The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania, 1920-1940

by Philip Jenkins

IN the mid-1920s, the industrial areas of Pennsylvania saw a series of riots and conflicts that seemed to many to be a real threat to the civil peace of the commonwealth. At Carnegie, in August 1923, a gathering of thousands of Ku Klux Klansmen met for a parade and rally in the presence of the Imperial Wizard, Hiram W. Evans. The Klan was seen as the leading organization of militant Protestantism, and violence was widely expected. The rally was indeed attacked by Catholics from the surrounding area, and one Klansman — Tom Abbot — was killed. He soon became the focus of a near-hagiographic literature as *The Martyred Klansman,* and revenge was promised. In the following months, other Klan meetings were staged as deliberate provocations, the organization summoning its supporters under the slogan "Remember Carnegie and Come Armed!" There was fighting at Lilly and Scottdale, and Klan gatherings across the state were the occasion for impressive exhibitions of strength, both numerically and in terms of firepower. At Reading, there were 3,000 Klan demonstrators, many with rifles or machine guns. At West Kittanning, 25,000 Klansmen from three states gathered on one night; there were nights when as many as fifty cross-burnings might be in progress simultaneously across the state. Catholic groups spoke equally violently of a "War to the Death" against the Klan.[1]

By 1925, the Klan may have had 250,000 members in Pennsylvania, making it one of the largest social movements in the state. This massive organization both used and inspired the rhetoric of civil war. Perhaps what is remarkable about this phenomenon is not the fact of violent rivalry existing between Protestants and Catholics — indeed,

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1 Emerson Hunsberger Loucks, *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania: A Study in Nativism* (Harrisburg, 1936); David Mark Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism* (Garden City, 1965), 36-42; Philadelphia *Inquirer* 26-29 August, 1923.

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in the English-speaking world, anti-Catholicism has traditionally been a far stronger and more venerable theme than anti-Semitism. The strange thing about the Klan movement in Pennsylvania is its chronology, the fact of a major eruption of nativist sentiment some decades after its apparent demise. Carnegie and the ensuing violence seem incongruous in a decade more customarily associated with issues such as the new prosperity and the advance of women's rights. Is this really the Pinchot era?[2]

Moreover, the extent and severity of the conflict implied by the events at Carnegie and West Kittanning suggest that accounts of political history should pay more attention to the continuing religious divisions within the state in the present century — up to the 1920s, and perhaps much later. As late as 1940, there were still several hundred active Klansmen in Pennsylvania, some of whom were prepared to merge their traditional nativist sentiments with newer and more pernicious models drawn from European fascism.

Historians of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania have often remarked on the importance of ethnic and religious conflict in determining party loyalties and platforms. There was a strong and enduring nativist tradition in the state, suggested by incidents such as the great Philadelphia riots of 1844, the strength of the Know-Nothings in the next decade, and the role of religion in dividing the labor movement in the 1870s. However, much less attention has been paid to the continuity of this theme into the present century. In most accounts of Pennsylvania history, "nativism" and "anti-Catholicism" appear to have faded away before the end of the nineteenth century. The history of the Pennsylvania Ku Klux Klan shows that the obituary was premature.[3]

The Strength of the Klan

The Ku Klux Klan has long been a focus of historical scholarship on

2 Richard C. Keller, *Pennsylvania's Little New Deal* (New York, 1982). There is of course a substantial literature on nativist movements in Pennsylvania. See for example W. Gudelunas, "Nativism and the Demise of Schuylkill County Whiggery," *Pennsylvania History* 45 (1978): 225-36; W. E. Lyons, "Populism in Pennsylvania 1892-1901," *Pennsylvania History* 32 (1965): 49-65; Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, Conn., 1975).

3 The number of general works which fail to refer to the Pennsylvania Klan is impressive. There is for instance no reference in Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* (University Park, 1980); R. F. Weigley, et al., *Philadelphia — A 300 Year History* (New York, 1982); or A. F. Davis and M. Haller, eds., *The Peoples of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1973).

the years of Southern Reconstruction.[4] More recently, there has been growing interest in the movement as it was revived after 1915, with major studies of the Klan in Utah and Colorado.[5] For all its charlatanism, corruption, and outright gangsterism, the new Klan rapidly became a mass movement of striking proportions, especially in northern industrial states like Ohio and Indiana. Pennsylvania was no exception to this pattern, as it rapidly acquired a Klan movement of very impressive size. By 1920, the first Klan envoys ("kleagles") had arrived in the state — F. W. Atkins of Atlanta in Philadelphia, Samuel D. Rich of Kentucky in Pittsburgh. The "kleagle" was a fascinating illustration of the way in which the "new Klan" adapted to contemporary fashions in salesmanship and public relations. Membership was available for ten dollars, of which the kleagle was entitled to keep four. Kleagles would first try to recruit personal friends, and next approached Protestant clergymen, offering free membership and Klan periodicals. Patriotic groups, veterans' organizations, fraternal orders, and Masonic societies were also solicited.[6]

In Pennsylvania, recruiting successes were early and dramatic. There were 125,000 Klansmen in the state by the end of 1924, and possibly 250,000 within the next two years. Such impressive figures might inspire scepticism, but there are grounds for accepting them in broad outline. They are based on documents originating from one of the Klan's many feuds between local regions and national headquarters in Atlanta. The central organization was anxious that all sections of the Invisible Empire should pay their dues ("taxes"), and local organizers were at pains to prove they had held nothing back. It was therefore in the interests of the state officials to *under*-report mem-

4 Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror* (New York, 1971); William Pierce Randel, *The Ku Klux Klan* (Philadelphia, 1965); Stanley Fitzgerald Horn, *Invisible Empire* (New York, 1972); William Harvey Fisher, *The Invisible Empire: A Bibliography of the Ku Klux Klan* (Metuchen, N.J., 1980); David Lowe, *Ku Klux Klan — The Invisible Empire* (New York, 1967); Patsy Sims, *The Klan* (New York, 1978); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York, 1967).

5 Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire — The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana, Il., 1981); Julian Sher, *White Hoods: Canada's Ku Klux Klan* (Vancouver, 1983); Larry R. Gerlach, *Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah* (Logan, Utah, 1982); K. T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City* (New York, 1967).

6 Loucks, *Pennsylvania*. This work can now be supplemented by the very substantial Klan archives: Pennsylvania State Archives, State Police Records, RG30: Ku Klux Klan records (hereafter cited as "Klan archive"). This collection includes five boxes of correspondence, 1922-1940, and three boxes of "general" material from the same period. The latter includes a wide selection of Klan pamphlets and newspapers.

bership. Moreover, confidence in the figures is inspired by the care taken to distinguish between committed members and casual "drop-in" sympathizers.[7]

It is doubtful whether even the leaders of the movement had a very precise idea of the exact number of dedicated supporters at any time, and the Klan had a very rapid turnover of membership. However, a broad picture of support within the state can easily be established. The Klan in its first years achieved enormous successes in the coal and steel areas of the southwest, where lodges ("klaverns") might often total five hundred or more. There were key centers at Pittsburgh, New Kensington, Homestead, Wilkinsburg, Mount Pleasant, and Johnstown. Altoona, indeed, might have had the largest number of Klansmen per capita of any city in the United States. At its height, Klan membership in eastern Pennsylvania may have exceeded ninety thousand — one-third in Philadelphia and its suburbs, most of the remainder in the mining regions of Luzerne, Schuylkill, Carbon, and Lehigh counties.

The strength of the Klan in its heyday can be generally deduced from the number of individual "klaverns" or klans in each region. While variations in membership make this an imprecise method, its conclusions are suggestive. By the late 1920s, Pennsylvania had 416 klans: the last to be chartered (1935) was the John Harris Klan in Harrisburg, number 423. Of the 416, the largest numbers were to be found in the following counties:[8]

Number of Klans		*Counties*
Over 30	1	— Allegheny (33)
20-30	2	— Philadelphia (20); Westmoreland (21)
10-19	7	— Armstrong (15); Clearfield (14); Fayette (13); Indiana (10); Luzerne (13); Schuylkill (11); Washington (17)
6-9	19	
1-5	36	
0	2	— Snyder, Union
Total	67	

One hundred twenty-three klans — some 30 percent of the total —

7 Loucks, *Pennsylvania*, 25-61; Seymour M. Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason*, 2nd edition (Chicago, 1978); John M. Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1924); Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* (Indianapolis, 1924).

8 Klan archive, general papers, boxes 1-2.

were therefore to be found in seven contiguous counties of the southwest. Five other counties in this area — Beaver, Blair, Cambria, Clarion, and Somerset — each supplied a further nine klans. During the 1920s, the southwest was clearly the Klan heartland within the state. Activity here was impressive, but we should not forget the intense interest stirred by the Klan in apparently peaceful areas with little racial or ethnic conflict. Why, for example, should there have been seven klaverns in Centre County, six in Bradford County, five in Huntingdon? In 1925 or 1926, the potential strength of the Klan must have seemed an immensely troubling prospect.

At its height, the Ku Klux Klan appealed mainly to the native-born working class of southwestern Pennsylvania. In his 1930s history of the state's Klan, Emerson H. Loucks remarked that "barring the intellectuals and the liberals, the white native-born American population was occupationally well-represented," although he admits that this statement is speculative in the absence of membership lists. Loucks' conclusions can now be confirmed from Klan documents themselves. Specifically, this evidence comes from the records of the "State Klavaliers," a paramilitary order established within the Klan, to be equipped with white military uniforms and black leather puttees. The klavaliers would serve as police, sergeants-at-arms, and leaders of the vanguard in conflict with hostile groups such as Catholics. Included in the Klan archives not available to Loucks are the forms completed by the klavalier applicants for each county between 1924 and 1926.[9] These were detailed documents, giving information about occupation, educational level, military service, and physical characteristics.

The resulting picture is of a true mass movement. In Westmoreland County, for example, the application forms of 124 individuals between 1925 and 1926 show that the Klan appealed to a wide body of support. Among those represented were unskilled labor (twenty-two "laborers") and skilled industrial workers (two draftsmen, six carpenters, four electricians). All the major industries — steel, coal, textiles, and aluminum — were included. Laborers apart, the largest single occupational categories were clerks and cashiers (thirteen) followed by truck-drivers (twelve). There were independent tradesmen (eight butchers, bankers, and blacksmiths) and even two farmers. There were a few foremen and managers, with one "student" probably representing the highest social category. The Klansmen were a very broad cross section of the native-born working class of the area.

9 Ibid. The klavaliers may have inspired the "Minute Men" of Sinclair Lewis' 1935 *It Can't Happen Here*, a storm-trooper-like movement.

Similar figures emerge from other counties, though the specific occupations depended on local economies. In Indiana County there were twenty-four klavalier applications, seventeen of which were from mining and related fields. However, a principal and a college student also applied. Throughout the state, there was a scattering of such "respectable" Klan members, often teachers or students. However, normally, the Klan spanned the working class, as with the fifty-seven Klansmen of Carbon County for whom occupations were recorded. Here, the railroad appears to have been the dominant employer. Five trainmen applied, as well as two railroad engineers, two firemen, a motorman, and a railroad clerk, in addition to the normal range of trades, both skilled (carpenter, blacksmith, bricklayer) and unskilled (fourteen laborers). Klavaliers were usually in their twenties or thirties. In Erie County, for example, the median age of the fifty-six recorded members was thirty-one, and only ten of the group were over forty-three years old.

The Appeal of the Klan

The Ku Klux Klan followed a long tradition of social and fraternal organizations in American life. It borrowed its ritual from a variety of groups, notably freemasons, but it added exotic titles and impressive ritual. A typical edict, for example, began with this salutation: "To all Hydras, Great Titans, Furies, Giants, Exalted Cyclops, Terrors; and to all Klansmen of the Realm of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc." [10] The Realm of Pennsylvania (under its Grand Dragon) was divided into provinces (eight by 1929, sixty-seven by 1936), each under a Great Titan. An individual klavern included these officers:

Title	*Meaning*
Cyclops	Master or President
Klaliff	Vice-President
Klokard	Lecturer
Kludd	Chaplain
Kligrapp	Secretary
Klabee	Treasurer
Kladd	Conductor
Klarogo	Inner Guard
Klexter	Outer Guard
Night Hawk	
Klokann Chief	Guards
Klokanns	

10 Klan archive, correspondence, 1939, file 1; for the masonic background to

The Klan even offered a complete language: "kodes" for codes, for example, and place names — "Krawford Kounty," "Klarion Kounty."

In its early days, the Klan seemed to offer the best of traditional social organizations, together with a romantic and mystical appeal. Many scholars have remarked on the contribution made by the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* to the refounding and early popularity of the movement. The Klan also had a very high degree of public visibility in the news media between 1922 and 1925. Indeed, in these years, all the major newspapers in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh frequently carried lead stories about the Klan, usually at times of major public or patriotic events like Independence Day. Klan gatherings made for dramatic stories and pictures — the purpose, indeed, for which they were customarily designed.[11]

Thus, the Ku Klux Klan appealed because it was dramatic and newsworthy, but there was much more than this to explain the thousands of recruits. The group seemed to meet the needs of a particular section of the working class at a time of serious ethnic conflict. This resulted from the ethnic divisions created during the labor disputes of earlier years. Consistently, employers had played on nativist prejudices in order to divide the workforce. In Allegheny County, for example, the great steel strike of 1919 was predominantly undertaken by unskilled immigrants, while the native labor force remained at work. In Cambria County, the steel workers were united, but Blacks were recruited to break the strike. Attacks on unionism regularly portrayed radicals as exponents of foreign ideologies, and often as foreigners themselves. There was, therefore, fertile ground by the early 1920s for an anti-radical movement among the native working class.[12] Nativist campaigns had achieved a major apparent victory in 1919 with the Eighteenth Amendment, which stimulated further efforts aimed at promoting "American values." As Loucks remarked, "Prohibition made the Ku Klux Klan."

The principles advocated by the Klan combined general nativist slogans (support for the Christian religion, white supremacy, pure Americanism, states' rights, pure womanhood) with explicitly anti-radical social views. They claimed, for example, to stand for closer

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the Klan, see Lynne Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture 1880-1930* (Princeton, 1985).

11 In these years, for example, the Klan frequently made front-page news in Philadelphia papers like the *Inquirer, Record, Public Ledger,* and *North American.*

12 Klein and Hoogenboom, *History,* 433-36.

relationship between capital and American (not immigrant) labor; to combat "unwarranted strikes by foreign labor agitators"; to "prevent fires and the destruction of property by lawless elements"; and to favor strict limitations on further foreign immigration. There was much appealing here to native-born workers. Although traditional labor practices were criticized, there was the suggestion that truly "American" workers would receive a privileged position in the labor force, while the attack on radicalism gave an excuse to purge troublesome foreign workers.[13]

The genesis of the Klan in these attitudes is important for the question of ideological definition. There is some question in the literature about whether the movement can technically be described as fascist, but its historical origins were almost identical to those of European fascist movements. They, too, originated in reaction to the failed radicalism of 1919-20, and advocated the rights of native labor in partnership with capital, against some insidious foreign foe. They too advocated a return to tradition, military virtues, and paramilitary structure. If a movement like the Ku Klux Klan in its Pennsylvania form had existed in contemporary Europe, historians would have no hesitation in calling it a fascist group on the model of Italy, Spain, or Germany.[14]

Anti-Catholicism

Of the traditional targets of the Klan — Blacks, Catholics, and Jews — it was the Catholics who were perceived as the greatest enemy in the 1920s, and probably in the next decade also. At a time like the late 1930s, when the "Jewish Question" was hotly debated, it is striking to find so much anti-Catholicism in Klan literature. To understand this, it is useful to examine the nature of religious relations in the areas of Western Pennsylvania where the Klan had its roots. Of course, the primary issue was conflict between native and immigrant labor forces, and memories of the 1919 strikes. However, there were broader cultural issues at stake. Since the late nineteenth century, a number of vigorous and obvious Catholic centers had emerged in a belt stretching from St. Mary's in Elk County to the great monastery

13 Loucks, *Pennsylvania*, 16, 33; Hiram Wesley Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *North American Review* 213 (1926): 33-63.

14 See for example F. L. Carstein, *The Rise of Fascism* (London, 1967); Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber, eds., *The European Right* (London, 1965); Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (London, 1979).

of Latrobe in Westmoreland County. Cambria County offered Loretto, Gallitzin, and a series of communities named for saints such as St. Augustine and St. Benedict. In the 1920s, the Catholic presence was becoming even more overt. John McCort, Bishop of Altoona and Johnstown from 1920, was a great builder who developed many schools in his diocese and was largely responsible for the imposing new cathedral at Altoona (1924-31). It was difficult for a traveller across the state to avoid the symbols of a confident and expansive Catholicism. By 1920, Pennsylvania had a foreign-born population of 1.4 million, 16 percent of its total, and Catholics represented a substantial majority of this group. The year 1924 marked the passage of the Immigration Act which finally limited this flow.[15]

The Catholic presence was deeply troubling to nativists for a number of reasons. First, Catholics apparently owed allegiance to a foreign potentate, the Pope. Many Pennsylvania Catholics were also German, raising the issue of divided loyalties during the First World War. (The custom of prominently flying an American flag outside the German-founded monastery of Latrobe dates from this period.) In the 1920s and 1930s, gangsterism and organized crime in the state were widely publicized, with the most attention being given to Jewish or Catholic immigrants — Micky Duffy, Max Hoff, the Lanzetti brothers. Catholicism seemed alien, corrupt, and threatening.[16] The Klan would obtain a remarkable constituency among Protestant clergy.

The battle against Catholic influence took a variety of forms, but it was especially concentrated in the schools. Parochial schools were seen by the Klan as training children in un-American and un-Christian doctrines, making the defense of public schools a high priority. However, these public schools had to be American, displaying the American flag, and Protestant, with frequent readings from a Protestant-approved Bible. In the 1920s, the Klan was often active in presenting flags to public schools, providing an opportunity for members to

15 For the new immigrants, see especially the works of John E. Bodnar, such as *The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1973); *Immigration and Industrialization* (Pittsburgh, 1977); *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians and Poles in Pittsburgh 1900-1960* (Urbana, 1982); or *Workers World, Kinship, Community and Protest in an Industrial Society 1900-1940* (Baltimore, 1982). See also: Dennis Clark, *The Irish of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1973); Michael A. Barendse, *Social Expectations and Perception: The Case of the Slavic Anthracite Workers* (University Park, Pa., 1981); Fr. John P. Gallagher, *A Century of History: The Diocese of Scranton 1868-1968* (Scranton, 1968).

16 Gary W. Potter and Philip Jenkins, *The City and the Syndicate* (Boston, 1985).

parade in regalia. In Allegheny County, the Catholic teachers of one township were transferred after a Catholic Douai Bible was found on the premises.[17]

Most of the Klan literature of the 1920s focused on "the Catholic Question." The Klan opposed intervention in Mexico, because Catholics wanted a military campaign against the anti-clerical government there. They opposed the League of Nations because it would ally the United States with predominantly Catholic powers. Above all, they opposed domestic Catholic influences. In 1927, a state representative from Dubois introduced a package of anti-Catholic legislation including a penitentiary term of up to ten years for membership in the Knights of Columbus. Imprisonment would also result from the expression of distinctively Catholic opinions, such as any suggestion that a civil marriage was invalid before God.

Meanwhile, the figure of Alfred E. Smith seemed to pose a real threat of a Catholic presidency. In the summer of 1924, the chance of Smith winning the Democratic nomination stirred religious conflict to a new height in Pennsylvania. There were mass rallies of Klansmen across the state, and one meeting at Ardmore led to the murder of a Catholic police officer. In 1928, Smith's presidential candidacy led to vigorous Klan electioneering. Ironically, this appears to have done more good than harm to the Democrats, as Catholics were apparently galvanized to register and vote in unprecedented numbers.[18]

But the Ku Klux Klan was much more than an anti-Catholic militia. It also performed many social functions. The Klan acted as a social welfare agency, helping to find jobs for the unemployed, actively retrieving by force a deserting husband, and giving aid and food to the poor. They also acted as vigilantes, enforcing extra-legal "justice" against loansharks, child molesters, and bootleggers — usually, but not invariably, Blacks or immigrants. A characteristic event was the sacking of "the nigger whorehouses opposite the schoolhouse at McKees Rocks." The Klan even had special printed "intelligence forms" to report suspects for offenses like bootlegging, presumably with a view to future vigilante action.[19]

The Ku Klux Klan also offered exciting forms of recreation. In 1924, for example, the Philadelphia *North American* included a small report

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17 Loucks, *Pennsylvania*, 134-48.

18 Philadelphia *North American*, 5 July 1924; Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, 15 Sept. 1924. I am very grateful to Ms. Victoria Donohue of Narberth for her assistance with the Ardmore incident.

19 Loucks, *Pennsylvania*, 40-43.

on the group's Independence Day gathering at Huntingdon. Ten thousand Klansmen were present, with friends and families — 22,000 people in all. There were 1400 initiations of new members, and three Klan marriages. This event was in effect a massive social gathering and picnic, with the focus of the blazing crosses to add drama. Moreover, the Huntingdon meeting was not considered a particularly large convocation, as it was the celebration only for the central counties of the state, between Johnstown, Williamsport, and Harrisburg. That meetings on this scale attracted relatively little attention may suggest how firmly the Klan had been accepted as a normal component of life in many areas of the state.

Decline

If the Klan had sustained this level of strength and activity, it would have become a major political force. In fact, the successes of 1924-26 were short-lived. Membership was probably below 30,000 by 1928, and only 4,000 by the early 1930s, a collapse almost as rapid as the initial successes. The reasons for this decline are complex, but the nature of Klan leadership was much to blame. Key leaders like Sam Rich and D. C. Stephenson were almost openly corrupt and ran the Klan as a profit-making enterprise. By 1923, each member was expected to pay a $15 initiation fee and $6.50 for robes, apart from dues. Accounting procedures were primitive, and a great deal of money went astray.

The leadership was also often in internal conflict, usually over personalities but occasionally over issues of principle. At the 1926 klorero (convention) in Dubois, the Reverend Herbert C. Shaw of Erie was elected Grand Dragon despite fierce opposition. Shaw was allegedly a rabid anti-Catholic too extreme even for the Klan, and moderates preferred his rival, Sam Rich. At the local level, klans split between supporters and opponents of the two candidates, and rival klaverns regularly banished or excommunicated each other. After 1926, Philadelphia klans were virtually at war with each other, engaging in acts of burglary and random violence. A series of embarrassing lawsuits portrayed a distressing world of thuggery and corruption. Finally, the need for the Klan seemed to have diminished by 1926, with the decline of the Red Scare. The Klan lost its early popularity throughout the northern states.[20]

20 Ibid., 162-98. The Utah and Colorado studies also show collapse after 1926 (Gerlach; Goldberg).

The 1930s

By the early 1930s, Emerson Loucks imagined that he was writing the obituary of the Klan. Surviving groups maintained themselves as purely social lodges, organizing ham suppers, male voice choirs, and "nigger minstrel" shows. But it would be a mistake to neglect the Klan after this point. It had ceased to be a mass movement, but it still had several thousand members and a statewide network connected to a national society. The 1930s also found the organization facing major new ideological issues and challenges.

By 1933, the statewide strength of the Klan was about 6,000, including some remarkable concentrations. Among the most active klaverns — each with over fifty members — were numbers 119 (Chambersburg), 128 (Uniontown), 304 (York), 359 and 362 (both Philadelphia). The movement continued to survive in many of its previous centers, such as Fayette and Allegheny counties, though its strength had now declined. In the 1930s, counties like Fayette and Westmoreland were again centers of more traditional labor militancy in coal and steel, with the employers rather than immigrants identified as enemies. The center of gravity now shifted decisively to the east of the state, where Philadelphia County in 1933 had almost twenty active klaverns with perhaps 750 members. Moreover, these were heavily concentrated in certain sections of the city — to the north, in Germantown, Olney, Frankford, Kensington, and Roxborough; in the western suburbs; and one lone outpost in the south, around Broad and Federal Streets.[21]

As in the 1920s, it was not possible for Klan candidates to stand openly in elections. However, Grand Dragon Samuel G. Stouch III was involved in a number of "front" groups in Philadelphia politics. There was the "Protestant Cooperative League" which attacked the New Deal for placing "racial and sectarian groups" in charge of American politics. In 1940, there was a "League for Protestant Action," which aimed to mobilize the Protestant vote through the churches. This attracted a remarkably respectable body of clergy, including Daniel A. Poling, who had led an anti-corruption campaign in 1936 and who would be the Republican mayoral candidate in 1951. Poling joined Stouch's campaign "to arouse the Protestant constituency of metropolitan Philadelphia."

21 It is in the 1930s that we are first able to reconstruct complete lists of officers for all the klaverns still in operation, and these continue until 1940. There are also complete quarterly lists of membership, showing periodic gains and losses. All information on Klan membership in the 1930s is from the Klan archive, general papers, boxes 1-3.

Thus, the Klan should not be disregarded after its halcyon days of the 1920s, but that there was a decline is beyond doubt. Klan publications such as the *Province Bulletin* often urged a return to the great days of 1926. In 1933, some three hundred klans may have been still in operation. By 1938, there had been a parlous decline, and the movement was on the verge of extinction in 1940. By 1938, only fifty klans may have been active, and the mere existence of a klavern says little about numbers. A klan should have had twelve officers, from "cyclops" down to "klokanns," but in the 1930s there were many semi-defunct units. The "Abiding" klan in Collingdale, Delaware County (No. 342), had a full complement of officers in 1934. By 1936, it had only five, two of whom were holding dual positions. The officers constituted the entire membership. In Clearfield County, klavern No. 187 had only three members by 1938, making the fulfillment of any rituals exceedingly difficult. No. 252 (Caleb Lee) had fallen from fifteen members in 1933 to only one in 1934, its exalted cyclops.

In 1938, there were certainly less than a thousand Klansmen in the state, and there may have been under three hundred by 1940. Between 1938 and 1940, Stouch circularized the remaining klaverns with new countersigns, and was able to collect replies from only thirty units. Their geographical distribution indicates the last bastions of Klan support in the state:

Number of Klaverns 1939-40	*Counties*
7	1 (Philadelphia)
3	1 (Fayette)
2	5 (Allegheny, McKean, Jefferson, Chester, Montgomery)
1	10

In its last days, the Klan maintained a dual existence: as a vestigial survival in its old industrial heartland in the southwest, and as a fringe nativist movement in suburban Philadelphia.

The collapse during the 1930s was so sudden as to suggest that available sources may under-report membership. However, the decline can be confirmed in many different klaverns. In klavern 119 in Chambersburg, there were seventy members in 1933. In 1937 there were thirty; in 1940, only eighteen. Uniontown had 101 Klansmen in

1936, forty by 1940. The "Calvin R. Butler" klavern in Williamsport had forty-two members in 1933, seven by 1935. Between 1933 and 1940, York's membership fell from fifty-five to thirteen; Fort Mason's (Fayette County) from sixty to thirteen; the William Penn klan in Philadelphia from seventy-nine to six. And these were the klaverns which survived; most simply went out of existence.

In the last phase of Klan activity in the 1930s, the composition of the movement changed markedly: it became more middle-class and relatively respectable. Klan officers whose correspondence survives tended to use their own headed notepaper, indicating ownership of a small business in retail sales, or public relations. Klan membership forms were now accompanied by a required declaration that the applicant had not engaged in speculation or that his business was not involved in dubious financial practice; and references were needed. This was a far cry from the movement of steelworkers and miners of the previous decade.[22]

The Nazi Controversy

Such a movement might have maintained a certain momentum, based on isolationism and the mobilization of business sentiment against the New Deal. That it did not — that the Klan simply collapsed — reflected the violent internal wranglings of the late 1930s. Effectively, the Klansmen faced a dilemma: if racial supremacy was the chief issue of concern, then pro-German views were a logical choice. Leading pro-Hitler activists included Philip M. Allen, Arthur Bell, and Paul Winter, an experienced kleagle from the early 1920s. On the other hand, the Klan claimed to be the American party *par excellence*, and the organization's letterheads regularly used slogans such as "Traitors to the cause of true Americanism must be ferreted out and exposed." The klaverns had patriotic names — "Paul Jones," "Cradle of Liberty," "American Defender," "Pride of America."[23]

Was not sympathy for Germany as un-American as the Catholic attachment to Rome? In the "Rescue" klan (No. 311) in Wilkes-Barre, there was a violent split between "moderate" Lewis Button and Nazi Paul Winter, who boasted of his membership in organizations

22 Ibid., correspondence, 1939-40.

23 Harold Lavine, *Fifth Column in America* (New York, 1940); Sander A. Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924-41* (Ithaca, 1974); Charles Higham, *American Swastika* (New York, 1985). For communist isolationism in 1939-41, see Paul Lyons, *Philadelphia Communists, 1936-56* (Philadelphia, 1982).

based in Germany. Even Klansmen were slow to abandon a nominal support for "American democracy," and were strong in their criticism of "totalitarian dictatorship" — which usually meant the FDR administration. Winter's overt fascism was thus deeply controversial; it is ironic that his views found their closest American parallels among Catholic movements of the extreme right, like the Christian Front.

Evidence for the ideological split may be found in the extensive surviving papers of Samuel Stouch of Germantown, the Grand Dragon of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey (hence his pen-name "Deljerpen" in pamphlets and letters to newspapers). Stouch's reading certainly gave credence to charges of Nazi sympathies. He owned a volume of Hitler's speeches, published by Berlin's Terramare Press, and another collection of *German Political Profiles* by the same publisher. These were character sketches of the Nazi leadership. There were also leaflets by the emigré "Union of National Socialist Russians." He read *The Free American* (or *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*), the journal of the Nazi *Bund*, and the newsletter published by the German Ministry of Propaganda. He also subscribed to the *Industrial Control Report* published by James B. True, one of the first Americans to recommend annihilation of the Jews as a solution to economic problems. Of course, simply reading a book or journal does not indicate complete sympathy for its point of view. Stouch also owned copies of the *American Free Press*, published in 1940 by the Philadelphia branch of the Communist Party, which he perhaps read for its opposition to American support for Britain against Germany. However, the great majority of his correspondence and reading indicates pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic views.[24]

Some of his correspondents were also very sympathetic to Nazi ideology. One G. Harry Davidson wrote in 1939 of the scandal caused in his Presbyterian church when a converted Jew was invited to speak and abused the German government. Davidson wrote that German Jews might be only 1 percent of the population, but this 1 percent "had stolen 95 percent of Germany's law, medicine and educational practice, besides a corner of mercantile and finance, a strangled press, and a state within a state, as they have almost complete here in America." Perhaps the persecution of the Jews was barbaric, but it was no worse than "Jewish" (i.e., Soviet) persecution of Russian Christians. Anti-Semitism was here linked to traditional

24 Klan archive, correspondence, 1940-41.

anti-immigrant prejudice. In January 1939, Stouch wrote, there were 880,000 foreigners seeking admission to the United States, and 90 percent of those were Jewish.[25]

Divisions within what was left of the Klan reached a climax in August 1940, after joint exercises between the New Jersey klan and the Nazi *Bund* at "Camp Nordland" in New Jersey. This resulted in unfavorable publicity and genuine shock among the Klan traditionalists. The Wilkes-Barre klavern now expelled Winter, seceded from the Klan, and wrote a bitter criticism of the "disgusting debacle." They were not alone, as klaverns split and seceded in many states. The national leadership realized the need for urgent action. Imperial Wizard J. A. Colescott urged the House Committee on Un-American Activities to investigate the *Bund* and all pro-Nazi groups, but it was too late. Profound damage had been caused.

For Stouch himself, the failure would soon be compounded by what appears to have been the work of Klan dissidents. In October 1940, his home was burglarized, and "several hundred pounds of material" were removed — the complete Klan archives for the three states over the previous decade. In June 1941, these records — or a portion of them — were secretly deposited at a State Police barracks with a note saying simply, "Please turn over to Lieutenant Tuehy." The State Police were very pleased at this anonymous donation, as it offered important evidence on potential Fifth Column activities. But in reality, the Pennsylvania Klan had little capacity left to pose a subversive challenge even if its members had so wished. The *Bund* link had been the final blow to what had once been a sizeable and potentially dangerous organization; the group ceased to matter in 1940. In 1944, a crisis over massive back taxes caused the demise of the national organization.[26]

Conclusion

Considerable attention has been paid by historians to the nativist and anti-foreign tradition in Pennsylvania. During the nineteenth century, this often manifested itself in violent outbreaks, most dramatically in the Philadelphia riots of the 1830s and 1840s. This was chiefly a reaction to Irish Catholic migration. Much less attention has been paid to the nativist reaction than to the even more substantial migration in the early years of this century, presumably because that

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.

involved less overt public violence. However, the nativist tradition continued at least into the 1920s, aggravated by new issues of labor conflict and alleged foreign-inspired subversion.[27] It would be interesting to trace the continuity of this tradition by pursuing the careers of individual Klan members into the 1940s and 1950s, and oral history would seem an obvious way of undertaking such research.

Historians of Pennsylvania are fortunate to have the resources to study this movement in remarkable detail. The history of the Klan provides information about local developments, but more importantly, it offers insights into many aspects of state history in this period — religious history, urban politics, and working-class history. The unsavory nature of the organization involved should not prevent us from recognizing the great value of their records, and the memories they have left behind. ■

NOTE ON SOURCES

The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania was the title of a classic 1936 study by Emerson H. Loucks, originally a Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University. This has attracted high praise from contemporary scholars such as Chalmers, Gerlach, and Goldberg. Words such as "brilliant" and "seminal" are frequently used of the work, although it is not easily available. But Loucks' work appears to have had less impact in Pennsylvania itself, where the Klan represents a virtually forgotten movement. They are essentially omitted from the standard histories of the state and its major communities; the group was a fleeting phenomenon which left no great impact in the years after its peak in the 1920s. Moreover, much can now be added to Loucks' work, as we now have an extensive archive not available to him: the papers stolen from Stouch's home in 1940, and now stored at the State Archives in Harrisburg. These provide additional information on the 1920s — notably the names and occupations of Klan members — and a very detailed series of materials on the next decade. It might also be noted that there are equally copious sources on the states of New Jersey and Delaware.

Finally, there is also an important oral tradition that remains untapped on this subject. A newspaper story about the present author's research drew a remarkable response from individuals and local historical societies from across the state, all generally following a common theme. There are widespread memories of Klan activity, of marches and cross-burnings, and many people apparently remember finding Klan robes or regalia in the homes of older relatives. Reading about an academic project on the movement permitted people to place such phenomena in context, and they were eager to discuss these memories.

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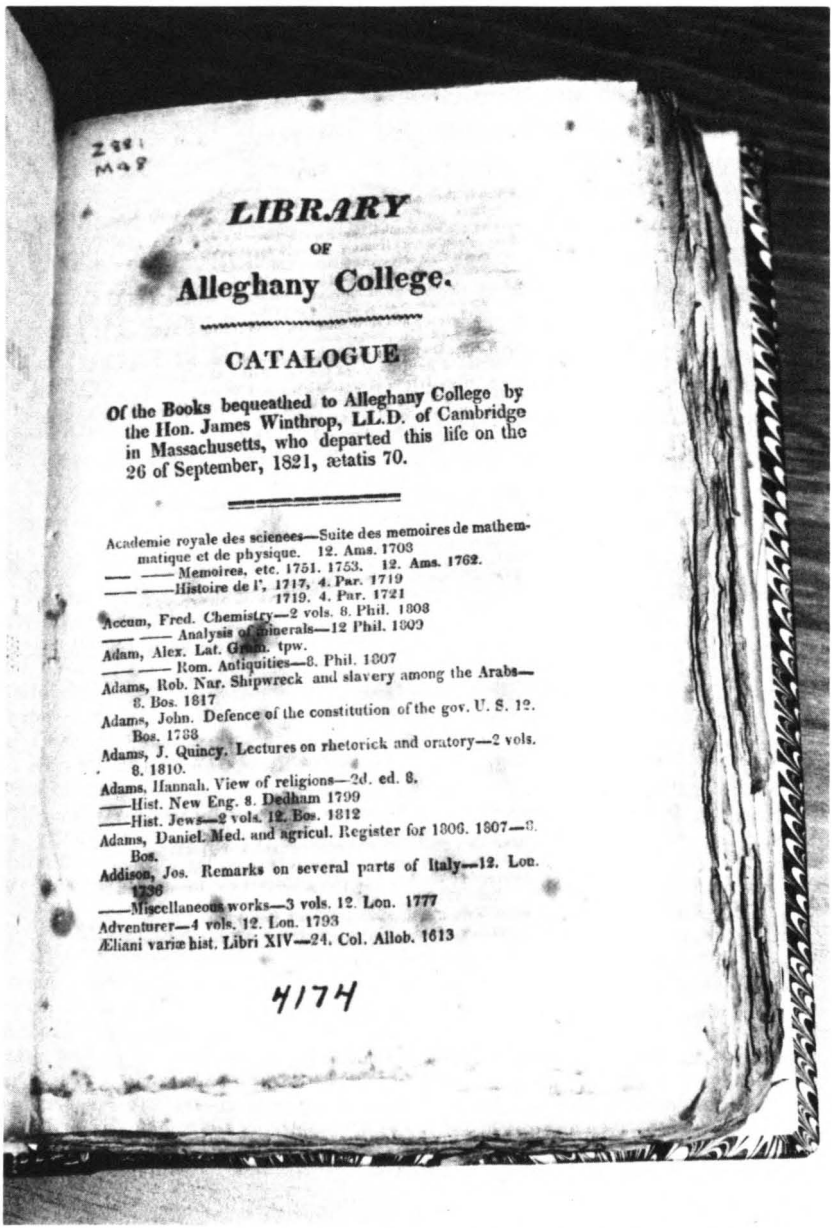
27 The present author has suggested elsewhere that the nineteenth-century nativist tradition profoundly influenced social and medical science in the state in the early decades of this century, and the policies based on that science. See Philip Jenkins, "Eugenics, Crime, and Ideology," *Pennsylvania History* 51 (1984): 64-78. Nativism was by no means the preserve of lower social classes, nor of the less educated.



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