

Dale, Dan "D. T.": The Fears They Had ^[1]

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Dan "D. T." Dale: The fears they had

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 12/14/2003. Copyrighted.
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Born in 1919, Dan "D.T." Dale has fond memories of growing up in Fuquay-Varina. He remembers the bustling tobacco market, the crowds that used to visit the town's mineral springs, and a happy, small-town childhood. He also recalls, however, the [Ku Klux Klan](#) ^[3].

More than any time in its history, the Klan rose out of the shadows in the 1920s, and not just in Fuquay. As many as 5 million Americans joined the hooded order that decade. Under the leadership of Superior Court Judge Henry A. Grady of Wake County, many of North Carolina's most prominent citizens were Klansmen.

Dale saw the Klan through a child's eyes, but his recollections are seasoned with the wisdom gained while being a missionary in Japan for 34 years. That experience helped him to see beyond a person's skin color. Today Dale is one of the few white members of Raleigh's First Baptist Church on Wilmington Street, a black congregation.

Dale's childhood memories reveal the tragic ordinariness of the Klan in the 1920s. It is an important, complex, often deeply disturbing, but rarely glimpsed part of American history.



Dan "D. T." Dale. Photo by Chris Seward, 2003. To request permission ~~for~~ ^{to} use or to purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.

The earliest that I knew anything about the Ku Klux Klan was when I saw them on the horses over in the schoolyard. I was at the school ground one night when the Klan paraded with their torches in Fuquay. I was 8, maybe 10 years old. You Of course, I was young then and all that was hard to understand. But I knew when I was growing up that there was something going around that they didn't discuss with children. In the late '20s, I think it was, a law was passed that they could I remember us getting in and putting on those robes and hoods and trying to scare one another, especially at Halloween. But the thing that impressed me was that my mother took off all those emblems and -- I can see her now -- she was ripped. We look back now, it's hard to believe the way it was. But you have to realize -- because I do know, I've heard it said over and over -- that the best people were all in the Klan: the town leaders, deacons in the church, maybe the mayor. You know, My father was an insurance broker. And I do know that, at my uncle's funeral, the men that stayed up at night with his body all wore Klan robes. And I know my father had some position with the Klan. I don't know how many of my brothers were in a way, the Klan was taking the law in your own hands, like if you didn't feel that there was enough being done by the government or law enforcement. They would tell a white man to straighten up if they felt like he needed it -- if they were nervous. But I think the Klan was primarily for two reasons. Now, just face it, it was so that the black people would be put in their place. Kept in their place, not put in their place, I mean. And also it was a warning, telling people to beware of the Catholics. There were a lot of new Catholic immigrants, and Al Smith was running for president and he was a Catholic. See, my father was a Democrat until Al Smith, and he turned for Hoover in that election. I can remember, we would get literature in circulation. Fear is a bad thing. You always fear what you don't know. You know, in Fuquay, there were no Catholics, not one, until Mrs. Hobson came. She was a schoolteacher. She was a good woman, and she was accepted into the town's social circle. On the corner where Johnson's Drugstore is used to be an empty lot. Just before the election, there were suddenly three crosses put on that lot and burned. And even though some of my family might deny it, I do know those crosses were made. It's hard to describe, because I just know that the people in the Klan in my community were not bad people. They were the good people. I don't know anyone that was better to black people than my mother and father. He was one of the best. I know my father came home one day and he was very troubled. A young black out from Fuquay had supposedly been intimate with a white girl. My father was telling us how they beheaded him and with his hair took his head through the tobacco. As a child, I wondered why. I wondered why I could eat the food that Aunt Alice fixed. Why I could sit on her lap? Why I could play with black children under the walnut trees? At that age, I had many, many questions. And I know -- I know very well I'm not the only one that changed through education and knowledge and love of their fellow human beings. I think education changed a lot of people, and I think religion did too. My mother never did make that quilt. Maybe she didn't want to after awhile, I don't know. I think a lot of people were put off by the way the Klan took a bad turn. I'm not saying that it was ever good, but I think it got more violent and real bad people. I never talked to my dad about the Klan. It was just never talked about. I never remember a minister saying anything about the Klan either. I don't know what they thought. I don't know what fears they had.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:
Daniel Thompson Dale lived from November 16, 1919 - June 29, 2010.

obituary: Daniel Thompson Dale http://www.cremnc.com/memsol.cgi?user_id=224590 ^[4]

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