

## The KKK in Martin County's History

It would seem relatively safe to say that Martin County's history is not laced with much in the way of extremism. However, somewhat ironically, it was once considered a Ku Klux Klan stronghold. The Klan appeared on the local scene secretly and silently in the 1920s. Their initial membership was comprised of the induction of seventy carefully selected local men that were considered the "cream" Fairmont's local citizens, thought to be reputable and trustworthy. Membership was secret and meetings were held in cow pastures at night. Membership fees were \$10.00, plus an additional \$5.00 for the ceremonial robes. Their meeting sites were patrolled by armed "Kluxers" who challenged anyone nearing the meeting location. As the membership grew to about 300, outside speakers arrived and public meetings were held.

A June 29, 1923, *Sentinel* article read "Ku Kluxers Here." The article elaborated on the fact that "Twilight" Orn, "thinker, orator, man, a happy combination," would be giving a free lecture on the courthouse lawn to understand "The most powerful, secret, nonpolitical, militant, Christian organization the world has ever known." Another account read, "100 at Ku Klux Klan Gathering Six Miles West," as evidenced by an individual out for a ride that noticed flashlights and white robes. County newspapers also reported numerous Klan happenings at that time.

Moving forward to 1924, a newspaper article entitled "15,000 Pack Fair Grounds For Klan Meet," stating that 600 candidates from three counties were initiated at the public "Klonklave."

The *Truman Tribune* also published an article referring to this Klan meeting at the Fairgrounds. It spoke of a Klan band from Sheldon, Iowa, several floats, and it stated that few Martin County Klansmen were seen in the parade as it's a policy of the organization to keep the membership secret. The ceremonies that followed involved fiery crosses formed by electric lights, speakers, and included the initiation of an estimated 300 to 600 new Klan members. At the conclusion of the initiation, various fireworks were set off, one forming a fiery cross.

However, the "District Kleagle in Charge" disputed these accounts by providing statistics that contradicted the newspaper articles. He claimed that there were 400 candidates, not 600, and that this number included 100 women and 300 men, all of which were initiated. He further claimed that there were 1,100 robed Klansmen, not the estimated 2,000 as cited in the article. He also disputed the starting time of the parade and said that Iowa men had nothing to do with the conclave.

A somewhat humorous account relative to the Klan told of a KKK celebration being scheduled for a chilly night. As a result, it was reported that every flannel nightshirt in town had been sold and that there were not nearly enough to go around. Consequently, some local citizens traveled to Sherburn, Dunnell, and Welcome in order to obtain additional flannel nightshirts. Furthermore, a rush order was wired to St. Paul to bring some down by airplane.

The *Truman Tribune* published an article in 1924 entitled “Principals of Klan Right.” This piece elaborated on the virtues of the Klan stating in part that “. . . with its vast secret membership, today (the Klan) is the most powerful secret organization in existence in America.” It continued stating, in part, that, “It is well managed and follows out the great principals of pure, unadulterated Americanism for which it stands . . .”

The most significant year relative to Klan membership in Martin County appears to have been 1926. Celebrations were held over July 4<sup>th</sup>, most notably at Interlaken Park. An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 people were in attendance at Interlaken Park, of which half were said to have been Klan members. Klan membership in Martin County apparently peaked at about 3,000 members, which coincided with the crest of Klan membership in the United States of approximately 6,000,000 in the mid 1920s.

In 1926, the *Fairmont Sentinel* did a series of four articles with an individual calling himself the Nighthawk. The Nighthawk provided the newspaper a confidential account of his experiences from the time he originally joined the Klan until that point at which he became disillusioned and decided to leave the organization.

The Nighthawk stated that it began for him in the summer of 1923. He went on to say that getting into the Klan was considered quite an accomplishment and that only the “best men” belonged. The campaign for new members was waged secretly, only cash was accepted for membership, and their oath, taken in a cow pasture, in part said “. . . to disobey means dishonor and death.” He found that to be a good “Kluxer,” you also had to be a good liar, finding that he eventually started to believe his own lies.

The Nighthawk’s account indicated that the first few weeks were happy as he was one of the chosen few 100%. At that time, the membership was less than 100 and included lawyers, doctors, preachers, and business leaders. They were referred to as the “flowers” of the male population.

However, as reported by the Nighthawk, this vexing organization seemed to be taking a turn for the worse. He was surprised that one candidate for membership was widely known as a swindler. He was further perplexed by the fact that bootleggers, women chasers, and pool hall bums had now infiltrated the membership. In addition, the Kleagle was driving a new car thought to be partly financed by his forty per-cent take of the \$10.00 membership dues.

In conclusion, unlikely as it might seem today, the Klan’s influence at one time elected both a Fairmont mayor and a city council. However, as outsiders such as Twilight Orn appeared preaching hate and vengeance, most became very skeptical of the organization. It seems that at that time in our local history, those who originally joined the Klan in good faith soon found out what it was really about and then quickly relinquished their memberships feeling that they got out just in time.

For more information on this topic, or to become a member of the Martin County Historical Society, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.

# KLAN TO SELL FAIRMONT LOT, SAYS OFFICER

Don't Need it Any More, as  
They "Cleaned up Here,"  
Secretary Avers

## WOULD GIVE MONEY FOR AVIATION FIELD

The Martin county klan, assembled in mass meeting at Granada, last night voted unanimously to dispose of its lot on the corner of North avenue and Fourth street, this city, at public auction.

This information was given The Sentinel today by the organization's purported secretary, who declined permission to use his name in connection with this announcement.

Paid Sworn  
Circulation  
Yesterday  
3,512  
3,200 With-  
in 35 Miles

SOCIETY

# FAIRMONT DAILY SENTINEL



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## FAIR BOARD DELAYS ACTION ON KLAN MEETING

**K K K K K K K**

# **Special Meeting Dates**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 8th, 4 MILES SOUTH OF FAIRMONT**

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9th, 4 MILES SOUTH OF FAIRMONT**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 10th, NEAR CATLIN HALL, NORTH-  
WEST OF TRUMAN**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 11th, NEAR SHERBURN**

**All Meetings Start at 8:30 P. M.**

**All Protestants invited, except on Wednesday, which is for members only.**

**Are you misinformed, or uninformed, or both? Come and hear this ISSUE. Be fair.  
Give the Klan a hearing.**

**MARTIN COUNTY KNIGHTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN**

# WHERE MARTIN COUNTY WILL OBSERVE HOLIDAYS

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**T**ONIGHT—Carnival dance and fireworks at Interlaken park. Fifty cent dance, Legion hall, Fairmont.

**TOMORROW**—Hand's park: double header ball game. Lismore vs. Gilkerson's Union Giants, 1 p. m., John Donaldson pitching. Union Giants vs. Swea City, 3 p. m. Moving pictures, Algona band, fireworks. Admission to park, free.

Interlaken park: Baseball, Fairmont vs. Butterfield, 3 p. m. Concerts afternoon and evening. Midway attractions. Special dinner at the Inn. Fireworks. Admission to park, free.

Fox Lake park: Religious observance at the tabernacle. Admission to park, free.

**MONDAY, JULY 5**—Fox Lake park: Baseball, Lone Rock vs. Rochester, 3 p. m., "Swede" Risberg pitching. Purse \$500. Mountain Lake band. Free moving picture. Fireworks. Dancing, afternoon and evening. Admission to park, free.

Interlaken park: Ku Klux Klan celebration. Baseball, Swea City vs. Fairmont, 2 p. m. Speech by Judge Wheeler of Duluth. Fairmont city band. Fireworks. Dancing afternoon and evening. Admission to park, 35 cents.

Wilbert: Annual festival. Speeches. Stands. Fireworks. No admission charge.

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# **3 CELEBRATIONS ON TODAY WITH CROWD COMING**

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**Hand Reports 15,000, Inter-  
laken 10,000 for Inde-  
pendence Day Pro-  
grams**

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**KLAN, SHERBURN AND  
WILBERT HOSTS TODAY,**

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**Not an Accident Occurs De-  
spite Record Turnouts  
Over Weekend at  
Resorts**

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# Klansmen Discard Ceremony for Frolic

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Klansmen and Klan women of Martin county will picnic at Kerns park on Lake Emogene, Sunday, August 23. Picnic dinner will be served at 1 p. m.

No robes will be worn. Each Klan family may bring a non member family as their guest.

Ten cents admission will be charged. Coffee and lemonade will be served free.

Speaking and music starts at 3 p. m.