

Kolorado Klaverns of the Ku Klux Klan

CU Daily 4/19/52 by phyllis smith

"I would rather be a Klansman in a robe of snowy white, Than to be a Catholic Priest in a robe as black as night; For a Klansman is AMERICAN and AMERICA is his home, But a priest owes his allegiance to a Dago Pope in Rome."

This charming invective was published in Boulder in the Ku Klux Klan's *Rocky Mountain American*, April 24, 1925. The Klan had been active in the Boulder area for about three years. Local activities started off with a silent parade down Pearl Street during a December evening in 1922. A number of hooded figures, shrouded in white, surrounded a float decorated with the slogans "The Invisible Empire," "100 per cent American," and "Watch Us Grow in Boulder." Sixty cars followed the float, their license plates covered up.

Klavern No. 3, the Boulder group, was formed shortly thereafter in a remote area north of Boulder. New members learned the secret handshake, passwords, other Klan rituals, and paid a \$10 initiation fee and \$6.50 for a white sheet and hood (although they could buy the Klan uniform from a local store that advertised Wizard Sheets at 98 cents each and Wizard Pillowcases at 25 cents each).

James H. Davis, scholar of the period, estimates there were from 300 to 500 Boulderites in the Klan. On the other hand, historian Robert G. Athearn in *The Coloradans* feels there may have been as many as 1,000 Boulderites in the Klan. Lafayette had its own Klan group; so did Longmont. Klaverns flourished in Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Canon City, Steamboat Springs, Montrose and Grand Junction. More than 50,000 Coloradans were members of the Klan at the height of its power.

The Klan started in Colorado as the Denver Doers Club under the leadership of Dr. John Galen Locke, a physician whose credentials may have been questionable, for he was denied membership in Denver's medical society. The Denver group came out into the open by 1921 as Klavern No. 1 with such warnings as "insane, feeble-minded and diseased undesirable aliens are being freely admitted to this country." They were against "suggestive dances," "titillating motion pictures," "loose women, roadhouses, and joyriding neckers and petters."

They wanted to rid the state of the civil service, in their minds a haven for Catholics, Jews and the foreign-born. Jews were responsible for the rise in female cigarette smokers, said the Klan, for Jews produced motion pictures in Hollywood. In the 1920s, chain stores were spreading across the nation; small store owners frightened by this phenomenon, were told this was a Jewish-backed scheme to run them out of business. The Klan pronounced, further, that wine should not be allowed in church services — an obvious insult to Catholic religious observance. Some of Denver's restaurants displayed the sign "Fish served every day . . . except Friday."

Jews and Catholics were not in the "mainstream," wrote William Francis, editor of the *Rocky Mountain American*, and Blacks were of such inferior intellect that they should be cared for by their White superiors.

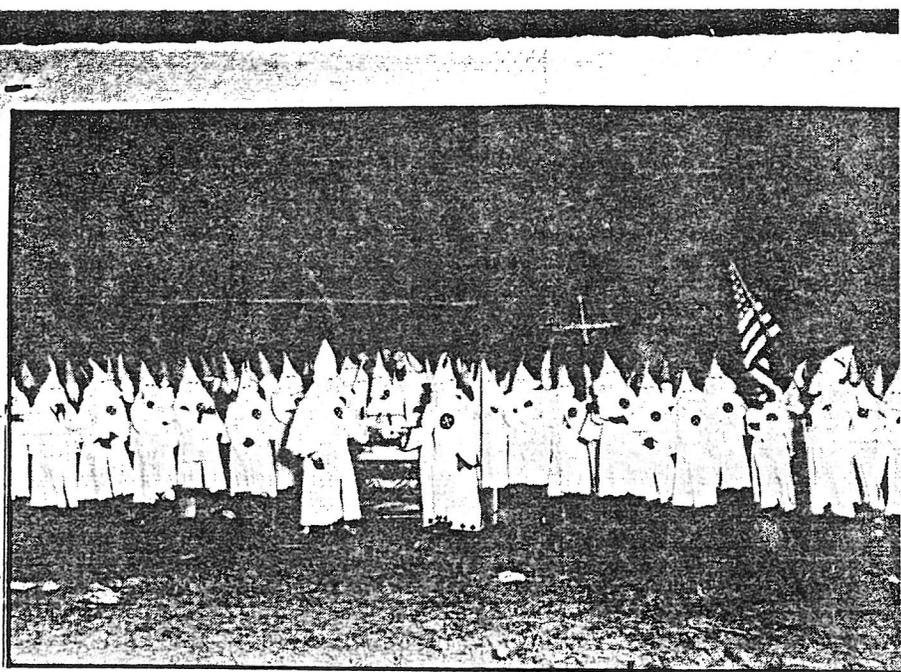
The Klan achieved power in Colorado by infiltrating the Republican Party convention in 1924, replacing Republican candidates with Klan-supported ones. They printed and sent throughout the state, including Boulder, specially marked ballots so that Klan members would know how to vote. When Klansman Clarence J. Morley was elected governor of Colorado, he took daily orders from Grand Dragon Locke (even after Locke was jailed for 13 years of income tax evasion). Colorado's national senators were Klan-supported, as was the mayor of Denver; both houses of the General Assembly were controlled by the Klan in 1925.

Some Boulder businessmen advertised in the *Rocky Mountain American* to show their support. (A few of those businesses still operate in Boulder today.) The Paris Dry Cleaning Parlor, it is easy to figure out why, advertised its service as "Klothing Karefully Kleaned." A car lot described its merchandise as "Klean Klassy Kars." A local grocery was "Kash and Karry" and a clothier sold "Klassy Kut Klothes." Other advertisers included a local mortician, a shoe store, a chiropractor, a coal company, a paint store, a shoe repair service, and several department stores.

By the 1920s, a few Blacks lived in Boulder; Black women could find work as cooks and maids but the men had to find work elsewhere. Those few Black men who did work here for the railroad were harassed by the Klan.

When a Boulder widow prayed beside the new grave of her dead husband, she looked up to see members of the Klan burning a cross to commemorate the passing of a fellow Klansman. Until then, she never dreamed her husband was a member and later wrote to the *Daily Camera* that she would "have trouble facing the world" knowing that her husband might have been a Klansman. It was not unusual, however, for the Klan to appear at graves of non-members to give the impression of wide membership. Crosses were burned in Louisville and on Catholic lawns in Boulder. A giant 50-foot cross burned all night on Flagstaff Mountain in May of 1924. Regular "Klavalcades" met at Golden every Monday night until 1926.

As was their style, hooded Klansmen paraded silently through meetings of the Salvation Army (leaving a \$50 donation) and a local Presbyterian group where, it was reported, there was much applause after their brief remarks on the value of Bible study in the public schools. Both Boulder and Lafayette Klans marched into a service at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Lafayette, depositing \$103 on the altar. The frightened congregation responded with an additional \$57.



This unusual photograph shows a Klan meeting just north of Boulder. Might there be other photos lying in Boulder albums or attics?

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CU had its troubles with the Klan. W. Rice Means, Klansman and candidate for the U.S. senate, notified the university that he wished to participate in the kick-off for the Colorado-Utah game. The university replied, "Mr. Means can kick-off anywhere he wants, except in Boulder." President George Norlin was ordered by the governor to rid the faculty of Jews and Catholics; this he refused to do. Little money was forthcoming from the General Assembly that year.

L. C. Paddock, editor of the *Daily Camera*, earned the Klan's hatred when he referred to their organization as the Comic Kapers Klub. Klan editor Francis would not use Paddock's name in his editorials but called him "the Pearl Street editor" who wrote editorials full of "Pearl Street lungmullion."

The Klan published a list of newspapers throughout Colorado who were unsympathetic to their cause. They ordered that the papers be boycotted by both subscribers and businessmen who wished to advertise. The *Boulder News-Herald*, also anti-Klan, warned Boulder in 1924, "The right of free speech would be destroyed. The blacklist and the boycott would be used against all citizens who would not be slaves to the Klan Kaisers. Sheriffs would select Klan juries. Klan judges and juries would dispense injustice under the Klan oath . . . fear, hatred, and strife would succeed community cooperation and good will. Heaven would become hell."

In the summer of 1925, Boulder played host to Klan members from Denver, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and Grand Junction. The meeting was led by the Exalted Cyclops and was

followed by an old-fashioned barbeque. On June 9, 1925, Klansmen paraded down Longmont's Main Street. Klan editor Francis editorialized that summer on Louisville's gambling, taking note that the Irish were involved. With regard to vice in Denver, Francis wrote, "Have you noticed the list of names of those arrested in the booze and vice clean-up of Denver? Looks like a page torn out of a city directory of the Holy City of Rome, with a sprinkling of Cork. Scan the list of names of those appearing in police court day after day on charge of bootlegging — Wops, every one of them."

Influence of the Klan in Colorado was strong for a time but its foundation was shaky and down it came. The Republicans, apparently no longer dazed from the Klan takeover, started to re-group. With the help of Colorado Democrats, they reasserted themselves in the General Assembly. Both parties bottled up Klan-supported bill in committee and started to fight back.

In addition to being charged with income tax evasion, Grand Dragon Locke "misplaced" the

Klan treasury. He was missed. From then on, the lost its grip over Colorado. In 1925, Locke surfaced by to form the Minute Men America, but the group did flourish. Klan editor Francis who for months predicted the Klan was not going to put out the last issue of paper on July 23, 1925 concerning "Boulder Klavern No. 3" officially died at the stroke of midnight . . .

Why was the Klan so active in a university town? Was it aftermath of World War I? Was it financial hard times? Was it the increase of immigration to the United States? It, as one writer suggests, "refuge of the mediocre man. Can it happen again?"

Smith is a local writer, author of *A Look at Boulder from Settlement to City*, work will appear regularly Colorado Daily.