Proclamation Against the Ku Klux Klan, 1922

By Governor Benjamin J. Olcott

Oregon Governor Benjamin W. Olcott issued this 1922 executive proclamation in response to three assaults in southern Oregon perpetrated by members of the Medford klavern (a local organizational unit of the Ku Klux Klan). The first victim, a white piano salesman from Medford, was kidnapped and threatened with hanging, while the other two, a black man and a half-Mexican man (according to one account), were taken out into the country and terrorized with “necktie hangings,” that is, non-fatallynchings.

The Klan began organizing klaverns in Oregon in early 1921. The first klavern was formed in Medford; other active klaverns could also be found in Portland, Eugene, Astoria, Tillamook, Ashland, La Grande, and many other Oregon communities. By the end of 1922 the Oregon Voter counted fifty-eight klaverns across the state.

The Oregon Klan focused most of their attention on Roman Catholics, who made up about 8 percent of the state’s population. In 1922, the Klan successfully backed a statewide ballot measure making it mandatory for children to attend public school, an attempt by the organization to shut down private Catholic schools. Federal courts later ruled the measure unconstitutional.

The Klan also backed several candidates for local and statewide offices in the election of 1922, campaigns that were vigorously opposed by anti-Klan Oregonians. Despite this opposition, Olcott, the Republican incumbent, lost the gubernatorial race by a wide margin to Democrat Walter Pierce, who was endorsed by the Klan.

The Klan’s influence on state politics was fleeting, however. It faced strong opposition from many Oregonians as well as internal strife caused by leadership struggles, organizational fragmentation, and a number of state and national scandals involving prominent Klansmen. By the end of the 1920s, the KKK’s influence on both state and national politics had all but disappeared.


