

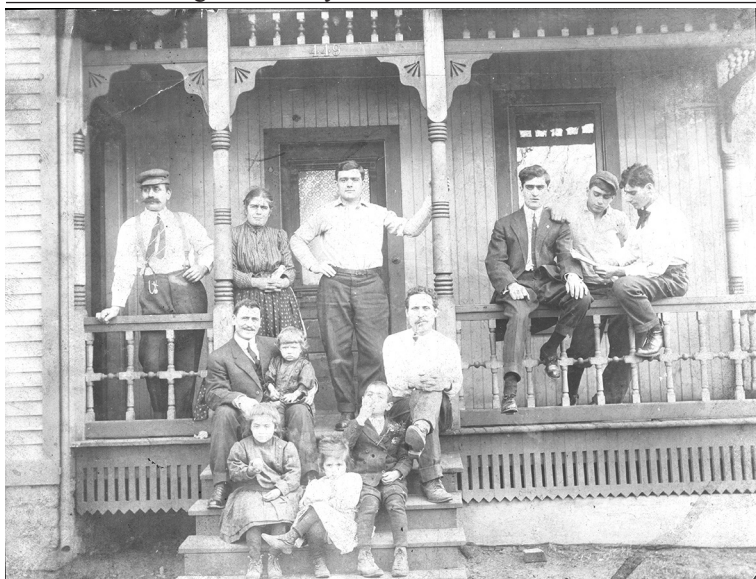
They Shall Not Pass Part I: 100 Years Ago....

Throughout 1924 there were parades by the Klu Klux Klan that led to many disturbances between the KKK and the Knights of the Flaming Circle (a militant organization founded in 1923 to fight the anti-Catholic Ku Klux Klan due to Klan activities of intimidation and a riot in Steubenville, Ohio in August of 1923). The name referred to the Circle tactic of burning tires to counter Klan cross burnings. These Niles disturbances resulted in the riot of November 1, 1924 where armed men on both sides confronted each other in three areas of Niles.

The KKK had seen a resurgence around 1915. Unlike the Southern Klan this group supported conservative Protestant ideals amid the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, many who were Catholic. The lifestyle of the immigrants was in conflict with white Protestants who did not play cards, gamble, drink wine or beer or whiskey. Klan members came from all walks of life and economic status. They became deeply rooted in government at the local and state level.

This is the story of Italian immigrants who came to Niles to work in the factories and mills such as the Niles Fire Brick Company. Joining them were Irish Catholics who were also considered to be “foreigners” by many Protestants.

The Klan purported to be on a moral crusade to clean up bootleggers and gambling. The Italian and Irish Catholics saw them as a threat to their Catholic religion and way of life.



Pasquale Scarnecchia house on Mason Street, the typical Italian family with multiple generations, husband and wives, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters and children living in one house.

Earlier Parades.

1924 was not the first time the Klan had marched in Niles. In 1922, a KKK parade passed the Warner Opera House (later the Warner Theatre) on State Street as noted by *Rose Ciminero* on the back of a photograph.

Niles Elects Klan – Supported Candidates.

Cleveland Plain Dealer November 3, 1923

Mayor *Charles Crow* was defeated in November 1923 by *Harvey Kistler* who had the political support of the KKK. Kistler took office on January 1, 1924.

Charles Crow was well – respected and was running for his fifth term as mayor. He lost by 462 votes out of 5,506 votes cast.

Leonard ‘Link’ Rounds remained as chief of police, he was appointed Chief in 1902.

The local school board members, bank presidents, firemen and policemen were all typically white protestants who set policy and enforced the laws. The lifestyle of the Italian immigrants was in conflict with those white Protestants who did not gamble or drink alcohol.

First Klan Parade in Niles: May 9, 1924

3000 Klansmen from the Youngstown – Warren area and Sharon, PA and 200 automobiles moved along the parade route. Several cars blocked the way.

The Klan ignited a cross at Central High School. Observers knocked it down. As Klansmen try to retrieve it, they are pelted with stones and bricks. Shots are fired.

The Italian protestors burn a tire in front of the Central School which provides clouds of thick smoke and an acrid smell to the Klan marchers.

This confrontation marks the point where certain East End Italians noted for their bootlegging and gambling activities assumed leadership of Italian opposition to Klan. Though it was to their self- interest to oppose the Klan’s moral crusade, they also viewed the Klan action as an attack on the Italian way of life.



Part of the parade route, the circular wading pond was where the Central School building was located. The Central Park Apartments are now at this site opposite the Dairy Queen on State Street.

Mayor Grants Permit for June 21 Parade

Klan leaders decide to hold another Konklave on June 21, expecting 50,000 Klan members.

On June 19th, *Mayor Harvey Kistler* grants a permit for the KKK to parade in Niles. He believed that the Klan had a constitutional right to have a parade. On June 10th a delegation of citizens opposed to the parade asked Kistler to have them parade unmasked or cancel the parade. Kistler refused to revoke the parade permit. The proposed parade moves the battleground into the streets.

Governor Donahey Warns Kistler

Governor warns Kistler to have plenty of police to avert disorder. Kistler is confident that he can handle the parade and that there would be very little trouble.

Events Begin on June 19, 2024

Thursday: A bomb is thrown at a burning cross erected across from the McKinley Memorial.

Friday: A crowd (150 anti-Klan supporters) tear down ‘Welcome Klan’ banner that hung across Main Street.

Saturday: An estimated 10,000 Klan marchers were attacked by roving crowds that threw stones, bricks, pipes at cars.

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Ward-Thomas Museum
Home of
The Niles Historical Society
503 Brown Street
Niles, OH 44446

Non-profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Niles, OH
Permit #337



Preserving and promoting Niles' History for future generations

Scan the QR Code to visit our website.

Visit our Website: www.nileshistoricalsociety.org

Check out the Photographs and Stories links.

Visit our Website: www.nileshistoricalsociety.org

Monthly Calendar

Museum 'Open House'
The first Sunday of each month, 2-5
Last tour begins at 4 pm

Membership Meetings

Westenfield Room
10:00 am First Saturday of each month

Call for private tours to be scheduled

330.544.2143

Officers

Anna Maria Beagle.....President
Dave Martin.....Vice-President
Lynda Ralston.....Treasurer
Coleen Tominey.....Secretary

Audrey John.....Curator

Ralph Tolbert.....Newsletter and Website

Trustees:

Anne Townley, Nancy Malone, and Sandy Bilovesky

The January-February 2025 newsletter will detail the events of the November 1, 1924 clash between the Knights of the Flaming Circle and the KKK that resulted in Ohio National Guard troops patrolling the streets of Niles and disbanding both warring factions.

Political Resurgence of the Klan.

The resurrection of the Klan as a political force was re ignited in 1915 with the film, Birth of a Nation by D.W. Griffiths, spreading throughout several states including Ohio. Seen mostly as a backlash against 'foreigners' and Catholics, who had a different lifestyle and were seen as competition for jobs, many Protestants joined to form a formidable voting block to elect local, state and national politicians favorable to their beliefs.

The image below shows the Klan marching in front of the U.S. Capitol in 1925 with faces visible. Locally, Klan meetings at Idora Park often numbered more than 10,000 participants.



Calendar of Events:

November 11, 2024

Monday, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Hosting Veterans with refreshments

Presentation by *Ralph Tolbert*.

December 7, 2024

Saturday, 10:00 AM: Business Meeting

All members are welcome to attend.

December 14, 2024

Saturday, 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM: M^cKinley Christmas

Entertainment and refreshments will be provided at all four sites.

Niles school bus will transport visitors to each site.

The Von Isley Estate will also have a craft show.

Because tours of the Ward-Thomas House will be provided during M^cKinley Christmas there will be **NO** open house

on the first Sunday of December.



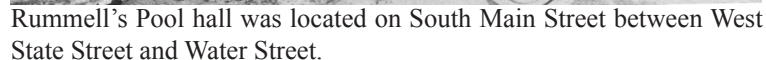
The much needed repairs to the brick chimneys of the Ward-Thomas house have been completed.

Confrontation marks the point where certain East End Italians noted for their bootlegging and gambling activities assumed leadership of Italian opposition to Klan. Though it was to their self-interest to oppose the Klan's moral crusade, they also viewed the Klan action as an attack on the Italian way of life.

East Side Athletic Club Meeting.

Rummell's Sporting Goods Store.

Knights of the Flaming Circle report that Klan members are carrying guns to *Joseph Rummell's* pool hall. Six Klan members are arrested. Kistler hires 24 hour special police.



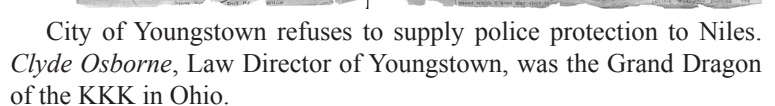
As the evening wore on, Freer grew bolder and walked further up Main Street, greatly agitating the pedestrians who saw him. Shortly before 11:30 PM, members of the FC barged into the police station and reported Freer's actions to Lt. Gilbert. Based on rumors they heard of

Calm Before the Storm.

Monday September 8, 1924.

Mayor Prohibits Parade by Foes of Klan.

October 29, 1924: Kistler house bombing.
Wednesday October 29th, 1924. Kistler's home at 956 West Park Ave. is bombed after denying a parade permit to Knights of Flaming Circle.



Chief Round telegraphs *Governor Donahey* about bombing in hopes of securing additional forces for Saturday's parade.

Clyde Osbourne issues orders that forbade Klan from wearing masks or carrying firearms and directed that, "No man shall resent remarks or take any action against any denomination, except in self-defense".

October 30 Meeting.

On October 30th a meeting was held at the McKinley Memorial. Sheriff Thomas announces it and invites all to attend no matter what race, political view, or religion. Hope was for peace.

He appealed to the clergy of all faiths to cooperate. 500 citizens attend the meeting. Two committees present how they would resolve the conflict.

The first committee asked Kistler to revoke Klan's permit to parade.

The second committee asked citizens to cooperate with Sheriff Thomas and maintain order at the parade.

The decision was to have Kistler stop the parade.

Frank McDermott says Mayor should protect the city.

Kistler doesn't respond to the citizens...sides with the Klan.

Governor Donahey Telegram to Mayor Kistler.

October 30, 1924.

Sending of state troops in mere anticipation of local trouble is without precedent in Ohio; I stand on my letter to you under date of October 27 and will hold you to strict accountability.

Tuesday, November 4, 1924 would be election day in Ohio.

October 31, 1924.

Colonel Watkins of Klan heads to Niles to post bond for three Klan members arrested for concealed weapons. He was recognized by several of the 100+ gathered in front of police station.

After posting their bond, he left in a sidecar of motorcycle and headed for Girard. It is estimated that 12 cars followed in pursuit. He was cut off and raced back to police station. Sheriff Thomas provided an armed escort for Colonel Watkins to the Niles City limits.



Front row: Lena Belcastro, Dora Fagnano, Clement Candio, Jim Belcastro, John Sidoti, Joe Chrisafi

Italian Newspaper.

The publication of an Italian language newspaper, Il Cittadina Italo-Americano, allowed the Italian immigrants to follow the local events.



The arrow points to Rummell's Pool Hall which was located on South Main Street. This photograph shows the street sloping down to the old iron bridge that spanned the Mahoning River and the railroad crossing tower and tracks. The pool hall would become a flash point on the night before the Klan parade.



The poster for the Knights of the Flaming Circle is one that was distributed the week before the November 1, 1924 confrontation. It advised that women and children should avoid joining in the parade that was to be held at the same time as the Klan march.

Presidents Notes: Nov – Dec 2024

Dear Readers: The Niles Historical Society has been very busy in October. The Society provided several private tours for organizations, participated in the Pumpkin Walk at the McKinley Memorial and entertained youngsters with a "Night at the Museum", a scary night.

On November 11 the Society will host our veterans in the Westenfield Room and on December 14 will again participate in McKinley Christmas with the McKinley Memorial Library, McKinley Birthplace Museum and the Von Isley Estate. Entertainment and refreshments will be provided at each site. Transportation will be provided to each site. So park your car and ride the bus. The Society will also participate in the Festival of Trees at the McKinley Memorial Museum during the month of December.

At this time the Society remembers *George John* who passed away at the age of 98 on October 1, 2024. Audrey's devoted husband George was a faithful supporter of the Niles Historical Society. He used his many talents to help keep the buildings on the Ward-Thomas property in repair and helped in the upkeep of the grounds.

Happy Holidays to all. Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!