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THE KLAN FINDS A N. E. WIZARD; 'I'M A BUSINESSMAN, YOU MIGHT SAY,' SAYS CONNECTICUT'S JAMES; FARRANDS

[THIRD Edition]

Boston Globe (pre-1997 Fulltext) - Boston, Mass.

Author: Marantz, Steven

Date: Nov 16, 1986

Start Page: A.26

Section: FOCUS

Document Text

PROFILE

SHELTON, Conn. -- The new Imperial Wizard-elect of the Ku Klux Klan is a wisecracking former Boy Scout leader who is so eager for publicity that he has posed for a photograph in a foreign sports car with the point of his white cone sticking through the open sunroof.

James W. Farrands, 52, a father of five and a native of North Attleborough, Mass., is the first Northerner and first Catholic in the Klan's 120-year history to be chosen as a national leader. As Imperial Wizard, he has exhibited a flippancy about sensitive topics that tends to amuse and offend both supporters and opponents. He claims he sends his white Klan sheets out "to a Jewish laundry," and that he uses Sterno to get a longer burn on crosses. His quips are accompanied by an upward turning of the mouth that is half smile, half sneer.

A Mercedes Benz and Corvette are parked in his driveway, and an above-ground swimming pool is in the backyard of his cedar-shingled home on a tree-lined street in this southeastern Connecticut town. Farrands is an eclectic Klansman; he raises chickens in his backyard, collects beer cans and railroad spikes and reads William Shockley.

"The Ku Klux Klan," said Farrands in an interview at his home, "is run by very sound minds."

But Farrands' actions are not always sound. He was convicted of breach of peace in Meriden, Conn., stemming from a 1982 incident in which he taunted and attacked a black man in a downtown bar. He also was convicted of illegal possession of firearms in Wilmington, Vt., as a result of a loaded shotgun found in his car after a Klan rally.

Farrands has boasted to friends of once having attacked a man who refused to sing the national anthem at a baseball game. Asked of this, Farrands says, "That sounds like something I would do."

While Farrands effects a light humor regarding his beliefs, he periodically lapses into profane diatribes against minorities, judges, reporters and liberal politicians. Town residents tend to express like feelings about Farrands.

"Most people are embarrassed and disgusted that he's here," says Susan McKay, a Shelton restaurant owner.

Those who oppose the Klan's credo of white Christian supremacy believe Farrands' election last summer by the Invisible Empire -- one of the Klan's three major factions -- was due to his organizational skill and publicity-grabbing potential and does not indicate a South-to-North shift in Klan demographics.

But they suggest that Farrands, who espouses voluntary rather than forced segregation, represents a moderate position that has angered many of the Klan's Southern extremists at a time when membership is dwindling.

A 1984 survey by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, a national watchdog group, put Klan membership at between 6,000 and 6,500, a 35 percent decline from 1981. Membership in the Connecticut chapter, which surfaced in the late 1970s, is estimated at between 15 and 50, according to the league and Connecticut State Police. There are no Klan chapters in other New England states, although each has a handful of individual members, the league said.

About 30-35 Klansmen and an equal number of spectators attended a national rally at East Windsor, Conn., in early September, State Police said. This contrasted to the 300 robed Klansmen and sympathizers at a rally at Scotland, Conn., in 1980.

Klan membership has declined because the country is relatively calm, and because many right-wing extremists have resigned themselves to integration and the civil rights laws, league spokesman David Lowe said. The remaining Klan membership consists of the "hard-core" extremists, Lowe said.

Many individual Klansmen are associated with recently emergent extremist groups such as Aryan Nations, Posse Comitatus, The Order and the White Patriot Party, Lowe said.

Federal law enforcement officials say that such extremists are active in the South, Midwest and Northwest, but that they have no evidence of them operating in Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire or Maine. State Police say that extremist activity in Connecticut is limited to the Klan, which has held nine rallies since 1980. Violence at rallies in Meriden and Scotland was caused by anti-Klan protesters, police said.

The Anti-Defamation League believes that the Klan's presence, though diminished, is dangerous because it brings a message to impressionable youths, said Scott Feigelstein of the league's Connecticut region.

"It's a message of hate, that anybody who is not Christian and white is wrong," said Feigelstein.

Farrands won't talk about his pre-Klan background. According to the league, he served in the Navy and moved to Milford, Conn., in the mid-1960s. In the early 1970s, Farrands took a job as a tool-and-die maker at Warner-Lambert's Schick razor blade plant in Milford and remains employed there. About 10 years ago, Farrands moved to Shelton.

Farrands works alongside minorities at Schick but has had no problems, a company spokesman said. "He has kept a distance between his personal beliefs and his work activity," said Byron Peterson.

Joining the Klan in 1980, Farrands came up through the ranks, serving as Chaplain, Exalted Cyclops, Kleagle, Great Titan and Grand Dragon before gaining the top sheet. He has led rallies throughout New England, including one in Boston, but has never advocated violence in his speeches, police said.

A coalition of Klan leaders from smaller Northern groups in California, Ohio, Indiana, Maryland and West Virginia were able to bring about Farrands' election, Lowe said. The lack of other strong candidates, and Farrands' healthy financial situation, influenced the vote, Lowe said.

"We're told there is some resentment of Farrands as a Northerner," said Lowe, "and that his reconciliation with integration has not gone over with other Klansmen."

Farrands operates the Invisible Empire out of a basement office decorated with a Confederate flag, color photographs of cross burnings, white-hooded Klansmen puppets and a bumper sticker that reads: "Freedom wasn't won with a registered gun." There are three telephone lines, often ringing with Klansmen who call "to chew the fat," Farrands says.

"Some of these good ole boys from California call at 2 a.m.," says Farrands. "It's 11 o'clock out there. They don't realize it's three hours later here."

The Imperial Wizard gets \$10,000 a year for telephone, mailing and travel expenses, "and whatever is left I can skim," he says. But not enough will be left, he says, to enable him to quit his job.

A tattooed bodyguard, his son-in-law, stood in his office during the interview, as Farrands propped his boater shoes on his desk, screwed a cigar into a gap vacated by two bottom teeth and said wearily that he had accommodated dozens of interviews since being elected last summer. The bodyguard, Richard Guerrero, has been armed with a shotgun at several interviews.

"I'm a businessman, you might say," says Farrands. "I want to show that a Northerner is for real and is fully accepted."

Most press accounts have been predictably biased, he says, but none has angered him as much as the one describing his wife as a Hispanic.

"My wife is not a Hispanic," he says. "Any idiot can tell the difference between a French-Canadian and a Hispanic."

The Klan's objectives will not change under his wizardship, Farrands says. The Klan favors prayer in schools and opposes school busing, affirmative action, abortion, homosexuality, communism, fascism, interracial marriage and integrated neighborhoods. "We're mostly against things," he says.

Elaborating on the touchy issue of integration, Farrands says, "If it has to be, if people just sort of move together, it's one thing. We believe in voluntary segregation. But I don't believe in the government forcing people, or even putting up money to get them integrated."

Farrands has already begun a journal of his reign and plans to write a book detailing "the exactly true feelings of a white person trying to do stuff for his race." It will be titled "A Connecticut Yankee in the Klan's Court."

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