

A Croaker's path: Charles A. Webb, a look into the reporting of Race Related
Issues in the Asheville Citizen in 1923.

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Title: A Croaker's path: Charles A. Webb, a look into the reporting of Race Related Issues in the *Asheville Citizen* in 1923. ID Number: 28423 Abstract:

The 1920's was a time of Progressive thought around the country. These liberal ideas were not limited to the Northern states; an emerging group of Southern Progressives sought change for its region as well. Charles Aurelius Webb was a progressive in the hostile South and editor of the *Asheville Citizen* Newspaper in Asheville, North Carolina during this time period. 1923 would put his broad minded ideals to a test in January, starting with the Rosewood Massacre in Rosewood, Florida. Numerous African Americans lost their lives in first few days of the New Year after the beating of a young white woman by an alleged black man, in a neighboring town. Later that year in July, the most influential and authoritative secret society of the twenties, the Ku Klux Klan, held a rally of State Grand Dragons in Asheville for three days. Webb would report on both of these events through his media vehicle, *the Asheville Citizen*. A look into editor Charles A. Webb's reporting of the race related events in the *Asheville Citizen* demonstrates a hint of liberal tolerance towards the disenfranchised in Asheville, North Carolina during the height of national racial tension in 1923.

Progressive, as defined in Webster's New World Dictionary, is moving forward or onward, continuing by successive steps, marked by progress, reform, or improvement, and lastly favoring progress, through political reform. Charles Aurelius Webb was indeed a progressive man in an increasingly changing world. Webb's vision, as editor of one of Asheville's competing newspapers, was to improve and enrich the lot of all who called Western North Carolina home. The 1920's would prove challenging for Webb in ensuring his Utopia. The influx of immigrants, minorities, and a hostile organization, the Ku Klux Klan, placed increased strain on his aspirations. 1923, in particular, was a year of amplified racial turmoil. As a nation, a race war played out for the country during the Rosewood murders in Florida at the beginning of the New Year. An undetermined number of the dead, many of whom were black, would surface in the articles of the *Asheville Citizen* and the *Asheville Times* in Asheville, North Carolina. Later on that year in July, the fuel feeding the flames of ethnic antagonism would emerge in Asheville. A three-day convention of Ku Klux Klan State Grand Dragons, the first of its kind ever, would take place in the heart of Western North Carolina.¹ A look into editor Charles A. Webb's reporting of race related events in the *Asheville Citizen* demonstrates a hint of liberal tolerance towards the disenfranchised in Asheville, North Carolina during the height of national racial tension in 1923.

The son of Alexander and Annabella Webb, Charles Webb was born in Warrenton, North Carolina on November 4, 1866. Webb's father arranged for him to attend school in preparation for college at the Webb School located in Bell Buckle, Tennessee under the guidance and training of his uncles, Messrs. W.R. and J.M. Webb. After admission to Chapel Hill in 1886, Webb engrossed himself in his studies and won numerous awards, especially his senior year

¹ *Asheville Citizen*, 27 June 1923.

² The Asheville Magazine (Asheville: Asheville Magazine Co, 1907), 3.

which included the debater's and the essayist's medals in the Dialectic Society. Webb graduated in 1889, salutatorian out of a class of twenty- two. His transformation into the progressive man of tomorrow was beginning as a college student.

At his graduation, during his Class Oration, which he titled the 'Modern Development,' Webb started his address with a fable of a German man returning home from a visit to England. A friend of the German traveler asked him how was the spiritual state of the residents. The man answered by saying men in Britain believed that making money is the key to success and happiness and the opposite, not making money, results in failure. Webb believed this fable could apply to the state of affairs in the United States. The drive to be successful along with the betterment of one's life are not inherently wrong, it is the manner in which America and the world is taking to ensure their advancement. This only ends with catastrophic results.³ Webb asserted "This is a rare thing these days, a person who rest[s] his treasures upon the earth by the slow and laborious ploddings of the 'good old days.' We have left 'the well worn and beaten' paths of our fathers trod, to seek crosscuts and methods to attain the end of the journey."⁴

To Charles Webb, achievements made over a length of time would be the only way to guarantee America's proper development. In a world where a country can take an ounce of gold, stamp it and make it worth twenty dollars, and a mechanic can mold matter worth less than ten dollars into trinkets worth ten times more, he asked " In the midst of these values and fictitious fortunes is work- real, true, and earnest ennobled or made more honorable?"⁵ The answer was no, and in light of the truth, the revelation can be made that there are dysfunctional components in the birth of modern development.

³ Southern Historical Collection, UNC, Wilson Library, Manuscript Department, Box number 3370. Webb, Charles Aurelius Speeches, 1889-1947. Folders 1-5.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The world seemed to be moving with rapid velocity in the wrong direction. Webb asked his fellow graduates to take a moment, slow down to enjoy and take in all that life had to offer. They would risk others calling them "croakers," those individuals who hinder the pace of growth, in fear of "jumping the track as a result of our rapid momentum."⁶ Charles ended the speech with well wishes and a reminder of the allure of the modern development. He hoped that he and his class would be the "croakers" of their day and experience the real rewards of a slow and steady progression towards a better future for all.

Even later on in his life, Webb continued on his quest as a "croaker." In an undated speech to a mechanic labor union, he illustrated his concerns over the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The rise of money power was producing additional dissatisfaction and difficulty between the two classes. Not wanting to stimulate their discontent, Webb only wanted to present that their cause was justified and not in vain, for "it is right for laboring men to unite themselves together for protection against the encroachment of the money power." He believed a day would come when a transformation would take place between the two classes; a rebellion not of violence, but of the common principles that this country built upon and that through them, the problems of classism will be resolved. Ignoring these facts will not make the problems of today go away, it is as old as ancient times, an enigma that engulfs all self-sufficient and progressing societies; not to react is to create our own demise.⁹ Nevertheless, "so long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of have and the House of want, progress is not real

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

and can not be permanent.. ."10 Charles Webb recognized that we all, the rich and the underprivileged, have to work together to achieve real progress: This keeps governmental power from the private sectors controlling national institutions and life.¹¹

After graduation, he moved to Asheville in August of 1889. Although not a Western North Carolina native, Webb fell in love with the area immediately. He described his first sighting of the Appalachian Mountains in his historical essay of the years he resided in Asheville. He stated, "Coming from a more or less level section of the state and never having seen a mountain, I shall never forget the thrill I experienced as I rode for the first time up the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains; nor the joy and happiness as my eyes first fell upon beautiful Pisgah and the other glorious and inspiring mountains in this vicinity."

After his arrival, he taught for two years in the public school system before returning to Chapel Hill to study law, a dream since childhood. With the completion of his studies and becoming licensed, Webb returned to Asheville where he opened his own practice. He soon married Miss Bell Bruce Banks of Washington, D.C. in 1895 and bore three children from this union.¹³

Law was not the only new addition in his professional life; he quickly engrossed himself into the world of politics by running for various offices. Webb was Chairman of the City and State Democratic Executive Committees and assisted in the 1912 campaign of Governor Locke Craig at his request.¹⁴ In a speech made before the State Democratic Executive Committee on his retirement as State Chairman in 1914, Webb expressed his gratitude for the position as Chairman

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ Arthur S. Link, "What happened to the Progressive Movement of the 1920's ?" *The American Historical Review* 64, no. 4 (1959) : 836.

¹² Charles A. Webb, *Fifty-Eight years in Asheville* (Asheville: Asheville Citizen-Times Co., 1948), 3.

¹³ *The Asheville Magazine* (Asheville: Asheville Magazine Co. 1907), 3.

¹⁴ Webb, 6.

of the party and playing an active role in the campaign of 1912 electing Governor Craig. Webb went on to purport that the election of Craig continued the legacy of "good government in North Carolina, and have once again placed the party of equal rights to all and special privileges to none in charge of this great government."¹⁵

In February of 1916, Charles Webb embarked on another professional passion; he purchased his first newspaper, the Asheville Gazette-News, Asheville's afternoon paper at the time, which he swiftly changed to the *Asheville Times*. Later in 1919, Webb acquired with the aid of friend from Charlotte, North Carolina named George Stephen, the *Asheville Citizen*, and within the same month sold the *Times*. As part owner of the *Citizen*, Webb was also the paper's editor and as editor, hoped to move Asheville into a "modern development" at a slow but steady pace. Webb was a well to do man, but a man still respected and loved. W.M. Sherrill, associate editor of the *Concord Daily Tribune* on a visit to Asheville, briefly reported his day playing golf with Webb and stated in his article that Webb was the "...popular and beloved owner of the Asheville Citizen...".¹⁶

While Webb was editor of the *Asheville Citizen* in 1923, the city had two newspapers, the *Asheville Citizen* and the *Asheville Times*. This was because citizens embraced two distinct views for the city. The elite-controlled *Citizen*, under editor and owner Charles Webb, wanted to push the city into the future by releasing the traditions of the past.¹⁷ Members of the elite, suggested by Professor Milton Ready, were not interested in the ideologies of belligerent societies, like the Klan. The order signified the reactionary institutions of the past, and in their eyes, the future of Asheville could not advance forward embracing such associations. On the front page of each

¹⁵ Southern Historical Collection, UNC, Wilson Library, Manuscript Department, Box Number 3370. Webb, Charles Aurelius Speeches, 1889-1947. Folder 1-5.

¹⁶ Ibid. Milton Ready, interviewed by Amina Moss, 5 min, 3 October 2003.

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issue of the *Citizen* was the phrase, "Dedicated to the up-building of Western North Carolina." Also in every issue on the editorial page, the *Citizen* declared its objectives for improving Asheville and Western North Carolina. A list of nine items placed on this page ranged from the building of highways in Buncombe County to the establishment of a college in Asheville.¹⁹ The *Times*, Asheville's other paper, represented the middle and lower classes. Compared to the *Citizen*, readers of the *Times* seemed to sympathize with the uncompromising ideals of the Ku Klux Klan through the reporting of both the Rosewood Massacre and the Klan rally in 1923. The Klan's philosophy was of, "pure Americanism, patriotism, and loyalty to God, country and home."²⁰ These were the values that helped sway middle and lower class families in the twenties, the central base of *Times* readers, to the Klan.

Klan saturated beliefs not only played a part in the lives of many American families in the 1920's, but also in the day to day interactions with African Americans, especially in the South. Blacks during this time were treated at best like second class citizens. This mind- set kept racial tensions at the breaking point. The levees holding back all- out chaos would soon break in January of 1923. The first race related event of the year Webb and his staff would cover in the *Asheville Citizen* was the Rosewood Massacre in Rosewood, Florida.

The story of Rosewood begins on New Years Day in 1923, when a man named James Taylor left his home in Sumner, Florida three miles from Rosewood, for his job at the Cummer and Sons Mill. His wife, Fannie and two small children were still asleep. He left early that day

Gerald N. Grob, ed., *Papers Read at the Meeting of Grand Dragons Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 4.

¹⁸ *Asheville Citizen*, 16 June 1923.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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to oil the machines; he was going to return home for breakfast later. When he returned home his

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wife meet him on the porch "sobbing, shrieking, her face battered, her mouth bleeding."

Sheriff Rob Walker was at the home with news that a black convict, Jesse Hunter, had escaped the day before from a chain gang that was near Sumner. A dozen men armed with hunting dogs and the scent off Fannie's clothing, headed towards Rosewood.

Rosewood was a tiny black town, with almost thirty homes; some homes were just small shacks and "others the size of the finest two-story homes in Sumner..." It was a prosperous village that took care of its own.

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Before the mob made it to Rosewood, the scent stopped at Aaron Carrier's home, a black man. When questioned about Jesse Hunter, Aaron said nothing. The mob dragged him out the house and then Aaron claimed "It was Sam Carter"²³ that took the fugitive from Carrier's home. The men then left for Sam Carter's residence with Carrier. At Sam Carter's home, Carter also remained silent, but after being choked, he talked and took the mob to where he dropped the man in the woods. The dogs no longer smelled anything, and one man became agitated and threatened Carter, aiming a rifle in his face. The man pulled the trigger, and "Sam Carter's face was gone."²⁴

The mob returned home but tensions and hatred still ran high. The attacker was still loose and the next day, talk emerged about going to Rosewood and "emptying that town, for good and forever."²⁵ The mob did just that. The next day, the men of Sumner went to Rosewood and stopped at the home of Sylvester Carrier. Sylvester had just finished rounding up all of his

²¹ Michael D'Orso. *Like Judgment Day: The ruin and Redemption of a Town called Rosewood*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1996), 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

family to shield them in the home until things died down, when the mob yelled for him to come outside. They then asked for his mother, Sarah to come out. Poly Wilkerson, an ex-quarter boss at one of Sumner's mills, claimed, "he didn't want to hurt any women or children. He said he had come for Sylvester."²⁶ Sarah then proceeded to yell from a window in the front room for the men to go home. That is when "a gunshot cracked, the window burst, and Sarah Carrier fell back, a bullet through her head."²⁷ A shower of bullets then fell upon the Carrier home. Sylvester was at the foot of the stairs with his two rifles when the door burst open and Wilkerson started coming in, Sylvester pulled the trigger on his gun and Poly fell back on the porch, dead. Henry Andrews was right behind him and once again, Sylvester shot and Andrews also fell dead.²⁸ Fire continued from both sides until 4:00 am, when the posse stopped only to get more ammunition. Returning to the Carrier home, the mob found it empty, only the dead bodies of Sarah, Poly, Henry, and Sylvester remained behind. The rest of the family was lead out by Sylvester's sisters to hide in the woods, for the storm was by no means over for them or the town of Rosewood. The men of Sumner left Rosewood in a pile of ashes looking for Jesse Hunter. Fannie's attacker never surfaced.

The number of people who lost their lives in the Rosewood incident ranges from survivor to survivor, black and white. Many of those who died in the four-day massacre were African Americans. Stories from white survivors project different numbers of fatalities, but most remembered burying mass graves of Negro men, women, and children.

The *Citizen* covered the conflict for three days; the first article appeared on January 5, 1923. Extensive reporting was not made by either paper, perhaps because of the vicinity and

²⁶ Ibid., 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 10.

²⁹ Ibid., 326.

information released from Florida officials was limited. The *Citizen* did suggest that the number of Negro fatalities were undetermined but numerous. Similar to the *Times*, the paper also implied that the two white men were killed upon entering Sylvester Carrier's barricaded home. The second article had a subtitle within the article: "Two Negro Women shot to Death." The article focused on the murders of two Negro women believed to been shot as they fled their burning homes.³¹ Sylvester and Sarah Carrier were listed by name under the dead in the articles.

The last piece was in the January 8, 1923 paper, and centered on the unnecessary burning of the Negro homes in Rosewood. The fires in Rosewood were carried out by at least 100 to 150 white men who all, " looked on with out making any effort to extinguish the flames.... The burning of the homes were carried out deliberately.. ." ³². Neither Charles Webb nor his readers provided any responses on Rosewood in the editorial pages, even though reports made front page news.

When comparing the articles of the Rosewood murders in the *Times*, Webb's *Citizen* exhibits more sympathetic and accurate coverage. In its first article, the *Times* briefly described the account of the ordeal and addressed that a Negro man, named Sam Carter, as killed. He was the only victim listed, black or white. The rest of the article gave reference to the Fannie Taylor's condition, claiming that she was still upset but recovering. "The young white woman has recovered from the shock and her condition is not considered critical." ³³The article continued on to describe her ordeal: "She was knocked down and beaten about the face and body before her screams attracted nearby residents."³⁴ The *Times'* recap of the assault seemed to draw

³⁰ *TheAsheville Citizen*, 6 January 1923.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *TheAsheville Citizen*, 8 January 1923.

³³ *The Asheville Times*, 3 January 1923.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the reader in by strictly focusing on the brutality of the attack by a black man, even though the victim was in fair condition. Webb did not reflect on the woman's physical state in any of the *Citizen's* editorials.

Later articles provided more inquiry and the list of the dead expanded to include the white men killed. One Negro woman and one Negro man were listed as dead. The names of Sylvester and Sarah Carrier were not in print. The articles made it clear that the two white men were killed while attempting to enter a barricaded house.³⁵ The "Negroes without warning opened fire" killing the two white men.³

On January 5, the article titled "Fierce Fight is Waged by Negroes Behind Barricade" implies that the standoff was instigated by the enclosed blacks. Sylvester and a woman named "Bertha" (stated as his mother's name) were finally listed in the article among the dead, although they were not expressed in the same light as the white victims.

The last article explained that funeral preparations for C. Poly Wilkerson and Henry Andrews as "being made...to bury the bodies of the two white men..,"³⁷ The paper only discussed the conditions of the white victims: "The four men wounded during the fighting were reported last night in good shape. No other whites are believed to have been wounded...." Neither the conditions nor the funeral arrangements of the black victims were listed.

The *Times* gave a list of loved ones left behind by the two white men killed, "Andrews leaves a wife and three children, and Wilkerson a wife and five children."⁹ The *Times* seemed more sympathetic to the white victims than the blacks by causing its readers to connect and focus

³⁵ *The Asheville Times*, 5 January 1923.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

only on the deceased whites' loved ones. The *Citizen* demonstrated a different angle than the *Times* by not placing sole emphasis on the white victims, but by centering on all the victims who lost their lives in the terrible tragedy, white and black. Webb in his reaction to the conflict may have not been explicitly shown in print, but his reporting gave his audience the truth and not a construed story to fit their ideals and morals.

It was during this time that the country's largest fraternal organization began an evolutionally turn as well. The Ku Klux Klan during this time was one of, if not the most, powerful secret society in the nation. Estimated figures for members in the Klan during the twenties ranged from three to six million.⁴⁰ Imperial Wizard, Dr. H. W. Evans conveyed his desire during the 1923 rally in Asheville for a unified Klan all across the nation, ten million strong.⁴¹ With millions of members, the Klan had associates in every facet of public life. Author Milton Ready stated, "Between 1920 and 1925, the KKK dominated Buncombe County politics."⁴² The second race related incident of 1923, occurred during the summer in Asheville, North Carolina. A rally of State Grand Dragons assembled in the city for a three-day conference to discuss key topics and concerns. By establishing the summit, the Klan was carving a new chapter in its history.

The Ku Klux Klan's rebirth began with the release of the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*. The film, directed by David Wark Griffith, was inspired from a literary work by Thomas Dixon Jr. Dixon, a native of Cleveland County in North Carolina, wrote a series of fictional books loosely based on his childhood and the first Klan. Dixon grew up during Reconstruction, and it

⁴⁰ Rory McVeigh, "Structural incentives for conservative mobilization: Power Devaluation and the Rise of the Ku Klux Klan," *Social Forces* 77, (2001) : 1465.

⁴¹ Grob, 3.

⁴² Milton Ready, *Asheville: Land of the Sky: An Illustrated History*. (Northridge: Windsor Publications, 1986), 91.

was speculated that his father was one of the founding members of the first Klan.⁴³ *Birth of a Nation* glorified the old days of the Ku Klux Klan and its reemergence as defender and protector of white womanhood and supremacy. The climactic moment of the movie was when the Klan saved a white woman from the lustful, insane hands of a black man.⁴⁴ The response from audiences was surprising. All major cities showcased the film. It was estimated that about twenty- five million people saw the epic tale. President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed, "It was like writing history with lightning. . .and my only regret is that it is so terribly true."⁴⁵ *Birth of a Nation* continues to be one of history's most successful movies.⁴⁶

One viewer in particular would help thrust the Klan into overdrive: William Simmons. Days before the release of the film, he formed a new order named the "The Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc."⁴⁷ The first cross burning was on Stone Mountain in Georgia, and would trigger the second coming of the KKK.⁴⁸ Unlike the first, the second Klan had leadership in Simmons and purpose in their emphasis on "100 percent Americanism and the supremacy of the Caucasian race."⁴⁹ In 1920, Simmons' Ku Klux Klan had thousands of members, and with membership dues, Simmons was becoming a wealthy man.

Simmons hired two "enterprising promoters,"⁵ Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler. They acknowledged that in expanding the Klan's appeal by enlarging the class of enemies to include Catholics, Jews, and immigrants, new ground could be gained in the northern states, a first in the

⁴³ *New York Times*, 4 April 1946.

⁴⁴ *Birth of a Nation*, produced and directed by D.W. Griffith, 94 min, Kartes Video, 1984, videocassette.

⁴⁵ David M.Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*. (TMew York: New Viewpoints. 1976), 26.

⁴⁶ Michael Lewis and Jacqueline Serbu, "Kommemorating the Ku Klux Klan," *Sociological Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1999) : 142.

⁴⁷ Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southeast*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press. 1965), 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Chalmers, 30-31.

⁵⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1967), 9.

order's history.⁵¹ The allure of its secrecy help increased membership.⁵² Membership in the North jumped to 100,000 strong during the early twenties.⁵³ In addition, the organization opened its doors to women. Women of the Ku Klux Klan (WKKK) chapters were established in 1923, putting the focus foremost on their children because the Klan believed motherhood was the highest level of white womanhood.⁵⁴

Asheville, like many towns in America, was affected and influenced by the ideals of the society because "white supremacy was the dominant philosophy of the day."⁵⁵ The Asheville Klan was established during the early twenties and sought to expand its own chapter. On August 4, 1921, the *Asheville Citizen* reported the founding of the society in the paper. The article stated a group of local citizens the night of August 3, 1921 called a meeting for the sole purpose of forming a chapter in Asheville. Membership cards from the Klan were sent to Asheville citizens, and even though sources of the card's origins "could not be definitely verified,"⁵⁶ a copy of the card's contents were printed in the article. It stated:

Your friends state you are a native-born American citizen,
having the best interest of your community, city, state, and
nation at heart, owing no allegiance to any foreign sect, creed
,or ruler, and engaged in a legitimate occupation, and believe in-

"The tenets of the Christian religion."
"White Supremacy" "Protection of
our pure womanhood" "Just laws and
liberty."

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Shawn Lay, *Hooded Knights of the Niagara: The Ku Klux Klan in Buffalo, New York*. (New York: New York University Press. 1995), 3.

⁵³ Arnold S. Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics*, (New York: Haskell House Publishers. 1972), 7.

⁵⁴ Kendra Arnold, "Enforcing White Womanhood." B.A. Thesis. , University of North Carolina at Asheville, 1995. 9.

⁵⁵ Lenwood Davis, *The Black Heritage of Western North Carolina*, (No place: No publisher. 1980), 28. UNCA Ramsey Library Number: E185.93.N6 B567 1980 c.2

⁵⁶ *The Asheville Citizen*, 4 August 1921.

"Closer relationship of pure Americanism" "The upholding of the Constitution of these United States" "The sovereignty of our state's rights." "The separation of church and state" "Freedom of speech and press" "Closer relationship between capital and American labor" "Preventing the causes of mob violence and lynchings" "Preventing unwarranted strikes by foreign labor agitators" "Prevention of fires and destruction of property by lawless elements" "The limitation of foreign immigration" "The much-needed local reforms" "Law and order" "Real men, whose oaths are inviolate are needed"⁵⁷

These ideals were what the group called, Klankraft, Klan doctrine. The Klankraft was the Klan's 'Bible,' ethics by which all Klansmen should live by. Imperial Klazik, Brown Harwood, in his introduction speech at the assembly declared, "There will be no failure of

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Klankraft, though Klansmen may fail in their responsibility." The card and the article ended with an invitation, "to become a member of the most powerful secret organization..."⁵

The meeting of State Grand Dragons held in Asheville began on July 16, 1923 at the Langren Hotel. Estimated numbers of Klansmen was well over 100 Imperial officers and included members of the Asheville Klan. Quarrels throughout the nation amongst Klansmen were receiving bad press. An article in the *Citizen* reported the Grand Dragon of Arkansas going after the Imperial Emperor Simmons for the "monetary value" he accrued from new Klan chapters that opened across the country.⁶⁰ Fighting amongst Western North Carolina clubs was "one of the reasons for calling the Kloncilium together in this city, to encourage the

The Asheville Citizen, 8 June 1923.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ **Grob, 4.**

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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strengthening of the local Klan and other Klans in this section of the state.. ."⁶¹ Klan headquarters not only wanted to increase cooperation between the chapters of the area, but also of the nation. Imperial Klazik continued in his introduction speech that all realms (local and state) would have to work together and stand with authorities willing to serve the best interests of the Klan.⁶² In his conclusion, he affirmed that the Klansmen were not going to disappoint the Imperial Wizard and that through unity, they could institute his goals for the Klan.⁶³

The first article on the rally to appear in the *Citizen* was published in June 27, 1923. Information was received from Atlanta that consideration would be discussed at the three-day conference about "Plans for moving the Imperial palace of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan from Atlanta to Asheville."⁶⁴ This is the first and last discussion about changing the home of the Imperial Palace. Confirmation was given that an assembly of Grand Dragons would begin in the city on July 16. The article also proclaimed that a "prominent resident of Asheville, who is affiliated with the Klan, has offered to donate property for the erection of the palace in Asheville."⁶⁵ This report, like most of the reporting on Klan activities in the *Citizen*, was based in gossip and hearsay; the reporter was unsure if the information given was factual. The reporter stated, "the organization here are silent on the plans, this information was obtained on supposedly good authority."⁶⁶ The Klan apparently did not want to discuss internal affairs with the *Citizen*.

The first article on the meeting to appear in the *Times* was published within a day of the conference's start on July 15, 1923. In the *Times*, the article explained that 200 Klansmen would

⁶¹ *The Asheville Times*, 15 July 1923.

⁶² Grob, 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁴ *The Asheville Citizen*, 27 June 1923.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

organize in the city for the next few days; Klansmen were supposed to start arriving in the city that very day. The information supplied in the *Times* was more detailed and not implied as gossip. Important information such as the Langren Hotel was cited as the location of the session. "Members of the Asheville Klan are planning to entertain the visitors and will take an active part in the meeting."⁶⁷ Imperial Wizard Dr. H. W. Evans, next in line after Simmons, was listed to be one of the attendees. The *Times* even went so far as to define a Klan term and thus clarify what a Klonecilium was: "the highest authority in Klan organization and is composed of the chief state
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officers of the order."

In the *Citizen*, no articles were produced in the Monday edition pertaining to the arrival of the Klansmen in town. There was no response from Webb, nor any from the *Citizen's* readers. Coverage was given in Tuesday's paper, the longest into the convention, but the article did not make the front page. Coverage of the rally was printed on pages nine to eleven. The information was general and the reporter only repeated a speech given by the Klan's spokesman. The journalist gave no direct quotes from the lectures and at the beginning of the third paragraph the writer stated "... the Imperial Wizard is said, to have stressed the necessity for Klansmen.. ." ⁶⁷ It was apparent the author was not present at any of the meetings or addresses. In Wednesday's article, a vote was mentioned acknowledging the newly developed WKKK into the order. A number of WKKK members attended the conference.⁷⁰ The last commentary was printed Thursday after the gathering was concluded. It centered primarily on the report given by "The Publicity Man" for the Klan.⁷¹ This also demonstrated the *Citizen's* constant use of other sources

⁶⁷ *The Asheville Times*, 15 July 1923.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *The Asheville Citizen*, 17 July 1923.

⁷⁰ *The Asheville Citizen*, 18 July 1923.

⁷¹ *The Asheville Citizen*, 19 July 1923.

for information and certainly "the publicity man" would relay only what Klan officials wanted distributed to the populace. The KKK at its pinnacle of power was still a secret society. At the end, the *Citizen* referred to the thanks given by the Klan for the press coverage of the forum through their columns. The *Times* does not print a public thanks from the Klan.⁷²

All three articles in the *Times* made the front-page news and with lengthy coverage. Unlike the *Citizen*, the titles of the lectures were not just given, but a brief summary was presented to the reader from the key speeches of the day. It is visibly apparent that the staff of the *Times* was present at many, if not all, addresses. In Monday's publication, Imperial Wizard Dr. H. W. Evans' lecture was methodically reviewed, presenting a glimpse into the assembly for its audience. The *Times* centered on Evans' focus on immigration, and America's need to "curb the flood of undesirable aliens to the United States."⁷³ In the final piece, the *Times* gave readers two presentations reported in detail; immigration was discussed again, the WKKK, and the Klan's contribution in helping and cooperating with law enforcement. One article mentioned Tuesday's night lecture where Mrs. Daisy Barr, a minister from Indiana and a high-ranking officer of the women's sect, spoke to a combined group of men and women. Mrs. Barr's speech was not summarized in the paper.⁷⁴

It is not surprising that the press was discussed at the forum. Dr. H.W. Evans, as well as other officials, responded to the press and its coverage of the Klan all across the nation. In his speech, Evans replied that the Klan needed to stop getting their policies from the papers. The Imperial Wizard claimed, "they are naturally antagonistic."⁷⁵ He believed the papers were

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *The Asheville Times*, 16 July 1923.

⁷⁴ *The Asheville Times*, 18 July 1923.

⁷⁵ Grob, 8.

controlled by Jews and Catholics and the papers could not understand the Klan or its agenda.

Another official, Imperial Night Hawk stated in his lecture that:

Never in History have shrewd newspaper writers and editors so materially misjudged the effect of scientific publicity, over shot their mark, and where they sought to destroy merely buildup and where they tried to annihilate create a firmer foundation.' ⁷⁶

More than any other institution, the media had influenced and increased Klan membership by giving free press and advertisement on a daily basis.⁷⁷ Imperial Night Hawk also attacked some Klan publications, accusing them of also defacing the order: "They fall into error

⁷⁸

of being vicious and place the Klan in the same attitude as its enemies..." Even though Night Hawk started out harshly attacking the media, he did call for a co-operation. He believed that, in every news room, "even in Anti-Klan papers,"⁷⁹ at least one staff member would empathize with KKK principles. Local realms needed to convene with the press and play a greater role. Klansmen should have personal conversations with their local editors, only if they were Protestant and American-born, to explain Klankraft and to have their truth published. Night Hawk believed most editors had an elevated sense of morality and strong beliefs in patriotism; thus, believing new patrons could be won.⁸⁰ Webb's *Citizen* wrote twice as many articles on Klan activities than its counterpart, *The Times*, but the *Times* coverage of the events taking place during the rally of 1923 gave its audience comprehensive reports because its staff actually seemed to attend the meetings. Since Webb was not a member of the society, an invitation was not extended to him or perhaps maybe he did not want to attend because of his personal objections to the order's backward ideologies.

⁷⁷

Ibid., 93. Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 96.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 96-98.

After the chaos of the previous year, Asheville continued to feel the after shocks in 1924. Richard Starnes, a Professor at Western North Carolina University, stated in his dissertation that after the convention, the following year city officials outlawed blacks from using the fountains downtown and a second fountain was furnished for the black citizens, but the city neglected to notify the black community. Of course, conflicts occurred and a few "white men goaded blacks into using the white fountains and then beat them severely. The *Asheville Citizen* was incensed by these instances.."81

It was the next year in 1925, Webb exhibited in clear fashion his progressive values in the case of Alvin Mansel, a black youth, who was convicted of raping a thirty five year old white woman in Asheville and sentenced to death. This case, in the eyes of the town's elite citizens, harbored too many inconsistencies for them to ignore. Angus Wilton McLean was Governor of North Carolina at the time and acknowledged a clemency submitted to him on behalf of the defendant's counsel to add new evidence to the case, information that could change the verdict. Only the Governor had the authority to apply the new material and change the outcome of the accused. Governor McLean found it hard to disregard the request of six jurors who "tried the case" calling for "[him] to commute the sentence of the prisoner to life imprisonment"⁸² instead of the death penalty. In addition to the appeal from the six jurors, the Governor received "either written.. .or signed petitions asking" that the "death penalty not.. be inflicted in this case because of the doubt which they feel as to the guilt of the prisoner." The pleas made on behalf of the accused were all by " disinterested intelligent white men and women of the highest character and

⁸¹ Richard Dale Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* Ph.D. diss. , Auburn University, 1999, 139.

⁸² North Carolina Historical Commission, Public Papers and Letters of Angus Wilton Mclean: Governor of North Carolina, 1925-1929 (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Company, 1931) ,754.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 754-755.

standing."⁸⁴ Charles A. Webb was among the list of men and women in McLean's patron letter. The Governor, after witnessing the protest conducted by " the best citizenry of Buncombe County,"⁸⁵ and as well opening his own investigation into the matter, changed Mansel's sentence from death to life imprisonment. McLean mentioned some citizens had expressed a "full pardon" of Mansel⁸⁶ but the Governor believed releasing a possibly guilty man had grave consequences.

Southern Progressivism during the twenties was about alleviating the lot of the common man, by improving life in their section of the country thorough the restructuring of numerous traditional establishments in Southern life; but many Progressives, as historian Dewey Grantham claimed, only wanted to "soften" racial interactions within the confines of the segregated South.⁸⁷ Southern Progressives asserted by Grantham and historian Arthur Link were middle class professionals⁸⁸ that included school teachers, small business owners, and editors who promoted the reforms of the twenties wanting to advance their own capitalistic and professional objectives within a controlled atmosphere.⁸⁹ However, a small minority of Progressive did push the transformation of Southern society for the right reasons and not personal ones. Grantham did say that those attempts were still "restricted by the bounds of white orthodoxy."⁹⁰ He continues later in his article and proclaims that more studies of Southern Progressivism would be

Ibid., 756.

Ibid., 755.

Ibid., 758.

⁸⁷ Dewey W. Grantham, "The Contours of Southern Progressivism," *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 5(1981): 1048.

⁸⁸ Link, 836.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1037.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1055.

"welcome additions"⁹¹ to the prose of this subject. Asheville's liberal thinkers of the twenties including Charles Webb could be a start for Western North Carolina.

By today's standards, Webb would not be considered the poster boy of Liberalism, but his words and actions placed him on a different path compared to the average everyday citizen of the twenties. John Kneebone purported that in relation to his peers, Webb fit in with the crowd, most intellectual and well to do men in the twenties believed "The southern evils that liberals opposed seemed to them uniquely lower-class phenomena born of ignorance. The South's civilized minority—the decent, educated southerners— had a patriotic duty to fight back. Yet they employed the ideals of modern liberalism..."⁹² Perhaps this is true in most but not all cases. Webb's maturity into the moderate thinker of the twenties began at Chapel Hill, before the birth of the second Klan even reached its height of political power and influence and before it became a national threat to the stability of the country. Progressive reform during this period was about advancing the South as well.⁹³ "Economic advances promised to bring the South " a larger point of view," help diminish "prejudice and emotionalism in Southern life," and further national integration."⁹⁴ He knew the country could only move forward in the right direction and at the right speed with all in tow. He seemed to hold on to that idiom when he asked his fellow classmates in his Class Oration to be like the 'croakers'. For 'croakers' stay true to themselves, they are their brother's keeper, they voice their concerns, and take the road least traveled to enjoy the ride.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1057.

⁹² John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the issue of Race, 1920-1944*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 27.

⁹³ Grantham, 1038.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

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The Asheville(N. C.) Citizen, 1921-1923.

This source was central in demonstrating Webb's Progressive views; and how they filtered though into the reporting of the Rosewood Massacre and the Ku Klux Klan Rally in 1923.

The Asheville Magazine (Asheville: Asheville Magazine Co, 1907)

This source was minor but gave me background information on Webb's childhood up to his start in the political arena. It was a short biography on Webb printed in this issue of the magazine.

The Asheville(N.C.) Times, 1923.

The Times was also central in my use of primary source material because it highlighted the *Citizen's* liberal reporting of the events in 1923 in comparison to the *Times* articles.

Birth of a Nation, produced and directed by D.W. Griffith. 94 min. Kartes Video, 1984.
videocassette.

The film was not a major source as well but it was key in explaining the origins of the Ku Klux Klan's rebirth; and how instrumental the film's impact was on the Klan's creation and the nation.

Gerald N. Grob, ed. *Papers Read at the Meeting of Grand Dragons Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* New York: Arno Press, 1977.

The lectures at the Klan Rally held in Asheville were all published in this book, therefore making it essential in my paper, especially the speeches on the Media.

New York Times, 1946.

A minor source but was useful in displaying the reach that the Ku Klux Klan had. This organization influenced prominent writers of the day, who in turn influenced their audience.

North Carolina Historical Commission, *Public Papers and Letters of Angus Wilton Mclean: Governor of North Carolina, 1925-1929* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Company, 1931)

This book was used to illustrate Webb's liberal mindedness even though the case of Alvin Mansel did not take place in 1923, it still was a great if not the best example of Progressive thought exhibited by Webb.

Southern Historical Collection, UNC, Wilson Library, Manuscript Department, Box number 3370. Webb, Charles Aurelius Speeches, 1889-1947. Folders 1-5.

The Collection of Charles Webb's speeches was another vital source in not only finding primary references but also background information from his graduation that included a copy of his graduation program with his entire 'Class Oration' inside.

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