

This is an oral history presentation for Indiana State Evansville History Library, prepared for Frank Ciardello by Gennie Streamer. We are going to discuss movements of the Secret Order of the Ku Klux Klan, that flourished in Indiana under the governorship of Edward Jackson.

MRS. STREAMER: What effect did the Ku Klux Klan have on the community, concerning their politics?

DR. ROPP: Well, I don't know what effects it had on politics except as I understand it, the Ku Klux Klan was built and established by the Republican Party of Indiana and in the rural areas many of the members rode horses in the evenings and nights, which was rather frequent during the time that I was a young boy.

MRS. STREAMER: Would you say that a large portion of your community belonged to this group?

DR. ROPP: Yes, they had many members. I found a roster of their members one time in a hollow stump, which I put back very quickly, but many people in the rural areas, many men, belonged to the Ku Klux Klan.

MRS. STREAMER: I found it rather surprising when they said that ministers headed this group. My grandfather was a minister. He was the first Christian Church minister in Owensville, when they built that new church in Owensville, and surprisingly enough I found out later

that he lead the group in Poseyville. Do you know of any ministers in your community that belonged to this.

DR. ROPP: No, I don't know of any ministers; but many farmers belonged to it and a state representative in Evansville belonged at that time. I don't actually know of any ministers that belonged.

MRS. STREAMER: You said this was a period of time, perhaps right after the World War I in 1917 or '18?

DR. ROPP: I believe so.

MRS. STREAMER: Then they had another period I remember around 1926 and '27. Well, this was the time when I was a child and I saw them marching in Poseyville in their sheets and they were going to bomb the Catholic Church. They had these; they said they had guns under their sheets and they had holes so they could see. They carried a kind of burning brand flame. Did they burn the fiery cross in your community?

DR. ROPP: Yes, they carried torches and they did burn fiery crosses whenever they wanted to scare somebody into doing right or doing whatever they wanted them to do. I remember several occasions, one time a family was very hard to get along with in school and they built a fiery cross in his yard and he moved to Kentucky.

MRS. STREAMER: Isn't it true that they did good also? That as a group they often did good deeds instead of all bad ones or what might have had an effect on the community?

DR. ROPP: I lived in a rural area in Southern Indiana and all I know of is that they did good. They carried Christmas baskets on many occasions and they didn't do anything harmful that I know of during the time I was; observed them.

MRS. STREAMER: This is rather surprising cause I had never heard that until you said it. To your knowledge; who was the head of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana?

DR. ROPP: D. C. Stevenson was the head of the klan; in fact the Republican Party came to the conclusion that he was too powerful.

MRS. STREAMER: Well, wasn't he involved in some scandal. Perhaps this was the reason they came to that conclusion.

DR. ROPP: Yes, Madge Overmar was his secretary I believe. She was on the train with him near the time of her death and she jumped off of the train that she and D.C. were on. She obtained some bi-chloride and took it and became very ill. She was put in University Hospital to the best of my knowledge, where she was treated and later died. Dr. Moon, the pathologist, said on the witness stand that she died as a result of wounds that she had received before she took her bi-chloride tablets, and that was the turning point in the trial that convicted D.C. Stevenson who said she died of infection rather than bi-chloride poisoning: he based his diagnosis on the appearance of the slides of her kidneys after her death; the slides

taken during biopsy.

MRS. STREAMER: You mean this was the fall from power for Stevenson?

DR. ROPP: Yes he was convicted then and sent to the penitentiary for life and I think he was released from the penitentiary a little while before his death. I'm not sure but I think he was.

MRS. STREAMER: You think then that the Ku Klux Klan probably went underground?

DR. ROPP: After that the Ku Klux Klan became very much less powerful, which was what the Republican Party desired. Dr. Moon moved east from Indiana.

MRS. STREAMER: He probably got a request.

In the preceding tape I was talking to Dr. Harold Ropp of New Harmony. Now the period of time that he is talking about was the time before he came to New Harmony. He lived in the community in and around Princeton, Indiana in Petersburg.

Now in the rest of the tape, I will be interviewing my father who is 82 years old and he has quite a few memories of the Ku Klux Klan because as I have stated before his father was a Christian Church Minister and surprisingly enough he was a leader of the Ku Klux Klan in and around Posey County.