

VF - Ku Klux Klan

KKK's presence in Boulder was short-lived

On July 14, 1922, in a secret ceremony, 200 Boulder men were initiated into the national organization known as the Ku Klux Klan. Prominent businessmen of the community were rumored to have belonged, but no one knew who they were. Their activities stirred up Boulder for the next few years.

The Boulder Klan's meetings were held in various locations along the foothills. Some were reported west of Dakota Ridge, while others were "north of Boulder" and were probably in the vicinity of Linden Avenue or Lee Hill Road.

"The Ku Kluxers didn't hurt anyone or destroy property, but they scared people," said Gertrude Dunning, a 91-year-old Boulder resident. As a teenager, she and a boyfriend witnessed one of the KKK's outdoor evening assemblies from a distance and from the safety of their car.

Although Dunning was too far away to see the Klansmen's secret handshakes or hear their passwords, she did get a good look at

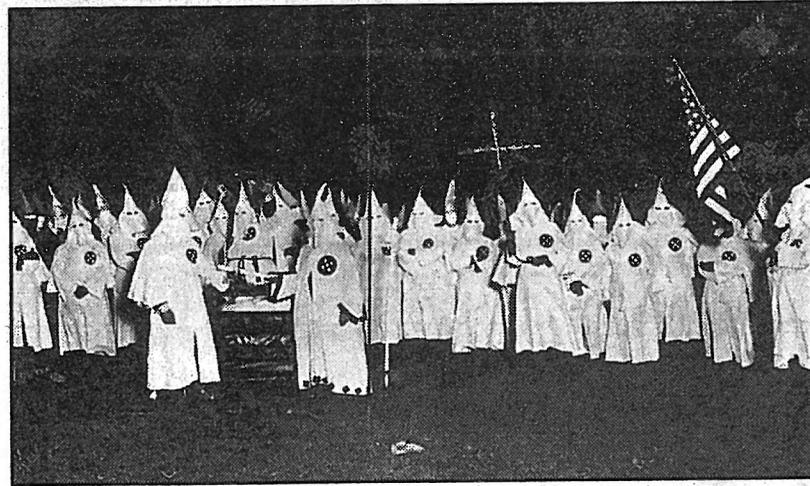


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the participants. "They were covered from head to toe in white gowns and pointed hoods," she said. "They were kind of spooky."

On a Saturday night in December 1922, the hooded and robed Boulder Klan, fortified with additional members from Denver, drove along Pearl Street in 63 automobiles and one float. They passed out fliers which read "Ku Klux Klan, 100 percent American." Even their license plates were blacked out, a fact the Camera pointed out was against the law. One reporter referred to the men as "a mysterious shrouded mass."

The Klan called themselves a "Protestant Christian order of



Courtesy Colorado History Museum

Catholics and Jews were the targets of Ku Klux Klan members when they assembled in the Boulder foothills in the mid-1920s.

Caucasian citizens." Although they had formed their organization after the Civil War for the purposes of restoring political power to disenfranchised Southern whites, the Klan deteriorated into a hateful racism. Over the years, the mem-

bers changed their emphasis to religion. In Boulder, they primarily tried to rid the town of Catholics and Jews.

Dunning, herself a Catholic, remembers that her sister was frightened when she attended a

cookout in a mountain cabin that was raided by hooded and robed Klan members. On another occasion, the Camera reported that eight members of the Klan dropped in on a men's Bible class at the Christian Church. After a dramatic entrance in their "flowing white robes," the Klansmen complimented the stunned class, then went on their way.

Besides secret meetings and sudden appearances, the Klan also participated in several cross burnings in the Boulder area. On the evening of May 20, 1924, a 53-foot high cross, made of sawdust and saturated with oil, burned for 30 minutes on Flagstaff Mountain. The blaze was visible for miles out on the plains. In an article the next day, the Camera stated, "Five carloads of men attended the rite (or wrong)."

Although most of the Klan kept their identities secret, some Boulder businesses went public in their endorsements. One dry cleaner advertised "Klothing Karefully Kleaned," while a car dealer pro-

moted "Klean Klassy Kars."

In 1924, the Denver Klan infiltrated the Republican Party convention. When Klansman Clarence J. Morley was elected Colorado governor, he supposedly took daily orders from "Grand Dragon" John Locke. One of these orders went to University of Colorado President George Norlin, who was told to rid the faculty of Catholics and Jews. Norlin adamantly refused, and the university received little money that year from the Legislature.

In 1926, however, a break between Locke and the Klan's national headquarters ended the activities of the local Klan organizations. Boulder was quiet again.

"It was exciting while it lasted," said Dunning. "There wasn't much else to talk about in Boulder at the time."

Silvia Pettem's history articles appear in this space every Tuesday. Write to her at the Daily Camera, P.O. Box 591, Boulder 80306, or e-mail her at pettem@earthlink.net.