

Clay County Historical Society

Volume XXIX No. 2

Clay County Historical Society Newsletter

March/April 2006

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Annual Meeting Set for May 9! Details inside...



Ku Klux Klan initiation ceremony, Moorhead National Guard Armory, mid 1920s.

President's Column

By Dale White



A good day—the first day of spring—to jot down a few words for CCHS. Signs of spring seem slow to appear this March, but we can't escape our history. Articles in the media remind the residents of Clay and its neighbors up and down the Valley of all the major and minor floods of past years and warn us of more to come. No matter how much we change our environment and our governmental policies, spring floods for us seem inevitable. Did our early county inhabitants mark this season (with whatever type of home-made calendar) the way we do today—*it's time for spring flooding?*

* * * * *

Spring also marks the time for the CCHS Annual Membership Meeting (May 9th) and the end of another organizational year. The Annual Meeting also brings the election or re-election of a new batch of board members. This year we have three board members up for re-election (including myself), and need candidates for one open board seat. We have written of this need in this column earlier in the year and have listed Board duties elsewhere in earlier newsletters. We hope you will consider volunteering your services. You will be able to help prepare for our Diamond Anniversary in 2007.

This is my last President's Column. After the Annual Meeting the Board will re-organize with new officers, but I am looking forward to serving one more term on the board.

This is a fun organization, and you can put your whole mind into it, if you wish. I am proud of some of things I have pushed for, like our present project of revising and codifying the whole CCHS policy structure. Most people won't even see this effort, but the result should make for a more organized, efficient Society. New officers and board members will have other priorities.

Thanks to the many of you who have made nice comments about this column.



CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Lisa Vedaa, Editor
Pam Burkhardt, Contributor
Mark Peihl, Contributor

Calendar

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| April 22 | Estate Planning seminar, 10 am |
| April 29 | <i>Boats, Bikes, BBQs & Other Fun in the Sun</i> exhibit opens to public |
| April 30 | May Day Open House, 1:00-3:30
Family activities and 10¢ Dilly Bar coupons |
| May 9 | Annual Meeting , 6:00 pm |
| May 17 | Board of Directors Meeting, 8 am |
| June 23 & 24 | Bergquist Cabin Open House
1008 7th St N, Moorhead, 1-4 pm |
| July 13-16 | Clay County Fair, Barnesville |
| Oct. 8 | 74th Anniv. of 1st CCHS meeting |

Schedule subject to change

Annual Meeting set for May 9

After some jostling on the calendar, Tuesday, May 9 has been set as the date for the CCHS Annual Meeting!

Plan to arrive at the Hjemkomst Center by 5:30 pm to take a peek at the new exhibit in the Clay County Museum, *Boats, Bikes, BBQs & Other Fun in the Sun* (more info below), before taking your seat for a delicious dinner at 6:00. Door prizes and the annual report will be presented beginning at 7:15. We will be announcing an exciting upcoming special celebration!

CCHS Archivist Mark Peihl will present the program portion of the meeting this year. Mark is putting together a fascinating presentation about films made in the 1930s by Bergstrom Studios. In 2004, CCHS received about 90 minutes of silent film shot by Moorhead photographer Olaf Bergstrom and his wife, Birdy. Mark is editing these down to about 20 minutes of footage showing the demolition and rebuilding of the Main Avenue Bridge, streetcars, parades and other scenes in and around Moorhead.

Bergstrom arrived with his parents in northern Minnesota from Sweden in 1893. He moved to Fargo in 1928 and opened a photography studio with Birdy.

Join us for this special evening of fellowship and history! Tickets for the Annual Meeting are again \$15 per person this year. Register by sending your payment with the tickets on page 14 of this newsletter to CCHS, PO Box 501, Moorhead, MN 56561. Remember to circle your dinner preference on the ticket (page 14).



Attendees enjoy conversation at last year's Annual Meeting

Boats, Bikes & BBQs opens April 29 April 30—May Day Open House

In the last newsletter, we announced that we would be opening a new exhibit this spring celebrating the society's 70th Anniversary of Collecting. As they do, plans have shifted slightly and we will be rolling this exhibit into an even better exhibit to open this fall in celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the organization of the historical society!

In the meantime, we will be extending our popular current exhibit *Inside, Outside, Upside Down* through Sept. 24, and adding a fun new exhibit for the summer, *Boats, Bikes, BBQs & Other Fun in the Sun* opening Sat., April 29.

A May Day Open House will be held Sunday, April 30, 1:00-3:30 to celebrate the opening of the exhibit. At this great family event, visitors can make May Day baskets, play Beach Ball Bingo, and pick up coupons for 10¢ Dilly Bars at the Moorhead Dairy Queen that day!

The exhibit showcases lake and water-related activities, the great outdoors and summer sports, and backyard fun. Featured artifacts include an Ole Lind boat, Minn-Kota trolling motor, 1930s baseball jerseys from

Sabin and Barnesville and 1950s travel games.

"We invite locals and visitors to come and see the variety of summer-related treasures and activities in Clay County," says CCHS Director Lisa Vedaa. "You can even get some great ideas for your own summer activities!"

The historical society has also created its own travel game for visitors to go along with the exhibit - Clay County Summer Bingo! The bingo card is the shape of Clay County and the game squares are the townships. The township squares are filled with sites and events to visit and things to do in Clay County in the summer. A calendar of events is on the reverse side.

CCHS Archivist Mark Peihl and CCHS Collections Manager Pam Burkhardt selected the artifacts and photos for the exhibit. "People will be surprised at some of the rarer objects displayed," says Burkhardt. "We have spectacular photos of people enjoying our beautiful Minnesota summers," says Peihl.

Check out summer fun past and present in *Boats, Bikes, BBQs & Other Fun in the Sun*, on display this summer through September 24!

Outreach Displays

	<u>Open</u>	<u>Close</u>
Hawley Public Library	April	June
Moorhead Public Library	April	June
Barnesville Public Library	April	June
Fargo CVB	April	October

BUTTER & EGGS at the Hawley Public Library will recall trips to the general store when credit was given for a farm's home-made butter and farm-fresh eggs.



The Moorhead Public Library display is A STRING OF PURLS which looks at the art of knitting with artifacts from the county's history. The libraries have books for the beginner and the expert.



Preserve your best JAMS & HAMS with information at the Barnesville Public Library. Artifacts in the CCHS display include preservation tools and equipment. You will see a sausage stuffer, pottery and glass canning jars, booklets and spices.

The welcome mat is out at the CVB (Convention and Visitors' Bureau) with a display of hospitality.

The Fargo Dome has a temporary display on the Hjemkomst Center in a small case shared between CCHS and HHIC.

IN-HOUSE DISPLAYS

The CCHS hall case has a display of 89 items made by members of the RED RIVER VALLEY WOODCARVERS. Techniques include carving in the round, chip carving, wood turning and tramp art. The display closes May 14.

A new display of exquisite, hand-decorated china has been arranged for viewing in the lobby area. These items were painted by Beulah Forness who holds china-painting classes in the building Tuesday mornings.

Artifacts & Donors

January/February 2006

Donors:

Moorhead: City of Moorhead, Clay County 4-H Extension Office, Clay County Sheriff's Dept., Helen Hedelund, Mary Lou Rosenfeldt, Edward Gudmundson, Jane Tandring
 Felton: Jean Steinbach & Sharon Askelson
 Gary, MN: Aldon Anderson
 Lynd, MN: Perry S. Banks
 Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, Linda Graff, Ted Hanson, Barbara A. Haug, Dr. Ronald Olin
 Iowa City, IA: Thelma Hottel
 Bryson City, SC: Rick Colcord
 Tucson, AZ: Charlotte Onstine

Artifacts: 1948 City of Moorhead plat map; Clay County 4-H reports, photos, newspapers & clippings and reports dating between 1938 and 2002; *Emergency Public Information for Nuclear Attack Preparedness in Clay County* publication; photo prints of former Clay Co. Sheriffs, photo prints of the Law Enforcement Center, candidate cards; 1931-32 FM and surrounding area telephone directory; farm diary kept by Edward Clark of Riverside Farm near Georgetown, MN between 1888 and 1892; letters dated 1911 from Baker area written to Mrs. Carrie Dresser when she was honeymooning at Niagra Falls, NY; book, *The Silver Anniversary Roost* 1900-01 [to] 1925-26 containing history of the MSTC Owls group; (1) vol, Felton, MN 1880-2005 including Averill; "History of Averill Consolidated School" by Mrs. J. Marie Kleppe dated Sept. 8, 1946 and a history of Averill by Mr. & Mrs. Omar Osmundson; folder, *Felton, Minn. Public School 1924-1925*, photo of class mates, program of April 26, 1929 Junior Senior Banquet, snapshot of Betts Farm near Felton, and information on teacher Adina Herr Banks; 1939 photo of Center Avenue, Moorhead; recipe for Muskoda Special Pie with history; set of greeting cards with images of historic Moorhead and Fargo buildings drawn by Gin Templeton; document case for the Dilworth Dairymen's Assoc. [ca 1919-1924]; cookbook: *Notably Norwegian*, by Louise Roalson dated 1982; autograph album belonging to Bertha Stafseth; (12) medals from 1992 Star of the North Summer Games; wedding cake topper from Oct. 4, 1936 Charlotte Bowman/Bud Onstine wedding and a small silver buttonhook; boxed set of three Rocket Pens with promotional materials from the Moorhead Drug Company.

Continued on page 6...

Board Members up for Re-election

Three members currently serving on the CCHS Board of Directors are up for re-election this year. We have provided their profiles here so you may be better informed of their qualifications for the vote at the Annual Meeting. We also have a board seat available at this time. More information about being a CCHS Board member is provided at the bottom of this page.

Rose Bergan

2nd 3-year term

Rose Bergan was elected for her first term on the CCHS Board in 2003. Rose is a graduate of Moorhead State College with a degree in Elementary Education. She taught at Hawley School for more than 40 years, and currently serves on the board of the Hawley School Foundation and the Clay County REACH program. Rose enjoys reading and gardening. She is an alumnus of the Blandin leadership seminar, and has served as Secretary of the Hawley Lutheran WELCA. Rose's husband Gary's family settled in Skree Township in the late 1800s. Their daughter Laura and two grandsons live in Duluth. Rose very much enjoys local history for its personal aspect. She believes knowing about the past helps one make more responsible decisions for the future. She thinks CCHS' greatest assets are its excellent staff and leadership, and research facility.



Pearl Quinnild

1st 3-year term

Pearl Quinnild is an active member of the Barnesville area historical society, and has lived in Clay County all but five years of her life. She attended high school in Comstock, Minnesota, and also attended Dakota Business College and MSUM. She and her husband Vern farm, and she enjoys reading and volunteering at her church, and spending time with their seven grandchildren. Pearl has a particular interest in environmental issues concerning good health. She has always had an interest in history and comes from a family that has a tendency for "collecting." One of the assets she brings to her service on the board is a familiarity with Clay County and a great many of its residents. She has enjoyed learning more about the workings of the historical society.



Dale White

2nd 3-year term

Dale White was appointed to fill a vacant board seat in October 2002 and was elected in 2003 for his first 3-year term. He has served as President of the Board since 2004 and is currently active on the Membership, Policy, and Fire Truck Committees. Dale was born and raised in Clay County, and is a retired Counselor and Registrar from Northwest Technical College in Moorhead. He taught English in Minnesota schools for several years, and served as Registrar at NDSU-Bottineau for seven years. One of his first jobs was as a railroad telegrapher. Dale enjoys writing, gardening, reading and spending time with his three children and four grandchildren. He became acquainted with CCHS through his interest in genealogy and local history. Some of the things he thinks are important are increasing awareness of CCHS in the county and increasing membership.



Applications for Board Seat now being accepted

As mentioned earlier, CCHS is currently accepting nominations for candidates for an open board seat. Serving as a board member for a nonprofit organization is a great way to serve your community. Tens of thousands of people throughout the United States and Canada contribute time, money, and expertise to historical organizations as members of a governing board.

The board of an historical organization should include members who reflect the diversity of people in the community the organization serves. Nonprofit organizations like the Clay County Historical Society depend on community members with a variety of different experiences and expertise to be volunteer board members.

Ethical and legal standards prohibit financial gain from service on boards of nonprofit organizations, but board members receive many other rewards through their work with the historical society. You have the

Continued next page...

Board Seat, cont.

opportunities to understand the inner-workings of the organization which are often unknown to the general public, to gain friendships with people who share a commitment to public service, and always, to learn more about local history. Perhaps the greatest reward comes from the fulfillment of contributing to the present success and future security of an important cultural institution.

In the next year, the efforts of the CCHS Board will be focused on the planning and execution of celebrating the society's 75th Anniversary. Some of these activities will include special celebration events, increasing membership in the organization and fundraising.

There is a time commitment involved in being on the Board, because board members must attend monthly meetings, committee meetings and historical society events.

We hope that some of the elements of board service mentioned here appeal to you. If you are interested in learning more about the CCHS Board, please contact Lisa at the CCHS Office for more information, or to apply. We would like to announce a candidate for this position at the Annual Meeting. It could be you!

Dr. Olin collection, cont.

We also received a collection of predominantly Moorhead advertising materials from Dr. Ronald Olin. He had been collecting these and other items for about 25 years. Among the 154 pieces are matchbooks, dinner plates, "Green Owl" salad plate, calendar plates, an unused calendar from "Brenden's Restaurant" for 1935; spoons, ash trays, clothes brushes, salt & pepper shakers including Mr. Peanut, liquor jugs, "Fairmont" milk and cream bottle, two still banks, pinback buttons, Christmas menu dated 1911 from the New Columbia Hotel, laundry strap, salad tongs and an ice pick. Among the more unusual giveaways are an ice cube tray from Moorhead Federal Savings dated 1975 and a potholder from Brigg's Floral's Silver Anniversary. Archival items include: a photos of Moorhead Plow Works, William Paasch farm, owners & employees of the Thompson & Felde Company of Barnesville. The entire collection will be displayed during our 75th Anniversary year celebration.

Red River Woodcarvers display their work

Thirteen Red River Valley Woodcarvers are currently featured in a display in the CCHS atrium hall case at the Hjemkomst Center. Eight of these 13 participated in the carvers' first display in 2003. The featured carvers are from Moorhead, Glyndon and Lake Park in Minnesota, as well as Fargo, West Fargo, Harwood and Wahpeton in North Dakota.

Judy Anderson has three tree bark carvings, with a clock integrated into one of the designs.

Dominating one side of the display is a classically carved mirror frame and wall shelf by Izo Becic. Izo is a recent immigrant from Bosnia and an avid woodcarver. He is trained in relief and other styles of European carving and teaches classes in the area.

Reuben Brownlee's Bactrian camel sits between a mounted cavalryman and a small, alert bird.

Wayne Hankel enjoys all types of carving and specializes in songbirds, waterfowl, animals and other wildlife subjects. He teaches both youth and adult classes. A plate and wall shelf both showing a classical influence fits well with a variety of wildlife and humorous subjects. *Watch out! What's behind the outhouse?*

An elegant gathering of shore birds were made by Maynard Hemmah who is noted for his chain saw carving. A kubbe stol and acanthus motif shows he enjoys all types of carving. Check out the bears and the Santa trio.

Purcell Hovland has carved most of his life and is a charter member of the woodcarvers club. He especially enjoys Scandinavian subjects and creating tramp art pieces. Four pieces of his tramp art are shown - three frames and a rather "prickly" lamp (shown at right).



Mayors declare 2006 the Year of the Museum in Dilworth, Moorhead, Fargo and West Fargo

As we reported in the last issue of the CCHS Newsletter, the American Association of Museums has declared 2006 the Year of the Museum. On Wednesday, March 1, the mayors and council representatives of Mayor Keith Coalwell (Dilworth), Councilmen Dan Hunt and Mark Hintermayer (Moorhead), Deputy Mayor John Cosgriff (Fargo) and Mayor Rich Mattern (West Fargo), joined in this national movement and declared 2006 the Year of the Museum in these cities!

The declaration was announced at the Fargo-Moorhead Convention & Visitors Bureau at a news conference held jointly by the eight museums in these cities: the Clay County Museum, Bonanzaville, The Children's Museum at Yunker Farm, Fargo Air Museum, Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center, Plains Art Museum, Red River Zoo, and the Rourke Art Museum. David Martin from the Chamber of Commerce of Fargo-Moorhead, Chris Barton from the West Fargo Chamber of Commerce, and Cole Carley from the Fargo-Moorhead Convention & Visitors Bureau also lent their support.

The museums also announced that they will be cooperating in some joint marketing, in particular with a "Museum Passport" that local residents can complete by visiting the museums through December to be entered in a prize drawing. The passports will be made available beginning early this summer. Each of the museums also has events taking place during National Tourism Week, May 13-20.

The body of the Mayoral Proclamation is printed here:

WHEREAS, museums hold in trust for future generations a substantial part of humankind's material heritage produced by the skill of our ancestors and our contemporaries; and

WHEREAS, museums encourage curiosity in the young, offer enlightenment and education to the student, and provide a continuing source of enjoyment and cultural enrichment for all; and

WHEREAS, museums present exhibits and programs created through research and scholarship for people to explore new ideas, exchange stories, and discover collections and objects from our cultural and natural heritage; and

Estate Planning for Everyone - April 22

Do you have children or grandchildren? Historical or heirloom items that you want to pass on to someone special? Do you want "peace in the family" after you are gone? Do you want to make the most effective use of your estate?

Estate planning is an important way that you can make sure your loved ones and a charity close to your heart and interests are included in the distribution of your assets.

A free workshop on estate planning will be held at the Hjemkomst Center on Saturday, April 22. The workshop is being co-sponsored by the Clay County Historical Society, Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center and Western Minnesota Steam Threshers Reunion. The workshop will start at 10:00 am and end at noon.

Presenters will be Nick Vogel of Vogel Law, speaking on creating a will and the legal aspects of estate planning, Neil Jordheim, trust officer with Heartland Trust, discussing options with trust funds, and Arnie Ellingson, CLU with Axa Advisors, talking about options in insurance investments.

This is strictly an informational presentation. Information about the sponsoring organizations will be available.

WHEREAS, museums enhance the quality of life in our communities and reinforce the cultural opportunities offered by schools, colleges, universities, libraries, and other institutions of learning; and

WHEREAS, the museums of Dilworth, Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo deserve recognition for their contribution to furthering our understanding of the human race and the natural world past, present, and future; and to the preservation of the heritage of these cities and the Red River Valley.

NOW, THEREFORE, WE, Mark Voxland, Mayor of Moorhead; Keith Coalwell, Mayor of Dilworth; Bruce Furness, Mayor of Fargo; and Richard Mattern, Mayor of West Fargo; do hereby proclaim 2006 as the:

"YEAR OF THE MUSEUM"

in our cities and urge all citizens to explore and enjoy the excellent museums in our area.

The Ku Klux Klan

By Mark Peihl, CCHS Archivist

Folks tend to think of the Ku Klux Klan as an exclusively southern phenomenon and are often surprised to find there was Klan activity here in Clay County. In the 1920s, the Klan was a nationwide organization with about 3 million members in every state, including Minnesota and North Dakota. Clay County's organization did not exist in a vacuum. Its story needs to be told within a national and regional context.

The group in Clay County was part of the Klan's second incarnation. Six former Confederate soldiers started the first Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1866. Bored and unemployed, the six created a new fraternal organization to occupy their time. The name is from the Greek word *kuklos*, meaning circle. The *klan* part came from the Scottish clans from which all six founders were descended. Secret rites revolved around death and ghostly images, goofy names for leaders and, significantly, hooded robes to hide the wearers' faces. Initially activities included practical jokes on friends, but in the post-Civil War South, these quickly degenerated into violence against newly-freed slaves and their white supporters. In 1867, the group reorganized under former Confederate General Nathaniel Bedford Forrest, best known for his massacre of black prisoners after the battle of Fort Pillow. It quickly became a white supremacist terrorist organization operating all over the south. In 1872, after a long investigation into Klan violence in South Carolina, President U. S. Grant sent federal troops into the state, suspended habeas corpus, arrested hundreds of members and effectively crushed the Klan. Violence continued, however, especially after U.S. troops left the south later in the decade. And during Congressional hearings, Klan supporters succeeded in instilling into the nation's consciousness their own version of events: a noble Klan rising up spontaneously to protect Southern whites from rapacious blacks and their northern carpet-bagging allies. This view would inform histories of the movement well into the 1960s.

In 1906, Rev. Thomas Dixon further implanted this vision with his novel, *The Clansman*. Set in the post-Civil War South, Dixon's historical romance featured brave Klansmen as the saviors of southern white womanhood and culture. Dixon also introduced another fiction: cross burning, never a feature of the original Klan.

Meanwhile, an alcoholic former Georgia minister, William Joseph Simmons, nurtured an idea for a new fraternal organization based on the post-Civil War Klan. Laid up for months after a car accident in 1915, Simmons drew up the details. He seems to have become obsessed with the use of the letters "kl" to begin words. An individual affiliate would be a Klavern, a recruiter a Kleagel. The chaplain would be the Klud; Klansmen speaking to each other would hold a Klonversation (I'm not kidding). Hallmarks of the revived Klan were a belief in white supremacy, hoods and robes, burning crosses and honoring the memory of the original Klan.

His timing was perfect. That same year D. W. Griffith made the world's first full length feature film from Dixon's novel. Renamed *Birth of a Nation*, the film was a box office smash. Despite Griffith's unfortunate choice of material, his innovative techniques and storytelling electrified the nation. It set the stage for a revived Klan.

Simmons had a few thousand members by 1920, almost all in Georgia. However, that year he fell in with Edward Young Clark and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler's Southern Publicity Association. According to William Peirce Randel's *The Ku Klux Klan: A Century of Infamy*, Clark and Tyler shared the "opinion that the public existed to be fleeced" and that there was money to be made in selling sheets. They knew that for Simmons' brainchild to grow beyond Georgia it needed to become more marketable. Clark and Tyler's new Klan expanded the old antagonism to blacks to include Catholics, Jews, aliens, bootleggers, divorcees and anyone else who did not live up to an extremely conservative, fundamentalist, white Protestant moral code. In a time of tremendous cultural change, the message resonated with many Americans. Membership in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas exploded.

The combination of intolerance, self-righteous indignation, masks to hide behind and the Klan's own history lead inevitably to new violence. Exposés in eastern newspapers of Klan atrocities gave the group publicity and ironically made the Klan more popular.

Soon, true believers began resenting Simmons and company for skimming off initiation fees and doing little else. In late 1922, Hiram Evans of Dallas, Texas and others staged a coup d'état, kicked Simmons upstairs and turned the Klan into a force for political change.

in Clay County

It was about then that Klan organizers began efforts here in the northland. Evidence suggests Kleagle activity in the Red River Valley by fall 1922, perhaps earlier. But the main push began in early 1923. In February, the Klan mailed out a press sheet to newspapers all over North Dakota and Minnesota describing the organization, its aims and ambitions. I'll quote a bit:

This is a white man's organization, exalting the Caucasian Race and teaching the doctrine of White Supremacy.... It is an American Organization, and we do restrict membership to native-born American Citizens...the aliens that have been flooding our land have come to this country, not because of any love for America, but...to advance themselves and to serve their own interests and sometimes serve the interests of the land from which they come.... It is a Protestant Organization. As such membership is restricted to those who accept the tenets [sic] of a true Christianity, which is essentially Protestant...

You get the idea. Some have suggested the Klan in the upper Midwest was just another lodge for people to join. But it was different. It was the KKK. There were dozens of fraternal groups folks could join. Some chose this one, knowing full well what it was all about.

People took notice. Both Minnesota and North Dakota passed anti-mask laws early in 1923 designed to keep Klansmen from hiding their faces in public. (Minnesota's is still partially on the books. Minnesota Statute 609.735 makes concealing one's identity with a mask or robe "unless based on religious beliefs, or incidental to amusement, entertainment, protection from weather, or medical treatment" a misdemeanor.)

The first evidence of a Clay County organization dates from fall 1923. In September the *Moorhead Daily*

**PUBLIC
LECTURE
AMERICANISM
and
KU KLUX KLAN**

By Mr. B. H. Kegley

National Lecture, under auspices of
The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. National organization

This Klan Meeting is open to the Public and

Everybody Welcome

To be held in
Christianson's Grove
Moorhead, Minnesota

Sunday Afternoon, July 26th
3:00 o'clock P. M.

Christianson's Grove and Ski Slide is half
mile north of Clay County Court House

Clay County Klan Moorhead Minn.

Paid ad for Klan lecture. *Moorhead Daily News*, July 24, 1925.

News printed what appears to be a Klan press release about an initiation ceremony in Austin, Minnesota, involving 1,000 Klansmen and 400 initiates culminating "an intensive campaign of six-months to organize in every county in the state." The article claimed that 27 full time and 13 part time recruiters had signed up 10,000 members in Minnesota.

These figures may be wildly inflated. It brings up some of the problems with researching the Klan locally – limited reliable sources. The Klan, obsessed with secrecy, left few tracks. Membership rolls were tightly controlled. Former members or their embarrassed families could quietly destroy what records might have existed. Likewise, few of those familiar with the Klan have left reminiscences. The researcher is left primarily with newspaper accounts and a couple of photographs. From these we'll try to piece together the story.

On October 19, the *Moorhead Country Press* reported a lecture by Klan organizer P. J. Orn in Moorhead's Phenix Lodge "was not largely attended," but that an Orn lecture at Hawley's Garrick Theater the next day attracted "a large audience." The *Country Press'* Hawley correspondent said "it is reported that there [are] nearly a hundred Klansmen in and about Hawley with the prospect of many more." Even if this number is inflated by half it's still fairly impressive. In contrast, the Hawley area Odd Fellows Lodge, around since 1910, had about 50 members in 1923.

A "Reverend Fink" gave another Klan lecture in Barnesville in November. Mayor Peter Engels heard about the meeting and sent Police Chief Tim O'Leary to break it up. The *Moorhead Daily News* and the *Moorhead Country Press* both reported that O'Leary tried to stop the meeting but had no grounds to do so. Fink finished

Continued next page...

Ku Klux Klan, cont.

his speech and Orn, also editor of the Klan's *The Call of the North* newspaper, wrote about it in his paper. The article is illustrative of how the Klan used the media. In 1965 a Barnesville resident turned over a copy of the Klan newspaper to the *Barnesville Record-Review*, which reprinted Orn's article as an historical curiosity. The *Record-Review* editor perceptively noted that "the reporter who covered the KKK meeting here failed to get [the Mayor's] name...he is constantly referred to as 'the mayor' while O'Leary is plainly identified as the policeman." In public the Klan carefully avoided directly attacking individuals for being, for instance, Catholic. They preferred oblique references. Many readers could guess from his name that Chief O'Leary was of Irish descent (and probably Catholic). Mayor Engels could not be so easily identified as Catholic (though he was) so the Klan just called him "the mayor." However, Orn did report that Rev. Fink later confronted Mayor Engels "in his saloon." In 1923, Engels operated a pool hall, but it had been a saloon prior to Prohibition. Close enough for the Klan.

In December the *Country Press*' Hawley correspondent reported that another Klan organizer, Raymond Batty, had been "in Hawley during the past week lining up several new candidates for this order. It is reported that Pelican Rapids has gone solid in favor [of the Klan] and numerous other villages in this territory are getting in line. There must be something to it when serious thinking men are joining and giving their support." The writer added, "Maybe it looks better from the inside."

It's difficult to tell from newspaper accounts just how popular the Klan was in the county or even how newspaper editors felt about it. As far as I can tell, the *Barnesville Record-Review* and the *Glyndon Red River Valley News* rarely if ever reported on local Klan activities. The *Moorhead Daily News* did so only occasionally. Editors had ample reasons to keep mum. Some, undoubtedly, were disgusted with the group and refused to give it ink. Others may have been concerned about shedding bad light on their community or alienating either Klan supporters or their opposition. The *Hawley Clay County Herald* and, especially, the *Moorhead Country Press*, reprinted Klan press releases verbatim with little editorial comment. Both newspapers' local correspondents occasionally mention activities and the *Country Press* ran a few (unsigned) letters written by Klan supporters. It's ironic that the *Country Press* would provide the most complete coverage. It was a supporter of the socialist-leaning Non-Partisan League, no friend of the Klan. The *Herald*, *Country Press* and even the *Moorhead Daily News* carried paid advertisements for

Klan meetings and picnics.

The most interesting coverage comes from the *Ulen Union*, by far the most conservative county newspaper in the 1920s. Editor O. E. Reiersgord was the only local journalist to write about Klan meetings as an eye witness. A Norwegian immigrant, Reiersgord's comments are terse and carefully written. For instance, in September 1925, he wrote, "Some speculation is rife as to who is responsible for the burning of two crosses on the baseball grounds of this village on Thursday and Tuesday nights at about 9:30 o'clock. It is thought by some that it is the pranks of boys and others think it is the Ku Klux Klan. If it should be the later, time will tell what the burning of these crosses mean."

Other area papers were not so neutral. In Grand Forks, arguably the hot bed of Klan activity in the Valley, the *Herald* bitterly opposed the group and its leader, Presbyterian minister F. Halsey Ambrose. In April 1924, Klan endorsed candidates won election to the city school board and later took control of the city commission and police magistrate's office.

Meanwhile, back in Clay County, newspapers were pretty quiet about the group through most of 1924. In August the *Country Press* and the *Ulen Union* announced anti-Klan lectures in Voss, Minnesota, and the National Guard Armory in Moorhead. The speakers were a Judge W. C. Carrick of Oklahoma and a Dr. E. A. Cowles from Detroit Lakes, whom reportedly had "been lecturing in Oklahoma for the past nine months." At Voss the meeting was "well attended." There was discussion of forming an anti-Klan club but nothing was done.

One wonders what appeal the Klan had in Clay County. In the 1920s the county was home to a handful of Jews, even fewer Blacks. Less than 20% of residents were Catholic. Even most of the immigrants were white, Protestant, northern Europeans. In other mid-west communities, a Klan organizer would visit a town, size up the place and approach a community leader, usually the minister of the largest fundamentalist church, with a pitch designed to appeal to a perceived local "problem." It might be eastern European immigrants, Catholics or whatever. Here it might have been licentious behavior, especially involving liquor and dances.

Throughout the decade local newspapers printed letters (not necessarily Klan related) complaining about country dances where liquor was illegally sold and consumed. In late August 1924 the *Moorhead Daily News* reported the burning of a cross in the western part of Fargo:

"and that there are rumors of further activity in that line if a certain dance held in that section is not cleaned up. It is reported that an automobile

containing hooded figures stopped at the place Thursday night, unloaded a big cross, and set fire to it, creating considerable stir among those living in the vicinity. It is reported that several warnings had been sent to those running the dance in question, but that no attention had been paid to them, and the fiery cross Thursday was the next step. It is reported that there is quite a strong klan organization in Fargo and apparently the organization intends to purify the morals of Fargo and Cass county, especially in the country dance line."

The following year the *Ulen Union* published a report that two Klan crosses had been burned at Felton and that shortly afterwards, "a dance that was staged in the Hall there was stopped and everybody had to leave the Hall." Editor Reiersgord later corrected the report, "The crosses were burned but no dances have been stopped. Our informant stated that the dances given at Felton have been well supervised so there has been no occasion to complain."

CCHS has one issue of the *North Dakota American*, a Klan newspaper published at Fargo. Only two articles in the eight page paper have anything to do with the local area: one covers an address by the Fargo Police Magistrate before the Women's Christian Temperance Union on drunken drivers and enforcing prohibition laws; the other details the drunken activities of boys and girls in local restaurants and cafés.

This writer has heard three local stories of Klan intimidation (none of which, admittedly, have I been able to corroborate). One involves a threatening letter sent to a recently divorced woman, another of a frightening nocturnal visit to a young rural school teacher accused of spending too much time with an area man and the third of a cross being burned in front of a local pool hall where liquor was reportedly sold. None of these incidents involve ethnicity or religion.

It is also difficult to estimate the depth of Klan support locally. The 1920s were a different time. Many local people, uncomfortable with post-war cynicism, the flouting of prohibition and other laws, the emancipation of women, Hollywood movies and radio and the teaching of evolution in schools probably welcomed a movement to turn the country in another direction. But numbers are difficult to come by.

An intriguing bit of evidence comes from Dr. Carroll Engelhardt's *On Firm Foundation Grounded: The First Century of Concordia College (1891-1991)*. In February 1926, visiting lecturer Dean Samuel Miller of the Lutheran Bible Institute in St. Paul criticized the Klan in a Concordia radio broadcast. The Klan's *North Dakota*

American responded by questioning "the potential success of Concordia's impending endowment fund drive in Fargo-Moorhead ... [Concordia College President J. N.] Brown nervously treated the issue 'with the utmost caution,' claiming [in a letter to the Klan paper] 'there is at least a 50-50 division of opinion among our pastors regarding the Klan.'" [My emphasis.] Dr. Engelhardt continues, "It is surprising that Norwegian-American Lutherans were attracted to the Klan in the numbers Brown estimated. After all, their church officially opposed membership in secret societies and many Norwegian-Americans were foreign born themselves."

Another clue comes from the photo reprinted on the front page of this issue showing a Klan initiation ceremony in the old Moorhead National Guard Armory. (The Armory, constructed in 1919-1920 now houses Ward Muscatel Automotive. The Guard replaced the Armory with a new one on 5th Street South in 1935, which in turn was replaced with the present Armory in north Moorhead.) The national Klan divided the country into states or "Realms" then into local groups or "Klaverns." North Dakota Klaverns seem to have been grouped by counties. It probably worked similarly in Minnesota. Advertisements often refer to the "Klay Kounty Klan." The ceremony is probably a county-wide affair. Some 100 robed Klansmen can be seen taking part along with a few others in the back row – possible state representatives or visitors from Fargo or elsewhere. Also visible are about 30 kneeling initiates. One might guess from this that total membership may have been between 150 and 300 or so. But that is just a guess.

The peak of local Klan activity probably came in 1925. That year saw a number of large scale Klan events. In May, the *Country Press* reported a Klan rally "in a hollow along the river four miles south of Fargo ... A crowd estimated [improbably] at 4,000 people watched the ceremonies from a distance." A similar meeting a week later also attracted "a large crowd."

In Hillsboro, North Dakota, the local American Legion Post hosted a Fourth of July celebration. Much to their chagrin, the North Dakota Klan crashed it, announcing a statewide Konklave and parade. The Legion disavowed any connection with the interlopers, but the parade went on, attracting an estimated 1,000 Klansmen including some 500 robed marchers. A special train from Fargo-Moorhead carried 700-800 to the event.

On July 26, the Clay County organization held a huge outdoor public meeting and lecture on what is now the grounds of the Moorhead Country Club, the first of several such outdoor meetings and picnics in Clay County.

Continued next page...

Ku Klux Klan, cont.

Finally, in September, the Klan held an even bigger *Konklave* in Fargo. A parade of between 750 and 800 robed (but not hooded) Klan members marched down Broadway. These included 50 women, about 60 horsemen, a 36-piece marching band and 30 robed children on a float. The route took them from the Fairgrounds (where Fargo North High School now stands), down Broadway (pointedly past St. Mary's Cathedral), west on 6th Avenue North, down Roberts Street to NP Avenue, then north via Broadway back up to the Fairgrounds. There the Mayor (in carefully chosen remarks) welcomed them. The *Fargo Forum* estimated the crowd in the Grandstand and on the grounds at 8,000. They listened to music, speeches and watched Klan inspired fireworks.

Things soon changed dramatically. Earlier in 1925, David Stephenson, Grand Dragon of Indiana, the most powerful Klan Realm in the country, kidnapped, beat and sexually assaulted a young woman. When she attempted suicide, Stephenson refused to get her medical aid. She died and the Grand Dragon wound up in prison.

Americans, already disgusted with Klan violence and bigotry, became contemptuous of the organization. Klansmen, stung by the gross hypocrisy of Stephenson and other national leaders, fled their sheets by the thousands. The group never recovered.

Through 1926 the Klay Kounty Klan tried desperately to inject life into the group. Rev. Ambrose and Klan speaker J. N. Van Cleve of Northfield, Minnesota conducted a series of lectures near Barnesville, Sabin, in Moland Township and at least two other locations in the

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CCHS extends a special thank you to the following individuals who renewed their memberships or became new members in January and February:

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Ku Klux Klan, cont.

county. In August they staged a picnic at Silver Lake. But it was too late.

In 1927, the Klan invited Hiram Evans, the National Grand Wizard himself, to a Klonkave in Fargo. We don't know if Evans appeared. No local newspaper covered the event. That fall Ambrose referred to the Grand Forks Klan in a publication in the past tense. The second incarnation of the Klan was effectively gone by 1930.

Beyond the egregious behavior of its leaders, the Klan had a major weakness. It was an organization opposed to much: Catholics, Jews, Blacks, aliens, and anyone who did not live up to its idea of proper behavior. ("Does a man gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?") What it supported was a white, Protestant, fundamentalist American-style Taliban which enforced its edicts through extra-judicial night time attacks by men hiding behind masks. In the end, Americans said, no thanks.

Dressed for the Camera: Clues *on* the Photos Update

By Pam Burkhardt, Collections Manager

Last issue we ran a photo of Laura Cleveland and Lora/Lova Johnson with some questions. The Olson family came from Wisconsin between 1882 and 1884 and settled in Morken Township. The Cleveland name didn't appear to be connected to the family. Who was Lora/Lova Johnson and why is she in the same photo with Laura?

Phyllis Nelson came forward with answers. Lava Johnson (b. Aug. 1878 in North Dakota) was the step-daughter of Sivert and Christina Johnson who were neighbors of Martin and Sophie Olson. Lava married Henry Bielfeldt of Moorhead. She died Oct. 5, 1967. Henry died on May 17, 1931.

Laura Kleveland was born in Norway 1867 to Bjorn L. Kleveland and Laura Daldorph. Mrs. Kleveland died 11 days after Laura was born. After coming to America, Bjorn settled in Iowa where he married Tallet Olson. The Klevelds moved to Dakota Territory eventually settling

in Trail County. Daughter Laura trained as a nurse in Fargo. Meanwhile, Bjorn and Tallet had 13 children, including Bertha (Mrs. George) Gilbery, Moorhead. Laura married Bert Legg in Cass County, North Dakota on Feb. 27, 1904. Laura and Lava remained close friends through the years.

Thank you, Phyllis, for helping us solve this mystery!



Lava and Laura in a Fargo studio between 1886 and 1889 (left, CCHS), and in Van Hook, ND in 1945 (right, courtesy Phyllis Nelson).

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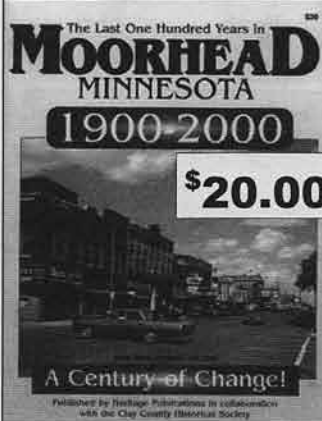
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