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The KLAN Goes to Church

by Kate Jackson Lewis

When I was a teenager, a revival meeting was held once a year, usually after the crops were laid by and before harvest time. The custom was to build a brush-arbor out of poles laid crosswise over corner posts placed securely in the ground. The entire structure was then covered with leafy branches to keep out the sun. Split logs served as seats with one placed at the front for a "Mourner's Bench."

A pump-style organ was placed to one side of the front to accompany the hymn singing. A center podium, made by anchoring a post in the ground with a slice of wood across the top, served for the evangelist's Bible.

People came from miles around in wagons, hacks, buggies, on horses—some on foot. Pallets were spread all around the outside edges and between the benches for sleeping children. Still farther back,

the wagons provided seating for some who didn't wish to sit under the arbor. Horses' reins were secured to fences or nearby saplings.

Sometimes a group of rowdies disrupted the services by whooping, whistling, or hooting like owls. At times they even mounted their horses and rode pell-mell around the arbor. Obviously, this behavior disturbed the speaker and caused great concern among those who had come to listen or participate in the services.

One night following the worst outbreak, a group of white-robed men filed in and formed a line in front of the congregation. One of the group, acting as a spokesman, made a warning speech to the rowdies. He minced no words. His threats included severe punishment to anyone who created a disturbance at any time during the remainder of the revival.

After services that night, stories of tarring, feathering, even hanging, were told all over the community. The people agreed that this group of robed men was definitely a return of the Klan.

I remember that I was frozen with fright though I kept thinking that I detected a familiar note in the spokesman's voice—a bit of Irish brogue. My brother-in-law was a full-blooded Irishman. Could it have been...? When I arrived home with my sister, I asked, "Where is Joe?" Her answer was that he stayed at home because he wasn't feeling well. As I walked outside toward the outdoor privy, I glanced toward a small washshed. I found the evidence. There on a bench was the worn sheet with eye-holes and all. I kept his secret and the revival continued undisturbed.

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