

Martin County Historical Society, Inc.



Spring 2023 Newsletter



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Spring 2023

Needleman Case Era Klan Activity

Contributed by Wayne Peel

In December 1915, the Klu Klux Klan re-formed in Georgia. The founder was the son of a Confederate soldier, and was influenced by the book The Clansman, a “historical novel” about life after the Civil War.

The re-formed Klan was not as violent as the Klan that was formed after the Civil War.

The membership was small until about 1918 when two people started recruiting for the KKK. Whenever they enrolled someone in the Klan, they received \$5 of the \$10 membership initiation fee. The number of members grew rapidly.

After WWI, the mood of the country became very anti-immigrant. The KKK adopted an attitude that was not only against Blacks, but also against immigrants, Catholics, and Jews. The Klan was against Jews because they were not Christian, against Catholics because they believed them to have a loyalty to the Pope instead of the United States, against Blacks because the group was openly white supremacist. On the west coast, The KKK was also strongly anti-Asian on similar grounds as the other groups it was against.

During this post WWI era, the KKK rapidly spread throughout the United States. Unlike the post Civil War Klan, activity was not limited to the South. It thrived throughout the US because it adopted prejudices that were so broad. The KKK would focus on specific groups according to the predominant prejudice in a particular area.

Like other parts of the US, the KKK was active in Martin County and Northeastern North Carolina. There were Klan rallies, parades, and other public activities openly sponsored by the Klan. In the October 9, 1925 *Enterprise* there was an announcement about a KKK parade at the end of the “Roanoke Fair.” Also, anyone attending the fair after 6:00 PM in full Klan Regalia was to be admitted free of charge.

There were at least two reports in the *Enterprise* of the Klan assaulting someone who they believed had been involved in immoral activity. One incident involved taking a person from the deputy sheriff transporting the suspect to Williamston. There were also reports in the *Enterprise* of the KKK donating money to needy families and churches. Whenever the Klansman came into town in their cars, they removed the license tags to conceal their identity!

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Klan, continued

There was an attempt in North Carolina to make secret organizations illegal and to ban individuals from wearing masks. This failed.

No one knows the exact number of members in our area. Membership was secret, but people knew who was active in the Klan. Of course, a lot of people did not join but were sympathetic to the Klan prejudices and philosophy. The Klan could not have exploded in membership without tacit support from the general population.

In several states, the KKK had tremendous political influence and openly campaigned for candidates and submitted candidates. There was a KKK march on Washington, D.C., and the members wore their uniforms but were not masked!

The Enterprise opinion of the KKK evolved from 1921 until 1928. Initially, *The Enterprise* seemed to endorse the KKK, or at least did not offer derogatory comments. But in 1928, the mood toward the KKK had changed. An editorial was very critical of the Klans activities and the “lawless” behavior of the members.

In 1928, the KKK lost a lot of membership and influence. Some scholars speculate the novelty of the Klan waned. Also, the leadership of the Klan got into legal battles over money, and several were found to have committed crimes towards women and had sordid relationships. The Klan prided itself on its emphasis on the “morals” of society, but the “morals” of the leaders did not conform to this emphasis.

Although the Klan lost a lot of membership in the 1920s, it did not go into oblivion. Occasionally, it would be resurrected, but never had the influence and notoriety as in the 1920s. In the 1960s there was a brief rebirth of the Klan in Martin County during the Civil Rights Movement.

Hopefully, hate groups like the KKK will not regain the prominence and influence as in years past.

- The above research came from the presentation on the “Needleman Case” at the Life-Long Learning Program at ECU.

Happy News!

Work continues on the restoration of the Smithwick Green House on US Highway 17.

New owners of the Wynne House on Church St in Williamston are renovating the Greek influenced Art Deco home including the restoration of the original windows. Thank you to all those involved!

GRIFFIN'S HATCHERY



Highway 17, Martin County
Williamston, North Carolina

Griffin's Hatchery National Register Evaluation

Joseph Simon Griffin purchased the property on which the hatchery now stands and cleared the land to raise tobacco as a cash crop in the early 1920s; Griffin built a main house and various outbuildings to run the farm.⁵⁸ An old wood frame store known as the Williams Store was located on the west side of US 17 where the hatchery now stands. Joseph Griffin's son, Jasper Griffin, inherited the property from his father and built a home north of the original main house in the 1930s. He also built the chicken hatchery, which he located on the site of the old store (which was moved back from the road and is now located behind the hatchery) in order to supplement his cash crops. In addition to the two-story hatchery, a three-story laying house and several sheds were built behind the hatchery to raise the chickens. The three-story laying house was demolished some time after the operation ceased. Rye fields were planted to allow the chickens to range and supplemented their chicken feed diet.

The hatchery building was designed to house incubators on the first floor. Griffin raised Rhode Island Reds as fryers and Leghorns as layers and sold them to local and regional markets.⁵⁹ The business ceased operation in the early 1950s due to the unreliable power supplied from the Washington grid, where the hatchery would sometimes lose power for up to three days. Griffin sometimes lost 90,000 eggs a month due to the power losses.⁶⁰ After the business closed he converted the second floor to a packhouse for his tobacco crop, and the building is presently used for storage. The three-story chicken house was also demolished after the operation closed. The original farm house burned down in the early 1960s and in 1964 Jasper Griffin and his brother built the present brick ranch house on the site of the old house. In the 1930s Jasper Comer Griffin, Joseph Griffin's son, built the one-and-a-half story frame house located north of the hatchery.

National Register Evaluation

Griffin's Hatchery was originally surveyed and determined eligible for listing on the National Register in 2000 under Criterion A for agriculture and Criterion C for architecture. The hatchery maintains a high level of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Although many of the related outbuildings associated with the hatchery, such as the three story chicken house and rye fields are gone, the hatchery still maintains its setting on the farm complex. Griffin's Hatchery is a unique Martin County structure that functions as an individually significant property.

From <https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/historic-preservation-office/PDFs/ER%2099-8744.pdf>

Hours

Martin County Historical Society, Inc.

P. O. Box 468, Williamston, NC 27892

Email - info@martincountynhistory.com

Visit Our Website at

www.martincountynhistory.com

Editor Contact
LDESQ@hotmail.com

Meetings

General (Membership) Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month., except June and July, 10:00am at the Biggs House. Annual membership dues are as follows:

Individual	\$15.00
Family	\$30.00
Business	\$50.00

MCHS Officers 2022

- **President - Jane Benson**
- **Vice President - Bonnie Robertson**
- **Recording Secretary - L. David Smith**
- **Treasurer & Book Sale Coordinator - Shirley Wilson**

We welcome submissions and recommendations for future articles!



We now have a youtube channel!

Check us out at martincountynhistoricalsociety.com ! You can view “Before” pictures of the Asa Biggs House, watch oral history interviews about our county, and more! We also welcome submissions for this educational tool as well!