

President's Notes:

Happy New Year to all! Hope everyone was able to celebrate the holidays with family and friends. In 2024 the Society participated in as many events as possible to draw attention to our organization and the Ward-Thomas property.

On November 11 veterans and their families were invited to the Westenfield Room to share stories and examine military pictures and artifacts on display. McKinley Christmas on December 14 was a great success. The House was gaily decorated by our docents whose help is always appreciated. The event brought 80 or more visitors to the House for a tour and refreshments, crafts and games in the Westenfield Room. Visitors took the time to share stories of their families and growing up in Niles. Key Club members who are students at Niles McKinley High School once again dressed as Santa's helpers and directed visitors, served refreshments and played games with the children who attended.

Preservation of the White House Ladies Gowns was a success, and the response to this endeavor was greatly appreciated. The gowns have been cleaned and repaired and now are stored in a temperature-controlled environment.

The contents of the Ward-Thomas House has been rearranged and clutter eliminated. The chimneys on the House have been rebuilt. In the coming year, 2025, the Society will continue to make improvements to the buildings. A top priority will be improvements in the landscaping and gardens. Hopefully by spring the work on the ADA improvements will begin. The plan for this project must be approved by the Ohio History Connection which is providing the grant funds.

The membership campaign will begin in January. The Society appreciates your support and encourages your participation. We are in dire need of members with expertise to oversee care of the physical property. Members are desperately needed to fill officer and committee positions. The current active participation is less than 1% of the membership. Please contact *Anna Marie Beagle* at 330-719-5716.



Docent *Meredith Elliot* explaining a display to some of the 80 visitors during the McKinley Christmas at the Ward-Thomas House.

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

Frank McDermott Shooting.

During the early hours of November 1, 1924, *Frank McDermott*, *Dude Murphy* and *Leo 'Shine' Jennings* noticed a crowd had formed in front of Rummel's Pool Hall. Upon approaching, they began shooting at a car that was pulling up in front of the hall. McDermott ran to the auto and jumped on the running board

Frank McDermott was shot twice by Klansman when he leaped onto the running board of the fleeing car; once in the shoulder and the second bullet grazed his scalp. He was stunned by the gunfire and lost his grip and fell to the pavement.

The crowd continued to shoot at the fleeing car. Brothers, *Rex* and *Willard Dunn* were in the car. Niles police later arrested both of them. Rex Dunn would be charged with intent to kill.

Knights of the Flaming Circle Plan for November 1st, 1924 Parade

•At Jennings Hall, the leader's (the *Jennings brothers* and *Tony Nigro*) plan was to stop all Klan members from coming through Niles on the way to their field encampment on Deforest Road and North Road.

•Blockades were to be established at Mt. Carmel Church at Linden and Robbins Avenue, GE at Federal and Main Streets, and the intersection at East Federal and Vienna Avenue.

•Protecting the East Side were machine guns positioned at Mason and Wood Streets.

•Men would stand guard at St. Stephen Church to protect the nuns.

•Saturday November 1, 1924 at 6:30 am, 1700 Italians crowded into Mt. Carmel Church grounds for Mass.

•By mid-morning, the Knights of the Flaming Circle had manned all the blockades with the intent to stop Klan members from assembling at their camp on Deforest Road and also from entering the downtown area where the parade was to take place.



Aerial view of three confrontation areas: Robbins and Linden Avenues, the Erie Railroad Station and the North Main and East Federal Streets.

Klansmen and Flaming Circle prepare for rival demonstrations.

Clyde Osborne, Law Director of Youngstown and Grand Dragon of the KKK in Ohio, would not cancel the procession and *Mayor Kistler* refuses to revoke their permit to march. The Knights of the Flaming Circle will march Saturday when the Klan march is scheduled.

At the Konklave.

A large field on North Road would be the headquarters for the Konklave. An estimated 25,000 Klansmen are predicted to attend and march in the parade. The actual number was closer to 10,000.

Sheriff on the scene.

Sheriff John E. Thomas was in Niles since early in the day, and with him all his available deputies. But the number is small as Thomas

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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

Visit our Website: www.nileshistoricalsociety.org
Check out the Photographs and Stories links.

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

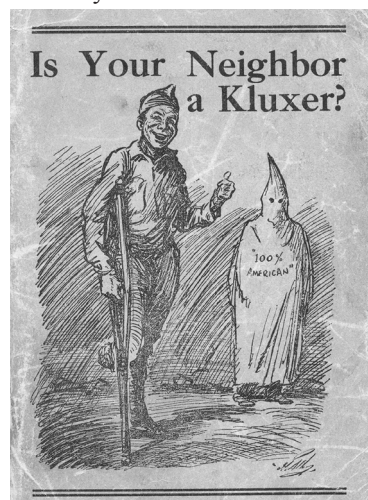
Ralph Tolbert.....Newsletter and Website

Trustees:

Anne Townley, Nancy Malone, and Sandy Bilovesky

Observations of the November 1, 1924 Riot

Tuesday November 4, 1924 Election Day results after the riot: Governor Donahey is re-elected and Sheriff John E. Thomas is defeated



Actual cover of the pamphlet.

Not only did the Klan never march in Niles, they never marched anywhere in the Mahoning Valley again. The Klan's local and regional power waned.

"Take it off, we know you".

A 1923 break-in at the Klan's Youngstown headquarters led to the theft of a record book, and a pamphlet "Is Your Neighbor a Kluxer?" was published, ultimately identifying its membership.

"Nobody knows better than the Ku Klux Klan that it could not exist if the names of its members were known." Quote taken from the pamphlet

printed by The Tolerance Company.

Cleveland Plain Dealer December 6, 1924

Trumbull County Grand Jury presents the 104 secret indictments after examining 257 witnesses. 79 cases were members of the anti-Klan forces and 35 belonged to the KKK. The Jury also recommended the removal from office of *Mayor Harvey Kistler* and *Police Chief L.J. Rounds* with the reorganization of the Niles Police Department. They also commended *John E. Thomas*, Trumbull County Sheriff, for doing everything in his power to prevent the riot. They condemned the State Police Organization for its function during the outbreak and declared its approval of Governor Donahey's action in sending troops.

Warren Tribune April 10, 1925

All members of the Ku Klux Klan who had been deputized at the Konklave off North Road and Deforest by Mayor Harvey Kistler were found guilty of carrying concealed weapons. Trumbull County *Judge Thomas* stated that the big question was whether the appointees were selected to keep the peace or simply give the men a pretext for carrying concealed weapons.

To read more about Mayor Harvey Kistler, follow this link:

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/mayors.htm>

Check our website: Historical Photographs for the webpages 1924 Riot Part I and Part II for more photographs and details.

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/1924Riot.htm>

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/1924Riot2.1.htm>

Calendar of Events:

January:

Open House: Sunday, January 5, 2025
2:00 PM – 5:00 PM, last tour begins at 4:00 PM
Business Meeting: Saturday, January 11, 2025
10:00 AM in the Westenfield Room

February, March and April:

Business Meetings are scheduled for the first Saturday of the Month at 10:00 AM in the Westenfield Room. All are welcome to attend.

Open House is scheduled for the first Sunday of the Month. However, this is dependent on weather conditions. Freezing temperatures and heavy snow falls are a detriment to public safety and access to the property.

For further updates visit the Niles Historical Society website or Facebook page.

found it practically impossible to find persons willing to serve as special deputies. At Warren, members of the headquarters unit of the National Guard mobilized in uniform before noon, though no order had been received for them to do so. Local guard officials called the men to be ready for an emergency summons from Niles, they said.

First Clash Before noon.

About 11 am the first clash between armed forces broke out near the field where the Klan foes had mobilized. *Colonel Connelly, Captain Voorsanger* and Sheriff Thomas went to the scene and found groups of men ready to open fire on each other.

After considerable difficulty, they succeeded in dispersing the forces, but one look at the expressions on the faces of men in the groups was enough for Connelly. He put in a call for the Governor's office immediately and the preparation for the mobilization of troops followed. Colonel Connelly then took off his civilian clothes and donned his uniform. Martial law was declared. Would the troops arrive before a pitched battle took place?

Main Clash.

The main confrontation between the two forces took place in the afternoon at the Railroad crossing and the G.E. Plant at the intersection of East Federal Street and North Main Street.

Several times Klan vehicles attempted to cross the intersection and proceed to the downtown area where the parade was scheduled to take place. Armed Klan members approached this area with guns firing only



Intersection of Federal and Main Streets where Sheriff Thomas pleaded for a truce and the firing began a few minutes later when a Klan car attempted to break through to downtown Niles.

to be turned back with anti-Klan forces returning fire with pistols and rifles. [In 1924 the Erie and B&O railroad crossing was an inclined roadway which aided the anti-Klan forces in preventing the Klan autos from proceeding to the downtown area.]

Shortly afternoon, an automobile sped past the stronghold of the Flaming Circle across from the GE plant, the occupants of the car firing repeatedly into the crowd. Three men fell wounded. The next automobile that passed was stopped by the infuriated Circlers and found to be full of rifles and revolvers. These were seized and passed around.

Skirmishes that started last night and resulted in the shooting of one youth were resumed this morning. Groups of anti-Klan factions patrolled the roads leading into Niles. Every automobile was stopped and searched. If any Klan robes or other regalia were found in the car, they were confiscated and the car was turned back. Fights broke out in a number of places but no blood was shed. The Flaming Circle was able to prevent Klansmen from entering the town in automobiles. Klan robes were strung up on telephone poles for miles outside the city.

Sheriff Thomas was in charge of the situation, *Mayor Kistler* having disappeared. Acting as advisors and observers were Colonel Connelly and Captain William S. Voorsanger of Cleveland. Captain Voorsanger is commander of the Service Company of the 145th infantry.

On Dangerous Territory.

Shortly before the troops arrived, Sheriff Thomas, escorted by Captain Voorsanger, went to the Klan encampment where the sheriff read Governor Donahey's proclamation of martial law and Captain Voorsanger announced that Colonel Connelly would not permit the Klan to parade.



Part of the crowd of anti-klans sympathizers ready to prevent Klansmen from entering the city. Troops would later disperse the crowd.

Captain Voorsanger estimated the number at the Konklave at 30,000 including women. A barbecue had been prepared and the assembled Klansmen presented a picturesque sight. Nearly all were robed and some were masked. Some of the robes were bright red, but the majority were white with decorations of various colors and designs. The Klansmen had come from all parts of Ohio and from Pennsylvania, Indiana and West Virginia.

Niles Riot Halted by Troops.

Two automobiles passed the place where the largest force of Klan foes had gathered. A man fired an automatic rifle into the crowd. No one was hit, but Klan foes chased the automobile into the center of town. Dozens of men brandishing every known variety of shooting arms sprung up suddenly and closed in on the car, a dilapidated Ford. The automobile was stopped in the heart of the town in front of the Antler (then Allison Hotel). Two men were dragged out, searched and taken back to the Flaming Circle stronghold. One was shot down and the other beaten into insensibility. Spectators who saw the vengeance wrecked on the pair were positive both had been killed and the report that two men had been lynched spread rapidly. Neither was dead, however.

The Knights of the Flaming Circle, sworn foes of the Klan, set out to prevent the Klan from parading through Niles. Preliminary skirmishes, which were gradually leading up to a pitched battle with both factions armed to the teeth, were halted just in time to prevent further bloodshed by the arrival of the troops. Of the dozen or more persons wounded or seriously beaten, six were taken to the Warren City Hospital.

The Klan held no parade, although an estimated 30,000 members of the order, including a number of women, had gathered at an encampment one mile north of the city.

Opposing the Klansmen were about 500 members of the Flaming Circle who gathered in a field on Main Street ...Continued on page 3



Troops roll into Niles on buses armed with machine guns to stop the two armed factions from rioting. Upon seeing the militia, the Knights of the Flaming Circle realized there would be no Klan parade. Page 2

near the outskirts of the city. This was a highly strategic position, for the Klansmen could not have entered the city without passing the stronghold of their enemies.

Both Sides Well Armed.

According to military authorities, over 200 Klansmen were armed with rifles and hundreds of others carried revolvers and clubs. Members of the Flaming Circle, authorities said, were plentifully supplied with revolvers, knives, clubs and stones.

Later, members of the Flaming Circle swooped down on twenty-five men wearing white ribbons marked 'Police'. These badges, military sources say, were given out by Mayor Kistler to Klansmen he appointed as deputies to preserve order.

The procession of special police was surrounded and their guns and blackjacks taken away from them. Members of the Flaming Circle called the local police and the twenty-five Klan members were marched to the city hall and placed under arrest.



Swearing in of special camp police with white ribbons marked 'Police'.

Soldiers Are Cheered

Meanwhile the Flaming Circle crowd had reached such proportions that North Main Street, near Federal Street, on the Niles-Warren Road was choked.

At 3pm a brown military lorry packed with helmeted dough-boys drove into sight. The crowd melted away to make way for the lorry and a great cheer went up as the soldiers were recognized.

For the Flaming Circle, the arrival of the military meant victory, for they knew the troops would prevent the Klan from parading. Nevertheless, they took care to conceal their weapons, but the lorry did not stop.

The lorry drew up in front of the City Hall, relieving apprehensions of the non-combatants in the business section of the town who feared the only safe place would be a cyclone cellar if the Klan parade ever got started.

A cordon was thrown about the city hall which was located in the fire station on Franklin Alley and guards with fixed bayonets were assigned to their posts. The Company had come from Warren. Most of them in a few minutes were detailed to patrol various roads.

Klan Train Stopped. *Steel Valley Klan Book* William D. Jenkins Pg 137

The anti-Klan members were forewarned about the special train loaded with 1,200 Klansmen when *Catherine Ritter* who worked in



Militia marched forward in a "V" formation ready to quell any uprising the train station heard about this train and informed the priest at St. Stephens Church. The priest passed on the information to the Flaming Circle leaders who then summoned a crowd of anti-Klansmen to prevent any Klan members from leaving the train.

Carmen DeChristofaro, who later would become Mayor of Niles, a six-foot 200-pound giant who played football for the Jennings Athletic Club, gathered at least fifty Knights of the Flaming Circle around the Erie Depot. They were armed with guns, knives, clubs and bricks.

As the train pulled into the station, the head of the Klansmen, former army captain *Jack Curley* of Massilon, used to conditions of battle, made an instantaneous decision "It's no place for us. We go right back." The train was sent back, no one was permitted to get off. The Circlers had outmaneuvered the retreating Klan members,

Youngstown Telegraph November 1, 1924

Under drastic military rule, Niles is comparatively quiet tonight after eighteen hours of rioting and bitter skirmishes between the Ku Klux Klan and foes of the hooded order in which at least twelve persons were wounded.

The streets are patrolled by approximately 1,300 National Guardsmen, practically the entire strength of the 145th Infantry, from Cleveland, Akron, Canton, Berea, Warren and Youngstown. They have taken charge of the civil government under qualified martial law.

Colonel Connelly, in temporary command of the troops, tonight issued a proclamation to the citizens of Niles, calling on them to observe the military regulations and warnings that all orders will be enforced without regard to race, class or creed.

Colonel Connelly also issued orders preventing any visitors from coming into Niles. Automobiles are being turned back or detoured around the city and no persons without legitimate business in the city is permitted to leave trains passing through Niles.

Complete List of Injured in Niles Trouble

Niles, November 3.—Following is a list of casualties from the first outbreak early Saturday.

G.E. Victor, 38, Farrell, Pa. shot in back, serious condition.
Lahanna Shirley, 31, Mineral Ridge, shot in stomach.
Joseph Mohan, 21, Niles, shot in mouth, fair condition.
E.E. Cope, 29, Sebring Ohio, stabbed and cut in head.
Ellsworth Kaiser, 22, Youngstown, stabbed and shot in shoulder.
Russell Brock, 21, Akron, cut in head and beaten, discharged.
Joseph Murphy, Niles, shot through jaw treated by Doctor.
Albert Davis, Niles, shot in back, removed to home.
Mrs. Ellen Scriven, 70, Niles, wounded in arm by stray bullet.
Frank McDermott, 19, shot three times early Saturday.
Dominick Petrone, head grazed by bullet.
Owen Shelley, beaten by three men, serious condition.
Plus 15-20 others with flesh wounds from bullets.

Meanwhile, *Mayor Kistler* had appeared at City Hall. He promised Colonel Connelly he would try to persuade the Klansmen to abandon their parade, and was taken to the scene of the Klan encampment in a military automobile.