



A Look Behind the Masks: The 1920s Ku Klux Klan in Monticello, Arkansas

Author(s): Donald Holley

Source: *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 131-150

Published by: [Arkansas Historical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40031018>

Accessed: 18/06/2013 02:09

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Arkansas Historical Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

A Look Behind the Masks: The 1920s Ku Klux Klan in Monticello, Arkansas

DONALD HOLLEY

ON THE AFTERNOON OF TUESDAY, AUGUST 7, 1923, members of the Ku Klux Klan from southeast Arkansas gathered on an athletic field at the Fourth District State Agricultural School just south of Monticello. At 5:00 P.M. they lined up their Model T Fords and drove through Monticello to boldly display their white sheets and other regalia. Large crowds gathered on the streets to see the Klansmen riding in their cars, sitting stiff-backed and staring straight ahead. As the whole community watched, Klan members drove up South Main Street and circled the courthouse on the town square. This parade produced images that were vivid and frightening.¹

After the parade, the Klansmen reassembled at a secret location near the town square and ate barbecue and watermelon. Seventeen Monticello men as well as others from nearby communities were “naturalized” into the order. It was a big day for the Klan, the first public demonstration of their presence in the southeastern section of the state. This local Klan group was exceptional in that membership lists and minutes of their weekly meetings have survived. These documents enable us to see them behind their masks, exposing their identities as well as their activities. We also have a chance to study the Klan in a small town whose population was more notable for its uniformity than for diversity.

¹Liz Chandler and Henri Mason, interview with author, Monticello, Arkansas, May 9, 1996. Both Chandler and Mason witnessed the parade, which also went through Wilmar, a lumber town about eight miles west of Monticello.

Donald Holley is professor of history at the University of Arkansas at Monticello. He is the author of *Uncle Sam's Farmers: The New Deal Communities of the Lower Mississippi Valley* (1976) and *The Second Great Emancipation: The Mechanical Cotton Picker, Black Migration, and How They Shaped the Modern South* (2000). This essay won the Arkansas Historical Association's Lucille Westbrook Local History Award for 2001.

THE ARKANSAS HISTORICAL QUARTERLY
VOL. LX, NO. 2, SUMMER 2001



APPLICATION FOR CITIZENSHIP
IN THE
INVISIBLE EMPIRE
Knights of the Ku Klux Klan
(INCORPORATED)

To His Majesty the Imperial Wizard, Emperor of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan:
I, the undersigned, a native born, true and loyal citizen of the United States of America, being a white male Gentle person of temperate habits, sound in mind and a believer in the tenets of the Christian religion, the maintenance of White Supremacy and the principles of a "pure Americanism," do most respectfully apply for membership in the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan through Klan No. _____ and guarantee on my honor to conform strictly to all rules and requirements regarding my "naturalization" and the continuance of my membership, and at all times a strict and loyal obedience to your constitutional authority and the constitution and laws of the fraternity, not in conflict with the constitution and constitutional laws of the United States of America and the states thereof. If I prove untrue as a Klansman I will willingly accept as my portion whatever penalty your authority may impose. The required "electoklon" accompanies this application.

Signed _____ Applicant
Endorsed by _____
Kl _____ Residence Address _____
Kl _____ Business Address _____
Date _____ 192__
The person securing this application must sign on top line above. NOTICE—Check the Address to which mail may be sent.

NOTICE
The sum of this donation MUST accompany application, if possible. Upon payment of same by applicant this certificate is made out and signed by person securing application, then detached and given to applicant, who will keep same and bring it with him when he is called, and then turn it in on demand in lieu of the cash.
DO NOT detach if donation is not paid in advance.

This Certifies that
_____ has donated the sum of TEN DOLLARS to the propagating fund of the **Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Inc.)** and same is accepted as such, and as full sum of "ELECTION" entitling him to be received, on the acceptance of his application, under the laws, regulations and requirements of the Order, duly naturalized and to have and to hold all the rights, titles, honors and protection as a citizen of the Invisible Empire. He enters through the portal of
Klan No. _____ Realm of _____
Date _____ Received in trust for the
KNIGHTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN, (INC.)
By Kl _____



OFFICIAL
CERTIFICATE OF
DONATION

An application form for the Ku Klux Klan, 1923. Courtesy Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

The 1920s Klan differed from both the Klan of Reconstruction and the Klan of the 1950s and 1960s. The Reconstruction Klan, a vigilante group that used force and intimidation to keep blacks from voting, was limited to southern states that were fighting Republican control. The later Klan of the civil rights era consisted of white supremacists who were similarly willing to use violence in their fight against integration in the South.

In contrast, the 1920s Klan was not only a nationwide movement—stronger in the North than in the South—but also less violent and more political. Its prejudices were broader, directed against bootleggers, prostitutes, gamblers, immigrants, Catholics, rebellious teenagers, and political radicals. Until recently, these Klansmen have been understood to be citizens of small, provincial towns and villages who were victims of isolation and ignorance. Harboring a deep suspicion of cities and cosmopolitan values, they were religious fundamentalists who opposed modernism. Socially, Klan members were found in lower middle-class or blue-collar occupations, and supposedly joined the organization out of resentment against blacks and immigrants with whom they competed economically.²

In short, the consensus among historians was that the 1920s Klan was a fringe group made up of marginal white men—provincial “misfits” whom the social changes created through modernization had passed by. They reacted against the evils of the city with its modernist values and greater economic success.³ The Klan, then, was an outburst of hatred, ignorance, and anxiety over lost status.

New studies of the Klan have questioned this interpretation.⁴ The main weakness of the older consensus view was always a lack of evidence. Nothing very much has been known about rank-and-file Klansmen, or what the Klan sought to achieve in the early 1920s. Recent historians, however, have employed new evidence that enabled them to probe beneath the newspaper stories and to focus on Klansmen themselves and their agenda. As a secret organization, the Klan naturally left no public records. Over the years a few membership lists and minute books have surfaced for several

²Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 4.

³For general works on the Klan, see David Mark Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976); Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965); Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); John M. Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963); Arnold S. Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1962). For photographs of the 1920s Klan see *The Palimpsest* 76 (Summer 1995).

⁴Robert Neymeyer, “The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s in the Midwest and West: A Review Essay,” *Annals of Iowa* 51 (Fall 1992): 625-633.

communities scattered across the country. The most remarkable example of this kind of evidence was the discovery of almost the entire Klan membership list for Indiana, the state with the largest Klan membership in the 1920s.⁵

This new evidence has resulted in a changed image of the 1920s Klan, rendering it less nativist and more “populist” than in the traditional view.⁶ In a series of studies published in the 1990s, historians have depicted the Klan as a middle-class movement with a religious and moral basis, a movement that emphasized legal and political approaches to solving what they saw as a serious moral crisis in American society. Though prejudiced, Klansmen were not a fringe group with violent tendencies. Here was a more complex social phenomenon than earlier historians believed. In a summary of the revised view, historian Robert Neymeyer wrote, “The new Klansman was socially and economically stable, civic minded, from a mainstream Protestant church, and likely to live anywhere, including in large cities. The 1920s Klansman was primarily concerned with local social problems rather than ethnic and racial issues. He called for the enforcement of prohibition laws, the elimination of gambling and prostitution, and the revival of quality education.”⁷ Neymeyer concluded that the 1920s Klan opposed those whom they saw as undermining traditional values.

By an extraordinary stroke of good fortune, grass-roots information has survived for local Klan No. 108 at Monticello, Arkansas. What has surfaced consists of a minute book and membership lists, including a list of charter members, and other miscellaneous documents. The minute book

⁵Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 193-196. See also Moore, “Historical Interpretations of the 1920s Klan: The Traditional View and the Populist Revision,” *Journal of Social History* 24 (Winter 1990): 341-357. For studies of the Klan in specific cities and using new evidence, see the following: Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, which covers the Klan in large and small Indiana cities. William D. Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990) focuses on Youngstown, Ohio. David A. Horowitz, ed., *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) publishes the minutes of the La Grande, Oregon, Klan. Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) includes essays on the Klan in Denver, El Paso, Anaheim, Salt Lake City, Eugene and La Grande, Oregon. Another work by Lay is *Hooded Knights on the Niagara: The Ku Klux Klan in Buffalo, New York* (New York: New York University Press, 1995). For a gender analysis, see Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). The Monticello Klan had no women's auxiliary.

⁶Moore describes a populist movement as one that “was united by a temporary, but powerful out-pouring of ethnic nationalism, and that concerned itself primarily not with persecuting ethnic minorities but with promoting the ability of average citizens to influence the workings of society and government.” Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 11.

⁷Neymeyer, “The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s in the Midwest and West,” 626.

covers the entire period (September 28, 1922, to October 6, 1925) that the local Klan was active. These records not only enable us to examine the Klan in a small town, but they also represent the most detailed records that have been discovered for a local Klan in the South.

In 1920, Monticello, a community of 2,400 people, was the commercial center for a farm and timber economy and the county seat of Drew County. The white population had been highly homogeneous since English and Scots-Irish pioneers from Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama settled the county in the 1840s.⁸ The 1920 census showed that Drew County contained only fifty-two foreign-born whites in its population.⁹

The quaint Second Empire courthouse that had occupied the Monticello town square since Reconstruction symbolized the past and seemingly reassured the community that life remained unchanged. But modern influences had made their appearance. Though roads were unpaved, automobiles gave people new mobility and new freedom, the A-Muse-U Theater showed the latest movies, and radio broadcasts from Pine Bluff reached the community. The social and cultural changes associated with World War I and the Roaring Twenties swept over Monticello, causing conflicts between those who welcomed challenges to old ways and others who clung even more tightly to traditional values.

Monticello had grown rapidly between 1900 and 1910, but during the subsequent decade growth slowed. Though Monticellonians liked to boast about their “city of wealth,” the county was rural, overpopulated, and poor. The 1920 census listed Drew County’s population at 21,822—25 percent higher than it was eighty years later. Most Drew Countians, like other rural southerners, were small farmers, and their farms were often marginal operations. The average farm contained 75.2 acres in 1920, with only a third of each farm consisting of improved land. Tenants, mostly black, operated 58.4 percent of these farms.¹⁰

The county’s black population was also rural but poorer than its whites. While most Drew County blacks worked as sharecroppers for

⁸The origins of the early migrants are found in the microdata sample for the 1850 census, a random sample of individuals and households drawn from the population schedules. On this data, see Steven Ruggles and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 2.0* (Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects, University of Minnesota, 1997). The URL for the IPUMS site is <http://www.ipums.umn.edu>. See also Rebecca DeArmond, *Old Times Not Forgotten: The History of Drew County* (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Co., 1980), 4.

⁹Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: Population 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), vol. I, 182.

¹⁰*Drew County Advance* (Monticello), January 15, 1915; Bureau of the Census, *Population 1920*, vol. I, 182; *Fourteenth Census of the United States: Agriculture* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), vol. VI, part 2, 562.

white landowners, many blacks worked as laborers in the county's timber industry, including the large operations of the Gates Lumber Company at Wilmar and the Bliss-Cook Lumber Company at Jerome. In 1890, Drew County was 57 percent black, but this population fell to 49 percent by 1910 as many blacks abandoned the area for better opportunities elsewhere. Between 1910 and 1920, however, the county's proportion of blacks remained unchanged. Drew experienced only a moderate out-migration until the 1930s. Like many poor blacks in the rural South, black farmers were controlled by powerful landlords and merchants who held liens on their crops. The black community posed little if any economic threat to the whites of Drew County.

While the county remained primarily agricultural in the early 1920s, the economy showed signs of diversifying. In 1900, a cotton mill began production of rough duck cloth and burlap and provided jobs for poor whites who settled near the mill. A cottonseed oil mill was another early local industry. But the timber industry was the major source of non-farm employment as rich forests of pine and hardwoods covered most of the county.

In 1921, Monticello seemed on the verge of dramatic change when oilmen began drilling a series of wildcat wells. The first oil town in Arkansas was El Dorado (seventy miles to the southwest in Union County), where a well called Busey No. 1 came in with a roar on January 21, 1921. As a result, El Dorado's population exploded, and with the boom came a host of vices including saloons, brothels, and gambling houses. In response to these malevolent influences, a strong Klan movement emerged in Union County.¹¹

After his initial success, Samuel T. Busey, the state's pioneer oilman, turned his attention to Drew County and confidently predicted that Monticello would become the "next El Dorado." On July 14, 1921, Jack Mobley, drilling a well east of Monticello, claimed he had struck oil and that the well would be a producer. Excited townspeople rushed to the site, and Monticello experienced the first symptoms of an oil boom.¹² After another two years of drilling, however, the wildcatters found only dust. Still, some Drew Countians continued to believe that their county would produce oil in commercial quantities.

In early 1923, the city of Monticello paid for an ad in the *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, the leading statewide newspaper, to tout the merits of their city and county. The *Gazette* ad was one of many in which towns

¹¹See Kenny A. Franks and Paul F. Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil: A Photographic History, 1901-1946* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982).

¹²*Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock), July 15, 1921.

all over Arkansas claimed that they had the most to offer newcomers. The ad pointed out that Monticello had the state's only cotton mill, which it labeled a sign of "progressiveness." Monticello also ascribed its success as a community to the fact that "there have been no saloons in Monticello for the past 50 years."¹³ The town was not only proud of its history of opposing alcohol but considered it a selling point.¹⁴

Monticellonians always bragged about their churches, but Drew County contained little religious diversity, with Protestants comprising almost 100 percent of the population. No non-Protestant group posed any threat to the religious establishment. There were no Catholics or Jews at all, and in recent memory Mormon missionaries had been run out of town. A small Christian Science group was popular among wealthy people with chronic diseases. The 1926 religious census showed that 40 percent of Drew County was Methodist, 39 percent Baptist, and another 20 percent Presbyterian. Thus 60 percent of the population were members of mainstream, not fundamentalist, churches.¹⁵ It was from the Protestant mainstream that the Klan drew its membership. The Klan played a large role in the First Methodist Church of Monticello. In 1923, Klansmen made up more than half of both the church's Board of Stewards and its Board of Trustees. The Methodist minister was the klavern's first exalted cyclops, and the church's presiding elder was also a Klansman.¹⁶

In the summer of 1921, the national Klan organization set up its Arkansas state headquarters in Little Rock and sent out organizers to form new klaverns. Under the leadership of James A. Comer, grand dragon of the realm of Arkansas and exalted cyclops of the Little Rock Klan, the

¹³Ibid., January 18, 1923.

¹⁴After Monticello went dry, a Dermott liquor store called itself the Telephone Saloon. Monticellonians who wanted a bottle of whiskey telephoned their order to Dermott, a delta town twenty miles away, and picked up their order on the next train. See ad in *Drew County Advance*, April 16, 1901.

¹⁵Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1926, Separate Denominations* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929), vol. II, 580-583; William Droessler, "Dogma vs. Diversity: The Christian Science Movement Comes to Monticello," *Drew County Historical Journal* 3 (1988): 45-56; *Drew County Advance*, August 4, 1903.

¹⁶Church Register, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Monticello, Arkansas; Quarterly Conference Record, July 25, 1923, both in Church Office, First United Methodist Church, Monticello, Arkansas. About 10 percent of the members of Klan No. 108 belonged to the First Methodist Church. For information on the Klan's membership, see note 21 and table 1.

estimated statewide membership reached between 45,000 to 50,000.¹⁷ Monticello's Klan No. 108 was established in September 1922. The high number indicates it was one of the later klaverns formed; but many local men rushed to sign up.¹⁸

The Klan limited its membership to native-born white American males eighteen years of age or older. But birth, gender, race, and age were not the only qualifications for Klan membership. According to a miscellaneous document in papers associated with the Monticello Klan,

the Klan, which has been termed militant Christianity, can serve best by living toward all men a genuine religion which will be a reflex of the Christ Life. The true Klansman will live such a life not only for his own sake but that his life may be an example to those about him. He will not violate the laws of the land; he will not drink, or gamble, or profane his creator, or neglect his family, or subject the weak of either sex to the seductive allurements of the dance hall, the gambling house, or the brothel. He will pay his debts promptly and not deal unfairly with his neighbor . . . He will set a good example for others by regular attendance upon the services in the house of God. He will not circulate malicious slander and scandal, but will ever remember that he is sworn to protect the honor and reputation of a Klansman and that of a Klansman's family. He will adhere with unflinching zeal to the faith of our fathers that [built] deep and strong upon a religious freedom the foundation of a great nation, that faith which is being assailed by materialism and infidelity, which we have sugar-coated 'modernism'. . . . Crime that sweeps over the nation in great billows—murder, rapine, robbery, domestic infidelity, corruption in high places, and dis-

¹⁷Todd E. Lewis, "From Bull Mooser to Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan: James A. Comer of Little Rock," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 43 (Summer 1995): 26-41; Charles C. Alexander, "Defeat, Decline, and Disintegration: The Ku Klux Klan in Arkansas, 1924 and After," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (Winter 1963): 312. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 237, estimates Arkansas's Klan membership at 25,000. On Methodists and the Klan, see Eric S. Jacobson, "Silent Observer or Silent Partner: Methodism and the Texas Ku Klux Klan, 1921-1925," *Methodist History* 31 (January 1993): 104-112.

¹⁸Charles C. Alexander, "White Robed Reformers: The Ku Klux Klan Comes to Arkansas, 1921-1922," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1963): 8-23; idem, "White Robes in Politics: The Ku Klux Klan in Arkansas," *ibid.*, 22 (Autumn 1963): 195-214; and idem, "Defeat, Decline, and Disintegration," 311-331.

regard for the sanctity of home ties—these things justify the existence of the Klan.¹⁹

The members of the Monticello Klan presumably affirmed these values.

The minute book of Klan No. 108 and membership lists yielded a list of 404 names, including 52 charter members, who were part of the local Klan.²⁰ This list included every person who, according to the minutes, was inducted into Klan No. 108.²¹ The Klan's total membership accounted for 15.7 percent of the county's white males sixteen and over. By comparison, the Indiana Klan embraced 20.8 percent of native-born white men statewide, including counties with Klan memberships ranging from a low of less than 1 percent to a high of 35.4 percent of white males.²²

In 1923, midway through the Klan's active period, the mean age of Klan No. 108 members was forty-two years of age and the median age was thirty-eight and a half years. Two-thirds of the members were between twenty-six and forty-nine, but the Klansmen included a number of young men still in their teens and men sixty-five years of age and older.

Three-fourths (76.8 percent) of charter members were Monticello residents. The entire membership was more geographically scattered. A majority (60 percent) of the local membership lived in the rural areas of the county, while 40 percent lived in Monticello or within four miles of town. To attend meetings many Klansmen drove from fifteen to twenty miles over rough roads. For whatever reason, Klan No. 108 included members from adjacent counties, presumably men living near the county line.

When Klan No. 108 elected its first officers, the klavern chose the minister of the Monticello Methodist church as exalted cyclops (chief officer); a tire dealer as klaliff (vice president); a bookkeeper in a hardware

¹⁹Miscellaneous Klan No. 108 documents courtesy David Taylor Hyatt, Monticello, Arkansas.

²⁰Monticello Klan No. 108 Minute Book, Drew County Archives, Monticello, Arkansas (cited hereafter as Klan No. 108 Minute Book); Charter Members Lists and miscellaneous documents courtesy David Taylor Hyatt, Monticello, Arkansas. See table 1.

²¹The Klan's process for accepting new membership had to be kept in mind while searching the minutes for names of members. The Klan solicited new members from among men they believed might be interested, and a small committee was assigned to approach prospective members individually. These prospects were sometimes identified in the minutes but for the purposes of this study were not recorded as members until they received further mention. Though the minutes are not always consistent in following each separate step of the membership process, new members had their names "read" two or three times before they were initiated in an elaborate "naturalization" ceremony. Not all members were formally "naturalized"; a few prospective members were rejected. On the other hand some individuals were allowed to shortcut this process; in addition, the local Klan accepted members who had joined other klaverns and transferred their membership.

²²Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 48-50.

store as kligrapp (secretary); and an insurance agent as kludd (chaplain). In time the vice president of a local bank also served as exalted cyclops. The remaining officers included an oil wholesaler, the farm extension agent, a bookkeeper at the oil mill, a public school teacher, a painter and decorator, a garage owner, a hardware salesman, and the city marshal.²³

Table 1: Occupational Categories of Monticello Klansmen, Charter Members, and Non Klan White Males, with Percentages of Total Membership

	Charter Members	%	All Klansmen	%	Non Klan Males	%
High White Collar	21	40	78	19	180	6
Low White Collar	16	31	38	9	270	9
Farmer	8	15	156	39	1,337	45
Skilled	4	8	22	5	163	5
Semi-skilled/ Unskilled	1	2	33	8	616	21
Unemployed	0	0	20	5	396	13
Unknown	2	4	57	14	6	0
Totals	52	100	404	100	2,968	100

Source: Computed from Monticello Klan No. 108 Minute Book, Drew County Archives, Monticello, Arkansas, and Charter Members Lists and miscellaneous documents. The names drawn from the minutes and from the list of charter members were identified in the following sources: 1920 manuscript census and the Arkansas Soundex to the 1920 manuscript census (M1550); and World War I Selective Service System: Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Arkansas Counties, rolls 127, 128, all in Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas. This effort resulted in the identification of the age, occupation, and residential location of 85.9 percent of the membership of Klan No. 108. The occupational categories are based on Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 290-292. Percentages are rounded.

²³Klan No. 108 Minute Book, September 28, 1922.

The officers and charter members were a cross-section of the community's business and professional elite, and came from the highest socio-economic ranks. Seventy-one percent of the charter members were from white-collar occupations and 15 percent were farmers, leaving only a handful of Klansmen who were skilled and unskilled workers (table 1). For the klavern as a whole, white-collar members made up 28 percent, and 39 percent were farmers. The membership of Klan No. 108 covered the full range of local occupations (table 2). High white-collar occupations included doctors, lawyers, and merchants, such as grocers and druggists. The number of ministers was high, as would be expected in a group devoted to moral uplift. Low white-collar occupations included bookkeepers, salesmen, and clerks. But the Klan also attracted men who were in lines of work that reflected the modernizing trends of the early twentieth century: automobile dealers, mechanics, and oilmen, among others. Almost anywhere Drew Countians bought goods or sought professional services locally, they dealt with members of the Klan.

In Klan No. 108, farmers composed the largest single occupational group (38.6 percent). Most men who lived in rural areas were farmers, but the group also included men who farmed as a sideline. Even some men who lived in Monticello reported their occupation in the census as farmer. Avoiding the mosquitoes and diseases in the "unhealthy" river bottoms, they rented their land to tenants and enjoyed the amenities of town life. In the 1920 census, most of the farmers who later joined the Klan reported that they were employers or self-employed, an indication that they were landowners rather than tenants.

The Monticello Klan included members who were prominent in local government. Between 1921 and 1925, the mayor of Monticello was a Klansman along with half of the members of the city council, including the city marshal. Indeed, the mayor and seven aldermen were charter members of the Klan.²⁴

The local Klan also dominated the county courthouse offices. In 1923, Klansmen served as sheriff, county school superintendent, county clerk, treasurer, coroner, and tax assessor. The incumbent county judge, the administrative officer of the county, was not a Klansman but his successor was. Many younger Klansmen later occupied county offices; the membership roster included six future county judges, six future county clerks, two future sheriffs, three future county treasurers, two future county coroners, one future county surveyor, and two future tax assess-

²⁴The names of members of the city council are found in Minutes of City Council, 1921-1925, Official Record Book D, City Hall, Monticello, Arkansas. Cited hereafter as City Council Minute Book.

Table 2: Occupational Distribution of Klan No. 108, Monticello, Arkansas, 1922-1925

White Collar	Number	Blue Collar	Number
Merchant	23	Farmer	156
Minister	13	Laborer	14
Student	12	Carpenter	6
State Agricultural School Faculty/Administration	11	Cotton Mill	6
Local Government Official	11	Blacksmith	4
Physician	8	Mail Carrier	4
Bookkeeper	6	Auto Mechanic	3
Realtor	5	Railroad	3
Lumber Mill Owner/Manager	4	Tinner	2
Teacher	3	Lumber Worker	2
Salesman	3	Telegraph/Telephone Operator	2
Lawyer	3	Oil Driller	2
Insurance Agent	3	Oil Mill Worker	2
Clerk	3	Printer	2
Druggist	2	Mason	1
Banker	2	Teamster	1
Railroad Agent	1	Barber	1
Oil Wildcatter	1	Painter	1
County Agent	1		
Totals	114		212
No occupation	21		
Unknown	57		
N=	404		

Source: See Table 1.

sors. Some older Klansmen had already served as county or city officials.²⁵

The Fourth District State Agricultural School, now the University of Arkansas at Monticello, formed a hotbed of “klannishness.” Both President Frank Horsfall and his son Frank Jr. joined the Klan. In all, eleven of fifteen male faculty members and administrators were Klansmen.²⁶ In addition, seven students also followed their teachers and mentors into the Klan. Three students who attended other schools were Klan members. William Frank Norrell, a future member of Congress from Arkansas’s Sixth Congressional District, was an active leader in many Klan meetings.²⁷

The profile of the typical member of Klan No. 108, then, was a white, Protestant male in his early forties who was a businessman, professional, or farmer living in or near town.

The minute book of Klan No. 108 supports the revised image of Klansmen as civic activists who, though bigoted, upheld the cultural values of mainstream Protestantism. The minutes of the local Klan discussed plans for cross-burnings, rallies, and parades, but contained no indication of any vigilante activity. This local klavern committed only one known act of violence—the beating of Joseph Arduengo, a Basque immigrant who had publicly criticized the Klan. As Arduengo struggled with his attacker, he tore off his mask, recognized him, and later filed a complaint against him. The Klansman was Jack Curry, who was convicted of assault and battery in Monticello municipal court and fined five dollars by Major R. L. Hardy, himself a Klansman.²⁸

While Monticello Klansmen presumably held stereotypical views of blacks, immigrants, and Catholics, their minutes contained nothing that attacked racial or ethnic minorities. They did express support for the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which increased restrictions on immigration by setting up a quota system based on the 1890 census. But

²⁵Janice Wegener, ed., *Historical Report of the Secretary of State, 1978* (Little Rock: Pioneer, 1978), vol. I, 467-472; vol. II, 127-132.

²⁶*The Boll-Weevil, 1926* (Monticello: Students of the Fourth District Agricultural School, 1925), vol. I.

²⁷William Frank Norrell, a resident of Monticello, served in Congress from 1939 until his death in 1962. See *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1961), 1393.

²⁸Wilma Edwards Hankins, interview with William F. Droessler, Monticello, Arkansas, April 6, 1998; Mayor’s Docket, Municipal Court, Drew County, Arkansas, May 4, 1925, 23, Drew County Historical Society, Monticello, Arkansas. In contrast, the Klan in Arkansas’s Ozark Plateau was involved in widespread violence. See Brooks R. Blevins, “The Strike and the Still: Anti-Radical Violence and the Ku Klux Klan in the Ozarks,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 52 (Winter 1993): 405-425.

there was only one mention of this issue. Nothing in the minutes can be read as an attack on urban America.²⁹

Nor did the presence of the Monticello Klan or its activities stir up racial violence. Although Drew County experienced lynchings in the 1890s and other overt threats directed against the black community in the early 1900s, there were no official reports of racial incidents in Drew County during the period when the Klan was active. The last lynching occurred on March 22, 1921, when Phil Slater, a black man, was lynched for allegedly molesting a white woman. The lynch mob consisted largely of white men from Wilmar, where the incident took place. This lynching, however, occurred over a year before the Monticello Klan was organized.³⁰

Instead of racial or ethnic intolerance, the local Klan preoccupied itself with the anti-liquor crusade, which had been one of the most popular causes in Victorian America. Arkansas enacted local option laws as early as 1879. By 1900, thirty of the state's counties, including Drew, were dry; soon the state had few wet counties left. In 1916, Arkansas joined other prohibition states by banning the manufacture and sale of liquor statewide; and the "Bone Dry" law of 1917 prohibited the shipment of liquor into the state. Nationally, anti-liquor forces succeeded with the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1919. Despite widespread support, the federal Volstead Act, which implemented prohibition, proved difficult to enforce.³¹

Monticello played an early role in the anti-liquor movement. Formed in 1876, the Monticello chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) consisted of socially prominent women who opposed alcohol with a religious zeal. They were part of a successful campaign that closed Monticello's saloons in 1888 under local option. In 1916, when Monticello hosted the WCTU state convention, these women paraded through the streets in celebration of achieving absolute victory against liquor. Despite the WCTU's success, alcohol was the leading law enforce-

²⁹Klan No. 108 Minute Book, March 23, 1924.

³⁰*Arkansas Gazette*, March 23, 1921; April Strickland, "The Phil Slater Lynching," seminar paper in author's possession, December 3, 1993. For another Drew County lynching, see Donald Holley, "Three Dead Men and \$10,000: A Drew County Mystery," *Drew County Historical Journal* 8 (1993): 4-11.

³¹See Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (New York: Little, Brown, 1962); and John Kobler, *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993).

ment problem throughout the prohibition period for Monticello's municipal court, a local court with jurisdiction inside the city limits.³²

Monticellonians were hardly alone in disagreeing about liquor. Across Arkansas and the South, rural communities typically ran afoul of prohibition laws in the production of moonshine and in bootlegging, the distribution of homemade whiskey. Many people who made their own whiskey found that the activity was more profitable under prohibition. Local law enforcement officers were often unable to shut down stills, even if they knew or suspected who was operating them. The Klan would provide extra-legal assistance in enforcing the law.

As was the case elsewhere, the minutes show that the zeal to enforce prohibition laws supplied the catalyst for the formation of the Monticello klavern. In one of the initial meetings, Drew County Klansmen formed a Shock Committee that outlined an anti-liquor strategy for the local klavern. The entire group endorsed the committee's proposal to "write every man in Drew County, whom [*sic*] we believe is making or selling whiskey, advising him to discontinue the said illicit traffic, or suffer the full penalty of the law." They also offered "a standing reward of \$50 to any person who gave information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone guilty of manufacturing or selling whiskey." They paid this reward three times, but later withdrew the offer because it disqualified Klansmen as jurors. They wrote letters to Gov. Thomas C. McRae asking him not to issue pardons to moonshiners and bootleggers in Drew County. Two Klansmen were "exiled" from the secret society for "habitual drunkenness and acts unbecoming Klansmen and detrimental to the best interests of the order."³³ The Klan's attack on the liquor problem was clearly a legal and political strategy, not one of violence.

In late 1923, an anti-Klan rally was conducted at Ladelle, a small community twelve miles south of Monticello. Opposition to the Klan at Ladelle was not the work of a group of civil libertarians. Ladelle had a reputation for moonshining, and local moonshiners opposed the Klan's effort to shut down their stills. The Monticello Klan proceeded cautiously because the potential for violence was very real. They hired the Ashley, Drew, and Northern Railroad to run a special train to Ladelle for a counter rally. Captain J. K. Skipwith of Morehouse Parish, Louisiana, who was allegedly in-

³²On the Monticello WCTU, see Henrietta Caldwell McQuiston, *History of the WCTU of Monticello*, January 16, 1920, copy in Drew County Archives; *Advance*, October 24, 31, 1916; *Advance-Monticellonian*, December 1, 1960; Mayor's Docket, Municipal Court, 1920-1933, Drew County, Arkansas, Drew County Historical Society. Some years are missing.

³³Klan No. 108 Minute Book, December 12, 1922, January 22, 1925, October 17, 1924, October 16, 1923.

volved in a notorious incident of Klan violence in early 1922, spoke at Ladelle in opposition to liquor. Despite the Klan's effort to stop bootlegging, Ladelle moonshiners continued to operate their stills. The Klan's Ladelle venture was a complete failure.³⁴

Beyond prohibition, the Monticello Klan's secondary mission was to enforce moral standards and family responsibilities. The Shock Committee recommended a secret committee that would "ascertain the names of young people who ride late at night that the Shocking [sic] Committee may advise their parents of the apparent danger of such amusement." The Klan rejected one man for membership because he was reported to have beaten his mother. They looked into a report that a twenty-year-old man had written an indecent letter to a fourteen-year-old girl. A woman appealed to the Klan asking that they "take some action to bring her son to some realization of his duty to her and the family." In response, the Shock Committee wrote the man "a strong friendly letter asking that he help support his family." Another man had deserted his thirteen-year-old wife, and the Klan voted to turn the matter over to the prosecuting attorney. They also agreed to aid the girl if she were in financial need.³⁵

The Klan's efforts to police the community were sometimes amusing. In one incident, Klansmen drove their cars to the south part of the county to talk to a man and woman who were living together without having married. When they arrived at the couple's house out in the country, the woman met them at the door with a shotgun. She opened fire and the Klansmen scattered so far that some of them had to walk back to town, a few not arriving until the next day. In another incident a black woman asked for help to oppose moonshiners at Greenmount in northern rural Drew County, but the Klan excused their failure to respond by stating that the roads were too bad.³⁶

Though Monticello Klansmen probably held typical Protestant attitudes toward Catholics, the minutes mentioned the Catholic Church only once in a passing reference to Catholic "propaganda." The Monticello Klan sent a donation to the Mid-East Fund, an effort to help Armenian Christians who were being persecuted in Turkey.³⁷

Klan No. 108 conducted a welfare program. They took up collections for widows and others in need, including a man whose family was suf-

³⁴Ibid., November 13, 20, December 11, 1923. On Skipwith, see Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, 68-75.

³⁵Klan No. 108 Minute Book, July 30, August 6, 1923, September 25, 1923, November 13, 1923, January 15, 1924.

³⁶Former Drew County sheriff David Taylor Hyatt, interview with author, Monticello, Arkansas, May 8, 1996; Klan No. 108 Minute Book, October 16, 23, 1923.

³⁷*Arkansas Gazette*, October 21, 1922.

fering because he was in jail. The Christmas Cheer Committee distributed baskets of fruit and toys to needy families.³⁸

Some recent historians have argued that in many communities the Klan was part of a conflict between different political factions. Klansmen represented a group of "outs" who fought with the establishment over specific issues. The Klan's strong position in favor of stricter enforcement of prohibition laws, for example, implied a criticism of the work of local law enforcement officials. The Monticello Klan was too well represented in local government to be considered a faction of "outs." In the 1924 Drew County political races, the klavern voted to "take no definite stand in the forthcoming election as there is no necessity for us to take action."³⁹ The incumbent sheriff was a member of the Klan; a new sheriff was elected, and he too was a Klansman. The klavern made a point of passing a resolution pledging their support to both the incumbent and the incoming sheriff.⁴⁰ The Klan already dominated key offices in the city hall and the courthouse.⁴¹ The Monticello Klan was not an opposition group to the town's establishment, since the two virtually overlapped.

Only one incident of conflict with local officials was found in the minutes of Klan No. 108. A group of robed Klansmen appeared before the Monticello City Council petitioning them to fire night-marshal J. P. Price and another man who often served as a deputy, Ira Johnson. No reason for this request was recorded. The council, though dominated by Klansmen, took no action.⁴²

Monticello's Klansmen did find themselves drawn into state politics. In the 1924 gubernatorial race, Grand Dragon James A. Comer favored Lee Cazort, former speaker of the House of Representatives and president of the Arkansas Senate.⁴³ Cazort campaigned openly as a Klansman. But another candidate with Klan credentials was Jim G. Ferguson, the state commissioner of mines, manufacturing and agriculture. On May 28, during a night of thunderstorms that produced a low voter turnout, klaverns across the state met to select their own slate of candidates. The Drew County Klan split almost evenly on their choice for governor (Ferguson received 10 votes, Cazort 11).⁴⁴ Across the state Cazort won the Klan pri-

³⁸Klan No. 108 Minute Book, February 16, 1924.

³⁹Ibid., March 23, April 1, 1924. See Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 64-69.

⁴⁰Klan No. 108 Minute Book, November 8, 1924.

⁴¹Ibid., March 23, April 1, 1924.

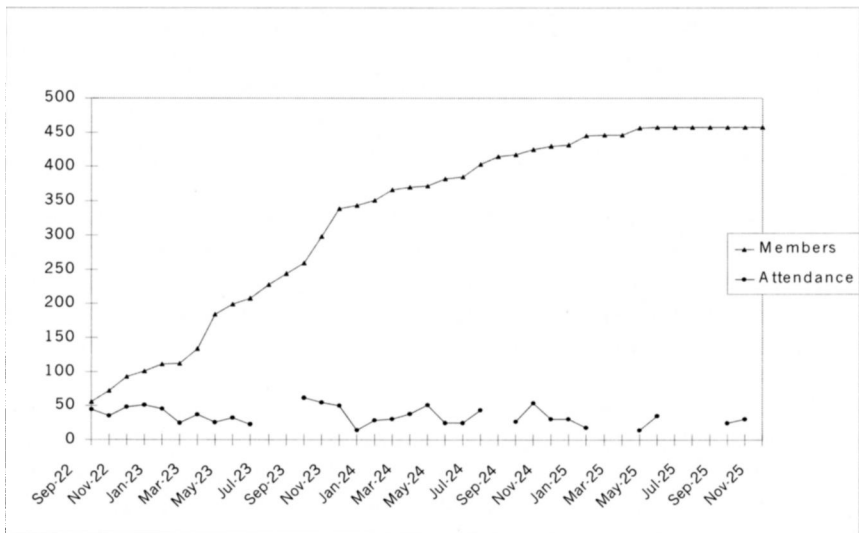
⁴²Ibid., May 17, 1923. Six months later Price was replaced, but not by a Klansman. The reason was not stated. City Council Minute Book D, May 18, 1923, January 4, 1924.

⁴³See *Arkansas Gazette*, August 18, 1924.

⁴⁴Klan No. 108 Minute Book, May 27, 1924.

mary, and Comer threw the Klan's support behind him, expecting Ferguson to withdraw. Ferguson, however, stayed in the race, joined by anti-Klan candidates John E. Martineau and Hamp Williams. The Klan's role in the primary was discussed openly in the press by both pro and anti Klan candidates. In the primary the Klan's candidate lost. Tom J. Terral, a Klansman not recognized by the Arkansas organization, won the governor's race. Despite the local Klan's endorsement of Cazort, Drew County voted for Terral.⁴⁵

Figure 1: Monticello Klan Membership and Attendance at Regular Meetings, September 1922–November 1925



Source: Minute Book for Klan No. 108, Monticello, Arkansas. Some attendance records are missing. Membership figures are cumulative.

By 1925, the Klan movement was in trouble at all levels. In Indiana, Grand Dragon David Stephenson was convicted of assault, rape, and murder, and went to prison.⁴⁶ Stephenson's actions revealed that he did not

⁴⁵Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest, 185-192*; Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 56-58; Alexander Heard and Donald S. Strong, *Southern Primaries and Elections* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1950), 23-24; *Arkansas Gazette*, August 19, 1924.

⁴⁶M. William Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon: D. C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991).

share the values of rank-and-file Klansmen, a disillusioning revelation that caused klaverns to fall apart nationwide. Moreover, in Arkansas, the 1924 governor's race had shown how divided the Klan was. The secret order's influence receded rapidly when its lack of political influence became evident.⁴⁷ While the Monticello Klan's membership had grown steadily, attendance at regular meetings never improved, indicating that most Klansmen were only nominal members (fig. 1). The need that some men had for the Klan was on the wane. By late 1925, one threat to the local moral order had definitely passed: it was clear that Drew County would not experience an oil boom and its attendant vices. The Monticello Klan held its last meeting on October 6, 1925. Instead of officially disbanding, it just ceased to exist.

The evidence from the membership lists and minute books for the Monticello Klan is consistent with the view of the Klan as an organization formed to support the enforcement of liquor laws and to uphold traditional morality. Though they formed an intimidating presence, the Monticello Klan offered no attacks on modernism, no campaigns against evolution, no anti-city tirades, and no nativist attacks on Catholics, Jews, or immigrants. While reports from around the country indicated that Klansmen in the 1920s were responsible for incidents of religious intolerance, racial prejudice, and violence, members of the Drew County Klan were not directly involved in such activities. The Monticello Klan existed in a homogeneous environment that made religious and ethnic intolerance a non-issue.

The 1920s Klan appealed to a national clientele of white Protestant Americans from communities large and small. The Monticello Klan provides a glimpse of a small southern town's reaction to the social and cultural transition from Victorian America to the Roaring Twenties. Like Americans elsewhere, the people of Monticello and Drew County, though secluded, responded to changes that swept the country. They worried about the erosion of traditional patterns of authority, which they associated with the decline in personal morality, including the use of alcohol and sexual misbehavior. Through radio and movies, these influences penetrated deeply into the nation's heartland, and apparently no one's family could escape their malevolent effects. Such values produced in many people a sense of loss of control. Thus, many men joined together in the Klan as a way of reaffirming traditional values.

In the end, the Klan's emphasis on liquor control and personal morality was not enough to sustain their movement over an indefinite period. Klansmen responded to a perceived threat, which quickly diminished. Monticello's Klan also competed with local chapters of the Knights of

⁴⁷Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, 56-58.

Pythias, Masonic Lodge, Odd Fellows, and Woodmen of the World. These fraternal groups sometimes added tangible benefits—like the Woodmen's life insurance plan—that helped sustain their membership.

The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s operated in a radically different social and cultural milieu than the Reconstruction Klan or the Klan of the civil rights era. Monticello Klansmen were not a group of misfits whose behavior was irrational. They were prominent business and professional men, including many community leaders. Klansmen presented an ominous appearance when they wore their regalia, but behind their masks they proved to be quite ordinary. Their efforts grew less effective as the Klan organization fell victim to mistakes that its leadership made on both the state and national levels. They had also failed to define issues and benefits that could support a long-term movement. After only three years the Monticello Klan vanished as quickly as it appeared.