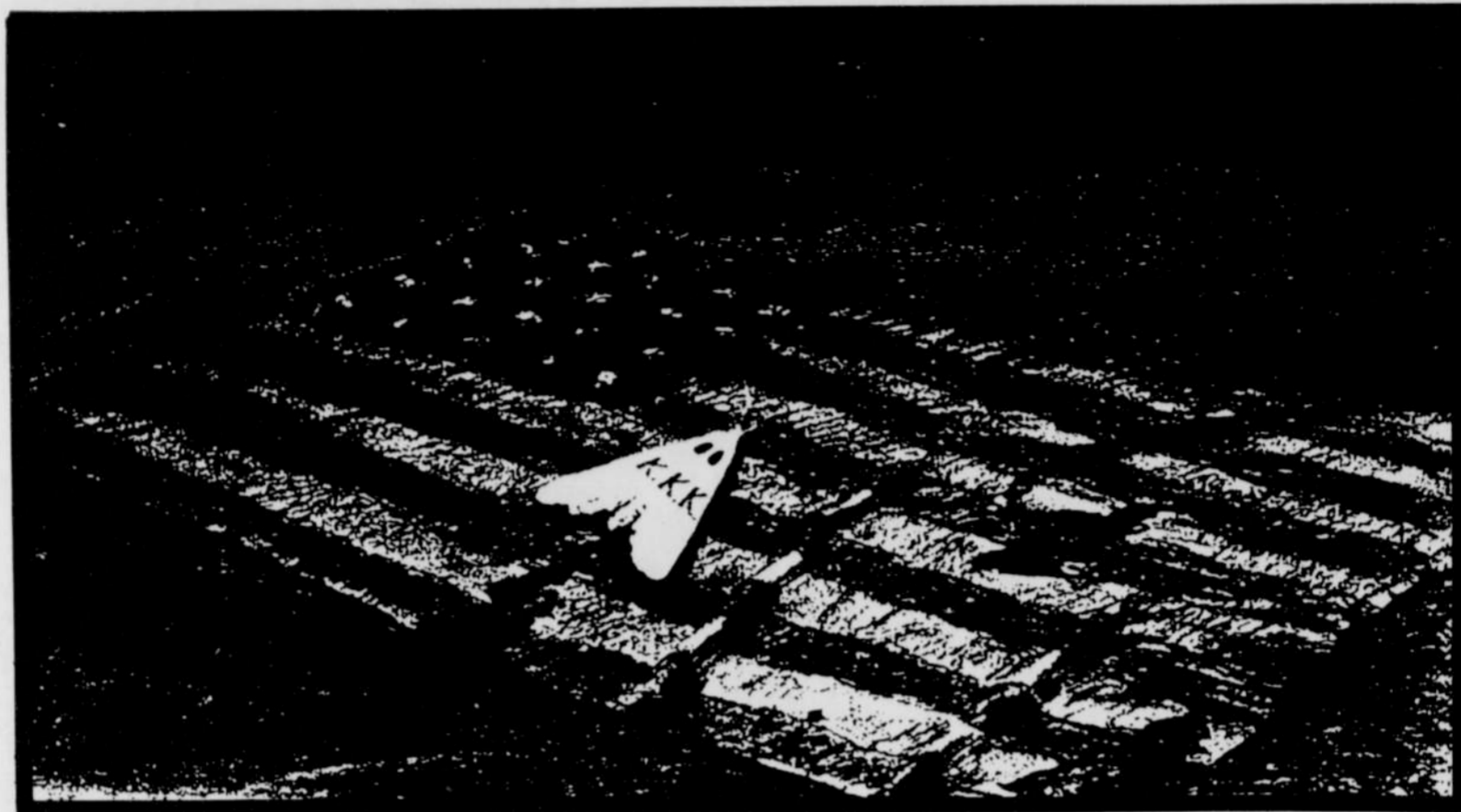


'YOU'VE BEEN WANTING A CROSS, NOW WE'LL GIVE YOU A D-----D FIERY ONE!'



CHARLES DANA GIBSON (1923)

BY HELEN HILL

Dark trends of fear and intolerance have at times swept like a forest fire through this isolated stretch of coastal paradise. And like a forest fire the causes of these trends are often difficult to pinpoint, and the remedy and prevention even more elusive. Should we let the fires burn? Should we agree to accept a certain amount of cyclical destruction of values; a nod to the same balance of negative positive energy that keeps the very nucleus of an atom together? Or, by presenting the facts, by dedicating time and care to an analysis of the cycles of fear and intolerance, will future fires be averted?

I firmly believe that unexplored history can continue to subtly direct and influence our relationships with each other as well as the institutions that shape our lives; including our schools, hospitals, community colleges, newspapers, clubs and social organizations. Perhaps there can be no significant movement forward until the past is fully known. The value of learning from the past seems of heightened importance in these challenging post September 11th times when fear and intolerance have the potential to underline our attitude towards every stranger we meet.

Imagine: a beautiful young woman in a small, isolated coastal town whose husband is mysteriously ill in a Catholic hospital 100 miles away. She is branded one stormy winter midnight by mysterious men wearing white robes and hoods. She attempts to level a lawsuit against the officials of the small town for allowing outrageous acts against a citizen but is buried at the grand jury hearing and disappears from history.

During this same time, an IWW labor organizer is hunted down and jailed on charges of inciting anarchy as one of the last descendants of a legendary tribal chief is hauled to jail for having a pint of whiskey in his back pocket. Illegal moonshine, rumors of loose women, concealed weapons, a crooked police chief, all this in a small town where the local newspaper editor accuses the big city papers of "mental orgies" when they dare to report the mysterious events happening on the other side of the coast range.

A Hollywood movie? No, this is 1923 Tillamook County. It is difficult to assess the amount (if any) or degree of terrorizing of the citizens of Tillamook carried out by the Ku Klux Klan since neither the Klan-controlled *Headlight* nor the head-in-the-sand *Herald* were likely to report these incidents. There are no records of any personal accounts on file, not surprising since the county clerk, the police chief and the sheriff were Klansmen during the years in question. Certainly there were outrages committed by the Klan in both rural and urban areas in other parts of the state and the country at this time. In Medford, a band of hooded night riders was terrorizing the town with exercises of "100% Americanism." On several occasions they would kidnap "undesirables" and drive them to a remote area, fit them with a hangman's noose just long enough so that their feet would barely scrape the ground and hang them for a few minutes, let them down, and string them up again until they got the desired confession, or sum of money, or whatever they were after. The burning cross, symbol of the Klan's reign, was a frequent sight on Skinner's Butte overlooking Eugene.

The only chance for the reporting of a Klan act against a citizen in Tillamook County was if the information was leaked to Portland and came to the attention of *The Oregonian* or the

Portland Telegram or the *Oregon Journal*, all newspapers not controlled by the Klan.

One such incident of a Klan attack on a Tillamook County did indeed leak to the Portland papers in January of 1923, and because it came to be so thoroughly discussed in the Portland papers and even sent across the national Associated Press wires, the *Headlight* was reluctantly forced to address the incident.

As the only actual record case of a physical assault by the Klan in Tillamook County, the story bears exploring in detail, especially as it becomes more revealing as more details are known. It is fascinating to compare this report of the branding by the Klan-backed Tillamook *Headlight* with the investigation by the *Portland Oregonian*, and *Telegram*, and the Associated Press, which were considered to be objective news sources during the Klan years. Incidentally, the *Headlight's* rival paper, the *Herald*, which seemed to be solidly committed to safely riding the fence during the Klan years, did not attempt even the smallest mention of this sensational local case.

First the Tillamook angle; from the top of the front page of the *Headlight*, January 19, 1923:

BRANDING STORY GREATLY MAGNIFIED

The "pop dream" which was published in this week's Sunday papers regarding an alleged branding outrage has turned out to have been considerably magnified as to details, according to later statements.

The supposed incident was said to have taken place November 21 last, but was not brought out in a public way until a few days ago, when Mrs. (Nevada) Standish and a friend of hers, Mrs. Emil Larsson, were apprehended for carrying concealed weapons in violation of city and state laws. They claimed that they needed the guns for protection. City and county officials say that the branding (of Nevada Standish) had later been brought to their attention. It is said that C.B. Trombley was the first to be notified of the assault by Mrs. Standish.

A number of statements that were first published were refuted later by Mrs. Standish. One of these was that the branding was done by the Ku Klux Klan. Mrs. Standish stated earlier this week that the branding was not done by the Ku Klux Klan and stated further that she positively knew one of her assailants and that the attack was made for fanatical reasons. She named a man of this city who is well known to be anti-Klan in his sentiments.

Saturday evening, when it was apparent that the story was to be published by Portland papers, Mrs. Standish telegraphed those papers and stated that the stories they had were untrue. This did not prevent the tales from appearing, however.

It is said Mrs. Standish has stated that R. H. McGrath of this city had repeatedly called on her to get her to lay the blame of the whole affair on the local Klan organization. This, Mrs. Standish says, she refused to do. It is also rumored that the Associated Press offered her a large sum of money to make a positive statement that the Klan was responsible for the outrage.

The local police were very incensed about a statement in the Portland papers attributed to Webster Holmes of this city, that Holmes had seen the police throw a stick of wood at the Standish home near Stillwell Avenue and that they gave "piercing yells" at the same time. Upon Chief Henry White's interviewing Mr. Holmes, the latter said that he had never seen such an incident. So, by that time all the trimmings were taken from the story and it doesn't amount to very much.

The Klan controlled *Headlight* was livid that a story which dared discredit the Tillamook local Klavern 8 was being aired out in the Portland press and the nationwide AP syndicate. From a *Headlight* editorial by the paper's owner, January 19, 1923:

The wild propaganda scattered to the four winds this week by two national press associations regarding an alleged branding in Tillamook shows to local people what little credence can be placed on metropolitan newspapers in their reports concerning little known and casual incidents. This practice of dillating (sic) some small rumor that has been bandied about from mouth to mouth and of circulating the same as truth has been the cause of lowering the estimation of such so-called news mediums in the minds of many vendors.

The worthy editorial staff of some of our larger contemporaries evidently believes that the crusade for education has had small result when they attempt to "put over" such a mess of verbal manure as appeared in Sunday papers this week. Metropolitan newspapers these days are not to spread the truth, they are simply intended as a means for entertainment and as such they fill their places very well. It is hard for the average person to comprehend the mental processes of such writers. Poe can be excused, for he was a drug addict, and his mental orgies were accepted for what they were.

Comparing the articles of the *Portland Oregonian*, the *Telegram* and the Associated Press to the "mental orgies" of a drug addict seems a bit extreme, but so was the need for Tillamook to distance itself from this very damaging story. In years to come, a compilation of exactly such outrages would gradually bring about the demise of the Klan, as denials grew less and less convincing.

The story is fascinating in its blatant contradictions. To begin with, if Mrs. Standish had wanted to stage a branding in order to discredit the Klan, as the *Headlight* claimed, why did she remain silent and wait nearly two months to speak about the incident? The scar was, as the *Portland papers* reported, almost healed over by that time. There were other stories of Klan brandings throughout the state and the country at this time, and why then would Mrs. Standish not come forward and accomplish her end in November when the brand was fresh? Obviously she was intimidated and afraid of further assault.

The fact she was later arrested by the Klan controlled Tillamook police for carrying a concealed weapon following the branding is also interesting. It seems reasonable to assume she was afraid of additional assaults. The *Portland papers* reported that her father had given her the gun and told her to keep it on her at all times, and to use it if she was assaulted again. How and why did the Tillamook police arrest her for carrying a concealed weapon? The circumstances under which she had been stopped and searched are not told. It doesn't seem far fetched to assume that whatever anti-Klan activities she had taken on which prompted them to brand her in order to silence her, she had been silenced, but it seems she was still being watched closely.

Webster Holmes, the attorney representing Mrs. Standish, stated in *The Oregonian* he knew of another branding that had taken place in Bay City. The *Oregonian* journalist interviewed the city recorder of Bay City, who knew nothing of the branding there, as it had not been reported.

Evidently Nevada's husband A. M. Standish was the one who originally broke the story to the police and the *Portland papers*. In an interview he related that he was curious as to why his wife was wearing an "awkward" high lace collar when she

