In the 1860s, following the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan, or KKK, arose in the South. Its efforts to restore white supremacy through threats and violence are well known. After World War I, a second Klan movement grew nationwide, advocating principles of white supremacy, the menace of the Catholic Church, and the threat immigration posed to the purity of native blood and to America’s democratic institutions. The patriotic and fraternal nature of the KKK attracted the participation of many of the most influential members of communities nationwide, including small towns in Montana. Above, Ku Klux Klan members parade on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., September 13, 1926.
"Ku Klux Klan" Will be Organizing in Harlowton," trumpeted the Harlowton Times on June 9, 1921. "According to information received today," the Klan was successfully recruiting members across the country, making its march into Montana inevitable. "It is said," the Times coyly continued, "that a number of well known citizens of this city have interested themselves in the organization and that the Klan representative . . . has come here to assist them." Six months later, the paper announced that the Klan had indeed established itself in a number of Montana communities. Most of the article, however, was devoted to describing the "remarkable" Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, William J. Simmons. His physique resembled a "graceful Hercules," his demeanor "pleasing" and "gracious," and his "imposing and majestic presence" were suited for an earlier age when he could have "graced a throne." Perhaps the fawning treatment of Simmons piqued the curiosity of Times readers, who were as yet unfamiliar with the hooded order, or perhaps they were more intrigued with the paper's claim that the Klan was gaining over one thousand new members a day.1

Simmons's perceived qualities notwithstanding—he would shortly find himself on the losing end of a battle with Texas dentist Hiram Wesley Evans for control over the Invisible Empire—the Harlowton Times article is suggestive in that it implied the Klan was simply a civic organization that any community would welcome.2 At least forty-six communities in Montana did so, although "welcome" would be a stretch for some, especially Butte, whose Irish-Catholic residents openly disdained the Klan. But Harlowton was not Butte. Those "well known citizens" the Times mentioned in 1921 were indeed interested in the Klan, and that included the Times editor. He, along with many of the most prominent and powerful men in the county, joined Wheatland Klan #29 in the early 1920s.3

It is likely that some of those Knights from Wheatland County journeyed to Billings, Montana, in late 1924 to hear Imperial Wizard Evans give a talk as part of his larger tour of western states. As Evans spoke to the faithful, he assured the approximately 1,300 enthusiastic Klansmen in attendance that they were indeed an important and welcome part of the Invisible Empire. Evans first expressed his "satisfaction" with the election of Calvin Coolidge and then proceeded to reiterate the main principles of the Klan, with which the audience was undoubtedly familiar: the imperative of white supremacy, the menace of the Catholic Church, and the threat immigration posed to the purity of native blood and to America's democratic institutions. Evans voiced confidence that these principles would continue to attract more candidates, including Montanans, into the Empire's fold. Larger membership numbers, as he knew full well, meant bigger profits and a more powerful voting bloc. While the Invisible Empire fell far short of the 20 million members Evans predicted—roughly 3 to 4 million paid dues at the Klan's peak in 1923–1924—Evans could count on just over 5,100 Knights from the Realm of Montana. Included in that number were the 191 Knights from Wheatland Klan #29.4

Joining the Klan offered opportunistic, primarily middle-aged men a new venue in which to socialize...
The January 26, 1922, Harlowton Times article implied the Klan was simply a civic organization led by a man of excellent quality that any community would welcome. By November 1922, Texas dentist Hiram Wesley Evans had ousted Imperial Wizard Simmons and taken control of the Invisible Empire. Having kidnapped and tortured a black man while leader of the Dallas Klan, Evans was not a benign character, though he later discouraged vigilante activities. Here, he appears front and center with fellow Klansmen parading on September 13, 1926, in an unidentified location.

with like-minded fellow citizens, yet the Wheatland Klan barely cast a ripple across Harlowton, the Wheatland county seat of fewer than two thousand residents. It did not need to because the men who joined the Klan were already firmly in control of the most important political and civic offices in the area, and they enjoyed plenty of other fraternal and social options. In fact, despite Evans’s exhortations, the evidence indicates that the Klan in Harlowton was concerned not with stamping out Catholic influence or African-American ambitions (the number of Catholics in Wheatland County was negligible; the number of blacks was even smaller), but with creating a prosperous and thriving community. Although there were no enemies, however, does not mean Klansmen in Harlowton were any less virulently racist or anti-Catholic than Klansmen elsewhere. It does suggest that in this homogenous community, leading citizens considered such attitudes as normal and self-evident; in the context of the 1920s, when nativist sentiment collided with an expanding urban and modern culture nationwide, such views probably did not change throughout the decade. By the mid-1920s, however, Wheatland Klan #29 disbanded as the Klan’s strict guidelines regarding eligibility for membership and the constant demands for money and time tested Wheatland Knights’ commitment, and members sought fellowship from other fraternal and social organizations.5

The story of the Wheatland Klan begins with the creation of Harlowton in 1900 in what was then Meagher County. Many charter members of the
The crucial factor in Harlowton's existence and growth, as in many Montana communities, was the railroad. Its arrival paved the way for the homesteading boom in central Montana as emigrants, “attracted to Montana by the lure of inexpensive land and the promise of golden wheat,” streamed into the state by the thousands before 1920. This view shows railcars on the tracks leading into Harlowton in 1900—the year the town was established.

Wheatland Klan were also founding fathers of Harlowton, civic boosters who committed themselves to encouraging the development of their new town. The crucial factor in Harlowton’s growth, as was the case in so many Montana communities, was the railroad. The arrival of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad paved the way for the homesteading boom in central Montana as emigrants, “attracted to Montana by the lure of inexpensive land and the promise of golden wheat,” streamed into the state by the thousands before 1920. Railroad and state government publicity pamphlets skillfully shamed readers if they did not immediately take advantage of such a splendid opportunity. Many future Klansmen did just that—at least 26 filed homestead claims between 1900 and 1914. Of the 180 Klansmen for whom occupations were found, 54 had some connection with the land. They either made their living from farming or growing stock, started out with a homestead and sold it, or maintained their investments while pursuing other jobs.

While homesteaders sought their fortunes in owning land, others came to work on the railroad or wandered into the state in search of new adventures. Future Klansmen were no exception. One Knight, reflecting upon his youth before the Harlowton Kiwanis Club in 1927, remarked that “things got too tame” in Minneapolis, so he made his way west to Montana in 1888. Another ventured to Montana with a friend in 1914 on the Milwaukee Road. Harlowton was supposed to be a temporary stop, but he liked his job at a grocery store and decided to remain. The first mayor of Harlowton, A. T. Anderson (a future Exalted Cyclops, or leader, of the Wheatland Klan), persuaded one well-known doctor to move from Bozeman to set up his medical practice.

Some central Montana residents who moved away were compelled to return. One former county surveyor and Klansman moved to Washington in 1923, but, as he exclaimed in a letter (that made the front page of the Harlowton Times), he could not “stand it any longer away from old Montana.” Another future Klansman and one of the most prominent ranchers in the Harlowton area moved from Maine to Montana in 1904 and then back to his home state in 1917. Yet “the lure of Montana that was in his blood” compelled him to return for good by 1920.

Once Klansmen made the long journey west, moreover, they were likely to stay put. Most were married and settled down with families, and close to half were in their thirties. Of the 117 for whom dates of death were discovered, 90 died elsewhere in Montana, half of them in Wheatland. Even most of the Klansmen who passed away in the state did so only a couple of counties away. The “lure of Montana,” obviously, captured more than a few Klansman.

As immigration into central Montana and Meagher County surged, civic boosters in Harlowton, including a number of men who would later join the Klan, began to vigorously advocate the creation of a new county with Harlowton, naturally, as the county seat. An intense and competitive campaign ensued as other towns, most notably Judith Gap, Hedgesville, and the current Meagher county seat, White Sulphur...
Springs, vehemently opposed the proposal. Harlowton boosters simply mowed over the opposition, as the editor of the *Meagher County Democrat* recognized in February 1915: “Harlowton is now rolling up its sleeves and will fight this thing through to the finish.”

Harlowton’s chances, which were already favorable because of the rise in the number of homesteaders, an increase in railroad-track mileage, and the recent construction of the only grain terminal in the state, were enhanced considerably when future Klansman W. E. Jones, who would become known as the “Father of Wheatland County,” won the election for Meagher County state senator in 1916. Armed with a list of county commissioners who were ready to serve Wheatland, almost half of which would join the Klan, Jones made his case before the state legislature. He met with a receptive audience. In early 1917, amid the frenzy of the county-splitting movement in Montana, Wheatland was carved out of Meagher and the northern tip of Sweet Grass. Shortly after the creation of Wheatland County, the patriotic fervor of World War I swept across the state. Montanans, to put it mildly, were enthusiastic supporters. As a spokesman for the National Council of Defense remarked in admiration: “Montana possesses a vital spirit of patriotism not found excelled anywhere.” Wheatland lived up to that assessment. Harlowton residents listened to Committee on Public Information-sponsored Four Minute Men’s speeches with titles such as “Danger to Democracy,” viewed *The Kaiser: The Beast of Berlin* at the local theater, and participated in Liberty Loan drives. The *Harlowton Times* proudly announced that Wheatland stood as the top county in the state for its part in war work. Patriots, including seven future Klansmen, also created a Wheatland County Home Guard for local protection when the National Guard was called into service in summer 1917, as did many other states across the country. Of the fifty-eight Klansmen found in the 1930 federal census, twenty-six listed their military service in World War I. Three more were veterans of the Spanish-American War, one of them a Rough Rider with Theodore Roosevelt in Cuba. After the war, they found an outlet for their patriotism in the Klan, but for several veterans, the creation of and participation in the local chapter of the American Legion (and later the Veterans of Foreign Wars) would prove to be a more durable affiliation.

Klansmen also heeded the Montana Council of Defense, which encouraged the crushing of antiwar dissent and the purging of all German influence in the state. Among other orders, the council prohibited the speaking and teaching of German, demanded
Shortly after the creation of Wheatland County, the patriotic fervor of World War I swept across the state. Patriots, including seven future Klansmen, created a Wheatland County Home Guard in the summer of 1917. At left, Wheatland County soldiers and community members parade in Harlowton on September 20, 1917, six months after the United States had entered the war. The building in the right foreground is the Ford garage owned by Ward Beley (inset), the first area resident to join the Klan and a two-time state representative. He was likely the Kleagle (organizer) and responsible for generating membership in Wheatland County. Almost all members of the Wheatland Knights—including most of the county elected officials and many businessmen and professionals—joined in 1923 and 1924.

The names of all students in German classes, and mandated the removal of German books from public and private libraries. The Harlowton school board, on which sat the future Gland Kligrapp (secretary) of the Realm of Montana and a fellow Klansman, took the council’s directive one step further, as did other school boards across the state, and ordered the burning of all German textbooks. Several Klansmen served on the local defense councils—and likely even more participated, as a letter to the chair of the Wheatland council indicated in April 1918: “With fifteen hundred members now enrolled . . . Wheatland County [could], in the near future, have the largest patriotic association there is in the state.”

After the Armistice, the patriotic fervor of the war years funneled back into local concerns as Harlowton boosters renewed their quest to promote their community as a center of civic pride and economic opportunity. It would be a common theme throughout the 1920s, championed in particular by the Harlowton Times and the chamber of commerce. But front and center in the effort to put Harlowton on the map were the individual members of Wheatland Klan #29.

The first resident in the area to join the Klan was Ward Beley, a Ford automobile dealer and a two-time state representative. As such, he was likely the Kleagle, or organizer, and was thus responsible for generating membership during the first recruiting drive in Wheatland County. Perhaps he connected with friends and acquaintances in the business community after a meeting of the chamber of commerce or after the completion of rituals in the local Masonic temple or International Order of Odd Fellows lodge. Perhaps he primed possible candidates for
membership during the annual gathering at his garage for Christmas eggnog. However, he went about it, if he was indeed point man for the Klan, the first efforts of recruitment were successful. In the spring of 1923, in the first and what would be the largest initiation ceremony in the county, thirty-four residents became "naturalized citizens" of Wheatland Klan #29. By the time the Realm of Montana officially entered the Invisible Empire in September 1923 under the leadership of Grand Dragon Lewis Terwilliger of Livingston, the Harlowton chapter boasted seventy-five members.22

Beley followed a time-honored pattern of Kleagles across the country by convincing prominent and leading members of the community to join, an easy enough task since he knew almost everyone. Among the first to pay the ten-dollar Kлектoken (initiation fee) were the chief of police, the county clerk and recorder, the county treasurer, five managers of local businesses, a notable attorney, a minister, a dentist, and a Milwaukee Road yardmaster. Other county employees—the surveyor, assessor, and commissioner—would join in August, along with the sheriff, the undersheriff, a pharmacist, and the editor of the Harlowton Times (who doubled as Harlowton’s postmaster). All members of the Wheatland Klan, with the exception of three, joined in 1923 and 1924, which could indicate that in this small town the pool of likely candidates was quickly drained.23

The majority of Wheatland Klansmen worked in middle nonmanual positions (managers, county employees, farmers, and ranchers) and in skilled positions (electricians, yardmasters, and boilermakers).24 Most of the Klansmen in skilled positions worked on the railroad, probably the Milwaukee Road, although another likely employer was the Great Northern Railroad, which passed through Judith Gap just north of Harlowton. The percentage of Wheatland Klansmen in these types of positions was far higher than in other western cities, such as Eugene and La Grande in Oregon and Denver, Colorado.25 Wheatland’s numbers make sense, however. The number of railroad workers—at least forty-seven and most of them skilled—reflect Harlowton’s status as a major link on the Milwaukee Road where “electric locomotives were exchanged for steam and later diesel-powered engines.”26 Moreover, the high percentage, almost 39 percent, of middle nonmanual positions corresponds with the large influx of population into central Montana.

Regardless of their occupations, Wheatland Klansmen opted to spend at least some of their free time in secret fraternities besides the Klan. As with other Klansmen across the country, Wheatland Knights proved to be eager joiners.27 Secret fraternities provided a ready-made avenue for business contacts and ritualistic work, and fraternities’ social and civic activities warranted mention on the front pages of the weekly newspaper. Records on individual Klansmen are incomplete, but the data suggests that at least seventy-four Klansmen found time for extra lodge nights.28 Of those seventy-four, a large majority were Masons, which was unsurprising given the propensity of Klansmen to tap into the Masonic order for new members.29 Klansmen dominated the top echelon of both the Harlowton and Musselshell lodges as well as the Palestine Commandery, Knights Templar. Their travels to Billings, Missoula, and Helena to participate in degree work and enjoy picnics likely enabled them to connect with other Klansmen; all three cities had active Klans.30

The International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) was the second fraternity of choice with twenty-six Klansmen as members, many with dual membership in the Masons, and Klansmen controlled the upper tier of Carbonate Lodge #39. Ritualistic work was obviously important to those Klansmen in the IOOF—they often competed in degree contests, one of which culminated in a state victory in 1923 (eight of eleven members of the degree team were Klansmen).31 At least eight Klansmen belonged to the Knights of Pythias. They made an impression on the past Grand Chancellor Lewis Terwilliger, who remarked in admi-
ration at the Knights of Pythias statewide convention in 1921, hosted by Harlowton, that “all our doubts were immediately dispelled.” “No other town of its size in the state,” he continued, “could do as well as Harlowton did...” It was a splendid convention and everyone left with a warm feeling for Harlowton.”

Undoubtedly, it also provided Terwilliger with an opening to sound out potential candidates for the Invisible Empire. Klan literature had arrived in Harlowton earlier that year; fraternal joiners most certainly would have heard of it even if they did not live in the county seat.

Most Wheatland Klansmen, almost 75 percent, did live in Harlowton, but seventeen came from Judith Gap, while a handful of other members hailed from nearby communities such as Shawmut, Hedgesville, Melville, Twodot, and Nihil. “Nearby” in Montana, however, is a relative term. Attending the monthly (or likely bimonthly—the records are unclear) meetings required a drive of seventeen miles from Shawmut, nineteen from Judith Gap, and over twenty-five from Melville. Unsurprisingly, of the thirty-three Knights who paid the initiation fee but did not bother to pay their dues, half lived outside of Harlowton. The rough Montana roads—and the time it took to drive them—perhaps played a role, or perhaps those who were farmers or ranchers encountered the combined bad luck of the “grasshopper menace and drought” that swept across central Montana during the decade. Almost a third of those who paid only the initiation fee belonged to the Masons or the IOOF (or both), so perhaps their needs for fraternal allegiances were satisfied. Nonetheless, even as Terwilliger grumbled at the end of 1924 that only 11 percent of men initiated at the annual statewide meeting, Wheatland Klan #29 wasted little time in making its presence known in the community. Recruiting continued into the fall, as the Harlowton Press reported that a significant number of residents attended lectures about the principles and goals of the secret fraternity offered over a late September weekend at the Masonic hall. The enthusiasm carried over through November, when the Klan made its first and only recorded visit to Harlowton Methodist and Presbyterian churches. “While these visitors came in robes and did not tarry long,” noted the Methodist Church approvingly, “they were welcome just the same,” especially, it is presumed, after leaving a sizable donation. Finally, as an exclamation point to end 1923, Klansmen ignited a fiery cross on Good Hill near Harlowton a week after the visit to the churches. The display gave Harlowton residents further notice, as if they needed any more reminders, that the Klan was in their midst.

There was always some ambivalence, however, about the Klan’s presence in Harlowton. One resident recalled that when someone, perhaps a Knights of Columbus member, infiltrated a Klan meeting—it was unclear how—and discovered that leading businessmen had joined the Klan, the Knights of Columbus decided to boycott all the businesses in town. Members of the Catholic fraternity started ordering their groceries by mail through Sears and Roebuck. The local postmaster wondered what was going on since there was so much more merchandise coming through the post office.

Another former resident remembered that after his family moved to Harlowton in the mid-1920s, Klansmen attempted to recruit his father, a dentist. Their efforts failed, as the father “didn’t put up with the hooded boys.” After he kicked them out of his office, the dentist told his son, “Those SOBs tried to put the heat on me.”

Howard Squires, editor and publisher of the Harlowton Times, vacillated between admiration and reproach. The front-page article about an initiation ceremony in Alabama in 1921, for example, reveled in the veiled mysteries and secret rituals...
Although the Invisible Empire fell far short of the 20 million predicted by Imperial Wizard Evans, membership reached 3 to 4 million dues payers at the Klan's peak in 1923-1924. Just over 5,100 Knights joined from the Realm of Montana. At right, Klan members in Roundup, another small Montana town, participate in a Klan funeral on May 30, 1923.

that welcomed five hundred new Birmingham Knights into "the mystic cave... where they [could] sit among the gods of the Invisible Empire." Yet a few months later, the paper admonished the Klan in the South for its violent methods and "act[ing] like bandits." While the Klan offered "some sensible things"—the "insidious attack" by "modernists" on American womanhood being one of them, according to Squires—"burning and murdering [was] not the remedy."38

Even more telling, an amused Squires shared a letter to the editor that declared the Klan was "going to rule the country just as they wiped out the carpetbaggers." "This is not a warning," claimed the writer, "but good advice from a wel [sic] wisher. Heed ye! Heed ye!" Squires noted wryly that he was not sure if the letter was sent in jest, but "we feel sorry for the perpetrator." The next week—this time the letter made the front page—the author asserted that "the Klan is coming and is going to be in power for good in Montana and in Harlowton and don't forget it. Your publishing of my personal letter and your remarks on it was uncalled for." To which Squires scoffed, "Why don't you sign your name? Take off your pillow case headgear and let's see who you are."39

Clearly, at least in this exchange, Squires's disdain and impatience rested not only with the writer but also with the Klan's culture of secrecy. Perhaps the anonymous letters were too abrasive and coarse for Squires to digest, or perhaps he had been keeping up with the New York World's exposé of Klan violence in the fall of that year. One year later, Squires kept insisting that there was no Klan in Harlowton. It was "doubtful," Squires claimed, "if Sheriff Clark would allow any Kus to Klux if they were here." Both Squires and Clark would set aside any apprehensions and pay the Klectoken less than a year later, in August 1923.40

It is puzzling why Squires, in particular, would change his mind about the Klan (although he did decline to purchase the required "pillow case headgear"). Maybe he bowed to pressure from his
colleagues and friends, or he might have believed that joining would procure more fraternal and business opportunities. It could be the case that he always believed in the Klan’s mission but deemed it more prudent to publicly dismiss the order—especially given the crudeness of the anonymous letter and the murderous activities of the southern Klans. The Klan in Wheatland County, presumably, would set a better example.

This brief flurry of activity essentially ended the Klan’s public presence in Harlowton, with the exception of one speech by the only Klansman who openly expressed his membership, at least as noted in the Harlowton Times. In the spring of 1924, Reverend A. C. Canole gave an address at the Methodist Church frankly entitled “Why I Am a Klansman,” which the newspaper reprinted in full on the front page. Canole, in explaining his antipathy to the Klan the previous year, maintained that he had been deceived by “the religious press.” He had since launched his own “investigation” into “the truth.” Plagiarizing almost word for word from the K-Uno, the first degree in the Klan’s initiation ceremony, Canole extolled the virtues of the “valiant, chivalric Ku Klux” who “dissipated
By the mid-1920s, Klansmen firmly controlled the most important political and civic offices in Harlowton and in Wheatland County, but the only Wheatland County Klansman who openly expressed his membership, at least as noted in the *Harlowton Times*, was Reverend A. C. Canole, who gave a speech at the Methodist Church entitled "Why I Am a Klansman." He revealed that "many of the very best citizens of the community" believed as he did and indicated that, if necessary, he could purchase "nearly" every item for sale in the city from a Klansman. He further conveyed in no uncertain terms that the Klan enjoyed enough power and prestige to "carry out any program" it wished in the county.12

While the Wheatland Klan never articulated such a program, at least as indicated in the *Harlowton Times* or Terwilliger's official state circulars, one obvious concern for all Klans was bootlegging. Perhaps this is what the Harlowton Methodist Church meant when it declared in early 1921 that "some evils in our city will be handled with ungloved hands."43 As the church championed the cause of Prohibition, the sheriff and his men (including several Klansmen) kept busy by launching raids against distillers of "Harlowton Hooch," the county obliged by filing criminal charges against moonshiners, and city officials had their hands full with the "booze problem" at local dances.44 The state initiative of 1926, which sought to repeal Montana's state prohibition law in effect since 1916, met with vigorous resistance from individual Klansmen, local branches of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (populated by Klansmen's wives), the Anti-Saloon League (headed by the Exalted Cyclops), and the local Methodist Church.45 But even as Klansmen were fighting a losing battle (the state, with Silver Bow County, predictably, in the lead, voted to repeal Montana's prohibition law), their top priority remained, as ever, the promotion of Harlowton.46 "This is your town, my town and our town," president of the chamber of commerce and Klansman Grover C. Perkins exhorted. "Let's make this town great."47

The chamber of commerce was the primary vehicle through which Klansmen operated in Harlowton and a common one for Klansmen nationwide.48 Klansmen rotated in and out of top positions in the chamber throughout the decade, serving as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and members of the executive committee. They also dominated the chamber's working committees, such as those concerning irrigation, publicity, and better roads. In

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Naturally, he declined to disclose how many such citizens actually belonged to the Harlowton Klan, but he smoothly indicated that, if necessary, he could purchase "nearly" every item for sale in the city from a Klansman. He may have been close to the mark, considering that in this town of roughly two thousand, Klansmen owned or managed at least nine businesses, including three garages, a lumber store, a pharmacy, a butcher shop, a laundry, and a grocery store. Canole further conveyed in no uncertain terms that the Klan enjoyed enough power and prestige to "carry out any program" it wished in the county.12

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By the mid-1920s, Klansmen firmly controlled the most important political and civic offices in Harlowton and in Wheatland County, but the only Wheatland County Klansman who openly expressed his membership, at least as noted in the *Harlowton Times*, was Reverend A. C. Canole, who gave a speech at the Methodist Church entitled "Why I Am a Klansman." He revealed that "many of the very best citizens of the community" believed as he did and indicated that, if necessary, he could purchase "nearly" every item for sale in the city from a Klansman. He further conveyed in no uncertain terms that the Klan enjoyed enough power and prestige to "carry out any program" it wished in the county. Above is Canole's membership and dues card from 1923–1924 from the Wheatland Klan records.

After his lengthy and racist ode to the Klan of Reconstruction, Canole honed in on more local matters. Canole revealed that "many of the very best citizens of the community" believed as he did. The cruel storm of the American reconstruction" and rescued wives and daughters from the "licentious longings of lust-crazed beasts in human form."44

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1923, for example, over half of the businessmen who served on the committees were Klansmen. Similarly, the Kiwanis Club, in which Klansmen were active participants, assisted the chamber of commerce in championing “the best interests of the community.” Squires continued to cheer the chamber and Harlowton in the pages of the *Harlowton Times*. Harlowton, declared Squires, enjoyed “a splendid system of schools, . . . unsurpassed railway facilities, [the] best wool and cattle market, one of the biggest flour mills in state, . . . [and citizens] who are boosters and go-getters.” The paper showed little patience with those who thought otherwise. Residents were living in “God’s country,” declared Squires, and if folks did not like it, the solution was simple: “Move to Russia.”

“God’s country,” however, lacked decent roads. W. C. Husband and others noted that Montana “was receiving unfavorable criticism” about its highways, which would surely affect tourism and commerce. Sending delegates to the Annual Good Roads Congress and proposing new routes, such as Harlowton to Helena, occupied the chamber and the county commissioners (and the Klansmen who served in that...
capacity) throughout the 1920s, but most of their time was spent debating the wisdom of federal assistance in building and maintaining roads. Reflecting Wheatland County and central Montana's distrust of and dissatisfaction with the Montana State Highway Commission and its general interference (as they saw it) with county affairs, a federal aid project to build good roads in the state was soundly rejected by the county commissioners.

The battle with the State Highway Commission demonstrated exactly the kind of local "civic pride" that Squires approved, and he urged Harlowton residents to elect "the best men available" to help the town "realize" its "destiny." Heeding Squires's call, Klansmen were only too willing to serve. They ran for and were elected to city, county, and state offices. Sometimes they challenged each other in the primaries, other times in the general election. While a few notable Democrats joined the Wheatland Klan—S. K. Campbell, for instance, became known as "one of the party leaders in this section of the state"—twenty of the twenty-five members for whom political affiliations were discovered belonged to the Republican party, not an unusual choice for Klansmen outside of the South.

Klansmen in Harlowton not only collaborated to promote what they considered to be the best interests of their community, but they also socialized with each other at dinner parties, bridge and chess tournaments, baseball games, and secret fraternal gatherings. They created and eagerly participated in the Wheatland County Sportsmen's Club and the Three-Pound Trout Club. The Rifle and Pistol Club, a local chapter of the National Rifle Association, in which Klansmen held top offices, competed in matches against Ryegate and Roundup; Klansman W. L. Dysart urged residents to "come out to the range and join a real crowd of Americans." The club also competed with "the boys"—the Harlowton National Guard unit, half of which were Klansmen. If Klansmen desired to contemplate civic and moral issues, they could join the Harlowton Brotherhood. Formed in the Methodist Church in January 1921 by several Klansmen, the Harlowton Brotherhood sought "to inspire higher ideals and promote good citizenship" among men through dinners and lectures. W. C. Husband, for example, gave an address of "exceptional merit" that provided young men with advice on how to forge a successful life. The Harlowton Times printed the speech in its entirety for the benefit of those who missed the lecture. It is clear that, although one of the functions of the Klan nationwide was to promote bonding between like-minded members in order to champion the Klan's agenda, a good part of that mission in Harlowton was already being fulfilled outside of the organization.

Indeed, with the exception of the public displays in the last few months of 1923, Klansmen did not represent themselves as a unit in the public eye. Large-scale community celebrations, such as Independence Day and the Days of 49—a huge three-day festival (over six thousand attended in the fall of 1927)—presented perfect opportunities for the Klan to march and show its strength, but members evidently believed otherwise. While individual Klansmen actively (and merrily) participated in the festivities—serving on planning committees and competing in the "whiskers contest" (in which men vowed to refrain from shaving for about two months), obvious displays of power perhaps were considered unnecessary. There was no need to impress. There was also no need, ultimately, to retain membership in the Klan. Even as the Invisible Empire waned in power and influence in the late 1920s, Harlowton Knights were hanging up their robes. By March 1927, only twenty-four Klansmen were current on their dues; the following year, that number had whittled down to one, Frank Dunn, a wrecking engineer. There is no evidence that Harlowton Klansmen attended the state Kloreos in 1927 and 1928.

As with other Klaverns across the state and country, a combination of factors spelled the end of the Klan's brief existence in Harlowton. Nationally, of course, the Invisible Empire was reeling from the arrest of its most powerful Grand Dragon, D. C. Stephenson of Indiana, for the kidnapping, rape, and eventual death of his secretary, Madge Oberholtzer. The passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 eliminated one of the main rallying cries of the Klan, and the sheer opportunism of the national leaders, who saw the Invisible Empire only as a means for acquiring wealth and power, hardly translated into a long-term and cohesive program. The violence instigated by the Klan, especially in the Deep South, as well as the intimidations, arson, and cross-burnings, helped lead to the Klan's demise. So, too, did the pretense...
of championing American principles while inflicting terror on those who failed to meet the Klan’s narrow definition of what it meant to be American. Wheatland Knights were surely aware of these issues, and others, despite Lewis Terwilliger’s enthusiasm and attempts to show Imperial Headquarters that “the Klansmen of Montana can always be depended on.”

The prohibition of foreign-born members as dictated by the Klan’s constitution, the Kloran, also worked to its detriment in Montana. If only native-born Americans could enter the Invisible Empire, then the Wheatland Klan, and apparently other Montana Klans, embraced a more expansive view of membership. As Terwilliger complained, with more than a hint of frustration, it had “come to his attention” that some Klans had been “naturalizing foreign born aliens, especially those born in Canada.” They would “immediately” lose their charters if they welcomed any foreign born into their ranks after January 1925. Foreign-born recruits, if they espoused Klan ideals, could find their fraternal home in the American Krusaders (formally the Royal Riders of the Red Robe), headed by Stephen Tighe of Roundup. Wheatland found it easier to ignore Terwilliger, especially since five Canadian-born Klansmen were distinguished citizens of the community, and three of them were charter members. The other foreign-born members, including a Norwegian, would join a few months later. Obviously Terwilliger did not realize that one of his primary state officers, W. C. Husband—chosen by Terwilliger at Montana’s first Kloreo to serve as the Grand Kligrapp and one of the most influential citizens of Harlowton—hailed from Ontario.

Wheatland Knights must have thought that Terwilliger and, by extension, the Invisible Empire, were not only overreacting to, but also interfering in what was essentially a local matter. Terwilliger’s threat would seem especially ludicrous considering that Husband and the other members were no slouches when it came to promoting patriotism, civic duty, and, most importantly, Harlowton. Coupled with the Realm’s persistent demands for payment of dues, reinstatements of lapsed members, and timely submissions of quarterly reports, Wheatland Knights likely grew weary of the obligations of membership. The bank failures in the state and the ensuing foreclosures of thousands of farms—Montana was particularly hard hit—may have also induced Klansmen to stop sending money to a remote organization that had ultimately little to offer them. Wheatland Knights’ decision to ignore the rules for eligibility, which were clearly laid out in the Kloran, reflected an independent streak. Outsiders, whether in the form of the Montana State Highway Commission, the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan, or, for that matter, Realm headquarters in Livingston, held little credibility.

The constant pursuit of enemies must have also been draining. Almost every official circular Terwilliger sent warned local Klaverns to stand guard against threats and remain dutiful to the Invisible Empire. In an almost desperate appeal in 1929, he pleaded, “If we get careless about our local organizations, it gives our enemies just that much greater chance of winning in local fights. Boys, don’t weaken our influence.” Yet, what local fights Terwilliger meant remained vague and amorphous. Just who these enemies were, how many of them existed, and what kind of damage they could possibly inflict upon Wheatlanders’ day-to-day existence, was never clearly revealed. In contrast, in Butte, immigrant Catholics surrounded Kontinental Klan #30. There, the Klan developed a siege mentality as members pondered the limits of Prohibition, fumed...
In the late 1920s, a combination of factors spelled the end of the Klan’s brief existence in Harlowton. Nationally, the Invisible Empire was reeling from the arrest of its most powerful Grand Dragon, D. C. Stephenson of Indiana for the rape and eventual death of his secretary. Wheatland Knights had ignored state-level condemnation for welcoming Canadians and other foreign-born men into their fold and had found demands on their time and money onerous. They already controlled the town and county, so they shed their robes and concentrated on their other fraternal and social activities. Above, Harlowton’s Central Avenue is pictured in the late 1920s, when the Klan was on the wane.

about Catholic teachers in public schools, organized picnics with the Whitehall Klan, and told racist jokes in the safety of the Klavern. Wheatland Knights, on the other hand, could operate in the open without fear of reprisal. Thus, the Invisible Empire’s demands on their time and money required more effort than it was worth, despite Grand Dragon Lewis Terwiliger’s plea that the Klan still had “special work to do” and that its “principles are worthy and Truth will prevail.”

In the end, and in the absence of enemies, Klansmen in Harlowton preferred to influence their community while serving in their capacity as businessmen and civic leaders, not as representatives of Wheatland Klan #29. The tenure of the Ku Klux Klan in Harlowton shows that ordinary citizens found the hooded order intriguing enough to join, if just for a short time. Yet the lure of white supremacy, anti-Catholicism, and “100% Americanism” was not enough. Wheatland Klansmen already controlled the town and the county, and they already enjoyed opportunities for fraternal and social activities. Even carving time out of their busy lives for the more established fraternities proved a difficult task, as the attendance of International Order of Odd Fellow’s “Old Timers’ Night” in late 1926 indicated. The “old timers” who showed up apologized for being “unable to attend lodge as much as they would have liked” and also expressed hope that they could participate in the IOOF more regularly in the future. Perhaps they did. What is certain is that the Klan represented an even lower priority in their lives; Harlowton had moved on.

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