

came to visit him at Portland's "anti-Klan" St. Vincent's Hospital, rather than the fashionably lower cut shirtwaist she usually preferred. She reluctantly revealed the brand to him, stating she had not wanted to worry him.

In the story of the Standish branding that appeared on page one of the January 14, 1923 Sunday *Portland Journal*, Nevada spoke at length about the assault. She described how two hooded men in Ku Klux Klan robes entered through her door around midnight. She said there were many more klansmen outside, though she could not say how many. She told reporters that while one man held her down on the bed with his hand over her mouth, the other heated an iron in the woodstove. One of the men asked the other whether they should brand her on the face, and he answered, "No, let's put it on her breast, then she won't wear any more low-neck dresses." She said she fainted from the pain. She remembered that before the brand seared her flesh, one of them said, "You've been wanting a cross, now we're doing to give you a d-----d fiery one!"

The *Portland Telegram*, which also covered the story in great detail, illuminated the meaning behind this ominous statement made by Nevada Standish's attacker. According to the *Telegram*, her husband revealed in an interview from his hospital bed (he had been seriously ill for 16 months) that Nevada, who had moved off their ranch into town to support herself by working for the editor of the more middle of the road *Herald* newspaper when Mr. Standish became ill, was:

...lonely in Tillamook, and because so many of the women were members of the Ladies of the Invisible Empire, (she) wanted to join the organization for the sake of the social life it might give her while I was away.

The 'Ladies of the Invisible Empire' was the women's arm of the Ku Klux Klan. Evidently she was turned down because, as her husband, "barely able to sit up in bed", continued:

Unless you have a relative who is a member of the Ku Klux Klan you cannot become a member of the Ladies of the Invisible Empire, and I am not a klansman. But the man who branded my wife knew of the fact that she had applied for membership in the women's organization and that's what his remark about wanting a cross meant. If he was not a klansman, he could not have known that my wife had ever made application for membership in the Ladies of the Invisible Empire.

Mr. Standish also referred to what he called the Klan's "further effort to damage Mrs. Standish (with) the dragging up in connection with this affair of the moonshine case in October." A still had been found on the Standish ranch outside of Tillamook, but they were acquitted on appeal of the charge of having anything to do with the still. Standish maintained:

"The moonshine charge couldn't have been any motive for klansmen branding her, for dozens of the klansmen around Tillamook are moonshining and bootlegging themselves and couldn't get into a moral frenzy over it even if they had believed she was connected with any moonshine affair, which they knew she was not.

Standish lay the blame for the branding at the feet of the Klan, who he believed were reacting to jealous small town gossip "of the sort that comes up around a woman who is left alone and defenseless." Mrs. Standish was described as one of the "best looking women in Tillamook" both by her husband and in several other articles.

On the lead paragraph on the front page of the *Portland Telegram*, Mr. Standish threw down the gauntlet to the Klan when he proclaimed:

If Ku Klux Klansmen were not guilty of breaking into my home and branding my wife, then let the Klan bring in the men who did do it and I may be convinced.

Mrs. Standish and her attorney Webster Holmes evidently pushed to have the alleged crime brought before the grand jury. The jury met to hear the case on February 5, 1923. According to a front page article in the *Headlight*, Mrs. Standish was examined by a doctor who testified at the hearing that the brand was a self-inflicted iodine burn. (Iodine in its full strength is extremely caustic and can cause severe and painful burns.) It bears noting that the doctor who examined her was a Grand Exalted Cyclops of the Order. The District Attorney presiding at the grand jury hearing, Mr. T. H. Goynes, was also a klansman with a high ranking.

The grand jury handed down a "no true bill." The *Headlight* reported that "this virtually means that the grand jury believes that the branding did not take place." The authorities ultimately claimed, on the basis of the doctor's pronouncement that Mrs. Standish had simulated a Klan brand in an attempt to discredit the Ku Klux Klan and turn public sentiment against them.

A few days later, after a private meeting with the Grand Dragon of the Realm of Oregon, Frank Gifford, Nevada Standish publicly and completely refuted that the branding had been done by the Ku Klux Klan. What went on behind those closed doors is forever lost to history.

A clue to the branding mystery surfaced 45 years later when Colonel R. Eberhard, former state legislator and Masonic Lodge Master from La Grande, was killed by a car while crossing a street on an icy night in 1968. When his safe was unlocked by attorneys seeking to settle his estate, it was found to contain over 200 pages of the secret minutes of the La Grande Ku Klux Klan from 1922-1924, a very rare and valuable historical find. These minutes were recently edited and published by David Horowitz, a professor of history at Portland State University.\*

On January 26, 1923, the minutes report a visit to the La Grande Klan by the Grand Dragon of the Realm, Gifford. After the opening ceremony attended by 72 klansmen, Gifford spoke to the group on several subjects, including the branding in Tillamook, which by this time was circulating around the country, threatening to further discredit the Klan.

"Relative to the case in Tillamook, Oregon, Mr. Gifford had this lady come to his office and give an explanation of these alleged accusations," the minutes read, and quote Gifford:

"On her left breast you could see a large red spot and by drawing the skin tight you could trace a very dim cross, probably put on by a very light acid and is rapidly disappearing. This woman held the position of a bootlegger and had trouble with the authorities to the extent that they desired to get rid of her and this is the means they used. Klansmen, the chief of police and his assistant put on the cross and though the papers refused to publish this, our Klan paper, the 'Western American' will eventually do so. We want the whole world to know that they can't put this over on the Klan."

\*"The Klansman as Outsider: Ethnocultural Solidarity & Antielitism in the Oregon Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s" by David A. Horowitz, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1989. Also by Horowitz, "Making Sense of the Oregon Klan in the 1920s", *North Coast Times Eagle*, June/July 1995.



A brief check of the Tillamook County Klan Klavern 8 membership list for 1923-1924, on file at the special collections library at the University of Oregon in Eugene reveals that the police chief of Tillamook at that time, Henry White, was a dues paying member of the Tillamook Klan.

The Klan paper, the *Western American*, never published a word about the branding of Nevada Standish as the La Grande minutes promised. Presumably the grand jury hearing took place soon after Gifford's visit to La Grande and, with a "no true bill" handed down, there was no need to refute the story. There is no appeal possible for grand jury decisions. Seven men voted that the crime never occurred. (Tillamook did not allow women on the jury even though a law had been passed in Oregon the year before requiring women to join the jury pool.) Whatever really happened, Nevada Standish ran out of options after the grand jury decision. She disappears from Tillamook history at this point, but the attorney who helped bring her case to the grand jury for a hearing, Webster Holmes, died a few months later. How he died is not known. According to the Tillamook County Court records on file in the state archives building in Salem, Holmes consistently defended numerous people the Klan would have targeted, including immigrants, foreigners, IWW organizers and the few Native Americans left in the county.

The same grand jury hearing of February 5, 1923 also handed down a "true bill" indictment against O. Hendricks, an IWW organizer charged with criminal syndicalism for passing

out union literature in the area lumber mills. Also indicted that day was Edward Kilchis Marshall, grandson of Chief Kilchis, for alcohol possession. As a result of this indictment Marshall was later sentenced to six months in jail and a \$500 fine (astronomical in those days) for carrying a pint of whiskey. When the O. Hendricks case was brought to trial it attracted statewide attention and became a high profile test case for the rights of Wobbly organizers across the state.

According to frequent articles in the *Headlight*, the Klan continued its steady gain in popularity and influence over the next few months. The paper proudly reported the consolidation of the Wheeler and Tillamook chapters, creating one of the biggest organizations in the county. Members of the "famous" Klan claimed to have "something less than a thousand" in membership throughout Tillamook County, a whopping 25% of resident adults. However, the Klan probably inflated estimates of their numbers to appear stronger and more popular than they were. In reality, Klan membership was probably very much less than a thousand.

On May 30, 1924, one of the largest Klan rallies in the state was held in Tillamook. The *Headlight* proudly reported the grand event as quite orderly and peaceful.

Following this large rally complete with a fiery cross that failed to light (and crash landing of a plane that carried the unlit cross), regular accounts of the Klan disappear from Tillamook Newspapers. In Tillamook County as well as elsewhere in the state, the Klan's influence was being rapidly undermined by reporters from larger cities and the dawning realization on the part of communities of what the Klan really stood for. Nationwide a growing wave of Klansmen were being convicted of more and more lurid crimes involving bootlegging, prostitution, murder and profiteering, the very crimes they professed to be safeguarding in places like Tillamook County. Perhaps more importantly, the citizens of Tillamook County had realized that far from offering constructive solutions to their lives, the presence of the Klan created negative disruptions, tensions, and a needlessly hostile environment.

Helen Hill is an artist, writer and playwright whose current play about the branding of Nevada Standish, *Time Out Of Mind*, which opened at the Bay City Arts Center on February 14, will be performed in Cannon Beach at the Coaster Theater March 14 and at the Astoria Performing Arts Center March 15. This article has been excerpted from *A Brief History of Fear & Intolerance in Tillamook County*.

## SONS & DAUGHTERS OF CHIEF KILCHIS LIE IN UNMARKED GRAVES

After a short trip to the present owners of the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Bay City, I learned that they are taking very good care of the old cemetery records that date back 150 years. These records reveal that the unmarked graves of Rosy Bob Kilchis, daughter of Chief Kilchis, and Columbus Kilchis, Robert Kilchis and Jack Kilchis, sons of Chief Kilchis, are located beneath the cypress tree in a site picked out and paid for by Charlie Kilchis, also known as Chief Kilchis, sometime in the 1850s. (The whereabouts of the grave of Chief Kilchis was a well kept secret among his people and may never be known.)

If you would like to pay tribute to these first citizens, resting in their unmarked and unhonored gravesites, go to the large cypress tree and find the grave of Nellie Kilchis Schunter. She is the great granddaughter of Chief Kilchis. She died in childbirth and you can find her mother, Sadie Oster, buried down towards the road. Nellie's grandmother was Rosy Bob, daughter of Kilchis, and she is buried in an unmarked grave between Nellie and Grant Marshall, a grandson of Chief Kilchis and son of Rosy Bob. Grant's brother Ed Marshall is nearby. Ed Marshall served in World War 1 and was arrested and jailed for 6 months for possession of a pint of whiskey in 1922. His case and that of Nevada Standish were both heard at the same grand jury hearing in February of 1923.

If you wander a little ways down the hill you will come upon the grave of Ellen Center, granddaughter of Kilchis and niece of Rosy Bob. Her mother, Maria Kilchis, was Chief Kilchis' youngest daughter, and Rosy's sister. Beside Ellen Center lies her son Frank Mitchell, killed in World War 1.

Visit these graves (I like to go when I am having a hard day) and bring flowers, gifts, tears, or prayers for the peace of these people who were treated so terribly. It is a sobering and humbling experience.

—HELEN HILL

