If you have attended a History Pub at McMenamins Old St. Francis School in Bend, you may have seen an illustration of an audience of white-clad KKK members seated in front of a Catholic priest. You may have surmised that the incident happened elsewhere. After all, history books tell us the Klan was a racist movement in the southern part of the United States – far away from Bend, Oregon.

The event actually took place in Bend, almost 100 years ago, when Father Luke Sheehan stepped onto the stage at Liberty Theater on Wall Street and took on the local representatives of the Klan.

The story of the KKK in Bend reveals the depth of the Klan’s influence in the early 20th century.

Over the last century and a half, the United States have had sharply contrasting feelings towards immigration. Depending on the social and economic underpinnings of the country at any given time, immigrants have either been welcomed with open arms or barred from entry. Often, U.S. immigration policy has favored certain immigrant groups while trying to keep others out.

Immigration provided cheap labor during the boom years that followed the shift from an agrarian to an industrial based economy during the 1800s. Many immigrants
Deschutes Memories Project: Troy Field

The Deschutes Historical Museum is launching a new oral history gathering event called Deschutes Memories Project. These events are a chance for people to gather and share memories of a place or certain topic, including bringing photographs and related artifacts.

For the first Deschutes Memories Project, our members and the public are invited to join us in sharing stories and memories of Troy Field throughout the years on Wednesday, May 10 from 4 to 6 pm. Bring photos and memorabilia to share as the Deschutes County Historical Society staff and volunteers will be on hand to digitize your items for inclusion in the archives. Sip, snack, and socialize with fellow history buffs as we share stories of Troy Field and preserve your photographs for future generations.

Deschutes Memories is joint project between the Deschutes Historical Museum and the Deschutes Pioneers Association. Each Deschutes Memories Project event will focus on a specific topic relevant to the Deschutes County area. Meet at the museum at 129 NW Idaho Avenue in Bend.

Troy Field – a year-around gathering place for Bend’s population. When it was cold enough, the fire department sprinkled the lot to create an in-town ice-rink. The top right picture shows an early Bend versus Prineville football game played at Troy Field.
settled in the urban centers and worked in emerging industries such as steel, coal, textile, and later, auto.

In the 1830s, most immigrants came from Germany, Britain, Scandinavia, Ireland and Central Europe. As political crisis and natural disasters marred the European continent, there was an increase in German, Irish, British and French immigrants. With that came a shift in religious affiliation, from Protestants to Catholics.

By 1890, an increasing number of native born, well-off Americans saw unregulated immigration as a threat to the health and well-being of the country. As many as 30 million Europeans immigrated to the U.S. between 1836-1914.

The anti-immigrant sentiment continued to permeate society and gained strength as the European nations went to war in 1914 and thousands of refugees arrived at the shores of the United States. By the time the United States entered World War I in 1917, one third of the country’s population was born abroad or had parents who had immigrated to the U.S.

As the war deepened and more U.S. soldiers were sent to France to shore up the Alliance, the Americanism movement started flourishing on the home front. Driven in part by the involvement in World War I, the main stream support for the cause, and deep-seated patriotism, the ideology of Americanism spread throughout society.

The American Legion, which was founded shortly after the Allied victory in Europe in 1918, defined Americanism as the devotion and allegiance to the United States, its flag, traditions, customs, and/or culture. It became an idea that permeated society after the victory in Europe. As the soldiers came back from the war, they were no longer Irish-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Catholic-Americans, or any hyphenated-American groups of people – they were simply Americans. There was a belief that the rest of society would follow suit.

It is important to note this type of Americanism is far removed from the “Americanism” promoted by the Ku Klux Klan, who took the ideology many steps beyond its original meaning. Their ideology was built on the purity of the pioneer American stock and of Protestantism.

Born as a secret Confederate club in Tennessee in 1866, the organization reacted to the threat to Southern white supremacy with the loss of the Civil War and the end of slavery. The KKK bore down on recently freed African-American slaves, using terrorism and intimidation to spread fear among the black southern population.

This so-called “first KKK” disappeared from public eyes in the mid-1870s. It was not until the publication of the book, *The Klansman*, in 1905 and the release of D. W. Griffith’s movie, *The Birth of a Nation*, in 1915, that the organization saw a resurgence in the United States.

It should be mentioned the movie received top-billing at the Grand Theater in Bend in July 1915 (see illustration below).

Maintaining their doctrines against African-Americans, the second iteration of the KKK perceived a new, second threat against white supremacy in the increasing flood of Jewish and Catholic immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. Bolstered by the national movement for Americanism and naturalization of new Americans, and under the battle cry of “One Hundred Percent Americanism,” the Klan spread beyond its southern roots. The organization now ran as a business with national and state representation. Paid, full-time recruiters scoured cities for potential members. The
Klan recruited heavily from other fraternal organizations such as the Masons, as well as Protestant clergy from Methodist, Presbyterian, and Christian churches. In the mid-1920s, the organization claimed to have a membership roster of 4-5 million.

Oregon was not immune to the activities of the KKK. In 1920, the state had 800,000 citizens and was to a high degree all white and professed Protestants. The organization got foothold in large cities like Portland, Salem and Eugene, as well as in many smaller cities in rural southern, eastern and central Oregon. This included Bend, which at the height of their influence boasted a membership of at least 350 members.

Like the rest of America, Bend’s lumber mills and local schools participated in the nationwide effort to naturalize immigrants and celebrate the new American Melting Pot under the wave of Americanization. In January 1920, the Bulletin ran a short blurb about the effort to “Americanize” Brooks-Scanlon’s workforce.

“A systematic campaign of Americanization has been going on for several months in the sawmill and lumber yards of Brooks-Scanlon Lumber Co.,” according to M. G. Wagner. “The results now are beginning to manifest themselves with only nine employes (sic) out of more than 370 who are not naturalized or on the way to naturalization.”

The description of an upcoming junior high school production in March 1921 provides insight into the forms of Americanization used in Bend’s schools:

“Pupils of the junior high school are being coached by Mrs. Maude M. Grant for the presentation of *The Melting Pot*, on the Americanization of the stranger within our gates.”

The play included a cast of boys and girls playing their parts as Hungarian, Slav, Greek, Italian, Swiss, Polish, Swedish, Irish, and Jewish immigrants. The cast was rounded out with Uncle Sam, a Boy Scout, Teacher, and a Daughter of the American Revolution.

However, that same issue of the paper – March 16, 1921, also ran a front-page article about Charles B. Rucker, chairman of the American Legion unemployment committee in Portland, stating that, “Bend is the third city in the state in the employment of alien labor.”

Mr. Rucker announced that he was on his way to Bend within the next two weeks, “[t]o call on employers and request the dismissal of alien laborers in order that Americans who needs jobs may be substituted.”

At the weekly luncheon of the Commercial Club, a committee headed by Clyde McKay with Carl A. Johnson representing Shevlin-Hixon and H.E. Allen representing Brooks-Scanlon, reported they were investigating Rucker’s sources. Frank R. Prince of the Percy A. Stevens post No. 4, American Legion, seriously questioned Rucker’s figures showing that “Bend is an important offender in the matter of employing aliens.”

This attack from outside gave rise to conflict between local KKK members and the community at large. One of the KKK’s political goals was the enforcement of Americanization and it was long rumored that Bend’s two sawmills, Shevlin-Hixon and Brooks-Scanlon, had KKK members among its workforce who nudged immigrant co-workers to adopt the American Way. It is safe to say that even with the Klan’s presence in Bend, the city’s citizens were not buying in to the message. On the contrary. The *Bulletin* reprinted an article from Klamath Falls’ leading newspaper on the editorial page with the following introduction:

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Local News Items

Shevlin-Hixon Fire Truck Gets a Restoration

The Shevlin-Hixon Fire Truck that used to make appearances in annual parades is getting ready for an overhaul. Last fall, the museum was pleased to host the Hixon family for an afternoon of shared history as the family traveled to Bend to learn more about their role in the logging industry in Central Oregon. In support of the museum, the Hixon Family Foundation sent a donation of $15,000 to help overhaul the fire truck, which has been stored with Bend Parks and Recreation for the past several years. The truck no longer ran and time had not been kind to the paint job. We received the news of the foundation’s support in November and began plans to move the truck to start repairs.

Then the snow started to fall, delaying the move. Sadly, Bend Parks and Rec staff later had to call to tell us that the barn roof collapsed. Fortunately, the damage could have been so much worse--while the cab of the truck was dented, none of the windows were broken and no beams fell across the fire equipment pieces.

Thanks to Consolidated Towing, who donated their services to the cause, the truck has been moved to Wade Bryant’s to begin work on getting the truck back in tip top shape and ready for the road. Stay tuned to The Homesteader for updates as we hope to unveil the truck at the Summer Cookout on August 13.

What Is It?
An Artifact Identification Event

Have a cool antique or collectible that you’re just not sure what the heck it is? Bring it to the Deschutes Historical Museum on May 24 from 4 to 8 pm.

Bring your strange, unknown antiques or collectibles to the Deschutes Historical Museum for our What is it? identification event.

Antique experts from the community and Deschutes Historical Museum staff will be on hand to help identify those unknown objects lurking in your family heirlooms.

Ward Tonsfeldt from Reels and Creels, Wendy Sexton of Trivia Antiques, homestead legend Bob Boyd, and local builders will offer their expertise. Smaller items are preferred.

Please, no art work, firearms, or large furniture — appraisals will not be provided.

Reservation System Now Required for History Pub

Following many requests from History Pub patrons, we are now requiring reservations. Reservations can be made on the museum’s website, www.deschuteshistory.org by clicking on the History Pub event on the event calendar. Reservations do not guarantee a table or specific seat, which will still be first come, first serve. By implementing the reservation system, patrons who are unable to line up early are still able to attend.

Reservations will begin on the first of each month for that month’s History Pub. If you have trouble registering, please call the museum at 541.389.1813 for assistance getting on the list. Thank you to everyone who continues to make History Pub so popular.
“Threats of business losses, statements of membership that are not true and assertions of official position that are false are some of the aspects of Klamericanism seen in the present activity of the K.K.K. organizers in Bend. Here seems to be one of the times when the best advice is not to hitch your wagon to a star. Just keep your feet on the ground and use the white nightie as a sleeping argument, not a means of concealing identity.”

The conflict between moral decency and radical racism came to a head in Bend in the years between 1922 – 1924. The opposing parties included The Bulletin and the Catholic Church on one side and the KKK on the other side.

The Klan in Oregon was led by Grand Dragon Fred L. Gifford, a Minnesota native and active Mason. Headquartered in Portland, the KKK was active all over the state. Gifford and his cronies worked hard behind the scenes to influence prominent political figures to drive the KKK’s agenda in Salem.

With support from Democratic gubernatorial candidate Walter M. Pierce and an installed base of KKK-friendly legislators, the Klan drove the passage of the Compulsory Education Act of 1922, an anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic effort to close Catholic schools in Oregon.

The Klan thanked Pierce for his support and helped elect him Governor in 1923. It is worth mentioning that the school education act was later struck down in the United States Supreme Court in 1925 as unconstitutional.

The local newspaper took a continued stand against the KKK, publishing several editorials from newspapers around Oregon on the topic of the Klan. A month after Father Luke interrupted the KKK meeting, The Bulletin published an editorial from the Salem Capital Journal taking a strong stand against the Ku Klux Klan:

“Most senseless of all the group antagonism existing in free America is the religious – and yet in Portland there was a class of 1200 initiated into the Ku Klux Klan, whose purpose is the spread of racial and religious prejudices and antagonism. This is in itself a sorry commentary on conditions in the metropolis.”

Father Luke & KKK...  
– continued from page 6

Inside the Klavern, the minutes of KKK meetings in La Grande covered the period from May 18, 1922 through April 22, 1924, approximately the same period the Klan was active in Bend.

The La Grande minutes offer an interesting view of the Oregon KKK leader Gifford and his thoughts on the Catholic representatives in Bend.

In a notation from the minutes of the January 26, 1923 special meeting, when Gifford met with the La Grande chapter of the Klan, the following is reported.

“Mr. Gifford informed us that the Pope has one of his representatives at Bend, Oregon. ‘I don’t recall the good Father’s name. Anyway, we may expect some trouble from this bird as we know him to be a big man politically, and that he isn’t in Bend for no special good.’”

The Catholic representative Gifford is referring to may be either Father Dominic O’Connor who had come from Ireland to Bend in December 1922 or Father Luke Sheehan.

Perhaps based on the early 1923 La Grande meeting, the Bend KKK decided to make a statement against the Catholic church and the local newspaper. The first incident took place in July 1923, when residents around Pilot Butte saw a blazing cross on the summit. The Bulletin reported:

“It shone for several minutes, then collapsed into a single blaze and died out. The demonstration is generally credited to the Ku Klux Klan.”

“One automobile load of white clad figures was seen headed towards the butte before 10 o’clock, by the local police, who were in the northeast part of town investigating a report that someone had been shooting a revolver or rifle in that vicinity.”

The second incident took place in September 1923, when the Klan paraded through the main streets of Bend on their way to a Klan ceremony on Pilot Butte.

“The parade, first seen about 8 o’clock was led by an automobile […] decorated with an electrically lighted cross, mounted on front of the hood. The second car […] carried an American flag on the left side.”

According to The Bulletin, a total of eight cars took part in the parade that passed “south of Wall street, down Franklin to Congress, and east of Delaware, then returned to the center of the city and wound slowly around the business streets.”

On the second pass through downtown Bend, it was clear that the KKK procession were taking a stand against The Bulletin.

“On its second trip past The Bulletin office, a klansman in the front machine leaned out and ordered ‘blow your horn at The Bulletin office.’”

The procession of cars continued to the Klan’s headquarters on Hill Street and then eastwards towards Pilot Butte. As they approached the butte, a car had been placed at the road leading up the summit.

“[…] Several men, some in robes, some in plain clothes, halted each car and conferred with each occupant. One of those standing there was Justice of the Peace E. D. Gilson wearing a klansman’s robe.”

The Klan gathering at the summit of Pilot Butte ended with another fiery cross that started burning shortly before 9 o’clock, and was still alight at 10:30. “The effect is secured by burning box factory waste soaked with oil.”

The Bulletin article also contained a run-down of the registered owners of the cars in the procession. The cars belonged to A. R. Barnett of The Dalles, Clifford A. Bushong, H. A. Henderson, H. C. Friedley, James T. Sheppard, and D. D. Ogle all of Bend. Two cars listed had recently been sold, and The Bulletin printed an apology the following day to the two owners, who categorically denied being a part of the KKK.

The five Bend men listed in The Bulletin article were all employed at the Brooks-Scanlon Lumber Company, which makes for a significant piece of evidence that at least one of the two mills had Klan members among its -- continued on page 8

The Bulletin office on 812 Wall Street became the ire of the KKK during a procession through Bend in September 1923.
employees. Although no names were linked to Shevlin-Hixon personnel, it is not without reason to speculate that members worked at that company as well.

The Bulletin took an immediate stand against the Klan and what had transpired the previous day. In an editorial published on September 8, 1923, headlined On Certain American Principles, the writer noted the following:

“In common with a good many other American citizens who, like us, have no connection nor affiliation with the Catholic church we deplore such an attack on that church as was made by a Ku Klux Klan speaker Thursday night. We deplore that sort of thing just as we would deplore an attack on any other decent and law abiding organization or institution. […] It is most unfortunate that at a time when there are so many real problems in our national life to be dealt with that misguided zealots should go stirring up the old embers of religious hatred and fanaticism.”

The Klan’s location in Bend was not a secret. E. D. Gilson, the former Mayor of Bend (1921-1922), is listed as the local Ku Klux Klan representative (Exalted Cyclops, or the chief officer of a Klan) in the 1924-1925 Polk Directory with an office in the O’Kane Building on Oregon Avenue. He is also listed under “Real Estate and Investments” on the same address.

The Klan in Bend came to a fiery end only a year and a half later. In April 1925, the Bulletin reported that Oregon Grand Dragon Fred Gifford was accused of interfering in Bend Klan business, something local members were strongly against. From 1924 to 1925, the local organization lost “at least half a hundred […] members” due to heavy-handed interference. In addition, another 300 members let their membership lapse.

The dwindling Klan membership in Bend split ranks. A faction under the leadership of I. G. Shaw, former pastor of the Christian church in Bend, tried to unseat G. H. Baker, who had taken over the Bend Klan after E. D. Gilson the year prior. A coup was set to take place on March 13, but was cancelled after the secret meeting instead was held in open forum at the Labor Temple. Confronted by H. W. Giddings, a former Portland man who was put in charge of Klan affairs in Crook and Deschutes counties, Baker and his cohorts Curtis Beesley, Floyd Turner, and Dr. Frances Bloom were sent into retreat.

The two issues finally came to a head on April 11, when Giddings declared that the charter of Bend Klan No. 39 had been revoked and a new charter had been opened and new officers appointed, though no names were mentioned in the article. Giddings also stated, “the klan, locally and nationally, is entirely out of politics, and exists solely upon a basis of Americanism as laid down in the klan doctrines.”

With that, the KKK in Bend went dark. There were no other Klan activities reported in The Bulletin except for an editorial in June 1925 titled, Where the Oregonian Stands, that briefly mentions the Masons and the Klan.

Gifford’s dictatorial rein came to an end in 1925. The KKK lost its influence in Oregon and elsewhere during the Depression and war years. The Klan reared its ugly head a generation later during the Civil Rights Era, again agitating hatred against the African-American population in the South.

The United States under President Hoover continued a dualistic approach to immigration – a kind of good versus evil approach depending on the times. In a speech in Elizabethton, Tennessee in early October 1928, the president made his policy perfectly clear, “I do not favor any increase in immigration.” As the economic downturn of the Great Depression gripped the United States, immigration fell to a trickle.

Father Luke passed away in February 1937 at the age of 63, after serving 27 years as a pastor in Bend. The editorial writer in The Bulletin noted, “Father Sheehan was a churchman who held steadfastly to lofty ideas. Those ideals included full recognition of citizenship. He accepted them and discharged them as he accepted and discharged all his duties.” Described as a kind and helpful man, “Father Sheehan was loved and respected throughout his sphere of influence. His going is mourned by all who knew him whether of his church or not.”

Bend came to a still on February 17, 1937 when Father Luke was laid to rest. He was buried in the Pilot Butte cemetery beside his nephew, Rev. Dominic O’Connor who died in November 1935.

– Tor Hanson
Events
• MAY 10  4-6pm Deschutes Memories Project: Troy Field, Deschutes Historical Museum
• MAY 13  10-2pm Redmond Hunt for History & Photo Contest Winners, Centennial Park
• MAY 24  4-8pm What Is It? Antique & Collectible Identification, Deschutes Hist. Museum
• JUNE 1-5  2017 Rock Art Symposium, Eagle Crest Resort

Geneology
• MAY 10  10am Santiam Wagon Road Walk at Whychus Canyon
• MAY 17  12pm Know Roots: Beginning Genealogy, La Pine Public Library Guided Tours
• MAY 19  9:30 Indian Ford Meadow History Outing/Wander
• MAY  Friday/Saturdays,10am Guided Tour of Historic Downtown Bend, Bend Visitor Center

Lectures
• MAY 10  12pm Training for WWII on the High Desert, High Desert Museum
• MAY 18  6pm Mount St. Helens: Survival & Revival of Life After a Major Volcanic Eruption, Sunriver Nature Center
• MAY 22  6pm A Complicated Legacy: The History of the Hanford Site, High Desert Museum
• MAY 30  5:30pm History Pub:Oregon’s Heritage Trees, McMenamin’s Old St. Francis School

Historic Preservation Meetings
• MAY 16  6pm Bend Historic Landmarks Commission, City Hall
• MAY 26  4:30pm Redmond Historic Landmarks Commission, City Hall

Congratulations to Bend and Redmond for their 2017 city/building recognition for heritage and historic preservation, more info on website below.
Heritage Walking Tours of Downtown Bend

The Deschutes Historical Museum invites you to spend a morning with us this summer. All tours leave from the Deschutes Historical Museum at 10:30 am. Reserve your spot as space is limited, please call 541-389-1813

“The Early Days of Bend”
Travel back to when the river was wild, the Ponderosa Pines were plentiful and Bend the Beautiful was a town in the making. The stories of 6 “Bend-ites” and how these residents helped transform a young hamlet into a booming town. Tour starts at the Deschutes Historical Museum (Reid School) and ends at Lone Crow Bungalow on Wall Street.
When: June 3, June 17, July 1, July 22, August 12, August 26
Time: Approximately 1 hour Length: less than a mile traveling through old neighborhoods and parkways.
Price: $5.00, Members are free

“Reflections of History: Architectural Styles of A Neighborhood”
Stroll through Drake Park Neighborhood Historic District and take a step back in time when walking was the thing to do and neighborhoods were all about proximity. The tour will introduce the architectural styles represented in the neighborhood while sharing history of a changing community. Tour begins and ends at the Deschutes Historical Museum
When: June 10, June 24, July 8, August 5, August 19
Time: approximately 1.5 hours
Price: $5, Members are free

We recommend the following: wear comfortable walking shoes, dress for the weather, bring water and don’t forget your camera! It does get hot so a hat is good too. Length: One mile, traveling through old neighborhoods pavement can be uneven at times. Not recommended for wheelchairs. No tours July 15 or July 29

Mark Your Calendars

MAY

13   A MURDER MYSTERY AT THE MUSEUM:
Support the MVHS theatre department as they tell their accounts of the fictional murder of school teacher, Miss Rose Foster.
Deschutes Historical Museum
30-minute tour. Admission is $5 per person.
Come anytime between 2-3:30 and 5-6:30.

24   WHAT IS IT? AN ARTIFACT IDENTIFICATION EVENT:
Bring your strange, unknown antiques or collectibles to the museum. Staff will help identify those unknown objects lurking in your family heirlooms.
Deschutes Historical Museum
4 p.m. - 8 p.m.

30   HISTORY PUB: THE ROOTS OF HISTORY:
OREGON’S HERITAGE TREES. Presented by Nate Pedersen, Community Librarian with Deschutes Public Library and Board President of the Deschutes County Historical Society.
McMenamins Old St. Francis
Father Luke Room, 7 p.m., doors at 5:30 p.m.

Save the Date
Join us on the lawn of the Deschutes Historical Museum for the 2nd Annual DCHS Summer Cookout. Mark your calendars for August 13 for delicious BBQ, music, and fun.
More details coming soon!