Speaker 1 (00:00):

I report to a group called the historical commission on a monthly basis. And one of their charges, right from the point I started out was it to make sure that everyone is included in the city's history that we collect and give back to the entire community of their history. Everybody can, everybody, everybody counts. And that means that we just finished a big, not big, but a significant project collecting the records of gay and lesbian organizations here in town. So nobody's outside the outside. The envelope

Speaker 2 (00:32):

We've set ourselves is to try and tell the story of the Klan in this state. And it's going to be a, an odd, we're always going to leave out something. I mean, ignorance is fast and my ignorance own ignorance is rather specialized. Uh, but it's all encompassing. So here we are. And I can't think of anybody, uh, better than to talk with about grand Rapids than you. And, uh, and dr. Jones, and you let us to doctor jokes. So when does the Klan show up here?

Speaker 1 (01:04):

The formal evidence we have of a Klan in the grand Rapids area is, is in the 1920s. The so-called second flowering of the Klan. Uh, there's plenty of evidence of racial discrimination and behavior towards African Americans in the 19th century. You'll find it in newspapers. Um, but in my reading of the, of the grand Rapids papers and the public press, at least in the 19th century, you don't find specific reference to a Klan organization. And I think that's probably fairly accurate that the, the Klan initially was a Southern organization. That didn't mean that, that, uh, uh, racial incidents didn't occur other places that, but, but as far as a formally organized Klan, it it's really in the 20th century that you find one in the grand Rapids area.

Speaker 2 (01:57):

And what did the Klan set out to do here?

Speaker 1 (01:59):

The Klan in grand Rapids, from what we can tell from there, uh, once again, the public record, uh, was, was focused on anti-immigration, uh, reaction to immigrant groups. Um, that was its negative side. It put that in a positive posture by, by, uh, emphasizing family, emphasizing a country and emphasizing religion, uh, specific kinds of religion, Protestant, religion, to be real blunt about it. Uh, they were anti-Catholic, uh, anti Jew. Um, so it was, it was responding to what it perceived. And a lot of people perceived as, as the threats to their, their way of life in the 1920s. And that that's what led to its organization here in West Michigan. What would be the ethnography of the city in the, in the room

Speaker 2 (02:52):

Early twenties? I mean, what were you looking at? Who, who did the Klan have to, uh, do to rally against

Speaker 1 (02:58):

By the 1920, uh, grand Rapids had grown to a city of some hundred and 30 540,000 people, uh, the immigration and the population of grand Rapids reflects what was going on across the country and in the 19th century that had been Northern European. Well, first it had been new Englanders and, and Easterners new people from New York, then Northern Europeans, uh, from Germany, from, uh, great Britain, uh, even the Scandinavian countries, but in the late 19th century, the early 20th century, that

changed. And it was, it was a immigrant population from Eastern Europe and Southern Europe. Um, and they were different. They, there that is they, they tended to be slightly darker skin, darker hair. They, they were described as swarthy, uh, individuals. They tended to not have quite as much education as those who had come earlier. They were perceived as a problem. They were also Catholic as opposed to the earlier Protestant, uh, immigrant group.

Speaker 1 (03:59):

They came in large numbers. Um, they came at a time when, when the United States was already starting to feel, first of all, the effects of world war one, uh, and attitudes related to world war one. But then secondly, in the 1920s already, uh, the furniture industry in grand Rapids was in significant decline. It was, there were furniture companies going out of business, and here were these new people who look different, spoke a different language, uh, and they were, they were not a source of cheap labor or a solution. They were a problem. They were a drain on the community. And so one of the ways people responded, uh, against this perceived threat was, was to, uh, support proposed organizations that, that wanted to draw a line at the water's edge and stop this immigration, um, that, uh, wanted to, to, uh, in one way or another keep America, uh, for a, in their minds, a pure America than, than the one that they were seeing before their very eyes.

Speaker 2 (05:03):

So at that point, it,

Speaker 1 (05:05):

It had very little to do with African Americans in, in grand Rapids, in West Michigan. It didn't have a lot to do with African Americans because there weren't a lot of African Americans here. They're in 1900, where less than a thousand African Americans in grand Rapids, um, by the 1920s, there were perhaps 2000. Um, I don't think it was, it was not totally devoid of a racial, uh, racial, uh, component because there were African Americans coming out of the South. And what is known as the great migration into this area, that their numbers were increasing. There, there certainly was a perception that there were more African Americans, but, uh, in a city of, of, of, as I said, 140,000 and more, um, a thousand or two African Americans. And that means total families aren't as big a threat as, as the, as the, uh, five, 10,000 and more poles and Lithuanians and Greeks and Italians over here, they were perceived, frankly, as, as a bigger threat to, to the city than the African Americans were to the city, as it was known by those who've been here longer.

Speaker 2 (06:18):

What's the first record of the Klan here. What kinds of things did the Klan do? It we'll get to the 20, the July for later is the biggest,

Speaker 1 (06:25):

Well, you find evidence of the Klan in, in the 1920s in the newspaper announcements of, of, uh, meetings across burnings are a standard kind of activity. And there are, uh, notations of that, um, by the early twenties and throughout the 1920s in town, um, as well as out of town and meetings out in, in the rural areas. In in fact, the newspapers make note of the fact that they're in their estimation, at least the reporter's estimation that the Klan strength was not in the city itself, but in the rural areas around the city of grand Rapids.

Speaker 2 (07:04):

And what kind of strengths are they talking about?

Speaker 1 (07:07):

The one set of figures, we have a focus on the mid 1920s and refer to a membership. Um, these are Klan numbers, a membership of 5,000 people or thereabouts in Kent County alone. Um, I think they are referring to a total statewide membership at that point of something like 80, 75, 80,000. Those, those are pretty loose numbers. And, and, uh, the, by nature of the fact they're a secret organization, or at least semi secret organization, it's, it's hard to come up with real numbers exactly what their membership was there. There was a lawsuit here in grand Rapids in 1924. And so there are affidavits, uh, that were gathered, uh, as, as a part of that lawsuit. Then that's where you get these numbers, the, the 5,000 number and, and some reference to statewide numbers. So, um, even though they may not be perfectly accurate, they're probably a pretty good estimation of the, the strength of the Klan and, and the role of the Klan in, in life here in West Michigan.

Speaker 1 (08:12):

Tell us about the lawsuit, what you know of, um, once again, what I know is primarily what I read in the newspapers and the old newspapers, uh, the lawsuit occurred in 1924 after an organizer and his wife, uh, came, came to grand Rapids. Um, and I'm going to have to check my notes real fast to make sure I get, get the name right. It was, he was a Nicholas and she was Vivian Souder sow, D E R a. The Souders had, had been active in the Klan. And several other States, we know that they had been in Georgia and the Carolinas, um, came to grand Rapids where they operated something known as the national research Bureau located in a federal square building, right in downtown grand Rapids. Um, then in 1924, and they had been taking in memberships on a pretty regular basis here in West Michigan.

Speaker 1 (09:06):

At that point, according to their testimony, it cost $10 to join the Klan. Um, you paid your $10 and then went through an initiation before you were formally a member. But, um, anyway, they'd been taking in significant, uh, funds and, and gathering members here in West Michigan then, uh, representatives of the Klan, the, the national organization, or at least the regional organization came to town and replaced the Souders and put other people in charge. And they in turn claimed that as a Souders that they had a contract and the contract had been violated and, and that they were owed money for the, uh, for the remainder of the contract. And so they went into court and sued the Klan, uh, for that money. And it's because of that, that we have these, these estimates of roughly the size and, and the activity of the Klan in West Michigan in the mid 1920s. I might directly

Speaker 2 (10:06):

Because to an area where you may not be expert on this next question, if that's so, you know, you've just given me the yep. Okay. Next, do you have any information or any, uh, any experience with the idea that in fact, the Klan organizers were perhaps they had their own, uh, patriotic or, um, higher motives involved, but there was a base motive of organizing the Klan was a great way to make money. You didn't have to do any work and you can take in dues, right?

Speaker 1 (10:42):

I can't speak to the Klan generally about what motivated people like the solders. I can speak a little bit to what motivated them, because once again, there was testimony and it was reported in the newspapers

and, and they did get a percentage for every new person that they brought in. So they were, uh, quite proud of the fact that they were bringing in some weeks, as much as a thousand dollars in new members, which they got a portion, that's what they did. And therefore, were they motivated by the, the ideals, if you can use that term, or it's hard to know exactly. I don't, I don't want to call it ideals or principles in association with the Klan, but the, the, those things which they advocated, uh, probably the solders were motivated by that, but they were also motivated by the fact that this, this was their living. This is how they made a living. And that's evidenced by the fact that when, when that was changed, they, they, they were doing well enough on it, that they felt it appropriate for themselves to bring suit, uh, to, to the people against the people who stopped this income.

Speaker 2 (11:49):

And one of the other areas that we have found again, and again, of course, with Cal lender's research, uh, Cal was a proponent. The late gal Anders was a proponent of the idea that the Klan would make use of other fraternal organizations as covers for its activity. Now there'd be no reason why the Klan could not be high, wide and handsome in public. I mean, the Klan was, was highly valued and espoused by, you know, you're talking maybe 3% of the population. Um, what about the idea of, of cover organizations for Klan activities? Did, do you know anything about that here?

Speaker 1 (12:28):

The Klan in, in grand Rapids, first of all, used to cover, uh, right from the beginning, because instead of calling itself, the Michigan KU Klux Klan, uh, the operation here went under the guise of something known as the national research Bureau. Uh that's. That was the overarching organization. And we also know that in 1925, when, what at the time was billed as the largest clown, vocation of Klansmen, any place in Michigan ever was held here in grand Rapids. Some came as, as KU Klux Klan chapters from different counties, but there was, there were other organizations as well that, that came in with them under different names. Uh, there was a youth organization and, and several different organizations, all of them identified and known to each other to be part of the Klan, but not all carrying that same name. Um, what I can't speak to is whether or not there might even have been other, other better known fraternal organizations that, that certainly were sympathetic to, and, and, and working closely if not in affiliation with the clam, but I wouldn't be surprised if that were the case as well.

Speaker 2 (13:43):

I think calendars identified the odd fellows in the Costa County and Millbrook in particular as one of the cover organizations and maybe, maybe in Mount pleasant too, but you'd have the odd fellows or United Methodist men or the Elks or the Eagles or the, so, so there are, there are cases where that, that was pretty much, yeah,

Speaker 1 (14:03):

There, there was a group in, in, uh, at the, at the meeting in grand Rapids known as the American crusaders, for example, a classic example of that, that period, the 1920s were, were a period of, of a lot of these fraternal organizations and, and they would be, uh, organized around similarities of, of the membership, uh, whether it was religious or ethnic or, or in terms of the, the, the class, the economic class in society or any number of things. So it would be not unusual at all that these same people then would, would be sympathetic to the cause of the Klan and might very well, very well be active in the Klan as well.

Speaker 2 (14:44):

I know that one of the attractions was the climb though to the Klan was that it seemed to cut across economic barriers would have, you would have farmers of various classes, you would have business men. So it wasn't just a, it wasn't poor, dumb, white trash,

Speaker 1 (15:00):

No, the membership of the Klan, just the few names that we have, uh, who are member mentioned as the leaders suggest that it was, it was a fairly diverse leadership of, of, uh, attorneys. Uh, we, we know of at least one attorney who, whose name is mentioned in, in, uh, 1925, uh, people, farmers, uh, from outside of grand Rapids, but business people as well. So it, a lot of people found something attractive. And in the notion of the Klan, uh, the interesting thing is they, they felt comfortable enough in their Klan membership that when this large clon vocation came to grand Rapids, there was a parade through the city. Uh, newspapers estimated as many as 3000 people parading through the streets of grand Rapids in their Klan robes, the, with the white robe, with a Scarlet sash and all of that. But without the hoods,

Speaker 2 (15:57):

They all paraded

Speaker 1 (15:59):

Without hoods and felt comfortable doing that. There was no, no at least community stigma attached in their minds to the fact that they were members of the Klan. And so that's the way that they, they paraded on that day. And according once again, to the accounts we have of it, there were large crowds of people lining the streets, watching the parade. So it was, this was not a secret thing at that point, they were, they were comfortable in their Klan membership.

Speaker 2 (16:25):

So tell us about that rally story headed there. Where did it start? Where did it go? What happened? What happened? This was,

Speaker 1 (16:31):

It was when this was the rally, the, the con not convocation clown vocation in grand Rapids occurred on July 3rd, fourth and fifth in 1925. It was a, essentially a 4th of July statewide rally of the KU Klux Klan of Michigan. Um, estimates are that about 15,000 people from across the state came, they, they gathered on the West side of grand ripe grand Rapids on the West end of bridge street in open field and some hilly area, um, near the, uh, today is the community of stand Dale. And in that area, they pitched tents, they parked their cars. Um, many of them brought enough food for the weekend, but for those who didn't, the Klan had organized, uh, organized cooking and feeding for, for the groups. Um, newspapers, describe it as a very orderly campground with a centuries at the entrance area to check and make sure that that, uh, not just anyone could come into the, to the area.

Speaker 1 (17:33):

Um, they're organized into rows upon rows of tents and automobiles and, and, uh, a weekend in which, uh, there apparently were a lot of musical groups who had come with the various County Klan organizations. And so there were regular entertainment. I'm sure singing patriotic songs, uh, there were speeches probably a lot more speeches than, than the Klansmen were, or in that sense, probably like

anyone else, they, they heard all the speeches they wanted. And then a few more, um, there were religious, uh, ceremonies there, there, particularly on the Sunday, the last day, there was a, a large gathering for church services and there were initiations, uh, what they called naturalizations. These were the new members and they would then go through an initiation ceremony to be made members of the Klan. Um, the highlight of the whole weekend, at least as far as the newspapers and the people of grand Rapids were, were concerned and were known publicly.

Speaker 1 (18:37):

It was a parade. The parade started on bridge street on the West side of grand Rapids came right down bridge street into the heart of the city, uh, then turned on Ottawa and, and, um, to the right and went from Ottawa to F uh, Fulton street and then turned right again and went right back out to, uh, where today is John ballpark. And, uh, the, uh, the parade had begun in a park Lincoln park and had an ended in another city park, John ballpark, where there were more speeches and musical entertainment for the rest of the afternoon. And, and, uh, so it, it certainly certainly caught the attention of most of the community of grand Rapids. There were newspaper accounts every day of what was going on. They were lead up accounts, and then there were false posts to rally accounts. So it was no secret to the people of grand Rapids that the Klan was here.

Speaker 1 (19:36):

Um, probably not, probably without a doubt. That was the high point of the Klan in, in, uh, not only in grand Rapids, but in West Michigan. And possibly that was the high point of the Klan in Michigan, 15,000 Klansmen in an open rally is a, is a very big event. I don't know that there's been another one too, to match it in size. They, they were quite proud of themselves that weekend. Um, it wasn't long after that, that, that, uh, on a Midwestern basis, the, the, uh, Klan leaders in Indiana had gotten themselves into, into serious trouble. And that really marked the beginning of the demise of the Midwestern Klan. So it may very well be that was the, for Michigan. That was the high point.

Speaker 2 (20:22):

Yeah. By the, by the late thirties, the Klan is all, but I mean, David's is even as soon as doing time for a murder, right. Uh, and rape. Right. And, uh, he, he, uh, got out of prison only if go back again and again, I guess [inaudible],

Speaker 1 (20:37):

I don't recall, but it could well be, he was not a very attractive human being. Yeah.

Speaker 2 (20:41):

And especially with a whole lot of people who were not very attractive in this, in the leadership. Yeah. Yeah. Um, but take a look at the time. I'm, you know, I'm trying to imagine, what was it like in 1925, in grand Rapids, Michigan, the civil war, there were still civil war veterans. Right? Know, we had fought the civil war. That just about what this country under, we had fought the Spanish American war and world war one and world war one, where, where people were gassed, I mean, mustard, gas, this was the war to end all Wars, the inhumane treatment. We had the revolution in Russia. You had the establishment of the Soviet union. You had Bolshevism, you had socialism, it was striking at the hearts. You had, you had communism, you had all these isms that were looming large on the continent, where we had just lost all these men. Wouldn't it be natural that you, that you'd want to do something to preserve whatever you thought of the American way of life. What was the, what was it like to be in American society? In 1925?

Speaker 1 (21:54):

There was, there was a definite undercurrent of concern, if not fear, uh, in grand Rapids for, for what many perceive to be the American way of life, uh, that, that there were things, things changing and they weren't comfortable with the change. They're there. I'll give you an example. There had been an explosion at the federal building in the early 1920s, uh, and immediately the newspapers were full of stories about how, how the anarchists had tried to blow up the federal building in grand Rapids. There was two people had been killed. So it was not a minor thing. There was then a full blown federal investigation that lasted, uh, several months close to a year. And when it was all said and done, they discovered that it had been a gas leak and not anarchists. So it had blown up the back side of the federal building, but it gives you something of a, of a sense of the mood in the city to know that that the minute it happened, there was the first idea wasn't that it was a gas leak.

Speaker 1 (22:59):

The first idea was this was anarchist striking and grand Rapids know exactly what made them think that anarchism cared. What was going on in grand Rapids is a question for someone else to answer, but that was the mood in the city. And that's part of a, of a bigger national, uh, attitude. This, this concern that there were isms out there that were, that were at work attacking the fundamental organizations and the structure of American society. Now, you add to that a second, second level in grand Rapids, and that is economic hard times, even by 1924 and 25, the furniture industry suffered early and suffered long in the starting in the 1920s and all the way through the 1930s and the 1940s, um, companies were already failing by mid 20th century or mid 1920s. Uh, people don't need new furniture to it when, when they're, if they look in their pocket book and they see a little less money there, that tangible good, like a new chair, a new table, you can do with the one you got.

Speaker 1 (24:08):

And so the furniture industry suffered early and suffered long as, as the nation slid into that long economic depression. So that's, that's another whole current people were already out of work here. And so you add that to this concern, that, that there are revolutionaries that work in other parts of the country. And, and maybe even here in grand Rapids, and you can see where something like the Klan, which promotes a hundred percent Americanism and all this sort of thing is going to be attractive to them. It's, it's going to, to appeal to their concerns and offer a very simplistic solution to some very complex problems.

Speaker 2 (24:46):

Interesting. When the Murrah federal building first first reaction was terrorists Arab terrorists

Speaker 1 (24:52):

International. Yeah, absolutely. In fact, the first descriptions that were went out were of an Arab. Yes.

Speaker 2 (24:57):

And then, so who is it? It's Terry Nichols and yeah.

Speaker 1 (25:01):

You know, guys from Michigan, a couple of guys,

Speaker 2 (25:03):

Michigan, who, who may or may have not have had a organizational ties with an organization, an awful lot, like the Klan. And then when, uh, when a plane flies into the world trade center, the first thing we think of is an accident. So it's kind of,

Speaker 1 (25:16):

Yeah, yeah. It's the mood of the time that, that, that dictates how you respond to these things and, and the mood of the times in the 1920s where that, that, uh, something was a foot that was attacking the very foundation of this country. And, and, and so when that happens, you, you rally and organize and, and, and respond to those who claim to be defending the, that same foundation. The interesting thing to me is that, that, that, uh, the Klan came back in West Michigan in the 1970s. Uh, and, uh, one of the interesting things, we have a newspaper account, a local reporter who, who attended a Klan rally just outside of grand Rapids. Once again, it was rural. Once again, it was aimed well at that time, it was aimed probably more at racial issues. Then it wasn't the 1920s because by the 1970s, grand Rapids had a sizable African American population beginnings of ever even in Hispanic population.

Speaker 1 (26:15):

Um, and there, there's a rather detailed, uh, account of a, of a Klan rally, uh, seven miles South of grand Rapids, right along us highway one 31 in a farmer's field. Uh, newspaper even goes so far as to identify the, the man who offered up his, his farm for the rally and the there's cross burnings once again, and, and, uh, all the things that go with a Klan meeting, um, and that particular even armed guards around the camp and, and, uh, and some shots being fired as a warning to people who slowed down to look at the cross, it was being burned and evinced too much curiosity and were driven off by the Klansmen. So, uh, the mood is, is there it, and from time to time that that notion of, of, uh, belonging to an order of a hundred percent Americans who are willing to fight to preserve what they perceive to be the, the foundations of the country, whether it's, uh, a foundation based on anti-immigrant sinned anti-immigration or a foundation based on anti anti-black, uh, racial, uh, purity kinds of notions will always appeal to a few people. Um, that's just, I guess, what, uh, makes human beings so interesting as the ways in which they try to identify what's in their best interests.

Speaker 2 (27:40):

Is it still appealing? Is the KU Klux Klan here?

Speaker 1 (27:44):

I think there's still climbed members in the area. I know that in, uh, around 1990, there was a very small effort to hold an organizing rally late eight and eight late 1980s, right. In that general period. I don't remember the exact year. Um, the one thing I remember about that particular rally is that there were more police, uh, there to protect the Klansmen. Uh, then there were people interested in either joining or being, uh, represented or indicating to the rest of the community that they were members of the Klan. Uh, but there, there, there are Klan, uh, activities going on in Michigan. And, and I, I would not be surprised if, if some of them are taking place within the greater grand Rapids area. It, that though as a, those notions do appeal to some folks, they, they offer as I, as I said once before a very, very simple solution and explanation to incredibly complex issues.

Speaker 2 (28:43):

You had talked before we had camera rolling about some cross burnings. And you mentioned Saint [inaudible] Saint Alphonsus. Yep. Can you, can you tell me about some of these early activities and cross burnings? What, what happened when, where

Speaker 1 (28:58):

After the big rally in 1925, there continued to be Klan activity here in, in, uh, in the grand Rapids area, and no doubt about that. And there are occasional, uh, noticings notices in the newspapers that, that, uh, that there had been, for example, cross burnings. Um, there's one, uh, account of, uh, an effort. I think it's in the late 1920s to burn across, uh, in front of Saint Alphonsus church right here inside the city. Uh, the interesting thing to me is in that particular case, and there actually are, uh, are, were a few years ago, parishioners who still remembered the moment when it happened is that between the members of the church who saw this, this cross, and it being lit and the neighborhood people who got there right away, they, they managed the number one drive off the Klansman immediately. And number two, put the, put the cross out before it had burned very much at all.

Speaker 1 (29:54):

Uh, and, and, and I think we're making a statement, you know, not in a, not in my backyard most definitely, and not in my community. So what sympathy there might have been for the Klan at its high point was already, uh, diminishing by the late 1920s. Um, there's another account of, of a meeting, a much smaller meeting, but a meeting nonetheless in California. Um, a little later there are, as I say, there are a few few notices in the newspaper from time to time the Klan is meeting. So there, there continued to be Klan activity in Kent County and late twenties into the thirties. No doubt about it. Um, probably later than that, um, until there was, uh, by the 1970s, still a Klan group meeting here, it, it, it, it has its high points and its low points, but it doesn't seem to go away completely. I know one of the precipitating incidents for,

Speaker 2 (30:50):

For Klan resurgence saying the Detroit area was unfortunate busing Pontiac. Do you remember the tires, slit

Speaker 1 (30:57):

Buses, Pontiac? I think that the given the fact that, that the, the one Klan activity that we have a fairly lengthy description of was in the 1970s, it's probably reasonable to look at what was going on. Not probably it is reasonable to look at what was going on in, in the community at that time and in the late sixties to see what would cause a resurgence of interest. And that, that is the period of civil rights activism. That's the period of, of the freedom riders in the South. Uh, that's the period in which grand Rapids schools went through a fairly, not a contentious, uh, busing and integration, uh, program here. And it was not well received and, and got a lot of publicity. And, and when you put those things together, again, you can see where there are going to be some folks out there who see, this is too much government interference.

Speaker 1 (31:51):

This, this is someone not like me taking over, uh, the institutions that I knew. And, and, uh, therefore what, what they're going to do is, is in some cases, at least, uh, respond and organize and respond to the, to the things that the Klan advocates and the next thing, you know, you've got, uh, a farmer just South of town with a 60, 70 Klansmen and armed Klansmen burning across to, to state in a sense their,

their anger, their frustration, and probably more importantly, their ignorance to what's really going on. You know, that first amendment though,

Speaker 2 (32:32):

Damn, that's quite a piece of work. And yeah,

Speaker 1 (32:35):

It is, it is the, the, the, the interesting thing is that, that, uh, within some pretty broad guidelines, the first amendment protects those who, uh, who are angry and full of hatred as much as it does, uh, someone from the, the other end of the spectrum and espousing peace and brotherhood. And it gives everyone the opportunity to say, what's on our mind. I think it maybe the best way to think of it as a safety valve on that this deem can't possibly build up when you can, when you can blow it off, uh, let your anger go. And if, if the worst thing that happens is across burning, then the, then the country is well served by the first amendment. Uh, I'd prefer it didn't happen, but, but if the that's better than, than the kinds of violence that, that sometimes follow not to say that the Klan hasn't been involved in its share of violence and other places, not, I don't, I don't know of anything violent, much beyond the gatherings in the cross burning, certainly in, in the West Michigan area.

Speaker 1 (33:43):

Uh, but there was a violent, uh, a more active branch of the class it's called the black Legion. And they were all tied up in the politics of, uh, of Dearborn. And, uh, man, some of these folks went to prison after the murder of a young black man by the name of Charles pool. Yep. Was the black Legion ever active here? I don't know of, of out outward behavior, uh, by a violent wing of the Klan in West Michigan. Um, that doesn't mean that there wasn't, or weren't sympathizers with the black Legion, which was active on the Eastern side of the state. That doesn't mean there weren't people with that bent. Um, but as far as I know, uh, there weren't at least the, not the same level of violence I, as I think back on it, I do recall hearing once about one, one episode, um, there were communist organizers in town and this would have been, uh, around 1930.

Speaker 1 (34:50):

I can't give you an exact year. They were here trying to organize a, which was legal, uh, a branch of the communist party in, in, uh, for the grand Rapids area and a group, uh, in including some veterans of world war one, um, confronted, uh, those organizers. And according to the, the, the man I talked to who said he was there at the time, they were, they were tarred and feathered and ran out of town. So that's violence that, that, cause there's no protection in the first amendment for that kind of behavior. Um, so we did get to that level here. Uh, but th that shows the interesting, uh, aspect of, if not Klan behavior, at least what was on people's minds. And it wasn't just, it wasn't race exclusively. It was concerned about as they would put it, the isms, uh, coming out the different political movements coming primarily out of Europe as well. And they were, they were as challenged by those as they were by changes in the demographics of the community.

Speaker 2 (35:56):

I have one further question. I'm not sure you can answer it. In fact, I don't know, I don't know where I'm going to find the answer to it, but the idea that, that I'll talk with somebody who will say, well, this was clinic. If this was clinic and this was Klan activity, and the idea that it would be very hard to tie this

inexorably to the client. Sometimes it seems like there's a real tenuous connection between the organization and activity that's ascribed to it.

Speaker 1 (36:30):

I think the Klan was one of those organizations that, that had a, like, like any organization, I guess, had a people of a variety of, of, uh, backgrounds, personalities, and behavioral patterns associated with it. And some of them were more prone to, um, act individually than they were as part of the group. An example is the, the cross burning at Saint Alphonsus, no one took credit after it was over saying that was a Klan activity. The Klan itself didn't step up and say, so whether or not the newspaper kind of doesn't even indicate if the, the, the people who started it were wearing robes. Um, were they Klan members or were they, they angry, uh, about, uh, the, the church has presence there. We don't know for sure there were crosses that were burned on top of Belknap, lookout Hill in grand Rapids, which is the most prominent, uh, point inside the city.

Speaker 1 (37:31):

You burn a cross on top of lookout Hill and it's, it's seen over much of the city. Um, but no one was ever identified as, as the organization responsible. Was it a group of individuals? Was it members of the Klan? We can't say for sure. What we can say is, is that cross burning is associated with the Klan. It was something that they themselves pointed to as a very important symbolic gesture. So when other people, even if they may not even be members of the Klan are doing that, they are in some way, identifying themselves with the, with the ideas espoused by the Klan and the activities of the Klan. So, so even though the connection may not always be a perfect one and may not always be a clear one, there's no doubt in my mind, at least that there is some sense of association with what the Klan is and what it represents.