

Carnegie Oral Histories Project  
on the 1923 Ku Klux Klan invasion of Carnegie

The Carnegie Oral History Project Committee, 2024

## Carnegie Oral Histories Project: Introduction

Walker Evans, Library Director of the Andrew Carnegie Free Library & Music Hall

On August 25, 1923, thousands of members of the Ku Klux Klan descended upon the small Western Pennsylvania steel town of Carnegie in a show of force and intimidation. The night of chaos and violence that followed would leave its marks in the memory of Carnegie's residents for many years to come.

A century later, the Andrew Carnegie Free Library & Music Hall was proud to partner with the Senator John Heinz History Center, the Historical Society of Carnegie, and author Bill Campbell and artist Bizhan Khodabandeh to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the night when citizens of Carnegie stood up to the Klan, driving them out of the Borough and weakening their influence in Western Pennsylvania.

In a moderated panel discussion, Campbell (born and raised in Carnegie) Khodabandeh discussed their graphic novel *The Day the Klan Came to Town* (PM Press, 2021), which dramatizes the 1923 Klan invasion. President Dan McGrogan and Secretary Jeff Keenan of the Historical Society of Carnegie shared a historical account of the event, as well as their reflections on its resonance and legacy within the community's memory.

Following this discussion, audience member Alan James of nearby Presto, PA approached me with a compelling suggestion. As we considered the lasting impact of the Klan invasion on Carnegie's identity as a community, why not gather more perspectives of the Borough's residents by way of an oral history project?

Dan and Jeff from the Historical Society were excited about the idea, as was Historical Society Director Carol Dlugos. In a stroke of serendipity, the Library had recently hired Ana Giampa as a part-time circulation clerk. Through a course in public history at her alma mater Washington and Jefferson College, Ana had recently designed and completed *Dynamic Decades: W&J and the City of Washington in the Midst of Social Change*, an oral history project which focused on interviewing college alumni and community members about the pursuit of racial equity. Her experiences made her an ideal colleague for this project.

Because a century had elapsed since the Klan invasion, we knew that we wouldn't be able to interview any community members who witnessed the event first-hand. Rather, our

focus became the way that the people of Carnegie understood this event in the context of their own history. How was the story passed down by those who did participate? Was it common knowledge, or something spoken of in hushed tones? How did members of the community feel about this dramatic incident in the past?

By the end of 2023, we had prepared a written agreement for our interviewees to sign, and we began to advertise for participants. We hoped to interview a representative cross-section of Carnegie residents from diverse backgrounds, and advertised via social media, emails to attendees of the August panel discussion, and direct outreach to Black churches in Carnegie as well as the historical societies of surrounding communities. While we ultimately only managed to connect with four interviewees, we believe that their memories and testimony contribute to a fuller understanding of the lingering effects of a definitive moment in Carnegie's past. Interviews were conducted by Ana Giampa in the Library building during a period from February through April of 2024. Sincerest thanks to all of our participants.

The Carnegie Oral History Project Committee:

Carol Dlugos  
Walker Evans  
Ana Giampa  
Alan James  
Jeff Keenan  
Dan McGrogan

Interviews conducted by:

Ana Giampa

Interview subjects:

Anonymous  
Joan Bryan  
Jim Dawson  
Diane O'Malley

Carnegie Oral Histories Project

Transcript: Anonymous, interviewed by Ana Giampa

Ana Giampa (A): I've started recording. You are an anonymous participant - can you just confirm for the record that you have signed the agreement as "Anonymous"?

Participant (P): Yes, I have.

A: All right. I have five guided questions that we can use, but I also see that you have come very prepared with materials, so this conversation [can be] completely led by you. I just have these for consistency. The first question is just establishing the basis of your connection to Carnegie, if you [could] discuss your relationship to the Carnegie community.

P: Okay. My mother was born and raised in Carnegie on Wabash Avenue, which is right off [the] bridge. One side of the [railroad] bridge is in Scott Township and it's Forsythe Road across the bridge, and [when] you are in Carnegie it changes its name to Chestnut. She was born almost at the corner of Chestnut and Wabash. Her parents were Rose and Henry Poppelreiter.

Henry was a superintendent of the coal mill, Superior Steel. He had about 300 men who worked under him during the 1920's up until the 1940's, when he went to Michigan in relationship to processing steel at a mill in Detroit. Over the years, my grandmother Rose Poppelreiter and my mother would talk, reminisce about times and things that happened in Carnegie. Not bad things - it's a small community - [they'd] talk about who they saw [in] Carnegie, down [on the] street. In Carnegie you learn, like [in] most small communities, that you do not talk bad about your neighbors, because either you went to school with [them], you went to church with [them], you were related to [them], or someone you knew was related to your next-door neighbor and you didn't want to say anything bad.

During the Ku Klux Klan [rally], my mother was approximately eight years old, as best I can figure it out. She was the second child. She had an older brother and a younger brother. The best I could figure out the years when they were born, my mother's oldest brother was approximately 11 years old that August, my mother was eight, and I'm not quite sure about her younger brother. He was maybe a year old, or [maybe] he was born the following year. But he didn't seem to have any memories. It was always my mother and my grandmother

talking about [the Klan rally], because it was a memory that was clear til the day they both died.

A: Okay.

P: I brought some pictures. The picture that I'm making reference to is the snow-covered bridge. These pictures are from my mother's album and unfortunately, they are not marked. I'm assuming this has to be in the 1930s or 40s. When you look to the right, that is Forsythe Road, and across the bridge you're in Carnegie and it's Chestnut Street.

This is Wabash Avenue, and you will see a car parked in front - you have to look very carefully because of the snow. The car is parked in front of the sidewalk, and there's two steps leading down onto the main sidewalk. The corner here, tust out of range, is the corner of the house's front porch. This is a close [up] picture of the porch, and you will see in the extreme, [a] portion of the bridge. [My mother and grandmother] always called it the Wabash Bridge because it was over what they considered the Wabash railroad tracks.

This area...[was] called Johnny Bull Hill, because a lot of the English people lived up there. A lot of these people worked for the railroad, or they worked for Superior Steel - which was the biggest industry, steel-wise, in Carnegie at the time. There were other steel mills but Superior had the most people working there. If you look up where I'm pointing with my finger in the picture, there are now houses up there. That is where most people will make reference to, [where] they would see the burning crosses. This is where they were burning the crosses that night.

This [photo] is [from] the 1940's, this is 20 plus years after [the Klan rally], and there's still no houses up there. This was Forsythe's property and they had cows and things up there. They had animals. This was a view that [my mother and grandmother] saw. That's how close they were.

In reference to what Judge [Ruggero] Aldisert had written [in his book *Road to the Robes: A Federal Judge Recollects Young Years and Early Times*], he was actually born four years after my mother, so he would have been four years old and he didn't have any memory [of the rally]. My mother was eight and she had memories. [Aldisert] was born on a street further down on Chestnut - right around where the road comes down, there's a slight bend and it's up in that area.

My mother and grandmother were closer, and my grandfather and two uncles were [also] closer to the area. Also, that area, Johnny Bull Hill, was Scotch Presbyterian, Scotch-Irish. Down on Dow Street, at Dow and Lincoln, was a little mom-and-pop store. It was owned by a family of Blacks. We didn't have supermarkets like we have today, but if you needed a loaf of bread, lunch meat, [or] milk, you would go there to get that and you pay for it on tick [on credit]. When payday came, you would go down and pay your bill.

They were Catholics. There was only two Catholic families up there, and they were in the midst of all of this. The night of the march, they had observed the family - this is how close they were. And you can see, up here this is where I'm talking about, the burning of the crosses.

A: Yes, it's very close.

P: Very, very, very close. I'd say maybe 200 steps, 300 at the most.

A: Yes, definitely.

P: I don't think anybody was closer.

A: Yeah, I don't think anyone could have been closer than that, except for the people [at the Klan rally] themselves.

P: And this is the back of the house.

A: Yes.

P: It's best I could get. This is the side of house, and there is a tree in this picture. And in one of the other pictures, you will see that same tree. If you look, you will see the tree, and that's the hillside.

A: That is really close.

P: Yes, yes. That's why I said, I know there's no place closer. I know that. Because on the other side of that bridge was the Forsythe house. Which is still there. And there was nobody else.

A: Yes.

P: There was a house next door to my grandparents - it was on the corner, and they were the second house. My grandparents' house was a yellow buff, and I went past it a couple weeks ago, and they put siding on it.

In reading the book, *Road to the Robes*, there are a couple things I agree with Judge Aldisert [about]. There are a few stories [that] are always consistent, with a few minor things that may or may not be true.

My family had observed - when I say family, I mean my grandparents and my uncle, my mother's oldest brother and [my mother] - [that] this was something unusual. The people were coming into Carnegie and a lot of them were coming up from the train depot down in Carnegie. A lot more...didn't need to take a train, they lived in the area. But they did march up to Chestnut Street, and it was a straight-through shot as you could see. That night, more and more and more people [were gathering], and they were having this ceremony, and my grandfather apparently was getting very nervous because the Catholics and the Black people and anybody they consider a foreigner was not welcomed.

I must say this for the people of Carnegie, even though they're all dead: they were very nice to the Catholics, and in reference to the two that I just mentioned, up in Johnny Bull Hill, and Judge Aldisert - they had a little bit more power, although they did not realize it. But the night when [the Klansmen] decided to march, Chris Kiesling, who was the chief of police at that time and remained so for many years afterwards, had only been on the job for about two years. And as I'm sure you're well aware, he was also a Ku Kluxer.

A: I was not.

P: Yes, he was. I'm sure his family is still here...but he was, I swear on the Bible. As I said, there was power. They were very nice, very polite. What was said, [was said] behind your back, and if you read [*Road to the Robes*], this is what he says. They caused you no harm.

My grandfather had 300 men working underneath him. This was during the Depression, and they were not going to harm or disrupt or do anything to my grandfather because he was their boss. Years later it finally made sense, but at the time it did not. The house that [my grandparents] had built on Wabash Avenue was only a couple years old - my grandparents had struggled and saved and they finally built a house on Wabash...there's the porch set back, and then right over here, there's part of the house that stuck out, and it had seven windows. That's where they were looking out the windows and they're seeing these Ku Kluxers going up the road, across the bridge and then up the hill.

Chris Kiesling had come, and he had blocked off [the bridge] with horses, and the police car, I guess. When they came across the bridge, they had to come down and they had to turn, they had to turn left. [In] the original plan, the Ku Kluxers wanted to march straight down Chestnut Street, into the Main Street of Carnegie. Down in Carnegie was a brand new Italian church called Holy Souls, and the [congregation was] very, very proud of their church. They had struggled, and when they had come over from the old country, the original place where they had their church was in an old barn...They were quite proud of their church.

The majority of the Ku - I hate to say Ku Kluxers, but that's what they were called then - came down and made the left onto Wabash Avenue. Some of the people - and there were women there - they got the OK from the Grand Wizard to march through Carnegie, that they were gonna make their big stand. Or, they weren't looking for a fight, but they were looking for, how should I say it, valuation? Or, that everybody in Carnegie would get rid of the "undesirables," and they were going to go after the Catholic Churches.

They did not have any permission, or so they thought, the Ku Kluxers. The railroad is down this embankment. The Ku Kluxers went down here, they would cross here. There were several thousand people, leading cars across. Some of them walked along the railroad tracks because when you got down to Liberty and Dow Avenue, where it veers off - and this is where I disagree with Judge Aldisert - if you follow this route, you'd have to take this down, and the road comes to a fork. Wabash starts at this bridge and it ends at this Y. To the left, slightly, is [an avenue] called Franklin. To the right, it would go down to Lincoln. Lincoln goes like this and comes down to Washington Avenue, approximately where the Boys and Girls Club is.

The school that [Aldisert] makes reference to is the Lincoln School. It doesn't make sense. Maybe some of them did [go there], who didn't know where they were going, from out of town, but people in Carnegie would know better. They would walk down this way until they got to the fork, veer slightly to the left and by the left is a little bridge, and there's a little tunnel and when you go through the tunnel, you'd have to make a left-hand turn and this would be Arch Street. And this is approximately where Carnegie Park would be - [this is] the short cut.

The people who came down the hillside and were on the tracks, they walked from this street down to the next street. It would be maybe an eighth of a mile. As a child I rode my bike from my grandmother's house and she had no worries...about my sister and I. So adults would have no problem.

They came down to Washington Avenue from Franklin, and right at Franklin and Washington is the most direct route. That would be approximately across the street from the apartment building that's called Governor's House Apartments. They would have to make a left-hand turn, and go up Washington Avenue. At the end of Washington, you go around - at that time it was not built, but there was going to be a future high school there called Clark High School. Right now, this is approximately where Aldi's and Subway are. This is the route that they're taking, and [Aldisert is] making mention of going that route.

You'll see there's a Hope Hollow Road at one end, and there's Washington Avenue, and then you turn on to Carothers Avenue. And [Aldisert] makes reference to the fact that there was a brand-new church, but it was for the Polish. The Catholics had four different nationality churches. We had one for the Italians, one for the Polish, one for the Germans and one for the Irish. Only because these people had come over and they were familiar with their own language and they built their own churches. The Polish had built their church, and it was actually a two-story facility. The school was on the bottom, I believe, and the church was on the top. They built two things - they wanted to have a school and a church. And it was a wood frame building.

The Ku Kluxers were too new and they just bypassed that. They [went] further down into Carothers Avenue and they got to the bridge. On one side of the bridge is Scott Township, which is by the firemen's club...and then across that bridge is where the incident occurred - approximately where the Szafranski- Eberlein Funeral Home is, down to the old Saint Luke's Church or Saint Raphael the Archangel Parish. This is where the melee had started.

The Irish and some of the Germans [had] two churches [which were] only half a block apart. Saint Joseph's was torn down - it's now an empty lot...

It was always that story that my mother and grandmother [would] talk about. Chris Kiesling was up at the intersection of Wabash Avenue and Chestnut Street blocking and making the parade turn left, and then down at the end of Franklin there were police cars there, having them turn left. I'm assuming that some of these ones that went down Lincoln, they would go down that steep hill, and they're several blocks away. The way the people from Carnegie would go, they went straight. They also had to make a left-hand turn, but they had to walk about four or five blocks and the ones who [went] down Franklin they had to be in the lead because that was the shortest.

A: We went over who told you about the invasion. Do you remember when you were told, how old you were, or is it just a story that your grandma had mentioned?

P: My grandfather died in 1950. She owned the house. Over the years, my grandfather [and] my grandmother went up to Detroit, and the house had enough rooms that my mother's oldest brother - this is during World War II, he was in the service and he had a wife and two daughters, [and] they lived downstairs. They had four rooms and a bath, and then upstairs my grandparents lived. But they would come back and forth.

This was during the Depression or World War II, [and they would come back] to check on the house. My uncle was there for a short time before he was called into the service, and my aunt - they would come back because they now had two sons. The son-in-law [was] in the service, and my grandfather was the only male of the family, so they would come back and check on their daughter and their two granddaughters and their daughter-in-law...and then later on my mother's youngest brother moved in upstairs and my grandmother moved downstairs. My other uncle had built a house next door, which is where this little girl is sitting - where this yard is, there is now a house that my uncle had built. So, even sitting in their yard, they could still see, that's how close they were.

Yes, they would talk about it and they would reminisce about the neighbors there, and it was always good. Even though they knew later on, they suspected. My mother would talk about the time very innocently, She and one of the neighbors, little girls, were up in the attic of this one house and they were playing bride, and the mother came upstairs into the attic and they were told they had to come downstairs, they weren't to play bride anymore. I can't make that anymore clear.

My mother would talk about that, and she was too little to understand, until much later. She played with the little girl and didn't know, neither did the little girl's mother and [neither

did] the little girl. So they would talk about it. It was something. My grandmother would go to church with us. My mother would take her shopping. We had my grandmother and my uncle and his wife up for Christmas dinner and all that. So they'd be talking about the neighborhood, "Oh, I saw Susie Q down," "Oh, what's new with her?" "Oh, how's her husband?" [There] was never any - what am I trying to say? Animosity? Or anything of that nature. It was, you don't talk bad about anybody.

A: My next question is, was the KKK incident something that many of your peers learned about at a young age as well? Or is it something that you [and your peers] ever talked about? Or is it something that your family told you about in private?

P: No, I don't know if the children that I went to school with [knew about it]. At this time, [in] the high schools that I went to, we had different class members from different parts. Not everybody was from Carnegie. My mother and dad [were] from Scott Township, so when they got married, they [moved to] Carnegie, but I went to high school and grade school in Carnegie.

Did we talk about it? No. Did we learn about it in school? No. What other people's parents and grandparents talked about to children my age, I don't know. But no, it was just that sometimes you would come in on a conversation and they would stop talking. Well, OK, you weren't interested anyway. Whatever they were talking about, you're in grade school and more worried about spelling tests than what they were talking about, you know. But no, we didn't talk about it. I'm not even [sure] anybody was aware. And maybe their parents didn't know, because they would've been my mother's age.

A: I genuinely thank you. I'm going to stop recording.

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Transcript: Joan Bryan, interviewed by Ana Giampa

Ana Giampa (A): For the recording, just for consistency, can you confirm your name?

Joan Bryan (J): Joan Bryan.

A: Thank you. And can you confirm that you have signed the oral history agreement?

J: Yes.

A: All right, thank you. So, we've talked a bit before I started recording, would you just discuss your relationship to Carnegie? You grew up here - just some stuff about your life in Carnegie?

J: Well, like I said, I was born over 92 years ago, and I was born in the McDermott Brothers Funeral Home. And I'm trying to think of what street that is down there because I don't know...

A: You went to school here?

J: I went to Saint Luke's High School. All of my brothers - four brothers and my sister - went to Saint Luke's High School and grade school. And my dad worked for the McDermott Brothers Funeral Home. That's how he told me most of the things that went on about the Klu Klux Klan. And it's all things that he told me because he was involved with it with Paddy McDermott.

A: How and when did you first hear about the invasion? Your father told you, but do you remember how old you were when you found out about it?

J: He talked about it probably when I was about five or six years old, and it seemed like all through my life, every once in a while, he would start remembering things and he wanted me to know about it.

A: So it seems like it was very memorable.

J: I was older too, so that's why I can remember because I was also older when he started to talk about it. Probably in my early teens.

A: Yes.

J: So that's why I remember, you know?

A: It seems like it was something memorable to your father.

J: It was because of him being involved with Paddy McDermott. He worked for him for years. He was the man that went out and got the bodies.

A: OK. Kind of a tough job, I imagine.

J: Yes, but we lived upstairs for quite a few years, and then we moved up to Boquet Street because my mother was left a house up there.

A: All right. [Are] there any specific stories you remember your father telling about the experience? Maybe his feelings about the experience as well?

J: I think what he was so upset about, being as we were Catholic, and the Klu Klux Klan was wanting to burn the crosses and it was the church that we belonged to - Saint Luke's

Church, which is now Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, but then it was Saint Luke's, and it was Saint Luke's grade school and high school. But I think that's what upset him the most, because we were Catholic and that's what they wanted to do was burn the crosses on the ground.

A: Did he see any of the members in the streets or anything like that?

J: Yes, my dad was right there.

A: OK.

J: That's what he said. He said he was right there with everything that was going on. But no one remembered - when the person [was] shot, no one remembered who did that...or if they did know, they didn't say anything.

A: You said you learned about it at first maybe at about five or six. Is this something that a lot of people your age learned about around the same time as well? When you were five or six, do you think that your peers might know about the event?

J: Well, you know, you just hear people talking...you don't really retain it. I think it was later on when I realized what was going on, but that would be too young. But I still remember...first going to school...in first grade [and hearing] people talking. But it was later on when [my dad] sat down with me and was telling me about the experiences that went on with the Klu Klux Klan.

A: We have a few interviews of different people today, and you have a lot of connections to the Historical Society and others who came to the event that the library hosted [*The Day the Klan Came to Town: A Panel Discussion*, August 23, 2023]. Do you think that a lot of your peers learned about it the same way - from a parent telling them about it, or do you think they learned about it differently, from talking to other people their age?

J: You know, I really don't know. I don't remember talking about this to anyone else. It just seemed like it was something in our house, you know. And maybe it was because my dad worked down there [that he] was involved with it. I didn't know you he wanted his name or not, but he worked down there with Paddy McDermott. John McIntyre [was his name]. That's about the only thing - I don't remember discussing it with anyone else.

A: When you first learned about the event, or at least the first time you remember really talking about it with your father, how did it make you feel to know that there was this attack on an aspect of your identity that was supposed to be violent?

J: Yes, it was, as far as I know. You know what? I felt, why would someone want to burn a cross on someone else's church? I mean, I didn't care what church it was, but why would you want to just pick out the Catholic Church to do that, you know? I just didn't think it was right. And you just wonder about some people and how they think about stuff like that.

A: Yes, I understand that. It has to be kind of hard...

J: A hate. It has to be a hate, you know, to do that.

A: Yes, definitely. I think that's something very, very common that a lot of people feel: you don't understand how someone could have so much hate.

J: It's just like the Jewish community in Pittsburgh, with hate, and that's what it is.

A: Do you remember some feelings that your dad shared about the event? Did he have some feelings about not understanding what could motivate someone?

J: Well, I just know that he was glad that he was involved with trying to prevent something like that [from] happening. And that's why he was there with his boss Paddy McDermott

and all the other people that were there - I don't know how many people were there in defense of the Ku Klux Klan walking over the bridge from Glendale.

A: Thinking about the legacy of this incident and the legacy of Carnegie, what do you think that we can learn? Because what I'm hearing from you, and something that I'm learning about this incident, is how resilient Carnegie is. About the people who were very passionate about dispelling this hate group. So, do you have any perspective about how this incident reflects the legacy of Carnegie?

J: No, I love Carnegie. And I've been here, like I said, since 1931, and I always feel safe walking the streets, and it just seems like I wouldn't want to live anywhere [else] - I mean, I lived in Collier Township, right on the line of Carnegie and Collier, when I was raising my children. But when I decided to retire, I retired here in Carnegie at the Honus Wagner [Apartments]. But I always feel safe in the town.

A: Yes, and I think a lot of that safety does come from the community members who are willing to make it a safe place.

J: You know everyone. When you have been living here all your life and you know so many people, you feel that you can walk in any store and you just know everyone. And with me having ten children, you know so many more people than a lot of people. It seems like no matter where I go, it's "Hi, Mrs. Bryan" - this is where I'm content to be.

A: Is there anything else that you want to add about anything relating to the event?

J: No. I think about it.

A: In that case, all the guided questions that I have written down have been answered. I think everything that we've talked about and that you've talked about with everyone else in the project thus far has been stated for the record. So, I'm going to go ahead and stop recording now.

J: Ok, that's fine.

A: Thank you for your participation.

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Transcript: Jim Dawson, interviewed by Ana Giampa

Ana Giampa (A): Okay, so if you would just confirm your name for me...?

Jim Dawson (J): Jim Dawson.

A: And just confirm for me that you've signed the oral history agreement?

J: I did.

A: Thank you. So, I'm just going to also enter into the record that I have this document here which is a transcript of a walking tour that talks about the KKK event. Would you like this back?

J: No.

A: Okay, so I'll keep this and this will be part of kind of the package of materials that you've given us, so thank you for that. I have a few guided questions here with me today. I would like to follow them, but it's also very loose so it's more important to hear what you're talking about. So, I just would like to start by discussing your relationship to the town of Carnegie.

J: I was born in 1939 in the city of Pittsburgh and lived my first four years in Sheridan. My dad built a house out in Robinson right off of Steubenville Pike. Bet my mother - the family is totally from Carnegie - they moved here turn of the century from Latrobe. It was Francis Stein, and my grandmother's maiden name was Mary Ann Hoover. They lived at 518 6th Avenue, Cabbage Hill. We spent a lot of time visiting there, and it's an easy drive from Robinson over there to come and chill.

Additionally, my wife grew up on Campbells Run Road. Her father worked in a mill and that mill closed - Crucible Steel out in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh - and he opened a nursery out there, selling shrubs. Her father's name was Sarvis and he was originally from

Heidelberg, but her mother was named Mary Solominsky, from Lexington Court in Carnegie. So we visited there often. They actually could walk out there - it was about two or three miles.

In addition to that, Carnegie really from 1890 to 1965 was really a commercial center so we did a lot of shopping here in Carnegie - and in fact, it was the spot where we did our shopping for groceries and clothing, and everything. So it was doing well. You think of Carnegie today as being a suburb of Pittsburgh - which it is - but from 1890 to 1965 or 1970, it was a center itself that people from Robinson, Moon Run... perial, Oakdale, Bridgeville, Muse, all those coal towns used as their center - as we did for shopping and entertainment.

I'm bouncing around, I know, but I still remember that we'd come in here often to go to a movie, and the [theater] we went to when I was 10, 12, 14, was the Liberty Theater, which is right there on East Main and Mary. I think there's a pizza shop in there now [Sunset Pizza and Grille], but it featured cowboy movies. I think we did that at least monthly, maybe more, so it's all good memories of Carnegie.

Even though I literally didn't live in Carnegie, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother up there at 518 6th Avenue. I'm a typical Pittsburgher. My father was 100% Irish and my mother 100% German. The Germans came here though in 1836 to Latrobe. We think that they were part carpenters and barn builders, with Boniface Wimmer who was the founder of Saint Vincent's College. We think they had something to do with the building up there and, and as I mentioned, my grandfather was a carpenter who moved here at the turn of the century and unfortunately died in 1912 of tuberculosis.

My mother had a twin sister. She was the youngest, she and her twin Madeline had four older brothers. All lived here their entire lives in Carnegie. Two of them were carpenters and two worked in the steel mill, so I'm familiar with the closing of the Superior Mill. Superior Mill was probably the biggest employer. I think was 1100 employees, and you probably have in your records, they got sold maybe in 1956, 57 to, to Copperweld Steel. They made a lot of the copper shavings for casings for the Korean War, but right after that, they wanted to make some improvements and to bring the mill a little more up to date with some modernization of equipment. That was resisted by the union. Unfortunately, they closed it, I think in 1962. So it was a big blow to the city.

Regarding the Ku Klux Klan, I just recently read this book I got for Christmas from my daughter. She knows I'm interested in the Klan. It's by Timothy Egan, who's a well-known author. He's done a dozen books, but this is *A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them*. It's an actual factual story

about the Klan activity in basically Indiana but the heartland, and a guy named DC Stevenson who was the principal Klan wizard there on that end. He worked closely with the national Klan Wizard Hiram Evans - he was a dentist in Dallas, but he was headquartered in Atlanta.

But the Klan really was frightening, and they had designs to really take over the country, in a political sense. They worked hard to get congressmen, statesmen, judges and everything, to be part of their network. In this book, there are several references to Carnegie and to the actual march, [which occurred on] the 25th of August 1923. It's a hundred, almost 101 years ago.

They were bivouacked at the Forsythe Farm, which we all know as the Carnegie Park, but it's extended. I know those houses to the left which are [from the] 1950s, were part of the farm. I'm not certain, but the farm could have extended maybe all the way up to Greentree or Greentree Road. There were 10,000 Klansman there, to include Hiram Evans, the [Imperial Wizard] from Atlanta. They were anti-Black, but this march wasn't necessarily anti-Black, it was anti-immigrant. They were really opposed to the Irish, the Germans, the Eastern Europeans... The Polish had taken the mill jobs, the jobs in the mines and the mills and the railroads, and Carnegie was a main target. Back then there were 12,000 people who lived here in Carnegie, virtually all working for those industries.

That evening was a Saturday evening, the 25<sup>th</sup>, and [the Klan] purposely decided to take the route they did, which was coming down the Forsythe Road, over the railroad bridge, make a left onto Wabash, right on Station and then [it] turns right into Lincoln. Down to Lincoln, down to Washington, go West on Washington until you get to Carothers. They wanted to do that because you had the Polish church up there, Saint Ignatius, and you go down a little farther and just over the bridge to the left was Saint Joseph, the German Catholic Church, which was my mother's church. That's been [torn] down now for about 20 years. Interesting church, as an aside - very pretty, very attractive. But the first floor was the schoolhouse, and you walked up steps to the church - a typical Gothic-style church [which] was very nice. And in fact, I carried two or three caskets up and down those steps, so I'm familiar with that route.

The Klansmen marched right down to the bridge. It's hard to imagine Carothers Avenue with 10,000 of them, but they did. They were stopped there by John Conley, who was the [burgess] of Carnegie, and the police chief [Chris] Kiesling. They stopped and said, "You had no permit to come in." They said, "To hell with you." Boom, right, right through.

But the residents here, they weren't fearful - they were angry. They met them right there, if you could envision, right on Third Street, [at] Third Avenue. That's where that Salvato's

studio is [Philip Salvato's 3<sup>rd</sup> Street Gallery]. Beautiful building, by the way - it was a former hardware, and it's got the Roman brick in there...it's a very attractive building.

I had four uncles there. My 4 uncles were Edward Stein, George Stein, Verner Stein and Carl Stein. They were born in 1899, 1901, 1903 and 1905. So, they were all in that 16-to-21 age group, and they got rocks or the cinders from the railroad up there. At one time, we had like 28 trains stopped up there - there was a big railroad. They got those stones there and they pelted them, but there were some people shot too and one Klansman got killed. He was relatively new - I mean he was just inducted up there into [the Klan]. His name's Thomas Abbott from Atlasburg, and Atlasburg is on Route 18 right near Burgettstown. It's a nice old country town up there, originally a mining [town], but a lot of hunting going on.

But anyway, he got shot and killed. They saw a guy they thought was [the shooter], his name was Paddy McDermott. But he was never found guilty. But the Klansman, according to this book that I read, they really used that as a recruiting tool, that one of their men got killed by a "radical," so to speak. But they turned them back, 10,000 [Klansmen]. They went back up there and licked their wounds and that was that. I can almost envision, and I'm not that old, but just for the record I'll be 85 here in about 3 weeks -

A: Happy early birthday.

J: I thank you for that. So, it's very meaningful to me, and I try to stay on top of it. It's still difficult to understand. Not to talk politics here, but there is something similar with the MAGA group, and it's sad. They have to research history a little bit because, you know, they're not all bad people. Not all the Klansmen were bad people, but they were sold a story about righteousness and all that. But they were definitely anti-Black, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic.

This book right here talks a lot about Indiana, and [how] they wanted to even shut down the Notre Dame, which in South Bend - it started in the mid-1800's, but in 1923 it wasn't that big. So they were working hard. But it's an interesting dynamic.

Do you have questions?

A: Yes. You said your uncles were present. Were they the ones who first told you about the KKK invasion?

J: It was mainly my mother.

A: Your mother?

J: Yeah, my mother. She wasn't part of it, as far as I know. I don't have any more details than that. They all [lived] here. In fact, Uncle Ed lived right here on Washington Avenue, up there not too far from where the [Boys & Girls Club] is. And George lived on Hill Avenue, which is right off of Station Street. And my uncle Carl lived actually in East Carnegie, [and] then he wound up up there on Federal Street, which is up again near Wabash. Verner, unfortunately, died early.

A: When talking about the event with your mother, or if you had the opportunity to talk with your uncles, did they share any of their feelings about their experience, or how it affected them going forward?

J: Not really. Other than what my mother said: it was a pretty dramatic time and that her brothers were part of the group, which is nice.

A: It is always nice to hear about the activity of your [family members].

J: The Klansman, some of them had guns under their robes. But what I was struck by is the townspeople, they just weren't fearful. They were angry, they wanted to do a little damage to those guys. Which they did. Which is good.

A: Do you know [if] this [is] something that many of your peers learned about as well, maybe from relatives? Is it something that you guys had talked about once [you] learned [about] it? Or is it still something that you feel like a lot of your peers aren't super familiar with, or maybe learned a lot later in life?

J: I think the latter. I don't think early on it was that much discussed, and even my brothers [are] vaguely familiar but, to be truthful, I don't think they're that interested - which is fine. I don't try to convince anybody to do anything, I just happen to be interested in history, and particularly some Carnegie history.

A: It's always fantastic to know who was involved, and also get some painted history of the event. What we're trying to do is understand how the event - because we can't interview people who are no longer with us, unfortunately -

J: No.

A: So we're really trying to gauge, how did people learn about it? What are the feelings around it? What does this tell us about Carnegie?

I just have two more questions that are along that line. When you learned of the event, how did you feel? And how does knowing that this event has happened give you perspective - also knowing that your family participated?

J: That's a good question. I'm not sure I know an easy answer to that. I just I think I was a teenager or something like that...it just didn't affect me. Just like the mill closing. I mean, it affected us, my uncle got out of a job and it made a downturn, but it was one of those things as a teenage guy [that] I wasn't that interested in. The older I got, the more I became interested in the history, and [have] done some reading.

A: Of course. The final question I have for you is, how do you see this incident and how does it fit into the legacy of Carnegie and the community that's been built here?

J: Again, another good question. I think that Carnegie's doing a very good job in bringing that forward and letting people know that it was a dramatic effect in the town. I'm maybe a little prejudiced [as] part of the Historical Society. I think they've done a very nice job up there. If anything, they could promote it a little greater, but I'm continuing to be pleased. It's coming back differently. You know? You've got the Menard [Ground Improvement Specialists] here and the building is doing very well. You've got a couple [businesses] in

town and businesses up there at the Carnegie Office Park. George Raftis has started that Red Valve company. Are you familiar with that?

A: I am not.

J: No? There's a guy, George Raftis - he's since passed away. A Carnegie Tech graduate, and he started a company. I knew him years ago, a bit of a character. He had like 30 patents. But he patented a backflow preventer, and this is some valve that does something other valves don't do, that prevents sewage and other things from happening. They've done very well.

A: Yeah. It seems like Carnegie has a history of being a center of industry, for tiny little things you wouldn't think of, that are actually crucial and can't be lived without.

J: Yeah. Well, this library building - if you're looking at the most significant buildings in Carnegie, [the] library [would be] number one and probably Saint Peter & Saint Paul Ukrainian Church [would be] number two, or vice versa. Historically speaking and architecturally speaking, they're just very significant.

A: Well, I'm going to stop recording here.

J: All right.

Carnegie Oral Histories Project

Transcript: Diane O'Malley, interviewed by Ana Giampa

Ana Giampa (A): I started the recording, so just for continuity can you confirm your name?

Diane O'Malley (D): Diane O'Malley.

A: All right, and then just confirm that you've signed the oral history agreement?

D: I have.

A: All right. Can you begin by discussing your relationship to Carnegie?

D: I grew up in Rook Station, which is a part of Carnegie, although we went to school in Green Tree. My father's family and his brothers and sisters were raised in Rook Station. The house that we grew up in was 100 years old - we were in the same home where my father grew up with his parents. There were three generations: six children, ten people altogether in the house.

A: Not dissimilar to my grandparents.

D: Rook Station is [now] a very active railroad station today for the Norfolk Southern [Railway], but at the time when I was growing up, it was part of the P&WV: Pittsburgh and West Virginia [Railway]. My granddad worked for the P&WV and my dad worked for the B&O: Baltimore & Ohio [Railroad].

A: When did you first learn about the KKK invasion in 1923?

D: I cannot answer that. At some point my dad was sharing stories about his dad, and one of those stories concerned my granddad's participation in the group that met the KKK to let them know that they were not welcome.

A: What was your grandfather's name?

D: Robert Adley.

A: Do you remember anything that your dad or your grandfather might have said about the event?

D: The one tidbit that I recall: my granddad got dressed to come down here to Carnegie with a jacket and dress pants, or some kind of jacket and pants, and he had a hat on. I don't know if it was one of those bowler hats, or a fedora. But at any rate, when he came down here to Carnegie and was part of the group that met the KKK, either in the melee he lost his hat, or - I know that there was a gun fired somewhere in the activity - if the hat got shot...this, I don't know.

The other part of the story is that he didn't come home with that hat. So, for sure, the hat is a part of that historic event.

The other thing that I remember my dad telling me is that his dad, who would have had six children at that point in 1923 - my dad was the fifth of six children - sought some safety in Henney's Funeral Home. So, either he ducked into the funeral home and went into the room where the coffins were, or he went behind the coffin, I don't know.

At the time, I presumed it was Leo Henney's funeral home, but I understand upon reading a little bit about this event that it could have been the Henney's funeral home right down on Main Street. But there's no way I know which one it was.

A: Of course.

D: And my understanding is that the man - it was called Henney's because he did the work there, but the funeral home was probably named for the owner which was, I believe, McDermott.

A: I've heard that name come up a lot. The funeral home seems to be the very centerpiece of this story, so it's very interesting to me that everyone seems to bring that up.

D: I don't know if my grandfather was a part of that action because of his work with the Irish Catholic community of Saint Luke's - my granddad and grandmother were married in 1914 at Saint Luke's, and this happened in 1923 - or if there were a lot of railroaders who came down from Rook Station. Almost everybody in Rook worked on the railroad. I don't know which group he was a part of, or who the leader might have been. This I know nothing about.

A: Is this incident something that many of your peers have learned about? Was it well known that this happened? Or is it something that you learned from [older relatives], and maybe [others] knew about it but you didn't talk [about it]?

D: That's an interesting question because when my classmate, who is Carol Dlugos, got involved in the Historic Society, she and I had met at a class reunion and for one reason or another started talking about this particular project. I mentioned that my grandfather had participated in it, and she said "Well, why don't you come and speak to the project people who are working on that?"

So I talked to my - I'm the oldest of the six - I talked to my next two sisters, and they knew nothing about this. I talked to my cousins, and they knew nothing about this. But their cousin, who is 90 years old, did know about this. She grew up in Glendale, and my understanding is that a lot of the actual fighting occurred up near the Glendale bridge.

A: Yes.

D: So she was well aware of it. But she remembers it, [and] hearing about it. She would have only been eight years old or something at the time. It's interesting that none of the younger kids - my brothers - none of them knew anything about this. But I think because I

was the oldest, I listened when my dad and his buddies talked about things that their parents got into, and about the history of the town, and so on. I listened to that because I was old enough to be there.

A: When you learned about the event, or since you've known about the event, how did it make you feel? Do you remember how you felt at that time, or feelings you have now about the event?

D: The only thing I can remember feeling is very surprised that it even took place. I was not aware that the people of Carnegie actually were members of the KKK. And I did not know that they found it necessary to enter the town and intimidate the people in the town. I wasn't aware of the people in the town - I wasn't as aware of the prejudice against some of the immigrant groups. But I was young to know - you know, I didn't experience it, but I know in my dad's generation, they experienced it.

A: Do you remember any feelings or tone of voice that you might have heard about your dad or your grandfather's feelings about the experience? The way they talked about it, or anything?

D: I can't attest to what my grandfather felt about it. However, I could say that since he found it necessary to participate in this, he must have felt pretty strongly about it. And when my granddad felt strongly about something, he let his feelings be known.

A: OK. My final question that I have for you is how do you see this incident fitting into Carnegie history and the legacy that the Carnegie community has created for itself?

D: Well, I think, like so many communities, they want to move on from an event like this and learn from it. The immigrant experience [included] not just the Irish Catholics - there [was] Saint Joe's, which was the German church, St. Ignatius was the Polish church, the Italian church was right down the road - all of those various groups had their own church, their own language. That was the way it was, it was just an accepted thing; it's not like that today. But I think the fact that these groups have all moved on into the third generation and fourth generation now, it doesn't play such a part in who you are, but it did then. Obviously [it] played a critical part.

A: Did you have anything else that you wanted to add, or any other comments you wanted to make while we're still on the record?

D: I just think it's a very interesting thing that you're doing, bringing all of this to light and letting the children and this generation understand what went on.

A: Yes, definitely - [it's] not something I knew about until very recently. And it is something you don't necessarily think about. Especially the way we were talking about history, you kind of separate yourself from it. "Oh, that was something that happened many states away and not here, five minutes from my house."

D: That's right.

## Appendix: Further reading

Aldisert, Ruggero J. (2005). *Road to the robes: A federal judge recollects young years & early times*. AuthorHouse.

Carnegie Klan riot verdict still in doubt. (1925, January 22.) *The Pittsburgh Press*, 1.

Carnegie Klansmen hold outing. (1929, July 14.) *The Pittsburgh Press*, 8.

Carnegie, Pa., mob martyrs Klan hero and violates all rights of Americanism. (1923, August 29.) *The Imperial Night-Hawk*, 5-7.

Craig, John M. (2005). "‘There is hell going on up there’: The Carnegie Klan riot of 1923." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 72(3), 322-346.

Find citizens of New Castle in Klan riot: Five men from nearby city are jailed in Carnegie, then released. *Youngstown Vindicator*, p 1-7.

K.K.K. holds session: Field day and celebration near Carnegie. (1929, July 14.) *The Pittsburgh Press*, 1.

Klan posts big reward for slayer: Step taken following killing of member when parade is staged. (1923, August 27.) *The Evening Independent*, 1-7.

Klan riot probe opens; undertaker held: Two gunmen slain in downtown pistol fight. (1923, August 27.) *The Gazette Times*, 1-3.

Klansman killed, many injured in an all night battle near Pittsburgh. (1923, August 27.) *The Lewiston Daily Sun*, 1-4.

Mystery man killed Abbott, four testify: Carnegie Klan case goes to jury today – McDermott alibi presented: Fled from rioters. (

One dead, many injured in Penn. Ku Klux Klan clash: Hours of rioting follow an attempt of Klansmen to parade through Carnegie. (1923, August 27.) *Meriden Morning Record*, 1-2.