



# Lady Shirley's

## SOCIETY PAPERS

Season II: Fifth Edition, May 2026

### EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY STORIES

*Dear Reader,*

This author has observed that a community may be known as much by what it embraces as by what it refuses. Concordia has long excelled in the fine art of being against things - both for better and for worse. But the refusals in this edition are most certainly for better.

In our earliest days, an association was formed to combat criminals preying upon its citizens. It operated with just enough secrecy and highly effective methods to make every horse thief in the Midwest sleep poorly.

Later generations, ever mindful of public refinement, briefly entertained another secretive league, whose members sought to elevate the town's vocabulary and perhaps moderate its tempers.

And later an unlikely alliance formed against a hateful organization - still spoken of in lowered voices. Three newspaper editors who could scarcely agree on the weather found themselves united in a common cause. It was a rare moment of harmony among men who typically preferred to duel with adjectives rather than stand shoulder to shoulder.

Three stories of secret societies, all vastly different in purpose and temperament, are the focus of this month's Society Paper. Each arose in its own hour of need, answering a different kind of trouble, yet all were bound by the same instinct to guard the character of the town. Together they reveal how Concordia has always possessed a certain intuition - an understanding that while we may indulge in our share of disagreements, there are boundaries we do not permit to be crossed. Even our most spirited quarrels seem to pause when the character of our town or the dignity of our neighbor is at stake.

Perhaps this is the secret strength of small communities: not perfection, but vigilance; not uniformity, but a shared sense of what ought not be tolerated. We may not always know precisely what we want to become, but we are remarkably clear about what we refuse to be.

Follow along with the tales of those who bravely took a stand showing clarity about what it will and will not permit within its borders.

*Yours truly,  
Lady Shirley*

members, but no one signed up, believing it was all bunk. But in 1922, one such meeting did indeed take place.

Organizers attempted to reserve several venues for the gathering, including the Presbyterian Church, the Masonic Hall, and the I.O.O.F. (Independent Order of Odd Fellows), which was housed in what is known to-day as the Bankers Loan and Trust building. All of those prospective meeting places were met with resistance and to no avail. Bowman Seed Co. finally agreed to host the meeting, where several previous gatherings were rumored to have been held. A membership of 500 was sought, and according to the Blade-Empire, *"part of the aim of the order is to control the politics of the county and to indicate the officers, the method and the manner of enforcing the laws. No man who is foreign born, or a believer in the Catholic religion, or has a near relative who is a communicant of the Catholic faith can become a member."*

Attendees were lured to the meeting under false pretenses of patriotism. One Concordia official extending the invitations - and acting as spokesperson - was Boss Knapp, Postmaster.

The story goes that when the three Concordia newspapers - the Blade-Empire, the Kansan, and the Press - caught wind of the upcoming meeting, they formed a plan to band together. Now, these three newspapers hated each other. Gomer Davies of the Kansan, Ray Green of the Blade-Empire, and William Danenbarger of the Press were sworn enemies. But when the KKK threatened our town, these men set aside their feuds and put a series of events in motion.

Green's janitor was an integral part of the mission. The janitor was a drunk, and the whole town knew it. The newsmen decided to take advantage of this knowledge and sent him to the meeting, fully sober unbeknownst to the people, to report the proceedings of the secret gathering and to make a list of all those in attendance - which he did.

Next, the newspapers all printed articles strongly opposed to the Klan and named civic leaders who had attended. They also hinted that the full list of attendees could be published but would be withheld *"in hopes that the others will permit themselves a moment of sober thought before further carrying on this dangerous scheme."* They further stated that *"citizens will not stand idly by and see the politically unfit wreck this peace and good order by fiery cross or hooded parade leading to riot and disorder."*

In the end, sober thought prevailed, and the Klan did not take root in Concordia. Postmaster Knapp attempted, in a letter to the editor, to denounce his membership and involvement. The editor printed the proclamation, though it was clear he did not believe Knapp was as innocent as he tried to appear. Days later, Lee Foster and Martin Blosser, whose names were also mentioned as members, tendered their resignations to the Cloud County Bank.

Less than a month later, a political speech in Aurora denounced the Ku Klux Klan, ensuring once again that there would be no Klan in Cloud County and that our greatest strength lies not only in what we build, but in what we refuse to harbor.

## HEY... THAT'S MY HORSE!

One of the oldest secret societies in the United States once had membership in our very own county. Founded around 1854, the Anti-Horse Thief Association eventually spread across roughly ten states. The AHTA began in Missouri with its Kansas headquarters established in Parsons.

The Anti-Horse Thief Association was, in its way, one of the most practical inventions of frontier life. A stolen horse was not merely an inconvenience - it was the loss of one's transportation, livelihood, and dignity all at once. The law reflected this reality: in that era, a convicted bank robber might serve only three to six months, while a horse thief could expect a penalty of six to seven years. Thus the Association arose - a network of neighbors who agreed that if a thief made off with your mare, they would not simply offer condolences; they would saddle up and go after the culprit themselves.

Despite its earnest purpose, the AHTA carried an air of mystery in its scattered local lodges. With more than 40,000 members across the United States, these small groups of farmers and townsmen met quietly, kept their membership discreet, and maintained just enough secrecy to make every would-be horse thief think twice. Members were asked to brand their horses' hooves with a letter "A" so that stolen animals could be identified by

those who knew where to look.

In 1879, the Concordia Republican reported that Arion Township - which today lies between Oat and Iron Roads and 60th and 120th Roads - had established an AHTA chapter with seventy-five members. When a known or suspected horse thief was in the area, the local sheriff was alerted. The Concordia Empire likewise placed notices that almost certainly served to warn local members to keep their eyes peeled.

Over time, their reputation grew so formidable that even the state took notice. In 1891, the Kansas Senate formally recognized the AHTA's contributions to law enforcement and granted its members the authority to act as deputies in cooperation with civil officers. This was no vigilante mob - far from it. Rather, it formalized what Kansans already knew: that the AHTA was often the most efficient line of defense between honest citizens and the opportunistic rogues who preyed upon rural communities.

Though their success in tracking down thieves greatly reduced the occurrence of stolen horses, what the Association truly embodied was the understanding that a community willing to stand together could deter far more mischief than any single sheriff's badge.

## WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

Nestled in the pages of the 1912 Concordia Empire, this author happened upon one of the most entertaining article clippings. A group of citizens, ever eager to polish not only its streets, but

its sentences, briefly entertained the Anti-Cuss League. One of those earnest reform efforts that swept across the Midwest in the early 1900s, this league apparently held a rather large

membership. Whether they were more successful in improving public vocabulary or merely in inventing creative alternatives to the words they forbade is lost to history. What remains is the impression of a community determined, at least for a season, to elevate its discourse and keep the rougher edges of frontier language from echoing too loudly down Sixth Street. The following is a reprint of the Concordia Empire article from June 27, 1912. It was simply too good not to include in its entirety.

*"Have you joined the Anti-Cuss league? Well if you have not, you are one of the few, as you would find out*

*if you happened to drop a cuss word under your breath. The Anti-Cuss society was formed this last week, and the rules and regulations are very strict. If you say a cuss word before any of the members of the society, you have to set up a five cent drink to all the club members who hear you, and you can't get out of the club without paying fifty cents. And when you remember that all the young men, and a lot of the young women of the town have joined it, you can see how expensive it will be to say a cuss word in Concordia from now on. All the young men down town are joining, and one young man had been a member only half an hour when he had to treat a crowd of eight boys, and since then he thinks twice before he speaks."*

## NOT IN OUR COUNTY

The 1920 census of Cloud County reported the population breakdown by race as follows: White, 9,824; Black, 120; Other races, 98. The census records do not show a breakdown by religious affiliation, though such information was sometimes noted informally in household demographics. What we do know is that there was a large population of Catholic Concordians in 1922, as evidenced by the presence of the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Nazareth Convent and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Concordia still being located in our town.

Why mention such curiously specific demographics? Because in 1922, the Ku Klux Klan attempted to gain a foothold in Cloud County.

Most to-day associate the KKK with their atrocities toward our country's Black citizens. However, their hateful agenda and terroristic ploys did not stop at race. Their hostility reached many groups, including those of certain religious affiliations -

especially Catholic and Jewish faiths.

Now, before you, my dear readers, fear that reading further may be too dark, rest assured: this story will leave our hearts proud to be Concordians.

Some accounts suggest that when the Ku Klux Klan made its way here, they attempted to exert pressure on local businesses — including the Barons House — to fire all Black employees. Whether this came to fruition is unclear, but it would align with the agenda of the time, and the Black population of the era largely worked for the railroad and in the hospitality industry. What is clear is that the Klan's presence brought with it an unmistakable tension.

As early as 1921, the Concordia Blade-Empire reported that KKK leaders were attempting to organize a meeting, outlining a movement that would "put down lawlessness and immorality." The representative asked for ten dollars from prospective