William E. Fanning Elementary School Name Question

1. Context of the Question

2. The Ku Klux Klan in Brea--an Incomplete History (p. 5)

Rev. Dr. Terry LePage
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Preface:

I am a partisan for removing the name Fanning from the school. This document is a follow-up to my Board address on 1/14/19. I pastor Brea Congregational United Church of Christ, a church of socially active and free-thinking members. I do not speak for them; some of them have spoken for themselves before the School Board. I also do research to try to fully understand a question. I want all parties to be informed. The History section aims to be 100% fact, with two judgments from a research historian. The Context section is fact mixed with my story; your story may be different. Links may not be clickable; they all work by cutting and pasting. Please report any errors or corrections to me at terry@opendoorcommunication.org.

1. Context of the Question

Rename Fanning Question in a nutshell

• Confusion exists around Brea Klan history; what is known is laid out with detailed references in part 2 starting Page 5.

• “Keep Fanning” supporters want to recognize Mr. Fanning, support his family and legacy, and/or just want to honor Brea’s history in general, and some value local control of Brea Olinda schools. To them, the Fanning name is a symbol of school and civic pride, and in some cases gratitude and fond remembrance. Some do not acknowledge past Brea Klan activity and segregation; some have not been informed, and some don’t think it should matter to the school’s name.

• “Rename Fanning” supporters want Brea students of color to get a clear message that they are welcome, that their feelings and needs are considered, and that past Brea Klan activity and segregation is repudiated. I am a supporter. Some hold Mr. Fanning personally responsible for this painful Brea legacy. I do not; he was part of a system. The Fanning name is, unfortunately, a symbol for us, and for anyone who searches Fanning Elementary on the web, of Brea’s history of Klan activity.

• The Fanning name serves as a symbol, with very different meanings to different people. As a symbol, its meanings are beyond anyone’s full control. As long as the O. C. Weekly website is up, it will serve as a powerful symbol for hate to those doing web searches on Fanning Elementary.

Background

• Fanning Elementary is loved and respected by many alumni, teachers, parents and students. Mr. Fanning is remembered with appreciation by many Brea elders for his service and leadership in many roles in the community including Brea schools, first as a teacher and then as school superintendent during roughly 1917 to 1942. The Fanning family is still active in Brea.
• The July 12, 2011 OC Weekly published an article reporting that Fanning was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, as part of a series of articles reporting on prominent men whose names are on a Klan membership list from 1924. This article contained an image of a person in Klan costume in front of the school sign. Article author Gustavo Arellano reports seeking recognition of Orange County’s racist past. Assertions rest on provenance of a list of names found at the Anaheim Historical Society. The provenance of the list has been a subject of contention. Interested persons should consult part 2, and judge for themselves.

Context

• Mr. Fanning attended a rally in Anaheim, as reported by his son Karl. As Leo J. Friis represents the list of Klan members, Fanning was a Klan member. We do not know whether he was an active member. We know of no other Klan-related or overtly racist acts of Mr. Fanning.

• Historical records leave little doubt that Brea had a large Klan presence in the 1920’s and was a “sundown town” (police would drive Blacks in the town after 6 pm to the city line) through at least 1950. If Mr. Fanning was an active Klan member, so were many of the leaders of Brea at that time. (See part 2.)

• Brea schools had very few students of color and no blacks due to housing segregation at least till the early 1960’s. That Brea had no segregated “Mexican schools” as did some other Orange County jurisdictions is no achievement. Brea didn’t have enough Mexican-American children to fill a classroom. Racism and segregation were systemic in Brea during Mr. Fanning’s tenure, but we have no evidence he played any special role in that system.

• Rhetoric of the current presidential administration has emboldened racist and hate incidents and groups locally and nationally, as well as emboldened individual expressions and acts of bias and hate. Students of color and of minority religions nationwide have felt increased fear about their personal safety in recent years. https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/hate-at-school-a-backtoschool-look-at-the-past-year, https://www.edweek.org/ew/projects/hate-in-schools.html.

• This fear is based in reality. Reported hate incidents and hate crimes based on race, religion and ethnicity have been on the rise in Orange County every year since 2015. https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2018/09/25/orange-county-hate-crimes-muslims-jewish/, http://www.ochumanrelations.org/hatecrime/hate-crime-reports/ A hate incident at a Brea school made national news: https://www.revealnews.org/blog/the-hate-report-t-is-for-trump-b-is-for-bully-n-is-for-noose/.

• Southern California is the home of thirty-eight recognize hate groups, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. An OC hate group “educated” the man who ran down and killed Heather Heyer in Charlottesville in August 2017. Another OC hate group “educated” the killer of Blaze Bernstein, a gay Jewish man, in Irvine in January 2018.

• Klan membership recruiting in 2016 in Brea and recently in other Orange County cities via leafleting of homes; Brea police were notified and did nothing, citing free speech. (Personal communication.) The proper response is, at minimum, to take a report of a hate incident and include it in the Department’s report to the Orange County Human Relations Commission.
• Brea retains a sense of small town history, place and civic pride in the larger suburban landscape of Orange County, with a number of longtime residents who remember the past with pride and want to celebrate it. Breans are trying to preserve Brea’s identity in the face of suburban sprawl without clear boundaries from neighboring cities.

• Hearing of sundowning and Klan activity, some Breans claim that such things could not have happened in the town they know and love, and therefore the evidence must be flawed. They have yet to admit, grieve, amend, and forgive the wrongs of the past, to form a more nuanced and realistic view of Brea history.

• Denial has been abetted by the Brea Historical Society. In Linda Shay’s report to the School Board, https://scng-dash.digitalfirstmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/naming-fanning-elementary-school-linda-shay-brea-historical-society.pdf, she justifies the behavior of the 1920’s Klan, omits documented descriptions of Brea Klan activities, infers that to be a sundown town, Brea must have evidence of a written ordinance in addition to its abundant personal accounts, and includes a footer attempting to restrict viewing of the report. The Society Board President has publicly supported “Keep Fanning,” http://www.breamatters.org/christmas-message-to-bousd-board/.

• Brea has grown and diversified dramatically since the sundown era, with a slim majority of residents now classified as other than White, and over 60% of BOUSD student body classified as other than White.

**Rename Fanning Question in Context**

• A “Rename Fanning Elementary” group began to address the School Board in 2017 after a parent considering Brea schools for his child discovered the 2011 O. C. Weekly article on William E. Fanning’s Klan membership.

• Some Rename supporters have attacked Mr. Fanning’s reputation personally; I do not believe such attacks are justified, and I grieve the anguish this has caused his family and friends.

• Rename supporters have made the name question a referendum on Brea schools’ openness to, and commitment to the rights of, people of color. I know of no evidence of current racial/ethnic/religious discrimination by District staff or policy. However it remains for BOSD to acknowledge, regret, and repudiate the racism in Brea’s past.

• Sadly, by their response to the Rename effort, some Keep Fanning supporters give truth to the judgment that racism and intimidation are alive and well in Brea.

• Some private communications to school board members and Rename members have described race, religion, and ethnicity-based bias and hate incidents in Brea schools, and families leaving schools because of them. Assurances that “those things don’t happen here” in Brea and refusal to acknowledge past wrongs make it harder for people affected to speak up.

• To reiterate, the Fanning name serves as a symbol, with very different meanings to different people. As a symbol, its meanings are beyond anyone’s full control. As long as the O. C. Weekly website is up, it will serve as a powerful symbol for hate to those doing web searches on Fanning Elementary.
• The Rename question has taken a huge amount of time and energy of the Board and Superintendent. Threats and name-calling have fostered division and animosity. People on both sides of the issue suffer great emotional anguish. My personal attempts to build bridges have yet to bear fruit. (Contact me if you want to change that.)

• The school is becoming a science and technology-focused school; a name change was on the table if only for that reason. It is the only BOUSD school named after a person. (I thought Falcon Science and technology sounded great!)

• The school board is charged with the well-being of the district and the children in it. All who support this charge will:
  • Challenge themselves and all persons to put students first— including students of color and students who live outside Brea.
  • Challenge themselves and all persons to set an example for students by using respectful language and behavior that state their position without threatening anyone.
  • Know the data. Courageously acknowledge that Brea’s past includes the KKK, unwritten sundown ordinances, and segregated housing ordinances and practices.
  • Invite the school, police, and other local organizations to create (or demonstrate) effective policies and practices that promote tolerance, respond effectively to intolerance, acknowledge Brea racism history, promote civil discourse, and facilitate effective hate incident and hate crime reporting and response.
  • Participate in efforts to build knowledge, relationships, and mutual understanding in Brea.

• The School Board and Superintendent can
  • Settle the question expeditiously and get back to their other business on behalf of Brea schoolchildren, if at all possible.
  • Reduce bias and hate in schools proactively with effective policies and practices such as a zero intolerance policy. For a possible template, see Teaching Tolerance tools at: https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/hate-at-school-a-backtoschool-look-at-the-past-year.

Cowardice asks the question - is it safe?
Expediency asks the question - is it politic?
Vanity asks the question - is it popular?
But conscience asks the question - is it right?
And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it because it is right.
    - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
A. Klan Membership List is edited copy of 1924 Ganahl list.

• Ernest Ganahl helped expose the Klan in Anaheim in the 1920’s using a list that contemporary sources report was copied with the help of a Klan member under cover of night in August of 1924 by Lafayette A. Lewis and other Club U.S.A. members. This colorful story was reported in newspapers of the time, and is narrated at length in several secondary sources.

• Ganahl deposited with the Library of Congress in 1954 a collection of Orange County Klan records including ‘membership list’ according to Library of Congress catalog record mm 81029017 “containing 83 items.” titled “Ku Klux Klan (Anaheim, Calif.) records, 1924-1925.” The list is now missing from the collection as verified by Library of Congress staff.

• In Appendix A of his UCLA PhD. thesis “The Invisible Government and the Viable Community: The Ku Klux Klan in Orange County, California During the 1920’s” (pp. 649-650) 1979, Christopher Cocoltchos describes:
   The selection of the Klan sample was a matter of obtaining access to a valid membership list of the Myers-led Orange County Klan. Fortunately, my thesis advisor, Professor Stanley Cohen, had obtained a copy of the list while researching at the Library of Congress. The membership list was found in a folder of newspaper clippings and telegrams relating to the recall election struggle [in Anaheim] between the two sides. The list was dated August 25, 1924 and was taken from the official records of the Klavern. This was a copy of the list from Lewis et al. from the Klan’s membership books and other records, as narrated in chapter V… based on personal interviews which I and others have conducted and on local newspaper accounts of that time, the list is, indeed, a valid and complete catalog of Klansmen to the middle of August, 1924…
   The list contained the names of approximately 1300 males…After eliminating duplications, I reduced the total to 1280 men…

He and other sources report that the 1924 list was numbered, apparently in order of joining. Cocoltchos researched names on this list individually and by city and produced a variety of statistical reports.

• Cocoltchos did not have access to a list of Klan members obtained in 1922 by Orange County District Attorney Alexander Nelson. (Cocoltchos Ref. 3, p. 207.)

• Two lists of names were given to the Anaheim Public Library by Leo Friis in 1972 in a sealed envelope with other documents pertaining to the Klan. Friis wrote:
   I deposit with you herewith a sealed envelope containing a list of names and other materials pertaining to Orange County residents who were members of the Ku Klux Klan, with the understanding and upon the condition that the contents thereof shall not be revealed until five (5) years after the date hereof.

Friis was titled the “Historian Laureate of Anaheim.” One list, the 1922 Nelson list containing 200 names, is not in dispute. The second list, 22 pages, is missing page 15 and has 1242 names. If another full Page 15 were included, it would have about 1280 names, as Cocoltchos reports. This list is alphabetical.
• This second Friis list contains the name of William E. Fanning. No other documentation has been found of Mr. Fanning’s participation or non-participation in the KKK.

• Ph. D. historian Kim Morrison Weiss, author of *Louis Pasteur's Butterflies: The Role of the Séricicultrices in the Metamorphosis of a Nineteenth-century Germ Theory*, comments:
  Supporting documents for William E. Fanning’s involvement in the KKK are lacking. To make a solid argument one would need to have additional documentation. These histories are notoriously difficult to uncover. Well-mined documents from municipal records are useful, but also explore intersecting interests social and club organizations, athletic clubs, town events, etc., as well as church records.

B. Klan Activity in Brea

• Background: The Klan in all its incarnations has always been a secret society promoting Whiteness (and nominal Protestant Christianity) as the basis of true American citizenship. Anonymous threats and anonymous arson are its stock in trade and are well documented in Orange County in the 1920’s. Threats made to people without the social status or tremendous will required to effectively recruit the response of law enforcement or news reporters are almost never recorded.

• The second Friis list contains over 100 other male Brea residents. The census population of Brea in 1920 was 1027; in 1930 it was 2435. A number of Breans on the list held roles in the community and government including Earl Sechrist, minister of the Congregational Church I now serve from 1922 to 1925, and Harry E. Becker, Mayor of Brea until 1924. O.C. Weekly articles give sketches of some other prominent Breans on the list.

• Cocoltchos reports 135 Klan members in Brea in the 1920’s (Note a to Table 25, pp. 246-247.)

• A cross burning in Brea:
  On Wednesday, May 2nd, 1923, Brea residents who had flocked to the Red Lantern Theatre to see a vaudeville show, while exiting the theatre, entered into a scene of horror as a cross burst into flames right before their eyes. In the distance another cross atop the city water tower could also be seen burning for miles. The next day the Orange County News Herald reported under the headline “Burning Crosses, Emblems of the Ku Klux Klan, Witnessed in Brea,” that this event had been carried out by the Klan. The report read, “Many believe that the Klan is taking this method to make the fact known that it is in evidence in Northern Orange County.” It went on to say that this was the second time in just a few days that the Klan had erected a cross and set a blaze to it, the first taking place on a hill between the city of Brea and Fullerton.(1)

Ref. 1: “Burning Crosses, Emblems of Ku Klux Klan Witnessed in Brea,” *Orange County News-Herald*, May 3, 1923, as described in “The City of Oil, Oranges and Racism” research paper by C. J. Adams, page 1, available from me by request; the original article can be seen at low resolution at [https://noctjr.com](https://noctjr.com).

• Klan threatened violence in Brea:
  In February, the Klan sent a note to oil company officials warning them to stop overworking their men or else a few oil wells would be set afire. (3)

Ref. 3: *Daily Tribune* (Fullerton), February 16, 1924, p. 1, as reported by Cocoltchos p. 331.

• Klan acting in 1924 Brea elections:
In Brea, during the same week [of April 14, 1924], the Klan openly backed Harry E. Becker and Isaac Craig in their successful efforts to win seats on the city council. The Klan could afford to act openly, because it firmly controlled the town, and, despite some councilmanic fireworks in April, the Klan maintained control of Brea for at least the next four years. (19) *Daily Tribune* (Fullerton), April 12, 1924, as reported by Cocoltchos p. 337.

- Cocoltchos reports on Klan presence in Brea on pp. 276-277, including a meeting in 1926:
  “The Klan won power in Brea, not by challenging the authorities in an election battle, but by quietly enlisting the people in power. Mayor H.E. Becker, appointed to office in 1922, joined the Klan in 1923, as did councilman Ben F. Blanchard. In 1924 the appointment of Klansman Forrest Hurst to the council gave the hooded order a voting majority. (55) Five of the town’s first eight mayors were Klansmen as were six of the councilmen who sat on the Board of Trustees from 1924 to 1936. Klansmen dominated the other civic offices during these years, providing 50% of the city engineers, 50% of its city clerks, 5% of its city marshals, and 67% of its fire chiefs (56)...The Klan recruited its members quietly and effectively, and during its years of rule there were few protests lodged against it, largely because it included the dominant leadership elements in Brea. The moral betterment element and the oil workers established a tact, yet effective, control over the town’s civic affairs which was illustrated by the casual remark in the minutes of the board of trustees of the First Baptist Church of Brea for October 6, 1926, “That we let the Ku Klux Klan have the use of the church building between now and the election of November 2, 1926”. (57) Ref 55 reads: “Membership list of the Klan; special insert in “Minutes of the Brea Board of Trustees,” 1”. If any special insert is still extant, it has not been found.
  Cocoltchos makes powerful assertions of Klan domination of Brea. We do not have all his primary sources and it is possible he relied on personal communications for some of them. Yet his assertions are supported by the following personal histories.

- Thelma Henderson, b. 1905, eldest child of Charles C. Kinsler, interviewed March 16, 1984:
  I can remember the Ku Klux Klan. You just couldn’t imagine what it was like. It was like this: if you’re not a Klansman, you’re not my friend...They were against everything and anything that wasn’t Protestant. If you weren’t white and a Protestant, you were nothing...They were against the Catholics, they were against the Jews, they were against the colored.
  O.H. 1828. Transcript, Center for Oral and Public History, Brea Community, California State University, Fullerton, as reported in Adams. Henderson also reports sundowning.

- Alice J. Thompson, b. 1909, interviewed April 17, 1982.
  …nearly every man I knew joined the Ku Klux Klan...A lot of people did. I know my husband did, and my father did, and all of my friends, or a lot of them did...
  Adams Ref. 33: O.H. 1726, Transcript, Center for Oral and Public History, Brea Community, California State University, Fullerton as reported in Adams. Thompson also reports sundowning.

- Ph. D. historian Kim Morrison Weiss, author of *Louis Pasteur's Butterflies: The Role of the Séricicultrices in the Metamorphosis of a Nineteenth-century Germ Theory*, comments:
  Based on previous scholarly investigation, recent journalism and ongoing oral histories, it is highly probable that there was a functional KKK presence in Brea in the 1920’s.