organizer in Wisconsin advertised that the agitator was to be the principal speaker at the convocations.¹⁴

Klan activities became rather boisterous in River Falls on the night of April third. Illuminating bombs, fired from the vicinity of the tabernacle, were exploded over the city at frequent intervals. A twenty foot cross was also burned. Though late in the evening, many townspeople assembled on the streets in expectation of a Klan Parade. The parade, however, was not staged.

¹³River Falls Journal, October 22, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁴River Falls Journal, March 11, 1926, p. 1.

William T. Doar, an attorney at New Richmond later received word of the Klan's Saturday night activities. In writing to Governor John J. Blaine, Doar explained that

the Ku Klux Klan burned a large cross at about 10:30 and at the same time some bombs were shot off which made a great deal of noise.

I have also been informed that one of the participants, and in fact a ring leader, was Sheriff Frank Baker of Pierce County. I am informed by non-Catholics that he was present at the meeting and called upon those present to show their Americanism by joining the Klan and is generally one of the ring leaders.

So far as his joining the Klan is concerned I have no objection to that, or of anyone else joining, but it seems to me that the Sheriff of any county should not take part in the burning of a cross and the shooting of bombs to the disturbance of the peace and quiet of a neighborhood.

Doar reported the incident in the hope that Governor Blaine would conduct an investigation and take any necessary action should the circumstances warrant it.¹⁵

Governor Blaine replied that he knew the Klan was quite active in Pierce County--especially in River Falls where they "....erected some building in which they have meetings and in which some imposter speaks." As to Sheriff Baker's involvement in Klan activities, the Governor related that he

....saw Attorney Patterson of Durand yesterday and asked him to see if he couldn't get me some information on the sheriff's action. You no doubt know him, and you may also realize that it is pretty hard to find out from

¹⁵Letter of William T. Doar to John J. Blaine, April 5, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54.

anyone in River Falls about those matters. It wouldn't do to write to the sheriff, I am sure, but I am in hopes that Patterson will be able to run across someone who can get some specific facts.

In any event, wrote the Governor, the Sheriff had no right to participate in a demonstration that was a breach of the peace--nor did he have the right to cause such demonstrations.¹⁶ Replying to the Governor, Attorney Doar believed there would be no difficulty in "...getting non-Catholics to testify that the Sheriff was taking part in these demonstrations." Doar said he would look into the matter the next time he went to River Falls.¹⁷

The most sensational event to occur in River Falls in relation to the Klan was the Emil E. Holmes-Pat Malone debate. Holmes, active in Minnesota politics and president of the World War Veterans Association, first came to River Falls on Monday, April fifth. What was described as a monster crowd assembled near the City Hall to hear Holmes deliver an anti-Klan speech. Holmes issued a challenge to Pat Malone to debate on the question of the Klan's Americanism. Posters were already circulated about the city announcing that the debate would be held on Friday evening, April ninth. "Prospects of such a debate....aroused

¹⁶Letter of John J. Blaine to William T. Doar, April 6, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54.

¹⁷Letter of William T. Doar to John J. Blaine, April 9, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54

considerable interest throughout the community.¹⁸ There were doubts as to whether the Armory would hold a fraction of the expected crowds. A Klansman assured the local paper that Malone would meet Holmes in debate.¹⁹

The Malone-Holmes debate took place as scheduled. However, the debate was held in the Klan tabernacle and not in the National Guard Armory as previously advertised.

¹⁸River Falls Journal, April 8, 1926, p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid. The remarks in regard to Holmes speaking on behalf of the Knights of Columbus are interesting in view of Father Peter Rice's testimony as narrated in Chapter six. It will be remembered that Father Rice received posters of a similar nature--with the exception that the posters gave the impression that Holmes was the priests' representative. The posters, ordered by Pat Malone and printed by Rod Chinnok of River Falls, "....also contained uncomplimentary references to certain individuals." (River Falls Journal, July 1, 1926, p. 1.

The Pierce County Herald of April 8, 1926, had the following to say: "Ellsworth was plentifully sprinkled with posters Sunday morning, announcing that Pat Malone, Klan leader, had challenged Emil Holmes, who came to River Falls to speak in the interests of the Knights of Columbus, to debate at River Falls." (Pierce County Herald April 8, 1926, p. 4.)

As seen in Chapter Six, the uncomplimentary remarks were directed at the local Catholic priests. Either way, the Pierce County Herald was misinformed. In its April 15, 1926 issue, the Herald published the following retraction: "The Herald was misinformed regarding the item published last week about the debate scheduled for Friday night at River Falls. We stated that...Holmes would speak in the interests of the Knights of Columbus. We are informed that ...Holmes is not a member of that order and that the K. of C. had nothing to do with bringing him to River Falls." (Pierce County Herald, April 15, 1926, p. 1.)

By the early afternoon of April ninth, hundreds from River Falls and surrounding communities had besieged the Klan tabernacle. Though the debate was still hours away, the tabernacle was filled to capacity. As for the remainder of the crowd "only a small portion...was able to gain admittance; hundreds massed about the building trying to listen through the doorways and even the tar paper was torn from the outside so that eager listeners might peep or listen through cracks in the siding." The crowd was described as being orderly. It was a "....splendid testimonial to the character of the individuals present that there wasn't a single instance of rowdyism or uncontrollable mob impulse displayed." As to the outcome of the debate, both sides were satisfied and continued to retain their respective viewpoints.²⁰

Governor Blaine himself was soon informed of this debate. Writing from Minneapolis on April sixteenth, Emil Holmes explained that Malone made various statements which could be taken into court. Holmes offered to take Malone into court if the Wisconsin Attorney General would cooperate. Among Malone's charges was that the Governor led the Wisconsin bootleg ring. Also charged with violation of the Eighteenth Amendment was Archbishop Messmer of Milwaukee. There were, wrote Holmes, "....many other statements made but not so direct that he could be held for

²⁰River Falls Journal, April 15, 1926, p. 1.

libel." Blaine only had to give the word and Holmes would sign the complaint and produce a number of witnesses who were in attendance at the debate.²¹

Governor Blaine replied that

....Pat Malone is a blatant representative of the Ku Klux Klan, and has about as much influence as the cave man of a few thousand years ago, and I certainly would not dignify him nor furnish him with free publicity, so far as I am concerned.

Any person who is willing to pay \$10 or \$15 to hear lies and believe them, will be just as willing to believe lies that such person may receive free of charge. However, there are very few credulous people in Wisconsin, and with respect to the Ku Klux Klan, this has been demonstrated repeatedly.

The Klan is an organization of organized hate and hatred, and they have been successfully beaten back in this state and have no standing and little influence.²²

Shortly after the Malone-Holmes debate, the series of Klan meetings held at the River Falls tabernacle were concluded.²³ Pat Malone, who had been in charge of the meetings, was scheduled to conduct a similar series at Oshkosh. The Klan tabernacle was to be dismantled and

²¹Letter of Emil E. Holmes to John J. Blaine, April 16, Blaine Papers, Box 54.

²²Letter of John J. Blaine to Emil E. Holmes, April 16, 1926, Blaine Papers., Box 54.

²³River Falls Journal, April 15, 1926, p. 1. The meetings concluded on Sunday, April eleventh. While at River Falls, Pat Malone was said to be accompanied by a bodyguard whenever walking the streets of that city. (Personal Letter of the Honorable Marshall Norseng to John A. Turcheneske, Jr., October 19, 1970.) Judge Norseng (Chippewa County Court, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin) lived in River Falls until 1929.

removed to Beldenville. Klan meetings were scheduled to be held in the Beldenville area throughout the summer.

Klan activity commenced anew at Ellsworth on Friday, April second. It was at this time that Ellsworth citizens witnessed their first Klan Parade. Ninety-seven robed men and women marched to services at the local Methodist Episcopal Church. "The marching delegation was headed by three men carrying large American flags. Next came a little girl carrying a small flag, then a large number of women, with the men bringing up the rear. Everybody in line was masked with the exception of one man. All wore the Klan uniform." Special services were conducted by a Reverend Benson with the choir rendering music specially arranged for the occasion. Evidently, word was passed around about the forthcoming parade. For "....a crowd that almost rivaled that at a circus parade, turned out." There were many individuals present from out of town.²⁴

Governor Blaine soon received information that a Klan tabernacle was to be erected in or near Ellsworth. In his letter to the Governor, John Fox, of Beldenville, asked: "Have the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan a right to run down the Catholic Church and other organizations and call them UnAmerican. And have they the right to parade with their robes and masks on in a village or small town?" Fox said that he was sending Blaine a Kluxer handbill which described

²⁴Pierce County Herald, April 8, 1926, p. 1.

part of the Klan program.²⁵ Also, wrote Fox, Catholic priests were not permitted to debate with Pat Malone. In regard to Malone, Fox explained that the agitator was "....telling that he got the permit from Mr. Blaine to build tabernacles and go on with speeches.²⁶" Fox requested the Governor answer as there were many people anxious to hear Blaine's position on the matter.

Ellsworth area Klan meetings were first staged in the transported tabernacle on Sunday, May second. The tabernacle was located east of Ellsworth on the Ellis Uppingham farm.²⁷ Pat Malone was the featured speaker on Monday evening. "The crowd, which came from far and near, packed the building to overflowing and many people were unable to gain admittance. Large posters announcing the event were broadcast.²⁸ Malone returned to Oshkosh immediately thereafter. Organizer J. H. Neff was to conduct the remainder to the Spring meetings. The tabernacle, erected by a large crew, was previously used at River Falls, The building was to be removed from Ellsworth upon the

²⁵Letter of John Fox to John J. Blaine, April 29, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54. The handbill in question was not in the Blaine collection. Inasmuch as the Iconographic Department of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin is in a state of reorganization, the handbill was not able to be located.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ellsworth Record, May 6, 1926, p. 1.

²⁸Pierce County Herald, May 6, 1926, p. 1.

conclusion of the Fall series of meetings.²⁹

John Fox of Beldenville soon received a reply from the Governor. Blaine said he understood that Malone spent a large proportion of his time "....at these Klan meetings, denouncing Governor Blaine and Archbishop Mesmer, and devotes considerable of his time to the Catholic church and other organizations." Malone might be a blatant representative of the Klan, but his influence was not as great as some might think. Though the hooded order was described as an organization of haters, the Governor explained that "....the Klan has been successfully beaten back in this state and has no standing and little influence, so whatever Malone may say, I doubt if anyone needs to let it disturb them, for it certainly cannot influence anybody who has very good judgement."³⁰

As far as Blaine was concerned, "anybody has a right to parade in robes and masks, providing that they do so peaceably, but if any criminal act should be done by anyone who is masked, then a double penalty is imposed under law." Blaine wrote that he himself had not seen nor heard Malone—or any other Klansman for that matter. "They surely never heard from me....." said the Governor. The "....only

²⁹ Ellsworth Record, May 6, 1926, p. 1.

³⁰ Letter of John J. Blaine to John Fox, May 3, 1926, Blaine Papers. Box 54.

information...I have that there was a Klan tabernacle built near Ellsworth is your letter." The Governor did promise to look into the matter by alerting the Pierce County District Attorney.³¹

Theodore A. Waller, Pierce County District Attorney, received a letter from Blaine directing him to report the names of those responsible for building the tabernacle. As the building was supposedly constructed of inflammable material, the District Attorney was also to assist "...the Industrial Commission to ascertain the violations of law and bring actions to enforce the penalties for the violation, for each and every person liable therefor, for each and every day that the offense was committed."³² Waller replied that the Governor was correctly informed with regard to the Ellsworth Klan tabernacle. The District Attorney suggested that

....the sheriff of Pierce County is in possession of considerable information as to the erection of these buildings, as well as to the parties who conducted the meetings, and under whose authority these meetings are held. I am wondering if it would not be a good idea to write the sheriff, Frank L. Baker, a letter similar to the one you wrote to me on May 3rd. Suggest to him that he lay all these facts before me, and I can assure you that you will have my co-operation at all times in seeing that the orders of the Industrial Commission and the Building code... are carried out.

Waller requested that Blaine send ^{him} a copy of the letter to the Sheriff "....so that I will know that you have written

³¹Blaine to Fox, May 3, 1926, Box 54.

³²Letter of John J. Blaine to Theodore A. Waller, May 3, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54.

to him...."³³ In the meantime, Waller said he would request the appropriate regulations from the Wisconsin Industrial Commission.³⁴

Governor Blaine did contact Sheriff Baker in regard to the poorly constructed tabernacle. Blaine directed the Sheriff to ascertain the organization and the individuals who were responsible for the tabernacle's erection and to

³³Letter of Theodore A. Waller to John J. Blaine, May 5, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54.

³⁴Ibid. Waller did contact the Industrial Commission. As the Klan was also accused of erecting a building lacking proper heating, ventilation and sanitation facilities, the District Attorney requested additional information as to the appropriate measures relating to these matters. (Letter of Theodore A. Waller to Industrial Commission, May 5, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54.)

In the meantime, Governor Blaine contacted the Industrial Commission himself. Enclosing copies of letters to the District Attorneys of Winnebago, Barron and Pierce Counties, the Governor wrote that it was his understanding that the Klan tabernacles were "...constructed of the most inflammable material, and most dangerous to the public who frequent them. This is a matter to which I called your attention, through your secretary, in the absence of the Commissioners, a long time ago. Of course I know the Ku Klux Klan is a powerful organization, but that is no reason why they should be permitted to construct and maintain, not simply a building in technical violation of the Building Code, but a building so constructed as to permit of the most dangerous fire hazard." (Letter of John J. Blaine to Industrial Commission, May 3, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54.)

In relation to the Klan tabernacle located in Winnebago County, the River Falls Journal of May 13, 1926, observed that "Pat Malone's Ku Klux Klan tabernacle, at Oshkosh, similar to the one in which he conducted a month's series of meetings in River Falls recently, has been closed by order of the Governor....The order followed Malone's announcement of an alleged ring of Winnebago County bootleggers, and the Klan organizer says that the Governor is merely trying to play politics by thus catering to the booze peddlers." (River Falls Journal, May 13, 1926, p. 1.)

report the same to District Attorney Waller.³⁵ Enclosing a copy of his letter to the Sheriff, Governor Blaine informed Waller that the matter was being taken up by the Industrial Commission and "....therefore you may await action until I get a report from the Industrial Commission, when I can advise you again." However, the Sheriff was to "....go on and ascertain the facts requested, so that when I receive the report of the Industrial Commission, matters will be available for prosecution according to the report from the Commission."³⁶ However, nothing came of this attempt to shut down the Ellsworth Klan tabernacle. It remained there throughout the Summer and early Fall until it was moved to the Town of El Paso in late October.³⁷

The Ellsworth Klan was next mentioned in August with regard to the arrest of several Minnesota bootleggers. On Sunday, August eighth,

....while Pat Malone was lecturing in the Klan tabernacle at East Ellsworth on the subject "Booze or the Water Wagon" John and Herman Mosher, from Minnesota, formerly of River Falls, drove into the grounds with moonshine in their possession. Evidently they thought they would slip one over on the Klan. Mr. Malone's secret service men were on the job and soon were hot on the trail.

³⁵Letter of John J. Blaine to Frank L. Baker, May 7, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54. This collection does not reveal any response on the part of the Sheriff.

³⁶Letter of John J. Blaine to Theodore A. Waller, May 7, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 54.

³⁷See Shanaghy to Blaine, note 2.

Sheriff Baker made some fast moves to get a search warrant sworn out. Mr. Baker had to drive to River Falls to get the warrant there being no officer in Ellsworth at home. He returned just as the Mosher's were about to leave. The car and men were thoroughly searched; three bottles found in the apparel of the two men. They were immediately taken to the county jail in that city to await trial. The wives of these men spoke of the humiliation of being searched before hundreds of people. If only a few more were humiliated perhaps we wouldn't have so much of this rotten illegitimate business in our good old United States.³⁸

The Ellsworth Klan tabernacle was again receiving maximum utilization in August. Pat Malone was the main speaker at this series of meetings--a series which was attracting large crowds. Capping the meetings, a two day celebration was scheduled for Friday and Saturday, August thirteenth and fourteenth. Klansmen from all over the northwest were to be in attendance. Pat Malone and Dr. G. Alfred Brown, among others, were to deliver the principal speeches.³⁹

As scheduled, the first annual Ku Klux Klan celebration began on Friday, August thirteenth. Due to inclement weather, Friday's attendance was estimated at only two thousand. The principal speaker on Friday evening was Pat Malone. Malone "....discussed political issues, taking the opportunity to severely score Gov. John J. Blaine, candidate

³⁸Baldwin Bulletin, August 13, 1926, P. 1. It should be noted that this article was not written by the Bulletin. It was handed in for publication--no doubt by a Klansman.

³⁹Ellsworth Record, August 12, 1926, p. 1.

for United States Senator...."40

Another important program feature was the play "Harold the Klansman." This play was

given three times during the celebration and drew packed houses each time. The scene of the play is a country town where a Klan organizer arrives and succeeds in working up a very active interest in his organization. Enemies plot to prevent an organization being formed. The organization thrives, however, in spite of the opposition and in the last act sees the Klan victorious, the election won and the town cleaned up. Organizer Neff and Dr. G. Alfred Brown took prominent parts in the play.41

Saturday, August fourteenth saw a much improved weather situation. The crowds were estimated at being in excess of ten thousand. Except for the Klan initiation and the fireworks, the most important event of the evening was the Klan parade. The parade's line of march began at the Fair grounds. From there it went to Main Street, traveling the full length to the East End and back. "It took 10 minutes for the parade to pass a given point." Most participants wore the Klan regalia.42 One estimate had it that there were seven hundred individuals participating in the parade.43

The composition of the parade deserves mention.

"Heading the parade were two Klansmen carrying the colors. Pat Malone followed on horseback, and then came the

⁴⁰Ellsworth Record, August 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Pierce County Herald, August 19, 1926. p. 1. The Ellsworth Record published an estimate of 500 participants.

Menomonie band. Following were Klansmen and Klanswomen ...marching two abreast. At intervals were Klansmen mounted on horses. Altogether there were about 60 mounted members of that order."⁴⁴

There were also a number of floats in the parade. The floats "....carried the name of the town or county represented. Among these were Menomonie, Boyceville, River Falls, Ellsworth, St. Paul, Dunn County, Wis., and Washington, Goodhue and Wabasha Counties in Minnesota."⁴⁵ Among the float entries were "White Supremacy," "Uncle Sam," "The Little Red School House" and "The Goddess of Liberty."⁴⁶ The feature float appeared to be "The Little Red School House." However, the float "White Supremacy" attracted a great deal of attention. This float depicted a "....minister marrying a white girl and a Negro. The float carried the slogan, 'We do not stand for this.'"⁴⁷ Also to be seen were several choirs singing hymns and Klan songs. The choirs were riding on several trucks provided for their use in the parade.⁴⁸

The grand finale of the weekend festivities was the

⁴⁴Ellsworth Record, August 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁵Pierce County Herald, August 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁶Ellsworth Record, August 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁷Pierce County Herald, August 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁸Ellsworth Record, August 19, 1926, p. 1.

Klan initiation and fireworks. One hundred fifty candidates were initiated into Klan membership. Only one hitch developed during the initiation ceremony. The Kluxers had to do without their fiery cross. "The man sent here to handle the fireworks display drove his truck over one of the guy wires holding the monstrous cross and it toppled over and broke. Described as really wonderful the fireworks not only included bombs and rockets, but also set pieces. Among the set pieces there were such titles as "Andy Gump," and "One Hundred Per Cent American," "Jiggs," "Mounted Klansman" and "American Flag."⁴⁹

One of the more prominent celebrities to appear at the late Summer Ellsworth Klan meetings was Helen Jackson who claimed to be an ex-nun and sought to expose Convent cruelties. In a leaflet distributed to Ellsworth Kluxers, Jackson's book, Convent Cruelties Or My Life In A Convent, was described as an important link of the Protestant reform movement. Billed as the "most thrilling story ever published from personal experience," the work was guaranteed to stir civilized forces toward appropriate action.⁵⁰

Among the leaflet's contents was Jackson's poem, "God Save My Daughter."

⁴⁹Ellsworth Record, August 19, 1926, p. 1.

⁵⁰Helen Jackson Leaflet, Summer 1926, Political File, Area Research Center, Wisconsin State University, River Falls, Wisconsin.

Off in a miners' city
 Sat a mother as she may,
 Bowed down in sadness
 Near the close of day.
 Years have passed in longing,
 That her loved one might come home,
 But all hope has vanished,
 Daughter's face had not shown.

Chorus

Father, wilt thou save her
 From the convent's awful doom,
 Ere my heart is broken,
 Save my daughter, my own.

Deep was the mystery
 Why poor Helen went away,
 Trusting Rome's agents
 One eventful day,
 How the black-robed sisters
 Spoke of life beneath the veil.
 Yes! must be her answer,
 Their will must prevail.

Barred doors and windows,
 With a high wall all around;
 These are the barriers
 Veiling gloom all profound.
 In a dark cell tortured,
 With her hands and feet both bound,
 Praying St. Anthony to save her,
 That for Mother she may be found.

How well I remember
 When mother to me hath said:
 Helen! Helen! You'll be sorry
 For leaving your mother's bed.
 Since then many tears have fallen,
 As I wished for her bread,
 But now hope has vanished,
 For Mother, she is dead.

God save my daughter
 From the nuns and priests of Rome,
 Before they will lie on others
 And ruin many a home.
 Let us, by our ballots,
 Drive this monster from our shore,
 In this land of Freedom,
 SAVE US EVER-MORE.

Father R. J. Fassbender, Pastor of St. Bridget's Catholic Church at River Falls, soon received word of Helen Jackson's activities. In a poster circulated through the area, Father Fassbender charged Jackson with being an imposter. The priest looked up the woman's record and claimed that Jackson never was a Catholic nun. The Pastor said that "Mrs. Jackson's charges and accusations against Catholics in general and priests and nuns in particular, contain no more truth than her claim of having been a nun. No intelligent person can place any reliance on any statement she may make. Her lecturing under false pretences stamps her as a fraud and an imposter." Father Fassbender offered to forfeit five hundred dollars to any individual who could prove that Helen Jackson was indeed what she claimed to be.⁵¹

Helen Jackson was quick to reply. In an open letter to the public, she remarked that the "....public I feel, is unconcerned as to Fr. Fassbender's statement, being based on hearsay and round about statements. Mrs. Jackson is still alive, speaking weekly, telling her true story from the platform. If my story is not true and I am a fraud and imposter, there are courts to handle such cases." Jackson then agreed to forfeit one thousand dollars if Fassbender's statements were true.⁵² The public, however, was never to find out who was correct. The matter was not

⁵¹Pierce County Herald, September 30, 1926, p. 1.

⁵²Pierce County Herald, October 7, 1926, p. 1.

discussed again in either of the two local papers..

A final word in regard to Klan activities in the Ellsworth area concerns the Fall political picture. As to the matter of the Klan being heavily involved in the Fall campaign, O. J. Hohle, Pierce County Clerk, informed Fred M. Wylie (Governor Blaine's assistant) that, so far, all was quiet along the political line. Little was heard from "....the voters so far as to who they will support in the primaries...."⁵³ The Kluxers, however, were said to have a good deal of strength in Pierce County, giving the impression that Senator Irving Lenroot was with the hooded order. Still, the Klan's exertions did not prevent Governor John Blaine being elected to the United States Senate. Indeed, what Klan candidates there supposedly were, were all defeated by Pierce County voters.⁵⁴ Following the yellow fringed flag affair (chapter 9), the Ku Klux Klan no longer made news in the area papers. Here, as elsewhere, the Klan was a dying issue.

⁵³Letter of O. J. Hohle to Fred M. Wylie, July 21, 1926 Blaine Papers, Box 56.

⁵⁴Shanaghy to Blaine, November 5, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59. In writing to Governor Blaine, Father Shanaghy told the Governor that he "....came out victorious. Even in Pierce County you had the American Legion and all Catholics behind you. Also--some sensible men who are not KKK....Our candidates won out here. Klan candidates completely defeated." Shanaghy did not mention as to who the Klan and anti-Klan candidates were. The late election was considered to be the worst blow the Klan had received to date.

Chapter 9

THE SHERIFF AND THE YELLOW FRINGE

Thursday, September 16, 1926, dawned rather gloomily upon Ellsworth and its environs. As the day progressed, the gray and moisture laden skies continued to hover over the village. Enshrouded in an intermittent and misty drizzle, it was not the type of weather to attract a goodly crowd on the opening day of the annual Pierce County Fair. Were one to believe in signs, that Thursday might well be described as lacking in any propitious elements. For one elected official of Pierce County, September sixteenth was to prove a most inauspicious time.

Despite the inclemency of the weather, a fair sized crowd had filtered through the turnstiles. By early afternoon, attendance had grown to an even more respectable size. One of the major attractions was the stock pavilion, though only the first floor devoted to this purpose. The second floor was utilized for such purposes as horticultural, domestic, vegetable and fruit displays. In addition, one of the more prominent Ellsworth organizations, the Eldon C. Kinney Post of the American Legion, had a booth in the midst of this symbolic agricultural abundance. As its principal project, the Legion was offering for sale World War One histories depicting Pierce County men in action.

Unwittingly, the Legion had placed in its booth an attraction which was soon to draw the attention of a most controversial element within the Ellsworth community--the Ku Klux Klan. A gift of the Women's Relief Corps, there stood at the front of the Legion booth an American Flag decorated with yellow fringe. By mid afternoon a hostile crowd gathered demanding that the flag be taken down because, among other things, the yellow fringe was un-American. Not the least involved in this affair was Frank L. Baker, Sheriff of Pierce County. His participation in this episode not only gained the Wisconsin Governor's *attention* and more than county wide notoriety, but also precipitated proceedings which nearly led to the Sheriff's removal.

Though there was discussion of the flag affair from the moment of its occurrence, the episode did not come to light in print until a week later. The Ellsworth Record noted that the late flag fracas at the fairgrounds "...was not one of the advertised attractions."¹ During the Ku Klux Klan-American Legion clash over the gold fringe on the American Flag, it was alleged that Klan members demanded the removal of the Flag in their belief that the fringe was out of place. Refusing to comply with their demand, the Legionnaires continued to display the flag until the closing of the Fair. The evening of the Flag incident, the Legion contacted the Wisconsin Adjutant General and was informed

¹Ellsworth Record, September 23, 1926, p. 1.

"....that the flag was the authorized regimental flag used in every Army post in the country and that the Legion had been given permission to use it by an Act of Congress passed in September of 1920."²

The Pierce County Herald commenced its commentary on the Flag incident to the effect that "....considerable excitement prevailed at the booth of the Eldon C. Kinne Post of the American Legion...when a delegation of men and women, said to be members of the Ku Klux Klan, threatened to take down the Legion colors." Klan members were said to have taken exception to the gold or yellow border on the Legion's Flag. In standing their ground Legionnaires were congratulated for their cool headedness. The colors, it was noted, had been vouched for by the appropriate authorities.³

It should be noted that the color of the fringe was actually yellow. Technically, however, it was called a gold fringe. Thus, as far as Army regulations were concerned, the shade of yellow or gold did not matter as it was still considered to be a gold fringe. As will be seen, the Kluxers literally interpreted the yellow on the fringe.

Roy D. Morton, Post Commander, publicly remarked that the Legion was well aware that the Flag, something which was always in the making, never left the loom of destiny. Woven

²Ellsworth Record, September 23, 1926, p. 1.

³Pierce County Herald, September 23, 1926, p. 1.

into the fabric of this Flag were "....the moral fiber of the Pilgrims, the fighting zeal of the men of Valley Forge, the suffering and sacrifices of those men of '61, the patriotic stewardship of the service men of '98 and the spirit of the men of the World War." Symbolic in the national banner were the people's hopes, aspirations and achievements. Yet, said Morton, "Whatever in people that is base, ignoble and selfish...." was also symbolized in the national emblem. The colors was but a symbol of the real flag that the individual American should carry unblemished.⁴

When an individual or a group threatens this symbol, the threat is not merely against a piece of fabric. In reality what is being attempted is the destruction of the ideals which made the symbol what it is. They not only insult themselves, Morton said, but also served to "....insult the very souls of the men who paid the supreme sacrifice...." Groups engaged in this type of activity were guilty of thwarting the national purpose.⁵

Roy D. Morton called a special meeting of the Eldon C. Kinne Post on Tuesday evening, September twenty-first. Held at the Ellsworth Community Hall, the session concerned itself with the type of action to be taken with regard to those involved in the threat against the national colors. The Post explained that drastic action would be taken, but

⁴Pierce County Herald, September 23, 1926, p. 1.

⁵Ibid.

refused to reveal the nature of its intentions in this regard.⁶ However, the minutes of the Kinne Post's special session reveal the course of action embarked upon. Einer Jurgenson gave a report on a trip to Fort Snelling with the disputed banner, after which Roy Morton stated that "....no one could take exception to our colors."⁷ Morton believed that a certain element in the community was about to challenge not only the disputed emblem, but also the good name of the Legion. A Reverend Garland explained that the regimental colors in question were seen in many instances during the Spanish-American War. After Garland proffered his assistance in the matter, A. B. Lord and Casper Olson rendered a description of the disturbance at the Legion's booth. Roy Morton was given authority to publish for the Post incidents surrounding the Flag episode. It was also decided that Theodore Waller, Roy Morton, and Arthur Quinn would draw up a letter to the Governor stating the Legion's grievances.⁸

There followed a vigorous campaign on the part of the Kinne Post for a full and complete redress of its grievances

⁶Ellsworth Record, September 23, 1926, p. 1.

⁷Minutes of the Eldon C. Kinne Post 204, American Legion, Ellsworth, Wisconsin, September 21, 1926, Mss, AA, I, the Area Research Center, Wisconsin State University, River Falls, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as K.P.M).

⁸Ibid.

in the matter of the Flag incident. Sworn out on September twenty-first was a complaint by the Village Chief of Police, Adolph C. Olson, which alleged that "...he heard the Sheriff of Pierce County, Frank L. Baker order the American Legion boys...to remove their colors because it had a yellow fringe and to replace it with the regular American Flag."⁹ This complaint was enclosed in a letter of explanation to Governor John J. Blaine. The committee established to contact the Governor explained in their letter that the Flag was the regular Regimental Headquarters Colors--red, white and blue with a gold fringe. Referring to the disturbance at the Fair, the committee stated that "the gold fringe was taken exception to by several individuals among whom was the Sheriff of our County, Frank L. Baker, who inquired what the yellow fringe was doing on the American Flag, and ordered those in charge of the booth to take this Flag down and replace it with one that did not have a yellow fringe." The committee made known that the Legion felt the incident to be an insult not only to the colors but its good name as well. As far as the committee was concerned, the episode was "....a legal cause for removal of said official from office."¹⁰

⁹Affidavitt of Adolph C. Olson, September 21, 1926, John J. Baline Papers, Wis., Mss, PI, The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Blaine Papers), Box 59.

¹⁰Letter of Theodore A. Waller, Roy D. Morton and Arthur J. Quinn, September 21, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59

Theodore A. Waller, Pierce County District Attorney, later wrote to Frank Kuehl, Governor Blaine's executive secretary, explaining that the Governor could "...gather from our letter that the people that objected to the fringe on the flag were Ku Klux Klan members." However, no mention was made of the Klan because it was not yet established that the "...objections were made by the Klan as a body." It was more likely that the demands were the result of individual initiative.¹¹

Proceeding to explain the events surrounding the afternoon of the sixteenth, Waller related that there were approximately twenty people who requested that the Flag be removed. As to the crowd's inquiry into the yellow fringe. Waller said that this was a mistake on their part since the fringe was gold. Several individuals objected that the "...yellow was one of the Pope's colors, and that they did not propose in any way to honor him." Particular focus was centered upon the fact that the Legion Post decided to vent its wrath on one individual--the Sheriff of Pierce County. The Post "...felt that his ordering us to remove our colors was uncalled for, and especially so in view of the fact that no investigation was made as to why the gold fringe was on our colors...." As the disputed emblem had been used by the Post, the Sheriff should have been more prudent in his

¹¹Letter of Theodore A. Waller to Frank Kuehl, September 22, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

approach giving the Legion the benefit of the doubt until the facts apropos to the situation could be ascertained.

Waller explained that the Post was told the Law's provisions for matters of this kind. Specifically, reference was made to Section 17.09 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The Sheriff could only be removed for legal cause. It was questioned whether there would be legal cause for removal. Doubts were raised because "....we do not know how serious an offense it is for anyone to order the Colors to be taken down or be removed without any justification for so doing." But it was the Post's belief that the case should be submitted to the Governor for a ruling or suggestions should there not be sufficient legal grounds for impeachment.

Waller further said that the Legion desired to avoid religious trouble. This was the primary reason why the matter was not being handled as a Klan issue. Doing so would have been a mistake. The Sheriff was picked out because his conduct was unbecoming of an elected official.

The Post realized, said Waller, that there might not be legal grounds for removal. Still, the Governor might issue a reprimand. Waller suggested that the reprimand be formulated in such a way as to leave no doubt that the Sheriff's actions were inappropriate. The Post expected at least this much.

The Commandant at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, Colonel W. E. Walsh, did indeed examine the disputed Flag. Colonel Walsh found that the Flag contained no irregularities. It corresponded to the "...general character and make-up, including the yellow fringe, with the service color prescribed by Army Regulations to be carried by dismounted organizations of the Army." Enclosed in the Colonel's letter was a copy of those Army regulations which prescribed the character and method with regard to the use of flags and colors.¹²

Sheriff Baker shortly received a rather vitriolic communication from the Governor. Blaine explained that the Sheriff was accused of ordering the Legionnaires to strike their colors because of the yellow fringe. To begin with, said Blaine, the fringe was not yellow but gold. As these were the regular regimental colors which the Legion had the authority to display, the Sheriff had no right to meddle in this aspect of the Post's business. Besides, under Army regulations, it made no difference whether the fringe was yellow or gold.¹³

¹²Letter of Colonel W. E. Walsh to Roy D. Morton, September 23, 1926, Frank L. Baker Investigation, Executive Department, Administration, Investigation of Charges, Surveys, Relief, Disasters and Social Unrest, 1926, Series No. 1/1/8-1, Box 30, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Archives Division, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as FBI).

¹³Letter of John J. Blaine, to Frank L. Baker, September 28, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59

Had the law been violated, said the Governor, "....it was your duty to make complaints accordingly." An attempt to compel the American Legion to desist from that which they had a legal right to do, bordered on official misconduct. Were the Sheriff successful in his ".....arbitrary and unwarranted intermeddling...." Blaine had no doubt that, upon proper complaint, Baker would have subjected himself to removal from office. The Governor explained that, for the moment, he would not pass judgement, but would, however, leave the matter open should there be further complaint.

Publicly defending its position, the Kinne Post explained that confidence in the government tended to wane when any public official became an object of suspicion. As they were the guardians of the people's rights, public officials were ".....'worthy of trust only so long as they fulfill the obligations made binding by their oath of office. When they fail to do this they should be removed.'" Making it quite clear that these remarks were intended for Sheriff Baker, the Legionnaires went on to say that

"THEREFORE WE MAKE CLAIM: A County Officer did cause a near riot regarding the National Colors which were displayed in a public place before several thousand people. Therefore he becomes an object of suspicion on the grounds that he is trying to undermine the confidence of our National Colors. Further we claim that he is accused of having conspired to deprive the County of Pierce, State of Wisconsin of his 'HONEST, IMPARTIAL AND UNBIASED SERVICE.'"¹⁴

¹⁴Ellsworth Record, September 30, 1926., p. 1.

Frank Baker was quick in his reply to the charges leveled against him. Though there was no formal complaint, the Sheriff desired to explain his version of the incident. The Sheriff admitted to being at the Legion booth at the request of certain individuals. At the time of the request, Baker "....told them to speak to Mr. Waller...as he would no doubt know whether...the colors with the fringe was proper, and that I did not believe there was any cause for making a disturbance relative to the same." Nevertheless, Baker was persuaded to go to the Legion's booth. While there, the suggestion was made to hang a flag without the fringe so as to prevent any disturbances caused through misunderstanding. As to demanding that the colors be struck, Baker denied ordering the Flag to be taken down. In fact, remarked the Sheriff, one of the Legionnaires offered to replace the flag with regard to future displays. Satisfied that the Post would do so, Baker claimed to have left the scene immediately.¹⁵

At a meeting called on October fifth, the Kinne Post decided to draw up a formal complaint, petitioning the Governor to remove Frank Baker as Sheriff of Pierce County.¹⁶ Governor Blaine later received a letter

¹⁵Letter of Frank L. Baker to John J. Blaine, October 2, 1926, Blaine Papers Box 59

¹⁶Minutes of Eldon C. Kinne Post 204, October 5, 1926, KPM.

from an interested party as a result of the Post meeting. Arthur Nelson explained that his attention was called to the courtesy shown the colors by the Sheriff. Nelson explained that "Some of our neighbor boys seem to think that ...Waller is using his influence with you in favor of Mr. Baker." Waller, explained Nelson, appealed "....to the boys...that it would look bad for the Legion Post to uphold a wet Governor." The sentiment around Ellsworth was described as strong in regard to any member of the Ku Klux Klan insulting the national emblem. Governor Blaine, wrote Nelson, should "....stand by the boys and the flag they fought for. And anyone insulting same should have no mercy."¹⁷ By way of reply, Blaine explained that the reprimand was the best he could do inasmuch as no formal complaint had been filed.¹⁸

Governor Blaine shortly contacted Arthur Quinn as to whether his letter to the Sheriff was called to the Post's attention.¹⁹ Kinne Post Adjutant A. B. Lord replied in the affirmative. In addition, Roy D. Morton "....will probably be down to see you in the course of a week and then it will

¹⁷Letter of Arthur S. Nelson to John J. Blaine, October 20, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

¹⁸Letter of John J. Blaine to Arthur S. Nelson, October 22, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

¹⁹Letter of John J. Blaine to Arthur J. Quinn, October 22, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

be possible for you to learn of other things that I refrain from at this time."²⁰ Father Shanaghy, Pastor of the local Catholic Church, also had some critical remarks to make concerning the Sheriff. Were the people rid of Baker, said the priest, a state of tranquility would return to Ellsworth and Pierce County. Continuing, the Pastor explained that "You will probably hear from Ellsworth in regard to Baker--later. The Legion are determined to put him out--if only two days before his term expires. I don't blame them. For 10 years I have been well acquainted in Crawford, Grant, Richland and Sauk Counties," Though it was against charity, Shanaghy "never knew as mean a man in a public office." Shanaghy believed that the Sheriff ought to be removed should the Legion request it.²¹

Indeed, Blaine did hear from Ellsworth. Arthur S. Nelson had filed and sent to the Governor a formal complaint petitioning for Baker's removal. It was charged that, rather than preserving the peace of the county, the Sheriff, in demanding the yellow fringed emblem be struck in the presence of a hostile crowd, "....upheld and countenanced the contempt of said riotous group in maintaining that said Eldon C. Kinne Post, Number 204, of the American Legion was not within its rights in having such colors on display."

²⁰Letter of A. B. Lord to John J. Blaine, October 29, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

²¹Letter of Father J. F. Shanaghy to John J. Blaine, November 5, 1926, Blaine Papers, Box 59.

The Sheriff became an object of suspicion as the County was deprived of impartial and unbiased service. This was so because the Sheriff had failed to keep the peace insofar as he "....neglected to quiet and suppress radical activities in his county." As such, the Sheriff should be removed.²²

Arthur Nelson was shortly informed by Governor Blaine that it would be necessary to serve the Sheriff with a copy of the complaint. As the Sheriff would have to be served ten days before the commencement of a hearing, the earliest date for this would be November twentieth. The Sheriff would have to file an answer, copies of which would be sent to the complainants "....so that they will know what they will have to meet at the trial of the case." Actually, the hearing date would be decided upon once Baker's answer arrived. Also, a commissioner could be appointed with testimony taken at Ellsworth. Therefore, it would not be necessary for anyone to appear on November twentieth.²³

From the law offices of Casey and Magee at Ellsworth, there arrived on the Governor's desk a letter in regard to the complainant Arthur Nelson. The letter revealed that Nelson was not present at the American Legion booth when the alleged incident took place. "When the complaint was drawn, Mr. Nelson was not present, and the whole matter was taken

²²Petition of Arthur S. Nelson, November 8, 1926, FBI.

²³Letter of John J. Blaine to Arthur Nelson, November 9, 1926, FBI.

care of by members of the American Legion." Though Nelson explained that his information was hearsay, the Legion officers "....failed to have the complaint drafted accordingly." An amended complaint was being enclosed so that Nelson would be protected from any difficulties which might otherwise arise.²⁴ Blaine broached no objections to this stating that the correction would be duly noted.²⁵ In the meantime, Sheriff Baker had received a copy of the complaint.²⁶ The Sheriff, though denying Nelson's charges, did admit in his affidavit that the Legion was wholly within its rights displaying the gold fringed Flag.²⁷

Kenneth S. White, a River Falls attorney, explained to Frank Kuehl that the Ellsworth Legion Post requested his firm to represent them in the upcoming Flag case. There was doubt as to the manner in which the Governor would proceed. White wanted to know just when and where the proceedings would commence and whether there would be appointed a Commissioner to hear the matter. In his conclusion, White remarked that "If this hearing gets the publicity which it should get it should prove a knock out blow to the Ku Klux Klan in this state." It was White's belief that no thinking

²⁴Letter of Irwin E. Magee to John J. Blaine, November 13, 1926, FBI.

²⁵Letter of John J. Blaine to Casey and Magee, November 16, 1926, FBI.

²⁶Letter of John J. Blaine to Frank L. Baker November 9, 1926, FBI.

²⁷Affidavit of Frank L. Baker, November 16, 1926, FBI.

person could support an organization which attacked the National Flag.²⁸

Sheriff Baker was advised that a definite time and place had been set for a hearing on the petition for his removal. The hearing would commence on November twenty-ninth at ten o'clock in the morning in the Courthouse at Ellsworth. At that time the defendant would be entitled to be heard, to produce witnesses and be represented by counsel. Fred M. Wylie was to be the Governor's Commissioner.²⁹

At ten o'clock on the morning of November twenty-ninth, Commissioner Fred M. Wylie began to take testimony. The hearing had attracted wide notice as the "....County Judge's office at the Court House was jammed to overflowing with witnesses and curious citizens...."³⁰ All the available seats and standing room were taken up by the spectators.³¹ Attorney for the complainants was Ferris M. White of River Falls. Thomas Mohn of Red Wing, Minnesota

²⁸Letter of Kenneth S. White to Frank Kuehl, November 17, 1926, FBI.

²⁹Letter of John J. Blaine to Frank L. Baker, November 19, 1926, FBI. As Baker had met with an accident, Assemblyman Theodore Swanson suggested the hearing be held at Ellsworth. (Letter of Theodore Swanson to John J. Blaine, November 19, 1926, Blaine Papers Box 59.)

³⁰Pierce County Herald, December 2, 1926, p. 1.

³¹Red Wing Daily Eagle (Red Wing, Minnesota). November 29, 1926, p. 1.

was counselor for the defense. Mohn agreed that the respondent's answer would be to the amended complaint. Both parties agreed to waive the personal appearance of the Sheriff. Later, Attorney Mohn objected "....to the introduction of any testimony on the ground that the petition does not state any legal cause for removal." This was overruled.³²

The first witness for the complainants, A. B. Lord, testified that "Why when I got there, there was quite a crowd around the booth, probably 25 or 30 men; they seemed to be excited about something." The crowd, said Lord, was threatening the colors. If the flag were not taken down, the crowd said it would tear it down. Though not exactly sure of how many threatened the flag, Lord believed that there had been thirty. The witness testified that he did not see Baker at that time, but did see him the day or day after the Sheriff had received a communication from the Governor.

Why Mr. Baker told me,--he says I was called up there at that time, that the crowd was there and he says I went in there,--he said there was a bunch there and he said they had on display a flag with yellow stripes and he didn't think it was the proper flag to display. He said there was a little small flag in the back end of the booth which did not have the yellow border on and he said he told them they ought to display that in place of the other one. Well, I asked him, I says as long as there was such a mob there and they were rather threatening, didn't you think it was your duty as a peace officer

³²Commission Hearing, FBI. p. 1.

to protect the flag or disperse the mob, and he says, I didn't want to get mixed up in it at all. He says I got right out and went away. He says he had a talk with his deputy...and he says I told him of the crowds up there, to keep away from it and not go near there at all because we didn't want to mix up in it.

However, as far as Lord could tell, there was no violence and no one laid his hands on the flag or on anyone else.³³

Lord later testified that, as a reason behind the demands that the colors be struck, "....I heard it said that this yellow fringe around the colors designated it as the Pope's flag." In regard to the crowd's authority for raising such a demand "I heard one of them, he said he had a pamphlet gotten out by Pat Malone, I believe, saying the flag wasn't right...and that it should be taken down."³⁴ Lord explained that he suggested to Claire Travis that the War Department be contacted concerning the matter. But Claire Travis replied that it was "....no use taking it up with the War Department...that ninety percent of them are Catholics."³⁵

Casper Olson, testifying for the complainants, explained that the first threat to the Flag was uttered by Claire Travis. Too, "the general opinion through the crowd when they was talking seemed to be if we didn't take our

³³Testimony of A. B. Lord, Commission Hearing, FBI, pp. 3-6.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 10-11.

³⁵Ibid., p. 115.

flag down they would take it down for us." The general feeling was that the color yellow should not be on the Flag. The crowd, said Olson, did not explain why the Flag should come down. Their only explanation was that it "....wasn't the American Flag,--it shouldn't have anything but red, white and blue." Yet no one stated their authority in this regard. Baker said the Flag would have to come down. Olson said the Legion's reply was that it would were the Flag not proper.³⁶

Sheriff Frank L. Baker was asked what attracted his attention to the American Legion booth. Baker replied that he had heard a great deal of talk on the grounds in regard to the yellow fringe. It was said that the Legion's Flag was not really the American Flag. As to making any comments at the Legion's booth, Sheriff Baker said "Why yes, I says my father fought under the flag, but I don't believe it had a yellow fringe on it...." Baker explained that he did not tell anyone to remove the Flag. However, he did suggest that the fringed emblem be replaced with "...the American Flag they had laying on the table...." The Sheriff explained that his only object in saying this was to prevent any friction that might arise. As to having ever observed a regimental flag with a gold fringe, Baker testified that "I never have, to tell the truth. I suppose every one of

³⁶Testimony of Casper Olson, Commission Hearing.
FBI, pp. 35-38.

our national flags were exactly alike."³⁷

Sheriff Baker was then asked whether he was a Klan member. Baker replied in the affirmative. However, as far as the Sheriff was concerned, the Klan was "....nothing but an American class of people, and I don't understand how it has anything to do with the issues whether we are Klan or not." Baker was not certain whether all the people in the crowd were Kluxers---though some of them probably were. Baker maintained that his being a Klanner in no way served to influence him in the performance of his duties.³⁸

Baker was also asked whether he had anything against the American Legion. Said the Sheriff: "Well, I should hope not, not against the American Legion, not in the least. I don't see how any good American citizen could have,--I would be a pretty poor American citizen holding the position I am if I didn't have respect for the flag. That is what hurts me now to think that they hold that against me." Baker believed that he acted and spoke in good faith. As to other comments, the Sheriff said

all I have to say is, I feel it is trying to humiliate me to think that I am not an American citizen, when I was born in this country and my father fought under the stars and stripes. Mr. White knows himself they have been after me ever since I have been in office because I have tried to enforce the law....I was unfortunate to get hurt and be here now....God, I don't want you to think because I show a

³⁷ Testimony of Frank L. Baker, Commission Hearing, FBI, pp. 103-105.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 102. ; 09. 239.

little emotion that I am chicken hearted or anything like that, but it humiliates me to be classed as un-American here. I felt terribly out of place when I didn't have a boy old enough to go to war and I myself was too old. The American Legion has never had anything going on at any time when I didn't contribute to it, but I can't help this now.³⁹

Edward Guest testified for the defense that the Legion admitted to not knowing what the fringe meant. Sheriff Baker's point was that as long as this was the case, the Post could stop the criticism by placing an American Flag by the fringed emblem. Guest said he asked one of the Legion members "....why they didn't put the American Flag up beside it and they said they didn't know how to hang it up. We thought it was funny how they knew how to hang the other flag up but didn't know how to hang the American Flag up." Upon further questioning, Guest admitted that the fringed emblem was indeed the American Flag, but that he believed the yellow fringe to be out of place. Guest testified that he told no one to take the Flag down.⁴⁰

Probing further for the rationale behind Guest's objection to the fringed flag, Attorney White asked the witness what authority he based his objections. Guest replied that he got it into his own head. As to the matter of yellow being a gold color, Guest said "I wouldn't swear to it, but I don't think it is." Guest was brought up to

³⁹Testimony of Frank L. Baker, Commission Hearing, FBI, pp. 106-107.

⁴⁰Testimony of Edward Guest, Commission Hearing, FBI, p. 161.

believe the American Flag was red, white and blue. The yellow fringe had no place on the National Flag. As to being a member of the Ku Klux Klan, Guest admitted that he was, but that it had no bearing on the situation. He was interested in the Flag matter because he believed it to be his duty as an American citizen. Guest had seen service in the Army and the Marines, but never saw a yellow fringed Flag, and never took the time to give this subject his consideration. Though he had no objection to gold, Guest was not able to tell the difference between gold and yellow. As to what the Legion's Flag stood for Guest explained that "I couldn't tell you what that did stand for with that yellow on it."⁴¹

Ferris White, in his summation, stated it was the complainant's position that Baker's duty was to quell disturbances which interfered with citizens' rights. The Sheriff had an inkling earlier on September sixteenth that there was to be a disturbance over the Legion's Flag--which was why his deputy was told to say or do nothing. Baker admitted to being a Klansman. A number of individuals in the crowd also belonged to this organization. The question was why Baker left the scene when he knew trouble was brewing. Though there was a dispute as to the exact words of the Sheriff, the evidence indicated that Baker had said something akin to ordering the disputed colors struck. The

⁴¹Testimony of Edward Guest, Commission Hearing, FBL, pp. 173-177.

crowd threatened the flag with the apparent knowledge of the Sheriff. The undisputed evidence was that the Legion had the legal right to display the fringed emblem. Not only had the Sheriff acquiesced in the demonstration, but went "...deliberately upon the streets...tackling members of the Post and discussing it publicly, showing that he himself was publishing the facts of the disregard they had for the rights of the Legion at the time." As the incident was widely publicized, the Sheriff's actions had the additional effect of disturbing the "...peace and good will of the citizens of this county, causing turmoil and dissension between neighbors...." It was in this manner that the peace of Pierce County was disturbed and, inasmuch as Frank L. Baker encouraged the crowd, he had failed in his duty as a public official. Baker should therefore be removed from office.⁴²

Responding for the defendant, Attorney Mohn believed the matter of Baker's membership in the Ku Klux Klan was irrelevant with regard to the late proceedings. Also, the Sheriff was not a part of the riotous group and, as such, the complainants testimony was invalid. Baker was not responsible for the talk about the propriety of the flag. Most importantly, the Sheriff went to the Fair as an individual. In short, the Sheriff was not guilty of misconduct in office, and, as such, there were no grounds

⁴²Summation of Attorney Ferris White, Commission Hearing, FBI, pp. 259-262.

for his removal.⁴³

Fred M. Wylie in reporting his findings to the Governor, cited Pat Malone as the instigator of Klan activity in the Ellsworth community during the previous summer. It was a group of Klansmen and Klan sympathizers which disputed the authenticity of the yellow fringed Flag--which in reality was gold--and alleged that this emblem was not only the Pope's color but the Pope's flag. Threats were made in the direction of this emblem. Too, the Sheriff was a Klansman. Evidence indicated that the Post was asked to take the yellow fringed emblem down. Furthermore, the Legion offered to have the matter investigated by the War Department, but that several individuals stated that this was to no avail as the personnel there was largely Catholic. Also, said Wylie

it seems that the authority the Klansmen had for their objection to the "yellow" fringe, and that this was the Pope's color, was secured either from a pamphlet by said Pat Malone, or from material in the Fellowship Forum, a periodical published at Washington, D. C., dealing principally with activities of the Klan and propaganda against the Catholic religion.⁴⁴

Though there was not a mob riot, the Sheriff aided and abetted the disturbance. This was an irresponsible action. Baker should have foreseen that this act would have had the effect of degrading the "....office of Sheriff in the eyes

⁴³Respondent's Brief, FBI, pp. 1-4. This was sent down to Commissioner Wylie after the hearing.

⁴⁴Report of Commissioner Fred M. Wylie, December 21, 1926, FBI, pp. 1-3.

of a great majority of citizens...not only the Catholic citizens of the County, but all citizens other than Klansmen and their sympathizers, to have lost confidence in the official integrity and judgement of Sheriff Baker.... and must have caused resentment that a public official should ally himself with the Klan...." This only served to aid the Klan in its preachments of hatred and bigotry.⁴⁵

Concluding his report, Commissioner Wylie stated that the Sheriff was guilty of misconduct in office "....and... should be removed from office except for the circumstance that his term will expire before the order could be enforced." Thus removal proceedings would be futile and would tend to create disrespect for the constitutional authority of the Governor. Under the circumstances, the best that Governor Blaine could do would be to concur in his Commissioner's findings. The Governor might also issue a severe condemnation of the Sheriff's conduct.⁴⁶

Governor Blaine, in rendering his decision, reiterated Commissioner Wylie's findings. Blaine went on to state that the Post was constituted of both Protestants and Catholics who shared together the burdens of the recent War. "Yet the Klan, in the furiousness of its fanaticism and its extreme intolerance participated in an act that disturbed the peace, that was an affront to the American flag and to

⁴⁵Report of Commissioner Fred M. Wylie, December 21, 1926, FBI., p. 6.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 6.

the World War veterans, and the sheriff of Pierce County aided and abetted this disturbance and affront." It was intolerable that Baker, as a public official, was in alliance with an organization that practiced dissemination of prejudice, hate and intolerance. Blaine agreed that time did not permit the successful conclusion of impeachment proceedings. Nevertheless "...public officials who associate themselves with an organization that undertakes to take government into its own hands are guilty of official misconduct, and the membership of Frank L. Baker in the Ku Klux Klan no doubt was responsible for his neglect of duty and his official misconduct." In short, Sheriff Baker had brought dishonor to himself by his association with this blighting organization.⁴⁷

After the expiration of his term of office on January 1, 1927, the erstwhile Sheriff returned to River Falls. Charging the Governor with slander, Baker stated that

I do not deny that I am a Klansman, but I do deny that being a member of the Klan in any way disqualified me for performing the duties of Sheriff. There was slander in the testimony of several witnesses who appeared in the investigation of the Legion flag affair...and the Governor has slandered me in charging that I neglected my duty. I am going to take the matter directly to the Supreme Court.⁴⁸

Baker also contended that the fact he was not removed by the Governor did not make Blaine's charges any less

⁴⁷Decision of Governor John J. Blaine, December 27, 1926, FBI, pp. 1-4.

⁴⁸River Falls Journal, January 6, 1927, p. 1.

serious.⁴⁹ However, the case never did reach the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Thus the late fringed flag affair was, for all intents and purposes, closed.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Pierce County Herald, January 6, 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Personal Letter of Frank L. Clarke to John A. Turcheneske, Jr., October 22, 1970. Mr. Clark is the Clerk of the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

As early as 1924, sentiment was expressed in several areas of northwestern Wisconsin that the Klan was definitely not needed.¹ Indeed, it came as a surprise that the hooded order was able to gain a following at all. These more perceptive individuals saw the Klan as a fraud, preying upon the imagined fears and prejudices of credulous people. The Klan's philosophy was one of bigotry and, as such, mitigated against any constructive benefits accruing from that order.² Clearly, the hooded order was not needed in northwestern Wisconsin if social disruption were its object.

¹Rice Lake Chronotype, January 30, 1924, p. 1. This journal noted that editors Horace A. Breese of the Spooner Advocate and "Paddy" Ryan of the Shell Lake Register recently devoted several columns to a discussion of this topic.

²Ibid. "Editor Horace A. Breese published a lengthy editorial in the last issue of the Spooner Advocate in which he said there was never a thought that Ku Klux Klan activities would come to their own door. He had carefully listened to explanations by the organizer, but noted four aims which tended to create discord and antagonism: anti-Catholic, anti-Jew, anti-foreigner and anti-Negro.

Every good thing the Klan stood for Editor Breese said was already amply covered by churches, lodges and clubs already existing and functioning in Spooner. The Klan 'anti' program he said wherever it operated resulted in stirring up community trouble, and for this reason he thought Spooner would be better off without it."

The fact is, however, that the Klan did attract a following and did become a force for social disruption in various communities. From the standpoint of Klan philosophy that America was to be remade in the Klan's image, it would verily appear that the Kluxers were out to divide and conquer. A valid question to be asked in this regard is why the Klan was able to attract a following at all. The answer lies in the Klan's philosophy. Under the guise of this organization's interpretation of Americanism, the nation was to be made whole. The concept of patriotism was twisted and warped out of all its logical proportions. Thus Klan adherents could not see the forest of bigotry for the trees of one hundred percent Americanism which were, in reality, composed of anti-Catholic, Jewish, Negro and foreign sentiment. To join the Klan was to rebuild America.

While the Klan lasted in northwestern Wisconsin, its influence in various communities was strong enough to inflict social disruption. The Ethan B. Minier political affair is one recorded instance which is illustrative of the Klan's involvement in politics and reaction thereto. Chetek was the one documented instance where the Klan attempted to infiltrate the public schools so as to use them for its own nefarious ends. For the most part, the remainder of the communities reveal one overriding theme: the utilization of anti-Catholic prejudice. The Catholics, in reality, said the Klan, were not Americans because they owed their

allegiance to the Pope. As if this were not dangerous enough, the Catholics were to murder off their Protestant neighbors once the Pope gave the signal for doing so. Other attempts at discrediting the Catholics were the accusations charging the priests and nuns with gross immoralities. Cornell and Hudson well illustrate this situation. The Klan tent burning affair near Hudson indicates rather well the Catholic reaction to the Klan's prejudice against them. Yet the Klan fell into a trap of its own making in that it became a victim of its own anti-Catholic prejudice from an unlikely source--the American Legion in Ellsworth. The Sheriff Baker episode is indicative of an element of reaction against the Klan's anti-Catholic prejudice as attached to a yellow decorative fringe on the American Flag.

For all its efforts in attempting to gain a lasting foothold in the life of northwestern Wisconsin, the Klan's life-span in this area was relatively short-lived--a little short of two years with peak activity in 1926. Before the Fall of 1926 was over, the Klan had ceased to be a viable factor in this section of the state. True, the Klan was quite effective in disrupting community life and arraying people against each other. But in the long run, the Klan was a failure.

There appear several reasons for this. In devising and implementing its devious philosophy, the Klan had one fatal flaw. It attempted to fool all of the people all of

the time. This, however, did not work. As Governor John Blaine explained on several occasions, there just were not that many credulous people in Wisconsin. The Governor, himself anti-Klan, was elected to the United States Senate in 1926. True, Robert Graham, an alleged Klan candidate was elected Assemblyman from St. Croix County in 1926. But Graham was never heard from again once his term was over. From the Ellsworth area of Pierce County, the Governor was given reports of great Klan strength. Still, according to one Ellsworth resident, Father Shanaghy, all the Klan candidates had been defeated. It would appear as one Pierce County resident stated that many former Kluxers and sympathizers had returned to the use of common sense.³

Finally, the Klan was the victim of its own hatred. By its actions, it had discredited itself. Charles Lowater, for example, was right for the wrong reasons in stating that the mouthings of bigotry were the seeds of the organization's destruction. Lowater was wrong only in that he attempted to separate the so-called Klan principles of one hundred percent Americanism from the Klan's speakers.

³Personal letter of Ralph B. White to John A. Turcheneske, Jr., December 17, 1970. White explained that Klan "...novelty wore off rapidly here (Maiden Rock, Pierce County area) as we were not unfriendly to our catholic acquaintances." As to the length of Klan activity "...the really up and at them part could not have lasted more than a season when common sense again prevailed and money failed to enrich the coffers." In regard to the money angle, Clair Travis testified at the Baker hearing that "It takes quite a little money to keep up with the organization and dues. It was for that reason I dropped out." (See Baker Investigation Commission Hearing, p. 149) Also see end of Chapter Three.

In actuality, the speakers were mouthing Klan ideology, And it is here that Pat Malone is the prime example. His misadventures with the law in Oconto helped to sound the death knell for the hooded order in this area. Practically every local newspaper in northwestern Wisconsin gave an account of the Malone trial. After that very little was heard of the Klan's former star and nothing was heard about the Klan.

Outside of Pat Malone discrediting the Klan, there was the Sheriff Baker episode over the Legion's yellow fringed flag. The fact that the Sheriff was a Kluxer only made matters worse. Baker's activity nearly cost him his office--which matter was also given wide publicity. Klan activity and reports thereof abruptly ceased thereafter.

Thus, the Ku Klux Klan as a force in the life of northwestern Wisconsin was short lived. Discredited, it did not survive beyond the Autumn of 1926. As the Klan did not gain a lasting foothold, its long range influence at the very most was minimal. However, in attempting to propagate its own brand of Americanism with its attendant hatred and bigotry, many a community's social fabric was rent asunder. It would be sometime, therefore, before relations in affected northwestern Wisconsin communities would return to normal.

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