

HUAC Investigates North Carolina: How Federal Documents Can Help Uncover State and Local History

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Federal Documents in State/Local History

- Often overlooked as a potential source
- Perceived lack of relevance
- Lack of familiarity/esoteric quality
- Intimidation factor

Federal Documents in State/Local History (cont.)

- House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations related to North Carolina offer a case study in how federal docs might be relevant to state/local history

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)



Source: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/hec.25582/>

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

- Created as a special committee to investigate Nazi propaganda in 1934-5
- Re-established in 1938; continued through 1944
- Became a permanent standing committee from 1945-1968
- Name changed to House Internal Security Committee in 1969
- Disbanded in 1975

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

- The committee actually met twice in NC
 - Asheville, May 1934
 - Charlotte, March 1956
- A number of other HUAC investigations touched on North Carolina
- On several occasions, HUAC's activities impacted political developments in NC

Fascism in the Mountains: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America



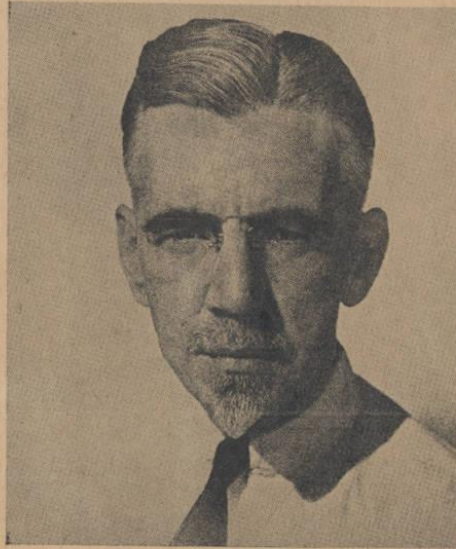
W.D. Pelley and the Silver Legion of America

- Founded in Asheville in January, 1933 by Pelley
- Known as the “Silver Shirts”
- Radical paramilitary organization
- Reached peak strength of 15,000 in 1934-35
- Anti-Semitic and Anti-Black
- One of the largest and most radical of the 1930s domestic fascist groups

The Special Committee Comes to Asheville

- Rise of the Silver Shirts helped spawn the “Brown Scare”
- Led to creation of Special Committee (1934)
- A subcommittee of HUAC came to Asheville in May, 1934 and held two days of hearings

WANTED



William Dudley Pelley

DESCRIPTION

Age, approximately fifty years; height, five feet, seven inches; weight, 130 pounds; has black hair mixed with gray; heavy eyebrows; wears mustache and a vandyke; has dark gray eyes, very penetrating; has straight Roman nose; wears nose glasses; dresses neatly; distinguished looking; good talker; highly educated; interested in physic research.

Capias has been issued by the Judge of the Superior Court of Buncombe County for the arrest of the above-named party for sentence on conviction of felony, making fraudulent representation, and also for violating the terms of a suspended sentence on another charge by failing to remain of good behavior, and by engaging in, among other things, UN-AMERICAN activities.

Arrest and notify

LAURENCE E. BROWN, Sheriff
Asheville, N. C.

1939 wanted poster for W.D. Pelley. Source: This Day in North Carolina History blog

(<https://nchistorytoday.wordpress.com/2013/07/30/asheville-fascist-and-presidential-candidate-william-dudley-pelley/>)

End of the Silver Shirts

- 1939: Buncombe County issues arrest warrant for Pelley
- February, 1940: Pelley testifies before HUAC
- Pelley leaves Asheville and disbands Silver Shirts soon after
- Imprisoned from 1942-1950

Silver Shirt Sources

- *Investigation of Nazi Propaganda Activities and Investigation of Certain Other Propaganda Activities. Public Hearings Before the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-Third Congress, Second Session. 1934-35, 8. v. (Y 4: Un 1: N 23)*
 - Los Angeles hearings contain testimony on Silver Shirts in So. Cal.

Silver Shirt Sources

- *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States. Hearings Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives. 1938-44, 17. v. (Y 4: Un 1/2: Un1/)*
 - Pelley's testimony is in v. 12, pgs. 7201-7333.
 - The Silver Legion is also discussed extensively in V. 6.

The “Red Menace” in North Carolina: 1929-1960



Junius Scales. Source: NCPedia (<http://ncpedia.org/scales-trial>)

Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960

- Always a small faction
- Centered in Triad and Triangle
- Focus on union organizing (tobacco and textile)
- Also strong at UNC-Chapel Hill
- Peak of popularity in late 1940s (250 members in 1947)

Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960 (cont.)

- 1929: Gastonia textile workers' strike
- 1948: Progressive Party campaign
- FTA Local 22 in Winston-Salem
- Junius Scales: 1947-1956
- Declined in late 1950s

HUAC and NC Communism

- NC did not have its own “Un-American Activities” committee
- Shreve-Regan bill (1949 & 1951)
- Fred Beal testified before Special Committee: 1939
- HUAC held several hearings regarding NC in the 1950s
- Came to Charlotte in March, 1956 for three days of hearings
- 1958 Atlanta hearings

HUAC and NC Communism:

Sources

- *Investigation of Communist Activities in the North Carolina Area. Hearing Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fourth Congress, Second Session. 1956. (Y 4. Un 1/2: C 73/63/)*
- *Communist Infiltration and Activities in the South. Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fifth Congress, Second Session. 1958. (Y 4. Un 1/2: C 73/95)*

Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida. Hearing Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session. 1954, 2 pts. (Y 4. Un 1/2: C 73/54/)

HUAC and NC Communism: Sources (cont.)

- *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Volume 10. Hearings Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-Sixth Congress, First Session. 1939. (Joyner Docs CWIS: Y 4. Un 1/2: Un 1/V. 9-10)*

-Contains the testimony of Fred Beal, a disillusioned former communist who had been involved in the CPUSA's campaign to organize the 1929 Gastonia, NC textile workers' strike. Beal's testimony can be found from pages 6006-6042.

The Spy who Ran for Governor

- In 1948, Mary Wolfe Price (1909-1980), became North Carolina's first female gubernatorial candidate (Progressive Party)
- On July 30, 1948, Elizabeth Bentley testified before a Senate subcommittee that Price was part of a communist espionage network, and repeated the allegations before HUAC
- Price denied the charges, but they did hurt her candidacy and that of the Progressive Party
- By the 1970s, the charges were regarded as McCarthyite smears

VENONA Revelations

- 2,900 NKVD cables intercepted and decoded by Army SIS during the 1940s, declassified in 1995
- Helped answer lingering questions about Soviet/CPUSA espionage
- Revealed that Bentley was telling the truth, and that Price had been a Soviet spy (code name: “Dir” from 1941-1944)

The Spy who Ran for Governor: Sources

- *Export Policy and Loyalty. Hearings before the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Expenditures, United States Senate, Eightieth Congress, Second Session. Part 1, July 30, 1948. (Y4.Ex7/14:ln89/pt.1)*
- *Hearings Regarding Communist Espionage in United States Government. Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eightieth Congress, Second Session. July 31-Sept. 9, 1948. (Y 4.Un 1/2:C 73/6)*
 - Bentley's main testimony against Price is on pgs. 25-27 of Export Policy and Loyalty.

VENONA

National Security Agency: VENONA

<https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/>

Federal Bureau of Investigation: VENONA

<https://vault.fbi.gov/Venona>

Cold War International History Project: Venona Project and Vassiliev Notebooks Index and Concordance

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/venona-project>

1965-66: HUAC vs. the “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

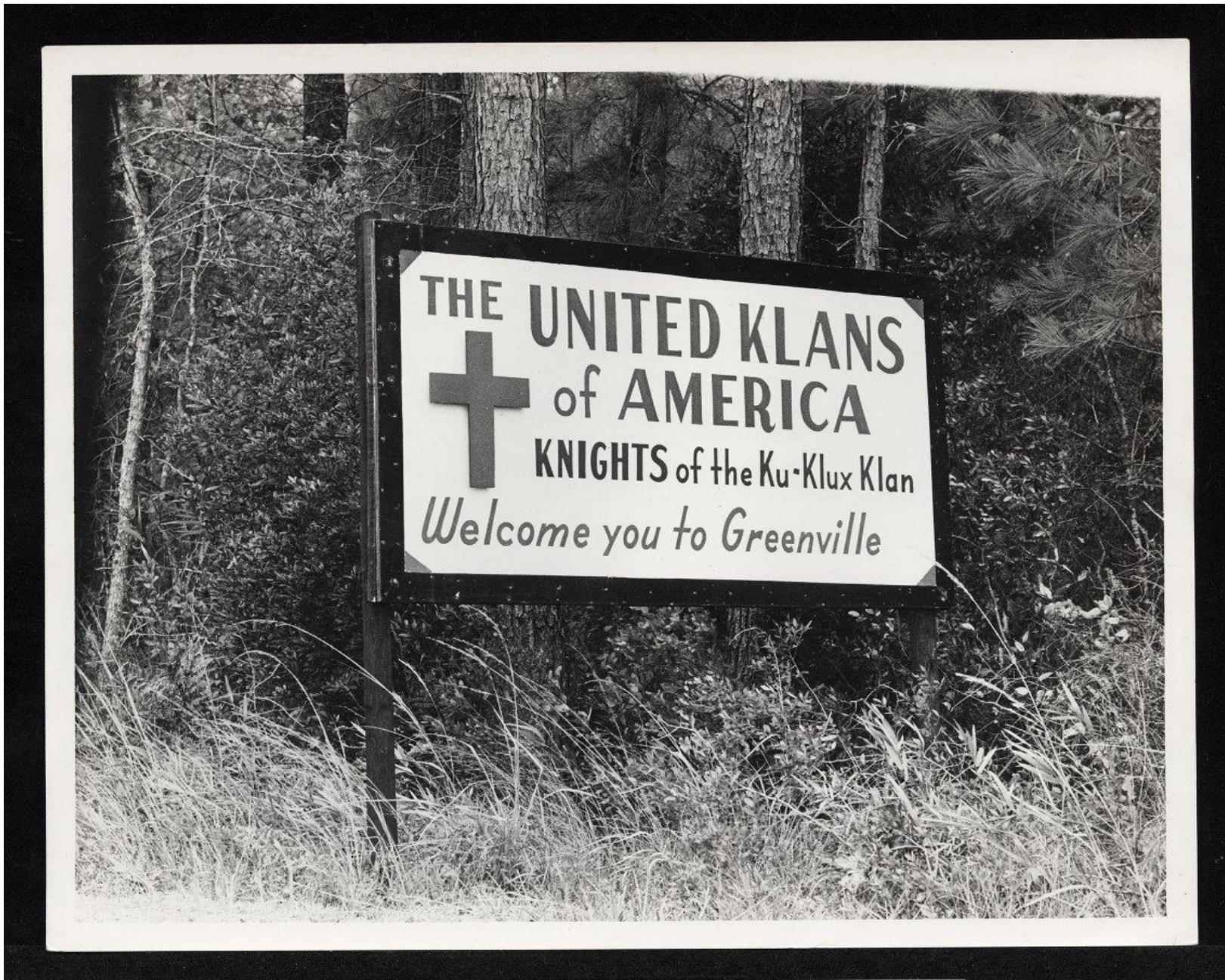


KKK rally in Greenville, NC, October 1965. Source: Daily Reflector Image Collection (<http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/3690>)

1965: HUAC Investigates the Klan

- In October, 1965, HUAC opened a series of hearings on the Klan
- Investigation revealed that NC had more chapters (“Klaverns”) of the United Klans of America (UKA) than any other state (112)
- Seven in Pitt County alone

The "Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association"



The Klan welcomes visitors to Greenville, n.d. Image courtesy of ECU Digital Collections: <http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/23542>

The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

- Cover name for the Greenville Klavern of the UKA
- Also known as the “Benevolent Association”
- Greenville, NC, resident and former Klansman George Leonard Williams testified about the organization in Jan. 1966
- About 40 active members (340 on the books)
- Leaders included Charlie Edwards (Police chief of Grimesland)

The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

- The negative publicity generated by Klan hearings provoked NC authorities into cracking down on the organization
- The UKA was a non-factor by mid-1967

1965: HUAC Investigates the Klan

- *Activities of Ku Klux Klan organizations in the United States, 1965-66, 6 v. (SuDoc no: Y 4.Un 1/2: K 95/)*
 - Pts. 1 and 3 contain information on the Klan in NC
 - Williams testimony in pt. 3, pgs. 2867-2900

Conclusions

- Using federal documents gives a broader perspective to state and local history:
 - Impact of external actors on NC developments
 - Impact of NC developments elsewhere
 - Unique local conditions best perceived by comparison
 - Corrective to excessive focus on local sources
 - Opens new avenues for research

CWIS Blog & LibGuide

- Blog: <http://blog.ecu.edu/sites/cwis/>
- LibGuide: <http://libguides.ecu.edu/cwis>
- Slides and bibliography will be posted to blog soon

Questions?



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