

More than 50,000 donned hoods at Klan's height in state in 1920s

By JULIE STAFFORD
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When Jack Murphy was about 11 years old, he stood on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Main Street in Longmont with his Aunt Mae Healey watching the Ku Klux Klan parade by.

"It was in the spring, I think," said Murphy, now 80, a former Boulder County commissioner who lives in his

native Longmont. "There were about 2,000 to 3,000 Klan members from northern Colorado — all in their bed sheets — and there were some black horses. ... There were a lot of people down there, scared to death."

While Klan membership in Colorado is not as widespread as it was in the early 1920s, recent years have seen Klan activity surface again — mainly on

the observance of Martin Luther King Day. In 1992 and 1993, protests in Denver involving the KKK ended in violence.

This year, the organization plans to come to Boulder on Saturday.

News clippings from the past several decades trace the Klan's history in Colorado to 1921, when a group of Denver
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residents formed Klavern No. 1. Their goal was to rid the state of the civil service, which the organization believed was a haven for Catholics, Jews and natives of foreign countries.

A year after the Denver Klavern was formed, 200 Boulderites were led into the countryside five miles north of Boulder and initiated into the order. In 1922, Klavern No. 3 was established in Boulder with membership rumored to be anywhere from 300 to 1,000. At its peak, there were more than 50,000 members throughout Colorado.

To join, members had to pay an initiation fee of \$10, and \$6.50 for a white sheet and hood, although a local store advertised "wizard sheets" at 98 cents and "wizard pillowcases" at 25 cents.

On a December evening in 1922, dozens of Klan members dressed in white sheets and hoods paraded silently down Pearl Street. Some walked beside a float decorated with slogans such as "The Invisible Empire" and "Watch Us Grow in Boulder." About 60 cars followed with their license plates covered.

Lafayette and Longmont had their own Klan groups, too.

Clancy Waneka remembers being in about seventh grade when the Klan came to his native Lafayette.

erected great, large crosses on the hills here east of Lafayette," said the 84-year-old. "They wrapped them with some kind of cloth, then ignited them."

The Klan also tried to run people out of town, he said.

"They actually, in a few incidences, approached the homes of these people with their regalia and broke windows and frightened them in various ways."

The Klan in Colorado claimed a voting base of up to 100,000 and by 1925 had taken over the seats of governor, secretary of state and U.S. senator, and the Denver offices of mayor, chief of police and police judge. Seven Denver police sergeants and 22 patrolmen also belonged. Klan members made up a majority of the state district court bench and dominated the district grand jury. One member was on the Supreme Court.

In Longmont, the Klan gained a majority on the City Council and school board.

In Boulder, the organization started its own newspaper, the Rocky Mountain American, in which local businesses advertised with such slogans as "Klothing Karefully Kleaned" and "Klean Klassy Kars."

In the mid-1920s, there were very few blacks living in Boulder; black women were allowed to work as cooks and maids, but men had to go elsewhere for

harassed by the Klan.

Crosses also were burned on the lawns of well-known Catholics. In May 1924, a 5-foot cross burned all night on Flagstaff Mountain.

The Klan got much of its publicity by interrupting meetings of other organizations.

Hooded Klansmen paraded through a Boulder meeting of the Salvation Army, leaving 50 half-dollar pieces at the altar. And they turned out the lights at a men's Bible study meeting in the basement of a Boulder Presbyterian church, marching in with candles and chanting "Who took the Bibles out of the public schools?"

Waneka was sitting with his parents in the pews of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Lafayette when the service was interrupted.

"Reverend Hopkins was getting on real well with his sermon," said Waneka. "There was a lot of noise in the rear portion of the church and four to five Klansmen came in, each in their hoods. They walked down the aisle with their torches and frightened many people. They gave the reverend a hundred dollar bill and turned away and walked out. ... I was frightened, oh my goodness yes."

The University of Colorado wasn't immune from Klan conflict, either.

Gov. Clarence Morley warned

the university would be reduced drastically unless he allowed the Klan to dictate courses and have the power to influence faculty appointments. Norlin refused — but appropriations were not cut.

In 1924, W. Rice Means, a Klan candidate for the U.S. Senate, told the university he wanted to take part in the kickoff of the Colorado-Utah football game. He was told: "Mr. Means can kick off anywhere he wants, except in Boulder."

By late 1925, Klan influence had started to fade. Republicans reasserted themselves in the General Assembly and Grand Dragon John Galen Locke was charged with income tax evasion. Locke cinched his dismissal when he told Klan headquarters in Indianapolis that he had "misplaced the Klan treasury."

Shortly thereafter, Locke tried to form the Minute Men of America, a group that followed Klan ideals, but it didn't prosper.

Waneka said Klan activity seemed to drop almost overnight. Years later he said he talked with some of the people who had belonged to the Klan.

"I knew some of the people in years after the Klan had passed into history and they were embarrassed," he said. "Some of them mentioned (they didn't know) why they had affiliated with such a philosophy. They were young and it was fortunate that it dropped so quickly as it

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