

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

Tom, can you give us an idea of what race relations were like in Kalamazoo at the end of the 19th century, around the turn of the 20th century?

Speaker 2 ([00:00:10](#)):

It's a little, it's a little hard to say for certain, uh, Kalamazoo Southwest, Michigan has long had a African American community. Uh, at the time of the civil war, you probably know this Cass County had the largest African American population in the state outside of, of, um, Wayne County, Detroit area. Uh, Kalamazoo had a bout, I would think about a thousand in the Kalamazoo County, a thousand African Americans living in Kalamazoo County, uh, around the turn of the century. Um, most of those, but not all would have lived in this city. Um, probably five or 600, uh, living in the city. Kalamazoo does not have a distinct, uh, African American neighborhood, uh, partly because of the small size of the community. Uh, the small size of the city. Uh, certainly African-Americans are limited to some areas, but you, not that you could say this is the African American neighborhood. Uh, they would have been as it would have been anywhere in the, um, more industrial areas, the poor areas, uh, and the like, uh, to my knowledge, there is not a great deal of hostility. Um, you know, it's, uh, uh, I'm sure there's sort of a sense that as long as African Americans are doing what they're supposed to be doing and staying in the places that they're supposed to stay, um, there was no, no real significant, you know, strains or stress that, that I'm aware of. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([00:01:46](#)):

Part of that lack of tension, or if you will, the, the apparent absence of tension between the communities be because of the fact that there was such a small number of African Americans in the community as well.

Speaker 2 ([00:01:59](#)):

Yeah, I think so. I think that because they're small because the community is, is growing at the time. I mean, that's not to say that they're not individual tensions, but we don't have any evidence that there were efforts to restrict to, uh, force the African American community to move to one area. Like, I think that the relatively small size, the fact that it was a homegrown community, uh, this was not, uh, an we did not experience any significant movement of African Americans from elsewhere in the country into Kalamazoo. Those who lived here probably have been here since, or at least their ancestors were here since the 1860s, 1870s, or they would have come up from places like Cass County and the like, so, uh, everyone knew the rules as it were as to what was acceptable. African Americans knew their place, the community knew what their place was. Uh, so, and I think again, the, the relatively small size, um, as, probably as much gives us as much as, as good a reason as any,

Speaker 1 ([00:03:05](#)):

But in the late 19th century, America experiences a wave of immigration, particularly from Eastern Europe, where you have a lot of Catholics and people of Eastern European descent that are coming into the United States and particularly into the upper Midwest. Does that have an impact on relationship in general, in Kalamazoo and specifically how the fortunes of African Americans fare from that point forward?

Speaker 2 ([00:03:30](#)):

Um, you know, it's, it's interesting. It doesn't strike me from having looked at various census data, that there is a significant influx of immigration, uh, Europeans, for example, moving into Kalamazoo per se, you know, directly here from Europe, it's, you know, the migration into this area that is coming in as Kalamazoo is industrializing at this time. Uh, we're seeing a lot of the new migrants are tending to come from, uh, the rural countryside and move into the city to take the jobs in the paper mills, which are starting to flourish, uh, in the, uh, in the metal working industries, um, a few exceptions, uh, again, very difficult to pin down in numbers. We know that there is, uh, an influx of, of Dutch at about this time, but of course those are Northern European Protestants, uh, coming in into here. And that's because Kalamazoo had had a, a Dutch community since the 1850s.

Speaker 2 ([00:04:31](#)):

And we know that, uh, there is some influx of Dutch immigrants directly from Europe at this time period coming yet. Uh, but from what I've been able to tell there aren't many of the Southern Europeans Eastern Europeans, uh, with the exception that in the nineties, we start to see, uh, a larger Eastern European, uh, Jewish community, uh, best evidence of which is the fact that their original synagogue, uh, still stands in the downtown neighborhood where they were located. Uh, but, uh, it's today, it's a, it's a dance studio. Uh, they have, that's been four or five decades since they use that as their synagogue. They're still the largest synagogue in town. We had previously had an earlier, uh, Jewish community, a German Jewish community that came here in the 1840s and 1850s tended to be liberal reform Jews, uh, active in, uh, political, um, progressive era reform in the area.

Speaker 2 ([00:05:30](#)):

But there is this change in, in the Jewish community enough, so that I've read some memoirs of some of those Eastern European Jews. And one of them talks even about sort of a Jewish community on the, on the East side. But if you look at the, at the city directories, you can see that, yes, there's a concentration, but there are also people from all, uh, various ethnic backgrounds living in that neighborhood, just on sort of the Southern Eastern of the downtown area. Um, so in general, the answer to your question is I don't think we feel that direct impact in the 19th prior to the second first world war. Uh, I don't think we see that same impact that you find in cities like Chicago, uh, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere as, as those European immigrants come in. I think we see sort of, they settled in Detroit and then maybe their children might move here.

Speaker 2 ([00:06:21](#)):

Uh, but yeah, so, and yet in the early part of the 20th century, there is a KU Klux Klan presence in Kalamazoo. Well, now that's, that's, that's a good question. We have one letter, uh, that is signed by the KU Klux Klan, uh, or at least purported to be signed by the KU Klux Klan. Um, and I can, I don't know if he'd mind to show this to you right at this point. I want you to give the background on that letter. What, what the, to was I led to the actual writing of the letter surrounding it. Yeah, the, the letter is dated, uh, November of 1906, and it is a threat written to the sheriff Charles sheen, who is up for election in November of 1906 for a reelection as sheriff of Kalamazoo County, uh, telling him that he asked to bring, uh, an African American prisoner in the County jail, turn them over to these folks at, uh, a, the bridge on gull road, uh, over the Kalamazoo river, the implied threat being that they're going to string him up from the bridge.

Speaker 2 ([00:07:24](#)):

Uh, the problem is, is that while we can find that there is a very high profile murder case involving an African American man, Amanda, the name of Walter Smith, uh, who is on trial for murder, uh, in, in the County courts at that time, uh, Smith is accused of murdering an African American woman at a young, very young African American woman, uh, Molly Pearl in a very brutal murder, uh, of which there seems to have been little doubt on any side that he was the guilty person. Smith is apparently, um, something of a drifter, a migrant. He, he does show up as having a job at times. He is a boarder in the house in one of the areas sort of on the East side of Kalamazoo, uh, along the railroad tracks where, uh, we do know that a number of African American families live. So there's a small grouping of African Americans over there.

Speaker 2 ([00:08:18](#)):

He stays in the boarding house one Saturday night in the summer of 1906. Apparently there's an argument. He, uh, he either asked to leave forced to leave storms out. It's not clear why he leaves the boarding house. He comes back later. The door is opened by Molly Pearl, an 18 year old, uh, African American woman. And he just guns her down. As soon as the door is opened, brutal murder. It strikes me as a little odd that the Klan would take that much interest in the murder of an African American by an African American, if it had been an 18 year old white girl, uh, I think it would have been fairly clear cut. So the question is, is, Mmm, Hey, is this the person they're referring to because they don't use my name, but it seems likely this is the most high profile case.

Speaker 2 ([00:09:10](#)):

Uh, you know, Kalamazoo is a small city of any murderer at that time as a high profile murder. Some perhaps it is the other possibility is that it is election time. And is this an effort by Sheen's political enemies to embarrass him in some way, uh, right. Immediately before the election, the trial isn't going to start until after the election later in November, uh, it is held in December and it lasts all of about a week. Smith is convicted. Uh, so we don't know exactly whether or not this letter is from an actual group of people who were organized as a KU Klux Klan chapter. Uh, or as I say, is this political, uh, um, dirty tricks as we would call them today, as you might think? Um, well perhaps, uh, they recognize that just calling themselves, signing themselves to KKK. And so therefore, uh, they are, they are using the, the cache, if you will, uh, associated with the Klan, uh, to, to, uh, further their cause it it's, it's just hard to say I've not gone back and done an extensive history as, uh, there is no good, critical analytical history of, of the communities.

Speaker 2 ([00:10:35](#)):

So anytime you want to learn something from the facts, you basically have to go back and dig up primary sources yourself. There's no one place you can turn to and say, yes, we know that there was an active Klan chapter. It's it's coincidental. Um, Thomas Dixon's book, the Klansman is 1905. Uh, how popular, how widespread it's popularity was in Kalamazoo is open to question. You know, I don't know, off hand how widespread the book's popularity was nationally. Doesn't really make much of an impact on the broader culture in 1905, or does that wait until DW Griffith's birth of a nation a decade later? And then people discover it and say, Oh, here's the book that DW Griffith used, look, it's now let's go back. And, and it becomes the source of, of the, of the revival of the Klan and the teens. So, uh, you know, I don't know, personally, just how influential Dixon was in 1905, 1906, certainly somebody that was, uh, open to, uh, wanting to use that for intimidation probably knew of the book, but, so it's a, it's an interesting little story.

Speaker 2 ([00:11:43](#)):

We w I remember the day that I found the letter in the, in the collection, and it was just, it was one of those take your breath away moments, because we were doing an exhibit on the civil war we were looking for was the civil war and the consequences of the civil war as well. It looked into, uh, racism and discrimination and then civil rights there. And also we were looking for things that we had to supplement this traveling exhibit, and I saw the record and I went and picked it up to actually pick it up and see it. And it's, it's a, it's not my nice neatly typed business letter. I'd say, uh, you know, it's got skull and crossbones misspellings, uh, written on what looks to be a, uh, Brown, uh, wrapping paper, maybe a butcher's meat wrapping paper, um, that sort of thing. So, but it took my breath away to go. Whoa. So

Speaker 1 ([00:12:39](#)):

I like to follow up though, on what you said about the people who use the letter, even if it didn't have any kind of practical value for this case relative to ms. Pearl. Yeah. And if it was being used by the Sheriff's political, political opponents, the people who wrote that letter knew enough to mention KU Klux Klan, right. So them is they have an understanding of the power of the organization, even in Kalamazoo. Yep. Can you, can you get some more on that?

Speaker 2 ([00:13:10](#)):

It is how much of an organization is the Klan even nationally? I mean, the invisible empire, the Knights of the KU Klux Klan really doesn't revive until the teens. I mean, there are certainly are individuals, uh, and smaller grouping. So I think they, I mean, I think the question could also be ask, are they simply drawing upon, uh, the post civil war Klan as opposed to the Klan that, that comes to, uh, to dominance in the, uh, in the late teens, especially in the 1920s. Uh, so are, are they, are they drawing upon that earlier memory? This was the Klan of, of the sixties 1860 and 1870s, uh, are, are, or are these folks, uh, somehow referencing this newer interest in the Klan that, uh, that Dixon's novel, uh, may have, uh, you know, but in any case, they, they do recognize that there is a certain power, a certain strength, a certain, uh, association that they want to link themselves to when, by using that name, uh, when they write the letter.

Speaker 2 ([00:14:16](#)):

Um, but as to what they're doing again, I don't know. And I don't know that we'll ever know, it's, it's one of those things that, in that sense, what we have is a fragment, you know, this is a document without context. And to the extent that we know something about it, it's because we've gone back and said, Oh, look at this, coincidentally, there is a murder case going on, but there is nothing in either our records or anywhere else. And I read the newspapers from that time period, uh, to see if there's any reference, uh, to, to, uh, uh, dirty tricks being played. It's a bitter campaign, uh, that, that is going on. It is a hotly contested. Um, I, I don't know if I ever had the time to sit back and read the Kalamazoo newspapers for the months preceding the election. I might find out what some of those issues were. It's not clear in the couple of months that I read exactly what the issues are that are dividing, uh, Democrats from Republicans at that point, the sheriff is a Democrat, uh, Charles sheen, uh, or, you know, so whether it's local issues or, or the, like,

Speaker 1 ([00:15:27](#)):

Can you go on to give some, some, uh, information on what eventually happens to the sheriff?

Speaker 2 ([00:15:33](#)):

Well, it's, it's an interesting, uh, story. Um, sheen decides not to run for reelection in 1908 or 1910. I don't recall right off hand, one of those two he's elected for two year terms at that point, uh, he serves, I think it's only one more term. I think he served two years, two terms rather, uh, as a sheriff of Kalamazoo County. Uh, and then Smith is convicted by the way. Uh, as I say, uh, there's, there's little doubt, uh, of his guilt, um, and he would end up in Jackson prison, at least that's where he, in, in the, uh, in the accounts that I've read of the trial, he's given life in prison in Jackson, uh, and coincidentally, some years later, uh, sheriff sheen is, uh, appointed warden of Jackson prison. And he will die in 1922 as 22. It, you know, I'm going to just double check those dates if you don't mind, um, be careful of your mic when you get it.

Speaker 2 ([00:16:41](#)):

Well, I think I I'm, I'm fairly certain, I don't have it here, but I think in 1922, so the trials in 1906 is Walter Smith still alive? Is he still in Jackson prison? You know, 15 years later? I don't know. Uh, it is that there is a little bit of, of, uh, of irony that if in fact, this letter refers to the Smith, uh, and Pearl murder case, uh, that, uh, uh, years later, the sheriff who was also pulled into it by this letter, uh, ends up as warden a Jackson prison. Uh, but you know, it's, it's just a coincidence. I, I was impressed when I was reading the obituary of, she knows, Oh, this is where Walter Smith ended up in jail. So

Speaker 1 ([00:17:26](#)):

Get focused on the letter for just a moment. The letter is written to the sheriff, right? Presumably by someone in the KU Klux Klan, and what they want is to get the prisoner Smith so they can take care of him. Right?

Speaker 2 ([00:17:40](#)):

Yeah. Um, let me just reach over here. And I don't want to use my gloves on a letter that papers already, it's very fragile, and I know you have a copy of this. This is extremely fragile, but it starts out be aware, be aware, be aware to Charles sheen, sheriff. We are going to have no talk about this Kuhn. We are his pals and we are going to get him. If you don't want to fight on your hands, brings him to the Gulf street bridge at the hours of 12 to one 30. If he don't come misspelled, we will cave in your joint. Beware. We mean, busy-ness, we have a gang that can, um, something, any bunch in the state, uh, beware. We will look for the Coon at the bridge at midnight, November 1st, uh, at the hours 12 and one 30 beware. Uh, we will jam the door in on the 2nd of November, KKK beware.

Speaker 2 ([00:18:54](#)):

And then there's a big skull and crossbones three times, uh, on, on the letter. And as I say, it's, it's looks to be, you know, and it's very, very fragile today. So I'm trying to be very careful in moving it around. And we still also have the envelope for that matter. Had said something about how she had to do to, uh, do your mail in those days. This was mailed at, uh, on November 1st to Charles sheen, sheriff Kalamazoo city, the jail was enough of an address to get it there. Um, of course this was a day in which there were at least the possibility of more than one mail delivery in a day. Um, so, but, uh, yeah, so it's, it's, uh, it's, uh, you know, the, the racism and it is, is also takes your breath away. Uh, and, uh, you know, the, the threat to do violence to the, to the sheriff, um, to the jail, at least if the sheriff doesn't comply, um, the Gulf street bridge would have provided more than adequate, uh, uh, you know, space to hang someone.

Speaker 2 ([00:20:16](#)):

And to me, that's the implication in the letter, uh, this, they say we are your pals, but, uh, then we are his pals, but then KKK, I, yeah, so, but it's, um, yeah, it's, it's a very into, it's a very interesting piece. And it does say something that, uh, certainly there were, there are going to be people here in Kalamazoo. We talked, you know, a few minutes ago in the interview here about, you know, uh, tensions in the community. And certainly there are some tensions with individuals, but again, the, to me, the real issue is I'd someday like to go back and see, maybe by reading more newspapers, is this just a political gambit by a political opponents of Charles sheen? Or does this reflect an actual group of people who are intent on lynching this man, uh, before the trial? Uh, and that's why, as I say, if, if Molly Pearl had been a young white woman, uh, I think, uh, that would, that was suggested more to me that this was in fact, a racially motivated as opposed to a primarily politically motivated letter. Uh, but the fact that she is an African American woman, again, it is a brutal murder. It's a very brutal murder. I mean, to shoot somebody as he did. I mean, Pearl just happened to be the person who opened the door and he shot the first person that was there. You know, I mean, this was, you know, I mean, I could see that it must have alarmed a community at that time to, to have a murder, you know, quite so cold blooded.

Speaker 2 ([00:22:00](#)):

The letter suggests at a minimum that irrespective of what the motivation was that the person or people writing it knew about who goes Klan in a suggest, something also they even in Kalamazoo, there was the possibility or the, or the possibility for vigilantism stepping outside of the law, using terror tactics and everything else that people knew to be associated with the Klan coming from that legacy of the civil war. As you said, they're, they're certainly drawing upon that, uh, that knowledge, um, you know, uh, to me, the issue is still is, are there people who really would have done this or is this political just simply a political, dirty trick? Uh, and, and that's what we don't know if there are at least, I don't know. Uh, and I don't know, I think it's going to be one of those serendipitous discoveries. Uh, at some point when you're, when I'm doing some research on some other topic that I find somebody that says news account says that there was a meeting of, of, of men calling themselves a vigilante group to, you know, uh, in, in force, uh, justice, whether it was, or, uh, simply reacting to, um, the, the new immigration of the time period and the like, uh, the, by the 1920s, when the Klan is reviving nationally, the Gazette is reporting the Kalamazoo Gazette.

Speaker 2 ([00:23:29](#)):

One of the two newspapers is reporting the story that Klans the Klan is having meetings in places like, uh, Berrien County, van Buren County, uh, that they're talking about coming to have media organizing meetings in Kalamazoo. Uh, of course by then it's, uh, by the 23, when this is happening 23, 24, uh, this is a newsworthy topic. Um, so whether or not the, the, the Gazette would have fared it out, such a story 20 years earlier, it's, it's hard to say, but by the 20th, when the Klan is as a national force, them it's like, well, this is happening in our community too. And we know that, uh, that they were very active. The Klan was a very active chapter of the KU Klux Klan in Kalamazoo as throughout, uh, Michigan, uh, in the 1920s. So then the KU Klux, Klan and Kalamazoo, would you say that's more because of just a byproduct of national spillover of the revival of the Klan.

Speaker 2 ([00:24:31](#)):

W is there anything specific to Kalamazoo that leads toward, toward his revival, in addition to the fact that it gets very popular on a national scale? Um, well we do know in 1923, the Kalamazoo Gazette, editorializes on the need to restrict immigration that, uh, we're getting too many undesirable, uh, immigrants. What we need to do is bring in more Northern European, uh, immigrants, if we need those in the city was growing at the time, this was a rapidly industrializing city. The paper industry was a major

industry, but we had a variety of industries here, metalworking industries, nationally prominent industries, making Caleb's checker cab company comes here in 22, 23, um, Kalamazoo stove company, a large manufacturer of stoves. Uh, the Gibson guitar company is here. Uh, so there is a need for labor at this time. And so people are coming in and the cause in 23, the Gazette is editorializing.

Speaker 2 ([00:25:25](#)):

Of course, this is the time that the debate is also going on nationally on immigration restriction with first, the 1921, and then later, even more restrictive 1924 immigration restriction acts, which, uh, in fact do exactly what the cassette is editorializing in favor of namely restrict, uh, immigration to the United States, to Northern Europeans, as opposed to those less desirable Southern Eastern Europeans, who tend to be Catholics, Jews, darker skinned, Mediterranean, you know, complexion, uh, that, that are not fitting in. And so the Klan may that some of the impetus in the 1920s were organizing the Klan, uh, may well reflect this growing concern and probably does reflect this growing concern over, uh, immigration. Um, again, I've never read that and someday maybe that'll be, you know, a retirement project. I can read, uh, the, the newspapers to get some primary accounts of what was going on in the community during this time period, because unfortunately our published histories of the, of the city tend to be booster, tend to be promotional.

Speaker 2 ([00:26:34](#)):

Even those that are written by professional historians, uh, tend to tell you all of the good things that are happening in the city and the, the new industries that have opened and the, uh, how the city is prospering. There's no real discussion of tensions between various communities, not just between African Americans and whites, but between, uh, immigrant communities and the established community between, uh, the, the dominant Dutch and, uh, Yankee, uh, Protestant population that has dominated the, the city for, for many decades. Uh, and the fact that there is, uh, I've been told, but I've never seen any documentation. For example, that anti Catholicism is still strong in Kalamazoo well into the 19th century, after it has peaked with the no nothings and, and the, like in the middle of the 19th century, that anti-Catholic speakers still could be assured of drawing a crowd here in Kalamazoo. And we, the only way to know that is really as to find the primary documents, that the secondary sources just don't address those, those things,

Speaker 1 ([00:27:43](#)):

World war one coincides within a year or two of his, of us beginning 1914, August, 1914. And then in 1915, of course, birth of a nation. How do the two of those in combination or the do the two of those in combination have an impact on Kalamazoo and then added to that with the general industrializing of the North, then the black migration that occurs right around the same time, how does Kalamazoo fit and tall?

Speaker 2 ([00:28:11](#)):

Um, well, it's several questions there, um, with, with regard to, uh, what with regard to the war, um, Kalamazoo is isn't plays, uh, and we have a number of, of, uh, of stories of Kalamazoo men going off to the war when the United States centers in 1917, uh, the, uh, Joseph WestBridge is a commander of the Michigan national guard, uh, locally, which is a local unit, uh, known as the red arrow division that plays a role in there. So Kalamazoo has a prominent role in the war, the red arrow division, and in fact plays a key role in some of the early American, uh, contributions to, uh, to the war. Um, there is, again, some

references that I've seen, uh, uh, to some anti German sentiment during the war years. Uh, but again, that would have been fairly typical nationally Kalamazoo had long had a German community as well.

Speaker 2 ([00:29:10](#)):

Um, as far as the, as the immigration, uh, itself goes to war. Uh, well, let's see you ask about the birth of a nation. Again, that's very hard to say, aye. Aye, aye. Certain that a movie that was such a national sensation played at the movie theaters in Kalamazoo at the time, did that lead to any kind of social or political agitation, uh, against, uh, immigration? Again, I don't, I've, I've never studied that issue. I've never gone back in again to do so you'd have to go back basically and read the daily newspapers for, you know, for weeks and months on end, uh, to see, because you're not going to find that in secondary sources, uh, the great migration of African Americans to Northern cities, uh, during the war years when the, uh, uh, immigration of, of Europeans is cut off because they make good cannon fodder over in the fields of Europe, uh, that doesn't really impact Kalamazoo. There is no significant increase in the African American population of Kalamazoo during, or immediately after, uh, the first world war. In fact, we don't really see a

Speaker 3 ([00:30:25](#)):

Eddie

Speaker 2 ([00:30:27](#)):

Nor any, any jump in the African American population that wouldn't be attributable to just occasional movement of people into the area and natural reproduction really until the years after the second world war. You know, and then we see as war industries that had hired people in Chicago and elsewhere are laying off those workforces, including African Americans, that some of those move into the community. And we do see some tensions in the, in the, uh, the late forties, but as far as world war one and the great migration of the, of the 19 teens, uh, uh, to the Northern cities that seems to bypass Kalamazoo, uh, it goes of course, to Detroit, of course, to Chicago. And that's not to say there aren't individuals, but it's, it's not the case that I'm aware of. That we see a significant influx of Southern African Americans coming to Kalamazoo, uh, in the year, say between 1914 and in 19, 19, 1920, and yet the Klan does experience something of a resurgence in Kalamazoo in the twenties, the Klan researches in Kalamazoo Justin's that does throughout Michigan in the 1920s.

Speaker 2 ([00:31:36](#)):

Uh, there seems to be at least in Kalamazoo, a strong anti-Catholic, uh, bias to the Klan, uh, here, uh, there is a, in 1924, a cross burning on a West niche, uh, Hill, which is a large Hill overlooks the city, just South of the city. Um, and apparently chosen in a park that still is up there, uh, so that it was visible elsewhere. Uh, the accounts that I've read, uh, including from people at the time, uh, second and firsthand accounts is that it was aimed at, uh, some Catholic families that had moved into that area up that way. Uh, but then, uh, the Klan does move into Kalamazoo and is very, very popular 24, 25, uh, there late, late 20 double check that date, if you don't mind me, just so I don't miss, um,

Speaker 3 ([00:32:33](#)):

Yep.

Speaker 2 ([00:32:33](#)):



In late 1923, October, 1923 of the Klan, after having some in organizing chapters in the rural areas in Berrien and van Buren County decides to move into Kalamazoo, uh, they, uh, seek to hold a rally, uh, at the city armory that, which was also the police station, the, uh, uh, armory, which stood about a block from the museum. It's now a parking lot, uh, over here. And, uh, they were turned down by the Michigan state armory board. Didn't want them to have a Klan rally there, and yet, despite the lack of, of getting permission to use it, they went ahead with a rally outside and apparently attracted in a heavy rain, still several hundred, uh, people to the rally in early 1924, they are able to, uh, get permission to use the armory auditorium, uh, for their rally and apparently hundreds more attend. And, uh, the auditorium was filled, uh, with, uh, with supporters an hour before the program was supposed to start.

Speaker 2 ([00:33:37](#)):

And then later in that year, a group of, of anticline, uh, folks want to have a rally, uh, a meeting to oppose, uh, the Klan coming into Kalamazoo. And these Klan supporters disrupt breakup, uh, the, uh, the rally that is an anticline rally, uh, ends up in a bit of turmoil, um, probably a little bit of violence and, uh, uh, and the like, uh, so, so that happens. So the Klan does get to have an active chapter here at 24 25, uh, and that it will continue through about 27. Uh, it, in 1925, there is a statewide, uh, Klan meeting that is held here in Kalamazoo. We have several photographs, uh, of the meeting, uh, the, they camped out in what would now be South of the, what then was South of the city today, it's in the city, uh, wood slake, uh, and then they had the rally up in crane park on the top of West nitch Hill.

Speaker 2 ([00:34:41](#)):

And they marched through the town, a big, uh, March came down West New Jersey Avenue, our main, uh, North South street, March through downtown had a big, uh, March, uh, all in costume and uniform. Um, and then we know that, uh, uh, the Klan, the local Klan folks were involved in marches the same time in places like Jackson Lansing. We've got photographs that show floats say Kalamazoo on them that went to these Jackson and Lansing rallies. Uh, so we know that the Klan is very active here. Um, we have copies, at least we have one copy of the Klans newsletter, uh, from the 1920s. Uh, we have, uh, Oh, and we also know that in 1925, the, we have a nonpartisan city commission elections here still do that was adopted in 1917. Uh, that is still the way our, uh, local government is, is run nonpartisan elections.

Speaker 2 ([00:35:41](#)):

Uh, and yet it became, apparently became general knowledge that one group of nonpartisan candidates ready for the city commission in the November, 1925 elections were either Klansmen sympathetic to the Klan. And there was great concern that this was going to be a, uh, the commission would be taken over by KU Klux Klan, uh, a group called the citizens commission, which is still with us, uh, which is kind of the, uh, business social civic elite that, uh, endorses candidates to this day, uh, for city commission, uh, on the basis that these are good regardless, good candidates, regardless of political affiliation, uh, was alarmed enough that they, uh, endorsed their own slate of seven candidates, uh, at the time. Uh, and, uh, some of the names are old Kalamazoo names, old, old line names that had been here since the middle of the 19th century, uh, and who are successful businessmen bankers and the like, uh, apparently we have a seven, seven number commissioned, apparently four of those folks were elected and three from the, uh, what was believed to be the Klan slate were also elected at 25. And then it seems like as it didn't Ashley by 27, the client sort of starts to fade away. Uh, there's not, it's not a real issue from what I've been able to tell in the 1927 city commission elections. Um, it just seems like, uh, as, as the Klan did nationally boomed in the twenties and then everybody's sort of,

Speaker 4 ([00:37:25](#)):

Well, yeah,

Speaker 2 ([00:37:27](#)):

I'm sure with the scandals associated with Klan nationally played a great deal, a great deal to do with the downfall of the Klan, uh, the folks, the cases in Indiana and Oklahoma and places like that, that, uh, uh, suggested that maybe, maybe this was just a bit of a fundraising confidence scheme that at least some of the leaders were profiting from, uh, you know, put the Klan doesn't, it just doesn't seem to become an election from what I've been able to read in, uh, in 27. So, but for three or four years that we have a large plant hundreds of numbers, apparently, um, we, we don't know, I don't know, again, maybe there are records somewhere, or maybe you'll find someday in reading through all, every daily newspaper at the time who saw who some of the members of the Klan were, uh, because even those who were suspected of being Klan in this 90, 25 election, deny it and say, there is no, you know, and of course it was a secret organization. So, you know, we don't know for sure, just who, but elsewhere, the Klan brought in, um, you know, good middle class, white Christian, uh, folks, uh, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, bankers. And I'm sure that if we, we could lift the hoods off of those who were marching of those, uh, we'd find some of those people, uh, maybe even some of the people who were critical publicly, privately felt they needed to be involved.

Speaker 1 ([00:39:02](#)):

What do you think the attraction was for people from that demographic? Like you said, they're Christian, they're good people. They're white middle class Christians. What was it about the Klan that might've attracted them to even join the organization?

Speaker 2 ([00:39:14](#)):

I, I think, uh, a lot of reasons go into it. It's, I don't think it's real simple. I think there is a, a great fear of, um, well, first of all, I think it was a positive attraction. This is standing up for what America believes. We're a Christian nation sounds familiar, uh, to some extent today, you know, uh, and these immigrants from overseas are Catholics. They're Jews they're even stranger. They're Eastern Orthodox Russians. Now, uh, this is somehow a threat to our Christian values. They are not able to assimilate into our American political system. Uh, everybody that is folks who were attracted to the Klan would have thought that everybody knew that Nordic Northern Europeans were higher up the ladder of evolution. And then as you went down into the Eastern, into Southern Europe, you went further down the ladder. These people were, we're not going to be able to, uh, assimilate.

Speaker 2 ([00:40:18](#)):

They were going to destroy our political system, our political values, they were going to be easily manipulated on top of which, of course, in the 1920s, we've got the great deal of fear of, uh, the red scare. Uh, the fact that in, uh, um, you know, late 1917, uh, uh, the Bolsheviks seized power and establish a communist government in, uh, in Russia create the Soviet union, uh, proclaim that they're out to promote the world proletarian revolution to bring this great wave of the future Bolshevism communism. And, uh, in the United States, we have a terrible red scare in 19, 19, 19, 20 people, lynched people murdered on this simple suspicion that they're communists or communist sympathizers, and who were the leaders of the, of the, uh, uh, Russian revolution, the communist revolution, or Bolshevik revolution in the Soviet union, where the hell, you know, you've got Jews, you've got Trotsky, you've got, uh, you know, maybe Lennon, uh, uh, you've got others who are Jews.

Speaker 2 (00:41:21):

And we got all these Russian immigrants coming in and, and they hang out in, in their Russian immigrants clubs rather than socializing and becoming Americans. Uh, so I think people are very fearful that these immigrants are bringing these alien political ideologies. And, uh, I think the fact that it is a time of dramatic social change, political change, uh, rural America is, is playing second fiddle to the, to the cities. Uh, population is growing in the cities, um, moving into the S uh, the twenties are also, uh, era of, um, you know, tension between modern cultural values, our modern at the time, cultural values against traditional cultural values. And those who were concerned about women smoking women, raising the hems of their dresses up, uh, women, uh, who are going out on chaperoned, who are, you know, the, the flappers, uh, the sexual freedom that seemed to be promised by, uh, Freud the, uh, the challenge to absolute values that Einstein and his theories of relativity, which had great everyday impact on people when they were established in 1921.

Speaker 2 (00:42:37):

Uh, now it was at 1919 test anyway, uh, but all of that, this sure world is, is falling around it. So here's an organization that says we're for traditional values, maintaining good old Protestant Christianity, uh, were for maintaining the LD, the political and social, uh, power of the established, uh, ethnic groups in the community, which are, are white, Northern European, white, Anglo, Saxon, Protestants, uh, join. Well, then your friends join and well, it's like joining any fraternal organization. Gee, if I don't join, am I going to be considered out of it and square? Well, I'll join because I'm a joiner. I'm going to be doing what everybody else is doing because that's what's happening so long winded answer. Oh yeah, no, we're good. The Klan then in some parts of the country, obviously like the South is an organization where terror is a major priority, but in many parts of the state of Michigan terror is a part of it, but it becomes more of a, of a social organization where people come together to gather and share similar values.

Speaker 2 (00:43:50):

Oh, yes. I think that's very much it because the case, I mean, Michigan, certainly there are some parts of the state which are going undergoing these dramatic changes, places like Detroit, where the African American population just triples in a, in a three or four year, time period, uh, alarming even the existing African American community in the case of Detroit, for example, because their modus Vivendi that they've got with the white power establishment is being upset by all of this. Uh, yeah, I think over there, you've got, I mean, we know that there's terror. I I've read, uh, uh, Kevin Boyle's book, arc of justice on, uh, ocean sweets in the, in the twenties. Uh, but, uh, uh, but, but, but at least he recounts the, the terror that at least the violence that is directed, uh, against African Americans who simply live on the, who want to move into houses where they shouldn't, uh, that doesn't happen across the state.

Speaker 2 (00:44:44):

I don't think in any great numbers, I think. Uh, but I do think that there is overall this fear that how our traditional American values are under attack under siege. And we joined together and joining in this social organization, we can reassure ourselves that the old ways are going to be preserved. Um, and, uh, we don't have to, I mean, we, they all had their cross burnings, but they were not for them. Uh, other than the one case that I know of that I mentioned earlier, I don't know of any cross burnings that were anything other than, you know, the, the highlight of a rally, as opposed to putting a across in somebody's yard and burning it as a symbolic act of terrorism, uh, to, you know, get out. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([00:45:31](#)):

Well, let me come at you like this, thank you for that, for that, uh, inclusion. So is it possible then, or what would you say to this perspective that people in Kalamazoo, for example, and maybe Creek ballistics focused Kalamazoo communities far away from Detroit, seeing the kind of tension and turmoil, and maybe when my saving chaos that's, that's, that's going through Detroit gripping Detroit with all these major major changes. The people viewing that from afar might, might be threatened. How might that play into it?

Speaker 2 ([00:46:08](#)):

I mean, I could speculate on that. I I'm sure that yeah, that they probably worried that this could come their way, uh, that, uh, you know, it wasn't going to stop in Detroit or, and certainly in a city like Kalamazoo, where we're literally midway between Chicago and Detroit, uh, you know, the railroads run through, you know, numerous times a day, eight, 12 different, uh, trains a day at Eastern West that, you know, so that you can, you know, can be spilling over from Detroit or Chicago for that matter. And, you know, very violent in 1919 in, uh, uh, Chicago, uh, terrible, uh, violence against African Americans. Uh, sure. I think they did look out and were fearful that if they didn't maintain the old ways that, you know, the maintain the old elites in power, uh, that could spill into their community from, from elsewhere.

Speaker 2 ([00:47:02](#)):

I mean, they, they certainly would have known what happened in Chicago. They knew of the great influx in, into Detroit. So yeah, I think there probably is this effort to get out ahead of the game as it were, and, and make sure that, uh, uh, this doesn't happen here, um, that either the violence or, you know, African-Americans moving in, in large numbers and upsetting, uh, the, you know, the, the status quo. Yeah. Okay. We're gonna wrap it up here real quick. So we know that we have white middle class Protestants of Northern European descent. They will probably not absolutely, but probably be attracted to the Klan as a, as a sort of fraternal organization. But that explains to people who are actually in the organization. What do you know about the people in the community who may not want it to have been formally part of it, but not necessarily opposed to what they were doing.

Speaker 2 ([00:48:01](#)):

Those are the people that are even harder to actually get any sense on, because if you are actively joining actively marching or like the citizen's committee in that 1925 election actively saying, we don't want the presence of the Klan here. So elect these folks. There's a record of what's it, the people who are going to work in the factories, but who are a little bit fearful of joining an organization that, uh, uh, they've heard some bad things about that. Some of their ministers, uh, for example, in, in 19, uh, in the 1923, 24, there were ministers in their churches on both sides saying the Klan is promoting good American values, but other ministers who were saying, you know, this is not good American values. So they're, they're here. Oh, they're not going, you know, like, well, maybe they won't join. Maybe they'll just watch. And maybe they do sympathize, but there's no historical record to turn to, to, to, to, uh, for them and say, well, yeah, the Klan had X number of members, but they probably had the, the silent supportive of a larger number.

Speaker 2 ([00:49:09](#)):

I'm sure they did, but, but how, how to, to, to gauge that, um, I've read, I've read it an attempt at an analysis of the 1925 election, uh, that, that I haven't really been able to digest. The person broke down the voting by precincts. Uh, but doesn't do a good job of the demographics of the precincts who lived

there and seeing, well, how many votes did the purported Klan candidates get in each of the precincts and, uh, and makes the, is able to demonstrate that the Klan candidates drew their strongest, uh, support in the neighborhoods where we would have probably found the higher concentration of, of working class, uh, people, uh, in the neighborhoods near the paper mills, near the factories and the like, and in the, uh, the more solidly middle professional, at least professional middle class neighborhoods, uh, uh, had less, got less support because that social elite didn't want Kalamazoo's name, you know, linked with, with the, with the negative sides of, uh, being involved with the Klan. Uh, so I think perhaps, uh, somebody who really understood better than I do, how to do statistics and statistical analysis of the election and then had access to good demographic information on the precincts might be able to give you some quantitative answer on, uh, the support, but okay. If I jump in, go right ahead, go ahead.

Speaker 5 ([00:50:53](#)):

Okay. 1906. And if you'd answered a Fred as though 1906, 2007, it's still here

Speaker 2 ([00:51:06](#)):

It assuming again, because I, I'm not, I'm going to keep saying it, but assuming that that letter does refer to an active Klan, as opposed in 1906 two, as opposed to just a, a political, dirty trip, assuming that there are people who are that dented, you know, what's interesting is that, yes, we still have that going on today as, as you well know. Uh, we, uh, we, we were unfortunately the, the scene of a, of a rally against black gang and terrorism as the white supremacist from New Jersey, uh, who organized the rally here last week called it. And yes, we still have those people coming here. Uh, uh, I certainly, we have those folks in our community. I don't know that the ones that are community, except those who are probably the most alienated and the most extremely committed are going to come out in a, in a small community, uh, with skinheads and do not see salutes, uh, the way, uh, people coming from elsewhere when they come to our community.

Speaker 2 ([00:52:10](#)):

We're willing to do that because, you know, you got to live with your, with your neighbors and you are very much, uh, gonna stick out if you do that. So how much of those, uh, how many of those people who were here for that rally two weeks ago were actually local, which is not to say we don't have those local people here, cause I'm sure we do. Well, the Michigan, uh, militia, uh, was, it was in this area. In fact, it was about just a decade ago that maybe not even a decade ago, but within the last decade that, uh, they, there was an alleged plot, uh, blow up the interchange in U S one 31, nine 94 and the Michigan militia. And they were out of the battle Creek area, I think at that time. So we know they're around, but yeah, that, that, it's, it's, it's still there.

Speaker 2 ([00:52:52](#)):

We're still going through a lot of social change. Uh, there are still people who are threatened by, uh, what's going on socially in our society. The, the rapid change, the de-industrialization, if industrialization was one of the causes is I would think it was for the plans are at least for the, the, um, one of the motivating factors that worried people, that to either join or silently support the plan a century ago, uh, today it's, de-industrialization my job's going who's to blame for that. Uh, well, those group, that group that was in town last weekend, uh, uh, is, is looking at others and saying, wow, it's, it's not them it's in their case. Uh, they would blame the Jews and the international Jewish conspiracy for de-industrialization, but of course they'd looked at it and we've got a little bit of racial tension as everyone does in the community.

Speaker 2 ([00:53:52](#)):

And so they exploit that, uh, uh, and make it, uh, make it seem worse. Uh, well, I know that there was, there was great fear that they were, and, and I, I watched their website before they came in. I know that they wanted to provoke violence. I know that they wanted, they were hoping that, uh, that, that someone would take enough offense at what they said, that they would throw a punch, throw a brick, God forbid, fire a gun, and then it could explode into a full blown, uh, uh, Maili. And, uh, uh, fortunately that didn't happen. But, uh, but yeah, I think it's, uh, it says something about our society that, uh, we, whatever progress we've made. And I would be one that would argue that we have made progress, uh, significant progress. Um, we haven't solved all of those problems that, uh, led people back in 1906 to think that, uh, signing a letter, KKK was either an effective political tactic or in fact was a reflection of the fact that they were an active KKK chapter here, the same issues. So same, you know, it's still here

Speaker 1 ([00:55:09](#)):

And in 1906, 2006 or 2006, seven, you have the KU Klux Klan real or imagined. And in both instances you mentioned industrialization de-industrialization and the KU Klux Klan is reacting to both of those is a reactionary response to both of those. And in the 1920, in the, in the early 20th century, the first decade of the 20th century, you have a very well established, somewhat robust Klan. Whereas in this element you have to bus supporters in,

Speaker 2 ([00:55:47](#)):

Oh, I think that's, I think that's great that they have, that they have to go to such extremes to find their supporters that they have to, they have to bust them in that. Uh, uh, well, I guess it's great on one hand, uh, um, because it does say that we've come to the point where people acknowledge that unless you are really an extremist in this cause that we no longer find that acceptable behavior in public, uh, to have, uh, uh, a real Klan March down West J Avenue, down Michigan Avenue, back out Burdick street, the way they did in the 1920s, that just couldn't happen. Um, yeah, I mean, if it would have to be a small number of people probably bust in who did it. I remember about a decade ago, there was a KU Klux Klan rally at the, uh, at the courthouse.

Speaker 2 ([00:56:42](#)):

And I think they got eight members of the Klan and none of them are local. Uh, you know, uh, on the other hand it doesn't mean that just because we, a lot of people would never do that kind of overt action. We know there's still, there's a lot of subtle racism. Uh, we still know that there are people who, uh, know that in public, they say African American. And when they gather over beers with, uh, their friends, the language that they use would not be anywhere near as, as, uh, as politically sensitive. Uh, we know that that's still out there among, uh, people that probably some who are just like 80 and a hundred years ago, professional educated, highly respected members of the community. But when they talk, uh, in terms of they'll use code words, I'm not even thinking of a neighbor of mine just had a conversation this weekend with a school teacher who never would, would talk about, you know, it has, I've seen them African-Americans at their home. They're not, but yet the code word she was using for the homeless for a young black teenagers who have been getting into trouble this summer with, uh, and we do have some fear that may be out of Chicago and elsewhere, there is some real gang activity, or at least some wannabe gang activity. It was very interesting to listen to her language just

Speaker 4 ([00:58:15](#)):

Carefully. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([00:58:17](#)):

Modulated, uh, as I say, I've, I've seen them with guests to dinner at their home, so African Americans and other minorities, but yet when she was talking about this, he could just sort of sense that there was, you know, well, you know what I mean, us white folks talking together, you know, though what this carefully modulating language means. So, yeah.

Speaker 4 ([00:58:44](#)):

All right, Sue, what I'm rolling in is our collection of good class Klan related material. Specifically, we have three, uh, robes. We have two of these [inaudible],

Speaker 2 ([00:59:00](#)):

Well, the, uh, the rope, uh, cincture or belt that, uh, they would have worn.

Speaker 4 ([00:59:11](#)):

We know in all cases who use these, this one was used in Sheldon, Michigan, is it Fremont, Fremont, Michigan, and Fremont, Michigan. Uh, this one, the second one here was used in, uh, worn by a gentlemen from Jackson, Michigan, but the family brought it over here and, uh, with them and then kept it and then decided to give it to the museum. And this one, uh, we just got it's our most recent one. We got it right before Christmas, last year, right. As the, uh, as our calendar year was that day. And it's a part of the much more extensive collection that the, uh, that the donor had preserved for. Uh, I have century and more, it was her, her grandmother's. So this is actually a woman's that was intended, not that there's much distinction, but just was worn by her grandmother. This was a woman wearing this in the Klan, uh, locally active in the Klan, uh, saved all of, uh, a whole variety of related material from song books and constitution of the Klan, uh, membership cards, ribbons, uh, photo album of, of maybe 25 or 30 images of rallies that they attended in Kalamazoo Jackson on Lansing and the like, uh, and they, uh, and she kept it, uh, knowing full well that, uh, it was an important historical document, uh, the whole collection together, uh, knowing that, uh, it was important to document that this had happened here, that this was not the case, that it was not the case said, Oh, that happened somewhere else.

Speaker 4 ([01:00:50](#)):

But right here in our good wholesome city, you know, 80 years ago, there were people who joined the Klan and with the photographs, we could see that it's not just an isolated individual or an isolated case. And also she saved that she offered it to us. She fully understood the real historical significance of keeping these things as evidence that we have these, these terrible things need also to be documented. It's maybe not quite the same as the Holocaust deniers, but, you know, there would be those who would like to downplay or pretend that this may never have happened here in this kind of material, uh, impact does suggest in improved document that it was here. Um, I think I was mentioning that she, she asked as all of the donors do not to use their names because they don't sympathize with these ideas, but they understood it. And we've got, I don't know if I need to get how much closer, but we've got a ribbon here from the Michigan state meet in Jackson in September, 1925. This is a Klan statewide meeting that was there. And in 1925, that her grandmother and her grandmother's husband, who was not the donor's grandfather, it was a second marriage.

Speaker 4 ([01:02:09](#)):

We've got that out here and proper museum technique, handling artifacts, that paper, you almost got to handle with bare hands with the gloves, tear the paper here. I didn't do that. That was already broken

off. Uh, uh, but it's just a photo album and I'll get your scans. If I don't have these, I'll get you scans constitution of the Kukulula of the, uh, it's not good. I said there was a constitutional, the KU Klux Klan. It's actually the constitution of the women of the KU Klux Klan, 1923, the constitution of a women of the complex plan accepted and adopted June 2nd, 1923. And then they incorporated on June the eighth in little rock, Arkansas.

Speaker 4 ([01:03:23](#)):

It's all about legals and regions and Clockers and clubs and clip grabs and Clabby's and Klans, and Clara goes and clusters and consuls. What else do we have over here? KKK songbook was the very active female participation. What's that was there very active and extensive female participation. All I'm sure there was, yeah, I don't know locally, but I suspect, so I know that this person was very active. Now there's the, Oh, they even have a song for the kazoo County Klan kazoo of course, meaning Kalamazoo. When we, women of Kazu County, you heard about the Klan. We said, we sure are with them and we help them all. We can.

Speaker 4 ([01:04:12](#)):

The interesting thing is how many of these, uh, uh, songs are, uh, the new lyrics. Some of them at least are, uh, using the church in the Wildwood, in the cross, uh, using, uh, one of the theme songs was onward Christian soldiers. Oh, of course. Yeah. And then they've got their own lyrics to battle cry of freedom and keep the home fires, burning, uh, faith of our fathers and all. So we have to get the song book and membership cards because as I understand that her grandmother was her grandmother's second husband, especially was, was very active locally, which is why we have six, eight blank membership cards. Somewhere in Michigan. You can fill out your application for membership motivational card.

Speaker 4 ([01:05:25](#)):

If you want to belong to the kind of a Klan with the kind of Klan you like, you couldn't slip your clothes in a group and started, you needed slip your clothes in a grip and start on a long, long hike. Real Klans are not made by men afraid anyway, wonderful stuff. Song the victory. That was something to the tune of marching through Georgia and about other things last night, I think I can, I'll just really show you here. Cause the rest is just images to scan, but we do have the 1927 newsletter of the Kalamazoo Klan number one 26 around with Michigan invisible empire Knights of the KU Klux Klan. And it's simple xeroxed. And as we can, you can see they're already responding to a, um, some of the allegations, some of the charges that are being made against them in the early in the twenties, because I noticed one paragraph here starts out to condemn the Klan as a moneymaking scheme, uh, because it requires of an applicant, a donation of \$10 is to condemn any venerable institution, which charges a fee. Uh, and that's obviously in response to the fact that some folks were making a heck of a lot of money promoting plan memberships.

Speaker 4 ([01:07:05](#)):

You gotta get that you have at least two hoods, both identical, just like those impressive, not very similar. Those are either mass produced or, uh, perhaps from a pattern or because you pull that.

Speaker 5 ([01:07:28](#)):

So this would be one of the hoods where they with shields down.



Speaker 4 ([01:07:33](#)):

I'm not sure shields down.

Speaker 5 ([01:07:36](#)):

This would be before then 1924 burns. And I mask law.

Speaker 4 ([01:07:41](#)):

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. This, this is the one that you saw in those images. It goes with this particular, uh, gallon right there and robe right there. Uh, and, uh, and all of the images they've got for the most part, they've got their hoods down and, uh, yeah, that's what this one is. So

Speaker 5 ([01:08:00](#)):

I think we're good. Thank you, sir. Alright. Alright.