

Mrs. John Frisk
April 16, 1981
Marquette County KKK

Q. This is an interview of Mrs. John Frisk of Magnetic St. Marquette Michigan by Howard Brown of Marquette Michigan on Mrs. Frisks' recollections of the Ku Klux Klan in Marquette County.

Q. You've mentioned the other day when you were teaching school that, uh, you had brought up the subject of the Ku Klux Klan in class, and you had some interesting things to say about it but when was this, what happened?

I was teaching in Michigan the 7th and 8th grade, I, uh... junior high at that time, and during the um, class we came to the part about the Ku Klux Klan, and the definition as I remember it was that they were a group of conservative whites, people, who were organizing against the Catholics, Jews, and negroes. And one of my students said, "well why is called the Ku Klux Klan?", I said, they were nick names because at that time a negro was called a coon, and a Jew was called a kike, and a catholic was instead of started with a c they started it with a k so that was right, so they had called them the Ku Klux Klan.

Q. Then there was another, uh, question that you were asked about the, uh, white robes. Would you tell us about that?

They were wearing the typical white robes that you see even today, with, with the um, long white sheets. I would say, I would call them sheets, and on the back of those sheets was written 100% American, and then they also wore the hood, the tall mask hood.

Q. Didn't one of the children ask why they were wearing them?

One of the children asked me why they had to wear those robes, and I said well, I suppose its because they didn't want to be identified.

Q. When you were studying them at that time, were you studying the Ku Klux Klan after the civil war, or were you studying the new movement after World War I?

I think we were studying the reconstruction period, and uh, the Ku Klux Klan died down to where it wasn't very active until 1915, when this administer, I think his name was Reverend Simpson, uh, uh, brought it up again. It emerged and, and grew up to be to the number of 5,000, I think as I remember it. But between that period 1915 and 1923, at the time I saw them, after I was married, uh, at that point they were a million strong.

Q. When was the first time you saw them here in Marquette County?

As far as I can remember, it was 1923, three years after I was married

Q. And would you describe the meeting, and where it took place, and what it looked like?

Um, they uh, rented uh, place, a quite a large open field between Marquette and Negaunee. They'd gather there, oh, at sunset or somewhere around that time, and, um, we went, we had to go past there in order for me to go to my home, and uh, I saw a minister with a bible in his hands, it was open, I imagine he was reading it, he was leading, they would parade around that field, he was reading it and, um, then behind him would be, I think it was two, carrying a cross as I remember it, and I saw them burn it, and I heard them, an awful lot of noise, whether they were speaking, or singing, or humming or moaning, I don't know, but they were making an awful lot of noise; I was in the car so I couldn't make it out.

Q. Was there a large number there? Have you any..

It appeared to be, because the field is big. I would estimate around 50. Now that isn't definitely, I didn't count them, but it appeared to be that many.

Q. Did you see any other meetings of the Klan, or hear about them during that time?

No I can't recall of any that were directly associated. I can't think of any.

Q. Were there any cross burnings or anything like that?

Not in Marquette County. There were at the time in the cities that I read about, there were a lot of that, but not directly in Marquette.

Q. Who would you say, have you have any ideas on the subject of who belonged to the, to the Klan of the people here in this county?

Well from the list of registered people, they had to register, and had their own uh, list,

(Garbled)

Q. You don't, you don't have to tell me names just what social classes (garbled).

But I saw the list, and the names I saw on the list were our most conservative people in Marquette.

Q. Were there any religious groups that seemed to support the clan here as in other places, or were they (garbled) our..er...if they religious groups didn't support them, were they predominantly from any one group?

I think they were predom...I know on the list that I saw they were, were predominantly from one denomination, but I don't know how many others were; I think they hushed it up so quick. I don't know if any others were involved or not.

Q. Would you say what denomination most of them were?

Well the ones I saw were Methodist.

Q. Were there any politica..was there any political involvement that there were obvious (garbled) Klan candidates or obvious activity the Klan in supporting ... (garbled)

Well if you want to separate the um..uh Klan philosophy from our affluent people, they were identical. I don't think you could separate them really. And our elected officers here were definitely the affluent people.

Q. Was there any ah, opposition, say, to catholic uh, businessmen or catholic candidates or Jewish business men or candidates..

There was an awful lot of prejudice against the catholic schools here, um, verbal attacks that I, that I heard myself, you know.

Q. Were they active in, in uh, opposing political candidates?

(garbled) I wasn't too interested in politics at the time but, I do know that a catholic running ... for an office, should know better because he'd never won..I shouldn't say...

Q. Uh, in the, uh in the time when, that you recollect, what was the, do you recollect a general feeling toward the clan, were they feared, where they despised, uh, what was the feeling of the people in general?

I have to be honest with you and I'll tell you that, I couldn't understand how anybody who went to school as far as the eighth grade didn't know who the Ku Klux Klan were but every one of my friends, and I love them and I like them and it isn't their fault that they belong to that particular uh, denomination, not a one of them will admit that they know who, knew who the Ku Klux Klan was and I said, that's impossible if you were educated in the public schools, ya know, but not one will admit it, that I know of not any of my friends, and I have a lot of fine protestant friends.

I don't know if they were hiding it, or didn't really know about it she..one of my friends...one of my friends asked me to explain and I said I kinda hate to, because I'm afraid I'll hurt your feelings.

Q. Yes, yes, then it seems in your estimation there's just been kind of a cover-up of the clan in the area.

Well...as if either they didn't want to admit it, or...they must have know.. Perhaps are ashamed of it themselves too, you know...

Q. Yes is there any other incident or reflection on the Klan that you'd like to share now that you..

I think I have always been very skeptical; perhaps that's a very narrow view, but I've been very very skeptical. During an election time, about believing too much of the, um rhetoric, from that class because they're the ones running all the time.

Q. ok, thank you very much

Oral History
Howard J. Brown
Activity Log

- March 30 Preliminary Conversation with Mrs. John Frisk on her recollections of the Klan
- April 1 Second conversation with Mrs. John Frisk on which we went into greater detail of her recollections of the Klan. Separated out the objective eye witness matter.
- April 6 Wrote local article appealing for information on U.P. Klan Activities.
- April 9 Article appealing for Klan information appears in U. P. Catholic
- April 14 Two responses received as a result of the article.
- April 15 Research at Public Library on the period - the Klan in the 20's. Interviewed Mrs. Cecelia Holland in Snowberry Heights. Final conversations with Mrs. Frisk.
- April 16 Oral History Recording Session.
- April 24 Third response to article requesting Klan Information.

UPPER PENINSULA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE CONTENTS

NARRATOR'S NAME: Mrs. John E. Frisk

TAPE NO: 1

TIME	SUBJECTS
<u>0</u> to <u>3</u>	1- <u>Recollections of KKK mentioned in class (before 1920)</u>
<u>3</u> to <u>6</u>	2- <u>Eye witness account of Klan rally near Negaunee.</u>
<u>6</u> to <u>7</u>	3- <u>KKK activities and membership in this area.</u>
<u>7</u> to <u>10</u>	4- <u>Reflection on other attitudes concerning the KKK.</u>
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	5- _____
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	6- _____
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	7- _____
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	8- _____
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	9- _____
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	10- _____
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	11- _____
<u> </u> to <u> </u>	12- _____

UPPER PENINSULA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWER'S NOTES AND WORD
LIST

Instructions to the interviewer:

To assist the transcriptionist, please identify:

- 1- Passages which may be difficult to understand because of outside noise, other people in the room, problems with the tape recorder, etc.
- 2- Passages which are confidential and therefore should not be typed.
- 3- Passages which need to be treated in a special way.
- 4- List words or phrases which might be difficult to understand, all proper names, and unfamiliar terms. If there is more than one tape, note where the second and succeeding ones begin.

Proper names: Neagunee, Ishpeming Marquette

Tape Mrs. John Frisk: Recollections of teaching 1910 - 1920

Time in minutes.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 0 - 2 | Training for the beginning teacher. |
| 2 - 3 | Location of the schools and the teaching of subjects. |
| 3 - 5 | Characteristics of the Students. |
| 5 - 7 | Parent relation to class and teacher. |
| 7 - 8 | Relation to the School Board. |
| 8 - 9 | Classroom incidents. |
| 9 - 10 | Salaries. |
| 10 - 12 | World War I |
| 12 - 13 | Success of Graduates. |
| 13 - 15 | Qualifications of teachers. |
| 15 - 17 | County Commissioner of Schools |
| 17 - 18 | Teaching then (1910 - 1920) and now (1981) |

Word List (Mrs. John Frisk - Recollections of teaching)

Proper Names -

Bates Township
Eli Township
Michigamme

Personal names:

Mrs. Frisk's maiden name: Delcie Luneau (Del)
Lou (she mentions her daughter, a teacher)
Mr. Paquin

Recollections of the Ku Klux Klan

On Monday, March 30, 1981, I made the first call on Mrs. John Frisk whom I had heard speaking about the Ku Klux Klan in this area. I talked with her and discussed her recollections. I then asked if she were willing to have a taped interview and she agreed to have one. As much of what she was about to tell me was sensitive material that might offend some of her friends she had some reservations. As she is 87 years of age, I assured her that her feelings and sensibilities would be respected. I asked her to think it over.

On April 1 I had another opportunity to drop by and discuss the details of what she was going to relate to me. A particularly sensitive item was her knowlege of the names of some of the members of the Klan. The list that she had seen had been found by chance and might incriminate those who had removed it from the place where it had been found to say nothing of the detriment to those on the list. Since there are no living witnesses to verify the list or the incident, she was understandably hesitant to reveal those names that she could recall. We discussed it at some length and she was willing to generalize and characterize the people whom she remembered. I encouraged her by indicating that no material at all had been able to be obtained up to this point and that the Oral History Repository might end up with absolutely nothing on this significant phase of history. She agreed that this would be very sad and agreed reluctantly to the interview.

I write a weekly column on history for our Church Paper and on April 9 I printed an appeal for any persons in the U.P. with and information on the KKK. Once again I gave emphasis to the

lack of any local information on Klan activities.

On April 14 I received two responses to the article. The first was from Sister Paulita, an older nun at St. Michael's Parish in Marquette. While talking to her, I determined that her information on the Klan dealt with Klan activities in Flint, Michigan. She related that the Klan had been very active in the state wide attempt to close the parochial schools. Since her reports concerned the Lower Peninsula, I only make note of her eye witness status and the item that might concern the U.P.

A young woman called on the same day and reported that her mother, a resident of Snowberry Heights, remembered Klan activity. I checked out her mother and found she had no phone. I made plans to call on her in person.

On April 15 I went to Snowberry Heights to check out the report on Mrs. Cecelia Holland. She had a good deal to relate, but it was activity in and around L'Anse. At that time, her father worked in the Ford Lumber Mill there.

She related that the KKK entered the area in the 20's and sought to put "their" candidates in the local public offices. The Catholic and Indian populations actively resisted them. She reported that there were a lot of cross burnings on the lawns of the Catholics - they burned a cross on the lawn of the Catholic sheriff, Mr. Sands. They harassed the Catholics a great deal.

They usually held their rallies where the Catholics and the rest of the population could see them. Crosses were burned on prominent hills. One time, she remembers, her brother and another boy sneaked up one of the hills and pushed over a cross before it

was ignited. Her father was furious with the boys because it was well known that the KKK were armed. He feared that the boys might have been shot.

Another night they burned a cross at the priest's house. The priest went out and ordered them off the property. The shot at him. The bullet narrowly missed him.

Another anecdote concerned a young Catholic teacher who discovered that her boyfriend was a Klansman. She became truly angry and is alleged to have said, "Put on your white nightie and get the hell out of here."

The workers at the mill issued a threat to tar and feather any Klansmen they got their hands on. The Klan diminished rapidly from that point on. None of their candidates were ever elected.

On April 24 I received a third response to my article from Mrs. John Poppe (343 Fisher Street, Marquette. She was at L'Anse during the Klan activity and while she says she is forgetful she does remember some activity up there.

There were six books at the Public Library that dealt with the KKK. Three of them dealt with the Klan of the Reconstruction while two dealt with the revived Klan. The third volume was checked out and not clearly enough described to indicate the era that it dealt with.

William Pierce Randall's The Ku Klux Klan discussed the rise of the new Klan in General. The exact origin is controverted. A strong need for fraternalism played a big part in its early days. Oddly enough, the motion picture, Birth of a Nation, seems to have stimulated hate and intolerance in the United States. The KKK first projected the image of the protector of public morals. There had been a post war lowering of standards.

One of the favorite ploys of the early Klan was to march down the main aisle of a Church in full Klan dress, deposit a large contribution on the Communion Table and March out. All this was done in silence.

Village and farm people made the best Klansmen. Jews and Catholics were the main targets. Jews cannot assimilate and Catholics were trying to set up a dictatorship with the pope as chief executive. Their constant cry was that the chief enemies of a nation were those within it. The Klan of the 1920's had less in common with the Klan of the Reconstruction than it had with the Know Nothings, the American Protective Association and other forms of Nativism.

One of the elements that caused consternation at the turn of the century was the "continental sabbath." These people went to church in the morning and then spent the rest of the day in relaxation and recreation. The typical American Sabbath was one of long church services and religious exercises for the whole day! Cooking was even forbidden. This made for an alarming contrast and seeming decline of morals.

The KKK revived forged documents of the A.P.A. which indicated that the Catholics were on the verge of a massacre of the Protestants.

The Klan was very adaptive. In an old population they played upon the fear of subversion of morals and customs. In a new population they appealed to the few of non-acceptance. They were Republican in Ohio and Democrats in Mississippi.

They escalated their activities to brandings and whippings in the early 20's. They had a membership of five million by 1926 when the involvement of some of their national leadership in a notorious rape case caused a rapid decline to about two million.

Al Smith was a perfect target for them in 1928. He was Catholic, wet, liberal, and a big-city-boy. He combined everything that the Klan abominated.

In Hooded Americanism, David Chalmers discusses the Klan in various locations. In Chapter 27, White Robes on Woodward Avenue, He discusses various Klan activities in Michigan. The Klan never became stronger than one in fifty in Michigan. The Klan had a hard time in Michigan before Change, ethnic diversity and new immigration. The Klan platform in Michigan dealt with corruption, foreigners, Catholic and Negroes. The state realm supported legislation aimed at closing all parochial schools. In 1924 the Klan supported the man elected mayor of Flint. There is no mention of the Upper Peninsula in this chapter on the Klan' in Michigan.

In Chapter 26, Badger Games in Wisconsin, I looked for any Upper Peninsula mention with the Klan in Wisconsin but found none. There was an anti-Klan demonstration in Marinette. That is as close as any mention of the Upper Peninsula.

In passing, I want to remark that there was a lot of involvement of the Methodist clergy at the lower levels mentioned in this book although many simplistic groups seemed attracted to the "old time religion" approach of the Klan.

On the 15 April I went to see Mrs. Frisk for the final session before the interview. I found her quite agitated and very apprehensive concerning the material. Her relatives and friends had put fear into her, believe it or not, of Klan reprisal for such a thing. This had upset her as well as asking herself why Others had not come forth. At this point I assured her that the

taped could be sealed and not listened to until after her death. This did reassure her and she agreed to go on with her interview. I promised her that no one would hear the tapes for twenty years.

We then went over the interview. There were two groups of recollections of objective memories: her recollections of the Klan being brought up in the classroom with the use of KKK as a list of those they opposed: Koons, Kikes, Catholics and the child's question about the hoods; the memories of a Klan rally and the seeing of the list of members. I then attempted to draw her out on various items to see if the local Klan was similar in manifestation to the national body or even like the Klan in L'Anse.

She seemed very responsive in regard to the classroom incidents and the Klan Rally - she gives a very good and thorough description of the rally. She would not name names in the recollection of the membership lists but she did characterize the membership in general terms. The interview is candid though short. It will be a valuable help for any future use of the Oral History Library in regard to the 20's.

Her insistence on secrecy was remarkable and indicative of the influence of a long departed organization. The 20 year seal proviso was an absolute requirement for me to come away even with the short interview that I made. She told me that relatives had felt that even a twenty year seal was too short a time. Nonetheless she signed the agreement and gave the tapes with a 20 year seal.

This lead to a concern for my grade in the course since the interview of record was sealed for 20 years. In the interview we discussed so classroom incidents from 1918. I thought that I might quickly organize an interview concerning her teaching in the second decade of this century. She was agreeable to that since it was hardly sensitive.

She was much relieved to have the Ku Klux Klan material out of the way and to have a subject dear to her heart to talk about. It was a very relaxed interview and she was able to talk with assurance and good spirits about her teaching days.

I attempted to focus on the training required at that time, teacher load, discipline, school organization and events in the classroom that stood out in her memory. Without the research and preparation of the formal interview, it leaves something to be desired but it is free and easy on the part of the narrator.

While the interview on the Klan is very brief, the difficulty of obtaining any information at all on the local Klan made me feel that it was worth while.

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