Chapter 5

KLAN HAPPENINGS IN ST. CROIX COUNTY

One of the more difficult areas in which to ascertain Klan involvement is in St. Croix County. Except for two incidents which will be treated as separate chapters, the dearth of materials mitigates against a more thorough assessment of Klan activities in this area. In December of 1926, the New Richmond News noted that the population of this city was partially composed of a strong Catholic element. Little was published about Klan activities there. Journals such as the Baldwin Bulletin, Glenwood City Tribune, Hammond News, and the Hudson Star Observer filled few columns with news relating to this organization. Newspapers were not available for Emerald, Somerset, Roberts, and Wilson.

One journal which extensively covered Klan activities in eastern St. Croix County was the Woodville Times. Klan activities were first reported in May of 1925. In a letter to the editor, John L. Roberts wrote that, on the twelfth of May, another emblem of Christianity was burned between Wilson and Hersey. Dubbing the Klansmen as shirt-tail

See Chapters Six and Seven. The New Richmond News gave excellent coverage of the events described in Chapter Six.
rangers, Roberts stated that, as on most other occasions, "...the 'Brave' Knights disappeared after the cross was lighted."\(^2\) Were the cause of the Klan as honorable and just as the organization claimed it to be, Roberts saw no reason why "...at least one Klansman wouldn't have nerve enough to stay by the cross after it was lighted. Cowards and criminals run away with cause after they do something they shouldn't, but of course 'True Americans' shouldn't. Brave men and True Americans have nothing to be ashamed of."\(^3\) Consequently, it was not necessary for the individuals involved to hide behind masks and shirts. Roberts did not blame some of them for covering their faces if they were as "...sneaky looking as those that have been pointed out to me as belonging to Klansmen. I have often believed that their bodies were of black fur with a white stripe up the back, but it's barely possible they are not skunks."\(^4\) In conclusion, Roberts suggested the Klansmen tell their "...Kleagle, Imperial Wizard, Grand Jackler or whatever you call him..." that it was he who cut the wires which held the cross up and that he was not afraid or ashamed to admit it.\(^5\)

\(^3\)Ibid.
\(^4\)Ibid.
\(^5\)Ibid.
There appeared an anonymous reply to Robert's letter in the May twenty-second issue of the Times. The writer, marveling at Robert's braveness, said that the principal ought to sweep his own door first before commencing to sweep for others.

Mr. Principal does not remember a few weeks ago, when he was to a dance at Centerville and was intoxicated. He could not be a true American then by violating the dry law and the Eighteenth Amendment. I think men of that kind (who were) supposed to be a leader for a good cause in the School District ought not to be a law breaker against the U.S.A., so I don't believe a man of that kind should say much about others before he purifies himself first and be a good example for Community.  

W.R. Lanxon, writing in the same issue, said that he felt rather sorry for the children of the Hersey public school. This was especially so as Roberts stooped "....to write such a brainless and unprovoked article...about the Klan." Lanxon said he would not be surprised if it were a case of the students themselves playing a joke on the principal. Even so, ".... if the cross was an 'emblem' of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, then Mr. John Roberts should have fallen down and worshipped, instead of boasting of destroying it, as was done long,long ago on Calvary. It would have made him a better man, surely a better educator."  

---


8 Ibid.
In the near future, said Lanzon, the students and their Christian parents would have the opportunity of hearing and seeing a genuine Klan meeting at Hersey. At that time it could be judged as to whether Klansmen were wolves rather than sheep.\(^9\)

There appeared in an August issue of the Times an advertisement placed by a Klan committee. The advertisement, which concerned a Klan picnic, stated that "there will be a Klan picnic Sunday, Aug. 23, 1925, three miles south of Baldwin. A national speaker. Free coffee—bring your own lunch."\(^10\) All Protestants were cordially invited.\(^11\)

Charles Lowater, in a September editorial under the heading "The Klan Tries the Camp Meeting," asked his readers whether they ever attended an old fashioned shouting Methodist revival. Those who had—particularly those who remained through the week—would remember

....the skillful building up of emotional interest from day to day and from night to night by the exhorters, the trained choirs, the stage setting—and more than all by what is called by the psychologists the 'mob mind'—that strange influence which makes a gathering of people, under the hypnotic usings do as a body what few of them would do as individuals.\(^12\)

---


\(^10\) Woodville Times, August 21, 1925, p. 1.

\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) Editorial, The Woodville Times, September 18, 1925, p. 4. Charles Lowater was also the editor of the Spring Valley Sun.
Meetings of this kind, said Lowater, did a world of good "...in spite of the evanescent quality of many of their 'conversions'..." The editor said that he personally knew of more than one individual who was changed for the better. No one turned out the worse for the experience. Of late, however, the churches were placing greater reliance on the use of reason. The utilization of raw emotion in the implementation of their message was becoming a thing of the past.

Yet somebody persuaded the Ku Klux Klan to utilize the technique of the camp meeting in its campaign for members. That the Klan had closed a recent series of such meetings near Knapp was evidence enough. A number of individuals from the Woodville area were in attendance.

The Klan's adaptation of the Methodist technique paled by comparison. The Kluxer's might have been more successful had they been able to secure the services of the Methodist organizers. "Had Elder Holt, with a good choir, been in charge of that meeting at Knapp, we'll bet that instead of a dozen or two being 'saved,' half the big audience or more would have been fighting to get on the Klan rolls."

---

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
Lowater then mentioned that the Klan would hold a week's camp meeting at Ellsworth. Catholics as well as Protestants were urged to attend at least one meeting.

After hearing it once you'll know whether you want to go again. But alas, 'Pat' Malone will not be there, as he dated up in more favored localities till Thanksgiving. 'Pat so announced, that is, unless he is in jail—he has been in jail in every state of the union, and is proud of the record.'

Despite this, Lowater suggested that everyone attend regardless of whether Malone showed up.

Lowater, in an October editorial captioned "He Should Be Quarantined," stated that "Woodville was lucky this week when Pat Malone, who was scheduled to speak here for the Ku Klux Klan, could not come." Instead, a young man from Menominee kept the speaking engagement. From the accounts of those in attendance, the speech was of honest, temperate and patriotic content. As to the previously scheduled speaker, "the editor of the Times has heard Malone—once. Once was enough." Malone was simply out for the money. He would stop at nothing to collect his ten dollar lecture fee—even if this meant disrupting a community's tranquility. Malone did not care "...That the decent

---

18. Editorial, The Woodville Times, October 30, 1925, p. 4. Lowater may have exaggerated here. However, Malone was known to conflict with the law. See the introductory chapter for details in this regard.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
members of the Klan must stay and hear the odium of his blackguardism." 21 Editor Lowater admitted that his remarks were rather strong but Malone needed it. "We hope the citizens of Woodville may never have Malone inflicted on them, for he is a calamity to any community." 22 Simply put, Malone should be quarantined like any other bad disease germ. 23

According to a mid-November issue of the Times, Baldwin was a recent scene of heavy participation in Klan activities. Concluding a series of meetings there, the Kluxers were scheduled to make Woodville their next meeting place. Pat Malone was to be the speaker. "Everybody, Catholic as well as Protestant, should hear Pat—once." 24

The Times published no additional news concerning Klan activities in the Woodville area until summer of 1926. In July of that year, Editor Lowater observed that, like it or not, the Klan problem was with Woodville. It was sure to enter as a factor in the Fall political picture. Many localities, said Lowater, were already afflicted with

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
disruptions of business and social relations.\textsuperscript{25}

The \textit{Times}, declared the editor, belonged to neither faction. Indeed, it was hoped the journal had good friends in both camps. Also, the editor did not intend to take sides on the issue. On the other hand, it was not the intention of the \textit{Times} to imitate other newspapers by refusing to publish any news which related to the Klan. The same policy would be applied with regard to the Knights of Columbus.\textsuperscript{26}

The Klan question, said Lowater, was one that could not be argued. This was so

\begin{quote}
...because when our prejudices are touched most of us cease to become reasoning beings; we think that we reason and that we choose our lines of action, but in most cases those lines of action were settled for us before we were born, by the opinions of our forefathers, which combined to give us our early training and environment.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Lowater believed that were the strongest Catholic born of Protestant parentage, he would be as sincere a Protestant as any Klansman. By the same token, a Klansman would be as staunch a supporter of the Knights of Columbus were his heritage Catholic. Thus the \textit{Times} would remain friendly, fair, and impartial. In conclusion, Lowater expressed the hope that the attitude of his journal would be appreciated

\textsuperscript{25}Editorial, The \textit{Woodville Times}, July 25, 1926, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.
by all fair minded men and women. 28

Editor Lowater, in an October editorial headlined "The Poison of Malonism," stated that

Pat Malone was given only the expected at Oconto last week—conviction on a charge of criminal slander with a sentence of a year in jail. He has a long time avoided such conviction by means of insinuation in place of direct accusation, and by denial when faced with proof. He denied on the stand that he had said what he was charged with at Oconto. 29

The spirit in which Malone preached, said Lowater, only served to discredit the Klan's cause. Malone's gospel of misrepresentation and hatred might win recruits for a short time. In the long run, however, it carried within itself "...the seeds of its own death at a not far distant period." 30 Despite Malone, the Klan could not

...justly be blamed for setting up its own standards as to membership every order and every society on earth does this. It is only when men like Malone are allowed to inject the poison of race and religious hatred in place of these truly American principles that the Klan fails—and there it must always fail. 31

No further news of Woodville area Klan activities was


29 Editorial, The Woodville Times, October 24, 1926, p. 4. See the introductory chapter for a more complete discussion of the problem of accusation by insinuation. The Oconto situation is a case in point.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.
was published by the Times.\textsuperscript{32}

Appearing in the Baldwin Bulletin of November 12, 1925, was the only entry relating to Klan activities in that area. Noting that the Klan meetings were attracting a large following, the Bulletin observed that crowds which rivaled "...any previous gathering of any kind (even the free movies) have been in attendance at the Klan meetings in the village hall this week."\textsuperscript{33} Indeed, many were turned away because the meeting place was taxed beyond capacity.\textsuperscript{34}

The speaker at these meetings was billed as the famous Pat Malone. The Bulletin observed that Malone was a "...remarkable one, with a voice of iron and a wonderful command of the English language."\textsuperscript{35} Later in the week, Malone was to speak in Woodville. It was understood that a large class would be initiated that Saturday.\textsuperscript{36}

The earliest known incidence of Klan related violence in St. Croix County occurred on October 2, 1924, in the Town of Springfield. On that day Earl Brandt murdered Lee Kerr—a murder which was alleged to have developed out of a

\textsuperscript{32}Editorial, The Woodville Times, October 24, 1926, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{33}Baldwin Bulletin, November 13, 1925, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
quarrel over the Klan. Trial was held at Hudson Court House in January of 1925. Brandt was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment at the State penitentiary. Yet there was a question as to whether the argument over the Klan was the real motive for the murder. Whatever the motive, it would forever remain a mystery.

One other incident was mentioned in relation to Klan activities around New Richmond. This concerned the Reverend Doctor Heber St. Clair Mahood's views on the organization. Dr. Mahood, the Pastor of the First Congregational Church, in an address given in May of 1926, issued a ringing denunciation of the Ku Klux Klan. Similar organizations also came under attack. Mahood particularly attacked the Klan for shielding itself under the guise of Americanism and proceeding "....to graft upon the unsuspecting public and for their own nefarious ends bleed illiterate dupes of their cocon." 39 

The foregoing was all that the New Richmond News carried about Klan activities in its area. In the summer of 1926, the News, Times and Bulletin covered several

---


39 New Richmond News, May 12, 1926, p.1. Unfortunately, no extant copies of Dr. Mahood's address are available.
important events arising out of Klan activities. All three papers covered, in varying degree, the Klan tent burning incident near Hudson. This will be treated in the next chapter. To a lesser degree, the News and Bulletin covered the Ethan B. Minier political episode. An account of this affair is the subject of Chapter Seven. This, then, was the known extent of the Ku Klux Klan’s involvement in the life of St. Croix County.

This location was also the junction at which the branch line veered north for Superior bound trains. The Klan tent, located about one mile east of this junction, was pitched on a rented plot of ground. It was a clear, salubrious June evening, the night the Catholics chose to make their stand. At approximately eight o’clock on the evening of June 14, 1936, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan began to assemble for their meeting. The Catholic delegation, marching en masse as a body, soon arrived. Arguments ensued and, to the dismay of the Klansmen, the Catholics managed to gain access to the tent. Father Peter Rice, Pastor of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church at Hudson, arrived soon thereafter. The priest approached the stage with the purpose of proving false the Klan attacks on the Catholic Church. Father Rice failed in his attempt to prove the falsity of the Klan’s attacks and