NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

The Ku Klux Klan in Small-Town America:

Belvidere, Illinois in 1923-1925

A Thesis Submitted to the University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With University Honors

Department of

History

By

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May 2011
ABSTRACT:

Using primary sources which include city newspapers and ordinances, the Ku Klux Klan is examined in the small town of Belvidere, Illinois. The research indicated that the Klan was a prominent force in Belvidere as there were listings in the city newspaper, the Belvidere Daily Republican (BDR) almost daily. Through the positive way the Klan was portrayed in the BDR, it can be concluded that the Klan was supported by many, which was why there were two conventions that happened in Belvidere where the entire population of the small town or more came to watch. Examining the way the Klan publicly flaunted its presence and work in Belvidere helps contribute to the effects of the Klan on rural life in the 1920s, as there is few research conducted on it. Aside from Klan fundraising events that were conducted in Belvidere, the Klan battled bootleggers and raised money for the establishment of a public hospital.
The Ku Klux Klan in Small-Town America
Belvidere, Illinois in 1923 to 1925

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4/11/2011

History 491 Introduction to Historical Research
Northern Illinois University
Introduction

This paper analyzes the effects of the Ku Klux Klan on politics, infrastructure, and society from 1923 to 1925 in Belvidere, Illinois. The reputation and legacy of the Ku Klux Klan is overwhelmingly characterized by its racist connotations, but there was more to the organization than just this. The Klan in the 1920s has been studied intensely by only a handful of historians, including Kathleen M. Blee and Kenneth T. Jackson, and few have examined the effects of the Klan on small towns, especially in the Midwest. What were the Klan’s effects on the small town of Belvidere during the 1920s? Discovering the effects on a small Midwestern town like Belvidere can demonstrate how the rural populations of the North viewed, embraced, and rejected the Klan. This did not change until the Klan and violence were considered synonymous towards the end of the 1920s. The importance of such research is the fact that there were a number of tangents to the organization that have been overlooked due to the connotations associated with the Klan, the second generation of the Klan in particular. The Second Klan was much more political than its predecessor and successor (see pages 4-12). This paper will examine Belvidere politics and its relationship to the Klan during the 1920s. The Klan dominated cities and towns during this period. The Klan was founded on the basis of secrecy, and often it is difficult to analyze the movement because of this. Many effects of the Klan on small towns were short term and now forgotten. How influential was the Ku Klux Klan in Belvidere IL to the extent of politics, infrastructure, and society? A brief analysis of newspapers suggests that the Klan was very popular in Belvidere. The Klan in Belvidere was a typical chapter in the 1920s. The intricacies and private meetings were shrouded with mystery, while they publicly and openly flaunted their presence and their accomplishments. The Klan was
involved in many political areas in Belvidere. They elected one of their own members, Harry Gabel as mayor.¹

Historiography

Historiographical interpretations of the Klan have changed over time. It was widely accepted that the Klan was just a male-only, Protestant, white-skinned group, full of “ignorant, simplistic, brutal, and naïve” people, mainly because that was the stereotype of Klansmen. However, through a very proactive search for primary sources, whether they are Klavern minutes, interviews, or old newspaper articles, the “Invisible Empire” has been uncovered even more in recent periods. Discoveries can always shed new light on the inner workings of the “Invisible Empire.” The most recent and best example is Kathleen Blee’s book, *Women of the Klan*. In her study during the late 1980s, she discovered there was an expansion of the Klan into another organization; incidentally called the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. This discovery stimulated further research on women in the Klan.²

The disagreement within the field of study of the Klan is whether the Klan was developed as a political force, combating the “dangers” of anarchy, the communists, and the Jew- and Catholic “conspiracies”, or whether the Klan had developed as a strategic way to help each other establish what the Klan saw was morals, purity, and charity. Richard Schaefer argues that the


² Blee, *Women of the Klan* 1, 7.
increase in Klan activity in the 1920s was a reaction to a threat of instability. This meant that the Klan had been formed in a “heightened patriotism” following World War I that had never resided. Furthermore, another wave of immigrants had begun to arrive from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Wyn Wade even gives tribute to the Klan in lobbying for the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924.  

In contrast, other historians believe the Klan had been formed as a middle-class movement to “protect” themselves from the “evils” that were going on around them. These historians see the Klan as having formed to protect each other’s morals and “American” viewpoints. The scholars, such as Horowitz and Blee, argue that those were the reasons why the Klan had existed and then exploded in membership within a year or two. Horowitz describes several instances where the Klan had helped out its own members and families. For this reason, Horowitz implies, the Klan was a small, middle-class movement. Blee also fits into this category, even if she does not explicitly state so. Several times, she cites on how the Klan was helping each other out. One example was how the WKKK came under fire by politicians, stating that a women’s job was in the kitchen and the entire cliché chauvinist ideals. In response, the men of the Klan threatened him with bodily injury. Furthermore, Blee notes when the Klan was fundraising, it not only raised funds for small, inexpensive items such as Bibles and flags for every school classroom, but they also fundraised for the building of hospitals (Protestant, of

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course).\textsuperscript{5} Nancy MacLean offers a striking assessment of the Klan, arguing that the Klan was many things, often seen as incompatible. One example that she gave was how the Klan portrayed itself as legally binding, yet was prone to “extralegal violence.”\textsuperscript{6}

In conclusion, the Klan has been proactively studied, especially up to the present day. New documents and other discoveries have currently opened up new arguments and histories. Although there is wide agreement on an overwhelming portion of the historiography of the “Second Klan”, it is still debated as to whether the Klan was developed as a right-wing, reactionary force to combat the communists and anarchists, or if it was a middle-class social movement designed to help themselves and also to combat the greediness of corporate America and big business during the Roaring Twenties.

\textit{The Three Klans}

Before examining the Klan in Belvidere during the 1920s, the organization should be explained. Historians recognize three different “generations” of the Ku Klux Klan. It is important to distinguish them, because, while they exhibit some similarities, they have deviated from each other based on perception, goals, public support, and legality, amongst other things. The First, or Reconstruction, Klan had started in Pulaski, Tennessee in a law office as a response to the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War. Its original six members had been James Crowe, Calvin Jones, John Lester, John Kennedy, Richard Reed, and Frank McCord. These

\textsuperscript{5} Blee, 144.

facts insofar are undisputed. It had been difficult to pinpoint when the original Ku Klux Klan was started and its initial history. The timing is hard to pinpoint for the start of the Ku Klux Klan. Some sources state that the Klan had evolved out of the slave patrols before the Civil War. In regards to the area of the six Confederate veterans, it is undecided as to whether they had decided upon the establishment of the Klan in 1865 or 1866. The founding members could not even remember. Additionally, although it is widely accepted that Nathan Bedford Forrest, the former Confederate General, was the first Grand Wizard and had a fundamental role in establishing the Ku Klux Klan, even this fact is disputed. Forrest denied ever having been a leader or member of the Klan, but Chester Quarles argues that George W. Gordon, another Confederate General, had been responsible for recruiting Forrest into the Klan.

The Klan’s initial activities were designed to entertain people through the randomness of their actions. Their ghostly costumes were seen at moonlight picnics, barbeques, or other types of town meetings. It had been widely understood that the Klan’s original activities were meant for hilarity and pranks rather than the overt and violent racism that the Klan became known for. Other sources depict the Klan “pranks” as psychologically terrorizing former slaves, posing as

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8 Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan*, 5-6.


11 Quarles, 28.

12 Wade, 34.
dead Confederate soldiers. Chester Quarles explains that, “Later, white landowners could then capitalize on the Negro’s fear by offering to protect his family in return for work and a basic minimal income.”\textsuperscript{13}

The “feel-good era” of the Klan (if there was one) lasted only briefly, as pranks soon turned to outright violence. Fed up with being “deprived of constitutional rights,” the Klan took action. The Klan held grievances over their local government. Corruption by the North and former slaves filled the void of the Confederacy. For example, sources cite that former slaves held public offices, were illiterate, and completely uninformed about how to function in government. Whites became increasingly afraid to walk the streets. Quarles states, “Former slaves were often disorderly, rowdy, and drunk. White folks were increasingly afraid.”\textsuperscript{14} Embittered about the emancipations of blacks, Klansmen began terrorizing the South. Many instances of lynching, public floggings, and public lashings occurred. Klan riots occurred in areas as well.\textsuperscript{15} There was one instance where Governor Reed of Florida requested federal troops to combat the Klan, because they had came to Florida and murdered many blacks. Most of the time, the Klansmen who committed the violence did so openly.\textsuperscript{16} If they got caught and arrested, they were usually not convicted. Congress passed a series of laws to contain the Klan and enforce the Civil War Amendments. Incidentally, the third enforcement bill was called the

\textsuperscript{13} Newton, \textit{Klan}, 6-7 and Quarles, 31-33, Quote from 33.

\textsuperscript{14} Quarles, 37.

\textsuperscript{15} Newton, \textit{Klan}, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{16} Michael Newton, \textit{The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida} (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001), 13-14.
Ku Klux Act, which “defined Klan violence as rebellion against the United States, permitting the president to declare martial law in troubled areas.”

The years following the establishment of the Klan were marked by a lack of concern for policing the South or freed blacks. Many of the Radical Republicans had died and the new Republicans had different agendas. Many blacks left the Republican Party. The South, in many ways, reverted back to its pre-war self. The pinnacle example of this was *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a United States Supreme Court decision which legalized state-sponsored segregation.

The Second Klan’s origin and structure is much more definitive. While not all scholars agree, as the evidence is sometimes inconclusive, the origin of the Klan in the twentieth century seems to originate around three main events. Firstly, the romantic and adventurous movie, *Birth of a Nation*, was undoubtedly the most influential reason for the interest in the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. D. W. Griffith and his cast had transformed Thomas Dixon’s novel *The Clansman* into a full-length motion picture. The film’s premier date was in January of 1915. Many things about it were impressive. Griffith claimed it to be the longest movie ever to have been produced, in a world where the average movie was thirty minutes. Additionally, Griffith commissioned a full orchestra for the score. The film had an extremely positive reception, although it glorified the First Klan. The end result of *The Birth of a Nation* was a “…gross well over $60 million, establish[ed] movies as a major American industry, and enshrine[d] Hollywood, the dull, parched countryside where the film had been shot, as *The Motion Picture Capital of the

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18 Wade, 112-113.


20 Blee, 18.
The Birth of a Nation had been viewed by over 50 million Americans by 1927. The movie was used by the Klan in future years as a recruiting tool for those who were indecisive of joining the Klan.

Secondly, the rape and murder of Mary Phagan, a fourteen-year-old white girl in April of 1915 in Atlanta, Georgia contributed to the outbreak of the Second Klan. The leading suspect was Leo M. Frank, who was a Jew. In a highly sensationalized case that achieved national and media attention, Frank was arrested, tried, convicted, and given the death penalty. Because the evidence against Frank seemed biased, conflicting, and thin, the governor of Georgia commuted Frank’s sentence to a life term. Outraged, people calling themselves the Knights of Mary Phagan stormed the prison compound, grabbed Frank, took him to Phagan’s home town, and hanged him from a tree. MacLean warns that this may not be completely accurate, even though the Klan claimed some of its origins here, because the Klan’s “vigilante spirit” would have loved to have claimed responsibility for this. Frank was innocent, as in 1982 a deathbed confession cleared his name.

The third factor that contributed to the start of the Second Klan was Colonel William Joseph Simmons, who was known as being a particularly good orator and an ex-Methodist minister. The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Inc.) was formed in 1915 on Stone Mountain near Atlanta, where the first cross-burning of the Second Klan happened. The Klan was not chartered

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21 Wade, 120.

22 Quarles, 53.

23 MacLean, Behind the Mask, 6 and Quarles, 54.

24 Jackson, Klan in the City, 257; MacLean, 12; Wade, 143.
until later that year, just before the Atlanta premier of *The Birth of a Nation*. Membership was slow at first, as Simmons and the other founding members had trouble defining themselves. With the help from a Southern Publicity Association, a professional advertising agency, however, membership started to flourish to a few million.

The Second Klan was the most influential of the three. Shawn Lay best describes the Klan, saying:

> Simultaneously, a vast social, political, and folk movement, the Klan of the twenties, more than any other manifestation of the hooded order, succeeded in significantly influencing national life for a period, establishing the white-robed Klansman as one of the enduring symbols of a critical decade in American development.

Through the help of Southern Publicity Association, partners Edward Clarke and Mary Tyler set out on a campaign to reign in as many Klansmen as possible. The ultimate goal was to transform the Klan into something new, something different from the “violent racism and Reconstruction vigilanteism” that was predominantly associated with it. This attempt at separation was most likely guided by Clarke and Tyler, as Simmons had stated as Imperial Wizard that the Second Klan was a direct descendant of the Reconstruction Klan. They did this by pitching Christianity, white supremacy, and male-bonding fraternity rituals. Further, they

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25 Wade, 146.


27 MacLean, 5.


29 Quarles, 56-57 and MacLean, 5.

30 Quarles, 55-56.

31 Wade, 146.
declared what the Klan was against: blacks, Catholics, Jews, and Bolshevism. And they declared what the Klan was for: patriotism and Americanism. The Klan grew into a political and financial powerhouse, which was another difference between the Second Klan and the other two.\textsuperscript{32}

The Klan grew to a number of several million by the mid-1920s and found a welcoming haven in the North. The hotbeds of the Klan were mainly in the North, where there had been a large black immigration from the South, as well as heavy foreign immigration of Jews and Catholics. An example of this was that Indiana had the largest Klan population; not Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, or any other “typical” states that have been associated with the Klan. In Indiana, the Klan was so imbedded into society and politics that the 1924 election for Governor was strictly fought over the Klan or anti-Klan platforms, with the Klan winning, electing Ed Jackson and a majority of the state legislature.\textsuperscript{33} Hugo Black, later a United States Supreme Court justice, joined the Klan in Alabama in 1923 as well.\textsuperscript{34} Incidentally, the success of the Klan in Indiana and publicity that Grand Dragon David C. Stephenson received eventually led to the Second Klan’s downfall, as he was arrested and convicted of the murder of Madge Oberholtzer. Reports suggest that he assaulted her and “chewed” her body, and this discredited the entire movement.\textsuperscript{35}

Aside from the Stephenson scandal, the Great Depression hurt the Klan tremendously, as well as the changing times (\textit{Birth of a Nation} was laughed at due to its age). Many people did not have the money or time to spare for Klan membership or activities, and thought of it as a

\textsuperscript{32} MacClean, 5 and Quarles, 56.

\textsuperscript{33} Jackson, 155-156.

\textsuperscript{34} Feldman, \textit{Klan in Alabama}, 66.

\textsuperscript{35} Jackson, 157, 159.
trivial thing, probably because there were larger problems to face. There was the Depression to worry about. The number of Klan membership fell from upwards of 8 million to only around thirty thousand going into the 1930s.\textsuperscript{36}

In the New Deal Era up through World War II, the Klan faced declining membership. The Klan hated Roosevelt and his appointment of Jewish people in government. Furthermore, the Klan launched extreme antiunion campaigns against those that moved to the South.\textsuperscript{37} Around the War was the time when the Klan had been juxtaposed to Hitler and the Nazis. The Klan had begun opening up chapters in Germany. Hitler quickly put a stop to it for his hatred of secret organizations.\textsuperscript{38} The Second Klan officially ended when Imperial Wizard Colescott was visited by an IRS agent at the Klan headquarters, informing Colescott that he owed $685,000 to the government based on profits made in the 1920s. Colescott disbanded the entire Klan and revoked all the charters.\textsuperscript{39}

The resulting fragmentation of the Second Klan led to independent instances, mixtures with other hate groups, and sometimes national attention.\textsuperscript{40} While the Klan mostly held a low profile, with most of the population against the Klan, they still showed themselves every now and then. There was even one Supreme Court case which stated that the Klan had the right to free speech.\textsuperscript{41} Most likely the most publicized and dramatic events of the Third Klan would be

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Newton, 16-17.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Wade, 257-258.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Wade, 266-267.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Wade, 275.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Wade, 276-403.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Per Curium, \textit{Brandenburg v. Ohio} (1969).
\end{itemize}
the massacre in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Klan was upset with the growth of a local Communist Worker’s Party chapter and its anti-capitalist, anti-Klan attitude. The CWP received a parade permit, hoping for a confrontation between them and the Klan. The Klan found out about this parade and rallied surrounding chapters to the “anti-Klan” parade. The CWP started attacking a Klan motorcade, with the end result being that the Klan shot and killed five CWP “leaders and union leaders, all of them shot either in the head or heart.”42 This was somewhat typical of the Third Klan: smaller than the others but prone to violence (there were only forty Klansmen/Nazis at Greensboro from many chapters).43

The Illinois Klan

The Klan in Illinois during the 1920s followed the above trends. More than one third of total Klan population lived in the Midwest, with Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana having some of the highest concentrated populations.44 The Klan organized politically and demonstrated its viewpoints publicly. This being the case, there had been no Illinois Klan chapters prior to 1920s. The population in Illinois was about 6.5 million, of which 6.3 million (97%) were white and 4.4 million (68%) lived in urban areas. The amount of black citizens in rural areas was just over 20,000, making them less than one per cent of the rural population.45 In 1921, C.W. Love created the first chapter of the Klan in Illinois in Chicago, and within a few weeks was able to

42 Wade, 380-381.

43 Newton, Klan, 28, 287 and Wade, 381-382.

44 Jackson, 90.

Furman 13

amass thousands of followers. Chicago, with a population consisting well over a million Catholics, passed a resolution designed to “rid” the predominantly Catholic city of the Klan, and soon over 50,000 joined in the city.\(^{46}\)

In Chicago, however, support for the Klan was not consistent, unlike other areas of the state of Illinois where it flourished. In the city, the American Unity League (AUL) was established to “destroy the Klan.” In 1923, \textit{Tolerance} was created by the AUL as an anti-Klan force in the media. \textit{Tolerance} published names of known Klansmen and advocated boycotting of business owners who were in the Klan. Some businesses were even bombed. Other men lost their jobs because of their association with the Klan. In somewhat of a peculiar story, the Commission Report on the Klan stated, “Remarkably, there were virtually no violence whatsoever associated with the Illinois Klan during the ‘20s except in the Williamson County area. Indeed, in Chicago, Klansmen themselves had been the victims of violence.”\(^{47}\)

The Williamson County incident that was described in the General Assembly report involved the town of Herin being the scene of a battleground. The area divided along Klan or anti-Klan lines, with a mass amount of bootleggers taking the anti-Klan side. There were “Klan wars” that the report mentions involved a total of twenty men that had been killed between 1923 and 1926. The National Guard had to come in to stop the violence and the report mentioned that it was an isolated incident, however three years of a domestic rebellion is still classified as violence.\(^{48}\)


\(^{47}\) Illinois LIC, \textit{Ku Klux Klan}, 40.

\(^{48}\) Newton, 16 and ILIC, 41.
Incidentally, historian Kenneth Jackson described the Chicago Klan as having been different than the other cities renowned for their Klan violence and incidents, describing that if any commit violent acts and attempt to, “shield themselves behind the anonymity of the Klan...[they] would be found guilty before both the state and the Invisible Empire.” Jackson reported only one incident that ran contrary to the General Assembly’s report, to which an officer of a Chicago klavern, William W. Newman, admitted that a group had traveled to Morris, Illinois to flog a chiropractor for “mistreating a teenaged [sic] girl.”

Yet, in only a few short years, the number of Illinois Klansmen exceeded 200,000, and they elected Charles G. Palmer of Chicago. Chapters had sprung up in the suburbs of Chicago, as well as other major cities like Springfield, Rockford, and Peoria.

Belvidere: The Small Farming Town

Belvidere was a quiet, small town formed along the banks of the Kishwaukee River. The town was first established as Elysian Fields in 1835. Later, when a man named Peck came along, the name was changed to Belvidere, meaning “beautiful to view.” By 1920 the town’s population was 7,804. Thirty-two of the citizens were labeled as “Negro” in the federal census that year, and 938 were foreign born, white and 2,446 of the natives had parents who were

49 Jackson, 100.

50 ILIC, 40.

foreign born (Refer to Table 1). This shows the overwhelming amount of whites available in Belvidere. About 40% of the population was either foreign born or had parents who were.\textsuperscript{52}

Though small, Belvidere was a modern town experiencing a period of expansion. While the Baltic Saw Mill closed in 1918 after a period of almost seventy-three years of operation, other businesses had opened to fill the void. For example, National Sewing Machine became extremely industrious and expanded up through the 1920s. They moved from Chicago to Belvidere in 1886 and in 1894 purchased Freeport Bicycle Manufacturing Company, moving all 1200 jobs to Belvidere. The company occupied five city blocks near the business section of Belvidere. From 1901-1903 it manufactured “Eldredge Autos” and from 1912 onwards it started manufacturing “Happy Day” washing machines. Even when the Great Depression hit Belvidere, National Sewing Machine Company barely felt its effects.\textsuperscript{53}

The grocery business in Belvidere was also a large market. Grocery stores lined downtown Belvidere, giving many an opportunity and a choice of what they wanted. There were classic family-owned groceries with such names as the Dempsey’s, Penticoffs, W. P. Lefzell, and the notable W. H. Piel’s (see Photo 1). W. H. Piel, who was known around town as “Billy,” had the largest and most profitable grocery store in town.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Race/Ethnicity} & \textbf{Number of People} \\
\hline
Native Born White, Native Parents & 4,388 \\
Native Born White, Foreign Parents & 2,446 \\
Foreign Born, White & 938 \\
Black & 32 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Population of Belvidere by Ethnicity}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{52} Department of Commerce, \textit{1920 Census}, 265.

\textsuperscript{53} Virginia B. Moorhead, ed., \textit{Boone County Then and Now, 1835-1976: A history in words and pictures by her sons and daughters to celebrate The Bicentennial of the signing of The Declaration of Independence} (Boone County, IL: Boone County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 82-84.

\textsuperscript{54} DoC, \textit{1920 Census}, 265.
On average, he made $5,000 a day, and in one year amassed $684,982.09. In the 1920s, this was quite an accomplishment, especially in such a small town as Belvidere.\textsuperscript{55}

Many other companies formed around Belvidere. The canning industry had its roots in Belvidere, as the Keene-Belvidere Canning Company began in the 1920s, later becoming Green Giant. Other companies of note during the era was the Midwest Bottle Cap Company, Belvedere Products, Inc., and many other small businesses. The Apollo Theater was bought from an old opera house and renovated into a modern moving picture theater.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Photo 1}

\begin{center}
\textit{Photograph of W. H. Piel’s Grocery Store, early 1930s}\textsuperscript{57}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{55} Moorhead, \textit{Boone County}, 84.

\textsuperscript{56} Moorhead, 85-91.

\textsuperscript{57} Moorhead, 84.
Belvidere was overwhelmingly Protestant. There were Lutherans, Methodists, Christian Science, Baptists, Presbyterians, and the Salvation Army, and more Protestants. There was only one Catholic church, and that was St. James, which had been built in 1886.\textsuperscript{58} Religion in Belvidere had its problems, as the only hospital in town was St. Joseph’s Hospital, which had been in operation since 1899. There was a tremendous drive for another hospital in town. Belvidere Public Hospital started operations in a makeshift, rented facility. It was later called Highland Hospital as the actual building of the hospital was finished in August of 1924.\textsuperscript{59}

Although there were few blacks in Belvidere, perhaps it was the presence of so many foreigners and a national climate of anti-black racism, anti-Semitism, and nativism that accounted for the blatant racism and acceptance of it. Three pieces from the Belvidere Daily Republican demonstrated this. Firstly, there was an article titled “Chinese are Everywhere,” to which it describes how “Chinese” are all around the world, working for the Bolsheviks, laborers, and building opium dens. The last line of the article reads, “All over the world he is a laundryman.” Furthermore, there was an article describing the type of fireworks were available for a shop downtown, and described one as a “nigger chaser.” Another piece, while much less racist and controversial, shows the nativist nature of Belvidere during the time. An article written around Independence Day, 1924, described an elderly man that had recently come back from visiting Denmark, the country that he was born in. He had lived in the United States since he was twenty and had voted for seventy years in elections. The man was stopped at the coast and the government was hesitant to let him in, because he found “himself an alien.” He claimed that he did not think he needed to be naturalized. The language of this last piece demonstrates

\textsuperscript{58} Moorhead, 76-81.

\textsuperscript{59} Moorhead, 110-111.
the nativist nature of the country as a whole, but Belvidere moreso as the article appeared in the city newspaper. These three things are perfect pieces of evidence to help grasp the stereotypes, rituals, and the lack of comprehension of the ignorance that plagued popular culture.60

The Origin of the Klan in Belvidere

Clay Baznik, a journalist for the Belvidere Daily Republican (BDR), described the Klan’s entrance into Belvidere as one to combat the immorality of the times. In his article, he suggested that the entrance, or spark as he called it, was when people “violate[ed] the Sabbath.” The Apollo Theater wanted to show Sunday pictures. Sunday movies were extremely popular to watch, but many people were opposed to it. Sunday was a day seen as going to church, and many businesses were closed on Sundays. In fact, there was a local law stating that, “Whoever disturbs the peace of society by labor...or by any amusement or diversion on Sunday, shall be fined not exceeding $25.” The Apollo Theater stockholders actually sent in a letter to the BDR telling the citizens of Belvidere why they wished to run Sunday pictures. “The people ...demanded that we give them the privilege of seeing moving pictures...[and] there has been constant pressure from the people for [them].” Further attempts to quell the anger for this “outrage” included how the statute had a negative impact on the Apollo’s business (they had just renovated it and needed revenue). Rockford had put Sunday pictures to a vote twice and both

60 “Chinese Are Everywhere,” Belvidere Daily Republican, August 3, 1923; “City Ready to Celebrate 4th,” Belvidere Daily Republican, July 3, 1924; “Man Votes for 70 Years; Finds Himself an Alien,” Belvidere Daily Republican, July 3, 1924.
times they were allowed. Another thing that the shareholders wrote in the BDR was that the “mood” of watching moving pictures was comparable to that of going to church.\textsuperscript{61}

Baznik followed this information with the opponents’ positions of the Sunday movie-showing, Reverands W. E. Mundell of First Baptist Church and S. H. Wirshing of Belvidere Methodist Church. Mundell co-wrote a letter with Wirshing to the BDR expressing their outrage on the Sunday movie-viewing issue, writing, “This is a violation of God’s day.” Baznik also wrote about the dozens of letters and advertisements that flooded the BDR about the topic. One of the “advertisements” gave reasons why a citizen should vote, stating that the citizens of Belvidere would essentially be breaking a tie between Jesus Christ and the Devil, because Jesus would vote against the Sunday showings and the Devil would be for it.

The end result of the Apollo Theater Sunday picture referendum concluded in the statute prohibiting Sunday showings being stricken from the books, with a vote from 2,038 to 948 on November 18, 1922. Baznik finished his article by saying, “The next year, crosses began burning.” Baznik indicated that there was a direct correlation between the Sunday picture showing and the Ku Klux Klan. While that may have been a factor (even a large one), there is no evidence to support such a fact. Belvidere was a changing, yet predominantly white, Midwestern town with a highly religious population—the “perfect recipe” for the Klan at the time, and membership increased dramatically through 1924.\textsuperscript{62}

The first evidence of the Ku Klux Klan arriving in Belvidere was in August 1923, when a banner was hung off the side of the Main Street bridge that said only “Ku Klux Klan”. In

\textsuperscript{61} “Demand From People For Sunday Pictures Declares Statement By the Apollo,” \textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, November 15, 1922.

analyzing this, it can show some of the typical behaviors of the Klan, especially at such a local level. Firstly, not much was said or displayed. These three words were all that was needed to gain attention by citizens. Secondly, such a public act shows that those that strung out the banner on the bridge did not care if anyone saw them post it. Thirdly, the use of such a public forum to gain attention is indicative of the Belvidere Klan. Throughout its existence it regularly used public areas to promote itself.\textsuperscript{63}

\textbf{Belvidere’s Mammoth Klan}

One of the goals of the Belvidere Mammoth chapter of the Klan was its promotion of Protestantism. This could probably be best illustrated through Reverend Wirsching, the pastor of the Belvidere Methodist Church who was a strong Klan supporter. He invited the Klan into his church several times, although it is unclear whether he actually became a member.\textsuperscript{64} As mentioned before, Wirsching was fervently against the Apollo Sunday picture showing, because of the blasphemy that went along with violating the Sabbath. The Klan held regular meetings in Wirsching’s Methodist Church. Wirsching was the Klan’s religious figure in Belvidere. Wirsching inaugurated an “open Klan meeting” in May 1924. Additionally, in a large gathering


\textsuperscript{64} Clay Baznik, “Ku Klux Klan helps one of its own win city’s mayoral election in 1925,” \textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, February 28, 1997 and “Klan Principles.”
at the Boone County Fairgrounds in May of 1924, Wirsching inaugurated the Klan’s naturalization ceremony with a prayer.\textsuperscript{65}

Holding true to the ideals of the Klan, Wirsching was extremely anti-Catholic. During the 1920s in Belvidere, there was only St. Joseph’s Hospital available to residents, which was a Catholic one. A solution for this was a public hospital. Highland Hospital had begun to be built. Analyzing the records of Highland Hospital, we can find that Wirsching was on the Finance Committee of the hospital. It should be no surprise, taking both of these facts into account, that, through a combination of the Klan, Wirsching and his church contributed more than $500 towards the construction of Highland Hospital.\textsuperscript{66}

The biggest contributor to the success of the Ku Klux Klan in Belvidere was the\textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}. The BDR mentioned every possible local Klan event, what prominent citizens were in it, national Klan news, and national political news that involved the Klan. From the Democratic National Convention to a cross burning in Marengo, Illinois, the BDR, along with its sister publication the\textit{Belvidere Northwestern}, covered all aspects of it, thus contributing to the popularity of the organization in this town.\textsuperscript{67}

In October of 1923, the BDR reported that there were three crosses burned in various places of the city. These were the first crosses burned by the Belvidere Klan. One of the crosses burned in the area around Highland Hospital. Another cross burned in front of the courthouse. The third cross burned in the yard of Assistant Police Chief William McCabe. The following

\textsuperscript{65}“Klan Demonstration Thursday,”; “Thousands See”; Baznik, “Klan election”; Baznik, “Fires brightly.”

\textsuperscript{66}Untitled Article,\textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, July 12, 1924 and Baznik, “Klan election.”

\textsuperscript{67}\textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, 1922-1925 and\textit{Belvidere Northwestern}, 1922-1925.
day, McCabe remarked that he thought it was a "joke" and in response to the cross he, "threw water on the fire and put it out."  

The article of the cross burnings were near another article about the Klan, but instead of the Mammoth Klan of Belvidere, it was the Klan in Oklahoma. Governor Walton of Oklahoma was cast as a power-hungry, anti-Klan governor. Walton had declared martial law on the people of Oklahoma, claiming that the Klan was a conspiracy to take over the United States. The people of Oklahoma were moving to impeach Walton and he was doing as much as he could to dodge the impeachment. Oklahoma politics seems irrelevant to Belvidere politics, but the fact that there was an article dedicated to it in the BDR says something about the Klansmen in Belvidere. Klansmen reading this article no doubt were upset with the fact that the government of anywhere could do this to its people. Declaration of martial law on the basis of the Klan was a scary thing, and the Mammoth Klan remedied the problem within a couple years.

The BDR coverage of Dr. W. G. Hawkey's funeral in December of 1923 also shows how important the newspaper was in supporting the Klan in Belvidere. Dr. Hawkey was a surgeon and a coroner in Belvidere, and had saved a young woman named Helen Hoag by performing the "best skin graft[ing]." Dr. Hawkey had been a general practitioner in Belvidere for over twenty-seven years and made a very strong case for the construction of Highland Hospital.

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68 "Fiery Crosses Reported in Three Parts of City," Belvidere Daily Republican, October 4, 1923; Baznik, "Klan fires."

He had gotten his medical degree from Northwestern University. Dr. Hawkey was a Freemason. Reverend Wirsching led the funeral ceremony. During Dr. Hawkey’s funeral, after the Masons completed their rituals, eight hooded men showed up (see Photo 2).

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70 “The K K K at Dr. Wm. G. Hawkey Funeral Dec 6, 1923,” December 6, 1923, Belvidere Cemetery, KKK Collection (1922-1925), Boone County Research Center, Belvidere, Illinois.
According to sources:

“The group wrapped a U.S. flag around a large bouquet of flowers and placed it in on the grave, and then planted a red cross with ‘KKK’ on it into the ground. Afterward they entered an automobile and were whisked away toward the business center of the city.”

There is no direct evidence that Dr. Hawkey was a Klansman, but his ties to Wirsching and the Freemasons are worth noting. The person responsible for a large portion of the revival of the Second Klan, William Joseph Simmons, was a member of the Freemasons, as well as many other fraternal organizations. A large number of Klansmen were persuaded to join from other fraternal organizations, so it would have been common for someone like Dr. Hawkey to be a part of both the Masons and the Klan.71

Klan members were skilled at promoting their organization. In an article in early May, the BDR reported how there was a two mile long parade in Herrin, Illinois at midnight. Following this, about one hundred men and women were initiated into the Klan. Later that month, the BDR reported of a planned Belvidere Mammoth Klan demonstration, noting that this was the first “open-air” Klan meeting. It was planned to be conducted at the fairgrounds, and around one hundred “aliens” were supposed to be there for a naturalization process. Additionally, a parade was being considered. The Klan was supplying its own security. The public was allowed to attend, but would only be able to watch from a distance. In this same article, Reverend Mr. Moore of Dixon, Illinois was visiting the Methodist Church in Belvidere that night, and there was an open invite for all to hear what the Klan was all about.72


72 Herbert Little, “Klan Stages Huge Program at Herrin,” Belvidere Daily Republican, May 2, 1923 and “Klan Plans.”
The results of these two events are striking. Firstly, the lecture by Reverend Moore of Dixon, where he talked about the Klan's issues and what they stand for was attended by over eight hundred people. Another thing that Reverend Moore touched on was the issue of the robes and masks. He hinted that the "secrecy" of the Klan was not needed as much anymore, just that the robes were parts of formality. The Klan ceremony that took place at the fairgrounds drew a crowd of over seven thousand, which was roughly the population of Belvidere. The event started with a parade around town, where electric crosses and U.S. flags were mounted and draped onto the cars. None of the Klansmen wore masks or robes while they paraded around town. The actual ceremony was held at the Boone County Fairgrounds grandstand (a large spectator fixture allowing many to sit and watch events that exists to this day). Harry Gabel began the "open" meeting for the public, and Wirsching offered up his prayer services. The sources also indicate that many visiting Klansmen came to Belvidere to witness the ceremony. This was a major Klan ceremony. There is no record of violence of any sort, but for the Catholics and blacks that were residents of Belvidere, this was surely an intimidating and even frightening display of the racist, nativist, and intolerant aspects of American super patriotism of the period. Additionally, the fact that Klansmen felt that they did not need to be hidden under robes and masks is worthy of note. First and foremost, it means that the Klansmen did not care who knew about them, which means that Belvidere was safe for the Klan. They need not worry about their businesses getting bombed or boycotted if the public new about their relationship to the Klan. And secondly, the openness of membership meant that the Klansmen had no shame and were proud to be the conveyors of a nativist organization.  

73 "Tonight's Klan Demonstration Open to Public," *Belvidere Daily Republican*, May 22, 1924; "Thousands See"; "Klan Principles."
The Klan was incredibly patriotic and nativist, and so it is surprising to see a lack of display of Klan activity during the official Memorial Day ceremonies of 1924. On Thursday, May 29, in the BDR, the programs and events were all listed as to what was going to happen. The Grand Army of the Republic and the American Legion were going to help conduct the Memorial Day ceremonies. There was no mention of the Klan participating at all. The “Reading of the Gettysburg Address” happened as well. On that Friday, the Republican Northwestern reported what was said. Most of what was said by Reverend Marks, the lecturer, was almost identical to what the Klan’s platform was. It was incredibly nationalist and proud, which is peculiar figuring that no mention of the Klan during the Memorial Day ceremonies took place.\(^7^4\)

The Klan found a way to get noticed during Memorial Day, though, even if it was not blatant parading downtown. One of which was the showing of Birth of a Nation showing at the Apollo Theater (the Klan’s number one recruiting tool). There were two ads placed in the BDR on Thursday, May 28 and Friday, May 29 and one ad was placed in the RNW on Saturday, May 30. There was one show every night from May 29 through May 31. Additionally, there was a special children’s showing on Saturday morning for twenty-five cents, which was more than half off of the adult’s price. Aside from the advertisements, there was an article describing D. W. Griffith’s film, noting that it was “filmed in the Southland,” when in reality it had been filmed in California. The test was a very vague, supportive language, describing how wonderful the movie was and how it was probably one of the best of the times, describing the film as “romantic” and “adventurous.” On the last day of May, the BDR put in a brief synopsis of the film, describing how Lincoln was portrayed as the “great heart” that he was in real life, but was assassinated so

that horrible, "remorseless" men, in their "hate towards the South," set up a structure that punished them. The writer further elaborated that this was a recollection of the Reconstruction through Southern viewpoints, but did not warn the reader (and viewers) of the bias that went along with that. Furthermore, the article ended with the popular Klan/Southern myth that "once order was restored from blacks, the Klan disbanded itself," when the reasons were different (refer back to page 7).\(^\text{75}\)

Aside from the showing of the Klan's most important recruiting tool, there were a few Klan activities around the area that were noted. The first notice was during an article on May 30 in the RNW stating that many Poplar Grove residents attended a "Klan Ceremonial," most likely a naturalization ceremony. Poplar Grove is a small village north of Belvidere. A few days later on June 3, a fiery cross was reported on the Peck property on West Grant Highway in Marengo. The Memorial Day ceremonies were devoid of any Klan activity, but the Klan made its presence known to everyone, indoctrinating through Birth of a Nation and reminding everyone that they still existed through the cross burnings and ceremonies around Memorial Day.\(^\text{76}\)

In late June, the BDR reported a Klan ceremony in Marengo. In the article, the writer mentioned that over three thousand people attended this ceremony to watch sixty Klansmen get "knighted" alongside West Grant Highway. The article also reported that there were "hundreds" of cars that lined the highway, creating a problem for traffic. The importance of this article was towards the end, where it mentions that many from Belvidere came out to watch this. The article presented the information as saying that many Belvidere citizens came out to watch it, but

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\(^{75}\) Birth of A Nation Advertisement, Belvidere Daily Republican, May 28, 1924; "Birth of Nation at Apollo,"; Griffith's Film Draws Crowds, May 31, 1924.

\(^{76}\) Many Grove Residents at Klan Ceremonial, Republican Northwestern, May 30, 1924 and "Fiery Cross is Seen at Marengo," Belvidere Daily Republican, June 3, 1924.
Belvidere Klansmen were sure to have been there as well. This could have been an opportunity to spread the Klan ideals to surrounding towns that the Mammoth Klan in Belvidere took on, which could be a reason why many Klan chapters were popping up around Belvidere. Or perhaps other towns wanted to be a part of something like the Belvidere Klansmen were and started their own. Either way, the Belvidere Klan had their hands in the construction of chapters that surrounded their town.77

Another interesting thing to consider would be Rockford’s Klan. Rockford’s Klan proclaimed that they would host a large celebration for Independence Day in 1924. The article stated that Rockford Klansmen were throwing a three-day weekend pageant for Independence Day. During the celebration, Rockford Klan Cyclops M. L. Ward had a $3,500 fireworks show planned and a massive parade consisting of three different bands at 175 pieces each. The most extravagant number was the 100,000 people he expected to attend the nativist celebration. While Ward was hopeful in his plans, there was no record of the celebration in the BDR of any of this happening. If the event was as successful as Ward had hoped, there would have been mention of it in the BDR.78

Perhaps an oddity in the culture of the Klan was an event that happened on July 1, 1924. In late June, the RNW had an article that mentioned that the Utica Jubilee quartet was going to be singing in the Methodist church and the event was hosted by Wirsching, the Klan supporter. The peculiar thing was that the Utica Jubilee quartet was made up of two black men and two black women. The Klan was openly inviting a black group into a place where they regularly met. The Utica Jubilee, as according to the RNW, sang “old negro folk songs, spirituals, and

77 “Klan Has Konklave Near Grant Highway,” Belvidere Daily Republican, June 27, 1924.

78 “Expects 100,000 Klansmen at Big Rockford Affair,” Belvidere Daily Republican, July 2, 1924.
plantation melodies.” Tickets were sold and the profit made off of the show would end up going
to the building of Highland Hospital. The event was a very big success. The BDR reported that
over six hundred people came (roughly the same sized crowd that wanted to hear the traveling
Klan lecturer) to see the quartet and that $100 was made and donated to Highland Hospital. This
event was in contrast to normal Klan activity, so it needs special attention. Some speculation is
needed. The easiest answer as to why the Klan did this was because they viewed that the
construction and maintenance of a hospital that was not Catholic was of more importance than
the racist idea of not fraternizing with blacks. In fact, many of the conflicts that involved the
Klan was moreso with religion, Prohibition, or “morality.” The Klan projected the idea of order
as well. The Klan in Belvidere could have invited the black quartet in to the city to demonstrate
to others as how they were the “ideal” black citizens. Contrastly, being the racist organization
that it was, it might have intended to invite a black group into the town to show them how things
ought to be run. Wild speculation of this event is not advised, but it was still a peculiar event
that took place.79

The Mammoth Klan: A Mayor and a Parade

1924 was a very good year for the Klan in Belvidere. In the summer, the Klan was
holding a Klantauqua, which was a Klan-sponsored convention with a play of words off of the
Chautauqua. In this convention, the Klan gave lectures and had everything related to the Klan on
July 26, 28, and 29. The Klan took a defensive position in its lectures and events. In one swoop,
the Klan turned the tables by talking about how “they” (the opponents) tell the Klan that they

79 “Colored Singers Here July First,” Belvidere Northwestern, June 27, 1924; “Songs of Old
South Pleased Big Audience,” Belvidere Daily Republican, July 2, 1924; “Klan Principles.”
were made up of the “riff raff” of America, but stated instead that the members of the Klan were “native born, Protestant Americans,” further provoking an “us versus them” nativist mentality. The articles’ (which are unknown as to whether or not they are from the BDR or the RNW) most important contributions to the study of the Klan was how they reported that the Klantauqua was a success and they reported that there was to be another celebration in August. 

In August of 1924, the Klan had plans for another convention. During the August convention, the Mammoth Klan planned to have a large “celebration” at the Boone County Fairgrounds on August 16. The advertisement and open invitation offered children’s games, a robed parade downtown which featured the Mammoth Klan Band consisting of over 125 “pieces,” and a fireworks display of $1,000 worth. When the day came for the parade, everything went as the Klan had planned. The parade started at 7 p.m. out in front of Highland Hospital and went all the way downtown, led by a dozen horsemen and the Women of the Ku Klux Klan chapter of Belvidere. Around 300 Klansmen and Klanswomen participated in the parade, “with masks up,” toting several American flags. Band members from Freeport, Lena, and Rockford came to play their instruments and the Klansmen carried a massive flag flat as they paraded. The parade detoured from its original route to go by Harry Gabel’s house, as he was recovering from an operation and could not participate in the parade. He was, however, out on his porch and when the Klansmen passed him they “greeted him with the sign of klan [sic] loyalty.” As the Klansmen got to the Boone County Fairgrounds, a crowd of 10,000 accumulated there. A national Klan lecturer named Dr. Oldacre gave an address describing the Klan. After the address, the Klansmen set off the massive amount of fireworks which, according

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80 “Obedience to Law is Virtue Claimed by K. K. [sic],” July 29, 1924 and “Klantauqua in July; Ceremony Here in August,” KKK Collection (1922-1925), Boone County Research Center, Belvidere, Illinois.
to journalist Clay Baznik, was the largest display of fireworks in Boone County in its history. Men and women were then naturalized as giant burning crosses “illuminated the fairground.” Following all of this “excitement,” the Freeport and Rockford Klan basketball teams played each other while everyone watched in enjoyment. The Klansmen helped direct traffic for the morning afterwards, helping everyone leave town. They made a profit of $1,400 from the fifty-cent charge for the “celebration.” The two celebrative events in Belvidere that the Klan constructed showed just how prevalent and popular the Klan was in Belvidere. While there were visitors coming from other areas to Belvidere for the events, it should also be noted that more than the town’s population came out for the parade and celebration—about 150% of the town’s population.\footnote{Clay Baznik, “KKK helps one of its own win city’s mayoral election in 1925,” \textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, February 28, 1997; “Street Parade and Fireworks,” August 16, 1924, KKK Collection (1922-1925), Boone County Research Center, Belvidere, Illinois; “Fireworks Here for Klan’s Use in Celebration,” KKK Collection (1922-1925), Boone County Research Center, Belvidere, Illinois.}

Harry Gabel announced his candidacy for the office of Mayor of Belvidere on November 13, 1924 as according to the BDR. He moved to Belvidere around the year 1900. Gabel was a city alderman for “several terms” so it was not a surprise when the Klan asked him to run for mayor. Not only had he been an alderman, he owned a confectionery and a restaurant, and then was a proprietor of “Gabel’s Garage.” The man had an extensive resume, which made him the prime candidate for the Klan if they were going to take the Mayor’s office. Other mentions for the candidacy were Dr. Swift, John Krieger, Alderman Teeple, and the incumbent Mayor Harry Perkins.\footnote{“Gabel in Field” and “Harry Gabel Dies in East at Age of 79,” \textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, October, 1948.}
The two times of note that Gabel announced his platform on local politics while he was campaigning would be in January and April of 1925. The January notice was practically a declaration of his principles while the April one was a more organized campaign platform. In the January article of the BDR, Gabel mentions that he was more than just the local cyclops of the Klan, and more people than just the Klan support him. One of the main issues that he claimed he was taking on was the strict enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment, or Prohibition. His campaign slogan was “A Square Deal for All,” and he cleared up the issue of the Apollo showing Sunday pictures. He told the voters that the idea of him shutting down the Apollo on Sundays (the reason why the Klan came to Belvidere, as according to Baznik), was just a rumor, as he did not have the authority nor the will to do so, as the Apollo showed “clean entertainment.” The April campaign ad had a ten-point platform that primarily sided with law and order, as a strong and effective police force was one of its points. Another group of points was lower taxes and smart spending. The issue of the Klan was not officially in his campaigning.\(^3\)

With each vote cast in each ward and voting done before the polls closed, the votes were tallied and Gabel beat the incumbent Perkins for the office of Mayor in a highly “spirited” election. Perkins stepped out of office lightly and gently, remarking in his closing address that the financial affairs in the city were very good and that all of its bonds were close to being paid off, something along the lines of fiscal responsibility that Gabel preached during his campaign. As Gabel took office, a newspaper title read, “New Regime in Control of City Administration Affairs,” symbolizing a change in leadership. First and foremost, Gabel announced the

development of a new type of committee to investigate local shops that were suspected of constructing any type of alcohol. One of the first laws that he passed was the idea that if you were dealing in cider or “near beer” (and soda), you needed a license. Other laws that were passed during Gabel’s time as mayor included taxes to preserve the library and punishment to those that damaged the paved streets. With the office of Mayor, Gabel was able to incorporate the “law and order” mentality of the Klan into the city and ensure a haven for the Klan at that time.\textsuperscript{84}

\textit{National News: Klan vs. Anti-Klan}

The idea of an anti-Klan conspiracy could have easily been seen across the nation (likewise, the Klan was seen as a conspiracy), so it would be no surprise that news of these issues would make it into the BDR. The BDR had already covered the national aspect of Walton, the Governor of Oklahoma, and his struggle between the Klan, voters, the Governorship, and constitutionality. Many of these were reported in the BDR, which further fueled the idea of fear in Klansmen’s minds. For example, Reverand LeRoy Mitchell, an evangelist Klan supporter, was arrested in East St. Louis, as according to the \textit{St. Louis Times}. Tensions were rising between the Klan and the anti-Klan forces in East St. Louis “for some weeks.” Thirteen arrests were made (two of them were ministers), on charges from “disorderly conduct” to “inciting to riot.”

\textsuperscript{84} “Big Vote Cast in Each Ward,” \textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, April 21, 1925; Baznik, “KKK helps.”; “New Regime in Control of City Administration Affairs: Mayor Gabel Takes Gavel in Assuming Duty,” \textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, KKK Collection (1922-1925), Boone County Research Center, Belvidere, Illinois; “Mayor Perkins Steps Down and Out of Office,” \textit{Belvidere Daily Republican}, May 1925; Ordinance 210-D Library Taxes (Date Unknown); Ordinance 194-D Neer Beer and Cider License, May 4, 1925; Ordinance 249-D Protect Paved Streets, April 30, 1927.
Other Klansmen were arrested for carrying "concealed weapons," although the article stated that the Klansmen had the proper permits and papers to do so, although East St. Louis police were "contesting" the permits. The article furthermore cited an incident when a former cyclops (chapter leader) was arrested by parking in front of a fire hydrant in front of the police station while trying to bail his comrades out of jail. At the end of the article, it gives the perspective of the Klan, stating that the Klan charged the police raided a meeting to which they had no business being there. This article states that "excitement reached its peak" when the arrests were being made, but a paragraph before (before the Klan's perspective) it stated that "riot was narrowly averted." Looking at this article, it would have given readers the impression that the police had a large part in stirring up trouble, and perhaps violating some constitutional rights.85

Another article that was in the BDR that showed the Klan that they were under attack by the government was an article in June 1924 reporting a court case from Edenburg, Pennsylvania. Forty-four people were accused of being part of a riot on April 5 of 1924. The previous day, a pro-Klan "demonstration" broke out in the courtroom and the judge had to clear the courtroom, so the judge ordered extra security for the day. The article also mentioned that there were a planned one hundred people going to be called to the defense. The article's text and substance were very definitive and make the Klan out to be the guilty party of this, but the title "Police Endeavoring to Maintain Order During Klan Trial" means something different. It suggests that the Klan held more power over the justice system than perhaps anybody was recognizing. Although the police arrested and charged forty-four people in participation of a riot, it started yet another riot—in a courtroom! Additionally, the defense was calling at least one hundred people

85 "Arrest Evangelist Known Here as Klan Parade Climax," *Belvidere Daily Republican*, June 10, 1924.
as witnesses. It was clear that the Klan had complete disrespect for the judicial process and that they felt that they dictated the terms of the trial—and the police were powerless to stop it!86

_Benjamin Dubois of Southbend v. Ku Klux Klan_ was a highly publicized court case. The BDR covered this federal court case brought against the Klan. Dubois demanded the Klan needed to bequeath its membership rosters in Indiana. This information would be used to see what senators and other public officials were Klansmen, and thus voters could oust the Klansmen from public office. The Klan won this case, further ensuring its security. This was another victory for the Klan, but if the Klan was feeling paranoid in any aspect, they had a right to. The effects of _Tolerance_, the anti-Klan newspaper in Chicago, had very negative results for the Klan, so it was no surprise that the Klan thought that there was a conspiracy against them. For this to be printed and presented in the BDR for Belvidere citizens, it was another doomsday scenario for the Klan to be on the watch for.87

_National News: The Klan and Political Parties_

If it had seemed like the Klan was ever predominantly Republican or Democrat, the answer is a complex one—it was neither. From the presidential race of 1924, it was blaringly obvious that the Klan was not only a hot national issue, but that it was deeply entrenched in both Republican and Democratic parties.88

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86 “Police Endeavoring to Maintain Order During Klan Trial,” _Belvidere Daily Republican_, June 11, 1924.

87 “Effort to Obtain Klan Membership Roll is Failure,” _Belvidere Daily Republican_, June 13, 1924 and ILIC, 41.
The first time that the BDR mentions the Klan as being a political issue was in May of 1924 with the Republicans. In the article, the Republicans almost unanimously decided that the existence of a Klan should not be a political issue. Another item to note is that, with many evangelists and ministers being a part of the Klan and preaching its ideals, many looked at the Klan as a religious issue as well as a political one. The general tone of this article was passive. The Republicans had the mindset that they would vote (for President) whoever was the Republican, regardless of their status as Klansmen, Klan supporter, or if they were not in the Klan at all. This tone was different from an article that was published not even a month later (in June), with Charles Thwig, a delegate from Ohio, urging the Republican Party to adopt an anti-Klan plank as part of the Republican platform for the presidential race. Thwig's views were not shared by his colleagues. The following day, an article appeared in the BDR with the resolution of the Republican stance on the Klan. The delegates voted down the "secret organizations" clause (which everybody knew was a broad term really meant to apply to the Ku Klux Klan) of the platform and issued a statement that stated that the political and religious freedom must be respected. The Republicans also added that people had a constitutional right to be a part of these "secret organizations."\(^{89}\)

The Democratic Party had a tougher time hammering out compromises. The first time that the Democratic Klan plank issue was mentioned by the BDR was in early June of 1924. The


\(^{89}\) Bender, “Republicans to Reject”; “Urges Republicans”; “Outline Planks.”
article was a small one, but had a very powerful message. The Democrats were fighting amongst themselves in very heated debates as to whether or not they should be pro-Klan, anti-Klan or leave the issue alone (as the Republicans did). Furthermore, they were arguing what it would mean to the party if they did any of those. William McAdoo had the support of the Klansmen and supported Prohibition while Al Smith had the support of many of the “new immigrants,” most of which were anti-Prohibition. In another article in mid-June, it described a meeting on June 19 in which they were going to discuss the Klan once again, but they had postponed the issue to the extent that they did not get to it that night. The article stated that Democrats did not want to touch the Klan issue for fear of losing important delegates or support of crucial Democratic supporters (both publicly and financially). The next day, however, the Klan issue was brought up and there was fierce argumentation and debate, but nothing was solved. The issue of the Democrats and the Klan went on for weeks throughout the BDR. There was a Klan-related article on the front page of the BDR almost every day talking about the issue of the Klan and the Democrats. Many times, there were multiple articles on the front page essentially stating the same things. Aside from just the front page articles, most times there were a few articles that were written and stored towards the middle section of the newspaper, so that anybody could get their news of the Klan and politics several times over. There were so many to pay too much attention to, but the one article that was titled “Democrats on Edge of Split that May Ruin Party Forever,” needed special attention because of the title. The Democrats still exist, but in 1924, many thought that it would splinter due to the issue of the Klan and that the party would fracture over this. That was some very powerful language and shows just how deadlocked the party was in terms of finding a suitable candidate to run for president.90

90 Fraser Edwards, “Democratic Bosses Find Klan and Dry Issues Perplexing,” Belvidere Daily
The Klan seen from the eyes of the average citizen of Belvidere shows that of one involved in every day politics—in fact it might be a *branch* of a party. A great image that demonstrates this was from the gubernatorial race in Indiana as the Klan was denied the Democratic nomination in the gubernatorial race. Many were cited as being Democrats first and Klansmen second, so they would still vote with their party. However, others were angry and claimed that they would switch political parties out of spite. Throughout all of this, though, the Klan was well-received in its quest in politics. The reason this incident should be noted is that, if the Klan had succeeded in gaining the Democratic nomination, it would have ran against Ed Jackson, another Klansmen. The Klan was presented like this in so many ways in the media so that the Klan was seen as just another ordinary political issue, like government intervention in businesses, taxes, or Prohibition. In fact, the Klan was *part* of these issues in some cases. With these things in the media, it almost forced the average person to accept the Klan as something as almost normal in the United States.\(^{91}\)

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Mammoth Klan of Belvidere was used as a fraternal organization. Although physical violence was averted during the time of the Klan, they still showed evidence of psychological violence. Many times they made their presence known. They held several lectures and public events. These were used as events for example-setting, indoctrination,

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\(^{91}\) “Little Solace” and Jackson, 155-156.
intimidation, and nativism. Crosses were burned, a hospital was built, parades happened, and large rallies were held.

The Klan in Belvidere was short lived. A few months after Gabel was elected mayor, he resigned his post as the cyclops of the Belvidere Klan. The BDR reported nothing ill as to what happened, and the chief of staff of the Klan in the realm of Illinois actually reported to the BDR that everything was in working order and that Gabel just wished to contribute more time and effort as a public official than as the leader of the Klan chapter of Belvidere. Baznik mentioned how Gabel resigned near the trial of D.C. Stephenson, a highly publicized trial involving the conviction of a Klansmen for murder, and the timing for the trial and Gabel was perfect, so it would not be a stretch to assume that the Stephenson trial was a reason why Gabel got out of the Klan. A year later, 1926, Reverend Wirsching left Belvidere, leaving a void in Klan leadership all around. The amount of Klan news in the BDR and the RNW stopped after 1925. The Klan was essentially nonexistent. Baznik mentioned in his article that the last reference was in May of 1928 and that was about a meeting of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan had all but left Belvidere.  

Belvidere society was fascinated by the Klan. For the two main rallies in Belvidere, the equivalent of the population of Belvidere or more came out so see the Klan. The political sphere was taken by the Klan as well. Harry Gabel was essentially the Klan’s candidate for mayor, ran, and won. From there, the Klan was able to effectively enforce Amendment 18 of the US Constitution, successfully raiding areas in Belvidere and penalizing those violating it. The Klan was paramount in helping promote the Highland Hospital. About half of the population of Belvidere was foreign born or had foreign born parents. It is traditionally held that communities

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92 “Gabel Resigns as Cyclops of Belvidere Klan,” Belvidere Daily Republican, September 25, 1925 and Baznik, “Klan fell.”
with what could be perceived as a large foreign population were hotbeds of Klan activity. This stereotype fits the Belvidere mold. However, the immigrants in Belvidere were mainly Protestant, in contrast to the main pool of immigrants coming to the United States during this time. It is very much possible that the Klan and community saw the new influx of “traditional” immigrants as long-lost brothers and it was their (the Klan’s) duty to help them along in their way to “become American.” This would explain the way that the Klan was accepted and approved of in Belvidere. The Klan was a group of influential people of Belvidere who had the same agenda. The name of the Ku Klux Klan was the organization that brought them all together.
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Capstone Title: (print or type):

\textit{The Ku Klux Klan in Small-Town America: Belvidere, Illinois in 1923 to 1925}

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Department of (print or type): History

Date of Approval (print or type): 11 May 2011