

The Ku Klux Klan in Northeast Ohio: The Crusade of White Supremacy in the 1920s

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ABSTRACT

The impact of the Ku Klux Klan in the twentieth century has been documented by many historians and scholars, from a national perspective. Local case studies are not quite as common. This thesis looks at two of the most important and popular chapters of the Ohio Ku Klux Klan, Akron and Youngstown. For Akron, I relied on thorough research of the *Akron Beacon Journal* newspaper archive. For Youngstown, I began research previously conducted by former Youngstown State University faculty Dr. William Jenkins' *Steel Valley Klan* and branched from there. I used *The Vindicator* newspaper as a reliable source for Youngstown Klan history. Specifically, the Akron chapter of the KKK previously has not been researched besides a Master's thesis several decades ago. Newspaper coverage was abundant in Akron and provided a clear, unbiased blueprint in order to perform the case study.

Results of the case studies in Akron and Youngstown show mixed results in terms of the Klan's effectiveness. In Akron, the Klan was able to infiltrate the Akron public school system for a period. Their ultimate goal of barring Catholic teachers, however, was not achieved. Their popularity peaked by 1925 which was a bit longer than the Youngstown Klan. In Youngstown, they showed moderate success in enforcing bootlegging laws but the 1924 Niles riots signaled the peak for the Klan. Ultimately, from a national viewpoint, the fates of both chapters were very similar. By the end of the 1920s, national Klan popularity had diminished in a similar fashion in Akron and Youngstown respectively.

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Chapter 1

In Ohio, Akron and Youngstown were epicenters for Ku Klux Klan activity in the 1920s. A Youngstown, Ohio, resident recalled her family being harassed by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) during the 1920s. Louise Liste stated “one day there was a real big fight [T]hey put a cross and burned the cross. My fathers and all our neighbors and they went to face them and my mother went with my father. She said she raised one of the hoods and it was the grocer that we used to buy groceries. We were so frightened we hid underneath.”¹ This re-emergence of the Klan into the northern United States was common in the 1920s, in Ohio specifically. Klansmen donned robes and hoods to conceal their identities, as they used violence and political actions to convey their ideology of white supremacy. The Klan’s message of education and social reform resonated with many whites in northeastern Ohio industrial cities like Akron and Youngstown. Through the Klan, white Protestants created their own form of agency and empowerment through their membership. For a brief period, the Akron and Youngstown chapters of the Klan were successful in enacting reform tactics that served their goals. By 1926, however, both chapters began to see decreased popularity and membership. One important factor in this was a national Klan mandate to unmask in 1928 that destroyed the anonymity previously enjoyed by members. In retrospect, neither chapter was successful in enacting long lasting change in Akron or Youngstown, partially due to poor leadership. Despite this, the Klan and its members played on existing nativist beliefs throughout the country as European immigrants came to America.

¹ Louise Liste, interviewed by Joseph Lambert Jr., 27 October 1990. Youngstown State Oral History Department, Transcript. Herein cited as YSU-OHP.

Many historians focus KKK research on the Klan of the Jim Crow South. Lynchings and intimidation were prevalent in the Reconstruction South; however, many historians lose sight of the second iteration of the Klan in the twentieth century. This Klan became popular in northern states, particularly in the Midwest, including Ohio. Two of the strongest areas for Klan activity were in Akron and Youngstown in Ohio. These cities represented the heart of the second Industrial Revolution in America and were epicenters for twentieth century manufacturing. Rubber and steel factories created jobs that led to economic success for both cities. Immigration and migration were key factors in supplying workers to factories, resulting in xenophobia that the Klan preyed on. The Klan used Protestant religious leaders to spread their nativist message and recruit members, as well as religious imagery to convey their beliefs. The Klan represented an important part of American history that deserves to be chronicled, especially the stories of these two industrial towns in the early twentieth century.

The twentieth century ushered in many changes in the United States. New inventions like the automobile were becoming quite popular with Americans. These were also interconnected with the development of manufacturing all over the country. In states like Ohio, steel, iron, and rubber plants were built to create much needed supplies. This also created new jobs, offered good wages, and improved the overall standard of living in the country. As the twentieth century began, however, factory owners began seeking laborers from Europe, who were willing to work for lower wages.² Immigration and migration created backlash and resentment amongst white, native-born Americans, who saw immigrants and migrants as threats to their own livelihood and families. Immigrants

² John Lee Maples, "The Akron, Ohio Ku Klux Klan 1921-1928" (MA thesis, University of Akron, 1974), 10.

brought elements of their own culture to the country that were foreign to Americans, creating fear amongst some Protestants. Migrants arrived only looking for short term work and were not willing to establish themselves in the Akron community, creating more resentment.³ The Klan used this angst to strengthen their base, in order to attack immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, as well as the Irish, Catholics and Jews

Factory owners also looked towards other areas of the country for laborers willing to work for lower wages. Manufacturing leaders recruited white and African American migrants from the southern United States and the Appalachian region. Migrants began arriving in states like Ohio, seeking higher wages than they earned elsewhere.⁴ Local citizens saw migrants as a threat to their idea of what American life consisted of.

American life and representing “100% Americanism,” to these people, was thought to be centered around a white patriarchy and often, Protestant religious beliefs. Immigrants and migrants brought a diverse set of cultures, religions, and lifestyles to states like Ohio, often representing the antithesis of white, Protestant America. White Protestants reacted negatively to the perceived threats of Catholics, Jews, and African Americans. Historians such as Kenneth Jackson and John Maples claim that the arrival of European immigrants and southern African American migrants into Ohio served as the catalyst for Klan recruitment. The anger and resentment felt by white Protestants towards these people would manifest itself in the re-birth of the Ku Klux Klan.⁵ The Reconstruction-era Klan of the nineteenth century had faded away but a new Klan would emerge.

³ Susan Allyn Johnson, “*Industrial Voyagers: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration to Akron, Ohio 1900-1940*” (PhD dissertation, The Ohio University, 2006), 84.

⁴ Johnson, 73.

⁵ Maples, 15.

The KKK has a rich history in the United States, beginning on December 24, 1865, in Pulaski, Tennessee. This first incarnation of the Klan terrorized African Americans in the South during the post-Civil War period known as Reconstruction. The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan served as a fixture for white supremacy in the American South in the aftermath of the Civil War. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, gave African American men the right to vote. The Klan viewed newly freed slaves as threats, creating fear and resentment. The Klan's violence undermined the Fifteenth Amendment as they intimidated many African American voters from participating in elections. The Klan spread violence and suppressed countless African American voters during elections as it attempted to rescue their southern heritage believed to be taken away after the War.⁶

The Klan and many white southerners believed Northerners and African Americans took away their power after the Civil War. They felt the North imposed themselves on the South while African Americans received emancipation and the right to vote. The Klan served as heroes to white southerners against their perceived enemies, newly-freed African Americans. Most African American voters were members of the Republican Party that took political power away from Southern Democrats after the Civil War. The Klan aimed to return power to the Democrats by any means necessary and they were largely successful at menacing black voters at polling places across the South. By 1877, Democrats successfully returned to prominence across the South and African Americans were effectively stripped of any civil and political rights they received following the abolition of slavery. The Klan's plan of intimidation successfully stopped many southern African Americans from voting.

⁶ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), Kindle edition.

Leaders in Washington D. C., especially those in the Republican Party, realized the Klan needed to be stopped. The federal government, under the leadership of President Ulysses S. Grant, intervened in order to squash the Ku Klux Klan. Grant signed into law three different Enforcement Acts in 1870 and 1872, in hopes of stopping voter intimidation at the hands of Southern militia groups such as the Klan. By 1872, the Enforcement Acts effectively diminished the power of the Klan, but the Klan's legacy continued through Jim Crow Laws that disenfranchised African Americans for decades. These acts would only serve to temporarily force the Klan out of power and it would be decades before they would return with new leadership and strategies.⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Klan virtually disappeared, but their reemergence was on the horizon.⁸

As a new century emerged, the nation was becoming more diverse. In the 1900s, similar to the perceived threat of African Americans, whites viewed immigrants and migrants with suspicion. In this case, racial and political anxiety combined with religious anxiety. The Klan sought to preserve the idea of "100% Americanism" using nativism. The association felt that being a "true" American meant being native-born, white, and Protestant. One-hundred-percent-Americanism served as a Klan construct that symbolized total white supremacy. They believed Protestantism was superior in comparison to other religions like Judaism and Catholicism. The Klan perceived themselves as marginalized due to the increase in immigration and migration within the country. To the Klan, Americanism and white supremacy were interchangeable with patriotism and foreign cultures acted as the antithesis to this concept. They felt the

⁷ Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 185.

⁸ Foner.

country was built on Americanism and that immigrants and people of color were destroying it. Through the first half of the 1920s, Protestants flocked towards the Klan in hopes of preserving Americanism through reform movements across the country.

One important change to the American landscape during the early twentieth century was the rise of fundamentalism. Evolution and other scientific concepts were taught in school and many religious fundamentalists disagreed with this. Fundamentalists believed in the strict and literal interpretation of the Bible. Scientific concepts such as evolution contradicted the teachings of the Bible and they represented the antithesis of Protestant Christianity. The rise of fundamentalism coupled with increased immigration and migration all served as the perfect catalyst for the rise of the Klan. Kluxers used the acclaim of fundamentalism to appeal to a broad audience of Protestants who felt marginalized by changes in America.

The Klan preyed on demographic and cultural changes within the country in order to attract new members. The KKK became irrelevant, particularly in the North, but in 1915, a white supremacist from Stone Mountain, Georgia named William Simmons aimed to resurrect the organization. Inspired by the film *Birth of a Nation*, Simmons reimagined the Klan as a social and fraternal club that men and women could join for comradery. This comradery was based on white supremacy disguised as Protestant moral beliefs and behavior such as enforcing active prohibition laws. By enforcing these laws, the Klan attacked Catholic and Jewish immigrants who violated them. Under Simmons, this second version of the Klan relied on more than just violence and intimidation to attack their perceived threats. They also gained political power through elected positions in hopes of enacting reform they supported. According to historian Linda Gordon, the

Klan's main ideological components were "racism, nativism, temperance, fraternalism, Christian evangelicalism, and populism."⁹ Simmons used the fear of miscegenation and threats to white masculinity to entice people to join the Klan. During Reconstruction, the Klan existed primarily in the South, but Simmons aimed to change that with his revival of the Klan. He ran the organization in a business-like manner and began looking at northern industrial cities like Akron and Youngstown, Ohio for recruitment.

William Simmons' new Klan broadened its scope, looking to branch out from its southern roots. This Klan expanded to the northern United States, establishing a firm foothold in northeastern Ohio. There, the Klan attracted white Protestants who felt disenfranchised and threatened. The Klan attracted these people, thanks in part to the aspect of secrecy that was prevalent in the organization. White Protestants could be anonymous as they directly and indirectly attacked immigrants and migrants. The newly reformed Klan operated similarly to a business, first creating a national unit that served as a headquarters, and then creating smaller, local units in places like Akron and Youngstown, Ohio. These two cities were among the strongest areas for Klan activity in the nation. Specifically, by 1925, Akron housed the largest number of Klan members in the country.¹⁰ The area served as a focal point for Klan activity during the height of its national popularity. In the beginning, however, Simmons struggled to gain its footing and attract members. Simmons lacked organization and membership remained stagnant for several years until he aligned himself with two marketing upstarts.

In 1920, Simmons enlisted the help of Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, who intended to increase membership in the Klan through clever marketing. The Klan

⁹ Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017), 26.

¹⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

partnered with Clarke and Tyler's advertising firm, the Southern Publicity Association, with marketing influence that included the *Atlanta Constitution* and the prohibitionist Anti-Saloon League.¹¹ This success was due in part to Clarke and Tyler but also to the changing landscape of the country as a whole. By the fall of 1920, America was in the midst of a recession that left millions of Americans unemployed. Rural whites were drawn to the Klan due to the weakened agricultural market. The hardships they faced made it easier to believe the conspiracies against Jews espoused by the Klan as they used Jews and immigrants as scapegoats for those hardships.

The Klan also found success in industrial areas of the country, especially after Clarke and Tyler took over control. The rise of manufacturing industries such as steel, iron, and rubber created job openings that mill owners needed to fill. Factory owners recruited immigrants from southern and eastern Europe for jobs in their iron and steel mills. Chain migration was popular as many would arrive, find jobs, and then encourage their relatives to join them. The fear of immigrants stealing the jobs of honest Americans was used by Clarke and Tyler to bolster membership in the Klan as they added more than 90,000 new members in less than a year.¹²

As the Klan separated itself from the leadership of Simmons, Clarke and Tyler sought to change the way the Klan was run in order to effectively increase their approval. One main thing Clarke and Tyler did to increase Klan membership, specifically in Ohio, was to introduce the concept of kleagles. Kleagles were appointed agents who would recruit members into local chapters based on the conditions of the area. First, kleagles would contact friends and then branch out to local Protestant clergy for potential

¹¹ Gordon, 13.

¹² William D. Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990), 17, Kindle edition.

members.¹³ Kleagles served under King Kleagles who were lead recruiters of the entire region. A kleagle could also stand to profit from the recruitment process through a commission system that operated like a pyramid scheme. Under Clarke and Tyler, membership increased to 125,000, in part due to the kleagle system.¹⁴ The kleagle system effectively increased membership while also generating profit for top KKK leaders. The kleagle system only served to benefit higher ranking members of the Klan. Many lower-level members actually lost money due to this system.¹⁵ Despite this, the system succeeded in increasing Klan membership across the country as the popularity of the group increased exponentially throughout the first half of the 1920s.

One important topic for the Klan was educational reform, as they aimed their sights at immigrants in America. The Klan believed they could enact national educational changes that re-enforced Protestant Americanism. Issues such as required Bible reading in public schools and the rise of Catholic parochial schooling were important to the group. The Klan preyed on the national fear of millions of new immigrants coming into the country and promoted 100% Americanism as a counter mechanism. In 1922, Oregon passed a bill requiring all children to attend public school, effectively eliminating parochial Catholic schooling. The Klan and the affiliated Federation of Patriotic Societies actively campaigned to get the bill passed.¹⁶ The idea of forcing children into public schooling was a key element in the Klan's educational thinking and its hatred of Catholicism. The Klan desired to pass similar legislation throughout the country in other

¹³ Jackson.

¹⁴ Emerson H. Loucks, *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania: A Study in Nativism* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Telegraph Press, 1936), 23.

¹⁵ Gordon, 65.

¹⁶ David J. Goldberg, "Unmasking the Ku Klux Klan: The Northern Movement Against the KKK, 1920-1925," *Journal of American Ethnic History* Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer 1996): 34.

states such as Ohio. Without Catholic parochial schooling, children could be properly “Americanized” through public school teachings. This helped the Klan appeal to Ohioans in cities like Akron and Youngstown, growing national influence as well.

By the end of the 1920s, the Klan faced its biggest challenges to date. By 1927, Klan popularity was at an all-time low with national membership only at about 350,000 in comparison to the millions the society boasted earlier in the decade. In 1925, Indiana Grand Dragon and national Klan figure David “D. C.” Stephenson was convicted of the rape and murder of his secretary. Previously, Stephenson was rumored to be a corrupt leader, exhibiting behavior that was the antithesis of Klan messaging. While he was Grand Dragon, rumors of drinking, partying, indecent exposure, and sexual activity plagued Stephenson. His behavior in the past resulted in his near-expulsion from the Klan by national leader and Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans, but his power in Indiana allowed him to continue his Klan work in the state. Many Klan members decided to leave after Stephenson’s conviction.¹⁷ This was only the first event to seal the fate of the Klan as an internal policy change greatly affected the organization.

The Klan experienced high points and low points throughout the 1920s. By 1928, they were past their peak in terms of membership within the country. That same year, Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans instituted a national mandate that all Klan members could no longer wear their hoods at public Klan functions such as parades. One major factor in joining the Klan had previously been the anonymity members enjoyed. Business, religious, and political leaders joined the Klan without fear of public scrutiny over their membership. Taking away their veil of secrecy led many members away from the group.

¹⁷ Gordon, 192-94.

By the end of the 1920s, the Klan completely lacked any national influence in the country. With the civil rights movement, in the 1960s, historians also began studying the second Klan in exciting ways.¹⁸

Klan history has proven to be a unique case study into American politics and culture that historians continue to explore through broad historiographical measures. Much has been written on this topic, both generally and locally. Klan history has proven to be a unique case study into American politics and culture that historians continue to explore through broad historiographical measures.

It is important to understand how historical thought towards the Klan has evolved since the twentieth century. Prior to the 1970s, main historiographical thought on the Klan came from scholars such as David Chalmers and Kenneth Jackson¹⁹. Chalmers and Jackson asserted that the main ideology of the Klan involved white supremacy, anti-Semitism, racism, nativism, anti-Catholicism, and xenophobia, all under one umbrella. Chalmers says that it was anti-Catholicism and patriotism that helped build the Klan in Ohio.²⁰ Jackson asserts that Ohio Klan recruitment was centered on the increased amount of Black and European immigrants coming into the state.²¹

In a similar fashion to this thesis, other historians have performed extensive research on specific Klan strongholds across the country. Focusing on specific locales provides a perspective on the inner workings of the club. This helps to tell individual stories of Klan successes and failures in its history. Nancy Maclean's *Behind the Mask of*

¹⁸ Gordon.

¹⁹ David Mark Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan 1865-1965*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965); Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*.

²⁰ William D. Jenkins, "The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown, Ohio: Moral Reform in the Twenties," *The Historian* Vol. 41, No. 1 (November 1978): 77.

²¹ Jackson, 164.

Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan provides an extensive examination of a specific Klan chapter in Athens, Georgia.²² Maclean finds that average Klan members in Athens were married white men with a modest income. These men were also politically oriented and interested in advancing in that realm as far as possible. Maclean points out that they exhibited violent tendencies towards their enemies. Published decades after Jackson's Klan research, Maclean provides a newer interpretation and serves as a blueprint for doing case studies of the KKK.

The popularization of social and cultural historical methodology led to a broadening of perspectives that have been applied to the Klan since the 1970s. Kathleen Blee's *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* uses gender history to examine the roles women played in the Klan.²³ Blee is the foremost expert on gender history concerning hate groups and the Klan in America. According to Blee, Klan women agreed to continue doing household work and assist in Klan activities in exchange for more political agency. The Klan developed their own gendered branches allowing female Klan members to gain agency. The Women of the KKK was an important part of the KKK's national identity, and Akron housed its own chapter. By examining the women's branches of the KKK, historians have illustrated the role they played in giving agency to members.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, historians began looking at the Klan through a more modern lens. Linda Gordon's *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* is an important modern

²² Nancy Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

²³ Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

study of the organization. Gordon provides a vast background on the history of the second wave of the Klan, starting with its founding by William Simmons. She argues that the Klan's core beliefs stemmed from fear of immigration and general xenophobia. The Klan exemplified nativism, racism, and bigotry, as their membership expanded in the 1920s. The author also explains the kleagle system of commissioned recruitment in detail. Gordon manages to evolve Klan historiography while using Jackson and Chalmer's work as a model for her research. This is a wonderful companion to Kenneth Jackson's previous extensive research.²⁴

The KKK in Ohio's Mahoning Valley, where Youngstown is the largest city, has been the subject of several studies. In *Steel Valley Klan*, William Jenkins built upon Chalmers and Jackson, studying the actions of the Youngstown chapter. Jenkins argues that the two main driving forces for the Klan in Youngstown were anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism. Many reasons for hatred and detestation of Jewish people and Catholics centered around conspiracies such as a supposed armed rebellion being planned by local Catholics. At times, however, the Klan was willing to work with Jews and Catholics, especially after Charles Scheible became mayor of Youngstown when Klan leaders denied "religious and racial prejudice on their own part and presented the Klan as an organization of brotherhood and justice." Once in office Scheible and "the Klan

²⁴ Other important writings include Homer Lawrence Morris, *The Plight of the Bituminous Coal Miner* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934); John Dean Gaffey, *The Productivity of Labor in the Rubber Tire Manufacturing Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940); Steve Love, *Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron* (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 1999); Daniel Okrent, *The Guarded Gate: Bigotry, Eugenics, and the Law That Kept Two Generations of Jews, Italians, and Other European Immigrants Out of America* (New York: Scribner, 2019); Geoffrey Perret, *America in the Twenties: A History* (N.p., n.d.); Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); and Nathan Miller, *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

administration passed no discriminatory legislation against Catholics or Jews.²⁵ This shift proves that each local and regional chapter of the Klan varies as to its driving factors and ideology. Jenkins also argues that the main reason for the political rise of the Klan was due to enforcement efforts of laws against alcohol usage and other vices. Stopping alcohol manufacturing and distribution was an important way for the KKK to attack immigrants.²⁶

Ashley Zampogna expanded on Jenkins' work in her MA thesis "*America May Not Perish: The Italian-American Fight against the Ku Klux Klan in the Mahoning Valley.*" She based her research on Jenkins' *Steel Valley Klan* and expanded on it with a fresh perspective. Her thesis was written in 2008 and this gave her the opportunity to have a new look at Jenkins' research from 1990.²⁷ Donna DeBlasio and Martha Pallante discussed Italian immigrants in Youngstown and the impact they had on the area. Italians immigrated in search of better paying jobs in the local steel mills and they created their own communities and identities as a result.²⁸

The history of the Youngstown Klan centers around the work of the aforementioned historians, while the Akron Klan only centers around local dissertations and theses; three in particular. In 1974, John Lee Maples wrote "*The Akron, Ohio Ku Klux Klan 1921-1928,*" for the University of Akron.²⁹ Maples explains that the Akron Klan was able to influence the area through educational reform, and does not reference

²⁵ Jenkins, "The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown," 86.

²⁶ Ibid., 78.

²⁷ Ashley Marie Zampogna, "*America May Not Perish: The Italian-American Fight against the Ku Klux Klan in the Mahoning Valley,*" (MA thesis, Youngstown State University, 2008).

²⁸ Donna M. DeBlasio and Martha I. Pallante, "Memories of Work and the Definition of Community: The Making of Italian Americans in the Mahoning Valley," *Italian Americana* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter 2016): 9-36.

²⁹ Maples.

many instances of vice and alcohol law enforcement. Susan Allyn Johnson's 2006 dissertation "*Industrial Voyagers: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration to Akron, Ohio 1900-1940*" helps explain how the demographics of the area may have helped usher in the Klan in Akron.³⁰ No major secondary source on the Akron Klan is available besides the aforementioned theses.

This thesis will provide an important look into two local chapters in northeast Ohio. This research is valuable to unearthing a part of Klan history never told before. No previous study has used as much local research as this thesis through the usage of the extensive archive of local Akron sources, specifically the *Akron Beacon Journal*. Taken together, the aforementioned Klan historiography provides extensive background on the organization's history in the twentieth century. This thesis adds a concentrated local case study of two very vital Klan chapters to KKK historiography. These case studies illustrate how these industrial cities fit into the national outlook for the organization. They will effectively demonstrate the complexity of the KKK's over strategy. The bulk of this is based on primary source research from area newspapers the *Akron Beacon Journal* and the *Vindicator*. These sources, specifically the *Beacon Journal*, provide first-hand accounts of local events. Akron and Youngstown newspapers carefully monitored and reported on Klan activity, providing a detailed, daily account not only of what the Klan was up to, but how the community was responding. Oral history interviews also lent valuable insight into events such as rioting in Youngstown. Both Akron and Youngstown played important roles in the rise and fall of the group as a whole.

³⁰ Johnson.

Chapter 2-Akron

The Akron, Ohio, KKK was the focal point for the Summit County chapter of the organization. It represented not only the city with the largest membership in the county but also in the state of Ohio as a whole. The Klan used a combination of factors to recruit Akronites who felt marginalized in their own city. These factors included competition with immigrants and migrants over factory jobs and housing shortages and overcrowding within the city. Issues like these created a divide amongst Akronites that the Klan used to its advantage. The non-existent unions of the early 1900s also left native workers feeling voiceless within the workplace. The popularity of the chapter in Akron was based on Protestant xenophobia and many Protestants in Akron felt marginalized and their membership in the Klan helped alleviate their anxieties. Factionalism and in-fighting ultimately led to the demise of the group. In 1924 and 1925, Akron represented an important area for the Klan, as a whole. Membership was large and booming as they also possessed political power within the Akron education system. Just a short year later, the once large and popular Klan haven began evolving into an extinct and relic of the past.

As the Klan ventured into Akron, reform measures remained their top priority. The organization wished for Akron public schools to be reformed parallel to their ideology. Their aims were to spread “100% Americanism” in the school system by infiltrating the Akron Board of Education. Prior to this, the Klan worked with the South High Civic Association (SHCA) as a means for reform, prior to taking majority control of the Board. The SHCA was based out of South Akron, whose demographics were primarily white Protestants. South Akron also served as a recruitment haven for the KKK

in the years that followed. Many Akronites even questioned the motives of the SHCA and whether it was only a means for high ranking Klansmen to get elected to the Board.

Education reform remained the main successful strategy for Kluxers in the 1920s.

Unlike in other northeastern Ohio cities, the Klan was not extremely successful in enforcing vice laws that targeted Italian Catholics in Akron. In fact, Klan members were actively engaged in this type of crime. Ohio Governor Vic Donahey believed Sheriff Chris Weaver's vice squad had Klan members who were involved in bootlegging. Donahey urged Weaver to "clean house" and he dismissed over 300 deputies on the squad.³¹ Three major figures arrested were Freeman J. "Jim" Worster, George Nichols, and Clates L. Baskey. Worster was head of the Akron vice squad, and the other two were deputies. Worster was charged with sending liquor to a picnic in the area.³² Fifty-five gallons of moonshine were found in the basement of Nichols' home.³³ Later, the charges against Jim Worster were dropped.³⁴ The Klan promised to punish those members who were found to be bootleggers. Several Klansmen were convicted of bootlegging and suspended as members in 1925.³⁵ The Klan could not gain a foothold in enforcing laws against alcohol manufacturing and sales throughout Summit County. They were, however, able to achieve some success in educational reform beginning in 1923.

One of the Akron Klan's objectives was to preserve "100% Americanism," through the segregation of Akron's public school system, and by instilling Protestant values over Catholicism and Judaism. This represented their nativist and xenophobic

³¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 7, 1925.

³² *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 12, 1925.

³³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 7, 1925.

³⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 2, 1925.

³⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 23, 1925.

vision for educational reform. The main goal for reform was to attack the parochial school system and to bar Catholics from teaching in public schools. These tactics served to advance their agenda of opposing immigrants and migrants who were not Protestant. The Klan's success in this regard was mixed. It was able to enact compulsory Bible reading in public schools but failed at reforming much else. The Klan was able to gain majority control of the Board of Education briefly. When the Klan had the majority, they pushed for segregation and for textbooks that contained offensive material regarding African Americans, Catholics, and Jews.³⁶ At the same time, however, they failed to address major problems. The Akron school system was overcrowded, and underfunded. Under the Klan, these problems were only exacerbated. If the KKK expected to advance their ideology into Akron public schools, they needed to address the growing problems within it.

Ohio was an important state for the Klan, as cities such as Akron and Youngstown were centers for Klan activity. Ohio ranked second in overall Klan membership in the United States, trailing behind only Indiana.³⁷ The Klan's popularity in the region was directly related to demographic change. The African American population in Akron also grew by over seven hundred percent which correlated with a larger overall trend in population growth as Akron's population grew 202% to a total of 208,435 from

³⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, February 20, 1966.

³⁷ Jackson, 247. Jackson estimates that the Ohio Klan boasted 195,000 total members between 1915 and 1944. This estimate was based on various records kept by Klan leaders, and by other sources such as various newspapers. During the time period of 1915-1944, Jackson estimated that the Youngstown area had the second highest total members in Ohio at 17,000 individuals. William Jenkins points out that *The Vindicator* estimated the number as being between 10,000 and 12,000, at numerous periods in local Klan history. Jackson also makes a correlation between the success of Klan recruitment in Youngstown with the area's period of population growth between 1910 and 1930. See also Jenkins, [*Steel Valley Klan*], #.

1910 to 1920.³⁸ One reason for this was the heavy amount of African American migration from southern locations in the United States known as the Great Migration. Beginning in the early 1900s and increasing during World War I, Black southerners migrated to the North in search of better paying jobs. The influx of migrants affected Akron considerably as many white Protestant citizens saw Black southerners as a threat to their jobs.

The Great Migration of southern Blacks was not the only source for migrant labor within the city of Akron. Rather than seeking immigrant workers, the rubber industry decided to recruit rural citizens from nearby areas, such as the Appalachians. The National Origins Act of 1924 stalled immigration into America, forcing manufacturers to look towards migration as a solution.³⁹ Southern Appalachian whites came into the city for jobs, and they outnumbered Black residents twenty-to-one.⁴⁰ Migrants primarily came from West Virginia and Kentucky for jobs in lucrative rubber manufacturing and this recruitment led to resentment from locally born citizens.⁴¹ These migrants often came to Akron for better wages. In West Virginia in 1909, coal mining jobs paid an average of \$481 per year. In Akron, during the same year, male rubber workers were paid \$667 per year.⁴² Akron's industrial background created not only an opportunity for migrants to have a better living while also serving as a catalyst for the KKK to flourish in the 1920s.

Specifically, migrants sought jobs in Akron's flourishing rubber and auto parts manufacturing plants. Unlike in other cities, such as Youngstown, Ohio, European

³⁸ *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910: Vol. I, Population.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1912.

³⁹ Following historian Susan Allyn Johnson, I am defining the Appalachian area as West Virginia, the mountainous parts of western Virginia, southeastern Ohio, western North Carolina, eastern Kentucky, western Maryland, eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia, and northern Alabama. Johnson, 22, 38, 39, 61.

⁴⁰ Maples, 15.

⁴¹ Johnson, 76-77.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

immigrants were not arriving as frequently as native-born migrants. The average number of factory workers increased from 15,831 to 64,054. As automobiles were becoming more popular, Akron's rubber manufacturing grew exponentially. In the 1910s, tire production in Akron increased by twenty times as a result.⁴³ The rubber industry represented eighty percent of all manufacturing workers in Akron.⁴⁴ Despite the prevalence of the rubber industry in Akron, it lacked a strong presence of organized labor which upset many white Protestant workers. Rubber and manufacturing workers felt disenfranchised due to the lack of a union and the influx of immigrants and migrants vying for jobs alongside them. In industrial cities like Akron, unions were wiped out leaving workers without an outlet for agency in the workplace. The KKK filled that void for white Protestant workers by giving them a place to vent their frustrations concerning their jobs. Many workers found solidarity with other like-minded workers who desired more agency in the rubber and steel mills. The Klan exploited the fears of white Protestant factory workers to bolster their ranks and create a major stronghold in Akron.⁴⁵

Looking more closely at the lack of union activity in Akron illustrates how the KKK preyed on workers seeking agency. In 1923, rubber mill employers defeated worker attempts at creating a union through the American Federation of Labor (AFL).⁴⁶ National Klan sentiment towards unions varied based on location and demographics. In some areas of the country where unions represented Catholics, immigrants, or African Americans, the faction violently opposed them. In other areas like Akron, however, they were very

⁴³ Ibid., 58-60.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁵ Thomas R. Pegram, "The Ku Klux Klan, Labor, and the White Working Class During the 1920s," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17 (2018): 374.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 376.

sympathetic towards white Protestant workers with their message of white unity and nationalism.⁴⁷

With the influx of migrants into Akron came overcrowding, which resulted in higher crime, housing shortages, and dilapidated living conditions. An editor at the *Akron Evening Times* estimated that there were enough migrants from Parkersburg, West Virginia, in Akron to fill a fair-sized town.⁴⁸ There was a tent city along the Ohio and Erie Canal where factory workers lived. The *Akron Beacon Journal* wrote “here in Akron are men of families, men with good jobs, able and willing to pay rent for a house of modern or semi-modern design, but who cannot find a place to rent.”⁴⁹ As more workers came from Appalachian areas, more housing was needed. Many Akronites rented out rooms or beds for rubber workers. This caused an increase in the construction industry and created more jobs in the field which further exacerbated the housing shortages.⁵⁰ Migrants did not stay in the city long and failed to create communities which Johnson says created “a sharpening divide between native Akronites and the ‘outsiders’.”⁵¹ The *Akron Evening Times* wrote “not only do men come from south of the Ohio River, but likewise women folk, all for the same purpose: to earn a stake and then go back.”⁵²

While migrants were welcomed by factory owners, many local citizens resented them. These citizens felt that “hordes” of migrants were overcrowding the city and lowering their wages. They also blamed increasing crime on newcomers.⁵³

⁴⁷ Ibid., 382.

⁴⁸ Johnson, 50.

⁴⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 16, 1916.

⁵⁰ Randall Slonaker, “*The Failed Crusade: The Ku Klux Klan Public Education Reform in the 1920s*,” (MA thesis, Kent State University, 2016), 29-30.

⁵¹ Johnson, 84.

⁵² *Akron Evening Times*, March 2, 1917.

⁵³ Johnson, 107.

Manufacturing workers were able to frequently switch jobs, also creating a high turnover rate.⁵⁴ All of these issues created a divide that helped to lay the groundwork for the Klan to grow its base in Akron through recruitment of workers who felt disenfranchised. The appeal of the Klan in places like Akron was rooted in nativist xenophobia and issues involving labor unions. Historian Randall Slonaker describes the Klan's strategy for recruitment in northern cities like Akron by saying "unlike the Reconstruction era in which the original Klan appealed to the fears of southerners concerning recently emancipated blacks, the second-wave Klan focused on appealing to the fears of white, Protestant Americans concerning crime, juvenile delinquency, and the perceived role of eastern European, Catholic immigrants in these issues."⁵⁵ Klan activity coincided with the lack of union activity among rubber workers.⁵⁶ Ultimately, the Klan provided agency to rubber and manufacturing workers in the city who may have felt disenfranchised.

Although the above reasons made the Klan appealing, Akronites and city leaders remained skeptical initially. There were rumors of the Klan recruiting members in Akron in 1921 but city officials said they were not welcome there. To put this into a larger, national context, this was only a year after the formation of the Indiana chapter of the Klan. Both Indiana and Ohio were the most popular states in the country for Klan activity and membership. The *Akron Beacon Journal* described the Klan as "endeavouring to extend its domain into Akron." This may be the first local mention of the Klan forming in the Summit County area.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵ Slonaker, 31-32.

⁵⁶ Pegram, 375.

⁵⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 27, 1921.

The Klan planned a recruitment meeting on May 24, 1922, where many Black Akronites protested, saying the organization was “undesirable and had no place in modern civilization.” The meeting was to be held at the Akron Armory. Associations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Young Men’s Progressive Club protested and the governor Harry L. Davis forbade the meeting at the Armory.⁵⁸ Samuel T. Kelly, president of the Akron NAACP, spoke with the governor and said “that the governor had promised him no meeting was to be held.” The Klan persisted in their attempts to stage the meeting at other venues. Invitations were sent to local churches for clergy and their congregations to attend. The Klan saw these people as important to the success of their desire to spread “100% Americanism.” The invitations read “if you are 100 percent American, and believe in the tenets of the Christian religion, white supremacy, our free public schools . . . separation of church and state, limitation of foreign immigration . . . law and order, you are invited to attend the mass meetings . . . to get the inside facts on the principles . . . of the Ku Klux Klan.”⁵⁹ The Klan instead held the meeting at the Calvary Baptist Church.⁶⁰ In regards to the meeting, Akron Mayor D. C. Rybolt said “if it is found that the session is not to be 100 percent American and strictly for law and order, legal steps will be taken to prevent its being held.” By this point, the Klan had an estimated several thousand members in Akron.⁶¹ Akron was fast becoming a Klan hotbed as it gained the attention of Akronites quickly.

⁵⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 24, 1922.

⁵⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 22, 1922; May 23, 1922.

⁶⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 25, 1922.

⁶¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 22, 1922, Slonaker, 32.

The first Summit County konklave was held on November 17, 1923, with thousands marching to Fountain Park in downtown Akron. Konklaves were meetings or parades of the Klan. It was billed as the first Klan meeting in the city, with 300 women and nearly fifty junior Klan members joining in. The faction scheduled a parade along with a speech from a high-ranking Klan leader with an estimated crowd of 12,000 in attendance. The master of ceremonies was Reverend Earl M. Anneshansly of Goss Memorial Reformed Church, in Kenmore, Ohio. Another minister, Reverend O. A. Henry, former pastor of the South Akron Church of Christ, delivered a message from the national Klan headquarters that Akron and Summit County were considered the “best in the country.”⁶² Ten days later, on November 27, 1923, the Klan interrupted an assembly at South High School and presented principal C. J. Bowman with a flag and a Bible as the Klan intended it to be read in school.⁶³ The Klan presented similar gifts to other schools in the area in 1923.⁶⁴

Bowman had previously been a target of the Klan-associated South High Civic Association (SHCA). The SHCA served as a launching pad for Klan members in Akron to gain political power as the group became more popular by the day. The SHCA was a civic organization that represented South Akron in political and city matters. South Akron was made up of Protestant whites and the Klan used this fact to recruit heavily from the area. South Akron represented the highest concentration of Klan membership in the city. The Akron Board of Education proposed building a new South High School building in January 1923. This caused some citizens and leaders to protest the new

⁶² *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 17, 1923; November 19, 1923.

⁶³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 27, 1923.

⁶⁴ Maples, 47-48.

building. The SHCA was created to “represent the interests of the vicinity around South High School in the school matter.” The *Akron Beacon Journal* believed that the creation of the SHCA was an attempt to place its members on the Board of Education in the 1923 elections.⁶⁵ Later in 1923, some criticized the motives of the SHCA. President of the Board of Education Charles Smoyer said “the South high civic association [sic] is being used by a few men for selfish motives . . . working only for personal political betterment.”⁶⁶ The SHCA clearly represented the Klan’s initial attempt at education reform in Akron, which continued over the next three years.

South Akron citizens represented a large portion of Klan members in Akron and the SHCA served as the civic group to represent their ideals. The SHCA wanted the Board of Education to improve conditions at South High School and increase its size, which they declined to do. The SHCA believed this would partially alleviate the congestion and overcrowding in the school system.⁶⁷ The SHCA inspected the building and said the building was a “health menace” due to overcrowding.⁶⁸ The SHCA ultimately wanted an enlargement of the present high school and the erection of a smaller building on the premises.⁶⁹ The SHCA also wanted C. J. Bowman to resign concerning the building of a new school building.⁷⁰ This led to the SHCA endorsing three nominees for the Board of Education who also were Klan members.

The SHCA was proving to be a useful tool for the Klan to reform the education system in Akron. The SHCA endorsed Klan members J. B. Hanan, J. A. Cunningham,

⁶⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 23, 1923.

⁶⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 5, 1923.

⁶⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, February 9, 1923.

⁶⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, February 14, 1923.

⁶⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 17, 1923.

⁷⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 16, 1923.

and George Beck for the Akron Board of Education in 1923. In a campaign ad, the SHCA wrote they have “carefully studied Akron’s school problems and previously protested to the public the gross mismanagement and criminal extravagance of the school board.”⁷¹ All three candidates won in the election, representing the first step of the Klan taking control of the Board of Education.⁷² Once the SHCA and the Klan obtained some power on the Board, they voted to build the new high school. The new building in Firestone Park would cost \$600,000 to construct. This was after the Board decided to cut the budget of the school, decreasing the student capacity by two hundred.⁷³ Through the SHCA, the Klan successfully began their pursuit of true educational reform in the city. They used the momentum from this victory to gain even more influence on the Board and recruit more members.

The Klan continued to grow throughout 1923 until 1925, specifically through the usage of parades, rallies, and community events. These types of community events served as recruitment and publicity tools for the Klan. The Klan often held konklaves, and even larger klonverses, serving as conventions, in order to interact with the Akron community for recruitment purposes. Annually, the Klan also held parades on Labor Day for workers at factories like B. F. Goodrich. The perception that the KKK supported disenfranchised laborers was reinforced through these parades.⁷⁴ This type of event connected the Klan and its ideology with white workers in factory jobs. This was a national Klan practice that helped create a sense of unity and camaraderie between workers and members, leading to the recruitment of new members. On October 16, 1923, the Klan held a large meeting of

⁷¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 5, 1923.

⁷² *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 7, 1923.

⁷³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 15, 1923.

⁷⁴ Pegram, 377.

8,000 members, at Goodyear Hall, to hear a speech by a high-ranking member named the “Old Man.” He discussed the idea that immigration laws in the country were lackadaisical and laws should only allow Northern Europeans to immigrate to America. He also described the Klan as being “pro-American.”⁷⁵ Another Konklave of over 5,000 people was held on May 24, 1924, amidst rumors of Klan political endorsements.⁷⁶ On January 20, 1925, the first Summit County klonverse was held with an estimated attendance of up to 5,000 members, 2,000 being from outside Akron.⁷⁷ The Klan also created public spectacles that garnered them publicity. On July 4, 1924, the Klan burnt a twenty-five foot cross on the steps of the Summit County courthouse as a demonstration.⁷⁸

At the May 24th klonverse, Clyde Osborne urged “every member of the Klan be a member of some church.”⁷⁹ Dr. Bertram C. Tipple, the president of the Methodist College of Rome, Italy, also spoke at the klonverse. Through this worldwide religious connection, the Klan was able to continue to use clergy as tools for rationalizing their ideologies.⁸⁰ Akron religious leaders were often supporters of the Klan, as churches received cash donations from the Klan for their support. For example, on December 23, 1923, ten Klan members interrupted a service at First United Presbyterian church and donated \$275. Reverend Orin A. Keach was delivering a sermon at the time. The Klan had previously donated over \$1,200 to E. M. Lewis for renovations at his church.⁸¹ Later,

⁷⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 17, 1923.

⁷⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 26, 1924.

⁷⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 20, 1925; January 21, 1925.

⁷⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 4, 1921.

⁷⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 21, 1925.

⁸⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 21, 1925.

⁸¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, December 24, 1923.

on January 20, 1924, twenty-five robed Klan members interrupted the service of Reverend Richard R. Yocum, at the Miller Avenue Reformed Church to donate not only to the church but to him personally.⁸² On May 24, 1925, the Klan presented several flags and cash donations to the Wooster Avenue Reformed Church and the Goodyear Heights Baptist Church.⁸³ The Klan used Protestant religious leaders to convey their message of nativism and xenophobia to their congregations.

The organization was also able to infiltrate and form other civic groups and associations throughout Akron. Reverend Annessansly's wife was also a leader for the Women of the KKK. The division reportedly had 8,600 members by October 1925, "more than one and a half times the size of the men's organization."⁸⁴ The Women's Electoral League was also an organization formed by the Women of the KKK in 1926.⁸⁵ Ida A. Heaton was the secretary of the Electoral League and she helped organize a list of Klan approved candidates for the 1926 elections.⁸⁶ Heaton denied the correlation between the League and the Klan by saying "it is a league of Protestant women, formed to study present conditions in the country, investigate prospective candidates for office, and take part in civic affairs."⁸⁷ Mrs. George McCord became commander of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan in April 1927, while her husband was superintendent of Akron schools. Mrs. Katherine Annessansley resigned her position in 1926. In her absence, Mrs. Maude Burke ran the organization, but was not officially the commander.⁸⁸ Through groups such

⁸² *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 21, 1924.

⁸³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 24, 1925.

⁸⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 21, 1925.

⁸⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 6, 1926.

⁸⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 7, 1926.

⁸⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 10, 1926.

⁸⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 8, 1927.

as the Women of the KKK, Klanswomen were able to create their own agency through organizing and other Klan activities.

The 1923 fall elections proved to be quite successful for the Klan. Klan member E. E. Zesiger was elected as judge to the Municipal Bench.⁸⁹ Judge Zesiger was formerly Exalted Cyclops of Summit County, and J. B. Hanan replaced him, according to the *Akron Beacon Journal*.⁹⁰ With the Fall 1923 elections, the Klan also garnered three seats on the Board of Education, which helped them greatly. In all, Joseph B. Hanan, George A. Beck, and James A. Cunningham were elected to the Board of Education.⁹¹ Hanan later became Exalted Cyclops of Akron on October 14, 1924 in front of a large crowd that included Ohio Klan leader and Grand Dragon Clyde Osborne.⁹² On August 1, 1924, the Klan was able to impose compulsory Bible reading in public schools through a resolution passed by the Board of Education. Klan member J. B. Hanan introduced the resolution for required Bible reading, causing division amongst Board members. Jewish and Catholic organizations in the city also opposed the resolution.⁹³ Reverend George Knepper from the High Street Church of Christ and E. S. Smith of the North Hill Methodist Church supported the resolution. The Klan previously sent petitions to the Board demanding the resolution's passing. Klan and Board member Hanan said "there are plenty of good teachings in the Bible which we hope to impress on the minds of our children."⁹⁴ This accomplishment marked the first attempt by the Klan to influence

⁸⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 7, 1923.

⁹⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 6, 1925.

⁹¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 7, 1923.

⁹² *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 15, 1924.

⁹³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 1, 1924.

⁹⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 2, 1924.

education in Akron. They continued along this path in the coming years as their popularity grew more.

In December 1924, Board member Harry Huber resigned his seat, paving the path for the Klan to gain majority control.⁹⁵ On January 5, 1925, the Klan won controlling power of the Board of Education when member Charles Sweeny was elected to fill the vacancy left by Huber.⁹⁶ Sweeny espoused the same rhetoric of the Klan and was a member. The Klan and Sweeny supported a resolution barring Catholic teachers from public schools.⁹⁷ Previously, Sweeny asked the superintendent about getting rid of Catholic teachers.⁹⁸ The Superintendent of Akron schools, at this time, was secret Klan member Carroll Reed. Reed resigned his position for a similar job in Connecticut, leaving another opportunity for continued Klan dominance in Akron education. In 1924, Reed requested that his name be removed from Klan files.⁹⁹ Speculation was that Exalted Cyclops Hanan would become the new superintendent, but he denied he was in consideration. Hanan said “I wish to make it clear to the board that I am not a candidate for the position of school superintendent and I do not intend to be a candidate for that office.”¹⁰⁰ Gaining a majority on the Board of Education was the first major step in the Klan’s attempt at educational reform. With their new majority power, they attempted to go even further as 1925 progressed.

Once the Klan gained a majority on the Board of Education, they immediately began making attempts at educational reform in the city. In June 1925, the Klan majority

⁹⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, December 31, 1924.

⁹⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 6, 1925.

⁹⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 24, 1925.

⁹⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 21, 1925.

⁹⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 29, 1925.

¹⁰⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 29, 1925.

was able to get member George McCord elected as Superintendent of Akron schools, giving the group even more political power.¹⁰¹ McCord previously served as superintendent of Springfield, Ohio schools, where his tenure stirred much controversy. McCord aligned himself with the Klan and attempted to segregate schools in the area, which caused minor race riots. During a police raid of the Klan in Springfield, McCord's name was listed on a membership list. Pertaining to the Klan, McCord testified "I am a member of the Klan; I am of glad of it; I think it is about the best 100 percent organization in the country."¹⁰² Still, the Klan vehemently denied having any involvement in the election of McCord. Ohio Grand Dragon Clyde Osborne stated "I understand there are several Klansmen on the Akron board of education but if the Klan played any part in the election of the superintendent of Akron schools, it was purely a local proposition, and the state Klan organization had nothing to do with it."¹⁰³ By electing McCord as superintendent, the Klan began their domination of the Board of Education but not without alarming many parents and voters in Akron.

McCord's actions as Springfield, Ohio, school superintendent give a healthy insight into his ideology and what he planned to bring to Akron city schools. The Klan aimed to use McCord as a tool for education reform in Akron and their grand vision for a "100% American" school system. The Klan's vision consisted of electing members and officials into positions of power in Akron public schools. In order to implement their ultimate goal of school segregation, the Klan barred Catholic teachers from public

¹⁰¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 8, 1925.

¹⁰² *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 9, 1925.

¹⁰³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 10, 1925.

schools and instituted mandatory Bible reading, similar to events that occurred in Springfield while McCord was superintendent.

George McCord's tenure in Springfield served as a precursor to his performance in Akron, in terms of controversy and job performance. First, African Americans had trouble becoming employed as teachers in Springfield. In 1922, the city redistricted school zones and McCord suggested segregating schools. In May, the school board voted to segregate the schools and begin hiring Black teachers. The Fulton school became a segregated school, which divided the city's African American population. Some viewed the decision as a means of employment for teachers, while others rejected the issue of segregation entirely. The NAACP had a petition signed by 900 Black residents in the Fulton school district who were against the segregation of schools in the area. This issue became more volatile and McCord was at its center.¹⁰⁴

The division within Springfield's African American community over Fulton's segregation made it more difficult to stop McCord. McCord's opponents formed the Civil Rights Protective League (CRPL), aimed at mobilizing citizens against segregation. The group organized boycotts and protests in the area and hoped to take the issue to the courts for reversal. On the first day of school, the CRPL picketed and sent letters to parents urging them to keep their children home. These letters said "if you don't want jim crow [sic] schools, keep your children home." Only half of all school children at Fulton stayed home as the other half crossed picket lines and the CRPL labelled them as traitors. The issue created incredible strife amongst Springfield's African American community as they began turning against one another. Some picketers changed their minds after city

¹⁰⁴ August Meier and Elliot Rudwick. "Early Boycotts of Segregated Schools: The Case of Springfield, Ohio, 1922-23," *American Quarterly* Vol. 20, No. 4 (Winter, 1968): 747-49.

officials began pressuring them to return. McCord initially warned parents to send their children to school, threatening to apply truancy laws against them. Many still persisted, however, as weeks and months went by.¹⁰⁵ McCord failed to hold many parents accountable for the protests due to fear of backlash in the community. In November, the CRPL planned a massive demonstration of over 150 people, aimed at preventing teachers from entering. This turned violent as rocks were thrown at people, including a police officer. In the end, thirty-two people were arrested. McCord and the Board of Education began targeting vulnerable, low-income parents who withheld their children from school. The Board threatened prosecution for truancy but this did not work in favor of McCord; in the end, most of the cases were dismissed in court.¹⁰⁶ McCord saw this as an opportunity to gain control over the situation in Springfield but it ultimately failed.

Inevitably, McCord's threats against parents regarding truancy failed as Springfield courts issued an injunction against segregation on January 31, 1923. Under the permanent injunction, the court ruled that children could not be transferred to and from school based on race or color. The Board then appealed the decision and McCord fired all African American teachers, replacing them with white teachers. Decades passed in Springfield with no Black teachers in the city schools. Following the injunction, numerous school board members were implicated as being members of the KKK, as well as teachers and McCord himself. By the end of 1923, McCord resigned his position as superintendent.¹⁰⁷ He proved to be a failure in Springfield, leaving division in the city

¹⁰⁵ Meier and Rudwick, 751-53.

¹⁰⁶ Meier and Rudwick, 754-55.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 755-57.

based on his decision to segregate schools. His legacy would be felt in Springfield for years to follow.

Following his tenure as Springfield school superintendent, George McCord accepted a position as Akron superintendent. Akronites saw McCord's selection as being a Klan maneuver within the education system and, as a result, the three non-Klan members of the Board resigned in protest.¹⁰⁸ The resigned members were Mrs. C. W. Garrett, Mrs. A. Ross Read, and Board President H. T. Waller. They argued that the majority Klan members conducted secret Klan meetings regarding school affairs, making decisions outside of the official Board meetings—including the nomination of McCord.¹⁰⁹ Waller was an interesting figure in that there was speculation that he was actually a Klan member. Waller spoke at a meeting in March 1925, prior to his resignation.¹¹⁰ It appeared that Waller may have been a disillusioned Klan member, considering his opposition to the Klan Board members was quite clear. Hazel Osborn and Charles Stahl filled two of the vacancies on the Board of Education on June 29, and they collectively denied being members of the Klan.¹¹¹ On July 6, car salesman J. Grant Hyde was elected to fill the final vacancy. At the same time, Hanan was elected as the President of the Board of Education after his resignation as Exalted Cyclops of the Klan.¹¹² The resignation of Read, Garrett, and Waller left more vacancies on the Board, but these would not be so easy for the Klan to fill. This, and the election of McCord, put a negative spotlight on the Klan that was difficult to break away from. The general consensus on the

¹⁰⁸ Maples, 60.

¹⁰⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 11, 1925.

¹¹⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 2, 1925.

¹¹¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 30, 1925.

¹¹² *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 7, 1925.

hiring of McCord was disapproval from such groups as the Akron Rotary Club. Rotary President C.W. Selberling said “I have no fight with the Ku Klux Klan, but I feel that our school affairs should be kept out of politics.” Selberling also stated “politics have never crept into the school system of Akron . . . secret organizations have never tried to dominate school affairs.”¹¹³ The Chamber of Commerce also opposed the move as it “should receive the unqualified condemnation of the people of Akron.” The Chamber also stated McCord was “elected by four members of the board representing a secret organization” which sought to dictate “on the basis of their religious prejudices . . . the appointment of principals and teachers in the Akron schools.”¹¹⁴ McCord’s election caused an uproar against the Klan throughout the city. The Klan’s decision to elect George McCord tested their popularity within the city and proved the amount of support they possessed.

Akronites were divided over the decision of the Board of Education to hire McCord as new superintendent. Reverend E. M. Lewis of the South Main Street Methodist Church praised McCord and the candidates associated with him for the Board of Education. Lewis claimed that this issue was not a “Klan fight but one of fairness and justice to all.” Lewis also said that McCord “is a Christian gentleman, who believes in having the Holy Bible, the only book which teaches us how to live, in the public schools” and that “it is there and we want to keep it there.”¹¹⁵ McCord’s insistence on Protestant religious teachings in public schools lined up with Klan thinking, and illustrated that this

¹¹³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 23, 1925.

¹¹⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 24, 1925.

¹¹⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 26, 1925.

was a Klan fight. Others in the city were not as happy about the appointment of McCord and this negatively affected the public perception of the Klan.

Some Akronites believed McCord was a “Christian gentleman” but others believed he was a man with xenophobic and racist motives bent on imposing Klan will on the school system. A group of concerned citizens scheduled a meeting to discuss the situation with the theme “Keep Politics Out of the Schools.” Mayoral candidate Gus Kasch suggested that the Board rescind the hiring of McCord and re-hire the three non-Klan members. He also said Charles Sweeny should resign from his position on the Board.¹¹⁶ Former Board member H. T. Waller led the “Keep Politics Out of the Schools” committee at the June 19 meeting. Waller asked “shall the board of education and its administration be controlled by influences that will make the selection and retention of teachers, the letting of contracts, the purchase of supplies, a political football at the expense of the children of this, our city?”¹¹⁷ This meeting led to the creation of an anti-Klan opposition society in an attempt to wrestle control away from the Kluxers.

The Non-Political Public School League (NPPSL) was formed in August 1925 with the intent of removing political and fraternal groups from controlling the Board of Education. They hoped to replace the four Klan members on the Board saying their replacements “will be chosen on account of their freedom from political or fraternal prejudice.”¹¹⁸ Mrs. A. Ross Reed, member of the NPPSL, claimed that Sweeny went to former superintendent Reed inquiring about removing Catholic teachers from public schools. Reed replied that it was not possible. Reed also suggested that J. B. Hanan

¹¹⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 18, 1925.

¹¹⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 20, 1925.

¹¹⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 8, 1925.

circulated petitions that read “We Want a Protestant Superintendent for Our Schools.”¹¹⁹ Resigned member Garrett also heard speculation that Sweeny would fire teachers of “a certain religion.”¹²⁰ These rumors were also substantiated by Socialist Party organizer J. Franklyn Viola who said “a local Klansman told him that the next step of the board of education will be to make the teaching staff of the city all Protestant.”¹²¹ In the end, on August 5, Sweeny announced he was not running for re-election to the Board of Education, citing conflicts with his job at a Cleveland mortuary.¹²² This allowed for a fourth vacant spot on the Board to become available, which Akronites would fill in the November election.

By July 1925, the Klan stated that the Akron chapter had the largest membership in the country, surpassing Indianapolis. At the same time, the *Akron Beacon Journal* reported the group was planning to build a new headquarters in the city. The club had previously abandoned their headquarters and planned to build an auditorium with office space. They formed their own auditorium company and began selling stocks for it.¹²³ This milestone marked the plateau of the Klan’s activity, power, and influence in Summit county.

The test of the Klan’s true power came with the 1925 Board of Education elections. If the Klan’s popularity was strong, they would win at the polls. As the summer of 1925 ended, the Akron Board of Education was poised to have four vacancies voted on in the November elections. The NPPSL, in opposition to the Klan, nominated their own

¹¹⁹ Slonaker, 52.

¹²⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 20, 1925.

¹²¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 22, 1925.

¹²² *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 5, 1925.

¹²³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 21, 1925.

candidates for the vacancies. These candidates were Robert Guinther, L. Roy Reifsnider, Wade DeWoody, and Walter Kirn vehemently opposed McCord's regime in the schools.¹²⁴ DeWoody exclaimed that there was only one issue at hand and it was whether citizens would have "free government of our schools or McCord-Klan government?"¹²⁵ A representative for the NPPSL said the four candidates "were chosen because they are representative citizens and are free from all influences."¹²⁶ The Klan nominees were backed by a group called the Citizen's School League (CSL), which seemed to act in conjunction with the Klan. They were able to essentially have Klan meetings under the guise of the CSL. These meetings and konklaves were seemingly interchangeable with KKK members attending both while discussing education issues. The Board elections would be a battle between the NPPSL and the opposing CSL for control of Akron's public schools.

The CSL was an organization created for the endorsement of Klan-backed candidates on the Akron Board of Education. The Klan wished to distance themselves from the Board as they could endorse candidates unofficially through the CSL.¹²⁷ The CSL did not disclose their members, with the exception of President Fred Weber and secretary M. C. Heminger.¹²⁸ Political campaign literature for the CSL stated the group was "free from any political influence and will represent all the people" while making no references to the Klan.¹²⁹ Board and Klan member J. B. Hanan also acted as a spokesman

¹²⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 14, 1925.

¹²⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 13, 1925.

¹²⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 22, 1925.

¹²⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 13, 1925.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 27, 1925.

for the CSL. As the elections drew closer, the rivalry between the CSL and NPPSL intensified.

The NPPSL continued to paint CSL candidates as Klan puppets throughout their campaign. Waller's Klan membership came into question again as Hanan argued that he was a Klan member and sought Klan support. At a CSL meeting in October 1925, Hanan said "outside influence was brought to bear with the proposition that if he would vote for Sweeney instead of Guinther the Klan vote would be thrown to him this fall." At the same meeting, McCord praised Hanan saying "he is not only 100 percent for education but he is also 100 percent for real religion and spiritual development of boys and girls." The fact alone that McCord spoke alongside Hanan shows evidence that they shared the connection of the Klan and that the Klan selected McCord. Similarly, McCord and the Klan nominees for the Board demanded that the Bible be read in public schools. McCord requested for every school session to be "commenced with the reading of a passage of the scriptures" and nominee Ruby Kahlor said she "would also like to work towards having every child in Sunday school."¹³⁰ These issues created tension in the city that exploded as the election drew near.

The upcoming election in November would decide the fate of Akron public schools for years and this represented an emotional issue for voters. On September 18, 1925, Carl R. Fink, representing the Margaret Park School in Akron, read a resolution condemning the Klan Board appointees and endorsing the NPPSL nominees. This meeting turned volatile and ended in a "near riot." McCord mentioned at the meeting that the Board was considering renting out churches for use as school rooms to accommodate

¹³⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 31, 1925.

higher enrollment in public schools in the city.¹³¹ Other NPPSL meetings occurred as the fall moved forward. Reverend Dr. Lloyd C. Douglas spoke against the Klan at an October 1925 NPPSL meeting. Douglas condemned the group by saying “the city of Akron is sick . . . it is full of personal prejudices, hatred, and narrowness.”¹³² Also, at another October meeting, the NPPSL condemned the Klan majority on the Board, and linked them with Ohio’s Grand Dragon Clyde Osborne. Walter Wanamaker, attorney for the NPPSL, said “a vote for a member of the present board is a vote for Osborne’s boast that he had taken over seven Ohio schools and was going to take over the rest.”¹³³ The NPPSL hoped that their campaign would be successful in ousting the Klan from the Board of Education.

The Klan and the CSL did their best to win the upcoming election. Board members Hazel Osborn and Ruby Kahlor were both Klan members. The Klan endorsed Hyde and Stahl as their replacements because they felt they could not be re-elected. Nominee Robert Guinther believed that Hyde and Stahl were not Klan members but were being used by the organization.¹³⁴ The Klan also gave \$1521.30 to support Hyde, Stahl, Osborne, and Kahler in the elections, including monies from Klanswomen.¹³⁵ Mrs. E. M. Annessansly, head of the women’s division of the Summit County Klan backed McCord by saying “we don’t hesitate to tell that we are backing him and the school board that is backing him as well.”¹³⁶ In the 1925 elections, there was also an ordinance to approve Sunday dancing at dance halls which the Klan opposed. If it was accepted, Sunday

¹³¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 19, 1925.

¹³² *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 30, 1925.

¹³³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 3, 1925.

¹³⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 13, 1925.

¹³⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 11, 1925.

¹³⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 31, 1925.

dancing would become legal in the city.¹³⁷ The Klan used their force to prevent the ordinance and win the Board of Education elections. Akronites prepared to cast their votes and decide these matters, once and for all.

Roy Relfsnider, Walter Kirn, Robert Guinther, and J. Grant Hyde were elected; Wade DeWoody was the only NPPSL representative not elected. The NPPSL also issued a statement saying they believed that Hyde was not a Klan member but was only being used by the group. The *Akron Beacon Journal*, regarding the election results, wrote the “vote shows hooded order is not dominant in politics of the city.” The Klan did score a victory in the defeat of the Sunday dance issue. The results show clearly that Akronites were interested in enforcing morality in their city but not as the result of actions by the KKK.¹³⁸

Under McCord, Akron city schools continued to be overcrowded and conditions worsened. Teachers had classrooms of as many as seventy students. Some students did not have desks and were forced to learn sitting on the floor. Others sat double-seated in their chairs. Rooms were often converted into classrooms, including the basements of some buildings. One school used two-room portable units to house classes, as congestion was only estimated to increase.¹³⁹ McCord failed to improve public schooling in Akron despite the attention given to him by the Klan members who helped elect him. In fact, McCord’s election acted as a catalyst for the Klan to lose their majority on the Board. Much like his tenure in Springfield, school overcrowding and sanitary problems were

¹³⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 1, 1925.

¹³⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 4, 1925.

¹³⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 28, 1926.

only exacerbated. This also marked the beginning of the end of the Klan's traction in Akron.

There was a connection between Klan Exalted Cyclops J. B. Hanan and McCord in that the latter's power came from his relationship with the former. When Hanan was not present, McCord was often unable to get much support from the rest of the Board. Hanan became ill with inflammatory rheumatism in 1926 and Guinther became interim President. At the time, McCord and Hanan were attempting to restructure the school system through a junior high school expansion to alleviate student overcrowding. Division within the Board continued past the 1925 elections. As Hanan took time off for illness, McCord decided to not press the unpopular junior high school issue and the divisions eroded in his absence. McCord needed Hanan in order to maintain any type of power in the school system.¹⁴⁰

In 1927, Hanan, George Beck, and J. M. Cunningham decided to not run for re-election to the Board of Education.¹⁴¹ Three CSL members were elected in the November elections: George Sherman, Willis Thornton, and Milton Murphy and they had no ties to the Klan.¹⁴² It also appears the Klan attempted to use McCord again in a different role as district enforcement officer of the federal prohibition department. Speculation was that he applied for the job, but he did not confirm or deny this.¹⁴³ On March 20, 1928, Akron schools informed McCord that his role as superintendent was ending once his contract expired later that year. In July, he took a leave of absence and never returned to the city. Board members Robert Guinther and L. R. Reifsnider began searching the Midwest for

¹⁴⁰ Maples, 84.

¹⁴¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 2, 1927.

¹⁴² *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 9, 1927.

¹⁴³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 19, 1927.

his replacement. McCord's departure signaled the end of Klan dominance in Akron educational reform.¹⁴⁴

The Klan ranks were divided over the 1925 mayoral and Board of Education elections, causing turmoil within the set. E. M. Annessansly resigned as secretary in October and Chicago organizer Dr. W. K. Smith announced as his replacement. Smith was a national business manager for the group, brought in to organize the Akron chapter in place of local organizers. Ohio Grand Dragon Osborne said their "most efficient organization in Ohio is in Tuscarawas County, and the Klan there is under a business manager. . . . [I]f it is successful in Summit County the local Klansmen will want to continue it."¹⁴⁵ As a result of the factional split, Osborne also ordered that no candidates would be endorsed by the Klan, state-wide.¹⁴⁶

The Summit County Klan removed Smith as speculation arose that the Akron chapter would be split into two factions, which was a result of the dissension within the KKK.¹⁴⁷ Frank Cox replaced Smith, and the Klan banished Smith from the set altogether, resulting in more division. Some local Klansmen voted to withdraw and return the Summit County charter to national headquarters and then form a separate organization on their own, which Cox denied would happen. He said "the charter will remain here. . . . [I]f the charter had been sent back it would have been returned to Akron immediately." Cox also had no knowledge of why Smith was banished, saying only "the Klan is a

¹⁴⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 20, 1928.

¹⁴⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 17, 1925.

¹⁴⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 15, 1925.

¹⁴⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 16, 1926.

military organization, Smith's banishment is the result of military orders. No one but the imperial wizards knows why Smith was banished."¹⁴⁸

All Summit County Klan officials resigned following Smith's removal and aimed to transfer funds and property to the newly created Protestant Service League (PSL). The Summit County Klan filed an injunction against national Klan leaders in order to prevent state and national officials from interfering. While previously praising national Klan leadership, many local leaders were involved in this injunction, including former Summit county Exalted Cyclops Reverend O. A. Henry. This followed a meeting of 3,500 Klan members discussing the removal of Smith and the idea of forming a new group, the Buckeye Civic Association (BCA).¹⁴⁹ Approximately 2,000 men and women attended the first Buckeye Civic Association meeting on September 25, with W. K. Smith speaking. Rather than a cross, the BCA chose a square as their symbol, burning one at this meeting.¹⁵⁰ Smith also proclaimed that Hanan was the Klan's new vice president, McCord was secretary, and Joseph Sieber was the new exalted cyclops in the area, all of which Hanan denied. Smith also claimed that finances were being mishandled throughout the Klan.¹⁵¹ Former Klan organizer and secretary Norman C. Clarke claimed the BCA would be neither pro-Klan nor anti-Klan. Clarke also mentioned that Klan membership was down to an estimated 2,000 members, compared to 24,233 in late 1923.¹⁵² The secession of members from the Klan to the BCA served as a deathblow to the Klan, from which it never recovered.

¹⁴⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 20, 1926.

¹⁴⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 21, 1926.

¹⁵⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 27, 1926.

¹⁵¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 4, 1926.

¹⁵² *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 25, 1926.

Ohio Grand Dragon C. Gilbert Taylor blamed insubordination for the removal of Smith from the Klan. State and national leaders disagreed with Smith allowing local Klansmen to brandish rifles in the Labor Day parade. This was regarding a recent mandate by Klan officials that members could not display firearms at official meetings and public spectacles. Taylor said “we are a law abiding organization. Why should any Klansman carry a gun?” Another reason given was Smith’s failure to hold elections within the group for official positions. Smith had previously been removed from other leadership positions on two separate occasions around the country. An anonymous letter in the *Akron Beacon Journal* said Smith was “continually fighting prominent klansmen who have had the nerve to oppose his dictatorship methods.”¹⁵³ Later, Smith issued a statement contradicting the charges against him. In his defense, Smith used a prior statement from Taylor against him, claiming the Ohio Grand Dragon previously regarded the Klan as a “military institution.” Smith asserted that he was not insubordinate in allowing Akron members to display firearms, considering Taylor’s prior statement. He defended the display of rifles, further adding that the rifles were empty. Smith also threatened leaders of the group as he said “unless they stop persecuting me I will make public a lot of material that will embarrass a large number of prominent Akron men.”¹⁵⁴ The matter of who owned the assets between the BCA and the Klan would be settled in court in a bitter fight that would destroy both organizations in the end.

Klan finances were put under scrutiny in a hearing involving the BCA and the Klan over the transfer of funds and property. The Klan claimed that the members who left

¹⁵³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 22, 1926.

¹⁵⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 23, 1926.

the group to form the BCA forfeited their rights to the assets once they left.¹⁵⁵ A judge ordered the Klan to submit twelve months of financial records before the hearing began.¹⁵⁶ In the end, the Klan failed to retrieve and submit records prior to June 1926, decreasing their chances of a positive decision.¹⁵⁷ During the trial, it was claimed by the Klan defendants that the local Klan failed to receive money from state and national headquarters. The plaintiffs representing the BCA said the Klan portrayed itself as a non-profit organization but it was argued that they only used \$2,894.36 for charitable purposes and kept \$185,122.61. That money was then used to fund Klan candidates in local elections. Also, the defendants stated that the Summit County Klan continued to operate despite the formation of the BCA. This meant that the Klan should still own the assets since they continued to exist alongside the BCA.¹⁵⁸

The judge granted the BCA/PSL two-thirds of Klan assets, and one-third to the Summit County Klan. The judge felt that both sides were “hopelessly divided and could see no reconciliation.”¹⁵⁹ W. K. Smith said the BCA was “perfectly satisfied” with the outcome and that the BCA was given a “fair trial.”¹⁶⁰ This was not the end of the ordeal as the Klan appealed the decision. The appellate court then reversed the initial decision in the Common Pleas court. It was decided that the case would be brought to the Ohio supreme court for final decision on the dispute.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, the Ohio Supreme Court

¹⁵⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 18, 1926.

¹⁵⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 24, 1926.

¹⁵⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 30, 1926.

¹⁵⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 30, 1926; December 1, 1926.

¹⁵⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 5, 1927.

¹⁶⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 6, 1927.

¹⁶¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 8, 1927.

decided to not hear the case and relinquished all assets back to the Klan. This battle over assets served to destroy the Klan and the BCA completely.

Later, Smith and Clarke changed the name of the BCA to the Buckeye Service League (BSL) and endorsed Democratic candidates in elections. These Democrats opposed Klan nominees, going against the notion that the BCA/BSL was non-partisan.¹⁶² W. K. Smith endorsed G. Lloyd Weil for mayor of Akron in 1927. One of Weil's promises was to combat vice in the city. Clarke also worked with Smith and Weil on the campaign.¹⁶³ After W. K. Smith was fired, 3,500 members out of 4,300 seceded from the Klan to start the BCA.¹⁶⁴ By the end of 1926, after the factionalism was over, attendance at Klan meetings only ranged from 150 to 400 members.¹⁶⁵ Thanks to the ruling that returned assets back to the Klan, the BCA/BSL was also incapacitated and died out by October 1928.¹⁶⁶ The Klan also faced other problems that further destroyed their vitality in the city.

Dating back to 1925, the issue of building a new Klan headquarters was a priority for the group. Many high-ranking Klan members were involved in the Summit County Auditorium Company, including Clyde Osborne and J. B. Hanan. This was a property investment company with three thousand stockholders, which subsequently violated federal laws in attempts to avoid bankruptcy. The company was commissioned to build an auditorium on First Street in Akron to serve as a new headquarters for the Klan. Later in an investigation, prosecutors ordered Klan financial records to be disclosed which

¹⁶² *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 12, 1927.

¹⁶³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 20, 1927.

¹⁶⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 23, 1927.

¹⁶⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, December 2, 1926.

¹⁶⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 31, 1928.

showed those violations in full.¹⁶⁷ Allegations against members of the company included former Exalted Cyclops Reverend A. E. Henry. These allegations stated that Henry and others who were handling the stocks for the company took more than the legal fifteen percent as a sales commission. Henry was also a stockholder in the company. The assets from the stocks could also not be accounted for leaving their whereabouts a mystery.¹⁶⁸ The fallout from the bankruptcy sealed the fate of the Klan in Akron as a dying entity.

The Akron Klan fell deeper into obscurity as the 1920s wound down, and by 1928, the national popularity of the group was declining in many states. The *New York Times* reported in February that in northern and southern states alike, Klan membership paled in comparison to its numbers just four years prior. This proved true in the state of Ohio as well. The *Times* wrote “in mayoralty and congressional elections . . . candidates who obtained support of the Klan were badly beaten.” They also reported that “no meetings or gatherings of any importance have been held in the state for more than eighteen months, and the organization is rarely mentioned in the newspapers.”¹⁶⁹ On February 22, in Washington, the Klan officially discarded the hood as part of their identity. This effectively stripped members of much of the secrecy that allowed the KKK to maintain power in the country. Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans stated, “no mask or visor shall be upon the helmet of the regalia of any Klansman.”¹⁷⁰ The Akron Klan followed through with the order, as well.¹⁷¹ This proved to be disastrous as members were previously protected by the secrecy that masks and hoods provided. With the order to

¹⁶⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 24, 1928.

¹⁶⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 8, 1928.

¹⁶⁹ *New York Times*, February 5, 1928.

¹⁷⁰ *New York Times*, February 23, 1928.

¹⁷¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, February 23, 1928.

unmask that secrecy uncovered every member in every parade and meeting. No longer could neighbors, family members, and business leaders be guaranteed that their membership would not affect their lives and careers, and many chose to leave the group as a result. In Akron, the Klan never recovered, and only isolated events would be written about around town and their popularity was non-existent. As of March 1929, the *Beacon Journal* labelled the Akron Klan as “extinct.”¹⁷²

In 1935, rumors of a newly organized Klan in Akron surfaced. Between 1,500 and 2,000 members were rumored to be attending a parade in September to hear Ohio Grand Dragon James Colescott speak.¹⁷³ Klan secretary P. E. Luther wrote “the Klan may ride again but I’m afraid the modern generation will think it’s an advertising stunt for a new war picture.”¹⁷⁴ In the end, only 1,200 members marched in the parade, which was described as the first public meeting in “at least eight years.” Colescott outlined numerous topics that the Klan was concerned with. He criticized President Franklin Roosevelt by saying “he is getting into the worst company any president ever had” referring to the “Jewish-Communitistic influence in Washington.” He also spoke about the Klan’s plan for deporting unnaturalized aliens who were “holding jobs that ought to be held by Americans.” He alleged that the Democratic Party was controlled by Catholics and he called on Protestants to clean up the party. Finally, he spoke on the future of the Klan by saying “the Klan today is not the Klan you knew in ‘24” and “we are on a

¹⁷² *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 12, 1929.

¹⁷³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 7, 1935.

¹⁷⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 28, 1935.

threshold of a real revival of interest in the Klan.” Judging by the words of Colescott, members were left optimistic regarding the Klan’s future in Akron and Ohio.¹⁷⁵

Colescott’s vision for a new and improved Klan in Akron sparked the same controversy within the city as in previous years. The Klan expected 35,000 members at the Labor Day konklave at the annual Goodyear field day in 1926. Klansmen from Ohio chapters such as Youngstown and Cleveland were expected to attend.¹⁷⁶ In comparison to the expected 35,000 members, only 10,000 members were in attendance as bands played and flag wavers performed. Women’s Klan organizations were given their own spotlight throughout the night, as well.¹⁷⁷ Other Klan meetings faced scrutiny from some in Akron as the Summit County Central Labor Union protested a planned October Klan parade.¹⁷⁸ Grand Dragon Colescott stated that Hiram Evans was scheduled to appear and that it would make Akron “the Mecca for the time being of the Klan.”¹⁷⁹ The day before the parade, a twenty-five foot cross was burned as a prelude to the event.¹⁸⁰ The mayor requested the Klan to march without masks and hoods, which helped to decrease attendance. Also, the burning of crosses was banned.¹⁸¹ Ultimately, Evans did not appear due to a death in his family, and only a few hundred people were in attendance. Colescott also confirmed the official Klan stance that they were primarily concerned with fighting

¹⁷⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 30, 1935.

¹⁷⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 4, 1926.

¹⁷⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 7, 1926.

¹⁷⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 11, 1936.

¹⁷⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 22, 1936.

¹⁸⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 2, 1936.

¹⁸¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 3, 1936.

Communism.¹⁸² Once again, secrecy was important to the strength of the Klan. When that secrecy was taken away, Klan membership and admiration dwindled away.

It is clear that once secrecy was stripped away from Klan members, many left the organization. Others, however, felt the Klan lost their edge and became too passive. This led to the creation of new hate groups such as the Black Legion, who first appeared in newspaper headlines in May 1936 after the torture and murder of a man in Detroit, Michigan. They only approached former Klansmen to be members and were very secretive in their actions.¹⁸³ The Legion was a brief, more violent successor to the 1920s KKK. Ohio Klan Grand Dragon Colescott later listed Summit County and Akron as popular locations in the state for membership in the Legion. Colescott, however, denied any connection between the Klan and the Black Legion. Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans also denounced the Black Legion and offered Klan aid in stopping the terrorist group.¹⁸⁴ A Black Legion member in Ohio testified that members would “kill their enemies if necessary” and labelled the Legion as the successor to the Klan.¹⁸⁵ There was speculation that the Black Legion was involved in riots involving rubber workers in the area.¹⁸⁶ Ultimately, grand jury investigations were launched into the Legion for two Akronites being suspected members.¹⁸⁷ Ohio lawmakers launched investigations into how prevalent the Legion was in Akron but found nothing significant.

The Northeast Ohio Protective Association (NEOPA) was another spin-off of the Klan that made headlines in 1937. The NEOPA aimed to assist local police in enforcing

¹⁸² *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 5, 1936.

¹⁸³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 26, 1936.

¹⁸⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 29, 1936.

¹⁸⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 27, 1936.

¹⁸⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 3, 1936.

¹⁸⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 28, 1936.

law and order and included former Klan members. The secretary of the NEOPA stated “we’re interested in catching all sorts of criminals and in protecting life and property.” The association also denied any similarities to the Klan and said that religion and race will not play a factor in their activity.¹⁸⁸ One last upstart hate group appeared in Akron within days of the reports of the formation of the NEOPA. The Legion of Action opposed “communism and allied or sponsored organizations, Fascism or other ‘ism’ or dictatorship foreign to American principles.” The Legion of Action originated in Toledo and aimed to form strongholds in both Akron and Youngstown.¹⁸⁹ Despite the dying popularity of the Klan, their core values and ideology remained in organizations such as the Black Legion and others.

The city of Akron clearly did not accept hate groups like the Klan or the Black Legion any longer. This marked a paradigm shift away from some xenophobic feelings against certain Akronites towards greater acceptance of immigrant populations. In 1937, the *Akron Beacon Journal* polled Akronites on whether hate groups like the “Klan should be prohibited by law” and overwhelmingly, the sentiment was that they should be. One citizen said “yes, it should be prohibited because of the fact that it is prejudiced against so many people.” Another Akronite said the Klan was “too radical.” As compared to the height of the Klan in 1924, Akronites appeared to be much less accepting of the Klan. This shows a definitive shift among citizens towards more acceptance of immigrants and diversity in the area.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, February 25, 1937.

¹⁸⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, February 27, 1937.

¹⁹⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 20, 1937.

The Ohio Klan heavily promised a return to its former glory going forward but failed to deliver much. Until May 1938, there were no public appearances of the Klan in Akron. That month they agreed to a resolution to “deport aliens” and for “protection of labor.” They called for passing of the Reynolds-Starnes Bill that would “safeguard the American people against the importation of foreign labor.” This bill called for the mass deportation of immigrants in the country.¹⁹¹ Later, thousands of postcards marked from the Klan were sent to senators protesting the hiring of immigrants for jobs that should be going to “Americans.”¹⁹² The postcards called only for the deportation of “foreign people who have come to this country illegally, whose only aim is to prevent crime, preach un-Americanism and live on charity.”¹⁹³

Imperial Wizard Colescott appeared in Akron in 1939 as part of a nationwide tour to spark renewed interest in the Klan. He insisted the Klan was no longer a hate group despite saying “the future of this republic rests solely in the hands of native-born, white, Protestant, Gentile Americans.” The *Beacon Journal* refuted his recruitment attempt writing “our blood pressure rises at this reminder of Klan bigotry, the same kind of nonsense which Akron suckered for so grandly 15 years ago.” It is clear that by 1939, Akronites were not nearly as accepting of the Klan as they were in 1924 at the height of their popularity.¹⁹⁴

In 1939, Imperial Wizard and former Ohio Grand Dragon James Colescott attempted to “clean up” the Klan to attract new members. In a visit to Akron, he insisted the group’s focus would be on “radicals” specifically referring to the Communist

¹⁹¹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 9, 1938.

¹⁹² *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 21, 1938.

¹⁹³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 25, 1938.

¹⁹⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, December 5, 1939.

elements in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and other trade unions. The *Beacon Journal* wrote “he doesn’t want any more intimidation of racial or religious groups.” Despite this, Colescott advocated for segregation of schools, Jewish assimilation, and to “purge bigotry and radicalism from the Klan.” He mentioned that Klan membership was still about one-third of its number in 1924. On the issue of African Americans Colescott “doesn’t hate Negroes [H]e even has a Negro maid. He likes her because she is capable and reliable [H]e even paid her wages and medical bills when she was sick recently.” Colescott knew Klan approval decreased since the 1920’s and this was his attempt to attract new members to the weakened KKK. This was a typical paternalist statement to rationalize and justify racist behavior. Portraying the Klan as against bigotry while still advocating for segregation is still bigotry. By 1939, the Klan’s forms of racism and bigoted intimidation tactics failed to resonate with many Americans.

The Klan’s popularity in Akron ran parallel with other Klan hotbeds in the United States. 1924 and 1925 represented the peak of the Klan in Summit County. Through political maneuvering, they secured a majority rule on the Akron Board of Education. Despite this, they failed to enact significant educational reform with the exception of compulsory Bible reading in public schools. Their election of George McCord as school superintendent also served as their downfall with the education system. McCord’s appointment spurred outrage among Akronites who organized an election campaign to remove Klan members from the Board. McCord’s job performance was poor as superintendent as conditions in schools only worsened. After the debacle of McCord’s appointment, internal factionalism served as the final straw for the Klan. Only a year

later, as 1926 ended, Klan membership decreased dramatically after many former members seceded to form another group. After the factionalism ended, attendance at Klan meetings only ranged from 150 to 400 members.¹⁹⁵ Once a national hotbed for Klan activity, by 1927, Akron housed a small fraction of their membership. The Invisible Empire truly became invisible in Summit county.

Chapter 3-Youngstown

The Youngstown, Ohio, area played a major part in the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the twentieth century. Most studies of the Klan focus on the South and demonstrate how the Klan used violence and lynching against African Americans to disenfranchise them. The Klan in the North used similar strategies. It was violent and relied on securing political positions in order to enact its ideas directly. Within a short period, Youngstown emerged as having one of the highest percentages of Klan members based on population in the United States.¹⁹⁶ By 1923, the Youngstown Klan presented itself as a social brotherhood aimed at enforcing laws and promoting educational reform. These tactics, however, were a means of attacking the region's Catholic immigrant population. The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley pursued its racist and xenophobic agenda by focusing on the enforcement of local laws of morality and vice.

¹⁹⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, December 2, 1926.

¹⁹⁶ William Vance Trollinger, Jr., "Hearing the Silence: The University of Dayton, the Ku Klux Klan, and Catholic Universities and Colleges in the 1920s," *American Catholic Studies* Vol. 124, No. 1 (Spring 2013): 4.

The Klan adapted its ideology of “100% Americanism” as it moved into Ohio and, specifically, into the city of Youngstown. The notions of Americanism and patriotism were often coupled with religion in Klan thought and rhetoric. As was true in nearby Akron, native-born white residents often Catholic immigrants arriving from eastern Europe, Italy, and Ireland a threat to democracy and to Protestant Christian morality. In 1923, a northern Ohio Klan lecturer spoke of “the decay of public morality” and called on “men, Americans, and Christians to forget differences and selfish interests and to unite to make a better nation.”¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the Klan preyed on the fear of immigrants to employ their anti-Catholic measures in Youngstown. Over the 1920s, Youngstown emerged as having one of the highest per capita numbers of Klan members in the country.¹⁹⁸ This was related to the high numbers of immigrants in Youngstown. According to historian William Jenkins, the population of Youngstown in 1920 was 132,358 people with sixty percent of the population composed of immigrants “and children of foreign-born or mixed parentage.”¹⁹⁹ Such a large percentage of immigrants in the area made it easier for the Klan to recruit members among Youngstown’s Anglo-Saxon, native-born residents.

Dating as far back as 1896, anti-Catholic sentiment was present in the area, which only increased as Italian immigrants arrived in pursuit of jobs in the local steel mills. For example, Republic Iron and Steel and Youngstown Sheet and Tube hired more than 24,000 new workers in 1920.²⁰⁰ Welsh, English, and German people had to compete

¹⁹⁷ Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 127.

¹⁹⁸ Trollinger, 4.

¹⁹⁹ *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920: Vol. I, Population, Number, and Distribution of Inhabitants*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1921; Jenkins, “The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown,” 77.

²⁰⁰ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 34-35.

with these new immigrants, who were willing to work for lower wages. Many thought that these immigrants arrived faster than they could assimilate. Niles resident Russel Westenfield said “many of them, coming particularly from the Mediterranean area, were not skilled workers . . . they came to Youngstown, Warren, and Niles.” He described Niles as “a big industrial center for the manufacture of steel.” The local mills would recruit people from places like Italy and many resented that.²⁰¹ While this was a separate incident, it would serve as a precursor towards future issues involving the Klan, specifically a clash with Catholics in nearby Niles in 1923. Kleagle D. E. Glossner founded the Youngstown chapter of the Klan in 1921, and by 1922, C. A. Gunder had taken over. The first public appearance of the Klan in Youngstown was in a letter to the Board of Education, on December 4, 1922, calling for religious instruction in public school curriculums. This letter to the Youngstown school board called for requiring religious instruction in public schools citing a Klan decree to “put religion in schools.”²⁰² The Klan was still able to create a strong settlement in Youngstown despite its large population of Catholic immigrants.²⁰³

One important factor in the Klan’s acceptance in the area was their agenda of enforcing existing laws concerning prohibition and promoting Protestant moral values. Protestants were in favor of prohibition and other types of vice including gambling. They also favored Sunday laws that prohibited businesses from opening that day. Alcohol sales commonly centered around Italian immigrants who illegally sold and produced it. For the Klan, enforcing prohibition laws served as a way of attacking the threat of Catholicism.

²⁰¹ Russell Westenfield, Interviewed by Stephen Papalás, 22 November 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

²⁰² *The Vindicator*, December 5, 1922.

²⁰³ Jackson, 167.

Often, Baptist and Methodist churches were in favor of prohibition, along with enforcing Sunday blue laws and crime laws. In Youngstown, many clergy from local denominations worked with the Klan in attempts to crack down on these issues. Pastor George Gibson of the Mahoning Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church was an important local preacher in support of the Klan. Gibson used his pulpit to voice his support for the Klan in their crusade against vice. In a sermon, Gibson said that the Klan “was going to open the eyes of the nation to the evils now sweeping the land.”²⁰⁴ Reverend Levi Batman of the Disciples’ First Christian Church, also professed complaints about the lack of enforcement of moral city laws, such as Sunday blue laws. Batman professed “let me warn those who are laughingly violating the prohibition law . . . among these no doubt are some folks of standing and influence, that they are breeding contempt and disregard for the fundamental law of the land which may ultimately result in the destruction of our civilization.”²⁰⁵ Although he did not join the Klan himself, many in his congregation did.²⁰⁶ Protestant leaders in the area supported enforcement of prohibition laws. This allowed the Klan to recruit congregation members and spread their anti-Catholic sentiment.

Religious leaders played a vital role in elevating the Klan as defenders of morality. Reverend A. C. Archibald once spoke to a packed church in 1922 on the immorality of the country. The Klan were given a special invitation to attend and they “were said to be liberally represented in the congregation.” Archibald stated “seventy-eight percent of all criminals released from Irish prisons come to America. The fact that

²⁰⁴ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 53.

²⁰⁵ *The Vindicator*, January 22, 1923.

²⁰⁶ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 122.

you can't keep the Irish from gravitating toward the police forces in the United States may account for the difficulty in getting the police force to arrest gamblers and prostitutes." He then glorified the Klan by saying "the most remarkable thing in America since the war is the growth and development of the Ku Klux Klan. . . . [I]t is an organization that is severely and unjustly criticised." He attacked the Catholic church, claiming bias towards them from the media. He said "we know that the Associated Press dispatches are dominated by the Catholic-church. . . . [W]e also know that when the religious leaders in any other denomination go wrong the Associated Press carries columns about it." One final and powerful message was "the Klan believes in the sanctity of the American home. When our homes go, we have nothing left. "In his sermon, Archibald powerfully connected anti-Catholic sentiment while victimizing Protestants. This message to his congregation served to elevate the Klan's image in the Protestant community.²⁰⁷

In Struthers, southeast of Youngstown, Reverend A. M. Stansel of the Struthers Baptist Church and Reverend Leroy Myers of the Struthers Presbyterian Church were both supporters of the Klan. Accompanied by eleven Klan members, Stansel interrupted a Board of Education meeting in May 1924 to oppose the hiring of Catholic teachers. Stansel demanded that "only real Americans" be employed in Struthers schools.²⁰⁸ The Klan also interrupted a sermon by Stansel to donate money to the church, and Stansel then offered up a prayer.²⁰⁹ Myers would later become exalted cyclops of the Mahoning

²⁰⁷ *The Vindicator*, November 27, 1922.

²⁰⁸ *The Vindicator*, May 6, 1924.

²⁰⁹ *The Vindicator*, December 24, 1923.

County Klan.²¹⁰ Religious leaders also created associations such as the Federated Council of Churches which served as a coalition aimed at competing with Catholic groups such as the Knights of Columbus.²¹¹ Led by Reverend George L. Ford, the Council later constructed a program for Protestant values to be taught in schools citing the “mixed character of our population.”²¹² It is clear that the Klan used churches to expand their membership base while clergy also benefited from cash donations towards their parishes.

The Klan also used print media to recruit Youngstown Protestants and lay out their anti-Catholic attitudes. Newspapers such as the *Vindicator* and *Youngstown Telegram* were important news sources and the Klan created their own paper to spread their message. The *Citizen* was a local Klan paper edited by Colonel Evan Watkins by 1923 and it acted as a means to give members updates and news. According to historian Ashley Zampogna, the *Citizen* often espoused the Klan’s bigoted rhetoric and even compared Catholicism to paganism.²¹³ Ashley Zampogna says the beliefs espoused in the *Citizen* often “echoed the values shared by mainstream America” and that “was what drew in so many supporters to the Klan.”²¹⁴ Evan Watkins would also use his position as editor to move up the leadership ranks of the Klan. Watkins also served as an organizer for the Ohio State Police and was seen as an influential figure in the development of the Youngstown Klan. Watkins would be involved in controversy later in his membership with the KKK. By using the *Citizen* as a tool to spread their message, the Klan was able to bolster its membership to new levels.

²¹⁰ *The Vindicator*, December 24, 1923.

²¹¹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 69.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 142.

²¹³ Zampogna, 26.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

As the Youngstown chapter of the Klan was building its membership base, D. C. Stephenson was doing the same on a state level. Stephenson was King Kleagle of Ohio and Grand Goblin of the Great Lakes region of the state. In attempting to establish the moralistic identity of the Klan in the area, he made the decision to offer “honorary membership to all Protestant clergyman.”²¹⁵ Stephenson was a proponent of the aforementioned Sunday blue laws which restricted leisure activity on Sundays to only church-related affairs.²¹⁶ William D. Jenkins argues that the Klan’s main purpose in Youngstown was the enforcement of the existing laws concerning the regulation of moral character in the community. The area was generally conservative, and the Klan believed that these citizens also felt that enforcement of local prohibition and Sunday blue laws was unsatisfactory. Consequently, this also led to the creation of groups such as the Mahoning County Dry Association and the Civic League, offshoots of the Anti-Saloon League.²¹⁷

The Ohio Anti-Saloon League (ASL) was founded in 1893 in Oberlin, Ohio, as a temperance movement with the aim of ending the sale of alcohol. To the ASL, illegal alcohol sales were associated with immorality and the demise of traditional American values. They were not only against the sale of alcohol but also other vices such as gambling and prostitution. Linda Gordon ties the Klan together with other reform groups such as the ASL by saying “both organizations identified immigrants and non-Protestants as the source of all the social vices.” Gordon makes the argument that both groups used

²¹⁵ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 24.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹⁷ Jenkins, “*The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown*,” 78.

alcohol consumption and sales to demonize both Italian and Irish immigrants.²¹⁸ To the Klan and its potential members, the saloon represented “the storm center of crime; the devil’s headquarters on earth . . . the defiler of youth; the enemy of the home . . . the enlisting office of sin; the serpent of Eden.”²¹⁹ The ASL was not strictly Protestant, as they did approach Catholics for potential members.²²⁰ The ASL was also purely secular and aimed to stay out of politics, which led to the creation of the Mahoning County Dry League (MCDL). On October 3, 1921, at Trinity Methodist Church, a crowd of over five hundred people attended the formation of the Mahoning County Dry League.²²¹ Perry Robison was the chairman of the Dry League in February, 1923, when massive raids were conducted on forty-two local alcohol locations. Robison declared “this is just the first raid of a number we intend making if the law is not enforced to the letter. . . . [W]e are going to see that Youngstown is dry, not just tomorrow but every day in the future.”²²² The Ohio ASL and MCDL acted as precursors for the Klan’s own reform league in the Youngstown area.

After having seen the success of reform groups such as the ASL and MCDL, the Klan attempted to create their own reform organization. In August 1923, the Klan formed the Civic League in a “crusade of righteousness.” The Civic League was headed by D. C. Hamilton and Reverend George Gibson, and it aimed to find evidence of wrongdoing among local lawmakers in the enforcement of laws against vice.²²³ Gibson preached “there are 15,000,000 men in this country banded together in this organization and they

²¹⁸ Gordon, 29.

²¹⁹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 29.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²²¹ *The Vindicator*, October 4, 1921.

²²² *The Vindicator*, February 16, 1923.

²²³ *The Vindicator*, August 11, 1923.

are going to open the eyes of the nation to the evils now sweeping the land. The robe this organization wears is the ancient costume of its founders.” He went on to state “it was organized by Christian and Protestant men and stands for a united Protestantism.”²²⁴ The Federated Council of Churches expressed their approval of the League.²²⁵ The Civic League aimed to oust then-serving Youngstown Mayor William Reese, who they claimed was not doing enough to stop the vice in the area. The local newspaper, the *Citizen*, transformed itself into a partisan Klan publication by this time, and they used the paper to aid efforts to remove Reese from power. Their efforts, along with a state investigation into Reese, helped to demean his credibility and acceptance in the city. Ohio Governor Donahey nearly fired him from the job of mayor of Youngstown but chose not to.²²⁶ If the Klan could help oust Reese, they could help elect a new mayor who would be sympathetic towards their anti-Catholic beliefs.

After the approval of Mayor William Reese decreased, the possibility for a new mayor arose with the 1923 Youngstown elections. For the 1923 elections, Youngstown had adopted a home rule charter under the Ohio Constitution. This effectively turned the election into a non-partisan affair which allowed the Klan to ignore the party system and act as its own party.²²⁷ The local Youngstown elections of 1923 proved quite successful for Klan endorsed candidates as many won races, including Charles Scheible for mayor. On election day, the headline of the *Vindicator* read “Scheible elected, Klan sweeps

²²⁴ *The Vindicator*, July 30, 1923.

²²⁵ *The Vindicator* August 11, 1923.

²²⁶ *The Vindicator*, August 28, 1923.

²²⁷ *The Vindicator*, May 16, 1923.

city.”²²⁸ With Scheible elected as mayor, the Klan acquired another avenue to fight prohibition laws that pushed against Catholics.

In his campaign, Scheible used Reverends Gibson and Evan Watkins as spokesmen for his election.²²⁹ Watkins was pastor at the First Baptist Church in Girard, and he welcomed at least one hundred Klan members for a service on September 14, 1923.²³⁰ William Jenkins suggests that Watkins played a major role in Scheible’s victory by depicting him as an “upright Christian businessman concerned about the morality of the city and the efficiency of the government.” According to Watkins, Scheible also “had no desire to discriminate against anyone on any basis, but he did want to enforce the law-to display the determination necessary for a government official to clean up the city.”²³¹ Another important religious figure was Reverend C. C. Rich of the First Baptist Church in Niles, who used his sermons to preach Klan ideology--especially during the 1923 elections. He described the Klan as aiming to “make America predominantly Protestant” despite also showing tolerance for other religious sects. Rich suggested that Americans “would practice Protestant moral values or suffer a fine or imprisonment.”²³² Religious leaders in the Youngstown area were vital in using their sermons to preach Klan ideology concerning Catholic immigrants.

Religious leaders played an important role in the success of the Klan in 1923. After his election victory, Scheible spoke to both the First Baptist Church and the Baptist Ministerial Association. He said “the church played no small part in my election. Most of

²²⁸ *The Vindicator*, November 6, 1923.

²²⁹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 67.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

²³² *The Vindicator*, November 12, 1923.

my meetings were held in churches. I appealed to the patriotism of the Sanctuary rather than to the leadership of the slums and as a result I won the battle.”²³³ This articulates the pivotal role that not only the Klan, but also religious supporters played in Scheible becoming mayor of Youngstown. Scheible’s victory was due to an endorsement from the Klan and their religious allies such as Gibson and Watkins, who were necessary components of his campaign. Concurrently, the Klan benefitted by aligning themselves with Scheible and the ministers that supported him. Scheible associated himself with other Protestant leaders in the area, such as R. E. Williams of the Himrod Avenue Baptist Church and A. E. Griffith of the Pleasant Grove United Presbyterian Church.²³⁴ During the election cycle of 1923, Kleagle Gunder evoked religion in the mayoral race by saying “the real and only issue in the coming election is between Christ and Satan, between Heaven and Hell, between Protestantism and the Pope of Rome.”²³⁵ Scheible was generally perceived by Youngstown’s white residents to be an honest politician with the goal of bettering the moral fiber of the city. The Klan’s connection to Protestant ministers and Scheible allowed the group to be more inviting to people in the area.²³⁶ Religious leaders clearly played an important role in Scheible’s election along with other factors that historians would determine.

Historian William D. Jenkins also speculates that the wealthy voters in Youngstown did not support the Klan, and the reason for its 1923 success was higher voting turnout among less affluent voters.²³⁷ Jenkins also says of the 1923 election results

²³³ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 125.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

²³⁶ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 71.

²³⁷ Jenkins, “*The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown*,” 85.

that voters favoring Klan candidates “believed themselves to be defenders of a Protestant culture that was essential to the preservation of a moral society.”²³⁸ After winning on November 12, Scheible spoke to a congregation at the First Baptist Church and at least thirty local Protestant churches served food at the postelection rally in November 1923.²³⁹ The connection between Protestantism and the Klan was a determining factor in Scheible’s victory.

After becoming mayor in 1923, Scheible appointed Clyde Osborne as his chief adviser and law director. His leadership brought the group to the pinnacle of its success. Osborne later became Ohio’s Grand Dragon of the Klan and appointed other new Klansmen to office. The Klan was also successful in passing important legislation concerning their xenophobic beliefs. Local legislation passed that aimed to maintain core Protestant values and limit the immigrant population. In April 1924, two proposed laws limited the rights of unnaturalized citizens. Under Mayor Scheible, the first proposed law prohibited “unnaturalized citizens from possessing firearms.” The headline in *The Vindicator* reads “Aliens forbidden to own firearms here.” This served as discriminatory behavior aimed at European immigrants. Pertaining to business, the second law stated “before any license is issued the alien applicant will be asked to show his first citizenship papers and also evidence that he was in business prior to April 1.”²⁴⁰ These were instances where the Klan was able to enact its xenophobic policies that had attracted so many people to join. Local developments in the area, however, led to the demise of the

²³⁸ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 76.

²³⁹ *The Vindicator*, November 12, 1923; Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 119.

²⁴⁰ *The Vindicator*, April 7, 1924.

Youngstown Klan: the publishing of Klan members lists and a nearby violent riot that erupted in 1924.

Klan membership reached its peak as 1924 began but the year began the demise of the club in the area. The American Unity League was founded in June, 1922, in Chicago, Illinois, as a general means of acquiring Klan membership lists in order to expose members publicly. By 1923, the League branched into Youngstown and established a membership of 1,600. The local group was led by Samuel Davidson, John W. Powers, P.H. McEvey, and Wallace T. Metcalfe, all prominent residents in the area.²⁴¹ The League was led primarily by Irish-Americans, who were tired of the Klan's anti-Catholic prejudice.²⁴² In October, 1923, the American Unity League stole membership lists of local Klan members and published them in a pamphlet called *Is Your Neighbor a Kluxer?* in April 1924. This publication contained "about a thousand names of alleged Kluxers of Mahoning and Trumbull counties. Many prominent Youngstowners, men in public office, divines, schoolteachers, and businessmen are listed in capital letters."²⁴³ Klan members relied on secrecy and these published lists unveiled individuals in the community. This served as the beginning of the demise of the Klan's power in Youngstown. Even though they fared well in 1924 local elections, they failed to win the Ohio governorship that year.²⁴⁴ The success of the Klan was beginning to stall.

One other important event proved to be a devastating final blow to the Klan's popularity in Youngstown. Niles, Ohio, is a small town in the Youngstown area that also felt the presence of the local KKK. It is located within ten miles of Youngstown, in

²⁴¹ *The Vindicator*, September 10, 1923; Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 104-05.

²⁴² Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 146-47.

²⁴³ *The Vindicator*, April 1, 1924.

²⁴⁴ Jenkins, "The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown," 89.; Jackson, 168.

neighboring Trumbull County, and near Warren, Ohio, where the Klan also had a strong presence. Niles was similar to Youngstown in that it was made up of primarily Protestant residents, including “Welsh coal miners and western Pennsylvanian Germans.” Later, immigrants from other European areas like Italy and Ireland arrived in search of industrial jobs.²⁴⁵ In 1924, the mayor of Niles was Democrat Harvey C. Kistler, who was endorsed by the Klan in his election. Kistler won the mayoral election of 1924 by narrowly defeating Charles Crow, thanks to Klan endorsement and support. This is notable in the sense that this victory infers the Klan endorsement was a component in ousting Crow, who had served four straight terms as Niles mayor.²⁴⁶ One of Kistler’s priorities was fighting vice, such as illegal alcohol sales and gambling, which aligned with the Klan’s anti-Catholic agenda. In general, the Klan fared better in areas with small populations of immigrants or African Americans, and Niles was populated by a number of Italians and Irish, which led to increased opposition towards the hate group.

Some Niles citizens were not happy about the Klan’s prevalence and decided to fight back. The Knights of the Flaming Circle were the opposition group who held their first meeting in Steubenville, Ohio, on September 27, 1923. The Knights’ meetings parodied Klan meetings in that they would often burn circles made of tires, similar to the burning of crosses by the Klan. One circle was reported to be forty feet in diameter that could be seen for miles around. At the same meeting, an estimated 1500 new members from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia were initiated into the Knights.²⁴⁷ Often, they had their Niles meetings at a popular speakeasy called the Jennings Dance Hall,

²⁴⁵ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 90.

²⁴⁶ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 93.

²⁴⁷ *The Vindicator*, September 27, 1923.

known for bootlegging and often subject to prohibition raids.²⁴⁸ This speakeasy was owned and operated by the Jennings, an Italian family, and it was built by Jim Jennings who was a major bootlegger around the area. Jennings often received his liquor shipments via places like Buffalo, New York and Port Clinton, Ohio.²⁴⁹ According to his grandson Joseph, Jr., Jim was also instrumental in the formation of the Knights of the Flaming Circle.²⁵⁰ This strong opposition would feud with the Klan throughout 1924 leading up to a final battle on November 1.

Tensions were heated in Niles as the Klan and their opposition were aiming their sights directly at one another. The Klan planned a parade in Niles for November 1, which Mayor Kistler permitted, despite the possibility of retaliation from the Knights of the Flaming Circle. Exalted Cyclops Gunder proclaimed his confidence about the parade when he said the Klan should not allow “a bunch of wops scare you out,” using a racial epithet against the Italian-led Knights.²⁵¹ In turn, the Knights planned their own parade, on the same day, which led to the possibility of violence. Kistler ultimately refused to issue a parade permit to the Knights creating even further tensions. The Knights and other citizens pleaded with Kistler not to allow the parade to go forward but he was adamant about letting the Klan proceed. On October 29, a bomb exploded at Kistler’s house; presumably a message to the mayor to cancel the parade. Despite this terrorist attack, his family was not harmed and his resolve towards letting the parade go forward only

²⁴⁸ Joseph Jennings Jr., Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 20 August 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

²⁴⁹ Kenneth Weber, Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 13 October 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

²⁵⁰ Joseph Jennings Jr., Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 20 August 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

²⁵¹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 160.

grew.²⁵² Klan members, Knights members, the press, and Niles citizens all prepared for a clash on November 1.

Two days before the scheduled Klan rally on November 1, the Chamber of Commerce held a final meeting on the issue, welcoming hundreds of concerned citizens to attend. To act as leaders of the meeting, the Chamber of Commerce and lawyer Walter F. McQueen formed a group to try and resolve the situation peacefully. It included former state senator John McDermott, general manager of the Niles Republic Iron and Steel Company Samuel Brown, John Hosack of the Mahoning Valley Steel Company, John Sharkey of the Empire Mill, and Niles Brick Company official Joseph Pallante. This body ultimately realized that Kistler would not cancel the parade but requested that citizens cooperate with the Sheriff in order to maintain the peace. Ultimately, a majority of the three to five hundred citizens at this meeting passed a resolution to stop the parade but Kistler still would not listen. A shoot to kill order was given to citizen guards ahead of the parade.²⁵³ The inevitable Klan parade would not be cancelled by Kistler, but the Knights of the Flaming Circle had plans to protest by any means necessary.

On November 1, the Knights prepared for their battle with the Klan at the Jennings Dance Hall, armed with machine guns and blockades. They aimed to stop the Klan from marching towards their regular meeting spot—a field located on Deforest Road, north of the city. Violence involving Jennings family members and McDermott had already occurred the night before. According to Rita Jennings, there were rumors that the Klan was planning to march to the St. Stephen’s Church convent and molest the nuns living there. Joseph Jennings, Jr., recalls that the Klan was “supposed to go over and

²⁵² *The Vindicator*, October 29, 1924.

²⁵³ *The Vindicator*, October 31, 1924.

terrorize and rape the sisters.”²⁵⁴ This provoked fear and only intensified the tension between the Knights and the Klan that day. Jennings also said the Knights and others surrounded St. Stephens Church to secure the building against the Klan. Then, the Klan burnt a cross and the Knights burnt a flaming circle of tires in retaliation. Jennings felt the tire burning stood for unity or protection.²⁵⁵ The Klan maintained their march until they arrived at the General Electric (GE) building at Main Street and Federal Street. This would be as far as they would march as they were met by the Knights and violence ensued. Shootings and beatings were a common occurrence in the days following the initial skirmish at the GE building. Mayor Kistler pleaded with Governor Donahey for the national guard to intervene. Finally, Donahey declared martial law in the city and armed federal troops arrived to bring peace to Niles once again. The ramifications of the riots signaled the beginning of the Klan’s demise.

The riots did not quell tensions between the Klan and its opposition. On January 28, 1925, someone fired thirty shots in the back wall of the Knights of Pythias Hall, where the Klan held its meetings and cross burnings.²⁵⁶ Some speculated the involvement of the Knights of the Flaming Circle. Also, an assault on three Klan members in February continued the rivalry. Smaller skirmishes involving various members of both sides followed.²⁵⁷ Various trials occurred following the riots, with mixed results for both sides. The most notable verdict was Joseph Jennings being found guilty of assault with intent to kill and he was sentenced to 1-15 years in prison. Jennings attempted to kill a Klan member and was also portrayed as the man responsible for the riot. Niles resident Leona

²⁵⁴ Joseph Jennings Jr., Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 20 August 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

²⁵⁵ Rita Jennings, Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 19 August 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

²⁵⁶ Frank E. McDermott, Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 8 December 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

²⁵⁷ *The Vindicator*, January 29, 1925; March 9, 1925.

Gray testified that she “had seen Jennings handing out guns and what she took to be handfuls of cartridges to persons upon the streets.”²⁵⁸ His sentence would be reduced to only one year in prison.²⁵⁹ The Judge sympathized with Jennings and other rioters who plead guilty by saying they are “to be commended for coming like true Americans and entering pleas of guilty.”²⁶⁰ The ramifications of the November 1, 1924, riots would be felt for years to come in the city of Niles.

The Klan’s anti-Catholic actions and rhetoric under the guise of Protestant morality also served to divide religious leaders of all denominations in the area. As a result of the riots, tensions between various religious denominations only escalated in the years to follow. A reporter from the *Niles Times* named Tom Murphy helped organize the Niles ecumenical movement which attempted to bring peace to the area. Murphy arranged dinners involving clergy from various denominations in order to unify them together in harmony. Other religious leaders involved in the founding of the ecumenical program were Reverend A. Robert Anderson of the First United Methodist Church, Reverend Robert Kelsey of the Presbyterian Church, along with Father William H. Hohman of St. George Church.²⁶¹ These dinners became an annual occurrence and each year the location would be at a different church. Niles teacher Kenneth Weber describes Murphy as “the one who healed that problem more than anyone else. . . . Tom was the one who organized and got cooperation to put on the dinner meetings.”²⁶² Murphy died on November 19, 1969, but his desire for peace and humanity would affect the city of

²⁵⁸ *The Vindicator*, March 19, 1925.

²⁵⁹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 186.

²⁶⁰ *The Vindicator*, March 25, 1925.

²⁶¹ *The Niles Times*, June 14, 1980.

²⁶² Kenneth Weber, Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 13 October 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

Niles for decades.²⁶³ Murphy's ecumenical movement helped ease tensions among religious denominations caused by the Klan's anti-Catholic behavior in the past.

After the Niles riots, it became clearer that the Klan in the Youngstown area plateaued. By the end of 1924, law enforcement during this time was underfunded and understaffed, leading to difficulty enforcing vice laws. Faith in the Klan to act as an enforcer was decreasing--especially after Evan Watkins was charged with bribery and using his position as pastor in Girard to take money. There were also questions involving the validity of his marriage and whether Watkins was his real name. According to *The Vindicator*, Watkins offered "\$2,500 from his pocket which he said he'd gladly give to the person who could prove that his real name was not Watkins." At the time, fearing an indictment from the Niles riots, Watkins suddenly fled the city on a midnight train, claiming he was ill. He was accused of taking money from the State Police while serving as an organizer there but denied it.²⁶⁴ The public could no longer trust their supposed enforcers against corruption, if Klan leaders were also seen as being corrupt.

Other controversy plagued the Klan as membership numbers began to dwindle. After the 1924 riots, the Klan no longer functioned as a formal political party and only endorsed candidates to the Board of Education in Youngstown.²⁶⁵ The Klan elected Reverend Leroy Myers of the Struthers Presbyterian Church as Exalted Cyclops which created a divide within his congregation. As a result, members of Myers' church asked him to resign, but he refused. *The Vindicator* described his activities as "creating

²⁶³ *The Niles Times*, November 25, 1969.

²⁶⁴ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 179.

²⁶⁵ Jenkins, "The Ku Klux Klan in Youngstown," 90.

dissension in the church.”²⁶⁶ In Trumbull County, the Klan was in disarray. One spokesman said the Klan had “now no officers and that a committee was selected at a meeting held about two weeks ago to affect a complete reorganization and arrange for the election of new officers.”²⁶⁷ In Youngstown, the Klan was dissatisfied with Scheible’s lack of enforcement of vice laws and attempted, but failed in ousting him through petitions. A Klan spokesperson issued a statement saying “I felt as did a great many Klansmen that if the Klan was responsible for electing a man to office who was not meeting with the approval of the general public we should do something about it.”²⁶⁸ These problems show that the Klan’s popularity was waning within the city.

The Klan’s acceptance was based on xenophobia prompted by a wave of new immigration from Western Europe. There was a fear that the traditional American way of living would be destroyed by the influx of immigrants, specifically Catholics. This was coupled with the fear of losing industrial jobs to immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Amongst members of the Protestant churches, there was a definite fear that democracy was at stake and the Klan used the notions of “100% Americanism” to recruit new members throughout the country and in Ohio, specifically.

The Niles riots proved to be an awakening for Klan members. Many people who joined the Klan were not prepared for the violence seen in Niles and chose to withdraw their support for the group. The kleagle system was taken advantage of by officials like Watkins, and this also left a negative impression on members.²⁶⁹ Another factor in the demise of the Klan was a pivot towards a more radical ideology through the usage of its

²⁶⁶ *The Vindicator*, February 12, 1925.

²⁶⁷ *The Vindicator*, March 9, 1926.

²⁶⁸ *The Vindicator*, March 8, 1926.

²⁶⁹ Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan*, 191.

newspaper, the *Citizen*, run by Paul Morris. Through the *Citizen*, Morris espoused more blatant attacks on Catholics using nativism to convey his beliefs to Klan members. This radicalism served to alienate members who were disenchanted following the Niles riots.²⁷⁰ Most members sought a white supremacist social brotherhood with a desire to protect and preserve “100% Americanism.” They were resentful of Italian and Irish immigrants who they perceived as a threat to their jobs and to the political and social order of their region. They hoped to promote their agenda through regular channels. They recognized that mob violence, on the scale of the Niles riots, did not serve their cause.

As a whole, the demographics of the country were changing during the 1920s and the Klan’s message provided a counter to it. Niles resident Russell Westenfield articulated that “there was a feeling that the number coming could not be assimilated and that American democracy was endangered a little bit by a great influx of people faster than they could become acquainted with American ways.”²⁷¹ The Klan attracted people who felt the same way but many were not willing to go to extreme measures to protect “Americanism.”

The Ku Klux Klan in the Youngstown area publicly decreed their group to be defenders of “100% Americanism” using Protestant ideals. In reality, they only used their Protestant label as an avenue to attack the area’s Catholic population. They disguised their anti-Catholic sentiment through enforcing prohibition, vice laws, and educational reform. Youngstown citizens who joined the Klan were looking for comradeship among like-minded men and women. Most members were also not willing to re-create the violence and bloodshed seen in the Reconstruction South. Inevitably, once that violence

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 192-93.

²⁷¹ Russell Westenfield, Interviewed by Stephen Papalas, 22 November 1982. YSU-OHP, Transcript.

became a part of this second Northern wave of the Klan, Youngstown area members fled in droves, leading to the organization's demise into further invisibility.

Chapter 4-Conclusion

When William Simmons re-formed the Ku Klux Klan nationally, he envisioned it as ideologically different from the Reconstruction-era Klan. Rather than targeting African Americans in the South, Simmons also chose to attack European immigrants. As the twentieth century Klan branched into Northern states, Simmons stayed true to the Klan's original tactics of violence, intimidation, and exclusion. Simmons attempted to influence reform politics and attack the new waves of European immigrants coming into the country. He hoped to deny immigrants and migrants equal access to education and assault their cultural and religious practices and beliefs. Where the twentieth century Klan differed from the original set was in its efficiency and organization. Simmons operated the Klan like a business with various chapters across the country serving as pieces of an overall puzzle. The Klan of the 1920s was far more organized than the nineteenth century Klan, as they sought to influence laws throughout the country. This was especially evident in Ohio.

The KKK chapters in Akron and Youngstown represented two of the strongest areas in the country in terms of membership numbers. Individually, they both garnered local spheres of influence and power for a short period in the 1920s. Their message of nativism and xenophobia resonated with thousands of white Protestants in these areas. The Klan exploited the fears of these individuals, who felt disenfranchised due to recent immigration and migration into "their" cities. Their perception was that immigrants and migrants were stealing their jobs, and threatening ideals of "100% Americanism." The country was changing, and the Klan used those changes to appeal to many in Akron and

Youngstown. Both chapters, however, failed in creating long-term change. In Akron, their plan for segregated schools never materialized. In Youngstown, the group failed to stop the influence of Catholic bootleggers in the area. Inevitably, by the turn of the decade, both chapters were non-existent and essentially extinct.

In Akron, the Klan failed to maintain control of the education system, thus making it difficult to enact changes in Akron schools. In terms of enforcement of alcohol and vice laws, the Klan supported Sunday blue laws that were on the ballot. In the November 1925 elections, there was an ordinance to approve Sunday dancing that the churches and Klan opposed.²⁷² In the March special elections, a similar proposal was defeated, and in November, this ordinance lost by an even larger margin.²⁷³ Besides such minor victories, the KKK disintegrated due to factionalism after losing power in the Akron public school system.

Due to the large presence of powerful bootleggers in Youngstown, the Klan aimed to target Catholics through enforcement of vice laws. These bootleggers, however, were influential in destroying Klan morale during the 1924 Niles riots. The violence and bloodshed during the riots were catalysts for decreased membership numbers seen in later years of the 1920s. The Klan never managed to stop bootleggers, like the Jennings family, who continued with their business after the riots. Major educational reform was also non-existent. Both chapters used the demographics of each area to their advantage but still could not maintain much power in Akron or Youngstown.

When comparing the two chapters, the Akron Klan chapter fared better than the Youngstown chapter in terms of its longevity and influence. The Klan leaders in Akron,

²⁷² *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 1, 1925.

²⁷³ *Akron Beacon Journal*, November 4, 1925.

for a short period, garnered influence in the public education system through the Board of Education. The majority vote on the Board, however, was not enough to enact meaningful change within the system. The Akron chapter ran member Joseph Sieber for the governorship of Ohio numerous times. In Fall 1924, Sieber ran in the Republican primary for Governor as he pledged to “make Ohio dry in fact as well as in name” if elected.²⁷⁴ He received 100,000 votes and came second in the primary, indicating his support in Klan strongholds like Summit County.²⁷⁵ Sieber again ran in the Republican primary in 1925. Sieber counted on Klan support “made up largely of Methodist and Baptist ministers and Protestant church members in rural districts.”²⁷⁶ Yet again, Sieber ran for Republican governor in 1926 and failed.²⁷⁷ The Summit County Klan announced they would not be endorsing any candidates in the 1926 local primaries.²⁷⁸ Sieber, however, gained the official Ohio Klan endorsement on July 29.²⁷⁹ Despite having Klan support, he lost the primary and underperformed his 1924 run, only receiving 58,000 votes. This showed the Klan was losing power and popularity in the area and state, compared to 1924.²⁸⁰ Klan attempts at gaining state level political power failed despite winning numerous regional elections in Akron and Youngstown.

In Akron and Youngstown, the Klan failed in every conceivable way. From a short-term perspective, their behavior served to discriminate against immigrants and African Americans, as well as create volatile conditions in Youngstown. From a long-

²⁷⁴ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 1, 1924.

²⁷⁵ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 26, 1926.

²⁷⁶ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 25, 1925.

²⁷⁷ *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 9, 1926.

²⁷⁸ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 26, 1926.

²⁷⁹ *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 29, 1926.

²⁸⁰ *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 11, 1926.

term perspective, the KKK failed to enact changes to serve their ideology. One important takeaway is that the nativism and xenophobia of Klan members in the area was exposed by the group. These members, some of them business, political and religious leaders, espoused their beliefs under the veil of secrecy. Klan popularity demonstrated the strong nativist and xenophobic beliefs of white Protestants in Akron and Youngstown in the state. European immigrants and southern migrants posed no threat as they were simply looking for better opportunities in the rubber and steel factories. The Klan still viewed those newcomers to the area as a threat to the construct of “100% Americanism.” For a period, the Klan successfully empowered members who used this platform to discriminate against marginalized groups. In Akron, factionalism destroyed the KKK, and in Youngstown, violence and opposition signaled the end of the set. The Ku Klux Klan maintained power for only a short time before the group truly became invisible, once and for all.

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