

White Sheet Business Brisk During KKK's Bo

By JOHN HOLLIDAY Jr.
Special for the Camera

It was a parade like no parade. No children lined the streets with balloons. There were no marching bands, no straight-backed cowboys on spirited horses.

The only float was surrounded by ghostly figures dressed in white sheets with hoods to match. Behind the float, 60 cars were assembled in a straight line with hooded drivers and occupants throwing circulars to the curious, stating their belief in "100 per cent Americanism" and shouting slogans like, "Join the Invisible Empire." Next to

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the blacked out numbers of the license plates (to prevent detection of the owners) were bumper stickers stating, "Ku Klux Klan - Watch Us Grow in Boulder."

That cold winter evening on Pearl Street in 1922 was the first time Boulder residents had witnessed the dramatics which usually accompanied KKK gatherings. But it was not the last. Rumors Boulder would have its own chapter had been circulating since the KKK officially announced its presence in Denver the summer of 1921. The following summer, members of the Denver chapter (Klavern No. 1) led 200 Boulderites into the country, five miles north of Boulder, officially initiating them.

The Klan's membership swelled in ensuing years; partly by circulating propaganda

literature saying that Klanners were the only true Americans, and partly by enticing prospective members with theatrics.

The initiation ceremony was the ultimate production. Men were only too willing to pay their \$10 initiation fees and \$6.50 for the white bedsheet in order to learn secret handshakes, passwords and rituals.

Besides newcomers also take part in the ceremony itself. Like some medieval cult service, Klanners in long, flowing, white robes would form a semi-circle around a huge, flaming cross. The man who wished to become a member would raise his right hand, then kneel on one knee and swear never to betray another Klansman (unless the Klansman was a traitor), defend the tenets of the Christian religion, abide by the

laws of the United States, and protect "the flower of white American womanhood."

Sometime in 1922, Boulder was granted its own chapter, Klavern No. 3. While its membership was never actually known, it was rumored to be somewhere between 300 and 500 people.

The Boulder Klavern gained most of its publicity by barging in on meetings of other organizations.

Six Klanners interrupted a Salvation Army meeting on Pearl Street and told the group that they were "anti" nothing except those principles that were un-Christian or un-American. The stunned Salvation Army members listened quietly as the Klansmen told them that they were looking for "100 per cent Americans," and would recruit

only those men who could meet these standards.

In other words, if you were not a devout Protestant (devout meaning regular church attendance), or if you had a drop of non-caucasian blood running through your system, then you were somewhat less than 100 per cent. To confirm their goodwill, the members of Klavern No. 3 threw 50 half dollar pieces into the army drum. The previously motionless Salvation Army members broke into fervent applause.

One evening, in the basement of a Boulder Presbyterian church, the lights suddenly went off in the middle of a men's Bible class, and eight Boulder Klansmen with candles slowly marched to the front of the altar chanting, "Who took the Bibles out of the public school?" They

then answered themselves, "We're going to put them back." The Klansmen decreed the Bible should be read daily in every classroom. Then they produced statistics showing what they termed the direct relationship between the rising burglary insurance rates and the number of years the scriptures had been missing from the public schools.

The Klanners told their audience they believed in everything the Bible class taught and hoped that some would join them. The hooded men left as quietly as they had entered. Again they were applauded.

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Not everyone in Boulder was tolerant toward the KKK. One Boulder widow went to the grave of her husband, finding the area blanketed with fire and smoke from a burning cross.

Several white-costumed men stood nearby. This was the usual ritual performed for departed KKK members, but the woman had no idea her husband was connected with the organization.

In a letter to the Daily Camera she wrote that she would have trouble "facing the world." Knowing her husband was a part of an organization "9 out of 10 Americans feel is un-American."

Ku Klux Klan candidate for the U.S. Senate, Rice Means asked University of Colorado athletic authorities if he could kickoff at the opening of the CU-Utah football game. His plans for seeking publicity in front of the 15,000 people in attendance were thwarted when a reply came back to him, "Mr. Means can kick-off anywhere he wants to, except in Boulder."

Though the majority of people in Boulder and Colorado were either indifferent or condemned antics of the KKK, the power of the "Invisible Empire" in Colorado politics between the years 1924-1926 was awesome. The Colorado general election of 1924 was fought almost exclusively on Klan and anti-Klan issues. The Klan, because of its more than 100,000 voting bloc in the Denver vicinity alone, was completely successful.

Those positions occupied by Klan members included state legislators, secretary of state and Denver's mayor, city attorney, manager of public safety, police chief, a district court judge, virtually all of the district grand jury, and seven sergeants and 22 patrolmen on the Denver Police force. The KKK's political influence in Denver reached its peak with the election of KKK candidate for governor of Colorado, Judge Clarence J. Morley.

Denver and its surrounding counties, including Boulder, were the stronghold of the western Klan movement. Under the strong and organized leadership of Grand Dragon Dr. John Galen Locke, Denver boasted a membership of somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000.

Not all of these members could be classified as violent racists. Many KKK members belonged to the organization because of its positive preachings of being a superior patriot, a return to a vigorous moral training, and its fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. Its bigotry and discrimination were either ignored or unknown.

could escape the stereotype of the timid shopkeeper. But out of Denver's 270,000 population in the early 20s, there were only 10,000 Jews and an even smaller number of blacks. The KKK did not concern itself with these minorities except for an occasional boycott.

The real targets of Denver's KKK were the 35,000 Catholics in the area. According to one Klan circular, the Catholics were directly responsible for three presidential assassinations and at least 90 per cent of all desertion during World War I. Catholic priests were constantly harassed, a state bill nearly passed prohibiting drinking of wine during a church service, and numerous restaurants placed signs in the window reading, "Fish served every day ... except Friday."

Abuses directed against the individual's right to freedom of religion did not last long. By 1926, the Klan's strong grip on Colorado politics was unfastened. Primary reason for its demise was the break between Dr. John Locke and the national headquarters of the KKK in Indianapolis.

The federal government launched an investigation of Grand Dragon Locke's alleged mismanagement of Klan funds and his failure to pay any income tax since 1913. National headquarters asked Locke to hand over all Klavern No. 1 funds but Locke conveniently said he had "misplaced" them. This led to his dismissal.

Apparently, Locke's personal magnetism was mainly responsible for the KKK's unity in Denver and Boulder. When he was fired, most members withdrew from the Invisible Empire to form a new organization under the leadership of Dr. Locke called the Minute Men of America. The new organization was to hold the same beliefs as the KKK, but since no information could be found about it, it is assumed that it barely functioned, then died.

The Boulder chapter voted unanimously to abandon the Ku Klux Klan and join Dr. Locke and his Minute Men. The official newspaper of the KKK printed on its obituary page the following: "Boulder Klavern No. 3 officially died at the stroke of midnight, Thursday, July 23, 1925."

What is disconcerting is that just 50 years ago, it lived at all.