

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

You know, of, of all the places we've been, people keep saying, have you been to Howell? Have you been to Howell? Have you been to howl? And so here we are. And why do you think it is that how is equated with the client?

Speaker 2 ([00:14](#)):

Well, because the grand dragon was here, he was the grand dragon of Michigan. Robert Miles was a, quite a distinguished fellow, very intelligent, a likable fellow. You know, he was a fellow that you'd really wouldn't mind talking with or spending an afternoon with. He never talked to you about the Klan. Anything, he just, uh, uh, just a nice, nice guy, but, but you didn't know he was with the Klan, but he lived right here in town for quite a while there, just down the street here on grand river. And, uh, no one knew anything about him. And then, uh, I guess as the word got out, then he left here, went up and bought the farm in [inaudible]. It was for my daughter lived after she got married first, she was married up there or her married lived up there. And, uh, they lived on the farm for a few years there and then started building a house on the road so that they were going to be leaving the farm. So, uh, Bob miles, we found out later bought the farm. He wanted the room anyway. So he get his meetings going on Sundays, they get together, you know, and burner crosses and just generally do that. What the things that they do, whatever it is,

Speaker 1 ([01:50](#)):

What year did Bob miles come to? Uh, to how

Speaker 2 ([01:54](#)):

I, I'm not really certain when he came, because nobody really knew he was here for a while. He had been an insurance man somewhere and, uh, lost that job. But, uh, I don't know when it was, I know we have records of him back in the seventies. I remember the first time he came in the studio, uh, he made an appointment, had to have a portrait taken to me. He was just a guy walking in, off the street, you know, but he came in with another fellow or rather rugged looking fellow and, uh, uh, not dressed up at all and told me who he was. And so I made out the form and took him into the dressing room to have her check his tie and hair and all that stuff. And this fellow was right behind me. He was a lot bigger than I was, but he, uh, just stood there.

Speaker 2 ([02:53](#)):

And when I took Bob miles into the camera room to start setting him up, get the lights up and everything, get his picture where this guy was looking in the door all the time and the doorway to the camera. I'm sorry. I finally went over to him and I said, uh, uh, there's a re reception room out in front, you know, a magazine, if you want to read out there. I think, and he reached his arm up, put his hand in his pocket. And as he did his, his coat moved over and I could see the 45 and under his shoulder there. And I agreed with him. He could stay there as long as he wanted. So that was it. He, he was a bodyguard and he went with Bob every time he came to town. But, uh, no, I had to get pictures of him for, Oh, for his little missiles that he sent out missives sent out, you know, and all his, their work talking, getting together with all the people from Pontiac and other areas around, of course, being the state grand dragon way. He, he had to keep contact with a lot of people, I suppose.

Speaker 1 ([04:06](#)):

No, he had, did he live here when he was sentenced? Uh, uh,

Speaker 2 ([04:11](#)):

He was living in on the fireman.

Speaker 1 ([04:13](#)):

Yeah. So, and, and he went to prison in 73, didn't he? I think it was. And the buses were burned in 71. Bombed

Speaker 2 ([04:22](#)):

You more of that? I think wasn't it. I don't remember.

Speaker 1 ([04:24](#)):

He was 71 as part of it. Yeah. And I just, I just read it. I think it was, I had thought it was in the late sixties, but I think it was 71.

Speaker 2 ([04:32](#)):

That's when they first cubed him of it or something. But, uh, I don't think he went to prison until a while. After that, after the, uh, if I remember the court case was handled down in Arizona,

Speaker 1 ([04:45](#)):

It was handled out. Yeah. It was out of state at any rate. Yeah. Now he was, he had been an insurance agent now, was there a miles agency in this town or not? No. Four. It came here there, but there wasn't miles agency here. Wasn't there? Uh, Nope. I don't believe so. Nope. Okay. Had done some research.

Speaker 2 ([05:06](#)):

I don't know about it. I have only been here since the war I got back from Europe after the war was over. It was second world war. I know most of everything has happened in town since then. And it wasn't here then. So he wasn't either.

Speaker 1 ([05:20](#)):

He just quietly came into town with he and his wife, evidently. Yeah. And what was she like?

Speaker 2 ([05:27](#)):

I don't really know her at all.

Speaker 1 ([05:30](#)):

Now. He, so he bought a house down here. He'd come in, do you have his picture taken or whatever else? And there'd be a bodyguard with him. Uh, and, and he was, he pastoring his church, the mountain church at that point? No, that started at, until he was out on the farm. Tell me, tell me the story about starting of that church.

Speaker 2 ([05:48](#)):

Well, the only thing that I know is that, uh, it just seemed that he was trying to ease out, to get everybody's attention away from himself and have an excuse for being, you know, and so, uh, he being a very learned fellow. He probably felt that if he could be a religious factor in there somewhere, he would,

he would, uh, have a reason for being and other than what he had been doing before. And he started this up. When people came, uh, every Sunday, they came to church. They're not people from around here, but they came from Pontiac and other points around the country here. And, uh, I imagine it was an excuse for him, you know, some reason for being here, but, uh, the FBI knew he was here. Of course they were out every time they had a meeting out there and burned across, out there on his farm. One, FBI were flying helicopters round over there by her daughter used to live just a quarter of a mile away. And she used to tell me how the FBI were watching them all the way underground and in the air, they were watching everything they did.

Speaker 3 ([07:10](#)):

[inaudible]

Speaker 2 ([07:11](#)):

Yeah. Yup. Now, before Robert Miles, what Klan activity had this town had? I don't know of any, you know, I don't know of any at all.

Speaker 3 ([07:27](#)):

Just two words alone with him, way back when, just for that kind of stuff.

Speaker 2 ([07:36](#)):

No, there was no record of it. We had, we had a few black people in the County over the years. Like I told you, the first one was a barber came here very early on. Tell me that story on camera. Well, the a, was it a Lorenzo was his name?

Speaker 3 ([07:55](#)):

Uh huh.

Speaker 2 ([07:57](#)):

Anyway, he came in on the stagecoach. Yeah. But before, before we had a railroad and the stages ran from Detroit to Lansing and down to Jackson, up to Flint and Byron, and there were several routes. This stage came in one day and this black fellow was on the stage and he, uh, he had his barber chair and on top of the stage. And so they stopped here to change horses and get something to eat. And the people in town, businessmen in town noticed that barber chair on top, they reached into the coach and pulled him out by his shirt and pulled him right out and held him right there and said, where are you going? And he said, I'm on my way to Lansing. And they said, no, no, you're going to stay right here. And he was scared, stiff, of course, but, uh, just a little guy, but he stayed and they took care of him.

Speaker 2 ([09:02](#)):

They took him right out and bought him a big dinner and find him a place to stay and, and set up shop in a barbershop. And there he was, he was here until he died. Yeah. He was a well liked, well known. We've had other colored people, uh, here that lived here. We had a large group over by just North of Brighton, uh, during the war and after the war that had her own church that over there, we've got records of it here in the archives of their church. They were, uh, they kept to themselves and, and nobody bothered them. They didn't bother anybody else. They just wanted to be alone. And so they did, but that kind of

faded away after a while after years go by and, uh, here in town, we had very few, very few here in Howell. We had a painter here, our white, who was a well liked fellow, did nice work.

Speaker 2 ([10:07](#)):

Everybody wanted him to do their painting, did a good job. We had Willie Wright who came to town from born in Birmingham, worked his way up through North Carolina. And over this way, I don't know how he ever ended up here, but he ended up here and, uh, early thirties and, uh, just washed windows and scrubbed floors for businessmen that made a living that way. He scrubbed my floors and washed my windows in the studio for years and years. But, uh, and a real nice guy, tall slim guy would have been when he was younger, probably six foot four, which is average. Man's about five eight. And those days way, he was a tall man. But, uh, he, uh, when he died, we, we had a big party for him. We'd started an Elks club here in town and for the County. And, and, uh, before, when he turned 90 years old, we had a party at the elk Scott forum and everybody came and we got, we sent out letters to all the senators and representatives to governor and all that stuff and got telegrams back from congratulating Willie on this, you know, and all that.

Speaker 2 ([11:24](#)):

I took pictures through the whole thing. We had all kinds of wild meat, uh, on, uh, for the meal that night muskrat and every darn thing, cool. Everything. And it was a big party. And Willie just, and I, at time then gave him great, big 60 by 20 pictures. I'd taken of him and framed and everything. He put up in his little house over there by the hospital. And he just was in his own glory. Then it was wonderful. Yeah. But we've, we've had a,

Speaker 1 ([12:06](#)):

But it has no been smooth sailing. Has it, it, it hasn't all been smooth sailing. Well, that's true. Can you tell me the story of that picture?

Speaker 2 ([12:13](#)):

We don't really know how this got started. These people lived down on Griffith, slid down on Chilson road and her neighbors all liked him. Nobody complained about them living there or anything. It was just, they got along well, but somebody from out of town came in and knew that they were there. And one night they burned a cross on her front lawn and it scared the Dickens out of them. A lot of people were awful mad about that because the people in town here aren't like that at all. And, uh, we just have,

Speaker 1 ([12:48](#)):

Uh, uh,

Speaker 2 ([12:50](#)):

I talked to people from Detroit often, cause I officiated in track meets and all around the state high school meets in that when I was younger. And uh, I talk with these black kids and they'd say, here's some how I don't want to go there. You know, they were scared, stiff just to come to Livingston County. They hated just drive through here until we got an expressway. They went right through without stopping. But it was just one of those things

Speaker 1 ([13:23](#)):

Now is that all a legacy of Mr. Miles? Is that the legacy that he left here?

Speaker 2 ([13:27](#)):

That's probably what he had. Yeah. Cause there's no, there's no Coca Klan in Howell. I'm quite sure there may be people, uh, who joined, who came in from somewhere else. But I don't, I don't know of any and I don't write signs and stuff mostly by kids in school. I worked here anytime you went to a public, that's the last

Speaker 1 ([14:09](#)):

Yeah. But these kids don't think this up themselves. Do they?

Speaker 2 ([14:15](#)):

But people probably come on board they're so, well, how do you,

Speaker 1 ([14:24](#)):

How do you feel about how being known as a Klan city? I mean, if you've been here since after world war two, what's, what's your, what's your reaction to this?

Speaker 2 ([14:35](#)):

Well, when I first heard about it, I, it bothered me, but, uh, and uh, I was afraid we were going to have problems around here, but when he moved out of town and all the activity he did was all on the farm, never anywhere else. Uh, it didn't bother other people nearly as much then of course I don't, I don't think that people would call haka, thought too much about it, but it's there. We just kinda went on our way and after he died, why we haven't heard anything more about it, nothing going on around here now that we know of there, once in a while you hear about something that somebody starts, but they're usually from somewhere else, you know? And they come here probably because we have a name that we haven't gotten rid of yet.

Speaker 1 ([15:40](#)):

What was that all about?

Speaker 2 ([15:45](#)):

Yeah. That's right.

Speaker 1 ([15:47](#)):

Protect them or protect the courthouse.

Speaker 2 ([15:50](#)):

Oh, somebody's scraping black power black shit.

Speaker 1 ([15:59](#)):

So, so what, what was, what, what is the story of this fence? I mean, could you tell me about that? About what about this fence, this \$20,000 fence. Oh, you mean the one where they put it up? Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([16:11](#)):

They were going to have a meeting on the courthouse, lawn on the courthouse steps and invited everybody to it. And, uh, the police, of course we got state police and everybody in here right away quick, and everybody was scared, stiff. There was going to be a problem there because there are a lot of people here in town and we're not in favor of this. So they, they built a fence all around the courthouse, in front of the courthouse to keep the general public out, to protect those people while they're doing their hollering up on the steps. Uh, it's a good thing. They did. There were a few rocks thrown, but, uh, uh,

Speaker 1 ([16:55](#)):

Almost, almost nobody showed up

Speaker 2 ([16:58](#)):

That wanted to be in there. If they could go inside defense. When the fourth, the four, they started, if they said they were interested in hearing what had to be said, but, uh, afterwards the general public was kept out and it was a fence. It cost the city \$20,000 or the County. But very few people actually came up except curious stuff. You know, nobody really was there that mountain. Anything who wanted to hear anything they had to say

Speaker 1 ([17:30](#)):

Was Miles speaking at that event? No, no. Was this after this was after he died? Yeah. So

Speaker 2 ([17:45](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([17:46](#)):

Any apocryphal tales about, uh, any, any of the other stuff that Robert Miles was associated with around here? I mean, he seems to be the last public spokesman for the Klan and Michigan. He used to be the last guy.

Speaker 2 ([18:01](#)):

He was the grand dragon. I don't know if they have a grand dragon now I have no idea, but, uh, if they don't why they, they don't have an organization. I don't know. There probably are a lot of undercover people, but we don't know about them.

Speaker 1 ([18:18](#)):

Well, isn't that one of the things that, that Miles advocated, he said, take off, hang up your robes, take off your hoods and go underground and breed like mad was, is that the kind of way he'd speak that, you know, if you're going to,

Speaker 2 ([18:32](#)):

That would be his idea. Yeah. I think that was primarily his idea for all of Michigan that he was governing, but, uh, just, uh, be, uh, just live your life. But anything we do we'll do. So nobody knows about it and he's still got caught. So they still didn't work. He went to jail, he served his time and came back afterwards, very submissive, quiet. But, uh, I talked to him one time after he came back and then,

then he died and, and, uh, his wife was very quiet and then I believe she died. I don't remember the date she died, but I know his daughter came into the studio one day. And, uh, my son was there with me, the study or running the studio at the time. And she ordered these pictures of, of the burning of the cross with him as a prime figure and to think there. So that's the last we've heard from him.

Speaker 1 ([19:53](#)):

And what was she going to do with these photos? I'm sorry, what was,

Speaker 2 ([19:56](#)):

Uh, apparently she didn't say, but apparently they were to be given out to the, the ones that were most active people that were most friendly with, uh, the ones who wouldn't want it. You know, it was quite a dramatic picture. They used to burn those crosses every Sunday night in the summertime,

Speaker 1 ([20:20](#)):

Every cent that had to account for a lot of traffic through this town though. Didn't it? Wouldn't it be? Lots of people who'd be coming to well, that's only about five miles. Isn't it go? Hocked. It's 12 miles or 12 miles up. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([20:33](#)):

Top of the counter. Tony. No, not really, but no, there weren't that many people there that no huge crowds or anything just to the people, the regular ones who came from Pontiac and area around in there, probably that came who, uh, were there regularly?

Speaker 1 ([20:51](#)):

What did the churches respond to? How did, how did they respond to, to Robert Miles? The kids, the churches.

Speaker 2 ([20:57](#)):

Oh, the churches. Yeah. They were against the course, uh, naturally, but, uh, uh, you mean the regular churches? Yeah. But, uh, they, they got together a group to them, uh, Fred Williams and some others got together and formed a society back in, Oh, golly, 95, somewhere along in there, or maybe a little before that. Cause after miles died, it was called 2001 that was a group of people here in the County who ministers and other people who were against, uh, KKK activities. And they formed this group and they met once a month or so. And their primary purpose was to be against anything to do with KKK stuff and burning of crosses and things like that to be one United people, you know, that was their aim and quite a few of the ministers and County belonged to it and everything. And a lot of other people. And it's, I think it's a lot stronger group than the KKK was around here. So in 2001 has come and gone now. And so they've extended it now. So they're still going, but we don't, uh, have a perfect County yet by any means, but we're working on it.

Speaker 1 ([22:35](#)):

What have I not asked you that I should have about Robert Miles? What have I forgotten? Well, I don't know.

Speaker 2 ([22:43](#)):

I, like I say, I, I, I didn't see him an awful lot of great number of times or anything like that because, uh, he just wasn't in town that often after he started living out there and uh, he's just, he was a fellow that you just a nice looking fellow. Well-built tall, well learned. I mean, he looked, he talked to you like a college professor and uh, he just a guy that you would meet on the street and would never know it. You could talk to him for an hour and never, never realized he had anything to do with it. Cause he would never mention it. But he was a very likable guy and you sensed his intelligence, just talking with him.

Speaker 2 ([23:38](#)):

And he had a rapport with him that hard to turn down. I can see how I get all these fellows with it, you know, but just in my estimation, I always felt what a tremendous citizen he would have been if he had just been steered in a different direction. When he was younger, somewhere along the line, something happened to him or he was led in different directions somewhere. Sometime that changed. It changed him. And uh, hard to say maybe early on a good psychiatrist, could've got with him and straightened him out. But we hope that they're on the wane now and we're not going to have that around here. We're, we're building up so many people in the population you see. When, when I came to town here after the war, I'm not a native of this town. My wife was a native. When I came to town here, we had in this entire County, we had 26,000 people in the whole County.

Speaker 2 ([24:51](#)):

Now we're approaching 180,000. That's an awful big change. I used to stand on the main four corners down here. After I've been here for three, four years working in a studio downtown, I used to be able to stand on the main four corners and no, or have a nodding acquaintance with everybody walked by. Now. I stayed on the main four corners for 20 minutes. Looking for somebody I know it's changed. Everything has changed. I think with a massive population we're getting in here that, that this is all all going to be forgotten for long. We have black people in here coming in now slowly, they're coming in. They work at citizens. They work at other places around here, take up their homes around here. And we had a mrs. Childers lived here for years. You're here at back in terms of the century raised a bunch of kids.

Speaker 2 ([25:54](#)):

Well before the turn of the century, almost every year for, for several years, uh, one of the seniors graduating was one of her sons and they were black and real nice people. She made her living, uh, while her husband was gone, he was assistant ambassador somewhere down in Nicaragua or somewhere. He was a very knowledgeable fellow. And while he was gone, while she would take in laundries and do things like that, you know, plus all her own kids' laundry. And she had to do plus cooking for all these people. But, uh, she was just a wonderful person and everybody liked her and all her kids. One of her kids grew up to be editor of a newspaper in st. Louis. One was, uh, a journalist somewhere else. One was a lawyer. They were all sharp kids. Yeah.