

Some 2,500 Colorado Klansmen gathered in a canyon north of town to initiate 150 Boulder residents into Klavern No. 3 in July of 1922. Taken by a Denver reporter, this is said to be the first photo of a Klan ceremony in Colorado. Locals could determine the growth of the Klan by an "inventory of the excessive numbers of sheets and pillow cases" on Monday morning's wash line, according to a contemporary report.

# The Campus and the Klan:

BY PETER KNOX

Serving as president from 1919 to 1939, George Norlin spoke eloquently for the ideals of the University — he's probably more often quoted on campus than any other figure in the history of CU. The ideals he espoused command respect because they were forged in the crucible of practical experience in governing the University.

His actions in the 1920s provide a test case against which we can measure our own concepts of civility — the way we act towards each other as citizens of the University and the state of Colorado.

That test case was when Norlin took on the Ku Klux Klan in 1925.

## THE KLAN COMES TO COLORADO

Immediately after the First World War, a reorganized Klan had only about 5,000 members. In 1920 the Klan began a nationwide recruitment campaign, and just a year later its membership had grown to 85,000. Continued rapid expansion left no region of the country exempt. At its height in 1924 the Klan was three to six million strong.

In the spring of 1921 the Klan came to Colorado with a secret visit by William Joseph Simmons, the self-proclaimed Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Simmons met with a select group of prominent Denverites sympathetic with the aims of the secret society, who were promptly initiated as Klansmen and formed the core of the movement in the state.

"Law enforcement" and "100 Per Cent Americanism" were the Klan's rallying cries that struck a chord with segments of the Colorado population. While Jews, immigrants and African-Americans also were excluded from the Klan's vision of "Americanism," in Colorado Catholics bore the brunt of Klan hatred. Stories of papal conspiracies spread all over our state. Citizens were warned that the Holy Cross Abbey in Cañon City had been constructed on orders from the Pope to provide a base for infiltrating Protestant America. Boulder's Klan newspaper urged Protestants to mobilize against the threat.

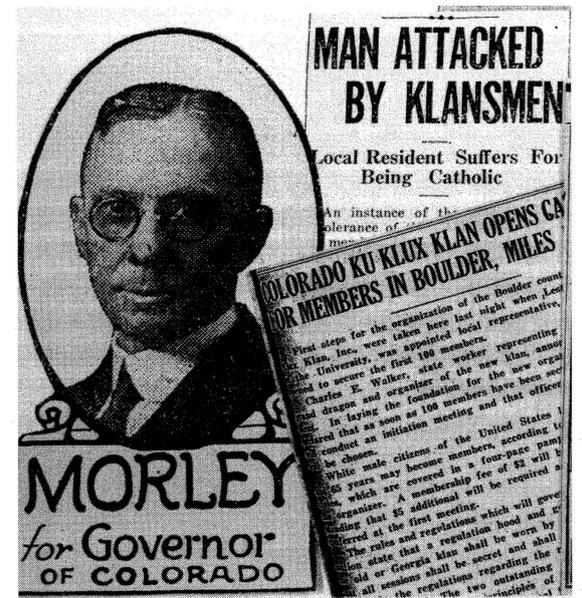
By 1924 some 40,000 Coloradans were Klansmen, and its leaders focused on that year's

elections. Distinctly bipartisan in its approach, the Klan supported candidates of either party who subscribed to its principles, but Republicans proved most vulnerable to Klan tactics.

That year Coloradans elected Klan-supported candidates as governor and U.S. senator as well as to five other top state posts.

## KLAN TARGETS CU

A week after the election the Imperial Wizard and a host of other Klan leaders arrived in Denver. Greeted openly amid a crowd at the



Although it gained control of part of the Colorado legislature in the 1924 elections, the Klan never gained full control of either the Democratic or Republican parties. After 1926 the influence of the KKK began to fade and had no impact in the 1928 state elections as traditional electoral issues and party politics outlasted the Klan.

Union Station platform by Governor-elect Clarence Morley, they proceeded to the Brown Palace Hotel to plan the agenda of the new administration.

By his own admission, Morley was little more than a puppet of John Galen Locke, Grand Dragon of the Colorado Klan. Their legislative proposals included bills to outlaw the Catholic Mass by prohibiting the use of sacramental wine, to prohibit immigration and property ownership by foreign nationals and to eliminate more than a dozen state agencies, including the Board of Health.

While the House was securely in the grip of the Klan in 1925, a slim majority of anti-Klan members from both parties controlled the Senate. These forces adopted delaying tactics, refusing to report legislation proposed by the

**"For the first time in the history of our country the attempt has been made to establish truth by majority vote....To put chains upon the scientist and the scholar is to enslave mankind," President George Norlin said in an address opening the summer session at CU in 1925. He refused Klan demands to fire all Jews and Catholics employed at the University.**

legislative program in ruins, Klansmen in the House took what revenge they could, refusing to pass even the reduced appropriation, and also withholding funds for the Pueblo state fair — thus displaying evenhanded hostility to colleges and carnivals.

#### **SURVIVING WITHOUT LEGISLATIVE FUNDING**

How did the University survive without state funds?

When Norlin became president in 1919 the University's financial situation was bleak. The litany of troubles it faced then has an eerily contemporary ring: steadily increasing enrollments,



controlled the statehouse clearly demonstrated that, in his view, serving the public interest did not mean subservience to public whims.

While we reflect with pride on the University's opposition to the activities of the Klan, we might also reflect upon whether that episode offers any paradigms for the present. For the University, in its quest to arrive at a common understanding of civility in its own house, is constantly under pressure from others seeking to impose their own concepts.

Last spring, as the Board of Regents prepared to decide whether to extend health benefits to partners in same-sex couples, newspapers reported that some members of the legislature intended to introduce measures to withhold all funding for the University if the policy were adopted. The regents rejected the proposal amid denials that political pressure played a role.

George Norlin's conduct in 1925 perhaps leaves us free to ponder whether our actions in 1997 remain consonant with his stirring definition of civility:

"To be courageous in the midst of panic, to cherish liberty in the midst of its excesses, to go forward even when progress is in disrepute." □

*Peter Knox is professor of classics. He joined the faculty in 1992 and currently chairs the classics department, where George Norlin began his CU career in 1899. This is an excerpt from a paper Knox presented in September as part of a discussion hosted by the new Center for Humanities and the Arts entitled "Civility, Censorship and CU: A Celebration of George Norlin and the Cause of Free Speech." The discussion began a year-long series the center is sponsoring on civility and censorship. For information, call 303-492-7226.*

# A Classic Lesson in Civility

new regime out of committee and virtually asphyxiating the governor's programs. The most important bills passed included one that prohibited picking the blue columbine and another that authorized convicts to manufacture license plates.

This was the climate in which President Norlin approached the General Assembly seeking the University's annual \$120,000 appropriation. Early in the session behind closed doors, Gov. Morley had pressured Norlin to adopt the Klan's agenda. Norlin described the incident in a 1939 letter:

"The Governor assured me that the University could have what it wanted in the way of appropriations provided the University would play the game with the Ku Klux Klan; that is, definitely provided the University would dismiss from its staff all Catholics and all Jews. I stated flatly to the Governor that if we had to pay such a price for the support of the Legislature, we preferred to do without that support. And we did without it."

The University's request was cut in half by the Senate and sent back to the House. With their

over crowded classes and labs, heavier teaching loads and increasing demands from the public for more service from the University. And, of course, grudging and inadequate funding from the state.

One alumnus later wrote, "To make the University independent of biennial appropriations, the whim and sport of every passing Legislature, has been (Norlin's) major aim." The president took the lead in presenting voters with an amendment to the state constitution that provided an additional mill levy for higher education. The amendment passed in 1920 by a margin of 7 to 1.

When he rejected the Klan's overtures in the spring of 1925, Norlin held this trump card. "Fortunately, the millage tax support for the University was enough to keep the University alive, though barely alive, during that period," he wrote later.

#### **CIVILITY LESSONS SEVEN DECADES LATER**

Today the case of the campus and the Klan holds no ambiguities; the view was perhaps less clear in 1925. Norlin's conduct while the Klan