

Unmasking the Oregon Klansman: The Ku Klux Klan in Astoria 1921-1925

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I. Introduction

“Carry on Knights of the Ku Klux Klan! Carry on until you have made it impossible for citizens of foreign birth, of Jewish blood or of Catholic faith to serve their community or their country in any capacity, save as taxpayers.” [1] On January 30, 1922 the Astoria Daily Budget ran an editorial responding to the racial and religious tension in Astoria created by the Ku Klux Klan. The staff of the Daily Budget joined local Catholics and immigrants in an attack against the organization they believed was responsible for the factional strife and political discord that characterized their city. While the editor attacked the Klan, one local minister praised the organization by saying, “I can merely say that I have a deep feeling in my heart for the Klansmen . . . and that I am proud that men of the type these have proven themselves to be are in an organized effort to perpetuate true Americanism,” [2] The minister clearly believed the Klan would lead the city toward moral reform and patriotic unity. Both the editor and the minister were describing the same organization but their conflicting language raises some important questions.

The tension between these two passages reveals the social and political climate of Astoria in the early part of the 1920s. Astorians believed their city was in need of reform at the end of World War I. Their economy was in a slump, moral vice invaded the city and political corruption was rampant. The city needed a way to rid the city of these problems, and initially the Klan provided that answer. Responding to the political and social needs of Astoria, the Astoria Klan functioned as a political machine, a benevolent organization and an enforcer of the law. To assume their power, Klan leaders brought in anti-Catholic speakers to produce racial and religious hatred, called attention to moral vice including liquor violations and prostitution, and successfully attacked the municipal government. Although the Astoria Klan wrought havoc on certain members of the community, the Klan ticket won the majority vote during the elections of 1922; they successfully replaced the county sheriff; and through charity donations they won the support of hundreds of church going, middle and upper class, white-protestant Astorians.

Typically the Klan of the 1920s thrived in areas with high native white populations where the press and small immigrant populations proved little threat to the Klan. Astoria’s immigrant population was the highest in the state, with over sixty percent of its population having at least one parent of foreign birth. The Finnish were the largest immigrant group; they supported Astoria’s salmon canning industry and as a result were involved in the social and political network in the city. Astoria’s diversity made it stand out from other cities in Oregon where native-born whites often numbered more than ninety-five percent of the population. Therefore Astoria provides a unique insight into the Klan and its opposition. During this period, anti-

Klan opposition was heard much more regularly and strongly than in other more homogenous areas of the state and nation. In Astoria both local newspapers frequently printed editorials and literature against the Klan. The opposition revealed how Klansmen used dirty politics, publishing circulars and a periodical that spread rumors and lies about local Catholics and political leaders. They demonstrated to the diverse community that the Klan would not promote moral reform but rather factional strife and disunity. They fought an uphill battle, but eventually the opposition to the Klan succeeded in ousting the organization from their town.

From my research of the Astoria Klan I have concluded that despite the political successes of the group, it could not maintain that power in an era beyond in which it existed. The Klan thrived in Astoria due to its ability to lead efforts towards ridding the city of vice and political corruption leading a majority of community members to support the Klan, demonstrated by the 1922 elections, the recall of the local sheriff and in the enforcement of prohibition laws. Although the Klan gained political control for a short while, it did not successfully serve the needs of a majority of Astoria citizens and therefore after two short years in political affairs the Klan lost its political power. With its large immigrant community and dependence upon foreign labor, Astoria's citizens could not afford to alienate their foreign population. Therefore I argue that the Klan could only thrive during a short period of social unrest, post-war hysteria and economic uncertainty. Due to economic improvement and as opposition to the Klan exposed the deception and corruption within the organization, the Klan inevitably failed to meet the needs of a community dependent upon diversity and social harmony.

II. Coming to Terms with the Klan of the Twenties

Historians agree that the Klan appealed to white native-born Protestants through its defense of one hundred percent Americanism, and its drive for political and moral reform. While certain generalizations can be made about the Klan of the 1920s, it is important to understand the Klan's success was a result of its ability to adapt to the local concerns of individual communities. Its methods in the South varied from its actions in the west. Not only did the Klan differ from region to region but from state to state and city to city. Many broad interpretations of the Klan have been done and although they provide a basic understanding and narrative of the Klan, in order to truly understand the reasons for success and decline, it is necessary to conduct local case studies. Two historians have adopted this approach. Nancy MacLean and Stanley Coben both analyze the Klan by using local case studies. Through their case studies it is revealed that Klan ideologies, rhetoric and activities depended upon the locality in which they existed.

Using the Athens, Georgia Klan as a representative case study of the Klan, Nancy MacLean explains how during the 1920s the Klan perceived the structure of American society as under attack and therefore sought social reform in the form of militant activity. [3] She builds her case of the violent nature of the Klan throughout

the book. With chapter titles including, "Mobilizing the Invisible Army," and "Paramilitary Paternalism," she places emphasis on the deeply embedded ideologies of Klansmen. They believed that as middle class white Americans they were the people of the constitution to the exclusion of anyone who did not fit the profile of an average, hard working American. "In the Klan's case, middle-class standing . . . led member to feel distinctively entitled to intervene in disputes of the so-called selfish classes above and beneath them with paramilitary means if need be." [4] MacLean provides evidence of four detailed accounts of local floggings occurring in Athens. She then extends the violence of the Athens Klan to the national scene stating that, "The vigilante practices of local Klansmen found support in the ideology articulated by national Klan leaders." [5]

Her focus on the militancy of the Klan is effective in that she uses evidence from the Athens Klan to back up her assertions. However, she uses the militant behavior of the Athens Klan to provide evidence to establish the violent militancy of the Klan nationwide. MacLean herself admits that the southern Klan was distinct in its ideas and activities: "The South . . . possessed a singular regional heritage. Slavery shaped its political economy and culture . . . other aspects of Southern life at the turn of the century were distinctive: the prevalence of sharecropping, tenant farming, disfranchisement and lynching." [6] Despite these regional differences, however, MacLean argues that as the location of the Klan's national headquarters, the Klan in Georgia provides an ideal representative of the national Klan. She states that the differences of Klan groups across the nation varied by degree, not character. Although she addresses the differences between localities she does not explain them well enough. Coben agrees that the Klan did at times commit acts of violence but recognizes that when violence did occur, the Klan often suffered.

Stanley Coben also uses individual case studies to examine Klan activity; however, Coben arrives at much different conclusions. Coben's book, *Rebellion Against Victorianism*, is a study of the weakening of the structures of Victorianism during the 1920s. [7] The last chapter of his book is devoted to the Ku Klux Klan, describing them as the "guardians" of Victorianism. He reveals how the Victorian understanding of racial and gender hierarchies influenced Klan ideologies. He states that the Klan's "primary objectives consisted of guarding the major Victorian concepts and the interests these protected . . . ideas of character, the home and family . . . and distinctively separate gender roles. [8] While MacLean recognizes the Klan's embrace of the Victorian hierarchy based on race and gender, she concludes that in order to defend that hierarchy, Klansmen resorted to violence. Coben, on the other hand, argues that Klan members in the 1920s were no more violent than other native, white, middle-class Protestant males. Using three studies done by historians, Christopher Cocoltchos, Leonard Moore, and Robert Goldberg, Coben finds a clear pattern emerge revealing Klan activities. The studies come from three small towns in Indiana, Colorado and California respectively. Coben concludes that the KKK represented not the outcast, backcountry, uneducated white man but rather represented a wide cross section of White middle-class Protestants. He states that "after the Klan organized nationally for maximum profit and political action in 1921,

the organization expelled members and whole chapters charged with having taken part in vigilante activities.” [9] Instead of viewing the Klan as a militant force, Coben argues that they saw themselves as victims; increasing immigration, modernization and the development of pop culture all threatened white middle-class Protestants. Instead of resorting to violence Coben argues that the Klan sought social control trying to eliminate, “those results of character defects which threatened the home and family: violations of Prohibition . . . prostitution, gambling, political corruption traffic violations, and Sunday blue-law offenses.” [10]

What is important about the in the interpretation between Coben and MacLean is not the correctness of their conclusions but the differences of Klan function in different regions. Both use evidence from different region of the United States. The town of Athens, Georgia reflected Southern native white Protestant culture whereas the small towns of Indiana, Colorado and California reflect the characteristics of a distinct native population. Thus it can be concluded that Klan activity varied dramatically from state to state. According to Shawn Lay, a revisionist Klan historian, the Klan of the nineteen twenties relied not on national Klan structure for its guidance, but that the Klan acted as a chameleon in which local conditions profoundly shaped the goals, activities and membership of the Invisible Empire. [11] Therefore, in order to fully understand the role of the Klan in individual communities, it is necessary to conduct local case studies.

The Klan experience in Oregon exemplifies the necessity to follow this method of historical understanding. Most historians of the Oregon Klan agree that the Klan found a home in Oregon where its population of eight hundred thousand in 1920 was 85 percent white, native born and 90 percent protestant. Two historians, David Horowitz and Eckard Toy, conducted case studies of the La Grande and Eugene Klans respectively. Although Horowitz highlights the presence of an African American and immigrant population in La Grande their numbers are proportionately very low. La Grande’s foreign-born population in 1920 was only 425. The same is true for Eugene where native white Americans consisted of 96 percent of the population. Conducting a local case study in such homogeneous localities the voice of the opposition to the Klan is missing. Clearly not all citizens of La Grande and Eugene supported the Klan. Even the small religious and racial minorities in these towns must have resented the Klan’s emphasis on White supremacy. The Klan was able to intimidate local newspapers and businesses with boycotts if they did not take a neutral tone when dealing with the Klan. [12] Toy points out that once the Klan gained political power in the community the local press maintained a silent voice. For this reason, the community’s response to the Klan cannot be fully appreciated. Although they recognize opposition to the Klan and the Klan reaction to these forces, they generally conclude that the Klan thrived in areas where there was little opposition from the press, immigrant communities and Catholics. Astoria on the other hand, allows for a larger scope of community reaction. With its large immigrant community, Astoria stood out from Eugene, La Grande and even Portland. Opposition to the Klan reveals how the Klan in Astoria did not step into a city where religious and racial strife was already at a peek; Klan

leadership actively and knowingly agitated local issues in order to gain prominence. The voice of the opposition also provides a clear picture into the reasons behind Klan success and Klan demise. [13]

III. A Brief Narrative of the National and Oregon State Klan

In order to understand the Astoria Klan and its function within the community it is first necessary to provide a clear picture of the origins, ideologies and structure of the national Ku Klux Klan. A brief history of the Klan will show how Klan leaders molded the organization to appeal to white Protestants across the nation, generating large profits and political power. The rise of the second Klan was inspired by individuals seeking to create a fraternal order that defended Americanism and an organization that would create great financial success. Its founder, Colonel William Joseph Simmons, was a soldier in the Spanish American War and a circuit preacher prior to becoming involved with fraternal organizations. Although he was a talented orator, he was voted out of the ministry due to inefficiency and moral issues and so he began his career as a recruiter for fraternal organizations. He met great financial success as a fraternal organizer but held onto his dream of establishing his own version of the Ku Klux Klan. [14]

Simmons initially designed the second Ku Klux Klan to appeal to Southern native white Protestants. In 1915, D.W. Griffith released the film, *The Birth of a Nation*, which idealized the original Klan, portraying Klansmen as the saviors of the war-torn south under the threat of savage freed slaves. In the film, local Klansmen rescue a woman from being raped by a freed slave. Americans all across the country viewed the film and were awed by the innovative special effects and the idealized image of the Victorian south. Simmons worked with Griffith in order to publicize the beginnings of a new Klan. In fact, at the beginning of the film, Simmons is shown interviewing Griffith about the original Klan. The popularity of the film created the perfect environment to establish an organization whose ideals included defending white supremacy and Victorian moral character. Thus Klan ideals from the beginning appealed to Southern native culture, protecting Victorian morality as well as supporting racial prejudice. [15]

World War I provided the Klan with an initial purpose. As wartime created a need for soldiers, greater production and patriotic support, the Klan sought to protect the nation from any alien influence, draft dodgers, and strike leaders. Commenting on the context from which the Klan gained prominence, one former Klansman describes, "The Klan is a war-time product. It was born of psychopathic hysteria and religious delusion." Such strong words come from a disgruntled Klansman, yet his words reflect the chaos and disillusion that pervaded the country during war. Simmons took advantage of the wartime hysteria and met the need for organized patriotism. Simmons excelled at organizing the ideals and rituals of the new fraternal order, but he needed assistance in creating an organization large enough that would produce great profit. The war would not go on forever and a purpose

beyond patriotism and white supremacy had to be established in order for the organization to grow.

The end of the war brought great social and cultural change to America. A growing intellectual population contested the racial hierarchies prevalent in the decade prior. Social scientists questioned whether whites were biologically superior to other races; sociologists and psychologists questioned Victorian morality and its emphasis on the moral superiority of the woman. Developments in the social sciences strengthened movements by feminists, blue-collar workers and racial minorities. African Americans rejected the caste system of the 19th century through variants of the Black Nationalism led by W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. The development of self-conscious black literature, and an enhanced pride in black music, namely jazz, gave African Americans a more visible voice in American culture. Jazz music became popular among white Americans. At the same time the growing militancy of the labor movement in the late 1910s and early 1920s reflected a growing emphasis on working-class identity in American culture. The political campaign of La Follette in the 1924 presidential election represented a collective movement of progressives including labor unions, socialists, farmers, racial minorities and politically active intellectuals. [16] Although these movements did not achieve their ultimate goals, they served to upset the social structure of the previous decade causing many middle-class native born Americans to fear the loss of their identity, as Americans, in a changing post-war world. Many of them feared they would become, "Strangers in the land their fathers gave them." [17]

In this tumultuous atmosphere, Simmons called upon The Southern Publicity Association, or rather its two members, Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Young Clarke to change the Klan into a national fraternal society. They were hired on as recruiters for the Klan and were paid well for their services, receiving eight out of every ten dollars acquired from membership fees. Tyler and Clarke molded the Klan's ideals to appeal to white-Protestants all across the nation. Understanding the need for the defense of native white protestant identity, Clarke and Tyler expanded Klan ideals to emphasize the fight for one hundred percent Americanism that they defined as a white, male, native-born Protestant, and defender of the American constitution. This shift expanded the narrow anti-African American rhetoric of the southern Klan to oppose Catholics, Jews, and Asians. Not only did Klan rhetoric oppose these foreign and religious groups but it also fought against moral vice including the violation of prohibition, prostitution, gambling, divorce and anything that violated Victorian morality. [18] The expanded purpose of the Klan as designed by Clarke and Tyler allowed it to spread across the United States, attracting a wide group of white Protestants.

The Klan's great strength was its hierarchy and secrecy, which allowed it to adapt to the individual issues of local communities. Klan leaders depended on their ability to appeal to all localities in order to generate enough members who paid membership fees, dues, and made donations to Klan projects. The fees and donations generated

their salaries, therefore it served the leadership well to exaggerate local issues, encourage Klan secrecy and use deceptive tactics to extort money from its members.

The hierarchical structure and secrecy maintained a membership that was often times misled and deceived into believing false accusations made by Klan leaders. Upon acceptance, Klan initiates recited an oath of allegiance in front of the entire Klavern—declaring obedience, secrecy, fidelity and “Klanishness.” Promising their obedience to the Klan meant demonstrating, “loyal respect and steadfast support to the Imperial Authority,” as well as a declaration to “heartily heed all official mandates decrees edicts rulings and instructions of the I*W* thereof.” [19] Thus in declaring their obedience to the Klan, they swore to protect the Invisible Empire at all costs, maintaining reverence and respect to the hierarchical leadership. Initiation fees and money collected for Klan regalia were divided among the Klan hierarchy. The initiation fee alone at the peak of Klan membership made over \$40,000 for Tyler and Clarke on a good month. By 1921 there were approximately eighty-five thousand members, bringing in nearly three-quarters of a million dollars. [20]

The success of the organization and its expanding appeal turned the Ku Klux Klan into a political machine wielding great political power from 1922 until 1925. The Klan successfully elected three U.S. senators, eleven governors, and half of the 1924 Indiana state legislature. Its focus on Americanism, patriotism and Protestant morality appealed to thousands of mainstream Americans. It was suggested also that President Warren G. Harding had been inducted into the Klan. The Klan pushed anti-alien legislation, worked to demand more federal aid to public schools and sought to reform municipalities in order to rid them of vice and corruption. [21]

The Oregon Klan was no exception. The Klan was successful in electing the Klan-backed candidate for governor, Walter M. Pierce. They helped pass the Oregon Compulsory School Bill that required all children ages eight to fifteen to attend public school. All across the state the Klan was successful in electing local government officials. The Klan focused on anti-Catholic legislation, law enforcement and moral and political reform. Oregon’s stalled economy, changing cultural climate and a post-war surge in nativism, all led to the Klan’s rise in the state. Both the local and state leadership played a role in the rise and success of the Astoria Klan; therefore it is necessary to understand the leaders of the state Klan. The national Klan sent Kleagle, Luther I. Powell to investigate the possibility of establishing a Klan in Oregon early in 1921. Powell established the first Klan in the Southern town of Medford, appealing to the need for law enforcement against Jackson County bootleggers. Not long after other recruiters founded Klaverns in Eugene, Salem and Portland. [22]

Luther Powell worked along side Fred Gifford and Lem Dever, forming a triumvirate that impacted Oregon politically and socially during this period. The Exalted Cyclops and later named Grand Dragon of the Western Realm, Fred L Gifford, wielded great influence throughout the state. As described by a fellow Klansmen, Gifford, “was of medium height, compact, decisive—instinct with a knowledge of how men’s

emotions act and react in a crowd . . . his voice was powerful and resonant, with a quality that tingled on the emotions of men already stirred to a high pitch of fervor.” [23] Gifford was appointed Exalted Cyclops in 1921 and later named Grand Dragon of the Western Realm, including all states west of the Rocky Mountains. Before entering into Klan leadership, Gifford was a Field Superintendent of the Northwestern Electric Company where he earned two hundred and fifty dollars per month. [24] The Klan appealed to his desire for power and money. He was paid well as Exalted Cyclops earning a starting salary of six hundred dollars per month. Through Klan meetings and Klan led activities, Gifford led numerous scams leading to the financial exploitation of many Klansmen.

Gifford led Klan leaders across the state to participate in his devious business endeavors and dirty political schemes. Lem Dever was one such individual who began as a leader of the Astoria Klan and later became Publicity Director of the statewide Klan. Dever describes the influence Gifford wielded over him when he first entered the Klan in 1921: “I called upon Satan [Gifford] to come up and get me and put me at work upon his meanest job. He said I was on—‘go to it!’” [25] Whether working as the editor of the Western American, publicity director of the Oregon Klan or revealing the dirty secrets of the Oregon Klan, Lem Dever exemplifies the deceptive nature of Klan leadership. The fact that he went from special officer for the U.S. Government, to publicity writer for the Port of Astoria, to Klan leader and then to anti-Klan writer reveals his nature as an individual whose ethics depended upon the situation he was in. As publicity director of the Portland Klan and brilliant liar, Lem Dever was responsible for much of the religious and racial propaganda distributed by the Klan. Dever was born in Pulaski, Tennessee, the birthplace of the first Ku Klux Klan. His father and kinsmen were all members of the first order, thus sparking his interest in the second Klan. Dever graduated law school but chose to follow a career in journalism. He served in the armed forces during the First World War, performing special work with the American Committee on Public Information, in Russia and Siberia. [26] As a well-traveled individual, Dever considered himself as, “holding extremely liberal views regarding religion, despising all forms of bigotry,” but explained his interest of the Klan stating, “They caught me by adroit appeal to certain peculiar motives. It was the lure of good fellowship, the prospect of helping friends in politics, desire to oust certain good-for-naught public officials, desire fore civic improvement, progress and righteousness.” [27]

Dever served as the editor of the Western American, the official periodical of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan. He also served as Publicity Director to Fred Gifford, for two and a half years. After a falling out with Gifford in December of 1924, Dever abruptly turned against the Klan. He printed a pamphlet, “Masks off! Confessions of an Imperial Klansmen,” that exposed the lies and corruption existing within the secret order. The document is filled with anti-Klan rhetoric as well as an attempt to present himself as an honest individual, repenting for his mistakes. Although Dever confessed to many of the wrong doings himself and other Klan leaders committed, his “confessions,” are to be read carefully. Throughout the period, Dever excelled at

persuading individuals to take his point of view, whether for or against the Klan. Regardless, his "Confessions," are backed up with numerous newspaper reports, Klan pamphlets and other confessions given by Klansmen.

Dever led the Klan in Astoria when it came to the city late in the year of 1921. The Klan in Astoria inherited the organizational and hierarchical structures of the national Klan. The Klan's adaptability is shown in the way the Klan allied itself with the local protestant churches, the way it focused on prohibition and municipal reform. But the Klan also had to adapt to the large immigrant population in Astoria. As already shown, the Klan thrived most in homogenous towns in Indiana, Colorado, and small-towns in California, Georgia and Oregon. It succeeded in these areas largely due to nativist tendencies inherent to localities with low immigrant populations. The lack of a vocal Klan opposition in the press helped maintain the secrecy required by the organization. As stated before the Klan initially met success in Astoria appealing to the Native White population, however as will be shown, opposition to the Klan by local Catholics, Immigrants and the press succeeded in breaking the Klan's political power. The Klan inevitably failed to unite Astoria's diverse population and lost its influence in the community almost as quickly as it had obtained it.

IV. Industry, Vice and Social Change in Astoria during the 1920s

In 1920, Oregon's population was eighty-five percent native born and ninety percent protestant and was therefore typically fertile ground for the Klan. Astoria, located in Clatsop County, was an exception to the homogenous nature of the state. Astoria is located on the northwest tip of Oregon, where the Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean. In 1921, Astoria claimed the largest Salmon Cannery business in the world, exported lumber internationally, manufactured flour and maintained Cranberry canneries and a dairy industry. Boasting the largest fresh water seaport in the world, Astoria was focused on expanding the economic potential of their resources. The business community in Astoria saw huge potential for growth in Astoria and fought hard to expand their industries. The community did not seek to preserve a rural identity; on the contrary, many Astorians hoped the city would grow to become a booming center of international trade. The City directory of 1920-21 describes Astoria as, "One of the oldest white settlements on the Pacific Coast, it is a new town as it stands today, vital living and dynamic force that has brought wonderful docking and elevator facilities, new business places, homes and streets and an altitude of mind." [28] The call for growth and development was in response to a statewide slump in the economy and high taxes. Local Astoria businessmen sought to utilize Astoria's resources hoping to become a booming port town comparable to Seattle or San Francisco. They saw huge potential for growth and fought hard to expand their industries.

Dependence upon the port made Astoria an attractive location for many immigrants who sought employment in the canneries and the port of Astoria. Astoria's population in 1920 was 14,027. Representing twenty different countries, the

number of foreign-born whites was four thousand five hundred, while Indians, Chinese and Japanese claimed a small five hundred and thirty residents. There were only fourteen African Americans in the city in 1920. [29] According to the 1920 census, Astoria held the largest percentage of foreign-born citizens in the state. Out of a total population of 14,027, foreign-born citizens numbered 4,509 a comparably high 32 percent of the population: furthermore citizens with at least one parent of foreign birth composed over 60 percent of Astoria's population. [30]

Although Astorians depended upon the immigrant populations for labor, the foreign population remained largely separated in the community. The largest populations of immigrants were the Finnish; other significant populations included the Swedish, German and Canadians. The Swedish and the Norwegians resided in Uppertown and a small Chinese population collected in the Eastern part of town. [31] Astoria's Catholic population was well settled in the community. There were approximately 660 Catholics in the community, forming a moderate religious minority. [32] Many prominent businessmen in the community were Catholics; there were Catholic representatives on the school board and many participated in local politics. Mr. W. P. O'Brien was the Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce. [33] Defining his reverence to the community and the nation, the priest of the local Catholic Church, Mr. Malarkey explains that the Catholics in America, "are just as loyal to this land and who have proved in every war that we had that they are ready to fight and die for the good old U.S.A." [34] Prior to Klan invasion, local Catholics were accepted into the community.

The largest immigrant group was the Finnish population with a total of 2,743. The Finnish community lived in the west part of town, called Uniontown. They came to Astoria initially for the Salmon industry, traveling to Astoria during the springtime, then returned home during the off-season. The Finnish were divided into two major social groups. The "white Finns" or religious Finns had a more religious and conservative outlook where as the second group, the socialist Finns were accused of radicalism and being un-American by the church Finns. The Church Finns were mostly Republican. Although some Finnish were involved in local affairs, they remained largely separated in Uniontown prior to World War I. With the war came Anti-Alien legislation that halted the influx of new immigrant Finns. This trend allowed the Finns to mature within the community and begin associating themselves more with the local population. Especially second-generation immigrants, many partook in the emerging popular culture of the new decade.

The Finnish were engaged in some activity in state and local politics. They circulated a petition demanding improvements in the streetcar service in Astoria, and campaigned for a better police force of the town. They consistently supported better funding of education and local improvements, and supported the supported the West End Development League, an organization of Finnish businessmen dedicated to civic improvement in Uniontown. The Finns continued to be divided into White Finns and socialist Finns but despite conflict over political issues, the two sides united in the temperance movement. As stated by Paul Hummasti, historian of the

Finnish radicals in Astoria, "The immensity of the drinking problem among Finnish-Americans and their often violent behavior when drunk had made the movement one of the most popular endeavors among Finns throughout American, and in Astoria, Finns of all political persuasions were united in a common concern over the scores of taverns that lined Taylor Street." [35] Their willingness to participate in the moral, social and organizational reform united them with other Astorians who adopted much of the post war hysteria the nation was experiencing.

Astoria resembled much of the rest of the country undergoing social change in the post war world. Jazz concerts, pool halls, movie theatres and automobiles invaded the city. Many white Protestants in Astoria reacted similarly to others across the U.S. They began to fear and protect old institutions of Victorian morality. Newspaper articles focused on the vice and corruption existing within the city and the responsibility of community members to prevent the problems. The local newspapers reported daily on the liquor violations in the city. Vice conditions in the city were bad enough that federal commissioners were sent to Astoria to aid local law enforcement enforce prohibition laws. Commissioner Zimmerman reported sixty eight roaming houses in Astoria, that boys were able to get cigarettes with no trouble and that the local law enforcement was not doing a good enough job at catching violators. [36] Federal officers working in the city for just two months made twenty arrests, nineteen of which led to conviction. This he stated in contrast to the 26 arrests made by the local sheriff and four or five deputies over the course of the previous year. The mayor and sheriff in 1921 were accused of aiding a vice circle of bootleggers. Divorce rates in Clatsop County were some of the highest in the state. An editorial in one local newspaper quotes the Oregonian reporting, "The residents of Multnomah County, 'have grown fully as weary of a monstrous situation as Clatsop county citizens have grown weary of granting divorces to couples from Multnomah County.'" Clatsop county courts accepted divorce requests from residents outside the county and this upset many local community members. Prostitution was also a problem; one woman, charged with illegal activity by federal officials, alleged that her chief patron was a policeman in town. [37]

Many Finnish, Catholics and Protestants all agreed that vice in the city was out of hand and something had to be done about it. Community members found a voice in the establishment of a law enforcement league that addressed local concerns. Established in January of 1922, The Astoria Law Enforcement League sought to enforce prohibition laws by aiding local law enforcement in catching offenders. Although the league was not recognized publicly as a Klan organization, Fred Gifford acted as the secret financier and organizer of the National Law Enforcement League. [38] It is unknown whether any members realized Gifford's connection with the group but what is important is the League succeeded in uniting Catholics, Finnish, and local Protestants to improve the vice conditions in the city. The Morning Astorian actually reports that the Law Enforcement League was established through the Finnish churches. The League held its first meeting on January 31st at the local Methodist Church, with the intention of "securing a more rigid enforcement of prohibition laws, laws governing regulation of pool halls and soft drink

establishment.” [39] Present at the meeting were representatives from the Methodist Church, the Ku Klux Klan, local Catholics as well as Finnish representatives. The group conceded that vice conditions within the city were terrible and something had to be done to enforce the law.

At the meeting community members including, James Hope, a local Catholic, and U.S. commissioner Zimmerman, exposed what many believed to be a vice circle between the municipal government and local bootleggers, including the Mayor, Mr. Bremner and the local chief of Police, Mr. Carlson. Hope denounced the vice circle alleging that Carlson was, “a grafter and a crook and is reaping his monthly harvest; is getting rich and when he gets out of office, will pack his bag and go, with enough to live on comfortably for awhile.” Furthermore, he commented on the Mayor and that he allowed such action by Carlson, “Do you think that if Mayor Bremner had given orders to clean up the 68 roaming houses which Mr. Zimmerman has told you exists here that they would not have been cleaned up, roaming houses which can’t possibly exist except by illegal practices.” [40] Hope reportedly held the attention of the audience and received applause when he exposed the vice ring to which many desired action. This unity against local vice gave the Klan a start from which to build their campaign against political corruption and immorality within Astoria.

Although members of the community agreed that conditions in the city needed improving, the methods by which to attain reform varied dramatically. While Hope denounced the sheriff and the mayor, he also attacked the Klan, stating that it was responsible for the factional strife in the community. He argued that the elected officials are selected not based on performance but by prejudice. He defined the divisions within Astoria, “class against class, creed against creed and Uniontown against Uppertown and the center of town against both the other sections.” Hope argued that he was turned down for re-election on the school board because he was Catholic. Supporters of the Klan quickly denied Hope’s claims of prejudice in the city. As soon as Hope began his attack upon the Klan, Reverend Wire interrupted, “you can’t say anything against the Ku Klux Klan from the rostrum.” Adding to Wire’s statement, Lewis M. Kletzing, circulation manager of the Astoria Evening Budget, declared, “you know this church is anti-Catholic, I won’t allow you to speak as you have been talking.” [41]

V. A Power Struggle: The Klan and its Opposition

The conflict between Hope and the reverend shows how the Klan had been elevating religious and racial prejudice in the community since they came to Astoria. The relatively small populations of Catholics, Greeks, and Polish gave the Klan a group against which they could unite local white Protestants. Rather than attack local Finns, evidence shows that the Klan left them alone. [42] This seeming hypocrisy made sense because the Klan’s higher goal was political power and in Astoria where nearly fifty-percent of the population had familial ties to the Finnish, it is logical that the Klan would not attack the immigrant community. Also the majority of Finns were protestant. The Klan agitated religious and racial tensions by hosting anti-

Catholic speakers, distributing false evidence against Catholic organizations and highlighting the immorality of local immigrants. Astoria Klansmen were told by its leadership not to trust Catholics: "The Roman Catholic Church is alien in its government and heretical in its teachings, tyrannical and despotic in its practices, claiming both spiritual and temporal sovereignty over the souls of men through the exercise of political and ecclesiastical power by the pope." [43] Whether or not all Klansmen whole-heartedly embraced this characterization it served to divide local Protestants from Catholics.

One of the first reports of Klan activities in Astoria comes from the Morning Astorian. On January 26, 1922 a Klan representative sent from Portland, spoke at the municipal auditorium in Astoria to a large group of non-Catholic community members. At the gathering, a fiery cross was lit up on stage with a U.S. flag behind it. Twelve men dressed in full Klan regalia sat behind the speaker, a pendant hanging behind the speaker bore a symbolic design and the words duty and honor. The Klan representative used false evidence to reveal how the Catholic Church did not recognize marriages outside of those married by a priest. The representative also attacked the Knights of Columbus, a statewide Catholic fraternal organization. John Waters, a local Catholic, quoted in The Morning Astorian January 29, 1922, reacted vehemently against the Klan speaker. Waters stated that the Klan was antagonistic to the Catholics and Knights of Columbus because of their criticism of the public schools. Waters demonstrates how the Klan speaker spoke out against the Knights of Columbus while giving no evidence to back up his claims, "In speaking of the Knights of Columbus did you not pull the foxy trick of saying that you would quote from their statements and instead you referred without dates or places of publication." Waters' response to the Klan speaker reveals how Klan leaders used deception in order to elevate the prejudices of local Astorians.

Another speaker, Sister Lucretia, was sent to speak at the Star Theater on October 28, 1922. Under the name of Sister Lucretia, Miss Elizabeth Schoffen was a former nun who experienced a falling out working for St. Vincent's hospital in Portland. In spite of the Sisters of St. Vincent's hospital, Lucretia traveled around the state denouncing the Catholic Church. The Sisters and many other Catholics denied her charges. Dever admits in his "Confessions," the Klan used ex-nuns, ex-priests and ex-temple Mormons, to lecture for hate-making purposes, "under the encouragement and protection of the Klan." [44] The Klan leadership therefore knowingly deceived the Astoria public in order to unite many white Protestants against local Catholics.

Pamphlets circulated by the Klan made false claims against the Catholic Church and its members. Lem Dever admitted in his "Confessions," that a publication he distributed falsely quoted the oath of the Knights of Columbus. The false document portrayed the Knights of Columbus as a radical political machine seeking to establish papal domination over the United States. Dever printed the false oath on the front page of The Western American, the Oregon Klan's periodical. The Western American often reported on the violation of prohibition laws by immigrants. In an article from Astoria, Dever reported on a Greek man, William Hull, who allegedly

was skimping out on his rent payments for the barbershop he owned. The Western American published a story three weeks prior that reported the late payments and since then, “the Greek fled town.” The article commands its readers to do their duty and help catch the man in order to, “SHOW AMERICANS how to operate in America.” [45] Not only did Dever blame immigrants for social problems but he called on Klansmen to act defend their identity as Americans stating, “If you love the good old U.S.A help control the alien forces of evil.” Controlling these “alien forces,” according to Dever, was not racism but rather a love of country. [46] The leadership of the Klan worked hard to build racial and religious tension in order to use the Klan to act according to their wishes.

This anti-Catholic rhetoric led to the resignation of the Catholic president of the Astoria Chamber of commerce, the firing Finnish foremen from the Union Salmon Cannery as well as the removal of Catholics from the school board. The Astoria Daily Budget reported that the resignation of the President of the Chamber of Commerce, W.P. O’Brien, was a direct result of, “the agitation in the community aroused by the Ku Klux Klan,” and that, “he resents bitterly the prejudice being worked up by the Ku Klux Klan.” His resignation was voluntary but as he describes, “The lies and forgeries freely circulated in the name of Americanism by the Ku Klux Klan—pardon the malodor of the K. K. K. and the desecration of one of the finest words in the language by coupling it with it—will cause me at times to speak out plainly and truthfully and when I do so I do not want the Chamber of Commerce as a tail of prestige to go along with me.” [47] O’Brien led a crusade against the Klan, sending letters to the local newspapers; in one such article he addressed his concerns regarding the Klan’s intimidation tactics. In a letter written to the Astoria Daily Budget, he asks the Klansmen, “Is there any law of God or man that justifies any man . . . any Clan, masked or unmasked, covered by sheet or even mattress to demand that we discharge our foreman because he is a member of some Norwegian Church or our Mill Engineer because he is a Baptist and possesses the sword his father carried with Lincoln?” [48] O’Brien clearly revealed to the Astoria public how the Klan used its power to remove citizens from their employment simply because of their nationality or religious background.

The Astoria Daily Budget refused to stand for the intimidation of the Klan that led to O’Brien’s resignation. The editor Merle Chessman attacked the Klan, “Carry on Knights of the Ku Klux Klan! Carry on until you have made it impossible for citizens of foreign birth, of Jewish blood or of Catholic faith to serve their community or their country in any capacity, save as taxpayers.” The Klan did not take Chessman’s remarks lightly. In fact, in a memo sent to Chessman, Dever threatens, “I demand a retraction of your personal strictures. I’ll give you 48 hours to think it over and make the amends honorable, otherwise you and I are going to tangle.” Dever and Chessman maintained an ongoing battle throughout the period. Although Chessman disagreed with Dever, he still maintained that many of the Klansmen, other than Dever, were good citizens and would still be an effective force in ridding the city of vice.

The Klan tried to intimidate the Daily Budget into publishing only favorable material in regards to the Klan. A committee of Klansmen sent a letter to the newspaper demanding that Chessman be replaced. The letter, sent by the Exalted Cyclops, E.P. Hawkins demanded that, "some person other than Mr. Chessman, whose attitude is more liberal towards said organization [Ku Klux Klan] than his, edit the Evening Budget in the future." Hawkins also realized that the editorials of the paper, "are not only one of the most potent factors in molding public sentiment of a community, but that they express the very heartthrobs of the paper itself and are read more generally, perhaps, than any other part of a small daily." The Klan offered to buy the Daily Budget at the lowest cash price if this demand was not met. [49] The Budget refused to stand for such intimidation. Unlike other sources of media in Oregon, the Budget served a diverse community that would support the paper regardless of its treatment of the Klan. Chessman writes, "The Klan is entitled to have its news published in any newspaper, the same as any lodge, group or organization," however Chessman writes, "Editorially, its opinions are it[s] own, to be agreed with or disapproved as its readers see fit, but as long as they are honestly held and honestly expressed, no person has a right to ask that they be surrendered." [50] The Budget's refusal to comply with the demands of the Klan made the goals of Klan leaders more difficult to attain.

With his extensive background in journalism, Lem Dever had to have been behind the offer to buy the paper. Dever was not opposed to resorting to such tactics to pursue personal interest. In fact in a later editorial Chessman accused Dever of coming to Astoria in order to promote his personal interests by publishing a local paper, and the Klan provided him with a vehicle for the opportunity. Chessman wrote, "He is the man who came here not so many months ago professing his Catholic affiliations and explosively denouncing the Ku Klux Klan, which organization he later joined when there seemed to be a field for a Klan paper." [51] Chessman's alleged accusations began to unveil the deception and self interest practiced by the Klan leaders, however his allegations would not effectively upset the Klan until later on in the year.

Attacks by Catholics and local press came at an early point in Klan control. At this point many community members saw the Klan not as a hindrance but as a good tool to reform the city. The Klan hid its malicious activities behind a mask of benevolence. The fact that Hope did not receive much support at the law enforcement league meeting when he spoke against the Klan is not surprising. The Klan solidified its benevolent appearance and willingness to reform by associating themselves with local churches and charity organizations. It made its first public appearance in Astoria when Klansmen entered the Methodist church, dressed in full regalia, marched down the aisle and presented Rev. Wire with an envelope containing twenty dollars and a letter signed by Pacific Klan no. 2 of Astoria. The letter was written on KKK stationery that told the reverend to make the donation known to the public and to continue its cooperation and support in defending 100 percent pure Americanism. The entrance of the Klansmen was made to seem mysterious, benevolent and exciting. The Klan made sure the grand entrance would

impress the reverend and the congregation. The Klan's appearance was successful, gaining them the support of Reverend Wire who stated in the Morning Astorian, "I can merely say that I have a deep feeling in my heart for the Klansmen . . . and that I am proud that men of the type these have proven themselves to be are in an organized effort to perpetuate true Americanism and the higher ideals. Their aim is indeed a modern crusade of righteousness and mercy, and my praise of that aim is unstinted." [52] This act gave the Klan a benevolent appearance to many congregants and therefore reinforced their role as moral reformers.

In the same way, Klansmen walked into a meeting of the local Women's Christian Temperance Union and gave the president a donation of eighty dollars. Five Klansmen entered the basement of the church dressed in robes, presented the envelope and left silently. The Klan donated the money in order to support the temperance union's effort to sponsor the construction of a children's home at Corvallis. A note inside the envelope read:

Dear Mrs. Smith: We are taking this opportunity of tendering you a slight token in the form of an amount of \$80, which kindly will add to the fund now being raised by your wonderful organization to purchase a children's farm home in the state. As citizens of Astoria and as God fearing law-abiding respectful Americans we ask that you and the members of your organization be assured that we may be relied upon at all times to support to the limit the great work you are now entering into. With our sincerest best wishes for your success, we are,
"Most respectfully yours,
"PACIFIC KLAN No. 2.
"Knights of the Ku Klux Klan." [53]

Their donations to both the Christian church and to the local W.C.T.U. appealed to many Astorians who believed moral and social reform was necessary in the city. The leadership's timing was impeccable as the donations were given just a few weeks prior to the primary elections where the Klan hoped to dominate.

The Klan continued its involvement in local reform throughout the early months of 1922. Members returned to the Methodist church on several occasions, once making a donation on behalf of a local community member who was sick and unable to care for himself. The Klan's visibility in the community appealed to many individuals and Klan membership continued to rise. By presenting itself as a benevolent organization and making connections with the local Protestant churches, the Klan gained the support of hundreds of local Astorians. On April 6 the Morning Astorian happily reported that as the weather improved the Klan would hold a meeting outdoors for all to see. The visibility of the Klan and its effectiveness in supporting local charities led membership to surge. On July 1st visiting Klansmen, R. J. Fulton of Portland and J. L. McKinney of Walla Walla helped the Astoria Klan initiate 250 new members. [54] As the Klan continued to grow, its power in the community did as well.

The Klan had achieved a measure of legitimacy in the community and therefore began to involve itself in Astoria politics and law enforcement. Believing that local law enforcement was not doing their job, the Klan led an effort to enforce prohibition laws, leading to the Whistle Inn incident and the recall of the local sheriff. On June 17, 1922 the Klan sent both local newspapers and the Sheriff a threatening letter, declaring that unless the Sheriff took action against the owners of the Whistle Inn, the Klan would take drastic action. The Whistle Inn, located just outside of Astoria, was believed to be the location of a bootlegging operation run by its proprietor, Dr. C. C. Rosenberg. Two weeks prior to the Klan's threatening letter, two fatal accidents occurred in which the individuals involved were intoxicated after leaving the Whistle Inn. Therefore, community members demanded that the Sheriff catch the offenders and clear the Inn of any liquor. The Klan's letter addressed to Sheriff Ole Nelson threatened:

If you do not take immediate steps to clean out the so-called Whistle Inn . . . this organization will take prompt and drastic action, not only to clean out some of these violators of the law, but also to clean out some of the county offices that are, in a measure, responsible by their passive attitude and indifference towards the performance of their sworn duty for the terrible conditions that exist in Clatsop county at the present time. [55]

The Klansmen made good on their threat and on the night of June 19 an armed group of fifty men entered into the tavern only to be met by local law enforcement. The proprietors of the building, who were subsequently arrested for violating prohibition laws, called the Sheriff for protection for fear of a confrontation with the Klansmen. The Sheriff stated that had he not been present, bloodshed would have occurred. This incident although it did not result in violence reveals the Klan's impact upon community members, convincing them to take the law into their own hands. Not only did they follow through on their threat to take action against the inn, but also after the incident the Klan successfully recalled Sheriff Nelson. The Klan petitioned for a recall election to be held in August, in which the community voted to recall Sheriff Nelson and elect Harley J. Slusher. Lem Dever boasts in his "Confessions," the Klan's ability to elect, "a bully good sheriff." [56] This incident although it did not result in violence, reveals the Klan's impact upon community members, convincing them to support Klan vigilante enforcement of prohibition laws.

Although the Klan convinced the community to recall the sheriff, its methods did not go without opposition. O'Brien led a crusade against the Klan and the lies it told regarding the Catholic Church. As he stated in his resignation, he wanted to speak freely against the Klan without hurting the chamber. Obviously he did not fear the Klan but rather sought to destroy it. Responding to the Klan's threat against the Sheriff during the incident at the Whistle Inn, O'Brien states that in "that practically anonymous letter [sent from Klan officials to the local papers and the sheriff] you manifest at least an advertising desire to respect the laws of this county and of our state." [57] He points out the contradiction in Klan actions by revealing how

although they enforce some laws, at the same time they opposed the very basic rights given to all Americans by the constitution.

Despite O'Brien's crusade against the Klan, the organization maintained support from the community as evidenced by the recall of the sheriff and the support in the coming elections. In the 1922 elections the Klan ticket won the majority of votes, electing a mayor and four city commissioners. This success, however, came at a high price. Although the Klan ticket was elected by a majority of Astorians, its ability to maintain control in the community failed after the new government took office. The coming elections revealed the darker truth behind the Klan's benevolent mask. This is attributed to the efforts of those who opposed the Klan, as well as the inability to unite city leaders and foreign community members under Klan leadership.

Although it was not a presidential election year, the elections stirred tremendous controversy within Oregon and Astoria. Lem Dever played a prominent role in wielding the Klan into an effective political machine by stirring up controversy during the campaign. In his "Confessions," Dever describes his efforts: "Intent upon my fantastic dream of ultimate good for the people of Astoria, foolishly imagining that dynamic leadership could change the wrongs in precept and practice, I speedily welded the Astoria Klan into an effective political weapon." Dever was not the only leader involved in the political dirty work. In his "Confessions" he explains that he acted as chairman of committee of individuals that worked to elect the Klan nominees in the controversial elections of 1922. Dever and five other unnamed individuals effectively wielded the Klan of Astoria into a political machine and vigilante organization. [58]

The Klan was actively involved in supporting candidates that supported Klan ideals of one hundred percent Americanism. This ideal included the support of a state-wide initiative, the Compulsory Education Bill, which proposed to outlaw all parochial schools, requiring all children between age eight and sixteen to attend public school. The Astoria Klan supported the Education Bill as well as Walter Pierce, the Democratic candidate for Governor. Pierce supported the Compulsory School Bill as well as the Ku Klux Klan. [59] In addition to voting on controversial state measures, Astorians voted on important local issues in 1922. In the primary elections the city voted and passed a new city charter that changed the municipal government to operate under a managerial system of governance. Under the new charter citizens elected a common council that acted as a legislative body. The common council was composed of the mayor and four commissioners. This council appointed a city manager who was in charge of appointing all other city officials. In this system of government the mayor was but one voice on the council and therefore held no more power than any other councilman. Aware of the new structure of government, Klan leaders sought to elect, "a spineless mayor and commissioners," [60] who would concede to the demands of Klan leaders as they saw fit. The Klan candidate for mayor, O.B. Setters declared in his campaign statement, "as mayor I will serve devotedly the welfare of the whole people, with equal and exact justice to

all, special privilege to none.” [61] His misleading statements enabled him to gain the favor of many Astorians.

As the year progressed, the fight continued between Klansmen and their opposition. The elections are most revealing as to how Klan opposition evolved and grew in response to the disagreeable tactics employed by the Klan leadership. Initially, many community members viewed the Klan as a political tool that could elect a municipal government that would clean up the city. A series of letters between Merle Chessman, the editor of the Astoria Daily Budget and the owner of the paper, Merle Aldrich, reveals how the Budget and its associates tried to work with the Klan in order to rid the city of vice. In a letter addressed to Exalted Cyclops, Ernest Hawkins, Aldrich describes his concern over the current municipal government and its involvement in an alleged vice ring. Aldrich states that the mayor realized, “the safety of the vice ring will be in jeopardy at the coming city election.” [62] It was this corruption within the municipal government that led many prominent businessmen to support the Klan ticket entrusting the Klan to elect commissioners and a mayor that would rid the city of the vice ring. In a letter addressed to Chessman, Aldrich recognized the potential power of the Klan in the coming elections. Aldrich wrote to Chessman that in order to down the vice ring, the right group of commissioners should be elected in the fall. He saw the Klan as a vital resource to ensure that happened. Aldrich writes, “If they are not guided into support of good men there is big danger someone else will try to head them into support of someone else.” [63] He believed the Klan members would prefer a clean, strong ticket. Chessman’s response to Aldrich reveals his efforts at working with the Klan to elect the right commissioners; Chessman responded that he had been working to get the Klan to endorse a proper candidate for mayor. “Skallerud and Hawkins are both strong for Higgins,” he pointed out, “Hawkins pledged me that he would do everything possible to keep the endorsement from going to [a different candidate].” [64]

While Aldrich, Chessman and Hawkins supported Higgins as the candidate for Mayor, Dever’s faction supported O.B. Setters. The nominations of the Klan ticket produced great controversy between the two groups. In an article published on August 30, 1922, Chessman reported that the committee led by Dever, succeeded in nominating O.B. Setters without the approval of all Klansmen. Chessman wrote, quoted by Dever that, “there was a great deal of wire-pulling’ prior to the nominations.” Chessman believed that the Klan was divided into a popular wing and a more radical wing led by Dever. The radical wing, argued Chessman, controlled the nominations of Klan nominees. Dever rejected those claims stating that hundreds of men would testify to the contrary.

The successful nomination of O.B. Setters marked the point at which the staff of the Astoria Daily Budget, realized the Klan leaders were not working to rid the city of vice but rather elected the officials they hoped would work with the Klan and its business interests. Thus, after August, Klan opposition grew fierce with editorials printed almost daily against the Klan. Chessman attacked Dever in a long front-page

editorial, exposing all of the lies told by Dever and his radical wing. Chessman wrote:

Astoria has in its midst one who, perhaps more than any one person is responsible for the bitterness, the strife, and the factional turmoil which is so apparent . . . He is the man who came here not so many months ago professing his Catholic affiliations and explosively denouncing the Ku Klux Klan, which organization he later joined when there seemed to be a field for a Klan paper. Since then he has been rabid and so radical in his championship of all things pertaining to that organization and so bitterly hostile to everything opposed to it that he has disgusted many of its own members. [65]

Chessman charged that Dever's actions led members of the Klan who believed in the Klan's goals of moral reform, to back away from the organization.

The Klan reacted to opposition from Chessman and others by releasing accusations against the other candidates. They circulated pamphlets and postcards, emphasizing the flaws of the other candidates while emphasizing that their candidates stood for moral reform and 100 percent Americanism. Secretly the Klan published political dirt on the other candidates. Grand Dragon Fred Gifford helped Klan leaders in order to find weakness in candidates. Dever described Gifford's methods of digging up the dirt, "Among the records of the Dragon's office were a voluminous mass of reports of the life history of prominent men, women and firms in Portland and Oregon. These typewritten documents told in detail many alleged dark and sinister secrets and revealed many alleged family skeletons." [66] On November 7th, election day, *The Morning Astorian*, described the scene: "The campaign has been bitter by an amazing amount of 'mudslinging' . . . It is generally conceded that the entire campaign is a most marked example of the political freakishness which seems prevalent in this state." The article further defines the bitterness of the election as "fanned by the flames of political and religious discord." [67] Thus the Klan leadership successfully exploited the opposition in order to deceive the public and elect the Klan backed candidates.

Chessman's editorial the day before the election, however, did not succeed in preventing the Klan ticket from being elected. The power and corruption of the Dever led faction triumphed in the elections. The Klan backed candidates and mayor won in the Astoria elections. The front page of the *Morning Astorian* carried the headline, "KU KLUX KLAN SWEEPS CITY," Pierce Wins." The Klan did not win by a stunning majority but it is revealing that the Klan played a prominent role in shaping public opinion. The passing of the compulsory school initiative as well as the election of Pierce reveal that a majority of the voting public in Astoria believed in the individuals and issues supported by the Klan. Setters won by 437 votes winning thirteen of the seventeen precincts, defeating B. F. Stone. The race for governor was also close within the city. Walter Pierce, the Klan backed candidate, won by a margin of 160 votes. The School bill was passed with a good majority, 2075 for and 1626 against. [68]

VI. The Decline of the Astoria Klan

Although the Klan succeeded at the elections, Chessman and the Catholic opponents to the Klan exposed many ills within the Klan, especially those activities led by Dever. In an attempt to repair his own as well as Klan reputation after the elections, Dever wrote a letter to the *Morning Astorian*, apologizing to the candidate Mr. Gorman. Dever wrote, "Dear Mr. Gorman, Personally, and as a spokesman for many others, I wish to congratulate you—a good loser—and for the fine spirit of American sportsmanship which characterized your campaign for mayor throughout." He continued by admitting the Klan's dirty tactics and apologizing for them, "It was far from our intention to charge or to insinuate that your election as mayor would develop a return of 'swill town' conditions. For we knew that your civic ideals are as high as those of any man." [69] Dever's vast editorials and pamphlets spread prior to the election were obviously intended to hurt the campaign of Gorman, however, for his own interest and the Klan's Dever deemed it necessary to make a formal apology in the local paper.

After November the Klan and its political leadership began to take over city affairs. However, the Klan never realized its full potential to transform the city as many Klansmen hoped. Dever left the Astoria Klan to work as the Publicity Director for Fred Gifford. Although he frequently published articles in the *Western American* about the Astoria Klan, Dever's absence contributed to divisions within the newly elected Klan government. Also contributing to the Klan's political decline was the election and administration of a city manager form of government. The new city charter operated under a city manager form of government. The city manager was appointed to the position and was responsible for appointing city offices such as the Chief of Police, city engineers and other city officials. The manager held more power than the mayor who had as much say as the commissioners. O.A. Kratz was selected to lead the city in its new form of government due to his experience as city manager in La Grande, Oregon. The Klan commissioners and mayor selected Kratz based not only on his experience but also upon the fact that he was a fellow Klansmen. [70] Believing Kratz would work with the commissioners and the mayor, they appointed him to lead their municipal government. However, Kratz did not maintain the subservience and loyalty as they had expected.

A devastating fire struck the Astoria business community in December of 1922. The fire destroyed the downtown area, causing many businesses to lose their building and residents to lose their homes. The reconstruction provided a great challenge for the newly elected government that took effect at the beginning of January. The mayor and commissioners began the reconstruction efforts by helping Kratz appoint officials they believed would serve the city best. In a letter addressed to the public of Astoria dated March 17, 1923, Kratz relayed his account of the appointing process and his dissatisfaction with Mayor Setters, Lem Dever and Fred Gifford. Kratz remarked, "When I arrived the appointments had already been agreed upon. I did not think this improper for the reason that I was a stranger here and had not the

knowledge the commissioners had." He defines his reservations with their choices, "I also made the mental reservation that I could discharge them at any time they proved unsatisfactory." [71]

In the beginning Kratz appointed those officials that the mayor recommended. However, once the reconstruction process was underway and Kratz began to feel more comfortable in his position he decided to replace a few of the appointed officials. Kratz fired Olaf Anderson Jr., the son of Olaf Anderson, local attorney and Klansmen because as Kratz put it, "it was obvious to me that he was not taking orders from his superior but from his father's office." The Klan assumed a more intimidating roll when Kratz began to act contrary to Klan wishes. Lem Dever published a threat in the Western American threatening Setters and the Astoria municipal government, "with all kinds of editorial exposure," [72] if he did not fire the city engineer, Mr. Rogers. Dever later recanted his demand when Fred Gifford suddenly changed his mind. Kratz revealed how the Portland Klan involved itself in local Astoria affairs: "Walter Smith, friend of Dever and of Fred Gifford, the grand dragon of the K.K.K came to my home with a command from Dever for me not to do anything about firing Rogers until I heard from him and for me to come to Portland the following morning to meet with Dever." [73] Kratz refused to comply.

His refusal led the Klansmen in the community to start a petition for his removal. Dever published editorials against Kratz and the city commissioners who supported his decisions. He wrote letters to both local papers accusing him of working for the best interest of his personal business connections. In a letter addressed to the editor of the Evening Budget, Dever charged that, "All proofs tended to show that Mr. Kratz was striving to get complete power for himself; to remove every strong man who might interfere with his plans, and to use the Western American, and the Klan influence to reinforce his position." [74] Dever's seemed to be describing himself. As editor of the Western American, Dever continually used the magazine for his and Gifford's benefit. One Astoria newspaper reported that a Klan leader from Portland came to Astoria with, "a large number of copies of the Western American the Klan paper, the issue being devoted almost exclusively to the Astoria situation. These papers have been distributed promiscuously about the city." [75] The Portland Klan was actively involved in the petition for Kratz removal. But the Astoria public did not support the petition. Kratz led the city through the reconstruction period and economic and social stability was slowly returning to the city.

The Klan's recall petition was unsuccessful. The community had shown great resilience after the fire under the city manager form of government and the Klan could not prove to the public that the manager was involved in the scandals he was accused of. Even the commissioners who were elected as part of the Klan ticket supported Kratz's decisions. Their opposition to Setters, Dever and Gifford is shown in the editorial printed by Dever in the Western American, who angrily asks the reader, "What do you think of a man who proves himself so low and base, so lost to all sense of honor and every sentiment of far play as to turn on his friends immediately after they elect him to office and give his patronage support to his chief opponent?" Dever was referring to the way the commissioners turned against the

leadership of the Klan and supported Kratz. Dever's cries for support were to no avail and the Klan lost its credibility and support as the community continued to grow and improve. The community demonstrated that it was ready to move on and rid itself of the factional strife that the Klan created. Klan opposition during the elections had succeeded in defaming the Klan leadership. From this point the Klan's involvement in local politics subsided. The opposition convinced the public and city officials that the Klan did not stand for unity and moral purity but rather factional strife and disunity.

Klan opposition succeeded in defaming the Klan and its newly elected officials. When the new government took office, and Kratz stepped in as city manager, only Setters maintained his support of the Klan. Although Kratz had been a Klansman in La Grande, his affiliation with the organization seemed to halt upon moving to Astoria. The commissioners, who were elected with the help of the Klan, backed away from the Dever, Setters and Gifford. This reveals that the Klan political career had ended. The opposition convinced the public and city officials that the Klan did not stand for unity and moral purity but rather factional strife and disunity. When Dever left the Klan in 1924 and subsequently published his "Confessions," he uncovered the "truth about the Invisible Empire." His publication and subsequent disarray of the State Klan led to the decline of Klaverns all over the state. Gifford's deceptive tactics were exposed through Dever's "Confessions," and so the structure that held the Klan together previously gradually disintegrated. [76]

VII. The Remains of the Invisible Empire in Astoria

The Klan remained in Astoria until 1926, however, its involvement in political affairs stopped after the tumultuous elections of 1922. Setters ran for reelection in the elections of 1926 but his candidacy proved unsuccessful. An editorial in the Astoria Daily Budget reflected on the factional strife Setters had created and shows how the Klan failed to serve the needs of Astorians. "Never did a mayor enter office with such an opportunity for noble service as did Mr. Setters on January 1, 1923 . . . but he failed utterly, miserably to rise to his responsibilities and opportunity." The article continued revealing the factionalism and turmoil created by Setters and his association with Gifford and the state Klan, "surrounded by an atmosphere of scandal . . . plotting, plotting, plotting to get rid of a city manager who refused to stand for the game he was trying to play, discredited before the very citizens who gave him his margin of victory and who were now ready to support a recall movement against him." [77] The alliance of Dever, Gifford and Setters failed to maintain power in Astoria and as this organization broke apart the Klan backed out of Astoria politics.

After Dever and Gifford lost their credibility and influence within the Astoria Klan, the former members maintained ties to the organization. They believed in Klan ideals and were united by the fraternalism and ritual of the secret order. The Klan remained in Astoria beyond the years of 1922, however without Dever and Gifford, the Klan in Astoria left politics and focused on moral reform and patriotic unity. A

document found in the Astoria Public Library seems to be a new constitution written by Astoria Klansmen who wished to sever their relationship with the national Klan. In the document they described the way the national Klan did not serve the interests of the local Klan. They argue that the Klan was hypocritical in its operations because while it defended the principles of democracy, the organization itself was despotic. The Klansmen complain, "the history of the present regime has been a history of usurpation, incompetency, tyranny, waste, espionage and coercion, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute autocracy over the membership of the local Klans." Therefore the Klansmen proposed a new form of the Ku Klux Klan. In the new constitution they proposed that the new Klan comply with democratic ideas. These ideals included: replacing the military character of the Klan with democratic principles, representation by local unites, abolishment of the Imperial Klan, the granting of power to no one to involve themselves in local Klan issues and the reduction of Klan fees and dues to one dollar. These new principles as outlined above reflect the troubles experienced by the members of the Astoria Klan. Many Klansmen wanted to be a part of the fraternal order and defend principles of democracy, however, the structure and hierarchy of the organization led the state and national leadership to assume too much power and work against the needs of individual communities. [78]

VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, by conducting a local case study of Astoria this thesis has demonstrated how the Klan adapted to the local issues of Astoria and became the foremost leader in solving those issues. The Klan enforced prohibition laws, donated money to local churches and charity organizations, and elected a sheriff and municipal government that would lead a campaign to clean up the city. The Astoria Klan experience reveals how community members initially saw the Klan as a useful tool aiding local law enforcement and charity organizations in the moral reform of the city. Despite opposition from local Catholics and other community members, the political power of Fred Gifford and the deceptive tactics of Lem Dever convinced many Astorians that the Klan stood for moral and social reform. Although they succeeded for a while, the local opposition revealed the Astoria Klan's deception and radical component leading them to fail to meet their political goals. As opposition to the Klan grew more vocal, many individuals defected from the organization so as not to be associated with religious prejudice and factional strife. Therefore, Klan membership was at its peak when the public perceived it as a defender of Victorian morality and social reform. It could only last as long as problems remained to reform. The Klan could not and did not serve the needs of the whole community and therefore the Klan inevitably disappeared from Astoria politics.

Endnotes:

[1] "Carry on Ku Klux Klan." Astoria Evening Budget. 30 January 1922, 4.

[2] "Ku Klux Klan on Visit to the Church." The Morning Astorian. 14 March 1922, 3.

[3] MacLean uses the term reactionary populism to define the Klan political movement. Reactionary populism combined the anti-elitism characteristics of populism with the commitment to enforce the subordination of whole groups of people. MacLean, Nancy. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), xiii.

[4] MacLean, 159.

[5] *Ibid*, 158.

[6] *Ibid*, xv.

[7] Coben, Stanley. *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change 1920-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

[8] Coben, 137.

[9] *Ibid*, 137.

[10] *Ibid*, 138.

[11] Lay, Shawn. *The Invisible Empire of the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 7.

[12] Saalfeld, Lawrence. *Forces of Prejudice in Oregon 1920-1925*. (Portland, Oregon: University of Portland Press, 1984), 50-51.

[13] See Toy, Eckard. "blank blank" in Lay, Shawn. *The Invisible Empire of the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992) and David Horowitz, "blank blank" in Lay, Shawn. *The Invisible Empire of the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan*.

[14] For a narrative of the Klan see Chalmers, David M. *Hooded Americanism: The history of the Ku Klux Klan*. 3rd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 28-30. See also Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1925-1926*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). Chalmer's and Jackson's books are broad studies of the Klan nationwide and provide a narrative of the Klan's rise and its involvement in politics nationwide.

[15] *The Birth of a Nation*, prod. and dir. D.W. Griffith, Part I. Video Yesteryear Recording, 1984. Videocassette.

[16] See Stanley Coben *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America*. Coben argues that these groups were weakening the structures of Victorianism during the decade of the 1920s. His analysis concludes

with a chapter on the Ku Klux Klan, presenting them as the guardians of Victorian morality. His conclusions regarding the social climate of the period are helpful in understanding the context from which the Klan came to power.

[17] Coben, 112-135

[18] Chalmers, 30-32

[19] Maintaining its vows of secrecy, the Klan was careful to exclude Klan names or Klan language in any published document. Here the I*W* refers to the Imperial Wizard, Joseph Simmons, the National Klan leader. "Klan Oath of Allegiance." Ku Klux Klan File. Oregon Historical Society Library, MSS 22.

[20] Coben, 140. Chalmers, 33-34.

[21] Horowitz, David, *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 4

[22] For a narrative history of the Klan in Oregon see, Lawrence Saalfeld, *Forces of Prejudice in Oregon, 1920-1925*.

[23] Titus, Ben. Title Unknown. 2 November 1922. Ku Klux Klan Records. Oregon Historical Society Library, MSS 22.

[24] Dever, Lem. "Confessions of an Imperial Klansman." 2nd edition. (Portland, 1925), 38.

[25] *Ibid*, 28.

[26] "Port of Astoria: Who's who and what's what in Clatsop County Oregon, U.S.A. 1922." (Astoria: A.S. Gregory and Lem A. Dever, 1922), 40.

[27] Dever, Lem. "Confessions," 36.

[28] "Astoria City Directory, 1920-21" vol. X. (Astoria: R.L. Polk and Co.) Clatsop County Historical Society, Astoria, Oregon.

[29] 14th Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920, Population 3.

[30] Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, 3.

[31] "Remembering Uniontown," prod. and dir. Lawrence Johnson. Written by Paul Hummasti. 27 min. Lawrence Johnson Productions, 198-. Videocassette.

[32] 14th Census of the United States: Taken in the Year 1920. Census of Religious Bodies I. 664-665

[33] The City and Port of Astoria Yearbook. 1923. 45. Clatsop County Historical Society, Astoria, Oregon.

[34] "By Father Waters: His Reply to Statements by Speaker of Ku Klux Klan Organization." The Morning Astorian. 29 January 1922, 6.

[35] Hummasti, Paul George. Finnish Radicals in Astoria, Oregon, 1904-1940: A Study of Immigrant Socialism. (New York: Arno Press, 1979)

[36] Roaming houses are understood to be local taverns or businesses where illegal activity took place such as the sale of liquor, cigarettes to minors, and prostitution. "City's Official Are Accused," The Astoria Evening Budget. 1 February 1922, 1.

[37] "SQUABBLE AT PURITY MEET: Law Enforcement League Meeting Has Near Riot Over Ku Klux Klan." The Morning Astorian, 1 February 1922, 1.

[38] In his Confession, Dever reveals that the Law Enforcement League was actually a Klan organization. Dever sates that Kletzing was and honest man who was duped by Gifford. "His business is to catch the bootleggers. The salesmanship lure of this fantastic scheme lies in a moving picture, "When Might Meets Right," portraying the evils of liquor." Asking the director of the film if Gifford was involved behind the scheme, Dever claims that Hall replied, "'Oh, yes, Mr. Gifford is behind it! We get our detectives from the International Detective Agency and Mr. Gifford attends to the finances.'" Dever, "Confessions." 36.

[39] "Law Enforcing Will be Goal of League to Organize Jan. 31." The Morning Astorian, 28 January 1922, 1.

[40] "City's Officials Are Accused; Carlson is Called Crook; Topic of KKK Starts Row." The Astoria Evening Budget. Feb. 1 1922. 1, 5.

[41] "Squabble at Purity Meet" The Morning Astorian, 1 Feb 1922, 1.

[42] 40 In an article written by the editor of the Astoria Daily Budget, reporter Merle Chessman states that the Klan even published some of its election propoganda in the Finnish language in order to gain the Finnish votes. See "Editorial," Astoria Evening Budget. 6 November 1922, 1.

[43] The Western American 28 December 1922. Vol. 1 no 21, 3

[44] Dever, Lem. "Confessions." 15.

[45] The Western American. 30 November 1922. vol. 1 no. 17, 5

[46] Ibid. 7.

- [47] "Chamber's President Resigns," *The Morning Astorian*. 29 January 1922, 1
- [48] "Letter On Klan," *The Morning Astorian*, 20 June 1922, 4.
- [49] Letter from E.P. Hawkins to Mr. E. B. Aldrich. 30 June 1922. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10.
- [50] Letter from Merle Chessman to Mr. E.P. Hawkins. 28 June 1922. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10.
- [51] "Editorial," *Astoria Evening Budget*. 6 November 1922, 1.
- [52] "Ku Klux Klan on Visit to the Church." *The Morning Astorian*. 14 March 1922, 3.
- [53] "Masked Klansmen Give to W.C.T.U." *The Morning Astorian*. 5 May 1922, 2.
- [54] *The Morning Astorian* 2 July 1922, 3.
- [55] "Klan Letter is Answered," *The Morning Astorian*. June 18, 1922: 1, 5.
- [56] Dever, "Confessions," 35.
- [57] O'Brien, W.P. "Letter on Klan." *The Morning Astorian*, 20 June 1922, 5.
- [58] Dever, "Confessions," 34-37.
- [59] David Horowitz's research of the La Grande Ku Klux Klan minutes, reveals that Pierce visited the La Grande Klan on November 21, 1922. After he was elected, Pierce appointed three Klansmen to state political office. See David Horowitz, "Order Solidarity, and Vigilance. The Ku Klux Klan in La Grande, Oregon," in *The Invisible Empire in the West*, ed. Shaw Lay (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 185-215.
- [60] Dever, "Confessions," 32.
- [61] "Setters to Seek Mayor's Post: Ku Klux Klan Puts Full Ticket Into Field." *Astoria Evening Budget*, 28 Sept 1922, 1.
- [62] Ed Aldrich to Mr. Ernest Hawkins. 3 July 1922. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10.
- [63] Ed Aldrich to Merle Chessman and Lee Drake. 7 July 1922. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10
- [64] Merle Chessman to Ed Aldrich. 9 July 1922. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10.

- [65] "Editorial," Astoria Evening Budget. 6 November 1922, 1.
- [66] Dever, "Confessions,". 35.
- [67] The Morning Astorian, 7 November 1922. 1.
- [68] "Ku Klux Klan Sweeps the City," The Morning Astorian 8 November 1922, 1.
- [69] "A Post Election Letter," The Morning Astorian. 9 November 1922, 5
- [70] Horowitz, David. Inside the Klavern. 32.
- [71] Letter from O.A. Kratz to the Public of Astoria. 17 March 17 1923. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10.
- [72] Dever, Lem. Western American.
- [73] O.A. Kratz to the Public of Astoria. 17 March 1923. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10.
- [74] Lem Dever to the Editor of the Astoria Daily Budget. 23 March 1922. Astoria Public Library, MSS K10.
- [75] "Klan Stand in City Row Is Live Issue To Members." Astoria Evening Budget 22 March 1923.
- [76] For further information on Klan decline in Oregon see Lawrence Saalfeld. Forces of Prejudice in Oregon. 56-60.
- [77] "Ten Brook or Setter." Astoria Evening Budget. 28 October 1926. 4.
- [78] Klan statement of withdrawal from the National Klan. Astoria Public Library, MSS, K10. This document does not have a sign of reference. I am assuming it is from the Astoria Klan because of the language and the script used to type the document matches other documents from the Astoria Klan. It was found in a folder containing various Klan literature. There is no date on the document but there is a date reference which proves the document was written after March of 1923.

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