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~~Clubs and organizations - (Ku Klux Klan)~~

# KKK influence was strong here in the 1920s

**Editor's Note: The following is the first in a four-part series about the Ku Klux Klan in Longmont during the 1920s. Researched by T-C Correspondent Marge Lastick, the series will focus on the Klan's influence in Longmont and Boulder County, its position of power in state politics and the relatively favorable press coverage it received. Today's story reflects on the Klan's portrayal in Longmont as a group dedicated to "100 percent Americanism."**

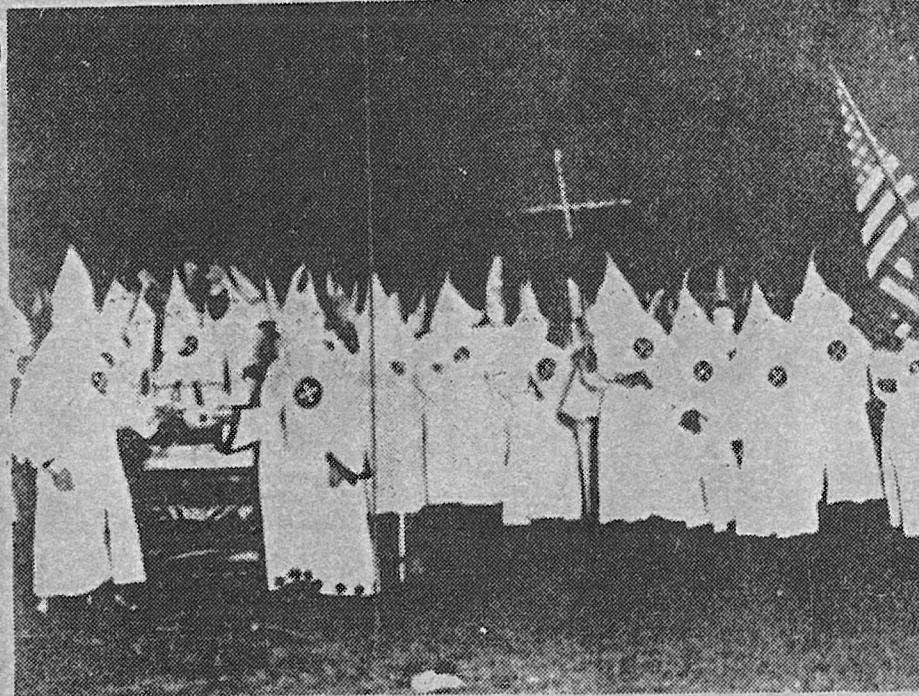
Longmont Dec 26, 79  
By MARGE LASTICK  
T-C Staff Writer

While most Longmont families were at home awaiting Santa Claus on Christmas Eve 55 years ago, a few workmen quietly added a finishing touch to the municipal Christmas tree at Fourth Avenue and Main Street.

An 8-foot cross formed in red electric lights, the unusual ornament could be seen from far away. "It is the most effective and beautiful decoration of its kind ever displayed in Longmont," the weekly Longmont Ledger reported.

Symbol of the Ku Klux Klan, the glowing cross marked a high point of Klan influence in Longmont and throughout Colorado in the 1920s.

Many Longmont residents apparently had joined the secret society. Virginia Estes, a longtime resident and member of the St. Vrain Historical Society, remembers Klansmen as being "well-respected citizens of the community. They were good people, looking out for the best interests of the city, but looking in the wrong direction," she said.



Hundreds of hooded, robed figures gathered for a Ku Klux Klan initiation ceremony near Boulder in 1923. The secret order, standing for "100 percent Americanism," gained 50,000 members in Colorado between 1922 and 1925.

Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society

In December 1924, the Daily Times reported more than 50 members of Longmont Klan No. 2 conducted a funeral service for the deceased mayor of Lyons, R.W. Epley, "a highly esteemed citizen" and former Klansman.

The hooded Klansmen filed into the

Methodist Church in military formation. Their leader carried an American flag, while another Klansman placed a large, fiery cross of red flowers on the casket.

The Klansmen marched to the cemetery, conducted final ceremonies and "in a few well-chosen remarks, eulogized

the life of Mr. Epley. It is believed that Longmont Klan No. 2 has the distinction of conducting the first Klan funeral in the state of Colorado," the Daily Times reported.

Most Longmont press coverage of the Klan emphasized its positive elements, its dedication to "100 percent Americanism" and its charitable donations to local agencies and churches.

For example, the Daily Times reported the dramatic appearance of eight robed Klansmen at a Salvation Army street meeting in Boulder Dec. 11, 1922. "The Klansmen poured 50 silver dollars in the Salvation Army drum, leaped into a waiting automobile and disappeared down a side street."

It almost sounds like a visit from the Lone Ranger. The Ledger commented, "If the Klan wants to call on the Ledger office that way, they are welcome."

The Longmont press did not discuss the seamier side of the Klan program, its exploitation of prejudices against Negroes, Catholics, Jews and immigrants.

Although Klan violence was prevalent across the country and the Denver Klavern's activities included threats to the NAACP and boycotts of Catholic merchants, local violence was only suggested and denied.

When William and Carl Frank of Longmont received several threatening letters marked by the Ku Klux Klan insignia, the Daily Times reported that the Klan had contacted Police Chief Ed Landers and authorized a \$100 reward for the arrest and conviction of the letters' author.

Colorado Grand Dragon John Galen Locke claimed there had been "malicious accusations" that the letters were written by the Klan. He proclaimed "the order is based on liberty and lawfulness."

Whether or not the Klan actually had issued the threats, such publicity turned the incident to the order's credit in Longmont.

A rash of burning crosses appeared in the area during April 1924, reported without comment in the Daily Times. The fiery cross, an implement of Klan ritual at regular gatherings, also was used to terrify its victims. The local press provided no record of whom the Klan might have been threatening.

At one of several large Klan meetings in Longmont, the Rev. G.M. Baumgardner, a national lecturer, explained the principles of the Klan.

As reported in the Ledger, "the most truly American organization in existence" supports the Bible in public schools, free speech and free press, allegiance to the Constitution, reverence for the flag, law and order and the restriction of immigration.

"From what he said, it appears the order stands for everything that you and I — Americans — stand for. The principles of the Ku Klux Klan as he represents them are beautiful, no other words can describe them," the Ledger commented.

Thursday's story will detail Longmont's Ku Klux Klan involvement with churches.