

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

Tell me about the collection of, uh, of materials that deal with race at the Clarke.

Speaker 2 ([00:07](#)):

The Clarke has several materials that deal with race. We've been interested in a number of areas. One of the preeminent collections involves the Klu Klux Klan in Michigan, in the 1920s, where we've been extremely fortunate in obtaining membership roles for the Klan for three separate counties in mid Michigan. These are invaluable resources to do demographic studies through which to determine who really joined the Klan, who were the members of that organization.

Speaker 1 ([00:37](#)):

And what do you know about them so far from looking at what three counties are we talking about here and who were the people in those counties?

Speaker 2 ([00:43](#)):

The three membership roles come from Ottawa County Newaygo County and Mecosta County. And what they reveal is a very interesting pattern Klan membership. Although we often tend to think of it as being people who were poorly educated, great transient people who perhaps were in a way taken advantage of suckered into the organization. If you will, most of the members turn out to be longterm residents of the community. They turn out to be a fairly representative demographic of the education community. There are, of course, some people who are poorly educated, but there are also professionals. There are also independent business people. It's a much broader group than you would have initially thought. If you simply looked at some of their critics and read some of the newspaper reports, which were often critical of the Klan,

Speaker 1 ([01:33](#)):

And weren't just, um, ignorant thugs or, or clod busters,

Speaker 2 ([01:38](#)):

That's correct. Uh, the saying at the time was you could tell they were more of more of a ditch diggers by looking at their shoes. And in fact, many of them were very well dressed because they were professional people. So it is a much broader group. The other interesting thing about the Klan and the period is it's not just a male organization, traditional we've often thought of the Klan is being all men. But in point of fact, it was a very broadly based organization. There were women auxiliaries for most of the Klan units. There were family events that the Klan sponsored picnics, which would feature a Klan speaker of course, but would have all the features of a typical County picnic. There would be food. There would be events for the children. There would be games, there would be prizes. There would even be special Klan fireworks in the evening.

Speaker 2 ([02:23](#)):

In addition to the burning cross, they would have fireworks, which could be purchased from Atlanta, from Klan headquarters. And they often used them. The Klan had its own vocabulary and usually using the word Klan, Klan vocations, um, various other words that they invented usually using a K of some sort. It was an attempt to give it, um, an air of mystery and era of it was a secret organization after all. And there was this attempt to build into it, this, this terminology that would give mystery majesty. I

think they hope to the organization much like the robes themselves, which they, again hoped would, would dress the organization in this, this veil of mystery and majesty and power and power. Absolutely power was much of what the Klan was all about.

Speaker 3 ([03:15](#)):

Where did you come by these materials? How did you get this stuff?

Speaker 2 ([03:18](#)):

The materials came from a variety of sources in general. We obtain them however through purchase. Um, generally speaking, these were painted auctions. The most recent occurrence was in Waco County. Where about 10 years ago, uh, a cache of Klan material was found in a fruit market that was being sold off the Mark. And the heirs of the gentlemen who had owned the market had put it up for auction. And this material appeared to gentlemen, had been the secretary of the Klan in the wiggle County. And apparently just could not part with this material. He kept it stashed away in a back room that no one knew about. There were probably a thousand people at this auction. It had been widely publicized in the newspapers around the state. Many, many sites, Sears turned out there was some concern actually that there might be violence. There were kind of sheriffs there, there were private security guards. There, there were newspaper reporters from around the state television reporters from around the state. There was a stringer from the New York times there that day. So it received a great deal of publicity.

Speaker 3 ([04:23](#)):

Where'd you come up with the bucks for this and how many bucks was it that you had spent?

Speaker 2 ([04:28](#)):

We paid approximately \$1,500 at an auction in the Waco County. It was a very interesting experience. There were several thousand people there. And as we milled about various items in the collection were sold, we were interested primarily in the membership cards, the membership cards were critical for documenting the history of the organization. It was a teeth biting moment. We sat there, we were afraid we would be outbid prices were going much higher than we had anticipated, but we were very, very fortunate and were able to obtain the cards.

Speaker 3 ([05:04](#)):

Wasn't there a chance that those cars were going to be sold one at a time,

Speaker 2 ([05:07](#)):

There was indeed a chance that the cards were going to be sold one at a time. And we were extremely fortunate in several members of the community intervened on the behalf of the historical groups that were involved, spoke to the family, spoke to the auctioneer and said we would deeply appreciate it. If that could be kept together as a bundle, our fear was that it would be broken up as auctioneer's often do and sold, um, to individuals, a person could buy as many as they would like for the original purchase price or card might, they might be \$50 and take two cards as a souvenir. Um, by keeping it together, the price was forced up and made it possible to keep it together. Keep the, keep the membership records together rather than breaking them apart into a group of, uh, individual cars that would have no historical value. It would lose its value if it were broken apart. So

Speaker 3 ([05:59](#)):

Another small miracle on the way,

Speaker 2 (06:00):

Small miracle, along the way, the work of a lot of very dedicated people who talk to people who talked to people and helped us a great deal by making that happen.

Speaker 3 (06:09):

Do I, I am sure I don't misrep, uh, remember that, uh, that Frederick Meyer had a hand in, in this acquisition. I know he did other processing things, but didn't that came out at the same time. It wasn't, it wasn't Frederick Meyer there too.

Speaker 2 (06:24):

No comment. Mr. Meyer requested editability so

Speaker 3 (06:34):

[inaudible],

Speaker 2 (06:36):

[inaudible]

Speaker 3 (06:37):

Good. So I can't give you, I think that was all over the grand Rapids. Press,

Speaker 2 (06:41):

Press probably covered it, but he had requested anonymity. So I got up

Speaker 3 (06:45):

And in fact then all hell broke loose. It was like walking into a shit storm

Speaker 2 (06:52):

Streamline interesting experience. Sunday morning, I woke up and some of my colleagues in the Clarke library woke up the front page headlines talking about the acquisition with a good deal of criticism from members of the community who felt that the purchase supported racism in one way or another, and perhaps was a reflection or a representation of institutional racism, whether conscious or unconscious. It was a very tense situation for a period of time. One newspaper in the area ran their poll, which said, should the university have bought this material? We, by the way, lost that poll and people called in and there were quotes in the papers such as just a bunch of racists, a typical example of racism among institutions in Michigan. It was truly a tragic response. We thought we firmly believed that to forget that the Klan was there is to forget a critical element of American history, a painful element of American history for many Americans.

Speaker 2 (07:52):

That's absolutely true. But to forget the past is to forget what has happened to us. To forget that there was a Klan is to forget the people who they inflicted suffering on is to create a situation. As I explained

to one group of students on this, on this campus, that's very similar to Holocaust studies. There are people who deny the Holocaust ever happened. If there is no documentation, if there are no records and there is no proof. So why this is offensive material, that many people, and we recognize that nevertheless, it's critical, fundamental historical documentation to understand the American experience. You have to accept the good and the bad about America and tell both in the history, but in the history books, you have to tell the truth.

Speaker 3 ([08:35](#)):

Yeah, yeah. But you know, if I were a client activist and I wanted to find out our long and noble tradition, I could come in here and use that material for, for evil purposes.

Speaker 2 ([08:46](#)):

That's absolutely true. Someone could come in and use this material. As you say, for evil purposes. Our point is to say that we believe in the power of the public to decide what is right and what is wrong, what is good public policy and what is bad public policy? Our role is a library. And as an archives is to document what's happened, how the future chooses to interpret that activity is up to the future.

Speaker 3 ([09:12](#)):

Yeah, of course they took their poll. The public did decide you shouldn't have done it. Thanks, Dave. You're welcome.

Speaker 2 ([09:20](#)):

I think we had a public education role to do here. I think the purchase did offend many people and, and I, I regret that I regret that people were offended by the purchase. Nevertheless, I think what we had to do is to reach out to those communities. And in fact, we, we did that and explained to them why we made this acquisition, that we weren't interested in supporting racist or racism. We were however, very interested in documenting an aspect of American life in American history, an unpleasant aspect of American life and American history in many ways, a repulsive aspect of American life and American history. But nevertheless, something that has happened in something that is critical that we remember.

Speaker 3 ([10:00](#)):

So, yeah, we've had a little bit about the people who are involved. They're not all Claude Buser. If you take a look at their shoes, some of them are, Oh, let's say they're even, um, postmasters, uh, the client. When did, when did this area see its biggest Klan activity and, and what was the Klan against in, in this part of Michigan let's, um, I'm going to go even farther back. There were waves of Klan activity. What are those waves generally considered to be

Speaker 2 ([10:30](#)):

Generally speaking, there's considered to have been three waves of Klan activity in the United States. The first in the 1870s towards the end of reconstruction, largely a Southern organization, essentially reacting to the emancipation of slaves and the various freedoms given to African Americans and trying to restore the old social order. The Klan of the 1920s also was an organization that responded to fears of the public, but there were more broad based organization. Racism clearly played a part in that Klan, but it was also antisemitic. It was anti-Catholic, it was anti foreign. If one reads their literature, they were in favor of 100% Americanism. And they would define that term for you essentially as being white and being Protestant. There's a third iteration of the Klan that appeared in the 1960s. And again, primarily a

racist response to changes in society regarding African-Americans the civil rights movement of the 1950s and sixties in the new legislation that was passed in that time period in change, the social status quo

Speaker 3 ([11:35](#)):

Klan still active in Michigan.

Speaker 2 ([11:39](#)):

The Klan has far fewer members than it had in the 1960s and seventies. But according to various documents, the Klan is still active in Michigan. There are still Klan members in Klan chapters.

Speaker 3 ([11:51](#)):

We want to find some of those people, good luck.

Speaker 2 ([11:54](#)):

They like to be interviewed, but, um, we use the, um, um, what is it? The, the Klan watch more some what's his, I can't think of his last name right now, Morris 12th out of my head, but we use that for documentation of clinic activity in Michigan. Now Laura's deeds. Thank you. Yes. That's the Oregon state

Speaker 3 ([12:11](#)):

In, in grand Rapids, a great reference suburbs. There, there was a Klan publication that was, um, put about house by house. And, uh, these folks were mildly surprised. You know, that Joel stuff that shows up on the doorstep, um, want to talk. And in particular about the power of the Klan in Michigan, I would gather Michigan probably bypass. The first one did take part in the second. I think there were tire burnings for unforced busing tire slashings and body act. There were okay. Yeah. The 1960s, but I want to talk about the Klan and its growth in to the twenties. Cause this really started with a defining incident. Didn't it? Which was release of a movie.

Speaker 2 ([12:54](#)):

The Klan was founded. Refounded actually in 1915 in Atlanta, Georgia, but what really caused it to start to grow dramatically was DW Griffith's movie birth of a nation. That movie portrayed the Klan of the 1870s as a heroic response by the white community to reestablish social order. If you look at the movie's plot, essentially the South is falling apart. The social order is collapsing and the noble and brave Klansmen as they are portrayed in that film rise up and restore of a social order. The movie was tremendously successful at the box office and it gave the reborn Klan, tremendous vitality people. Many people thought this looked like a good organization. One uses that word, very cautiously with the Klan, but people did not perceive it as we perceive it today. Very often

Speaker 3 ([13:48](#)):

You had the president of the United States talking about this movie

Speaker 2 ([13:52](#)):

Got me. I'll take your word for a day.

Speaker 3 ([13:56](#)):

Let me tell you, uh, president Wilson, uh, who was a historian said, yup, that's pretty much the way it was and lauded the movie. And there were, there were, uh, riots, uh, on, uh, about birth of a nation. There were race riots about this and people were killed when people died because of this. And you've got the president of the United States saying, good job, DW

Speaker 2 ([14:20](#)):

Woodrow Wilson was never known for his progressive racial views. Another activity that's happening in American society at the time is the reaction to world war one. There is a frustration, I think to world war one, the boys went over there to make the world safe for democracy. And it didn't work out that way. Woodrow Wilson's dreams for the treaties are our failed dreams. And what we see in 1918 and 1919 is the beginning of American isolationism. Americans are withdrawing from the world. They're saying we, we went to Europe, it failed enough. We will live in fortress America and the rest of the world can do as well. And so there is a retrenchment going on at the same time that that retrenchment is going on. There's an interesting development. African Americans are beginning to assert their rights, the Niagara movement, which will lead to the founding of the NAACP, even national association for the advancement of colored people meets in 1917, founds that organization.

Speaker 2 ([15:19](#)):

And it's an organization dedicated to assuring African-Americans their legal rights as American citizens. I think some Americans were very concerned about that. They saw this as, as a minority, one of many minorities who were, who were rising up, who were asserting that they too were entitled to the American dream and there was a concern attention, a fear. So there are a variety of, of, of activities that are happening at this time period. That one has to take into consideration near or just after world war. One, a variety of, of new fears are emerging among the American public. The Bolshevik revolution has occurred in Russia, and there's a tremendous fear of, of the red menace of, of what these communists might be doing. There's a fear of the new social order of the 1920s after all of the era of the flapper, um, social mores are changing and many people are concerned about that.

Speaker 2 ([16:19](#)):

Prohibition has been installed, but prohibition is widely ignored. There are many elements of the public who are very concerned about this outright violation of a law of, it seems not to interest anybody. Labor unions are organizing. There's concern that perhaps those labor unions are going to change things in ways that will not be acceptable. There's a tremendous fear of others, of tremendous fear of people who are not one of us, for lack of a better word. That fear is primarily expressed in the white community. Primarily the white Protestant community. They're terribly worried about changes in society and they're looking for an organization that'll help them restore the social order. In many ways, the Klan plays directly into that fear. And the Klan is a very equal opportunity. Exploiter of fear and hate, depending on where you are in the United States, the Klan will use different issues to recruit members.

Speaker 2 ([17:18](#)):

For example, in the Detroit area where the Klan began in Michigan and in 19, in 1922, approximately the primary recruiting tool was fear of African Americans. It was racism in mid-Michigan. However, in Mecosta County, the primary recruiting tool, although blacks were present in the County and lived, there was anti Catholicism. There was a fear that the Catholics were quite loyal enough. They were more concerned with the Pope than with the government and the Klan organizers, exploited fear. They built

on it. They recruited with it. The Klan organizers would take the fear of the community. Take advantage of that fear, exploit that fear and use it to develop membership in the Klan.

Speaker 1 ([18:03](#)):

We're all afraid of something.

Speaker 3 ([18:09](#)):

I don't know if you want to go with that one, I'm waiting for you.

Speaker 2 ([18:13](#)):

We're certainly all afraid of something, but at different times in American history and at different times in individual's lives, fears tend to predominate. And in 19, 19, 1920 period was a very fearful time for many Americans. The way they understood the world was changing. That change left. Many people uncertain, doubting unclear about what the future was going to bring and often longing for perhaps a simpler, less complicated life. That may be a case of looking backwards and seeing time and a golden globe. But nevertheless, there was that longing. And so this was a particularly vulnerable moment for America, perhaps like the 1950s, where of the communist scare. There are moments in American history where there is a vulnerability to fear. There, there is great concern that changes are happening, that the public is uncomfortable with. Doesn't know what the outcome will be. And so they react often by joining organizations that protect the status quo and the Klan very much portrayed itself as protecting the status quo.

Speaker 2 ([19:26](#)):

The Klan was very involved in politics in particular in Michigan, it was a strong proponent in the 1924 election of a constitutional amendment that hadn't passed would have banned all private education in the state. It was very clearly aimed at the Catholic parochial school system. It, unfortunately for the Klan was also a very broadly based and worded constitutional amendment would have, would have knocked out all religious education regardless of denomination or private education in any form. All students would have been compelled to attend public K through 12 schools. It failed, but it gained a substantial number of votes. So it was a very real threat. It also created some very interesting alliances in the state at that period where groups, which normally would have not much use for each other were found themselves political bedfellows. For example, the Dutch reformed congregations on the West side of the state, which usually would have not a good word for the Catholics in Detroit and the Catholics in Detroit, who would've reciprocated found themselves, both voting against this amendment because they both had parochial. They both had religiously based educational programs for their children, which their children would not have been allowed to attend.

Speaker 1 ([20:42](#)):

In addition to the educational issues, the Klan was, was politically, politically powerful in other ways, in terms of even running candidates, but how, how big a power did it

Speaker 2 ([20:54](#)):

At Michigan? The Klan in Michigan was never as successful as it was in some other Midwestern States. Indiana is usually cited as the state where the Klan was most successful. The governor was either a Klan member or beholden to the Klan or some contradictory evidence there. The Klan in Michigan was successful in putting candidates forward in gaining substantial votes for those candidates in general.

However, they did not manage to elect a great number of candidates in Michigan. They were not successful in cooperating. One of the major political parties to their cause. Their candidates often ran his independence and thus were unsuccessful, but they were forced to be reckoned with much like the third party politics of H Ross Perot. And in recent presidential elections.

Speaker 1 ([21:40](#)):

Are you saying H Ross Perot is a

Speaker 2 ([21:43](#)):

No, I'm not saying H Ross Perot is in any way associated with the KU Klux Klan H Ross Perot ever, or third party movements in American history are similar to that. One could also point to the, the socialists who ran in 1912, very successfully in many States, including Michigan as a force, which was politically important, but which never actually accomplished its goals. Well, among the changes that are occurring in the late, just after world war one, some of the most dramatic our women are given the right to vote, which fundamentally alters the relationship of the family. There has been a massive migration to the North, from the South, both of the African Americans and of whites. Many of those people ended up in the urban areas of Michigan, primarily Detroit, but the other urban centers as well, tremendous tensions came along with that.

Speaker 1 ([22:37](#)):

And then you've got Henry Ford, shortly thereafter, who says five bucks a day to anybody mean you've got this Ford guy who is,

Speaker 2 ([22:46](#)):

We have an interesting situation developing in the auto industry where Henry Ford is indeed saying \$5 a day to anyone who will do the work. Now it should be pointed out that the auto industry remained segregated through world war two in most cases. And that in general, African-Americans ended up in the least desirable jobs. Often the Foundry jobs, which are dirty, hot unpleasant, and often very dangerous or paint operations, which had the same problems. Nevertheless, black and white workers are working together. They have to work together. And that creates friction. These, these are communities not used to dealing with it.

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

Archie bunker, well, I'll have to work with them at work, but when I come home, I can speak as I want.

Speaker 2 ([23:28](#)):

I think Archie bunker might not be a bit, might be a very good metaphor for what's happening in the 1920s. White workers are being told they have to work with black workers. They grudgingly accept that, but when they go home, they have a very different attitude.

Speaker 1 ([23:42](#)):

And sometimes when they go home, they put on

Speaker 2 ([23:46](#)):

Sometimes when they go home, they joined the Klan. Detroit was a very active Klan center in the early 1920s continued to be. There are the Detroit mayoral elections. The Klan was very involved in usually sponsoring a candidate. It was a very difficult situation. It was a very tense situation. Detroit also experiences the Aussie and sweet trial in this period. Dr. Sweet, dr. Sweet. Let's do dr. Sweet. Dr. Sweet was a African-American physician, a medical doctor who purchased a home in a white only nation

Speaker 4 ([24:20](#)):

Brookwood

Speaker 2 ([24:22](#)):

Word got out that an African American is moving into the neighborhood and essentially a riot developed Detroit police were at the scene of the riot, but did absolutely nothing to stop it. Eventually shots were fired from inside the house. One of the riders was killed and the Detroit police then arrested everyone in the house for murder. The case of course goes to trial. It becomes one of the most celebrated cases in the country. At the time, Frank Murphy, who would eventually become a very well known liberal governor of Michigan presides and records court over the case, Clarence Darrow, the very famous defense attorney took on the case to defend Aussie and sweet. And the other defendants, he presented a stunning defense. He brought police officers onto the stand. Who said there were no rioters, there was no problem. And then he would read them the account from the Detroit newspapers saying thousands of people were milling about the house armed.

Speaker 2 ([25:21](#)):

And the officer would say, Oh yeah, I missed that. He pointed out the obvious contradictions in the police testimony. He pointed out that the police had no evidence of who actually fired the shot. It had come from the house true enough. But these people were being tried for murder of a state head to establish who pulled the trigger of a state, could not establish that piece of information. And he of course offered the self-defense justification that in point of fact, there was a mob. The people in the house had good reason to fear that their lives were at jeopardy. And therefore they had acted in self defense. The trial ended in a hung jury. The prosecutor was furious. Nevertheless, the charges were dropped because the prosecutor realized that he could not get a conviction

Speaker 3 ([26:06](#)):

Better, a hung jury, then

Speaker 2 ([26:10](#)):

Better a hung jury than the alternatives. And clearly on that evening, the alternatives could have been quite, quite grim. The possibility that it, that the situation could have gotten out of hand and that another murder could have occurred. That, that, that dr. Sweet, one of the people in the house could have been killed is quite possible. Dr. Sweet. After the trial did choose to leave, leave the state and resettle in Chicago as a result of the experiences he had in Michigan, and apparently was very successful as a physician in Chicago and labor,

Speaker 3 ([26:38](#)):

He'd been very successful in Detroit. You don't move into the upscale neighborhood where he was moving without having some bucks. Yeah. Um, we even had a Klan candidate for governor didn't we, I don't know. I think,

Speaker 2 ([26:52](#)):

Could it be 34? I mean, there is also Charles Bowles who ran in 1929 as the campaign candidate for mayor of Detroit. And he, ain't no relation. He spells his name the same way.

Speaker 3 ([27:04](#)):

That's a bad,

Speaker 2 ([27:06](#)):

It's like, we're not going to that election either. I didn't even see that day. They're going to see child. Oh yeah.

Speaker 3 ([27:12](#)):

So, so who do you know, can we, can we go to the, to the three counties in particular and I, the closest one is Mecosta and at the heart of Mecosta is this enigmatic figure of Lou Capen. Do you know about Lou?

Speaker 2 ([27:29](#)):

Lou Capen was a variety of things. He was an entrepreneur. He was the postmaster hailed variety of post and Mecosta County. Very interesting man. And he was a Klan organizer. He eventually obtained all of the records of Mecosta and preserved them. He could not bear to throw them away. And so they eventually found their way here to the Clarke library.

Speaker 3 ([27:54](#)):

But how deep did the Klan reach? I mean, how, how present was the Klan in everyday life? How did the Klan reach out? I think here's the, the masking organization.

Speaker 2 ([28:05](#)):

It's very difficult to know the Klans reach because of course it was a secret organization. The Klan always claimed it was deeply involved in the community, but that was a standard claim of all Klan organizations in every County, almost throughout the United States. So it's not clear that it was true. In many cases in the counties in mid Michigan, it seems that the Klan did indeed become deeply involved in the life of the community, primarily through the mechanism of family and friends. What you tend to see if you look at the membership roles of the Klans of the three counties that we have membership roles for are people who had resided in the community for many years and who knew each other. It's often a question of a brother recruiting a brother, an uncle recruiting, a cousin, an these are people who have known each other through blood or marriage. These are the people who are joining the Klan. It's, it's that kind of relationship that's developing.

Speaker 3 ([29:09](#)):

They, but they'd use, they'd make use of, of organizations instead of starting the Klan of Mecosta County, they they'd make use of other organizations wouldn't they,

Speaker 2 ([29:18](#)):

The Clinton would often do it's best to try to co-opt other organizations of a similar type organizations that recruited among white male Protestants. Um, and that could be fraternal organizations that could

be religious organizations. It's difficult to document how successful that was. And it seems to vary from community to community. So it's difficult to generalize, but very Klan organizers when they entered a community, looked for people of influence and preferably people who had these ties already because they were able to recruit them into the Klan very often because of this network of family and friends, they would then ring along the people who were in the organization as well. So Klan organizers were very astute in looking for these sorts of links and connections.

Speaker 3 ([30:03](#)):

Give me some ideas for the covers. Cover organizations,

Speaker 2 ([30:07](#)):

Cover organizations could vary Masonic organizations. Of course we're always targets because of in this area because of their history of antique analysis, some fraternal organizations like the Elks, the moose, the Eagles, those types of organizations would all be targets. As I said, the ability to penetrate those organizations vary dramatically between communities. Sometimes this was a very successful tactics. Sometimes it did not work at all. Churches sometimes could be a target. Um, and the Western side of the state Dutch reform congregations were sometimes Angus targets. But again, the reaction varied in the town of grand Haven. There were two Dutch reform congregations, one pastor resolution, banning membership and secret organizations, very clearly as a reaction to Klan efforts. The other did not. So it, it varies. It's very difficult to generalize

Speaker 3 ([30:58](#)):

Now, Cal lender's, uh, he's not here, but, but his claim was the, the leading organization in this part of the state was the hot fellows.

Speaker 2 ([31:09](#)):

Kelly Anders was a historian of the KU Klux Klan. He spent many, many years studying the organization in Michigan tragically. He died before he could complete a manuscript. He was working on in publishes his results. Dr. Andrews clearly believed that the odd fellows were an organization that was particularly vulnerable to Klan penetration in its various organizations and various chapters throughout the state.

Speaker 3 ([31:38](#)):

Now, where are, where are Cal's papers?

Speaker 2 ([31:41](#)):

Calendars? Professor calendars papers are here at the Clarke library. After his death. His family extremely graciously made them available. His unfinished manuscript is available here. Many of the chapters are in draft form. Others are merely a note form, but it still remains a wonderful resource for understanding Klan activity in mid Michigan in the 1920s.

Speaker 3 ([32:03](#)):

So are you looking for somebody to complete this work?

Speaker 2 ([32:07](#)):

We would be delighted to have someone come in and write the definitive volume of Klan activity in Michigan in the 1920s. It's clear, there was a lot of activity. It's clear. There's a fair number of myths about who joined, who didn't join. What recruiting tools were used. Dr. Andrews was able to publish several articles and those are quite enlightening. He, he, for example, studied the demographics of Klan membership versus the demographics of the 1920 census to see who is joining and how typical they were. Their it's his research that tells us that there were a group of professionals and independent businessmen in the organization, as well as under poorly educated rural residents. So his research is, is very important and very vital. And we'd be delighted to have someone come use what he has done and complete the project. I think his family would be equally delighted.

Speaker 2 ([33:05](#)):

The Klan was active in most of the cities of mid-Michigan Mount pleasant among them in Mount pleasant. There was Klan parades. They came down main street. They walked to the major park in the community at that time Island park. And they burned across. This was very typical of many communities in, in the mid Michigan area where the Klan was a very public organization. Although we think of it as secret and membership was secret. Nevertheless, there were often parades. The Klan was present and pretty often the face plate, the piece of the, the Klan regalia that covered the individual members face was left in the up position, not the down position. So you actually did know who was in the Klan.

Speaker 3 ([33:48](#)):

They were high, wide handsome and proud

Speaker 2 ([33:52](#)):

The Klan in the 1920s, the members of the Klan, the 1920s in mid-Michigan were not embarrassed by their beliefs. Now we projecting backwards can find many flaws in those beliefs. But unfortunately at the time they were the belief shared by many Americans. Many Americans at the time were afraid of foreigners. Many Americans were racist. Many Americans were anti-Catholic. Many Americans were antisemitic. These were positions, which today I think many of us obviously object to and find wrong. But in that time period, we're not so obviously objected to and not so obviously believe wrong. Although there were many people who would speak out against racism, religious bigotry, or other forms of discrimination, but they were more common in the 1920s who did speak out. There was no one voice that opposed the Klan in Michigan. But what occurs is a variety of voices of individuals like the editor of the Highland Sentinel, who simply disliked secret societies who felt this is not a good way to run our community.

Speaker 2 ([35:03](#)):

Then if we're going to have a debate about public policy, if we're going to talk about schools about religion, we should talk about it openly. We should have a very traditional American discourse, a civil discourse within the community, without people hiding behind sheets, without people sending anonymous letters to the editor written as a Klansman of Nuevo County, that people should be willing to stand behind their views publicly. And I think it's that sense that causes a great deal of distress with among people who oppose the, that secret organization should not have that kind of influence.

Speaker 3 ([35:41](#)):

How can you fight against them if they're secret?

Speaker 2 ([35:44](#)):

Well, the Klan of course was secret, but their actions were not secret. The Klan publicly endorsed candidates for office. The Klan publicly burned, crosses the Klan publicly expressed its intolerance for various groups. And those public expressions of the Klan could be opposed. One could say, tolerance is necessary. One could say, cross burnings are wrong. It frightening people is wrong. One could say banning private education is wrong. So one could not, of course, attack the Klans private membership role. There's no way to know who was a Klan member, but one could very clearly attack the positions of the Klan, the beliefs of the Klan and the efforts of the Klan influence public policy and the community.

Speaker 3 ([36:30](#)):

What led to the Klans partial demise or its largest a downturn in Michigan. What happened is this David Stevenson?

Speaker 2 ([36:41](#)):

It could be, there are many reasons that explain the Klans, the Cline in Michigan, no one of them is wholly sufficient to explain what happened. But probably the primary reason was the Klan lost its public support because of a series of scandals, some of them in Michigan, some of them around the country, many of the cleanse leadership or essentially involved in the organization, not because they believed in any of the principles, the organization was, was suggesting believe boys was arguing for because they wanted to make money.

Speaker 3 ([37:13](#)):

I mean, they, they made money on new members,

Speaker 2 ([37:16](#)):

A Klan member play pay a new member of the KU Klux Klan paid a \$10 fee to join the organization of that \$10, \$8 left local community and went into the pockets of various officers of the Klan. The Klan recruiter who had come into the community was paid for by that fee money went back up the Klan organization all the way back to Atlanta to headquarters. In addition, the Klan had a very active marketing program. There was, for example, in official factory that made official Klan robes, you were supposed to buy from them. There was Klan jewelry that was sold so that you could buy a lovely broach for your wife. The Klan in many ways was a profit making organization among many of its leaders because of that, they often lost credibility. People would, would lose faith in these individuals. They were, they would be seen as essentially profiteers and then they would lose status, lose prestige in the community. And the Klan itself would decline.

Speaker 3 ([38:19](#)):

And then you've got the Klan organiz organizer, David Stevenson, who who's, uh, accused of rape and murder.

Speaker 2 ([38:27](#)):

There are some episodes of Klan members, particularly Klan leaders, David Stevenson being one of the most who are accused of rape and murder, who in fact probably committed were convicted of the acts actually not merely accused. And this causes tremendous scandal. It causes the Klan who is portraying itself almost in the image of DW Griffith, Nobel Klansman of, of, of the birth of a nation of the film birth

of a nation w the public realizes this image is a myth. These people are not noble protectors of the public. Good. Many of the leaders are in fact, simply opportunist trying to make a few dollars. And this causes the Klan to go into decline

Speaker 1 ([39:12](#)):

Stevenson. In fact, he was convicted and then he came out of prison, I think in 54 and then wound up right back in prison. Again,

Speaker 2 ([39:19](#)):

He was not a nice man, the best way to put that.

Speaker 1 ([39:22](#)):

Yeah, he died in what, 65. I don't know, but he's not, he's not necessarily of our own.

Speaker 2 ([39:27](#)):

She's not a Michigan boy. So he doesn't become anything

Speaker 1 ([39:29](#)):

Who was the highest power that you can think of in this. You don't have to go back here.

Speaker 2 ([39:36](#)):

No, we do not remember. We're a library. We, we, we work in information. We're not really a museum. So we're less interested in the artifacts of the Klan. I know there are other museums in the state who would like Klan robes, because that would be important for them to visually represent what the Klan was in the 1920s. But our role as the documentation, the information, not so much the visual representation and the artifactual history of the Klan left behind.

Speaker 1 ([40:01](#)):

What are you looking for about Klan activity right now? What do you want?

Speaker 2 ([40:06](#)):

What we, we would always love to know about the Klan or a couple of things. The first is who joined it. Now we have some membership roles, but they're often incomplete. The more membership we can document, the more we can look at the demographics of the Klan, the better we understand that we're also interested in Klan recruiting techniques, Klan policies. How did the Klan work? How did it operate that, that aura of secrecy that they love to develop an emanate that they were their fingers were in every element of the community? Well, is that true? This is where one begins to look for things like letters, diaries, information that where people would say, we really did do this. We knew the mayor and we arranged this, or perhaps the opposite. The mayor is not being cooperative and helpful. And then we're unhappy with the mayor, but that's the kind of information we would love to discover how deep and how thorough was Klan penetration in the community. Because we truthfully, truthfully don't know that in many places, it's still a mystery. One of the interesting issues one runs into when one is trying to document Michigan's Klan is that many of the people who know their relatives, their grandfather, their great grandfather, was involved in the Klan of the 1920s are frankly very embarrassed by it. They really

would like to disassociate themselves from that belief system, from the activities that the Klan engaged in. And I can certainly understand why they would want to do that and why they feel that way. But yeah,

Speaker 5 ([41:37](#)):

It's still important from our point of view

Speaker 2 ([41:40](#)):

To document what happened knowing the past helps us understand the American experience, both in its good and its bad aspects. And so I would hope that people would, even if they have to hold their nose a little bit, be willing to part with the documentation. If it wasn't important to documenting the Klan and be willing to, to put it in a public repository where it could be used.