

## Close Reading: *The Homesteader: Deschutes County Historical Society Newsletter*

In 2019, staff uncovered a story in the *Central Oregon Press* that in 1925 the 'colored citizens of Bend' hired attorney and state senator Jay Upton to protest signs appearing around downtown that excluded colored patrons. His clients are unnamed. The years 1920-25 saw the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Bend, a time when attention turned to race and immigration in the city and tensions flared. Living in Tumalo, the Phelps family may not have witnessed personally the two times the Klan burned crosses on top of Pilot Butte, but they most certainly would have been aware. The KKK found no solid footing in Bend, a town filled with many Catholic immigrants from Ireland and Eastern Europe—two groups the KKK also disliked. The local Klan chapter collapsed in spring of 1925. That August, Mr. Upton argued to city leaders that 'white trade only' that had appeared in recent years around downtown were unnecessary and 'humiliating'.

Mr. Upton's resolution is printed word for word and in that testimony we find a clue that the Phelps' might be Upton's unnamed clients. Upton referenced African American military service to the United States in foreign wars as more than enough reason to expect to be treated without humiliation at home. Is this Ernest's service in the war, something well noted in local papers? Upton himself was a veteran of the Spanish American War and no doubt felt a common bond. Upton pins the unwelcome signs, ironically, on new immigrants to the area who are 'unfamiliar with our customs.' In the end, the city councilors agreed and passed a motion to have the signs removed. Whether or not the Phelps were his clients, the certainly took part in this push back against the KKK's attempts to enforce segregation in Bend.



## Close Reading Questions

1. ***The Homesteader* contends that the Phelps family may have been Upton's anonymous clients. Why would the Phelps's need to remain anonymous?**

2. **Why would the Phelps family hire a lawyer only to argue against "whites only" signs, and not to argue against the legality of discrimination?**

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Erin L. Johnson, MAT, MSc



