“You Can’t Burn History”
Getting Right with the Klan in Noblesville, Indiana

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In the summer of 1995 Noblesville, Indiana, site of the sensational 1925 homicide trial of Ku Klux Klan leader D. C. Stephenson, again drew national attention after the discovery of Klan records dating back to the 1920s. In March, Don Roberts, a local building contractor, chanced upon a trunk in the barn of a property he had recently acquired. The trunk contained over one thousand membership cards and dues receipts revealing the names of Hamilton County “citizens” of klavern #42 of the Indiana realm of the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan. Hoods, sashes, and an eighteen-inch electric cross were also among the contents. After rejecting an offer from a private collector, Roberts decided to donate all the Klan material to the Hamilton County Historical Society. While recognizing that exposure of the members’ names might pain descendents,

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Noblesville Daily Ledger columnist Gregg Montgomery called for access to the records, a view endorsed shortly after by an editorial in the same newspaper arguing that the Klan records were “a part of the Hoosier state’s social quilt.” At its regular bimonthly meeting in July, the historical society’s board of directors voted unanimously to accept Roberts’s donation. At the same time it established the policy that the Klan records would not be placed on public display, with access limited to genealogical or scholarly purposes. Curious individuals could inquire whether specific relatives’ names appeared in the records, but names could not be published without consent of both the society and the individual’s descendants.

The discovery of the Klan records, and the issue of what would be done with them, precipitated a wave of media attention that astounded residents of this county seat located ten miles northeast of Indianapolis. The story was featured on Indiana television news broadcasts and was circulated across the country by the Associated Press. Feature stories in the nation’s leading newspapers included local residents’ comments on the town’s prior record of discrimination. The revelation of these Klan records, wrote Dirk Johnson of the New York Times, “has forced this upscale city of 20,000 people . . . to confront its racist past.” Judy Pasternak of the Los Angeles Times, in an article entitled “Trunk Opens Up Indiana Town’s Secret Klan Past,” cited Don Roberts’s comment that the local Klan’s ranks included “pillars of the community.” The articles by Pasternak and Johnson provided platforms for critics of the decision not to publicize names. Stephenson biographer William Lutholtz, historian Nancy McLean, and John W. Jarrett of the NAACP in nearby Anderson, Indiana, argued the historical and social benefits of full disclosure. Sam H. Jones, president of the Urban League of Indianapolis, argued against the decision to limit access to scholars: “History is very important to me. It helps me to understand the past and to chart future directions. The Klan is very much alive in Indiana, so it would be important to know more about its roots.”


David Heighway, then director of the county historical society, defended the board's decision. He explained, "If it had been 10 more years, there wouldn't have been any problem at all. . . . The local community is really important to us. We don't want to offend them." For a time, Heighway, Roberts, and Burgess were deluged with telephone calls from reporters and others. Newsweek entered the fray when its "Perspective" column featured a statement by Burgess describing the men he had personally known whose names appeared on the Klan rosters as "fine, decent people." The magazine misrepresented his words as a cumulative assessment of all those who were listed on "the town's 70-year-old Ku Klux Klan membership rolls." Some residents were bewildered by the attention; one historical society board member couldn't understand "all the hullabaloo. . . . The media has their way of blowing things out of all proportion." Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that some of Roberts's friends inquired why he had not simply burned the records. Several years later Roberts reflected, "Well, you can't burn history, you know. That's what is wrong today. Too many people are trying to bury history, and history is history. You may have liked to change it, but it's gone, it's behind us."

Fortunately, Roberts did not attempt to "burn history," and the Noblesville Klan records will be preserved as a valuable resource for those seeking a better understanding of the operations of the Hoosier "Invisible Empire." While the commotion over the records' discovery soon subsided, and only a few residents have inquired into their ancestors' possible membership, the Klan, as Roberts recognized, is a part—though not a welcome one—of the town's history. Heighway acknowledged to the New York Times that the discovery of the Klan records "meant some embarrassment, some shame, for our community. . . . This is not a proud moment for us."  

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3Don Roberts interview.  
4David Heighway and Diane Nevitt interviews.  
5New York Times, August 2, 1995, B.
Historian Carl Becker observed many years ago that history, as we grapple with it, is "the memory of things said and done." What we "know" and remember about the past may be very different from what actually happened, particularly if the subject is, in retrospect, an unpleasant one. This article explores what we might learn today about the Noblesville Klan of the 1920s, utilizing not just the newly discovered records, but local histories and official accounts, personal recollections, and contemporary press accounts. It examines as well how the community has "constructed" its historical understanding of its involvement with the Klan. It addresses the sensitive issue of how a community deals with the fact that its most respected citizens, its esteemed forefathers, embraced an organization which now is commonly regarded as an anathema, a gross antithesis of the fundamental ideals of this nation.

While the community's embarrassment and regret over its Klan past appears genuine, there has been difficulty in coming to grips with some of the more disturbing implications of the organization's overwhelming, if relatively brief, appeal in Hamilton County. The article also considers how the discovery of the Klan records has become part of the process by which a community has been compelled to reexamine and even possibly redefine its sense of community as well as its history.

Considerable debate exists within the historical profession over the significance of the Klu Klux Klan movement, given its multiple and diverse manifestations in this nation over the past century and a half. Popular readings tend to blur together the massive movement of the 1920s, the earlier post-Civil War Klan that challenged radical Reconstruction, and the later multitude of splinter groups that appropriated the Klan name in vicious endeavors to undermine the civil rights movement of the 1960s and to vilify a broad array of minority groups. Among historians who distinguish these phases from one another, disagreements nevertheless remain. The orthodox view of the 1920s Klan as a nativist, racist, and sometimes violent movement, centered in rural or small town America,10

has been challenged over the past few decades by revisionist studies that have noted the strength of the movement in urban areas and its complex regional variations. Revisionists have suggested that authentic social, political, and economic problems, including corruption, vice, and the trampling of Prohibition, played a larger role in stimulating Klan support than did ethnic, racial, or religious tensions, although such tensions were often entwined with the other issues. Demographic analysis of Klan membership has revealed that, rather than coming from marginal economic groups as earlier studies had suggested, citizens of the Invisible Empire came mostly from the economic and social mainstream of American life. These individuals, revisionists contended, could not be dismissed as irrational or paranoid, and their propensity towards violence had been greatly exaggerated. Yet there are contemporary scholars, including Nancy MacLean, who seem unconvinced by these revisionist arguments and continue to focus on the nativist and racist aspects of the movement while at the same time exploring additional ideological and gender issues. Thus if residents of Noblesville today are somewhat at a loss to explain the meaning of the strange happenings in their community three-quarters of a century ago, it is only fair to point out that historians, too, have failed to reach a firm consensus about the Klan's role in American history.

Noblesville presents a particularly fascinating case, imbued with paradox, irony, and complexity. At its height in the 1920s, one-quarter to one-third of native-born white males in Indiana were Klan members. Hamilton County, with an estimated 35 percent in 1925, was one of the strongest Klan bastions in Indiana. In its earlier history, however, the county (organized in 1823) had provided noteworthy examples of tolerance—epi-

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13Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 54.
sodes celebrated in its local histories and official publications. George Boxley, a one-time slave owner who fled Virginia after being arrested and indicted for his alleged role in organizing a slave insurrection, arrived in Hamilton County in 1828 and established the small community of Boxley, where he conducted a free school in his log cabin home and, according to some accounts, continued to disseminate his strong abolitionist message. Quakers had a sizeable presence in the county, particularly in the western townships and in the town of Westfield, and some were active in the underground railroad. The "colored" of Westfield, one local historian reported at the beginning of the twentieth century, had been treated with a "near equality." County residents have taken special pride in the Roberts Settlement in Jackson Township several miles north of Noblesville, founded by free blacks from North Carolina in 1837. Although it attained a population of over 400, the settlement, like other rural African-American communities in Indiana, gradually disappeared in the twentieth century as new generations left to find economic opportunities in larger towns and cities. Many who were raised there, like Carl D. Roberts, a Chicago surgeon, and Ezra Roberts, head of the education department of Tuskegee Institute, went on to distinguish themselves professionally. To this day,
large numbers of community descendents gather for annual reunions where they provide testimonials to the area's racial harmony.\textsuperscript{18}

Yet there were racial tensions, not so much heralded in the local histories. Even nineteenth-century Quakers were sharply divided on the issues of abolition, the underground railroad, and racial equality. George Levi Knox, who escaped bondage by fleeing behind Union lines in 1863, was nearly run out of town when he visited Boxley the following year. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries patterns of racial discrimination, including exclusion from the public swimming pool and local restaurants, and segregated seating in theaters, existed in Hamilton County as they did throughout the state. Few aliens or Roman Catholics resided in the county. One small German-Catholic church had been established in the town of Cicero, early in the county's history; a Catholic mission in Noblesville to minister to immigrant workers attracted by the late-nineteenth-century gas boom shut down in 1904, after the boom ended. If Catholics were not numerous enough to exert much influence or generate extreme forms of anti-Catholicism, sermons delivered in local Protestant churches reflected common biases against Rome and its hierarchy. Moreover, the First World War unleashed a loyalty campaign marked by suspicion of German Americans and others who were deemed less than "100% American."\textsuperscript{19}

The Klan movement which took root in Indiana during the twenties fed upon these racial, religious, and ethnic tensions. In 1920 Joseph Huffington, the first representative of a small, Georgia-based revival of the Klan, arrived in Evansville, Indiana, and agents began soliciting members in the southern counties of the state. In 1922 D. C. Stephenson, who had worked with Huffington in Evansville, moved the recruiting effort northward to Indianapolis, and Klan representatives spread out statewide in a massively successful membership drive. As numbers increased, so did Stephenson's power in the statewide organization. From July 1922 through

\textsuperscript{18}For example, see Kurt Meyer, "Independence: Roberts Settlement's Annual Reunion Continues a Family Tradition," \textit{NUVO}, July 31-August 7, 2002, 16-18. In this article in an Indianapolis entertainment weekly, one former resident indicated that she had been a cheerleader in "an overwhelmingly white school," and another, when asked about Klan activities in the county during his boyhood in the 1920s replied, "I didn't know a thing about them back then. Never gave us any trouble."

the next twelve months, over 100,000 Hoosier men joined the Klan. By early 1923 Noblesville had its own klavern (a local Klan unit); at a Kokomo Fourth of July rally the same year, in front of a record crowd, Stephenson was named Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan.20

Contemporary press reports of Klan activities in Noblesville during the 1920s—despite the questions one might raise concerning their objectivity

or accuracy—offer a picture of how the organization presented itself to a community, of the kind of public activities it sponsored, and of the possible sources of its appeal. Almost all copies of the Republican Noblesville *Daily Ledger*, sporadic editions of the Democratic Noblesville *Morning Times*, and copies of the biweekly Klan publication, *The Fiery Cross* still exist.\(^{21}\) These sources make it apparent that, regardless of the diverse motives that might have led individuals to join the organization, the Klan's stance on issues such as race, religion, and immigration should have been common knowledge from the onset. Without some local foundation of racism, religious prejudice, and nativism, therefore, it is unlikely that an organization such as the Klan could have attained a high level of support.

A good deal of press coverage accompanied the Indiana Klan's efforts in late 1922 and early 1923 to launch a klavern in Hamilton County. Klan demonstrations, parades, cross burnings, and extravagantly ritualized funeral services conducted in Cicero, Sheridan, and Noblesville received vivid first-page coverage in the Noblesville *Daily Ledger* and the *Morning Times*.\(^{22}\) For all of its ritual and mystification, however, the Klan in Hamilton County quickly became explicit about its ideology. Charles Orbison, a former Democratic Marion County judge, Masonic grand master, and a key figure in the state and national Klan, addressed Noblesville's Masonic Lodge in early January 1923. He called for the expulsion of every radical from the country and for stricter immigration laws, "laws that make Castle Garden's gates swing with more difficulty inwardly and more easily outward."\(^{23}\) The following Sunday, the Reverend A. H. Moore, who would eventually be identified publicly as a local Klan leader, gave an evening sermon at his First Christian Church entitled, "Is the Ku Klux Klan a Menace to America?" The *Ledger*, on its front page, reported that this was the largest church gathering that had taken place in Noblesville in a long

\(^{21}\) *Daily Ledger* copies are missing for November 2, 13, 16, and 19, 1925, at the time of the Stephenson trials. The extant copies of the *Morning Times* (1920–1922, random issues for July–December 1924, and random issues for 1926, 1928 and 1929) are available through the courtesy of Image Builders/Rowland Printing, Noblesville, Indiana. Unfortunately, no copies of the *Morning Times* are available in the newspaper collection of the Indiana State Library. *Fiery Cross* articles dealing with Noblesville cover the years 1923 to 1925.

\(^{22}\) *Daily Ledger*, November 20, 1922, 6; December 22, 1922, 1; December 23, 1922, 1; December 26, 1922, 1; December 28, 1922, 1; January 2, 1923, 1; January 29, 1923, 1; Noblesville *Morning Times*, December 21, 1922, 1; December 23, 1922, 1.

time, with several hundred people being turned away. The paper concluded that “the theme of the discourse was either of wide interest to the general public or there must have been a thousand members or more of the organization in this locality who desired to hear something said in public about the workings of the invisible empire.” Mincing few words, Moore proclaimed the need for Protestant Americans to have their own organization. The foreign element, he announced, posed a threat to the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment, and the preacher referred to the “poison in the melting pot.” He stated that the Klansmen believed “that every colored person should keep his place,” and warned against the danger of racial intermarriage. He deplored the Jew who failed to accept Christ and who “holds the dime so close to his eye that he cannot see the dollar beyond.” It would be unwise, he continued, “to allow the Jewish element to control the finances of the United States.” Although the pastor insisted that he held no malice towards Catholics, he suggested that they held a disproportionate number of government appointments and that they failed to respect the principle of the separation of church and state. Catholics, he maintained, “cannot continue allegiance to the Pope of Rome and still be loyal to the institutions of America.” In his conclusion, Moore pointed to the charitable efforts of the Klan, asked God to bless “every Ku Kluxer who may be under the sound of my voice,” and declared, “I would rather wear a white sheet in the dark than to see my country in a shroud.”

In early February, in the midst of a revival service at First Christian, eight robed men presented Moore with a $40 personal gift, as well as a letter listing the Klan’s principles. These, as reported in the Ledger, included the tenets of Christianity, white supremacy, separation of church and state, the limitation of foreign immigration, and protection of the public school system. The newspaper, which a week earlier had observed that the Klan appeared to be “growing by leaps and bounds in Hamilton county,” remarked that “[i]t was an impressively religious sight to see the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan kneeling in prayer before the pulpit last night. It is difficult to find fault with the principles expressed in the letter to Rev. Moore.” A few days later, Moore proclaimed that the power of the

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24*Daily Ledger*, January 5, 1923, 5; January 8, 1923, 1.
Vatican had overshadowed the supremacy of Jesus. The popularity of the church and its pastor soared. During a three-week revival, the church gained new members, making a total of additions since had assumed his pastorate two years earlier. By the year's end, the pastor could boast that had the largest Sunday school attendance and church membership (some individuals) in the county.

Klan membership mushroomed as well. The editors of the took delight in discussing the inroads made in Hamilton County and Noblesville resounded with nativist rhetoric for the next few years. In March 1923 Rev. , a Baptist pastor from a church in the northeast corner of the county, disclosed his Klan membership to a full house at Noblesville's Olympic theatre and told his applauding audience, ironically paraphrasing Lincoln, that the nation could no longer continue to be half American and half foreign. On June 30, the Klan conducted its largest gathering yet in Hamilton County, with a crowd estimated at 10,000 to 12,000 assembling in Noblesville, although the still coyly observed that there were no recognizable local Klansmen in the parade. But some 20 to 25 local Klansmen were deputized to help keep order; over 200 candidates were initiated into the town's klavern; businesses and homes were decorated with American flags; and a “flaming fiery cross on the dome of the court house attracted a great deal of attention.” Banners proclaimed “We Are Pure Americans,” “White Supremacy,” and “We Favor a Limitation on Immigration.” One local Klansman informed the press that the organization had acquired about members in Noblesville and about members throughout the county.

Before a large, approving Klan crowd in Noblesville in August 1924,
a Baptist minister insisted that “colored people,” Catholics, and Jews were not as well qualified to conduct the government as were “100% Americans.” In November a large delegation of Klansmen assembled at Cicero’s Christian Church heard Rev. E. E. Kuhn inform them that the struggle against the evil force of the papacy still continued. At a gathering held in December at the Red Men’s Hall (the regular meeting place for the Noblesville Klan), Rev. Percy James, after insisting that the Klan was not anti-Jew, anti-Catholic, or anti-Negro, called for eliminating parochial schools, placing Protestant Bibles in every public school, tightening immigration laws, and extending the time barrier for the eligibility of naturalized citizens to vote. In May 1925, the Ledger ran an advertisement that Helen Jackson, an “Escaped and Converted Nun,” would give three presentations at the Olympic Theatre. The Invisible Empire paraded Jackson, whose autobiography, Convent Cruelties, was a staple at Klan rallies, across the country where she graphically recounted lurid tales of atrocities committed in Roman Catholic convents, including torture, enslavement, and the infanticide of the illegitimate offspring of nuns and priests.

In April 1925 scandal erupted around the Indiana Klan, centered on the person of D. C. Stephenson. Although he was no longer Grand Dragon, the public still associated Stephenson with the state organization at the time that he was arrested for the rape and murder of Madge Oberholtzer, a young state government employee. Stephenson was charged with having brutally assaulted the young woman on a train to Chicago; Oberholtzer attempted suicide by swallowing mercury bichloride tablets at a Hammond, Indiana, hotel after the rape but died several weeks later at her Indianapolis home, having signed an affidavit graphically detailing Stephenson’s brutality. Stephenson was already hated by opponents of the Klan; his arrogance, greed, and power-grabbing had lost him many supporters within the organization as well. Newspapers turned the story into a sensation. The trial was moved from Marion County, where the defendant and his

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33Daily Ledger, September 1, 1924, 1; Fiery Cross, November 28, 1924, 1. The September article does not report the Baptist minister’s name.
34Daily Ledger, December 5, 1924, 1; Noblesville Morning Times, December 11, 1924, 1.
lawyers claimed they could not expect a fair jury, to the Noblesville Court House in Hamilton County. 

As preparations for the trial began in June, the Ledger began to publish, on virtually a daily basis, an unsigned front-page column entitled “Klan Komment,” which sought to clarify the organization’s objectives. The column, which ran for several months, compared the Klan to fraternal organizations such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Elks, but it also spelled out in very clear terms the organization’s support of white supremacy, racial purity, prohibition enforcement, separation of church and state, and immigration restriction. It expressed alarm at the number of Roman Catholic federal employees and concluded that “there are nations and races that can never by any process of education or assimilation become Americanized, and we have determined that the time shall come when there will be no place in America for people who cannot think in terms of Americanism.” The enemies of the Klan were described as “the measly, motley mob of misfits,” and readers were queried as to whether they preferred to be controlled by native-born white Protestants of good character, or by foreigners, criminals, and degenerates.

The discovered Klan records do not contain the names of the Ledger’s editor and manager (Edward E. Neal and Charles S. Neal), but the Neal’s paper often appeared to endorse Klan activities and strongly echoed Klan sentiments regarding aliens and prohibition. Editorials expressed little hope that undesirable immigrants from southern Europe could be assimilated. These people were not only the prime violators of prohibition but were the nation’s most egregious criminals. “Too many people,” one editorial complained, “get into Uncle Sam’s land who have no right here and who have no regard for any laws, human or divine. It is these men and women who come, not being properly scrutinized, and they form the rum-running, hijacking bands, the gunmen, the gangs of bandits and murderers which infect the big cities and even now get out into the country.”

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36Robert A. Butler, So They Framed Stephenson (Huntington, Ind., 1940), 23–28.
37Daily Ledger, June 19, 1925, 1; June 23, 1925, 1; June 24, 1925, 1; July 8, 1925, 1; July 13, 1925, 1. Andalusia, Alabama, was cited as the place of origin of the column; ibid., September 16, 1925, 2.
38Ibid., July 28, 1925, 1; August 21, 1925, 1.
39Ibid., July 20, 1925, 1.
40Ibid., January 20, 1923, 4.
41Ibid., August 27, 1928, 4; see also March 17, 1923, 4; September 15, 1928, 4.
ernor Al Smith of New York was a particular target of the paper, which attacked his stance on prohibition, his ties with aliens and Tammany Hall, and his presidential aspirations. The Ledger insisted that the candidate’s Roman Catholic faith was not an issue, but it nonetheless endorsed evangelist Billy Sunday’s assertion that the governor had no more chance of being elected President than the Pope of Rome had of being made Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.42

While it is easy enough to find in the press numerous expressions of racist and nativist sentiment, it is more difficult to assess the impact such pronouncements might have had on minorities. In Indiana, as elsewhere, the Klan promoted a TWK (Trade with a Klansman) campaign in which Klansmen were urged to patronize the businesses of fellow Klansmen and to boycott Jewish and Catholic enterprises. Leonard J. Moore, in his detailed revisionist study on the Indiana Klan, Citizen Klansmen, contends that the campaign had “little effect,” and was largely a sales-promotion effort for those who purchased advertising in the Fiery Cross.43 In any case, the Ledger published not only Rev. Moore’s denunciation of Jewish economic influence but his plea to his Noblesville audience that it “trade at home.”44 During the years 1923 and 1924 the Fiery Cross included the names of more than twenty Noblesville enterprises—groceries, garages, drug stores, and undertakers—in its advertisements. Among these, ironically, was the “Finest Little Candy Kitchen,” operated by Greek-born George Kosto. The store’s name had originally been “Kosto’s Kandy Kitchen” but was changed, reportedly due to the objections of the local klavern, which apparently wanted to maintain its monopoly over triple Ks.45 Ineligible for Klan membership himself because of his immigrant status, Kosto perhaps felt it wise, due to economic and social pressures, not to alienate his Klan neighbors.

Personal recollections provide another source of information concerning Klan intimidation, although such testimonies must be viewed cautiously. In 1995, Bud Costomiris related to Los Angeles Times reporter Judy Pasternak the story of his father, Sam, who purchased Kosto’s confec-

4Ibid., September 12, 1927, 4; September 21, 1928, 4; November 20, 1928, 4; see also June 2, 1923, 4; June 3, 1923, 4; August 23, 1928, 4; November 3, 1924, 4; November 20, 1928, 4.
4Moore, Citizen Klansmen, 92.
4Daily Ledger, January 8, 1923, 1.
4The Kosto advertisement appeared in the Fiery Cross, July 6, 1923, 9. For other pages with Noblesville advertisements see Ibid., May 11, 1923, 3; July 6, 1923, 6, 20, 21; July 13, 1923, 3; August 10, 1923, 6; August 17, 1923, 6; December 7, 1923, 9.
tionary business from his cousin George. Many years after closing the shop and moving to Connecticut, Sam informed Bud that his departure had been prompted by Klan "calling cards," including a dead raccoon and a dead groundhog. Pasternak also spoke with eighty-five-year-old Fanny Glover, whose uncle, Andrew Lucas, had worked for Craycraft Dry Goods. The Klan invited the Craycraft brothers to join under the condition that they fire their black employee, which they refused to do.⁶ In more recent

interviews conducted in conjunction with this study, Joseph Roberts indicated that he had heard of at least one Jewish businessman who had encountered difficulties during the Klan years, and Don Roberts stated that he had heard of Klan-led boycotts against Catholics but knew of no Catholic-owned businesses that operated at that time. Most other interviewees who had some familiarity with local history and Klan activities had no knowledge of such boycotts in Noblesville.47

Not surprisingly, little was said in the press about more physical forms of intimidation, although in September 1921 the Ledger reported the arrival of the Horse Thief Detective Association in northern Hamilton County. Within a few years the association had nine or ten companies operating throughout the county, with as many as 600 members.48 The organization's roots went back to an 1865 Indiana law that permitted the creation of volunteer constabularies for the purpose of apprehending horse thieves and similar felons. The moribund associations were revived during the 1920s and were commonly regarded as the enforcement arm of the Indiana Klan, with a considerable overlap in membership. The connection was occasionally alluded to in the Noblesville press. The association most frequently targeted bootleggers, gambling establishments, and other moral transgressors,49 but there is no definite evidence that it was used in Hamilton County to intimidate minorities per se.50 The Ledger occasionally referred to association meetings throughout the county but said little about what they actually did.51 The only reference to any racial or ethnic

47Joseph G. Roberts and Don Roberts interviews. One Jewish resident of Noblesville did not know of any problem with the Klan encountered by his father, a clothing merchant, or by other Jewish business owners. Samuel Zeckel, telephone interview with author, July 13, 2000. County historian Joe Burgess was unaware of any Klan boycotts implemented against Catholics or Jews. In 1927 a controversy did erupt when Maurice Bernheimer, a Jewish resident of Crawfordsville, leased the Noblesville Opera House to show films on Sunday; objections were raised by the Ministerial Association, and ultimately Bernheimer was fined $25 for showing a film without the proper license. Daily Ledger, September 17, 1927, 1; September 19, 1927; October 5, 1927, 1; December 3, 1927, 1.


49Moore, Citizen Klansmen, 123; Richard K. Tucker, The Dragon and the Cross: The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America (Hamden, Conn., 1991), 81–84. The Daily Ledger reported the attendance of Horse Thief Detective Association members at Klan gatherings in the county; see January 16, 1923, 3; August 21, 1924, 1.

50Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, 166, reports that members of the organization “rode through the Negro district of Indianapolis, waving their revolvers, on primary day.”

51Daily Ledger, January 16, 1923, 3; March 3, 1927, 1; August 24, 1927, 1. The newspaper, however, did report on how members of the Horse Thieves Detective Association from Ekin, just
physical intimidation came in a January 1924 article reporting how mysterious “night riders” in Sheridan, perturbed by an Asian immigrant’s supposed dishonorable conduct, “made the Chinaman, Smiley Sue, feel so unwelcome that he left town and in all probability will never return.”52

Contemporary newspapers do provide more information about Klan charitable and civic endeavors. As the organization sought to gain a foothold in the county, the Ledger’s frequent articles about Klan donations to county churches and others in need undoubtedly enhanced its philanthropic image.53 Thus those who defended their connections with the Klan by pointing to its benevolent works were not entirely disingenuous. Revisionist studies have tended to stress that in many regions local klaverns seemed more preoccupied with addressing legitimate social and moral reforms than in harassing minority groups. Leonard Moore, for example, maintains that this movement is “best understood not as a nativist organization . . . but rather as a populist organization,” and he contends that Indiana Klansmen were predominantly concerned with socio-political issues such as prohibition enforcement and eliminating vice and political corruption.54 While evidence suggests that Moore might have underestimated the significance of the Klan’s nativism in places such as Hamilton County, the “populist” features of the movement were certainly present (if more vaguely defined than in areas like Tipton and Howard counties to the north).55 During the 1920s the county was the site of a well-publicized effort to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment and to eliminate illegal gambling, and articles appearing in the Fiery Cross claimed that the Klan played an active role in bringing violators to justice.56 The Ledger, while anxious to give the impression that vice was being vigorously suppressed through raids and judicial action, provided little information as to how much the Klan contributed to this effort beyond its staunch public opposition. However, Rev. Moore, who emerged as the leading public spokes-

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52Ibid., January 4, 1924, 1.
53Ibid., January 11, 1923, 1; February 5, 1923, 1; February 19, 1923, 1; February 26, 1923, 1; August 16, 1923, 1.
54Moore, Citizen Klansmen, 11.
56Fiery Cross, March 16, 1923, 2; March 30, 1923, 4.
person for the Hamilton County Klan and served as its Kludd (chaplain), played a prominent public role in supporting anti-vice efforts in general as well as Sunday blue laws through other organizations such as the Noblesville Ministerial Association.57

In a number of communities the women's Klan organizations were openly associated with moral and political reform efforts,58 but in the case of Hamilton County their role, like that of their male counterparts, was relatively muted. The Queens of the Golden Mask, a forerunner of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan, made their first public appearance in Noblesville in June 1923. Eventually four women's chapters operated in Hamilton County, but their public role seems to have been limited to activities such as participating in meetings and parades, distributing Bibles to school children, and conducting funeral rites for deceased members.59

Newspaper accounts reveal that the Hamilton County Klan maintained its visibility in a variety of ways. In the summer of 1923 it sponsored memorial services across the county upon the death of President Harding.60 The next year Klan-produced motion pictures such as The Traitor Within and The Toll of Justice were shown at the American Theatre in downtown Noblesville, followed by the screening of D. W. Griffith's 1915 The Birth of a Nation, which romanticized the exploits of the original post-Civil War Klan.61 Perhaps the Hamilton County Klan's most ambitious promotional endeavor was its 1925 sponsorship of a Klan day at the annual summer chautauqua. Just a few days before the chautauqua, the Ledger announced that the final day of the event would be observed as "Klan Day," with special speakers, including Judge Orbison and Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans, the highest-ranking figure in the national Klan. In front-page stories, the newspaper forecasted the largest gathering ever assembled in Noblesville, with Hoosier Klansmen being joined by delegations from

57Daily Ledger; November 17, 1923, 1; October 28, 1924, 1; February 5, 1925, 1; February 7, 1925, 1; February 9, 1925, 1; March 31, 1925, 1; January 18, 1926, 1. For more on prohibition in Hamilton County see Lantzer, "Dark Beverage of Hell."

58Blee, Women of the Klan, 39-41, 139-53.

59Ibid., 124; Daily Ledger, June 22, 1923, 1; August 29, 1923, 1; January 14, 1924, 1; January 24, 1924, 1; February 7, 1924, 1. In a number of communities there were also efforts to organize chapters of the Junior Ku Klux Klan for teenage boys. An article in a Noblesville newspaper alludes to the participation of Junior Klansmen in a parade held in Arcadia; Noblesville Morning Times, August 28, 1924, 4.

60Daily Ledger, August 8, 1923, 1.

61Ibid., January 11, 1924, 1; January 12, 1924, 1; January 14, 1924, 6; April 23, 1924, 3; April 24, 1924, 6; September 23, 1924, 6. The American Theatre was renamed the Palace Theatre by the time of the showing of The Birth of a Nation.
Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio. Mayor Horace Brown pledged his full cooperation, and extra police were assigned to assist Klansmen in maintaining order and preventing gambling and the illegal sale of alcohol. Town officials enacted plans to reroute traffic, ban parking on a major thoroughfare, and provide additional bus transportation, all in anticipation of record crowds.62

62Ibid., July 21, 1925, 1; August 4, 1925, 1; August 5, 1925, 1; August 7, 1925, 1; August 8, 1925, 1. Klan sources often fed inflated predictions to the local press to promote a Klan event.
In the end, however, Klan Day was something of a disappointment. Evans did appear, having just returned from the infamous Washington, D.C., Klan parade, in which forty thousand robed men and women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, with the domed Capitol in the background. His address was biting, praising the recently passed National Origins Act, which sharply restricted the immigration of certain national and ethnic groups, for building "a stone wall around the nation so tall, so deep and so strong that the scum and riff-raff of the old world cannot get into our gates," and arguing that "the colored man" should be "kept in his place." Yet there was also an element of defensiveness in Evans's remarks as he refuted news accounts that the Klan was declining in the wake of the Stephenson scandal. "If the Klan is dead," he replied, "then America is dead." Moreover, one of the scheduled featured speakers, Robbie Gill, head of the national Women of the Ku Klux Klan, failed to appear. The Ledger, which in the past had boosted the Klan with accounts of large crowds, uncharacteristically said nothing about overall attendance at Klan Day other than to mention that the last session, an address by Judge Orbison on the need to more thoroughly Americanize the nation's schools, was well attended "despite the rain in the late afternoon." (Three years after the event, however, the Ledger reported that its files revealed that only several hundred had attended the Klan Day meeting). The paper did note that the Chautauqua Association's largest single source of income that year was the local Klan's agreed contribution of $1,250, but added that the chautauqua's board of directors, the evening before Klan Day, had decided "not to turn next year's program over to any organization." The board, the Ledger reported, announced that the 1926 event would be "strictly a community affair to which every organization of every kind will be invited. A better and a bigger program in every way is promised next year." As the 1926 chautauqua approached, the board solicited the support of the "entire community," and made no mention of any special role for the Klan. The event was such a failure that there was some doubt as to whether a chautauqua would take place in 1927.

It is the Stephenson trial, more than any other event, that has most identified the town of Noblesville—in history books, in the press, in popular memory, and even on television—with the Klan. Indeed, prepara-

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63 For more on the Washington demonstration, see Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, 286–88.
64 Daily Ledger, August 10, 1925, 1, 2; December 21, 1928, 1.
65 Ibid., August 5, 1926, 1, 4; August 11, 1926, 1.
66 In 1989 NBC broadcast the four-hour, made-for-television docudrama Cross of Fire. The melo-
tions for the trial were underway, and Stephenson was incarcerated in the old county jail in the town square, as the 1925 chautauqua was taking place. What is sometimes overlooked is that by then Stephenson, often credited with building the Indiana Klan into a potent force, had broken with the Evans organization. Just a few months after Stephenson’s dramatic installation as Grand Dragon in Kokomo on July 4, 1923, he had stepped down from his official position because of disagreements with the national leadership. Evans had refused to provide financial support for Stephenson’s efforts to take over Valparaiso University and convert it into the “Klan’s Harvard.” Stephenson was also upset by the Evans organization’s propensity towards violence and its failure to map out a coherent national political program. In the spring of 1924, well before the Oberholtzer affair, Stephenson was officially banished from the Evans Klan amidst charges of drunkenness and womanizing, with Walter Bossert succeeding him as Grand Dragon. Stephenson assumed leadership over an autonomous Klan group, and Hoosier klandom was in effect split into two warring organizations. A significant number of Noblesville Klansmen appear to have supported Bossert’s faction. Moreover, the Ledger reported that John Speny (exalted cyclops or head of the Noblesville klavern) presided over the Klan Day events. Thus the significance of the trial and its outcome are more complex and ambiguous than is sometimes realized.

Despite the change of venue, some commentators expressed doubt as to whether a fair procedure could take place in a Klan-ridden community such as Noblesville. Given the divisions and rivalries within the

dramatic account of Stephenson’s career, filmed in Kansas, detailed Noblesville’s connections with the Klan and with the Stephenson trial. Ratings were low; critical reaction was mixed; and, as historian William Lutholtz pointed out at the time, the film abounded with historical inaccuracies; see Steve Hall, “Indianapolis writer questions historical accuracy of ‘Cross,” Indianapolis Star, June 18, 1989, J5.


68 Daily Ledger, May 26, 1924, 1. The article reports that 200 Noblesville Klansmen participated in an Indianapolis parade organized by the Bossert faction; see also December 23, 1925, 1.

69 Ibid., August 10, 1925, 1. This appears to be the first time that the Ledger publicly identified Speny as a Klan officer.

70 For a detailed account of the Oberholtzer case and the Stephenson trial see Lutholtz, Grand Dragon, 178–301. Also see Tucker, Dragon and the Cross, 136–38; Wade, Fiery Cross, 239–47; Francis X. Busch, “The D. C. Stephenson Case,” in Guilty or Not Guilty? An Account of the Trials of the Leo Frank Case, the D. C. Stephenson Case, the Samuel Insull Case, the Alger Hiss Case (Indianapolis, 1992), 77–124. Regarding comments on the trial’s change of venue, see Lutholtz, Grand Dragon, 3.
Indiana Klan, however, this may have been almost a moot issue. Judge Fred Hines, who had been less than pleased when the controversial case had been remanded to his court, was met with an outburst of applause and cheers by the crowd in the packed courthouse when he denied bail for Stephenson. After the defense filed a request for a change of judge on grounds of bias, the apparently relieved Hines stepped down. His replacement was Judge Will Sparks of the Rush County Circuit Court. No friend of the Klan, Sparks reportedly refused his Catholic secretary's offer to resign when he ran for reelection, maintaining that the race would not be worth winning if he lost because of her religion.

County Sheriff Charles W. Gooding was perhaps another matter. William H. Remy, the anti-Klan Republican Marion County prosecutor who played a key role in Stephenson's indictment and continued to lead the prosecution after the trial was transferred to Hamilton County, was certain the sheriff was a Klansman. Years later Gooding provided an affidavit in support of Stephenson's unsuccessful effort to win an appeal. At the time of the trial itself the sheriff and his wife had befriended Stephenson, who was housed in the small county jail adjacent to the courthouse (also the sheriff's residence). Stephenson was fed home-cooked meals and was given virtually free run of the facility. He entertained a steady flow of visitors in the evening and was permitted gifts that included money and confiscated bootleg liquor. John Niblack, who covered the trial as a reporter for the Indianapolis Times, claimed that Gooding became so attached to his prisoner that he shed tears when, following the guilty verdict, Stephenson was removed from the county jail for incarceration in Michigan City. There was also an allegation that Stephenson, to demonstrate his gratitude, gave the sheriff a large sum of money.

Despite the kind treatment he may have received from Sheriff Good-
ing, Stephenson did not regard Noblesville's climate as hospitable for the trial. He reportedly had been vilified at meetings of the Evans-dominated Hamilton County Klan, and after his conviction Stephenson repeatedly claimed that the chautauqua Klan Day had been orchestrated by the Evans-Bossert faction to turn public sentiment in the county against him. He accused Evans and his supporters of circulating anonymous literature throughout the county attacking his character and claimed masked klansmen gathered beneath the outside window of his cell, threatening to kill him if he revealed Klan interest in his conviction. He would ultimately claim that threats such as these were what prevented him from testifying in his own behalf at his trial. Upon his conviction, Stephenson informed the press that the verdict was the result of political persecution. Half of those who filled the 176-seat courtroom, he alleged, were there to prejudice his case. In a statement to Judge Sparks when sentence was pro-

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nounced, he denied that he was guilty of murder and insisted that hissing and other disruptive demonstrations in the courtroom—not, in his words, from Hamilton County residents but “from the scum and scurvy of the whole state of Indiana”—prevented a fair trial. For many years thereafter Stephenson, who was sentenced to life, repeated his charges and sought unsuccessfully to win an appeal. His claims were, of course, self-serving, but the Evans Klan seems to have had good cause in wishing Stephenson good riddance. Soon after the conviction, the secretary of Elkhart County Klan No. 77 publicly expressed “gratitude and sincere appreciation” to the judge, jury, and attorneys responsible for putting Stephenson away.

The legal merit of Stephenson’s conviction has generated considerable debate over the years, but the Noblesville jury’s decision has been hailed, not just by the people of Hamilton County but in well-regarded American history textbooks, as a major contributor to the ultimate collapse of the Klan. County prosecutor Justin Roberts, years later, recalled the quest to fill the jury with “honest people who had nothing to do with the Klan.” In his unpublished memoirs, William Remy said he was informed by Ralph K. Kane, the Hamilton County assistant prosecutor who assisted the state in jury selection, that most of those ultimately selected to serve were Klan members, but nonetheless honest individuals who could render a fair verdict. The available county Klan records partially confirm this: they contain the names of at least three jurors. It would appear that in view of the divisions within the organization, and the many possible reasons for joining, Klan membership alone would not necessarily have determined personal sympathies in the Stephenson case.

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77Among the charges Stephenson would later make was that Robert McNay, a high-ranking state Klan officer, and others had visited him at the Noblesville jail and threatened to kill him if he testified in his own behalf or revealed the Klan conspiracy against him. Stephenson biographer William Lutholtz believes that Stephenson did not testify during the trial because his lawyers feared a damaging cross-examination by the prosecution. Butler, So They Framed Stephenson, 23–28; Lutholtz, Grand Dragon, 259–60, 302; Daily Ledger, November 14, 1925, 1; Feb. 16, 1928, 1; March 4, 1929, 1; Indianapolis Star, November 17, 1925, 1, 2.

78Daily Ledger, November 23, 1925, 1.


80Roberts, quoted in Foland, Remembrances, 193; Remy, “Autobiography,” 255.
Press accounts and personal recollections, as subjective and inexact as they might be, give some feel for what was happening in Noblesville during the 1920s. Extant Klan records can expand historical understanding even further, although this type of source has its own limitations.

The documents discovered in 1995 are not the only relevant records available to scholars interested in researching the Hamilton County Klan. Another useful source is the Klan report, "Ku Klux Klan, Local Officers, Indiana Records, 1925," the result of a request by Grand Dragon Bossert that Indiana klaverns provide current membership figures in the wake of the damage created by the Stephenson trial. Harold Feightner, a reporter for the Indianapolis News, obtained a copy from a state Klan official, and many years later, in 1965, donated the document to the Indiana Historical Society. The report includes membership figures as well as a list of all local Klan officers for all but three Indiana counties. Hamilton County Klan #42, headquartered in Noblesville, is reported as having a membership of 2,461 in 1925, while a separate unit in the town of Arcadia, a few miles to the north, claimed 150 members, for a total of 2,611 in Hamilton County. As Leonard Moore has suggested, there is reason to believe that the 1925 figures fall considerably short of the peak strength that the Klan had attained a year or two earlier. On the basis of the 1925 figures, some 35.4 percent of the native-born white adult males of the county were members at that time. Thus Hamilton County ranked second in the state behind White County with 37.7 percent. (Indiana's overall percentage was 20.8.)

The homogeneous demographics of north central Indiana underscore that a sizeable minority population was not a prerequisite for gener-

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81Unfortunately, the 2347-page transcript of the Stephenson trial is missing, and thus Lutholtz, in his detailed account, had to depend to a large degree on newspaper accounts; Lutholtz, Grand Dragon, xii.

82"Ku Klux Klan, Local Officers, Indiana Records, 1925," typescript, (Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis), pp. 29–30. The document has generally been viewed as a fairly accurate estimate for a period in which the Indiana Klan had begun to decline from its peak membership of somewhere between 200,000 to 300,000. The records were published (with occasional discrepancies from the original text) in H.R. Greenapple, D. C. Stephenson, Irvington 0492: The Demise of the Grand Dragon of the Indiana Ku Klux Klan (Plainfield, Ind., 1989), 93–170. For more information on Indiana Klan membership see Jackson, Klan in the City, 237; Tucker, Dragon and the Cross, 2, 207n.; Moore, Citizen Klansmen, 46–47.

83Moore, Citizen Klansmen, 46–50. The percentages would be somewhat rough estimates since the basis of the Indiana counties' populations was the 1920 census, and the Klan membership figures are for 1925. Also, the census included males 21 and older in the adult category, while the Klan admitted men over the age of 18 as members.
ating Klan membership. The 1920 census reported that Noblesville had a population of 4,758 and Hamilton County a population of 24,222. The county's "Negro" population of 464 represented less than 2 percent of the total, while only 166 county residents were classified as "foreign born white."84 In 1926 there were just 94 Roman Catholics reported living in the county.85 There was no Jewish community to speak of, just a few families engaged in trade who appeared, at least on the surface, rather well accepted. Many of these Jews eventually intermarried with gentiles; some converted to Christianity.86

Newspapers at the time of the 1995 discovery of the 1923–1926 Klan rolls erroneously reported that these lists contained the names of 2,500 members;87 a careful review indicates that there actually are far fewer. A large number of the names appear more than once in the records, which include oath cards, dues stubs, lists of those who were delinquent in dues payments, and those who were reinstated. An effort to eliminate all obvious duplications has yielded a total of 1,164 different names (not including one which is illegible).88 Also, it is apparent that the Hamilton County

86The Josephs, for example, had operated a large brewery in Noblesville, and Julius X. Joseph was mayor of the town during the latter 1920s. A. N. Haas, member of a family long associated with the garment business in Noblesville and the region, was selected as president of the Noblesville Country Club in 1924. Salmon, or S.O., Levinson, son of the proprietor of one of the town's finest clothing stores, achieved prominence as a Chicago lawyer and a prime promoter of the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 that was designed to "outlaw" war. S.O. maintained ties with his hometown, provided scholarships to Noblesville High School and Junior High School graduates who ranked at the top of their classes, and received the honor of having the high school gymnasium named after him. Helen Cromwell with Robert Dougherty, Dirty Helen: An Autobiography (Los Angeles, Calif., 1966), 18–25; Daily Ledger, February 28, 1924; John F. Stoner, S.O. Levinson and the Pact of Paris: A Study in the Techniques of Influence (Chicago, 1943), 1–6; 175 Counting, 24; Campbell, Story of Hamilton County, 178; Foland, Remembrances, 127–28; Daily Ledger, January 19, 1926, 1; July 11, 1928, 4; March 20, 1929, 1; December 23, 1935, 1.
87Daily Ledger, July 12, 1995, A1; "Old trunk gives a glimpse into ugly past," Kokomo Tribune, July 16, 1995, A4. David Heighway has surmised that the 2,500 figure was based on the 1925 estimate, rather than an actual count of members; David Heighway interview.
88Hamilton County Klan Records, on deposit at the Hamilton County Historical Society, Noblesville, Indiana. The number 1,164 is an estimate, since there were many misspellings and typographical errors on the Klan lists, and there were a number of members who had the same common names. An attempt was made to verify names by checking the addresses sometimes provided in the Klan records with county directories.
Klan records that are now available are incomplete in that they do not include all members' names. For example, of the 25 officials for the Hamilton County and Arcadia klaverns listed in the aforementioned “Local Officers” list, the names of only 7 appear in the 1923–1926 local records. Even the name of the individual most publicly identified in the press as a local Klan leader, Rev. Moore, does not appear in the Klan records.

The availability of both the 1920s Hamilton County records and the 1925 list of Klan leaders does reveal more about the type of people who joined the organization, if not about their precise motives and concerns. By examining county directories, obituaries, and census records we can garner at least some information concerning the ages, occupations, and backgrounds of many of these men.

In 1925, John Sperry, the Exalted Cyclops of the Hamilton County klavern, was a fifty-three-year-old native of the county who since 1907 had operated a clothing store in Noblesville. The klavern's secretary (Kligrapp) is simply listed in the county directory as an “organizer.” The Vice President (Klaliff) was a resident of the small town of Sheridan. The thirty-seven-year-old lecturer (Klokard) of the klavern was one of the community's most distinguished attorneys, operating a legal firm that his grandfather had established before the Civil War. Rev. Aubrey H. Moore, the klavern's chaplain (Kludd), was the officer who was most publicly identified with the Klan, his name appearing countless times in Ledger accounts of the local organization's activities. Born in West Virginia in 1882, he had moved to Indiana as a boy, graduated from Butler University in Indianapolis, and held pastorates in various communities, including Arcadia, Zionsville, and Tipton. He became pastor of the First Christian Church in Noblesville in 1921, using his position to publicize and recruit for the Invisible Empire. He left Noblesville in 1928 to assume a position in Indianapolis but returned as minister of the First Christian Church in

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89Greenapple, D. C. Stephenson, 142. The fact that Moore's name does not appear is not surprising. It was common practice to exempt ministers from dues payments, because the Klan often used these individuals to recruit members through their churches. See Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, 293–94; Jackson, Klan in the City, 10.
91Daily Ledger, October 6, 1958, 6.
April 1938, just a few months before his death. "Noblesville possibly never had a more popular pastor," the Ledger noted in its obituary, and he received one of the largest funerals ever held in the city, with an overflow crowd of over 800.93

The klavern's treasurer (Klabe) was a fifty-five-year-old former school teacher and grocer, who owned a furniture store and was selected as a trustee of the Noblesville school system in 1925.94 The conductor (Kladd) was a utility company employee. The inner guard (Klagaroo) worked at the Union Sanitary Company; the guard (Klexter) was a thirty-seven-year-old box maker.95 The "Night Hawk," in charge of initiating candidates for membership, was a prominent fifty-five-year-old funeral director who, in John F. Haines's History of Hamilton County (1915), was numbered "among Hamilton County's most substantial and enterprising citizens."96 Another prominent local resident, a fifty-three-year-old pharmacist who owned his own drug store, served as a "Klokann," a member of the klavern’s board of investigators, auditors, and advisors.97 Another Klokann was the sixty-year-old proprietor of a shoe store begun by his father and uncle—one of the oldest firms in the county.98 The third Klokann is simply listed in the directory as a resident of Carmel.

The leadership profile of Hamilton County Klavern #42 would appear to confirm the impression of those interviewed for this project that the organization was centered in the business community. Of the ten officers for whom occupational information exists, five were merchants or businessmen, one was a lawyer and another a minister. The evidence suggests that they were, at least collectively, middle-aged men who had attained a certain stature in their community.99 The rank and file of the Noblesville Klan, however, represented a significantly broader occupational distribution.

93Daily Ledger, November 18, 1938, 1; November 19, 1938, 1.
94Ibid., February 13, 1930, 4.
95Ibid., December 13, 1965, 8.
96Ibid., July 16, 1953, 1; Haines, History of Hamilton County, 688–90.
97Haines, History of Hamilton County, 679–82.
99In Tipton County, directly to the north of Hamilton County, the Klan leadership was also largely middle-aged, but a bit more diversified occupationally, almost even divided between white-collar (five) and blue-collar (four) men. The Exalted Cyclops in Tipton was a retired railroad conductor. See Safianow, "The Klan Comes to Tipton," 215–16.
Table 1.

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<th>Occupation</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<td>Low white-collar</td>
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<td>17.4</td>
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<td>BLUE-COLLAR OCCUPATIONS:</td>
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<td>Skilled workers</td>
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</tr>
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Of the 1,164 individuals named in the available 1923–1926 Klan records, some 450 could be identified, through the city directory, newspaper articles, and sometimes the records themselves, as having resided in the town of Noblesville. Only two members were specifically described in the directories as being retired. In all probability, many of those who had no occupation listed in the directories also fell into this category. The occupational categories used here are modeled on those used by Stephan Themstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880–1970* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 289–302.

Of the other members, 192 could be identified as having residences in the rural areas surrounding Noblesville: 131 in Arcadia (including the illegible name), 121 in Cicero, 51 in Westfield, 50 in Carmel, 46 in Fishers, 11 in Atlanta, 5 in Deming, 4 in Lapel, 4 in Sheridan, 2 each in Castleton, Clarksville, Hortonville, Eagletown, Pendleton, Indianapolis and Anderson, 1 each in Fall Creek Township and Fortville, and 84 whose residences could not be determined.

W. H. Hoffman *City Directory of Noblesville, Indiana*, 1922, 1924, 1926. These directories provide addresses for, but not occupations for, county residents living outside the town of Noblesville. These directories would provide more current information about occupations and addresses of those listed in the 1923–1926 Klan records than the 1920 census. Unfortunately, there is a serious problem with the legibility of the 1920 census films produced by the National Archives. Many of the census entries for Hamilton County are totally or partially unreadable.

289-302.
pharmacist, a teacher, a banker, and the president of a utility company. The 65 in the low white-collar group included 17 salesmen, 16 clerks, 5 mail carriers, 4 insurance agents, 3 cashiers, and 2 bookkeepers. While the white-collar category represented a significant proportion (38.5 percent) of the total, it was surpassed by those who fell in the skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers categories. These blue-collar workers (together with farmers) constituted a majority (61 percent) of the Klansmen. The skilled category contained 17 molders who worked for the Union Sanitary Company, 18 mill workers, 15 carpenters, and 15 mechanics. The 117 semiskilled workers who represented the largest single occupational category (31.3 percent) included 37 employees of the local enameling works, 15 who labored for the Capital Furniture Company, 9 workers at a strawboard factory, and 7 who were rubber workers at the Burdick Tire Company.

This analysis of the 1923–1926 records indicates the broad occupational diversity found within the Noblesville Klan membership. While business and professional men played an important leadership role and constituted a significant percentage, they were a minority of the total membership, outnumbered by those in the blue-collar worker categories. It is possible that individuals in many different occupations may have experienced some economic or social pressure to join the Klan. Yet quite clearly the belief that the Klan to a large degree consisted of coerced businessmen is an oversimplification, and the situation in Noblesville adds support to the revisionist contention that Klan membership represented a broad spectrum of the population. It also must be kept in mind that the 450 men who can be identified as having lived in the town of Noblesville represent less than half of those whose names appear in the Hamilton County records. The county's Klan membership had a strong rural component, and it would be fair to assume that many or most of these unidentified individuals were involved in farming.

\textsuperscript{103}In this analysis all thirty-four merchants and eleven managers were placed in the high white-collar category; Themstrom in his analysis places “Merchant with sufficient property” in the high white-collar category, and “Proprietor or manager of a small business” in the low white-collar category. Since there was insufficient evidence to make a distinction based on the size of the businesses these individuals were involved in, this study placed them in the high category. This category perhaps better reflects the status and economic structure found in a small community such as Noblesville.

\textsuperscript{104}These 450 represent 41.5% of the 1,081 listed members whose residences could be determined.
Among those listed in the Noblesville records were several city or county officials: a city attorney, four city councilmen, the assistant postmaster, the chief of the fire department, a county prosecutor, a superintendent of schools, a coroner, and a county road superintendent. These men constituted a significant percentage, if not a majority, of local officials. Of the fifteen top city officials listed in the 1924 city directory, only four appear in the Klan records; of the fifteen in the 1926 directory, seven can be identified from the same records. Of the twenty-four top county posts in the 1924 directory, four were filled by identified Klansmen; of the eighteen top posts listed in 1926, four Klan members appear in the records.

Due to the incomplete nature of the available records it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which Klansmen dominated the political scene in Hamilton County. The Klan in Indiana was noted for its ties with the Republican party, particularly the administration of Governor Ed Jackson; sometimes it met challenge from Democrats, yet there were also important Democrats like Judge Orbison who were prominent supporters.\(^\text{105}\)

In Republican-dominated Hamilton County, it appears that the Klan drew support from both parties. Four of the sixteen candidates for county office in 1924 are listed in the Klan records; three of these are Democrats. The only Democrat to win a post that year was Charles Gooding as sheriff.\(^\text{106}\) Seven candidates from each party ran in the 1925 Noblesville municipal election (which the Republicans swept with one exception); five of the Republicans and two of the Democrats appear in the 1923–1926 Klan lists. The names of both candidates elected to office in Cicero that year—one a Democrat and the other a Republican—also appear in the lists.\(^\text{107}\)

An examination of the Ledger and the Morning Times reveals relatively little community opposition, political or otherwise, to the Klan when it was at its peak. The exception was the appearance of a speaker sponsored by the Independent Voters League, which operated statewide in 1924 in an effort to persuade African-American voters to desert the "Republiklan" in favor of the Democratic ticket. The League's efforts failed; Republican incumbent President Calvin Coolidge and Ed Jackson, the Republican candidate for governor, carried every precinct in Noblesville, including

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\(^{105}\)Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, 170–74.

\(^{106}\)For a listing of the candidates and the results of the election see Daily Ledger, November 5, 1924, 1.

\(^{107}\)Ibid., October 30, 1925, 6; November 4, 1925, 1.
the third, where most of the town's African Americans resided. Even after the Stephenson conviction and the political explosions that erupted when he released his confidential files revealing the gross corruption of state and Indianapolis Republican political leaders, there were few public expressions of anti-Klan sentiment in Hamilton County. The Ledger expended most of its editorial energies denouncing Stephenson as "the monumental liar of the generation," and questioning the value and authenticity of the incriminating material found in his infamous "black box." The paper urged Jackson not to resign as governor, despite the mounting evidence against him, and expressed relief in 1928 when he was spared conviction because of the statute of limitations. The Ledger was especially vocal in its support for Marion County Republican Chairman George V. Coffin (also spared because of the limitations statute) and the ultimately convicted Indianapolis Mayor John Duvall; both had earlier resided in Hamilton County. At the same time the paper minimized the Republican party's connections with the Klan and insisted that, despite the bad publicity generated by the Stephenson scandals, the "Hoosier state has nothing for which to apologize."

The Ledger did, however, publish one letter in September 1927 from a reader who expressed outrage against the racial bigotry of "so-called 100 per cent loyal and Christian persons." William H. Stern, a Civil War veteran, life-long Republican, and one of the oldest native-born residents of the county, wrote that such racism made his blood boil, and insisted that the "colored race has as much right . . . to their freedom and enjoyment . . ."

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108 Ibid., October 24, 1924, 6; October 28, 1924, 1; Noblesville Morning Times, October 30, 1924. The Ledger claimed that the large audience contained few blacks. For more on the Independent Voters League, see William W. Giffin, "The Political Realignment of Black Voters in Indianapolis, 1924," Indiana Magazine of History, 79 (June 1983), 133–66. For results of the 1924 election, see Daily Ledger, November 11, 1924, 6. Coy Robbins, telephone interview with author, May 2001, indicated that his father, who did become a Democrat in the 1920s, was something of a rarity in the black community at that time, and that many blacks did not vote because of their skepticism about politics. Murphy White, a Republican, who in the 1960s became the first African American to be elected to the Noblesville city council, indicated that today the community's blacks are divided in their political loyalties between the two major parties, although the town still remains strongly Republican.

109 Daily Ledger, July 25, 1927, 4; July 26, 1927, 4; July 27, 1927, 4; February 17, 1928, 4.

110 Ibid., September 10, 1927, 1; September 23, 1927, 4; November 15, 1927, 1. The Ledger's defense of the accused was so intense that it led to criticism from other Indiana newspapers, including the Republican Indianapolis Star. Ibid., January 25, 1928, 4. For more on the proceedings against Jackson, Coffin and Duval, see Lutholtz, Grand Dragon, 302–309.

111 Daily Ledger, October 23, 1926, 4; January 14, 1927, 4; January 2, 1928, 4.
in this country than the hypocrits [sic] and traitors who oppose them."\footnote{Ibid., September 24, 1927, 1. For more on Stern, see ibid., June 18, 1928, 1.}

A few months later the Ledger reprinted a letter that appeared in the Indianapolis Star, in which the Reverend N. C. Trueblood deplored the connections that had developed between Protestant churches and the Klan as “un-American, un-Christian and dangerous.”\footnote{Ibid., December 26, 1927, 4.} The following year the paper reported that Father Miles Holland of the Cicero Catholic Church had been recruited as a last-minute substitute by the Noblesville Kiwanis Club when the intended speaker failed to appear. Father Holland, the first Catholic ever to address the club, spoke on the subject of “good fellowship,” maintaining that hatred and suspicion might be reduced if individuals did business together.\footnote{Ibid., October 3, 1928, 1.}

If the Klan was fading in Hamilton County as the 1920s came to a close, the nativism and racism of county residents persisted.\footnote{The available Klan records, unfortunately, do not provide precise evidence concerning the degree of membership attrition in the wake of Stephenson's conviction. There is a list of 63 members who were delinquent in dues for the first quarter of 1926. In addition, there is a set of four-part cards, providing the names of 263 members who apparently were remiss in paying dues in 1926. Of these 263, the cards indicate that 27 eventually paid dues sometime in 1926, and that another 11 requested a postponement in paying their dues. Subtracting these two groups would leave a total of 225 members in arrears who were not seeking a postponement. Four of these 225 filled out cards submitting formal resignations of membership. The names of two of these 225 members also appear on the list of 63 who were delinquent the first quarter of 1926. If one makes allowance for these duplicates, this gives a total of 286 who were behind in paying their dues and had made no provisions for a postponement. This would represent a sizable proportion of the 2,611 Hamilton County Klan members cited in the 1925 Local Officers List. No membership records are currently available for the period after 1926.} Al Smith, the Roman Catholic presidential nominee of the Democrats in 1928, was trounced in the county returns, receiving fewer votes than any other Democratic candidate. It seems noteworthy that the normally Democratic Morning Times hedged on this race, informing its readers that Smith and his opponent, Herbert Hoover, were both “high type fellows and either will make good Presidents.”\footnote{Ibid., November 6, 1928, 1; November 7, 1928, 1; Noblesville Morning Times, September 27, 1928, 4. Smith received 3,611 votes compared to Herbert Hoover's 7,194. The 1924 Democratic presidential candidate, Protestant John Davis, had not fared any better in this Republican stronghold. For results of the 1924 presidential election in the county, in which Calvin Coolidge defeated Davis 7,463 to 3,785, see Daily Ledger, November 11, 1924, 6.} The June before the election, an item in the Ledger announced that a “Liberty Loyal League” was being organized in
the county in behalf of patriots disturbed by a growing crime wave, 117 and in December the newspaper reported that between 50 and 100 men were soon to be inducted into a local lodge of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, a national anti-Catholic, anti-black nativist organization formed in the nineteenth century. According to the Ledger the Noblesville chapter, open to white males between the ages of 16 and 55, had been growing rapidly, with the goals of shielding Americans “from the depressing effects of unrestricted immigration,” and maintaining the separation of church and state. 118 Locally, it was regarded as a successor to the Klan. 119 It was not until well after World War II that the de facto segregation of facilities such as restaurants, movie theaters, and the public swimming pool took place, as returning African-American veterans challenged such restrictions.120

Fifteen years after the Stephenson trial, Noblesville again gained notoriety with the arrival of William Dudley Pelley, who, under congressional pressure, had just dissolved the quasi-fascist Silver Shirts. Noblesville became the base of his new Fellowship Press, which issued anti-Semitic publications that disparaged America’s entry into the Second World War. This led to unflattering comments from New York columnist and radio broadcaster Walter Winchell, as well as an article in Life magazine that portrayed central Indiana as a hotbed of disloyalty. While Noblesville had been divided between those who welcomed the new jobs the press might bring and those who were repulsed by Pelley’s presence, his prosecution by the federal government for sedition, and his ultimate conviction in August 1942, hardly helped the town’s image.121

117Daily Ledger, June 5, 1928, 1.
119Joe Burgess interview. Larry Venable commented that the Klan became known as the Junior Order of United Mechanics after the former organization was “outlawed.” His father served as the “warden” of the Junior Order, which also used the fiery cross as a symbol and conducted minstrel shows; see Larry Venable, “We Lived Above the Urban Depot When Dad Was Station Master,” in Lois Kaiser Costomiris, Rail Fences, Rolling Pins, and Rainbows (Indianapolis, Ind., 1994), 183.
120Indianapolis Star, February 21, 1940; Coy Robbins and Murphy White interviews.
121Indianapolis News, December 27, 1940, 1; Daily Ledger, December 26, 1940, 1; Noblesville Morning Times, December 27, 1940 (Pelley Files, Indiana Room, Hamilton East Public Library, Noblesville, Indiana).
Noblesville has changed dramatically since the 1940s. Hamilton County, with nearly 200,000 residents in 2000, ranks first in Indiana in its rate of population increase and is among the nation's fastest growing counties. It is part of the rapidly expanding metropolitan region of Indianapolis, with a mixture of farms, small towns, and affluent suburbs (such as Fishers and Carmel) offering expensive homes and condominiums, and upscale dining and shopping facilities. The population of Noblesville has jumped a remarkable 61% between 1990 and 2000 to reach 28,590. Its carefully preserved downtown, centered on the restored 1878 courthouse, evokes the spirit of the past with brick-paved streets, nineteenth-century street lamps, wrought iron benches, an old-fashioned ice cream parlor, antique and craft shops, and an open-air farmer's market on Saturdays. Yet the downtown is encircled by a multitude of new housing developments and shopping centers; like the county, it presents an almost schizophrenic quality, a curious mixture of past and present, rural and suburban. While some residents have deep family roots in the county, many are newcomers who work in Indianapolis and have little historic attachment to the region. The superintendent of Hamilton Southeastern Schools remarked, "The local joke is that an old-timer is somebody who was here before the Kroger's opened last November."

The Klan has long been held in ill repute in Noblesville: in 1973, when a group of forty or fifty Klansmen staged a walk downtown in "the shadows of the building where the Ku Klux Klan was destroyed as a political force in Indiana," they were met by local counter-demonstrators carrying anti-Klan placards. Yet there is still little racial or ethnic diversity in the region. More than 96 percent of the county's population is white, with less than 2 percent each in the categories of Hispanic or African Americans. Noblesville's population remains, as well, almost exclusively...

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125U.S. Census Bureau, QT-P3, Race and Hispanic or Latino: 2000, http://factfinder.census.gov. The Asian population tripled between 1990 and 2000, and there has been a recent influx of small numbers of Asians, who now constitute 2.4% of the county's population; see also Daily Ledger, March 12, 2001, A4.
And like other communities across the nation, there is still evidence of racial if not religious friction. In recent years, the appearance of racist graffiti, the absence of minority teachers in its schools, the harassment of a Noblesville interracial couple, the lack of minorities on county boards, and the alleged racial profiling of black motorists in neighboring Carmel, have led the Ledger, now a warm advocate of multiculturalism, and others in the community to raise questions concerning the area's receptiveness to diversity.\(^\text{127}\)

Noblesville residents have chosen a variety of ways to remember (or to forget) the Klan, Stephenson, Pelley, and the views they represented. In 1998, a "Blue Ribbon Committee" excluded mention of Pelley in its publication commemorating the county's one hundred seventy-fifth anniversary.\(^\text{128}\) 175 & Counting was also circumspect regarding the Klan's earlier presence, with a brief reference to the Stephenson trial as perhaps "the most memorable event" to have taken place in the county courthouse.\(^\text{129}\) A publication on the 1992–1994 restoration of the 1878 courthouse makes no mention of the trial at all.\(^\text{130}\) The county historical society's membership brochure notes that the county's history "reflects the history of the state in general" and that "through national events like the trial [sic] of D. C. Stephenson to today, the county has always been an important part of the formation of the state of Indiana."\(^\text{131}\)

Other sources do provide more detailed accounts of local Klan activities. Frank S. Campbell's The Story of Hamilton County, Indiana (1962) is unique in that its author, a lawyer, represented Stephenson in 1940 in one of his numerous appeals of his conviction. During the 1920s, Campbell recalled, "Torchlight Parades and hooded clansmen riding on horseback were common in Noblesville and also throughout the entire mid-west." Campbell discussed the national attention the 1925 Stephenson trial had received and commented on the number of loyal friends the defendant...
had had in the town. Many observed, Campbell wrote, that if Stephenson's
“activities had been properly directed, he could have become a great Ameri-
can leader and statesman.”132 In Lois Kaiser Costomiris's Rail Fences, Roll-
ing Pins, and Rainbows, a 1994 collection of oral memoirs, Larry Venable
remembered witnessing Klan parades as a young boy, described the elec-
tric cross the Klan used in its demonstrations, and related the story of
George Kosto's candy store and its name change.133 In another compila-
tion of personal testimonies, John R. Foland's 1976 Remembrances, John
Carey, who had been a bank collector in the 1920s, recalled that he could
distinguish Klan members by a special insignia, a small circle, which ap-
peared on the cancelled checks he handled. Carey claimed he refused an
offer to join, despite advice that membership was a prerequisite for ad-
vancement in the banking business. Justin Roberts, who as county pros-
ecutor had assisted at Stephenson's trial, related the difficulty of finding
twelve residents to serve on the jury. He, too, had been urged to join the
Klan for the sake of his political career, but resisted. In his commentary,
Foland remarked,

No one knew how many members of the Ku Klux Klan were in the
community or who might be a friend or foe. Certainly the Klan
had done their work well. They had donated to the churches, some-
times actually appearing in their robes during a church service,
making a donation and leaving. The church was always thankful
for the contribution. It was claimed that there were five million
members, and no one was certain who they were. . . . The Ku Klux
Klan was a force to be acknowledged, whether one believed in it or
feared it. . . . 134

The point that seems to be emphasized above all others by Noblesville
citizens is the town's role in bringing an end not just to Stephenson's ca-
reer but to the Klan itself. On the fiftieth anniversary of the trial the Led-
ger observed that

132Campbell, Story of Hamilton County, 51–55.
133Venable in Costomiris, Rail Fences, Rolling Pins, and Rainbows, 175–94.
134Foland, Remembrances, 187–94.
having the Klan leader on trial for murder (and eventually found guilty) was a severe blow to the KKK which professed the exercise of puritanical ethics and morality. It was a jury of Hamilton County citizens who found Stephenson guilty, and thereby damaged the Klan reputation beyond repair.\(^{135}\)

About the same time Justin Roberts, in his reflections on his role in the Stephenson trial, expressed pride in being “an integral part in bringing about the downfall of the Klan in Indiana.”\(^{136}\) His son, Joseph, also an attorney, has given a number of public presentations on the Stephenson affair. In his speeches he stresses the political threat posed by Stephenson, who reportedly had presidential ambitions, and thus the critical importance of his conviction in the county courthouse.\(^{137}\)

Noblesville’s role in Stephenson’s downfall was again highlighted during the furor over the discovery of the Klan records. Tom Jekel, editor of the \textit{Ledger}, noted that “a Hamilton County jury seated in our historic Noblesville courthouse convicted the Indiana grand dragon of murdering an Irvington woman,”\(^{138}\) and David Heighway wrote in a guest column:

\begin{quote}
It is grossly unfair and historically invalid to judge Hamilton County by those four [Klan] years of its history, which goes back centuries to the first occupation of the Delaware Indians. The African-American Roberts Settlement has been here. . . . Carmel and Westfield were known for the abolitionists who helped keep the Underground Railroad going before the Civil War. Our cemeteries are filled with Union soldiers (many of whom were black) who laid down their lives for the cause of freedom. And we should not forget that it was a jury of ordinary Hamilton County farmers and merchants who put D. C. Stephenson behind bars.\(^{139}\)
\end{quote}

As part of the county’s 175th anniversary commemoration in 1998, the county celebration committee placed a plaque at the entrance of the restored courtroom where the trial took place, proudly proclaiming:

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{135}{Justin Roberts, quoted in Foland, \textit{Remembrances}, 192–93.}
\footnotetext{136}{Joseph Roberts interview.}
\footnotetext{137}{\textit{Daily Ledger}. July 14, 1995, A4.}
\end{footnotes}
SITE OF D. C. STEPHENSON TRIAL
A JURY OF 12 HAMILTON COUNTY CITIZENS CONVICTED KU KLUX KLAN LEADER D. C. STEPHENSON IN THIS BUILDING IN NOVEMBER 1925 FOR THE MURDER OF MADGE OBERHOLTZER. THE OUTCOME OF THE TRIAL RESULTED IN THE RAPID DECLINE OF THE THERETOFORE POWERFUL KLAN INFLUENCE IN STATE GOVERNMENT.

If Noblesville can take some legitimate pride in contributing to the Klan's demise, it still has had to reckon with why so many of its residents became members. Even before the discovery of the Klan records, residents knowledgeable in local history were aware of the support the Invisible Empire had enjoyed throughout the county. Joseph Roberts, in a 1992
address to the local Kiwanis, acknowledged that Hamilton County had played an important role in Stephenson’s rise to power as well as his fall. Foland’s Remembrances, as noted, detailed the organization’s local visibility. Yet almost as much emphasized as the role Noblesville played in Stephenson’s downfall is the conviction that many who had joined the Klan, particularly among the merchant or business class, did so under coercion, believing the Klan to be a patriotic, charitable organization and largely unaware of the group’s bigoted ideology. Once these members learned of the Klan’s actual ideology and its inner corruption, they quickly withdrew in large numbers.

Foland, for example, maintained that “Businessmen joined the organization [the Klan] as an insurance to the fact they could meet their bills. They were forced into joining.” He described a business owner who “was approached by a Klan member and told he had better join or his business would be destroyed.” Roberts observed that “a lot of people joined the Klan to protect their business. Others really believed in the Klan. They thought the organization stood for good things. They were gullible people and I felt sorry for them.” In a Kiwanis address a number of years later his son suggested, “The Klan was sold as a patriotic organization. It backed the isolation politics of the day. Although it was an organization of WASPS (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants), it was not known in Indiana as an anti-black or anti-Jewish group.” County historian Joe Burgess also believed that many men joined the Klan to prevent harassment or boycotts. Prior to his discovery of the Klan records, Don Roberts had known of the group’s activities, but he, too, had been led to believe that merchants joined under threat of boycott, and that the Klan of the 1920s, with its emphasis on patriotism, was a very different type of organization than today’s.

This understanding is shared by younger members of the community. David Heighway, responding to the discovery of the Klan records, maintained in the Ledger that

141Foland, Remembrances, 189.
142Ibid., 189–90, 193.
144Joe Burgess interview.
145Don Roberts interview.
Many of the people on the list were forced to join through boycotts. Others left very quickly when they realized the true goals of the organization. Some openly resigned, others pleaded financial reasons. The organization was virtually defunct by 1926.

It is important to remember that the Hamilton County Klan only officially existed from 1923 to 1926. That is just four years. (The Brady Bunch Fan Club lasted longer than that).146

In trying to explain to the New York Times some of the reasoning behind the county historical society's decision not to disclose the names of Klan members, Heighway alluded to Klan threats of boycotts against merchants, adding, “There’s an ethical question here . . . since we don’t know how many people were forced to join the Klan.”147 Tom Jekel informed his Ledger readers that

History shows that many Klan members of the time were hoodwinked into thinking that the movement was about patriotism, not racism.

No newspaper, radio station or TV station that I know of has criticized the Noblesville people who joined and quickly quit this pro-American group 70 years ago when its white-supremacy motives were exposed.148

In the same vein, Gregg Montgomery in his column argued that

During the 1920s in Noblesville, virtually everyone was a Klansman.

If you didn’t belong to the Ku Klux Klan, you essentially weren’t part of the community. Businessmen on the Courthouse Square quickly learned that, losing clients if they didn’t sign up and pay dues.

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Stephenson's notoriety helped reveal the true intentions of the KKK's white supremacy ideas. Many locals were embarrassed and rebuffed their membership in the Klan almost as quickly as news traveled from the Hamilton County Courthouse, where Stephenson's trial was held.149

Montgomery, a Purdue graduate who arrived in Noblesville in the late 1980s, was told by local history buffs that the Klan of the 1920s was a more “pc” (politically correct) organization than it is today. It had begun in the town as primarily a religious and fraternal group, and its members were embarrassed, during the publicity that came in the wake of the Stephenson trial, to learn of its true meanings.150 Diane Nevitt, an almost lifetime county resident who succeeded Heighway as director of the historical society, had heard little before the Klan records' appearance about the group's activities, even though she had known that her uncle had served on the jury that convicted Stephenson. At the time of the discovery, she was informed that the Klan had consisted mainly of merchants, that they had been blackmailed into joining, and that they left upon learning the organization's true nature.151

A survey conducted among twenty-eight county residents attending a presentation on the Klan sponsored by the county historical society in August 2001 yielded similar responses. When queried as to what groups the Indiana Klan of the 1920s opposed, twenty-three respondents identified the organization as anti-African American, seventeen as anti-Catholic, fourteen as anti-Jewish, and twelve as anti-foreigner. Yet only five identified the Klan as a hate group, while fourteen identified it as a “social, fraternal organization” and fourteen identified it as a “group designed to protect the interests of white, Protestant Americans” (respondents could select more than one description). When asked to provide a brief written explanation of why people in Hamilton County had joined the Klan in the 1920s, only three made reference to factors relating to prejudice or bigotry, and two others made general references to “fear.” Fourteen respondents, however, singled out factors relating to social or economic pressures.152

150Gregg Montgomery interview.
151Diane Nevitt interview.
152This survey, consisting of 23 questions, was distributed on August 23, 2001, by the author to
In other words, Noblesville residents condemn the Klan as an organization but are more forbearing in assessing the motives of those who affiliated with the group during the twenties. Yet if the Klan's triumph was relatively short-lived, as local observers correctly point out, the documentary record leaves little doubt about the organization's ideology or its baser characteristics. This helps explicate the quandary of those who value their ancestral history and yet share a distaste for the Klan and would like to erase, minimize, or repudiate an especially sordid episode in the town's past.

Noblesville is not unique in having to reconcile itself with its Klan heritage. For many years, residents of Pulaski, Tennessee, the 1865 birthplace of the original Klan, maintained a sanitized image of that organization as “a noble and chivalrous group that saved the South from the ravages of Reconstruction.” The second Klan was not well received, however, and in 1917 the United Daughters of the Confederacy donated a plaque, affixed to the old courthouse, which was designed to honor the founders and simultaneously disassociate them from the new Klan, which the daughters considered “unworthy of the name made sacred by men who bore it in years gone by.” There was again consternation when, beginning in 1985, latter-day Klansmen, neo-Nazis, and others initiated annual pilgrimages to Pulaski, bringing with them unwelcome media coverage. The “solution” was a concerted local campaign to distinguish the original Klan, remarkably recast as a preserver of racial harmony, from the more recent extremists. In 1989 the owner of the old courthouse turned the Klan plaque around so that its inscription faced the wall to demonstrate that the community turned its back on prejudice.153

The historic role of Stone Mountain, Georgia, parallels that of Pulaski, for it was here on Thanksgiving eve in 1915 that William J. Simmons and a small band of followers launched the second Klan movement. Like Pulaski, Stone Mountain became a mecca for latter-day Klansmen. By the 1990s residents of the small tourist town that adjoined the mountain were chagrined by the site's annual Klan gatherings, which included processions through their main street and cross burnings. The Klan rallies ceased in a group who came to hear his presentation on his research on the Noblesville Klan. The author would like to express his appreciation to Diane Nevitt and David Heighway for their assistance in arranging this presentation.

1991, and six years later Chuck Burris, an African American, was elected to serve as mayor of this community of 7,000 which included a growing number of newcomers with little awareness of the town's previous connections with the Klan. The new mayor expressed his hope that in the future Stone Mountain would come to be regarded as a symbol of racial healing rather than one of racial hatred.\textsuperscript{154}

In his \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory}, historian Michael Kammen points out that "societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and that they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present." He observes that, "We arouse and arrange our memories to suit our psychic needs."\textsuperscript{155} Kammen also notes the tendency of those dealing with their local histories to reconcile the antithetical values of tradition and progress in order to extol a "tradition of progress."\textsuperscript{156} To varying degrees, Noblesville, Pulaski, and Stone Mountain have all chosen paths of reconstruction in dealing with their uncomfortable pasts.\textsuperscript{157}

Undeniably, the citizens of Noblesville and Hamilton County are making serious attempts to understand their past and to make amends for past mistakes through present actions. The Klan years are an intrinsic part of the history of Noblesville and Hamilton County, and many people in the community have come to accept that fact. They have, to paraphrase Don Roberts, refused to burn their history. This attitude is reflected in the decisions of the historical society in dealing with the Klan records and in editorials in the \textit{Ledger}. On the other hand, the process of reconstructing Noblesville's history as it relates to the Klan and other racist and nativist movements remains problematic. It is understandable that residents today have difficulty in getting the Klan right, given that the group can be perceived as a fraternal organization, as a reform movement that appealed to people's patriotism and idealism, and as a sinister, corrupt enterprise.


\textsuperscript{156}Ibid., 14.

that defrauded and hoodwinked its own members. Yet the commonly accepted local view that the Klan was a brief if embarrassing part of Noblesville’s history, that many members joined under coercion not fully understanding the Klan’s hateful agenda, and that it rapidly disintegrated in the wake of the damaging evidence unleashed by the Stephenson conviction, does not tell the whole story.

James Madison, in his recent examination of the 1930 lynching of two African-American youths in Marion, Indiana, discusses how over the past decade that community has attempted to make amends through a number of efforts, including bestowing the key to the city to a third individual, James Cameron, whose life was somehow spared by an enraged white mob. Madison, however, emphasizes that what transpired in Marion must be understood in the context of prejudices that preceded Indiana’s Klan era and persisted many years thereafter. In this sense, too, it is difficult to burn history. The disconcerting events that took place in Noblesville during the 1920s cannot be erased by any process.

A close examination of the available evidence indicates that the Noblesville Klan was a manifestation of the racism, nativism, and anti-Catholicism that was a central ingredient of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture, both before and during the 1920s—even in a locality that might legitimately claim countervailing traditions of tolerance. If the Noblesville records lend strong support to the revisionist argument that the twenties Klan should be seen as a mainstream movement, not as a group of demented, marginalized misfits, other available sources very much suggest that the Invisible Empire could not have achieved such tremendous support in Hamilton County had there not been a strong base of bigotry to draw on (a point acknowledged in varying degrees by revisionists and very much emphasized by their critics). Klan leaders explicitly pandered to these prejudiced sentiments, with considerable success.

“Getting right with the Klan” is no easy task, either for historians or for communities trying to come to terms with their past. By the time of the 1995 discovery of the Klan records, there was general acknowledgment that there was something shameful about the Klan’s one-time strong presence in the community. The public discussion of what to do with the newly discovered records, and the ultimate decision to accept and pre-

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serve them, testify to the community's changing sensitivities. Locals also express genuine pride in the plaque in the courthouse, and the building itself has become a symbol of a community attempting to "do the right thing." The objections raised by historians and African-American spokespersons to the policy of restricting access to the records demonstrate, however, that not everyone would agree that Noblesville was doing the right thing. Those who appreciate a local historical society's need for broad public trust and support will empathize with the dilemma faced by the board of directors; at the same time it is possible to see why some might interpret their decision as one more act of denial. Moreover, the "progressive" local spin on what happened in Noblesville during the 1920s tends to obscure the essential point that the Klan of the twenties was a painful symptom of racial, ethnic, and religious antagonisms that were deeply rooted in the town's—indeed the nation's—past.

Historical researchers face a parallel quandary. There are still many unresolved issues that surround the phenomenal success of the Klan of the twenties, including the motives of those who joined and then left the organization. It is important that historians and others scholars examine and reexamine these matters. As historian and cultural critic George Lipsitz reminds us, "What we choose to remember about the past, where we begin and end our retrospective accounts, and who we include and exclude from them—these do a lot to determine how we live and what decisions we make in the present."

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159 As significant as the Stephenson conviction may have been, there needs to be more research on the local level to understand the unraveling of the Hoosier Klan, which certainly began before the Stephenson trial. See Safianow, "Konklave in Kokomo Revisited," 343–45.

160 George Lipsitz, Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture (Minneapolis, Minn., 1990), 34.