THE KU KLUX KLAN IN WISCONSIN IN THE 1920'S

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ABSTRACT

The First World War brought about drastic changes in the United States militarily, politically, and socially. The upheaval brought about by that period gave rise to the Ku Klux Klan throughout the country. The Klan considered itself a reform movement promoting 100 per cent Americanism, separation of church and state, Protestant fundamentalism, White supremacy, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism.

The Klan was brought to Wisconsin in 1920 and after a rather slow start, it enjoyed some success in the years 1923, 1924, and 1925. Because of poor leadership, a shortage of issues, and a growing resentment against hate speakers, the organization failed. By 1925 the Klan was having membership problems and by 1928 it was almost nonexistent.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Decade Following The Great War</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Emergence Of The Klan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Klan In Wisconsin</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Klan In Rural Wisconsin</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Conclusions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This seminar paper investigates certain members of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin in the 1920's. This topic was chosen for three reasons: first, the author has been deeply interested in this period of history in Wisconsin; second, it is important for a society to be made aware of the mistakes of the past in order to try to avoid their repetition; and third, time is running out on the generation which can provide information about that period.

The subject has been indeed challenging since enough published studies exist to provide an adequate background for leads on primary sources. The personal interviews and the legal documents have been extremely interesting and valuable.

The objective of this paper will be to show that the Klan in Wisconsin was mainly a "paper tiger" and that during its short life it was constantly frustrated by poor leadership, graft, and a public that was unwilling to respond favorably to its philosophy. While in many states the Klan had great success in dominating political events, the Wisconsin Klan failed generally.

Others have studied the organization generally. The main focus of this paper will be to study some of the leaders in several communities to determine their motives and to evaluate their activities.
CHAPTER II

THE DECADE FOLLOWING THE GREAT WAR

The first World War lasted from August, 1914, to November, 1918. Enough time has passed to enable historians to measure to some extent the changes brought about by that period. It can be said with certainty that the western world of 1918 was vastly different militarily, economically, politically, and socially from what it had been in 1914.

Military demands forced the advanced nations of the West to develop industrial technology that helped cause economic collapse in many nations and industrial development in others. The war brought on far more industrial output than these societies could consume. This was an important factor in the economic failure of 1929.

The political changes were even greater. Three old empires perished in Europe and seven new countries emerged. One of the main allies turned to Communism and others turned to Fascism both of which proved to be incompatible with the rest of the western community of nations. All of these changes brought about a crisis in national loyalties that led to mass migrations in Europe as well as emigration of thousands of people from Europe to the United States.

The nature of the American involvement in the war brought on a revolution from the traditionally isolated American stand to
international participation. This was further complicated by the need to create a hate for the Central Powers in a rather short time. As a result of this need, one of the most elaborate propaganda campaigns was launched in the United States that the world had ever seen. An emotional pitch was reached that could not be controlled, much less turned off when the war ended.\textsuperscript{1} The wartime fever forced the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment after the war was over. "\textit{The New York Tribune} said that it was 'as if a sailing-ship on a windless ocean were sweeping ahead, propelled by some invisible force.'"\textsuperscript{2}

President Wilson, who had proven to be a masterful political leader, grossly misjudged the American people. He had shown his ability to generate mass support behind his war effort, and he then expected this same cooperation to continue with his League in a spirit of reasonable conciliation. The white-hot passion against the Kaiser which Wilson had helped develop did not end, it was only transferred, and the President himself became one of the first victims by being accused of "selling out to the councils of Europe".

This same transferred emotion was leveled at labor movements and their allies. Since the Kaiser was no longer a threat to America, the union organizers and their "Red friends" were. Unions were regarded as un-American since they were considered a

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\textsuperscript{1}Fred W. Friendly and Edward R. Murrow, "I Can Hear It Now 1919 to 1932", Columbia Masterworks, III.

threat to free enterprise because of their desire to challenge the owners' power.

Partly because many joined unions and partly because many were unable to adjust to American ways, the immigrants who came were victims of those who preached 100 per cent Americanism. The immigrants of the 1920's were mainly East European and predominantly non-Protestant. The Roman Catholics practiced their religion throughout the United States with relatively little interference until the years following the war. It was at that time that white Protestants, who made up five out of eight adult church goers, felt threatened by Catholics. Many non-Catholics believed that since the Church was international and that the Papacy was actually a government, the Catholics could not be considered loyal Americans.

Another of the drastic changes brought on by the war was the migration from the rural areas to the urban centers. This was most particularly noticed in the case of the Southern Negro farmers who took their families to the promised land in the North. Up until that time the racial problem had been generally confined to the South but after the war the social unrest in the northern cities became serious.

The social changes brought on as a result of the war were indeed dramatic. It was as though the vast majority of the American people declared war on the traditions of the past and were going to create a new society. One of the most significant

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 199.\]
manifestations of this change was the Nineteenth Amendment. It not
only gave the vote to women, it allowed them to be more assertive,
more competitive, and more nearly equal. The changed status of
women was accompanied by a general alteration in values on the part
of men which helped to intensify the change. This social change
took many forms such as an increased divorce rate, a radical change
in fashions for both men and women, an increase of mixed parties,
and a new style of music and dancing. Many sociologists have
regarded the automobile to be the most important factor in bringing
about the change. It put the young people on wheels and thus made
it more difficult for the family to determine their conduct.

At the same time these changes were taking place, there
developed a strong desire to get back to "normalcy" on the part of
many people. To them the things they saw signalled a moral decay
and a breakdown of society.
CHAPTER III

EMERGENCE OF THE KLAN

The emotions and social changes brought on by the war forced some conservatives to find a scapegoat. They began to feel that the government was unable to cope with the situation and it needed their help. It was this attitude that served as the catalyst for The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan for the second time in our history. This Klan is not to be confused with the organization which developed after the Civil War. The Klan of the Reconstruction period was first formed in 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee, by veteran officers of the Confederacy. It became the instrument of power and protection for the veterans, widows, and orphans of the "Lost Cause". While the Reconstruction was going on, the whites of the South believed they had no voice in the governing of their communities and believed they needed an organization to stand against the Negroes, the Yankee reformers, and the United States Army. Their plan was a simple and specific one of regaining control of their society and getting the Negro back into his place. By 1877 with the removal of Federal troops, its goal had been achieved, and that Klan went out of existence.

The Klan of the 1920's looked at itself as a reform movement. It saw a need for a kind of crusade to right the wrongs existing in the country at the time.

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To the Klan reform meant preserving or restoring the status quo at the national level, the separation of church and state, the primacy of fundamentalist Protestant religion, white supremacy, a capitalist economic system, and dominance of native born whites in American society.

It brought much of the spirit of reform from the Progressive Era into the post-war period. The great difference was not one of zeal, but of leadership. The leading reformers of the Progressive Era tended to be intellectuals, while the reformers of the post-war period were generally anti-intellectual. In 1922 the Imperial Wizard admitted that his members were relatively simple, led by passion not reason. That passion made the Klan a powerful instrument for the preservation of Americanism.

Enrolling over two million members between 1920 and 1926, the Klan commanded almost as much support as organized labor and was described with considerable accuracy by Journalist, Stanley Frostas, 'the most vigorous, active, and effective force in American life, outside business'.

Contrary to popular belief, the Klan was not principally anti-Negro. In the Southwestern part of the United States Negroes reported that they had no particular fear of the Klan. The only exception was in the northern cities where they posed a threat to the status quo.

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5Ibid., p. 21.


8Alexander, op. cit., p. 23.
The Klan was large enough and so loosely governed that it could stand for quite different things in each area of the country. In the East it believed the Jews were the danger, in the South it stood for fundamentalism in religion, in the Midwest it feared the Roman Catholic Church and the immigrants, and in the West the "yellow peril" was the concern. In all of the above-mentioned areas, anyone with radical political beliefs was considered a serious threat to the Klan's campaign for 100 per cent Americanism.

In all areas of the country the Klan attempted to ally itself with the Protestant churches. It made a great effort to present a picture of being completely in favor of the Bible with special importance placed on Christ and the Cross. The symbol of the burning cross was to mean that the Klan and the Protestant churches stood for a living cross while the Catholics worshipped a dead and meaningless cross.

It was common practice for the Klan to depend on Protestant preachers to provide inspirational messages for its meetings. Frequently during the twenties, a few Klansmen dressed in their robes would visit small churches in the middle of the service. They would come mysteriously, quietly march to the front of the church, and present the minister with a sealed envelope containing a considerable amount of money. They would then immediately turn and leave the church just as they had come in.

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10 Statement by Earl Williams, personal interview, July 1, 1968.

11 Rice, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
In many cases the gift was given as a token of appreciation for some service the minister had performed and in other cases it was only an attempt to show that the Klan was a kind and "Christian" organization. These incidents had some rather important ramifications in that they showed first, that the Klan must have had a certain amount of respectability, and second, that the Protestant church leadership generally seemed to accept the money in good faith.

Regarding the matter of respectability, after a series of syndicated articles appeared in the *New York World* in September of 1921, the Klan gained in prestige and in numbers. The investigation had been conducted by staff writers of the *World* to show how sinister the Klan was. Randel in his book suggested that the press tended to be more interested in sensational efforts to increase circulation than to harm the Klan.\(^1\)\(^2\) The one outstanding exception to this was William Allen White of Kansas who continued to ridicule the Klan and as a result he has been credited with helping to destroy it.\(^1\)\(^3\)

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 216.
CHAPTER IV
THE KLAN IN WISCONSIN

The Klan's first appearance in Wisconsin came in the fall of 1920. A small group of Milwaukee businessmen met on a Coast Guard cutter in the Milwaukee River to draw up a plan of organization for The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Wisconsin.14

Milwaukee seemed to be a reasonable place for the Klan to get its start in the state. Because of its very large German population, it had been the scene of some rather unpleasant incidents during World War I which helped to stimulate a polarization of sentiment. It also had a large Polish minority who were both immigrants and Catholics. It was with an awareness of these factors that the national Klan leaders planned to develop a strong successful organization in the state with Milwaukee as its headquarters.

Additionally, there was a rather complex social explanation for Milwaukee's political make-up. The old families of Milwaukee were mainly of German background and had a strong democratic socialist tradition. The old church-state conflict went back to the Germany where the Socialists had been constantly in opposition to the Catholic Church. All during the life of the Klan in Milwaukee it continued to capitalize on this feeling among Milwaukee's Socialists.15


15 Ibid., p. 75.
Although many Milwaukeans who were Socialists became Klansmen, the party leaders remained vehemently opposed to the organization. This can be best illustrated by an open letter from Mayor Daniel Hoan to the Klan Imperial Palace in Atlanta following an anti-Catholic lecture in the Milwaukee Auditorium. The mayor let it be known that Milwaukee people wanted no part of the Klan. He said that the best governed city in the United States needed no advice from anyone from Georgia where lynching had become a common practice.¹⁶

In spite of the fact that Wisconsin was one of the first areas for Klan activity, it got off to a rather slow start. The first leader was a man by the name of Mitchell, presumably sent from Klan headquarters in Atlanta. The fact that Mitchell was from out of state and that the Wisconsin unit always seemed to have been seriously hindered by the national organization, caused a problem in finding able leadership at the top level in the state. During the years 1921 and 1922 when the Klan elsewhere was growing rapidly, Wisconsin's organization was not making substantial gains.¹⁷

As a result of Mitchell's inability to get the Klan moving and his unwillingness to let the local members see the financial record, he was replaced by William Wiesman of Milwaukee. Under Wiesman the Klan grew in that city and many successful units were established in other areas of the state.

Evidently King Kleagle Wiesman was more interested in the money than he was in the Klan. As long as the Klan was not yet

¹⁶Ibid.
¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.
chartered by the state, a portion of the ten dollar membership fee was to go to the King Kleagle and some to the Kleagle who signed the new member. Wiesman found this to be very profitable and he wanted to maintain this income as long as possible. It was originally planned that when the membership reached 1000 a charter would be obtained. But Wiesman seeing that his $2.50 commission from each member would be gone, had the requirement raised. This plan succeeded twice, but when he tried to raise the requirement from five to ten thousand, the Wisconsin unit revolted. Wiesman was replaced by C. B. Lewis a trouble shooter the national Klan sent from Michigan.18

On December 1, 1924, the charter for the Ku Klux Klan of Wisconsin was presented to the Secretary of State and was accepted. Article one presents a good picture of the philosophy and objectives of the Klan.

Article First.

The undersigned have associated and do hereby associate themselves together for the purpose of forming a corporation under Chapter 180 of the Wisconsin Statutes, and the acts amendatory thereof and supplementary thereto, the business and purposes of which corporation shall be to unite white, male persons, native-born Gentile citizens of the United States of America, who owe no allegiance of any nature or degree to any foreign government, institution, sect, ruler, person or persons; into a brotherhood 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

18 The Milwaukee Journal, April 10, 1928.
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 pure Americanism.  

The political structure can best be shown by presenting the officers and their duties found in article four of the charter.

**Article Fourth.**

The general officers of said corporation shall be elected by the members of the corporation and shall be a Grand Dragon, Grand Klaliff, Grand Klokard, Grand Klextor, Grand Knight-Hawk, and the Board of Directors shall consist of seven members, and the principal duties of said officers shall be as follows:

(a) The Grand Dragon shall act as the executive officer, preside at all meetings of the corporation and its board of directors, and have general supervision of the affairs of the corporation.

(b) The Grand Klaliff shall discharge the duties of the Grand Dragon in the event of the absence or disability of the latter.

(c) The Grand Klokard shall give instructions in the ritualistic work of the corporation, and act as a lecturer in the work and teachings of the corporation.

(d) The Grand Kludd shall act as a chaplain of the corporation.

(e) The Grand Kligrapp shall keep a record of all the proceedings of said corporation and its board of directors, and safely keep all records, papers, books, documents and files of the corporation.

(f) The Grand Klabee shall keep and account for all moneys, credits and property of the corporation which shall come to his hands, and keep and render accurate accounts.

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19 Office of the Secretary of State Madison, *Articles of Incorporation for the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Wisconsin*, 1925.
statements and inventories of moneys received and disbursed and property on hand.

(g) The Grand Kladd render and perform ritualistic work assigned to him in the ceremonies of the corporation.

(h) The Grand Klarogo and the Grand Klexter shall act as guards at meetings of the corporation, and render and perform such ritualistic work as shall be assigned to them.

(i) The Grand Knight-Hawk shall have charge of, conduct and make investigations as directed, and render and perform such ritualistic work as shall be assigned to him.

(j) The officers shall perform such other and additional duties as may be imposed upon them from time to time by the board of directors, or as may be prescribed from time to time in the by-laws and regulations of the corporation. 20

The state was to be a realm in the invisible empire and the realm in turn was divided into provinces. The smallest division was the Klan organization on the local level. 21

The charter reveals the most serious weakness of the whole organization. The purposes of the Klan were to bring the white Protestants into an organization to protect and promote certain virtues which were all rather abstract. These purposes were not enough to allow the Klan to maintain itself alone for a long period of time. Since the Klan did not have a concrete program, local units succeeded only where there was an issue that stimulated interest. In their desire to create issues, very frequently the leaders selected the wrong cause or misunderstood the mood of the community and by so

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
doing did the organization permanent harm. A case of this kind occurred at Oshkosh. Pat Malone, one of the most well-known speakers of the Klan, delivered a series of speeches in the spring of 1926.

Malone's lectures aroused the anger of a good many Klansmen, . . . he damned the Catholics and exposed the priests until only the fact that the Oshkosh organization was involved pretty deep financially kept the Klan from ending the meetings.  

Since the Klorman of the Klan specifically stated that the organization and its members were not to hold prejudice against any man for his sincere religious belief, many members became disenchanted as a result of the lectures. A similar situation occurred in the Chippewa County community of Cadott. Klansmen preaching anti-Catholicism and 100 per cent Americanism, went in to organize a Klan local. They failed because Cadott was a Catholic Bohemian settlement.  

The attitude of the people in Oshkosh and Cadott was misjudged, but in Madison the situation with the Italians was right for a hate campaign by the Klan. The Italians had come to Madison around the turn of the century to work on the new capitol building. Most of them had remained and by the 1920's their settlement had become quite large. Although they were becoming adjusted to American ways, they retained several characteristics objectionable to prejudiced Madisonians. They were Catholic, they liked their wine, and they tended to resort to violence to settle their differences.  

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22 The Milwaukee Journal, April 11, 1928.


24 Weaver, op. cit., pp. 78-80.
On December 2, 1924, a Madison police officer was shot to death in the Italian section. At his funeral 200 robed Klansmen were in attendance.\textsuperscript{25}

As a result of the incident, the Klan gained in strength and influence in the Madison area. It claimed to stand on the side of law and order. The Madison and Dane County Klan grew until it became a major force in local political affairs.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25}The Capital Times, December 3, 1924.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., December 6, 1924.
The Klan generally had its greatest appeal to the rural areas. Its philosophy was designed to protect some of the old virtues of rural America such as fundamentalism, preservation of the home, and the simple way of life. This attitude of wanting simple answers for complex problems is still manifested today by the John Birch Society and Goldwater Republicanism. The cities are in some ways an antithesis to this philosophy in that they are a manifestation of modern industrialism and social change which the Klan opposed. If the Klan was to succeed anywhere in Wisconsin, it would have its best chance in rural areas.

In Rusk County in Northern Wisconsin the lumber companies had left a great deal of cut-over timberland and had invited East Europeans to come and rent the land in the years following the war. This created so much concern among the native-born Americans that they turned to the Klan in such numbers that the county had the highest membership per capita in the entire state. It lasted only a short time because the local people became disenchanted when they learned of the dishonesty of the Klan leaders.27

With these above-mentioned exceptions, the Klan locals were generally unable to stimulate enough enthusiasm to create a strong influence in Wisconsin communities.

In Grant County, an area with one of the largest proportions of early settlers, the Klan was organized and for a time had a substantial following. On August 2, 1924, an outdoor meeting was held at Livingston, Wisconsin, with 350 in attendance. The program included band music, a parade, and a speech by a Klan speaker from Michigan. Many of those in attendance were there only for the curiosity and were not Klansmen. The speech was an attack on the three K's the "Koons", the "Kikes", and the "Katholics". Many of the people who heard the speech were repelled by the speaker's remarks and left the meeting quietly before it was over.

On August 16, 1924, a large celebration was held at Boscobel, Wisconsin, lasting all day and into the evening. This included Klan locals from several counties. The Klan selected Boscobel because it wanted to show the Catholics of that town that they could have a big meeting in spite of the large Catholic population. That program was marred by an event which occurred while the parade was proceeding down main street. George Shields, a local law enforcement officer, had promised he would stop the Klan as it came by on the grounds that it was not legal. He had been known as a strong opponent of the organization. When the parade came to his position, he stepped into the street and pulled the mask from the leader, and as he moved to the next man, he was struck to the pavement.

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28 *Fennimore Times*, August 13, 1924.

29 Statement by F. W. Miles, personal interview, July 8, 1968.

30 Statement by Earl Williams, personal interview, July 16, 1968.
As Shields jumped to his feet, he pulled the trigger on his assailent, but the gun failed to fire. Other police officers apprehended the two men and took them to the county jail. The case received statewide attention when Governor Blaine demanded that the District Attorney of Grant County, Mr. Clemenson, arrest the Klan leaders for disturbing the peace. The District Attorney instead charged Shields with assult with a deadly weapon. After a long court battle going as far as the State Supreme Court, the case was settled with Shields being convicted and sent to jail for a year. The Governor gave him a full pardon and on Shields' return to Boscobel he was welcomed warmly by the people of the town and rewarded with an increase in pay as law officer.  

Most of the people of Grant County felt that the Klan was un-American and so it did not exert any influence on county politics. E. I. Rothe was elected to the State Senate from the county in 1924 and he stood strongly against the Klan. 

The only political success in the rural areas was found in Chippewa County where "Doc" W. L. Tilton was the successful Kluxer. In 1924 the Klan of Chippewa Falls endorsed eleven candidates for county office and they were instrumental in electing ten of them. In September, 1925, Governor Blaine went to Chippewa to speak against the Klan. As the meeting started, the Klan-elected assemblyman appeared at the door and received an enthusiastic ovation. The

\[\text{\small \textsuperscript{31} Weaver, op. cit., p. 109.}\]

\[\text{\small \textsuperscript{32} Miles, op. cit.}\]
Governor changed his speech to discuss the Algerian-French situation. This Klan strength was rather short-lived as a result of an incident. At Chetek on Labor Day, 1926, Pat Malone and J. H. Neff, two prominent Klan leaders of the area, disappeared with the $5,000 collected during the celebration.

"Doc" Tilton of Chippewa, the Klan organizer for the Western Counties of the Realm, was convicted in 1927 of malpractice and thus lost some of his prestige. He was eccentric and died in 1963, leaving no estate. The Klan had an active but short life in Northwest Wisconsin and according to James Schlough the Klan only made the Catholics go to church more often.

The Klan frequently allied itself with local church organizations. Often local preachers were used as Klan speakers and the Klan at times was permitted to use the local church facilities for their meetings. On New Year's Eve, December 31, 1924, a Klan meeting was held at the Osseo Congregational Church. The church building was mysteriously burned to the ground shortly thereafter. A letter from C. B. Lewis, the Grand Dragon of Wisconsin, to A. E. Smith of Viroqua told that the Klan was to hold its big twenty-five-county celebration on Flag Day, June 14, at Osseo and the proceeds were to go to the

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33 The Milwaukee Journal, April 12, 1928.
35 Statement by Register of Deeds Chippewa County, personal interview, July 12, 1963.
36 Probate Court Chippewa County, July 10, 1963.
37 Schlough, op. cit., p. 16.
reconstruction of the church. The festivity occurred on the appointed day, but the church reconstruction was not paid for by the Ku Klux Klan but rather by local contributions.

In all areas of rural Wisconsin the main victims of Klan activity were the Roman Catholic Church and its members. Most of the Klan speakers and publications warned of the danger of the Roman conspiracy in the United States, but only occasionally did their activity result in damage to anyone. An incident on June 25, 1926, in Marinette, Wisconsin, indicates an extreme example of feeling against the Catholic Church. The Klan announced for several days in the local paper that it would hold a meeting to expose certain conditions in the Catholic Church. The attendance was large and because of the advertisement many Catholics were present. As the speaker proceeded with his lecture, he spent some time telling of a certain order of Sisters. In the audience were nine men, some of whom were related to Sisters in that order, who started a riot. Before the melee ended the tent had been burned and the alleged culprits were arrested. Four of the men were released while the other five were convicted of inciting a riot. The case received state-wide attention and the Governor decided to pardon the prisoners. The incident only helped to discredit the Klan in the eyes of the community.

Pat Malone, an itinerant preacher for the Klan, proved to be an outstanding hate speaker. He went into the Fox River Valley as

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38 The Capital Times, January 16, 1928.
39 Church Records, United Church of Christ, Osseo, Wisconsin, 1925.
40 The Capital Times, November 10, 1926.
well as into Northwest Wisconsin preaching against Jews, Negroes, and particularly against Catholics. His career ended after an incident which occurred at Oconto. There Malone publicly accused a local priest of being the father of an illegitimate child. He was tried and convicted of slander and later left the state. 41

The Vernon County unit serves as a good illustration of the Klan's power, appeal, and influence. A. E. Smith, the KKK leader in the county, had been mayor of Viroqua and in 1922 was elected to the Assembly with a vote of 3,025 to 158 over his opponents. 42 This victory came before the Klan was organized and indicates that he had a large following in the community. He was reported to be an outstanding speaker and remained a leading political figure throughout his career. By 1924 he had established the Klan and his insurance office in Viroqua was used as its headquarters. 43

Smith's political views as revealed in his speeches which showed an anti-Catholic feeling, a contempt for the "bootleggers", and a desire to have Governor Blaine removed from office because he and the chief executive represented two different wings of the Republican Party. 44 Governor Blaine was also strongly opposed to the Klan in Wisconsin. 45 In the campaign of 1924, the Vernon County Censor, which was controlled by Smith, launched a front-page campaign

41 Weaver, op. cit., pp. 135-136.
42 The Vernon County Censor, November 22, 1922.
43 The Capital Times, January 16, 1928.
44 Statement by M. Daffinrud, personal interview, June 12, 1968.
45 The Milwaukee Journal, April 13, 1928.
denouncing the governor. On July 23, 1924, after the governor had spoken in Viroqua, the Censor pointed out that the crowd was small and uninspired. It went on to accuse him of being "wet", of failing to pass the Progressive platform, of disrupting state commissions, of vetoing the gasoline tax, and of having the most costly administration in the history of the state. Later in the summer the paper threw its support behind A. R. Hirst in a front page article pointing out that Hirst was honest and considered government a problem to be solved, not a game to be played.

The political strength of A. E. Smith as well as his Klan affiliation were largely determined by his close association with Fred R. Zimmerman, Secretary of State, and a fellow Klansman. The Klan in Vernon County under the leadership of Smith was very active in 1923 and 1924. In October, 1924, the Censor reported a colorful ceremony during which the Vernon County Klan was awarded an American Flag valued at $150 for having the most successful recruiting program in the entire state during the month of August.

The inspiration was provided by the leader and Kleagles urged men in several areas of the county to join the Klan. Because of

46 The Vernon County Censor, July Issues, 1924.
47 Ibid., July 23, 1924.
48 Ibid., August 24, 1924.
49 Daffinrud, op. cit.
50 Weaver, op. cit., pp. 122-123.
51 The Vernon County Censor, October 16, 1924.
the share of their ten dollar membership, many of the Kleagles were primarily interested in the financial gain involved. Of the four Kleagles studied in Vernon County, three of them had limited financial success and left estates valued at less than $1,000 each and the fourth retired as a successful farmer.

After interviewing people who had joined or remembered the Klan, it became clear that the members looked upon it as a lodge on the same level as the Masons, or the Odd Fellows, or the Knights of Columbus. They believed at first that the Klan represented the kind of ideals they liked since many of their community leaders including ministers were involved. The Rev. Edward Ward, who served the Dell Evangelical United Brethern Church in Vernon County from 1921-1925, was a Klan speaker for a short time. As a result of his assistance, the Local Klan donated $40 for the bell for a small church located in Rev. Ward's parish.

The robe and hood worn by members at their meetings were considered more a thing of amusement than anything else and many who came to meetings on special occasions tried to learn the identity of their neighbors under the sheets. The Cross burning was part of their attention seeking methods and it had no particular

52 Daffinrud, op. cit.
54 Statement by H. V. Daines, personal interview, June 28, 1968.
55 Statement by V. Fulmer, personal interview, July 12, 1968.
importance as a threat of any kind. Many cross burnings were sighted and were nothing more than a conversation piece for the next few days. Klansmen usually did, however, choose to have their cross burnings near the homes or churches of Catholics as a symbol of their strong determination to let the Catholics know they were being watched.

The Klan was eager to stand for right principles and used this as their appeal. While the Klan was active, it believed its responsibility was to correct the misconduct of its neighbors. One man in Vernon County was found to be running a still. Three members of the Klan came to him and warned him to destroy it. The man complied. Another man was living with a woman to whom he was not legally married. The Klan insisted that they either separate or be married. They took the latter alternative a short time later.\(^5^6\) Many times, however, the Klan did not succeed, but only caused hostility. A local Negro reported that his brother had been threatened by the Klan, and he warned the members that another visit by them and he would resort to violence. The Klan did not continue with its threat.\(^5^7\)

An organization of that kind had an appeal only to a small portion of the population of a community and that lasted for only a short time. As the romance of the Klan activities wore off, the members found themselves faced with the problem of running

\(^5^6\) Statement by Earl Williams, personal interview, July 12, 1968.

\(^5^7\) Statement by Otis Arms, personal interview, July 14, 1968.
an organization with the same dull duties of any other club and the membership began to drop off. By 1925 the Grand Dragon pressured A. E. Smith to speed up his recruiting program because Smith was falling far behind. The fact was that the Klan had lost its appeal by that time and no amount of pressure would bring it back again.

58 Weaver, op. cit., p. 71.
59 The Capital Times, January 16, 1928.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

There were several reasons for people to join the Klan. First of all, it provided many with the opportunity to show that they were 100 per cent American at a time when being so was extremely important. Second, it provided people with a social gathering which brought a pleasant relief from an otherwise rather uneventful life. Third, Wisconsin, being predominantly Protestant and still suffering from some war hysteria, developed the fear that the Catholic Church posed a real threat to the American way of life. Fourth, by the nature of the organization it served as a vehicle for evangelistic, crusading type of individuals. As a result of this and because of the magnetism of some of its leaders, the Klan enjoyed a certain amount of success.

On the whole as time passed many of those inspiring leaders proved to be somewhat less than the followers expected of them. The history of the Klan movement in Wisconsin was filled with examples of members losing faith in their leaders for one reason or another.

As time went on and the Klan throughout the entire country became more and more militant and their speakers reflected a

60 Statement by H. V. Daines, personal interview, June 20, 1968.
61 Fulmer, op. cit.
62 Weaver, op. cit., p. 70.
hate for those who looked or believed differently than the majority of the people, members tended to become embarrassed by their affiliation and put their robes in the attic to stay.
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