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Introduction

It may come as a surprise to some readers that the Ku Klux Klan was not only present in Grand Junction and Mesa County just sixty years ago, but that it became a dominant force in the political life of this community. Long time residents will not be surprised but may well have the events of those days so shrouded with continuing rumors and community stories that the actual atmosphere and happenings of those days have become somewhat confusing.

The writer's interest sprang from many years of desire to learn the local history of the various communities in which he has been privileged to live. The investigation of the days of the Klan began in 1970 and is now revised by additional information gathered from time to time.

The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan following World War I formed some vivid childhood memories for one who was born prior to America's entrance into that conflict and whose life in a small, rural community in the decade of the 1920s included experiences familiar to Grand Junction and a multitude of American cities and towns. The burial of a county patrolman, killed in a traffic accident, conducted by many robed and hooded Klan members, both men and women, made a great impression on an eight-year-old boy. No less vivid is the memory of parents and neighbors speculating on the identity of those Klan members. A near neighbor, believed to have physically abused his wife, was left a large bundle of sticks on his doorstep one dark night. This act was attributed to the Klan and was generally applauded by the community. An uncle, a devoted member of the Methodist Church and, perhaps, an even more devoted member of the Masonic Order, never passed a large Roman Catholic Church without saying: "That basement is filled with guns." Many adults, just seven years after the ending of World War I, predicted that the next war would be between Catholics and Protestants. This prediction was also stated by the writer's mother, although her favorite neighbor was a devoted Roman Catholic lady who lived just down the lane.

These personal reflections are only intended to suggest that similar tensions and fears gripped the thoughts of many persons in many communities during that turbulent decade. Thus the writer has sought not to exercise judgement on any individuals who may be mentioned in this study. The motivations and actions of those persons can probably never be more than partly understood. As one who sought to minister to the congregation which was served just thirty-three years earlier by the Exalted Cyclops of the Grand Junction Klan, the writer learned that many remembered him as a good friend and treasured the many kind things he sought to do for people.

I conclude with the hope that some who examine these pages may have materials and evidences which will help some future study become more complete than this one.

"THE KU KLUX KLAN IN GRAND JUNCTION, 1924-1927"

by J. Kenneth Baird

CHAPTER I A NEW KLAN FOR A NEW DAY: THE KU KLUX KLAN IN COLORADO IN THE 1920s

The acceptance of Jim Crowism by the nation as a means of controlling Negro freedmen in the South and elsewhere eliminated the need and the appeal of the Ku Klux Klan in post-Reconstruction days. Occasional lynching parties required no continuing organizations and the dissolving of individual Klaverns (local Klans) resulted in the practical demise of the entire organization. As time passed, a number of novels romanticized and memorialized the movement. The most influential of these, by a combination of circumstances, was *The Clansmen* by Thomas Dixon, which appeared in 1906. It is doubtful if its success resulted from the literary merit or factualness of the novel. *The Clansmen* provided the background for the script of one of America's greatest early motion pictures. When *Birth of a Nation*, directed by D.W. Griffith, was released in March, 1915 it carried the romantic picture of the Klan and the South's view of Reconstruction to over fifty million Americans during the next decade. By the time the film reached Atlanta, Georgia the following December, it was so popular in the South as a whole that a cross had already been burned on Stone Mountain outside that city and the Klan was reborn. William Joseph Simmons, the author of the revival of the Klan, was a fraternal type man who loved belonging to organizations and especially secret ones. Under the impetus of the film, this inclination combined with his desire to see the "old" Klan in action once again, and the new Klan was born. For five years it was little more than a token memorial to the Klan of Reconstruction days. The post World War I climate in the United States and the appearance

of two enterprising promoters, Edward Young Clarke and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, combined to make the Simmons revival of the Klan more than a short-lived and sentimental secret order.

The Southern Publicity Association, formed by Clarke and Mrs. Tyler, sought issues and groups against which a "one hundred per cent Americanism" group could be directed. The Red Scare of post-Revolutionary Russia; the flood of Southern European immigrants, as yet unassimilated into the "melting pot," with their predominant Roman Catholic faith; the always identifiable Jewish community, sometimes suspected of communism and always suspected of being wealthy; these, added to the everpresent Negro problem, were enough to mobilize the Klan's revival. These were issues being felt far more generally than the old question of control of Negro freedmen following the Civil War. Northern cities had received the first wave of Negro migrants from the South during World War I. They held, also, the largest identifiable number of the new Southern European immigrants in well defined ghettos and almost all had large Jewish communities. During the war years the Klan had remained a small group of approximately five thousand members with strong groups in Mobile, Birmingham, and Montgomery, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia.¹ The first national attention came soon after the takeover by the Southern Publicity Association.

The first nationwide notice of the Ku Klux Klan came in the fall of 1921. On September 6, after months of research by Rowland Thomas, the *New York World* began a three-week expose of the secret order, with particular attention to the more violent aspects. Carried by eighteen leading newspapers . . . the articles documented Klan purposes, ideals, and practices. The *World* estimated its combined strength in forty-five states as five hundred thousand. . . .²

Months before this article was written, the Klan had made its way to Denver, and in early 1921 the Denver Doers Club was organized. In June, 1921, it was made clear in the Denver press that this was really a Klan organization.³

The work of Kenneth T. Jackson on the Klan in the period 1915-1930 has called attention to two unique characteristics of the early twentieth century revival of the Klan. Jackson pointed out that the first and third manifestations of the Klan have been directed at maintaining white supremacy over the Negro and have been strongest in the rural South. The second period found its greatest following in large urban centers and was directed against the enemies of America as defined by the Klan. The Klan identified enemies by contrasting them to "true" Americans

who were white, native born, and Protestant. Thus, according to Jackson, the enemies in large urban areas were apt to be recent immigrants, especially Southern Europeans, who were Catholic. Jews, an unassimilated "foreign" bloc, were the second most important group of identified enemies, and, finally, Negroes.⁴ Denver and its developing Klan serve as a near perfect example of Jackson's thesis.

The Colorado Klan came into being in Denver with the creation of Klan No. 1. This Klavern would remain the most powerful in the State with a membership of over 20,000 persons. During the next three years the Klan would spread into other Colorado communities. Denver remained the geographic center of the organization through numerical strength and aggressive leadership. When the Klan virtually controlled Colorado's state politics in the 1924 election, the Denver delegation to the state Republican convention exerted enormous influence and hand-picked many of the Klansmen to run for state and national offices.⁵ The strength of the Denver Klan can be attributed, to a large extent, to the organizing ability of Dr. John Galen Locke. Locke had been refused admittance to the Denver chapter of the American Medical Association because of his failure to keep up with developments in his field following graduation from medical school some time before. Locke had practiced in Denver for twenty-eight years but now abandoned his profession and turned his talents to organizing and directing the Invisible Empire in Denver. Jackson quotes the *Denver Express* to give an indication of the success of Locke in this endeavor:

In 1924 the *Denver Express* tagged him the most powerful man in Colorado and declared that his powers were those of an absolute dictator: "He may at his pleasure remove any officer in the state of Colorado. He may also suspend any man from the order without a hearing . . . public officers are completely subservient. They either obey or are kicked out of the organization."⁶

This was written after the capture of the statehouse in the 1924 elections, but Locke and the Klan had set out on a political course more than two years before when the Klan first began to gain power in the city and the state. Early efforts directed toward individuals of Denver's 7,000 Negroes and 10,000 Jewish residents had later turned more in the direction of anti-Catholicism, and political strategy had been accepted as the prime means of attaining goals. As the Klan's political strength grew, it was primarily directed against the Roman Catholic community. However, the early Klan in Colorado was not simply anti-Catholic, and its goals were not entirely negative. Klan activities across the state included support of the work of Protestant denominations

by contributions to community Y.M.C.A. (Young Men's Christian Association) organizations and contributions to deserving pastors and congregations. The clergymen so honored were not necessarily Klansmen, although many Protestant ministers did belong to the organization and assumed positions of leadership in it. Grand Junction's *The Daily Sentinel*, under a Colorado Springs dateline, told on January 9, 1924 of such a gift to the pastor of the Fountain Baptist Church.⁷ A similar gift to "Big Jim" Kramer, an evangelist, was reported at Loveland the same month.⁸

A story in *The Daily Sentinel* of March 19, 1924 told of Klan support in Canon City for a Y.M.C.A. financial drive and the parade of 267 Klansmen in regalia to the local football field to give approval to a student celebration of a school bond election victory. A parade in Walsenburg, Colorado was reported in the same paper on January 24, 1924. Banners carried in that parade announced aims of the Klan: "The Bootleggers Must Go," "America for Americans," "Free Press, Free Speech," and "We're for Restricted Immigration."⁹ The interest of the Klan in the enforcement of the Volsted Act is relatively easy to understand. Conservative Protestants had been primarily responsible for the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Klan sought to appeal to exactly the same group of Americans. Since enactment of a law prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages was unique in the western world, and since the Klan considered its type of Americanism authentic as well as unique, the desire to see Prohibition work was a logical goal for the Klan. Anti-Catholicism could also be expressed through Prohibition enforcement, since this was the one major church not opposing the use of alcoholic beverages. The use of fermented wine in the Catholic services provided a spot for attack by the Klan once it had gained political strength.

The aims and goals of the Klan were sufficiently close to the temper of conservative Americans that the organization received support from those who fought the forces which they considered threatening American ideals. The appeal and apparent patriotism of Klan aims were demonstrated by a Klansman's speech in Grand Junction on Thursday, October 30, 1924, prior to the national, state, and local elections of that important year. The guest speaker called for free schools, free speech, free press, and one hundred per cent reverence for the American flag.¹⁰ Obviously these are goals to which every patriotic citizen could subscribe. However, to Klansmen such high-sounding ideals had other meanings. Free schools in the parlance of the Klan was usually another way of saying that parochial schools were un-American and should be abolished by law. One hundred per cent

reverence for the American flag was usually interpreted as pointing out that Catholics held a competing reverence for the papacy, which was considered a foreign power. There was a strong emphasis on religion and patriotism at Klan meetings, which were opened with a pledge of allegiance to the flag and prayer, much as meetings of service clubs are still opened. But Klansmen believed that they addressed their prayers to an American and Protestant God.

The opposition to Catholics in Denver was very strong. Jackson indicated, however, that more enmity was directed to the 15,000 Eastern European Roman Catholic immigrants in Globeville, a well defined community in north Denver. The inhabitants of Globeville, being concentrated and conspicuous recent arrivals from the Old World, generated more hatred from the Klansmen than the 20,000 other Roman Catholics scattered throughout the remainder of the city who were second or third generation citizens.¹¹ Efforts in Denver, copied by other larger cities in the state, were limited at the beginning to individual and somewhat sporadic maneuvers. Klansmen charged that Catholic businessmen discriminated against Protestants. This charge produced a backlash against Catholic businessmen which resulted in a loss of customers and business. Catholic leaders, particularly writers and publishers, were attacked and they charged, in turn, that the Klan had threatened them physically.¹²

Soon the Klan sought to extend its power through elected officials. It is not surprising, therefore, that the office of the mayor of Denver became a primary target for the Klan. Benjamin F. Stapleton became mayor of Denver in the municipal elections of 1923. He ran on a reform platform and declared his opposition to secret orders seeking to stir up religious or racial prejudices. When his early popularity waned, Mayor Stapleton apparently found it expedient to cooperate with the Klan and Locke. Stapleton was probably not a full member of the Klan but his cooperation with it caused the circulation of a petition for his recall in 1924. Before this Stapleton had sought to break with Locke, but the petition drive seemed to leave him without friends and he sought Klan help. The Klan exacted a political favor: appointing a Klansman Chief of Police. Stapleton survived the recall election, and the Klan probably gained its greatest strength in the months that followed.

Despite the pattern of cooperation between Stapleton and the Klan, the Klan turned elsewhere for support in the 1924 elections. Stapleton was a Democrat and the Klan worked within the Republican Party to elect Klan candidates for state and national posts. In this it was very successful and Klan candidates for governor, United States senator, and

Colorado Secretary of State were nominated and elected. This was largely accomplished by complete domination of the Denver Republican assembly. The state assembly was not so noticeably controlled but the powerful Denver delegation was able to have its way. It must be remembered that the Denver Klan had been in existence for over three and a half years when the 1924 elections were held.

The year 1924 saw the rise of many active and powerful Klaverns in smaller cities and towns across the state. The Grand Junction Klan was, apparently, organized about this time. Cities along the eastern edge of the Rockies were organized earlier and the influence of the Denver Klan No. 1 was very strong. Klan activity in Walsenburg already has been noted, and news of Klan organizations in Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and Trinidad appeared about this time in the various presses. It should be remembered that the towns of the southern half of the eastern slope area contained a rather large number of Mexican-Americans and these were almost all Roman Catholic. Canon City was to gain some prominence in Klan circles later because it became the center of state Klan activities after the discrediting of Locke and the loss of power by the Denver Klan. Canon City was also the last sizeable town in the state to eliminate Klan control from city politics.

The general elections of 1924 put the statehouse and the Denver city government under Klan control. William E. Sweet, the incumbent, a liberal Democrat, was defeated by Klansman Clarence Morley for the governorship. The Klan probably relished the defeat of Judge Ben Lindsay, a liberal and anti-Klan Juvenile Judge, as much as it did any of its other victories. Klan control of the lower house of the state legislature was established, and also much legislation was introduced with Klan aims directly or indirectly connected to the bills. One of the most obvious was a bill to prevent the use of wine in the celebration of religious rituals. This would affect both Catholics and Jews and eliminate legal Roman Catholic worship. Only the presence of previously elected legislators on key committees prevented much of this legislation from coming to the floor of the House of Representatives where it most likely would have been enacted.¹³

The two years of Klan control of the state house and partial control of the legislature were, perhaps, among the most frustrating of the state's political history. Bills were almost impossible to get out of committee for reasons noted above. Stroke and counterstroke prevented even essential measures for running the business of the state from getting before the legislature. Last minute enactments, just before the adjournments of sessions, permitted a limited functioning of state offices and programs. Meanwhile, Locke was under fire from the

United States Department of Internal Revenue on charges of delinquency in filing and paying of income taxes. At first Governor Morley supported him, but continuing charges caused the national organization of the Invisible Empire to ask for his resignation in the summer of 1925. Locke had already resigned his state offices. He now withdrew from the Klan and established his own rival group called the Minutemen. Other internal squabbling weakened the Klan and lessened confidence in the Klan's leadership in Colorado at a time when anti-Klan forces reached a working agreement.

Repudiation of Klan candidates in the off-year elections of 1926 practically eliminated the Invisible Empire as a power in state politics in Colorado. Municipal elections in the spring of 1927 served largely to complete the destruction of the political power of the Klan. There were one or two exceptions, the most notable at Canon City. This part of the story is more completely illuminated in the rise and fall of the Klan in Grand Junction which has been reserved for consideration in a succeeding chapter. Needless to say, Colorado was, for a time, one of the showplaces of Klan power in the United States. A visit of Imperial Wizard Simmons to Denver had sparked the beginning of the Klan early in 1921. Within a week after the tremendous success in the 1924 elections, another visit was made to Denver. This time it was Simmons' successor, Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans, who made the visit to congratulate the victors and lay plans for the fullest capitalization of that victory. Unfortunately for the Klan, Evans was writing an embarrassing letter just seven months later, asking Locke to resign. As we have seen, this was the beginning of the end of statewide power for the Klan.

Ideals of The Klan

I. The Character of the Organization.
 And here is a opportunity to express itself more fully than with words. It is here that we find the true character of the Klan, and we find that it is an organization that is not only one of the most patriotic and most loyal of our country, but also one of the most intelligent and most forward looking of our people.

2. IT IS AN AMERICAN ORGANIZATION, and we find that it is an organization that is not only one of the most patriotic and most loyal of our country, but also one of the most intelligent and most forward looking of our people.

3. IT IS A PROGRESSIVE ORGANIZATION, and we find that it is an organization that is not only one of the most patriotic and most loyal of our country, but also one of the most intelligent and most forward looking of our people.

4. IT IS A BROTHERLY ORGANIZATION, and we find that it is an organization that is not only one of the most patriotic and most loyal of our country, but also one of the most intelligent and most forward looking of our people.

5. IT IS A UNITED ORGANIZATION, and we find that it is an organization that is not only one of the most patriotic and most loyal of our country, but also one of the most intelligent and most forward looking of our people.

6. RACIAL IDEALS
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

7. WE MUST KEEP THIS WHITE MAN'S CONCEPT
 This is the true character of the Klan, and we find that it is an organization that is not only one of the most patriotic and most loyal of our country, but also one of the most intelligent and most forward looking of our people.

8. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE NEGRO
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

9. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE CHINESE
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

10. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE JAPANESE
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

11. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIANS
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

12. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE HISPANICS
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

and that demands the enforcement of laws by those who have been duly elected by the people. We are with our rights as American citizens when we demand that those who are elected by the people shall be held to the principles of our constitution, and we are ready to meet their responsibility in a practical way.

IV. Patriotic Ideals
 The purpose of this Klan is to protect and to defend the principles of our constitution, and to protect and to defend the principles of our constitution.

1. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE NEGRO
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

2. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE CHINESE
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

3. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE JAPANESE
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

4. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIANS
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

5. WE WOULD NOT DENY THE RIGHTS OF THE HISPANICS
 We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race. We stand for the white race, and we stand for the white race.

THE CHURCH CITY ELECTION.—Locally the Klan stands for law enforcement, the election of competent and conscientious officials, and the enforcement and business-like administration of the affairs of the city. It stands for the election of all citizens entitled to vote, and for the election of all citizens entitled to hold office. It stands for the election of all citizens entitled to hold office, and for the election of all citizens entitled to hold office. It stands for the election of all citizens entitled to hold office, and for the election of all citizens entitled to hold office.

Grand Junction Klan, No. 35 **Box 183**

Courtesy of Mesa County Public Library

Full page ads, such as this, appeared in The Daily Sentinel during the Klan's three-year existence in the city. This one preceded the 1925 City Council election.

NOTES

¹Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 7.

²*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³*Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. xi-xv.

⁵*The Daily Sentinel*, 4 August 1924.

⁶Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, p. 220.

⁷*The Daily Sentinel*, 9 January 1924.

⁸*Ibid.*, 22 January 1924.

⁹*Ibid.*, 24 January 1924.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 31 October 1924.

¹¹Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, p. 219.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹³James H. Davis, "Colorado Under the Klan," *The Colorado Magazine*, XIII, 2 (Spring, 1965), pp. 100-104.

CHAPTER II GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO: THE PERENNIALY POTENTIAL METROPOLIS OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

Removal of the Ute Indians from western Colorado in the fall of 1881 opened the last major section of the state to settlement. The fact that white men had been encroaching on Ute lands for the purposes of mining and settling for a number of years is a story which must not distract us at this time. The first major movements of settlers followed the soldiers who herded the Indians down the valleys of the Gunnison and Grand rivers toward their new reservation in Utah. When the first groups arrived in the wide valley at the confluence of the Grand and Gunnison, they staked out claims for ranches. Before the end of September, six men had planned a city for the junction area of the two rivers.¹ The changing of the name of the Grand to the Colorado River 43 years later was to leave this city with a confusing misnomer for a name.

Other towns, notably Delta, were planned earlier, but Grand Junction, located at the confluence of two major mountain drainage systems, occupied the most advantageous location for a city in the new area. The arrival of the railroad from Gunnison during the first few months of the new city's life, and the completed connection with Salt Lake City shortly thereafter, assured Grand Junction's rapid development.

Grand Junction began as a transportation hub and continued to develop as such. The completion of a rail line down the Grand (Colorado) River valley in the 1890s and a link with Denver through the Dotsero cutoff after the completion of the Moffat Tunnel in the 1930s added to the city's importance in the transportation network. Better roads and highway passes over the Continental Divide would bring more traffic, but these events came after the mid-1920s when the Ku Klux Klan was active in Grand Junction.

The first settlers were interested in ranching, but the possibilities of intensive agriculture through irrigation were apparent very early. Fruit growing, including peaches, plums, cherries, apricots, and apples, were feasible from the first. Within twenty years of the settling of the valley, sugar beet growing had been introduced, and a sugar processing plant was established. Other industries related to agriculture, such as flour mills and canning factories, came into being, waxed and waned and sometimes disappeared depending upon the general condition of the agricultural economy of the time.

Mining appeared to hold promise as a profitable enterprise to early settlers. Mining for precious metals had first brought Euro-Americans to western Colorado. Coal was discovered in abundance in the Bookcliff formation along the north side of the Grand Valley. It is difficult to know when it was discovered that the shale of the same formation was oil bearing. Stories of rock chimneys catching on fire because they contained oil shale were prevalent in early Grand Junction folklore. The mining of various ores made it seem logical that a smelter would prosper in the Grand Junction area. Shortly after the turn of the century such an effort was proposed. The organizers asked for and received help from the city. Land was contributed, stock was purchased locally, reduced freight rates from the railroads were secured and the plant was actually erected. According to historian Mary Rait, failure to secure adequate supplies of ore and dissension among the operators caused the closure of the smelter after a few months of operation. Newspaper reports of Chamber of Commerce plans in the mid-1920s would seem to indicate that the promises of new industries were always "just around the corner."

Grand Junction did grow from the time of its organization. Except for its earliest years and the decade from 1900 to 1910, the growth was slow and steady. The years from 1910 until the time of the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan were a period of little growth, however. Population in the 1900 United States census showed 3,503 persons in the city, 19 years after its founding. By 1910 there were 7,754 residents. The 1920 census showed a ten-year growth of just over 900 to a total of 8,665. A mid-decade estimate showed a loss of population to about 7,000.² An interesting local commentary on the slow growth was reflected in *The Daily Sentinel* in the spring of 1920 where the lack of new houses is listed as the cause of no new persons moving to the city.³ There was no suggestion in the story that lack of jobs may have reduced demands for homes and made house building unprofitable for contractors. Mention was made of the fact that several families had reportedly left Grand Junction in preceding months because they could not find adequate housing. Of course, this was the time immediately following World War I when a temporary depression prevailed throughout the nation. Grand Junction had experienced some population growth from 1915 to 1920, but had not built much, apparently, because of wartime difficulties. But the postwar decline in agricultural prices continued during the otherwise prosperous decade of the 1920s. Being agricultural in nature, Grand Junction suffered as a result.

Aside from agriculture, Grand Junction had found, by 1920, only one reasonably consistent source of community income. The railroad

maintained a fairly sizeable payroll and Grand Junction served as a distribution point for many types of commodities needed in towns and rural areas all over the Western Slope. At least one Grand Junction resident who was just beginning a 40-year career with a local firm in 1920 remembers the railroad payroll as an important component of the Grand Junction economy.⁴ However, agriculture remained the single most important economic activity. Agricultural successes and failures may prove to be the key to the writing of a full history of Grand Junction and the surrounding trade area, should that task ever be undertaken. It is worth noting that agricultural problems gave local historian Mary Rait material for her conclusions regarding future difficulties in the early 1930s.⁵ Recent surveys of the community have brought the conclusion that tourism is, in terms of outside money brought to Grand Junction, the largest "industry" at the present time. It should be remembered that the automobile tourist was a post-World War I phenomenon and the lack of roads prevented tourists from getting to Grand Junction until well beyond the time of the advent of the Klan in the mid-1920s.

The agricultural economy of Grand Junction brought it into close contact with the national movements that sought to bring agrarian relief during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Populist Party of the pre-World War I years and the Socialist Party in the second decade of the twentieth century both touched the Grand Valley. The Populists, a third party, sought to gain strength for the farmer and rural citizen against the railroads and the industrial East. The Populists registered quite an impact on Grand Junction, a place that experienced problems which were much the same as those of the prairie states and the Midwest.

The interests and contributions of James W. Bucklin exemplify happenings in Grand Junction. Bucklin was one of those six men who founded the Grand Junction Town Company in Gunnison, early in October, 1881. A young lawyer scarcely twenty-five years old, Bucklin had cast his lot with the new community he helped to found. He was elected, as a Republican, to the state legislature from western Colorado only three years after coming to Grand Junction.⁶ Twelve years later, in 1896, Bucklin was elected to the State Legislature on the Populist ticket.⁷ This change had occurred because Bucklin had studied the single tax theory with "a purpose of refuting the arguments of Henry George, but his investigation of the subject convinced him that Mr. George was right. . . ."⁸ This study led to his change of party affiliation. He was elected again to the legislature in 1898 on the same ticket and finally succeeded in getting the single tax issue before the people

in the form of a constitutional amendment, which was defeated. He was later appointed to a study commission on the single tax and went to Australia to study the tax structure of that country. He refused government expense allowances on that trip. Financially he had become a rather successful man. In 1892 a Democrat by the name of Page had run for State Legislature from Mesa County and, after winning, had turned Populist.⁹

The Socialists were the second third-party movement to gain attention in Mesa County. Beginning in 1910 the Socialist Party ran candidates for nearly every local, county, and state post from Mesa County. Seeking relief for the laboring man and the farmer, this group commanded sufficient attention that party candidates ran respectable races in 1910 and 1912. They continued to place candidates on the ballot in the 1914 elections. Full- and half-page advertisements were placed in the *Daily News* each week in the late winter and spring months of 1911. Topic headings indicate an interest in peace movements as well as in economic problems.¹⁰

The strength of these movements and the duration of their impact on Grand Junction is of particular interest to us. Grand Junction was only eleven years in existence and had a city population of less than three thousand when the Populist Party began to gain strength and to have an elected official even though Page went into office on a Democratic ticket. We have seen that the town achieved a population growth of over 120 per cent between 1900 and 1910 but was actually losing population during the five years that the Socialist Party was strong enough to publish its own paper, *The Grand Valley Sun*, run ads in the *Daily News*, and place candidates for most offices in three successive election years.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the insecurity of an agriculturally based economy made the city and its surrounding country receptive to movements that promised economic aid and help to the farmer. As we begin to deal with the coming of the Ku Klux Klan just a decade after the decline of the Socialist Party movement, there will be many opportunities to point out the similarities and weaknesses of the agricultural economy during that time. It is not being suggested that the Klan was simply the third of a number of "hope movements" in the Grand Junction area that gained a hearing because of agricultural problems. No social movement in the life of a community or nation can be analyzed so simply or monolithically. Rather, we would suggest that there is a relationship to be seen between the success of the Klan and of these previous movements, so briefly considered, and that the successes of



Photo courtesy of The Museum of Western Colorado
Old First National Bank, circa 1918, northwest corner of Main and Fifth, looking northwest to the YMCA building at Fifth and Rood.

the Klan and of these previous movements, so briefly considered, and that the successes of all three must be understood in the light of economic and social life of the community.

Before turning to a close look at the Klan and its impact on Grand Junction, a word needs to be said regarding the reaction of the press

to third party movements and to other reform movements with political implications. A case may be made for variations occurring when the local press of a community is not oriented toward either major political party. This was not the case with the major continuing newspaper in Grand Junction. *The Daily Sentinel* came into existence before the turn of the century and continues until the present. It has called itself an independent press, politically, but during the first three decades of this century it might be more fairly called a Democratic paper. This was particularly true from the time that Walter Walker became editor in 1910 through the period of the 1920s with which we are concerned. We have no specific comments on the period of the Populist Party to use for examples, but later periods indicate that *The Daily Sentinel* viewed third-party movements with hostility. *The Daily Sentinel*, as a newspaper with a loyal affiliation with a major political party, naturally held a dim view of any extensive third-party movement. This reaction will become especially significant as we find it necessary to rely on its news stories and editorials for most basic information regarding the Klan and its activities in Grand Junction.

NOTES

¹Mary Rait, "Development of Grand Junction and the Colorado River Valley to Palisade from 1881-1931" (unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Colorado, 1931), p. 11.

²*ibid.*, p. 85.

³*The Daily Sentinel*, 6 April 1920.

⁴Interview with William Chapman, August 1970, Grand Junction, Colorado.

⁵Rait, "Grand Junction," p. 147f.

⁶*Progressive Men of Western Colorado*, "Hon. James W. Bucklin" (Chicago: A.W. Brown & Co., 1905), p. 148; also see Donald A. MacKendrick, "Thunder West of the Divide: James W. Bucklin, Western Colorado Utopian Reformer," *Essays and Monographs in Colorado History* 1984 edition, pp. 35-53.

⁷Interview with Don MacKendrick, 23 November 1970, Grand Junction, Colorado.

⁸"Hon. James W. Bucklin," p. 148.

⁹MacKendrick interview.

¹⁰*ibid.*

CHAPTER III GRAND JUNCTION'S KLAVERN

Historian Kenneth T. Jackson indicated that the Ku Klux Klan of the post-World War I period differed from its predecessor by being centered in large urban centers rather than finding its strength in the rural areas. The second distinction that Jackson made is that this first revival of the Klan was directed at recent immigrants, Southern and Eastern European Roman Catholics, and Negroes in Northern cities. In the 1920s Grand Junction barely qualified as an urban center and it lacked the populations which the Klan targeted as un-American. *The Daily Sentinel* on February 19, 1931 listed the 1930 census results: total population, 10,459; native Americans, 92%; foreign born, 7.07%; Negro, .48%; Indian, .05%; and Japanese, .01%. It cannot be stated with certainty that an exact proportion was present ten years earlier, but it is doubtful that it had changed much, or for the Negroes particularly. A group of Negroes had been in Grand Junction for many years. A chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church had been erected in 1902 at the corner of Second Street and White Avenue. The population of 50 Negroes represented in the 1930 census figures had probably not changed much in the intervening decades.

An older Negro resident of Grand Junction told this writer on November 25, 1970 that he remembered well when the Klan was active in Grand Junction, but said that they "never bothered me." In an interview with a former Klansman the question was put, "Was the Klan directed at the Negroes?" His answer was: "Not at all. There were only a few here and I knew them all. They were my friends."¹ It is difficult to imagine strong feelings against Jewish people in Grand Junction and no evidence exists to indicate that there was such. Fifty-five years later there was an insufficient number of Jewish families to maintain a synagogue in the city. There was a Jewish section in Denver, and a well defined Negro section as well. Recent Southern Europeans were concentrated, as we have already mentioned, in Globeville to the extent of over 15,000 persons. Nothing like this was present in Grand Junction. Yet the Klan came and gained a large following.

It may well be that Adam Keith in the 1965 issue of the periodical *Denver* has the answer:

The normal description of the Klan as anti-Negro, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic is too abstract and too simplistic. It was anti-whatever minorities existed in the locale, whether or not that minority fell into any of the main classifications Negro, Jew, Catholic. Many Slavs in a steel town? The Klan was anti-Bohunk. Many Spanish names in a town of the

Southwest? The Klan was anti-greaser. Chinese on the West Coast? The Klan was anti-slant eyes.²

Grand Junction has had, and presently has, a number of Spanish surnames. The area was inside the section originally claimed by Spain and Mexico. *The Daily Sentinel* always distinguished people as "Mexicans" in news stories, particularly if they were involved in a real or suspected crime. Yet the census breakdown does not include Mexicans in 1930, so it must be assumed that they were included in the native born, or the alien classification if they were imported for work in the sugar beet fields. The fact that they were almost all Catholics quite likely added to the attention given them as a separate group.

Grand Junction had gained a number of Italians in the waves of Southern European immigrants during the second decade of the twentieth century. No figures are known to exist, but one former Klansman remembers that there were quite a few in Grand Junction in 1925 when he arrived here and that one of their number, Mr. Raso, served as an informal banker and financial advisor, enabling a number of them to purchase property in the downtown area.³ The answer of one former Klansman to the question, "What were the goals or purposes of the Klan in Grand Junction?" cannot be considered as definitive. The answer is of interest, however, and the gist of it was that, while he could remember no specific goals, his strongest impression was that the Klan was anti-Catholic.⁴

The Klan in the 1920s appealed most strongly to white, conservative, middle-class, and Protestant Americans. This same general classification of citizens had been responsible for the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution forbidding the sale of beverage alcohol. Enforcement of Prohibition was an announced goal of the Klan when it paraded in various Colorado cities. Apparently a similar appeal appeared in the Grand Junction manifestation of the movement, although there is no evidence of vigilante action against bootleggers on the part of the Klan in Grand Junction as there was from time to time in other portions of the United States.

Some opposed the establishment of the movement in Grand Junction. On July 3, 1923, an anti-Klan editorial appeared in *The Daily Sentinel*, saying that the writer hoped that there was no room for this organization in Colorado.⁵ This editorial would appear to reveal a lack of information or a certain naivete, but it must be remembered that no great amount of news had yet appeared on Klan activities in Colorado and political influence of the Klan was not to become common knowledge in Denver for several months beyond this date. In view

of the constant interest of the local Grand Junction daily in the Klan, it can be assumed that no indications of Klan activities were known at this date. Thirteen months later the Grand Junction Klan would be an active and growing organization.

In the summer of 1923 many stories of Klan activities under such datelines as Indianapolis were appearing in *The Daily Sentinel* and efforts of the Klan in Oklahoma to impeach Governor Walton regularly appeared as front page stories. September 18 marked the first editorial in the Grand Junction daily commending the governor in his fight against the Klan.⁶ The editor could scarcely ignore the presence of the Klan in the capital city of Denver less than two months later when announcement came of the burning of eleven huge crosses simultaneously in that city.⁷ The aftermath of this incident was certainly more important than the burning itself although such public displays of cross burning came to be the method of announcing new or renewed Klan activity.

Mayor Stapleton of Denver, as reported in Chapter I, maintained an on-again, off-again relationship with the Klan during this period. At the time the crosses were burned, he and the Klan had reached something of an understanding. The city council sought an investigation into the burning of the crosses and Jackson reported the results:

Criticism of the Stapleton regime received additional stimulus in November. On the night of the tenth, burning crosses were placed at various locations in the city. The city council demanded an investigation, but the new manager of public safety, Klansman Reuben W. Hershey, reported that the police department could find no trace of any crosses. Mayor Stapleton added that his personal inquiries into the incident were similarly unsuccessful.⁸

It has been pointed out earlier that this opposition led to Stapleton's attempt to sever connections with the Klan the following spring, and then a renewed relationship followed when a petition for recall gained over 25,000 signatures forcing a recall election. We review this now because this action against Democratic Mayor Stapleton in Denver brought forth an editorial comment in the Grand Junction paper opposing any attempt to recall Mayor Stapleton.

The period of time between the burning of the crosses in Denver and the move for a recall election of the mayor in that city saw Grand Junction, through its daily paper, getting a number of glimpses of the Klan at work in Colorado. In January two instances were reported, one from Colorado Springs and one from Loveland, which showed the Klan in typical actions. In both cases the Klan gave a gift of money

to a Baptist minister in a church at the close of an evening service. The second of these is particularly interesting. An evangelist known as "Big Jim" Kramer had conducted an interdenominationally sponsored series of services in Grand Junction two years earlier. He was to return to Grand Junction in February, 1924, to conduct a similar series at the request of the First Baptist Church of that city. In the meantime, he was conducting an evangelistic meeting in Loveland the third week of January when the Klan in that city paid him a visit. *The Daily Sentinel* reported that an unspeaking Klansman gave Kramer a substantial sum of money and that the congregation applauded. The story concluded with the statement: "His [Kramer's] return to this city will be welcomed."⁹ An editorial comment three days later gave approval of the gift and said that the evangelist should now believe in the law of compensation because the gift balanced out some unnamed unpleasantness which had occurred to Mr. Kramer two years before.¹⁰ Other news stories of January, 1924, told of the burning of a 100-foot cross in Colorado Springs with a commendation to the sheriffs of Colorado for their fight against crime and un-Americanism. A few days later the story of the rapid growth of the Klan in the same city told of the receipt of applications by many residents through the mail. The use of the membership lists of the various lodges of the Masonic Order for this purpose apparently became common about this time. The editor of the Grand Junction paper did not make editorial comment about these news stories.

February saw the revival showing of the film *Birth of a Nation* in Grand Junction. The advertisement in the paper on February 5, 1924, pointed out that the film had first been shown in Grand Junction several years earlier at the Armory under the sponsorship of *The Daily Sentinel*. The revival showing of the film proved so popular that it was held over for an additional day.¹¹ No open indication of the presence of the Klan in Grand Junction was to be observed for another six months. Comment about the attitude of the newspaper owner and publisher during this period must be mentioned in detail, however, in order to place the eventual opposition of the paper to the Klan in its proper perspective. It may be pointed out at this time, in review, that the paper had commended Governor Walton, a Democrat, for his fight against the Klan in Oklahoma and was supporting Mayor Stapleton, also a Democrat, in his fight to avoid ouster as a Klansman, Klan supporter, and sympathizer.

It is of more than passing significance, from both the standpoint of Klan strength and opposition to the Klan, that the organization and primary growth of the Ku Klux Klan in Grand Junction took place

during a major election year, 1924. It will be remembered that this was the year of Klan victories in both state and national elections in Colorado. A column, "Mesa County Politics and Politicians," appeared from time to time in the Grand Junction daily paper. The issue of April 4, 1924, carried the column and it contained this interesting item:

The Ku Klux Klan is going to prove a very formidable factor in every county in Colorado. There is no use denying this fact and there is no use of underestimating the strength of this great organization. It is strong in Colorado just as it is strong in 47 other states in the Union. It is today the largest secret order in the world.¹²

This item in an unsigned political comment column must have carried editorial approval. It appeared almost nine months to a day after the editorial expressing hope that the Klan would find no place in Colorado and just one day after the editorial supporting Klan-endorsed Mayor Stapleton in his fight against recall. Too much should not be made of a single word, but it is worth noting that the item did not call the Klan a strong or influential organization but rather a "great organization." It is also worth noting that the item refers to the Klan as a very formidable factor *in every county* in Colorado. In such a context it is to be assumed that the reference to this factor is with regard to the November elections. Yet the same paper would speak of the total surprise of the community and county four and one half months later when a strong local Klan appeared.

Two indications of Klan presence in the Grand Junction area came from news stories in late May and early June of 1924. One story in *The Daily Sentinel* told of the attempt to burn the Roman Catholic Church in Hotchkiss, Colorado.¹³ The second told of five robed and hooded Klansmen placing a wreath on the casket of a revered Methodist clergyman at Cedaredge.¹⁴ Both of these events occurred within a fifty mile radius of Grand Junction and in the same general area. The placing of the wreath was a typical Klan action. The minister in this case was probably not a member of the Klan. The honoring of people of note at a funeral or cemetery burial was used statewide as a means of drawing public attention to the Klan and, by implication, suggesting that the quality and purposes of the deceased had been the same as those the Klan espoused. No editorial comments appeared in *The Daily Sentinel* about either of these events.

In the meantime preparations proceeded for the national Democratic convention where presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the 1924 election would be named. Walter Walker, owner and publisher of the Grand Junction *The Daily Sentinel*, was to attend as

delegate-at-large from the fourth Colorado Congressional District. The Denver County Democratic Convention had approved a resolution, by a three to one vote, condemning the Klan.¹⁵ The Colorado delegation went to Madison Square Garden in New York City uninstructed as to a candidate, beyond a first "native son" vote for former Governor William E. Sweet, the head of the delegation. Apparently, the delegation was also uninstructed as to a position on the Klan. Of the two front-running candidates, William Gibbs McAdoo of Georgia was thought by many to be "soft" on the Klan because he never spoke out against it. Alfred Smith, a Roman Catholic from New York City, took a strong anti-Klan position. Mr. Walker made his position clear in a special report to his own paper:

... I shall vote for Governor Sweet of Colorado on the first ballot, then for McAdoo until convinced that he cannot win. I do not expect to vote for Al Smith at any time, for he is not the preference of the people of the West. I am against *any sort of reference to the KKK* in the platform. [author's italics]¹⁶

The Klan issue was injected into the convention. The platform, as presented to the delegates, made no mention of the Klan. An anti-Klan amendment was defeated by one vote out of nearly 900 votes cast. The Colorado delegation voted nine to six against the amendment, but Walker was absent when the vote was taken.¹⁷ While the amendment was being debated, a demonstration in favor of the amendment occurred on the floor. When some of the Colorado delegation sought to take the Colorado banner and join the anti-Klan demonstration, other members of the Colorado group bitterly and physically restrained them. Walter Walker was one of those who resisted the movement to join the anti-Klan demonstration.¹⁸ Walker also kept his word with regard to candidates and, after over 100 ballots, a substitute candidate was chosen in place of the leading contenders in the Klan, anti-Klan controversy.

By the end of July, the Klan began to announce its presence in and around Grand Junction. Three crosses were burned simultaneously in various parts of the valley. They were strategically located so that most residents could view one or more.¹⁹ August proved to be a momentous month for the Klan in Grand Junction and in Colorado. We have seen that it was early in this month that the Klan captured the Denver Republican Assembly and used it as a means of controlling the state assembly of the party. During the time that these events were developing, Grand Dragon Locke came to Grand Junction and delivered the charter to that Klan. A meeting at the Armory occupied

all of Sunday afternoon, August 17, 1924. A double-column, front page story on Monday, August 18, 1924, in *The Daily Sentinel* told of the dramatic events that followed. About nine o'clock in the evening (after evening church services ended), a large group again gathered at the Armory, paraded down Rood to Seventh Street, thence to Main Street, and back on Main to Second Street, and to the Armory. There were 500 robed and hooded Klansmen in that parade.²⁰ The news report stated that interested observers thronged the streets and that there was general surprise at the strength of the Klan in the city. The estimate of the number in the parade seems to have been made by observers and is corroborated by the memory of those present at the time. Other figures listed in the newspaper story seem to have come from Klan members and would appear to be only guesses. An estimate of those in attendance at the Sunday afternoon meeting was 800. The story also reported that Klan members claimed a total membership of 1,000 in Mesa County.

There are, apparently, no membership lists or records of any kind that would give a total membership of the Klan in Grand Junction. One member remembers that the Klan meeting place changed several times, and that meetings were held in wasteland areas north of the Highline Canal to ensure isolation and to make certain that there would be adequate room for the members.²¹ What percentage of the total membership regularly attended meetings has not been speculated upon. The same member recalls a figure of 1200 as the highest membership. This number is probably high and may represent a self-estimate on the part of the Klan. The member here quoted has revealed that he joined, received his regalia, marched in the parade, attended two or three meetings, became disillusioned, and resigned.²² His estimate of membership is given, by his own admission, as only a remembered figure. It does seem evident that the Grand Junction Klan grew as a result of the publicity of the parade and the chartering meeting. Taking the 500 in regalia in the parade as a base figure, it can be safely estimated that several hundred more, perhaps even a thousand total, were brought ultimately into Klan membership in Mesa County. With approximately 9,000 population in Grand Junction and probably that many more scattered through the contiguous valley, this would still mean that one in eighteen were, at one time or another, Klan members. When the number of native-born, white Protestant males is considered as a base figure, this would become more impressive.

The local newspaper did not comment on the event editorially except in a brief squib on August 19, 1924, when surprise at the event and the size of the membership was once again expressed.²³ A longer

IMPRESSIVE, SILENT PARADE OF HUNDREDS OF ROBED KLANSMEN PASSED THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE CITY'S BUSINESS DISTRICT

Spectacular Yet Silent and Orderly March of White Robed Figures Created Tremendous Sensation Through City Streets Thronged With Interested Observers of Unique Parade Staged Shortly After Nine O'Clock Last Night, Climaxed Afternoon Meeting At Armory At Which Charter Was Delivered to Mesa County Klansmen.

STRENGTH OF KLAN GREAT SURPRISE

More Than Eight Hundred Reported in Attendance At Sunday Meeting; Colorado Membership Said to Be One Hundred Thousand With Sixty Thousand in and Near Denver; Is Rapidly Gaining in Strength Over Western Colorado; Denver Men Were in Attendance Here.

The impressive affair, reported to be the largest of the kind in all parts of the United States, attracted to the business district of Grand Junction last night, and the spectators numbered in the thousands. The parade was a silent one, and the only sound was the clanking of armor and the clanking of armor. The parade was a silent one, and the only sound was the clanking of armor and the clanking of armor.

THE DAILY SENTINEL.

GRAND JUNCTION, COLO., MONDAY EVENING, AUGUST 18, 1924. No. 156.

VOL. XXXI.

ALL GRAINS REACH A NEW RECORD PRICE

Corn Went to Six Cents Above Saturday's High Prices; September Corn Reached \$1.24.

ALL GRAINS REACH A NEW RECORD PRICE. The market for all grains is showing a strong upward trend. Corn has advanced to six cents above Saturday's high, and September corn has reached a new record price of \$1.24.



PICTURE BOUND-THE WORLD PLACES. The picture shows a group of men in a field, possibly engaged in agricultural work or a community activity. The men are dressed in simple, practical clothing, and the background shows a rural landscape with trees and a building.

LA FOLLETTE SENATOR COLT IS CONFIDENT PASSED AWAY OF A VICTORY THIS MORNING

Certainty of His Election Republican Senator From Colorado Expressed in Letter of Appreciation to Federal Government. 1913 Dead After Two Weeks' Illness.

LA FOLLETTE SENATOR COLT IS CONFIDENT PASSED AWAY OF A VICTORY THIS MORNING. The late Senator La Follette, who died in 1913, is remembered for his contributions to the Progressive movement. His passing is a significant loss to the nation.

LETTER FOUND IN PARK SUNDAY INDICATES THAT LOCAL MAN MAY HAVE ENDED LIFE IN THE RIVER

INDUSTRIAL PEACE IMPOSSIBLE UNTIL LABOR IS REPRESENTED

The chartering of the Grand Junction Klan and the parade that followed are featured in this Monday, August 18, 1924 issue of The Daily Sentinel.

Courtesy of Mesa County Public Library

editorial on August 20, 1924 dealt with the Klan and its importance in politics and the coming elections. Surrounding states received somewhat extensive treatment, but Colorado got only passing comment. Mention was made that the Democrats had an anti-Klan nominee for Governor and that the Republican nominee had not been selected yet.²⁴ No editorial comment appeared on the presence of Clarence Morley and Rice W. Means in Grand Junction on August 17, although their presence was reported in the August 18, 1924, news story.²⁵ Morley was one of three potential candidates for Governor on the Republican ticket and would win both the nomination and the election. Means, the son of an American Protective Association leader, was to be elected as a short-term senator to the United States Senate in November. Both were strongly endorsed by the Klan and both, apparently, accompanied Locke to the chartering meeting of the Grand Junction Klan.

While political campaigns were developing, the Klan was expanding, gaining strength, and exerting its influence on the Western Slope. The pattern at Grand Junction was duplicated a couple of weeks later in Montrose. On Saturday, August 23, just six days after the chartering of the Grand Junction Klan, a huge cross was burned at Montrose.²⁶ A month later the Klan demonstrated its strength in that city with a parade at the closing of the fair in Montrose. The news story reported that 274 marched in the parade and that 100 others would have participated had robes and hoods arrived from Grand Junction.²⁷ The Montrose Klan probably was chartered at that time since the parade was a device usually used to bring the Klan quickly to the attention of the city. As always, newsmen reported that cheering crowds greeted the parade.

A Klan meeting open to interested persons was soon held in Grand Junction, and it was reported that hundreds were turned away from the hall. The guest speaker's message was that the Ku Klux Klan was a movement made up of the best people in the community to foster education, Christianity, Americanism, and clean government.²⁸ The Grand Junction Klan gained additional attention four days later when a news story told that a crowd cheered six robed Klansmen who appeared at the Y.M.C.A. with a \$100 donation to be used for membership of deserving children.²⁹ The Klan may have been a benefactor to this organization because the secretary of the Grand Junction Y.M.C.A. was linked with the local Klan on many occasions. He and the minister of the First Christian Church, the Reverend George Rossman, seem to have furnished a great deal of the Protestant church leadership in the Grand Junction manifestation of the Klan. Rossman



Photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Colorado (F-1558)

From Seventh and Main looking west: the Avalon Theatre and Daily Sentinel building (second on right) were both erected in 1922. The Klan parade, on August 17, 1924, started at Second and Rood, went east to Seventh, south to this point, and returned west to Second.

was, or was soon to become, the Exalted Cyclops of the Grand Junction Klan and the publisher of the Klan paper in that city. His personal relationship with the Klan and the antagonism that arose between him and Walter Walker, soon to become spokesman for Klan opposition, played such an important part in the Klan story in Grand Junction that it becomes necessary to mention him by name and to identify him by a brief description.³⁰

George Rossman came to serve as pastor of the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Grand Junction in June of 1922. He had served previously in Alexandria, Louisiana. The congregation in Grand Junction had been undergoing difficulties in leadership conflicts and in financial problems. A denominational executive had served the congregation well for several months. The call of Rossman and his leadership beginning in August of 1922, benefitted the progress of the work of the church. From the first Rossman was active in community affairs. The work of the Y.M.C.A. interested him. He wrote fiction for Christian publications. The church was asked for and gave permission for these extra activities. While his Klan activities are not mentioned on record until near the end of his ministry, it can be assumed that this was considered as another community enterprise. Some members of the congregation were members of the local Klan, but not out of proportion to those of any other Protestant group in the city. Rossman's church, as a religious institution, seems never to have been involved in the Klan but considered the minister's activities, at least at first, as a personal matter.³¹ This contrasts with the congregations of Highland Christian and Grace Methodist churches in Denver and their ministers,³² who were very active in Klan affairs.

We have described the organization of the Klan in Grand Junction and related its rather significant strength. It is more difficult to relate the Klan to local social and economic causes. That Grand Junction was suffering from the economic difficulties of agrarian America in the midst of the prosperity of industrialized America in the "golden twenties" is not difficult to imagine or establish. Evidence in the second chapter of this manuscript and a perusal of the local newspaper demonstrate the insecurity of farm income during that period. To what extent persons were blaming the recently arrived Southern European Catholic immigrants is more difficult to authenticate. That there were sufficient foreign born persons in Grand Junction to be identified for prejudicial reasons is evident from the 1930 census figures already quoted. That proportion was just over 7% of a population of just over 10,000. The population was smaller in the mid-1920s, but it is likely that the percentage of foreign born was as high or higher. Over 600

foreign born persons in a community of 9,000 would certainly be identifiable. The percentage was as large as was that of Globeville in relation to Denver.

One Klansman recalled that the economic situation was critical enough to create tension.³³ A member of the Klan in Iowa, this young man came to Grand Junction with his recent bride to make his home. Unable to find employment, he sought the help of a relative. Knowing of his affiliation with the Klan, the relative sent him to George Rossman, Exalted Cyclops of the local Klan. The suppliant received no help from Rossman, for there were simply no jobs to be had. His reflective judgment was that Rossman already had parishioners and local fellow Klansmen whom he could not help because of the lack of available employment. Ferdinand Ferguson, the job seeker, found it necessary to return to Iowa for employment, and only returned to the Grand Junction area at a later time when the economic situation had improved.

Whatever caused the Klan to appear, it grew and made its presence felt in the community largely through political strength and influence. As a general policy, the Klan did not ally itself with one party or the other lest it lose a portion of its following. We have seen how it began in Denver with a Democratic mayor but turned to the Republican Party when it seemed to offer wider opportunities for state, national, and local influence.

In Grand Junction the local Klan was identified with the Republican party from the beginning by the one community voice that could speak to the citizens at large, *The Daily Sentinel*, a Democratic newspaper. At least two major editorials appeared in the newspaper prior to the 1924 elections. The first dealt with the Klan and the GOP.³⁴ This was a rather general linkage of the Klan with the Republican Party. The second, appearing just before the election on November 2, occupied two double columns and was entitled: "Shall the Klan Dictate?" The position of the editor was unmistakable in the closing line: "The Klan has invited the ballot as its weapon of offense, by the ballot it should now be checked."³⁵ We have already seen how the Republican Party served as a vehicle for the Klan to win stunning victories in the state of Colorado. The victory of the Klan in the state-wide elections of 1924 and the editorial efforts in *The Daily Sentinel* cannot be taken to mean that the Klan was Republican in Grand Junction or that it was to rise or fall depending upon the success of that party. It does mean, however, that the Democratic owner-publisher became a political opponent of the Klan in that year. Later he became a personal opponent of the Klan in Grand Junction. That this was not a directly and progressively arrived-at position would be shown in the Grand Junction municipal

election of 1925. Just now it is important to take a brief look at what is known of Walker's connection with the Klan and the varying positions he took with regard to it.

Newspaper editorials reflect the opinions of the owner-publisher of that paper. In the case of *The Daily Sentinel* almost all editorials during the period under consideration were written by Walter Walker's father, R.C. Walker. News stories carried so much editorial opinion that they too provide nearly as much insight as the editorials themselves. Walter Walker had been connected with *The Daily Sentinel* for many years and became its editor in 1911. The paper was to become the visible rallying point for opposition to the Klan in Grand Junction. Walker, however, had not shown an anti-Klan bent in his editorials to the time of the 1924 elections. As noted earlier in this manuscript, his activities at the National Democratic Convention of 1924 and his position on Denver's Mayor Stapleton and the 1924 elections indicated no consistent theme of opposition to the Klan.

At this point the witness of Grand Junction Klansmen must be taken into account. William Chapman, whose recollections in an interview have been quoted, remembers Walker as a one-time Klansman. A letter from an active Klansman in Grand Junction, who later moved to California, gives more specific information.

Mr. Walter Walker was a member of the Grand Junction Klan. He took or made his Klan obligation in the St. Regis Hotel (a room on the second floor). He made his obligation in the presence of D.B. Wright, Floyd Harmon and "Bunk" Templeton. "Bunk" was the first member of the Grand Junction Klan and was always proud to proclaim it. Walter Walker was the second man to become a member of the Grand Junction Organization. Walker made some of the most bitter, vitriolic [sic] anti-Catholic speeches I ever heard. Walker attempted to gain political control of the Klan in the early days and failed. It was in 1924 and while he was still a dues paying member of the Klan that he began his publicity campaign against the Klan and the various men he attacked through the columns of *The Sentinel*. He was present at the hall over the Fair Store the night the motion was made, voted on and carried unanimously that he be expelled from the Klan for violation of his obligation. He was offered the opportunity of making any explanation he desired but left the meeting in a very angry mood. It was also voted to make his expulsion public.³⁶

Charles Thomas, Jr. does not say if news of the expulsion was published. Obviously it would not have appeared in *The Daily Sentinel*, and the Klan newspaper could not have carried it because that publication did not begin until the summer of 1925. Since the month and day



The St. Regis Hotel where Walter Walker and others made their obligation to the Klar, according to Charles F. Thomas, Jr.

Photo courtesy of The Museum of Western Colorado (F366)

of Walker's expulsion are not given, we are left to speculate whether or not the editorials preceding the 1924 state elections and the Republican victory became the cause of this motion on the part of the Grand Junction Klan. Additional evidence of Walker's membership in the Klan was given in a taped interview with Al Look in 1972. Al Look stated:

I not only was present [at the chartering], I was a member of the Klan and I worked for the *Sentinel* at that time. No, there isn't any doubt at all, regardless of what it says in the *Brand Book* story about Mr. Walker. He brought the Ku Klux Klan to town. He wanted to be the Grand Kleagle; is that what you call it? . . . D.B. Wright was another man with ambition, and he beat Walker out of that office, and when that happened, Walker quit the Klan.³⁷

Wright, identified by Look as Walker's competitor for leadership in the Klan ranks, according to Thomas' account, joined the Klan in Denver along with Dr. Galen Locke when Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley made his first visit from Atlanta in 1923. Wright became the Grand Titan of the Western Slope, District of Colorado, and was the Exalted Cyclops of the Grand Junction Klavern for some time.

The municipal elections in Grand Junction in 1925 add further ambiguities about Walter Walker's relationship with the Klan, assuming that the weight of the remembered witnesses is adequate to establish his membership and expulsion from the organization.

Klan activities in Grand Junction from the time of the general election of 1924 until the municipal election of 1925 can only be a matter of speculation. Mention of the Klan in *The Daily Sentinel* during this time was largely limited to the problems of the state legislature. There had been one brief, and rather empty, note of exaltation in November that Mesa County had gone for Sweet rather than Morley, the Republican ticket, and the Klan.³⁸

Almost three months before Grand Junction elected its City Council members of April 7, *The Daily Sentinel* announced that it intended to remain absolutely neutral in the upcoming election.³⁹ This decision was a bit unusual for *The Daily Sentinel* of that day, and a position that it did not repeat two years later. The newspaper carried stories about the upcoming election and possible candidates in the following weeks. A front page editorial less than a month before the election called for the submission of acceptable names as candidates.⁴⁰ The local Klan took notice of the elections as well and purchased a full page advertisement in *The Daily Sentinel* nine days before the election.⁴¹ The page was largely devoted to restating Klan ideals. The text described the typical



Photo courtesy of Mesa State College (Walter Walker Collection, Special Collections)
Walter Walker in 1919, shortly before the Klan came to Grand Junction.

Klansman as a white man, Gentile, Protestant, and a native born American. Racial ideals included white supremacy, America as a white country and the purity of white blood. The goals of good citizenship

included proper use of the ballot and strict law enforcement. Patriotic ideals and Christian ideas were given sufficient space. A brief note at the bottom of the advertisement called attention to the coming municipal election and urged that only men measuring up to these ideals be elected to the council. No names were suggested. Whether or not the Klan printed, in its own paper, a list of preferred candidates is not known. Two years later a preferred list of candidates did appear.

Three weeks before the election, Reverend Wasser of the Methodist Church, to which members of the Walker family reportedly belonged, began a series of sermons exposing the evils of Grand Junction and calling for a reform council in the coming election. Each Monday, *The Daily Sentinel* reported major points of these sermons on the front page. Some remarks from the pulpit may have been directed at the Walker family. One sermon called attention to the evil of movie going and dancing. Walter Walker owned one of the local theaters. The minister threatened to oppose the establishment of a junior college in Grand Junction unless there was immediate reform. Walker was working very diligently for the establishment of such a college. Each Monday the story of the sermon on the previous Sunday was filled with more and more deprecatory comments concerning the minister's messages.⁴²

The upcoming election received extensive coverage in *The Daily Sentinel*. The candidates were: at large, J.A. Dixon, A.C. Miller, Dr. James E. Bell, William Murr, and Clyde Moslander; first ward, O.E. Boston, T.P. Flucken, H.O. Bear, and Lee Phillips; second ward, C.H. Nelson, Frank Logsdon, and S.W. Rader; third ward (west), D.B. Short; third ward (east), H.S. Sanders, O.H. Ellison, W.L. Downing, and E.W. Reams; and, fourth ward, C.A. Latimer and W.E. Meders. Wasser and others seeking a "reform council" made public their choices for the council. Reverend Wasser and the Grand Junction Ministerial Alliance endorsed Bell, Milne, Flucken, Logsdon, Ellison, and Latimer. The W.C.T.U. endorsed a nearly identical slate: Bell, Milne, Logsdon, Short, Ellison, and Latimer. When the election results were in, the people of Grand Junction had elected Bell, Moslander, Bear, Logsdon, Short, Meders, and Ellison.⁴³

The page one story on the election in *The Daily Sentinel*, with typical news story editorializing, said, "The election results insure Grand Junction a safe and sane administration and are a complete repudiation of recent exaggerations. . . . Every one [councilmen elected] stands for progress and law enforcement."⁴⁴ The reference to the "exaggerations" can only refer to the Methodist clergyman's reform messages, yet three of the seven elected were his choices, and the W.C.T.U. list included these three and one more who was elected. Less than two years later,

the editorials in this paper would be referring to this Council as Klan controlled with one councilman, Frank Logsdon, called the "Klan's messenger boy."⁴⁵

It is impossible to speculate why the newspaper did not oppose any of the Klan candidates in this election. If the writer of the letter we quoted earlier is right in his facts and his dates, Walker had already been expelled from the Klan. It is impossible to believe that he did not know of the candidates' Klan connections. One candidate who was on both Wasser's and the W.C.T.U. list and was elected was Frank W. Logsdon, a brother-in-law of D.B. Wright. Any informed person, and particularly one formerly connected with the Klan, would have known this man as a Klansman at the time of his election in 1925. Yet the entire new Council was commended in an editorial on April 9, 1925.

Charles Thomas' evaluation of this election appears in his letter as follows:

The Klan had realized its aims as outlined by one man who was most active in the Grand Junction Klan at that time: The aims of the Klan in Grand Junction were to elect men to public office who would be honest, who would be depended on to try to enforce the Volsted Act and check bootlegging and to whom people could furnish information concerning violations of the law without fear of reprisals from gangsters. . . . The general aims of the Klan were as honorable and as much to be respected and admired as those of the Masonic Lodge or of any church organization. However, the development of its political strength made it a great tool for the selfish and greedy politicians.⁴⁶

The Klan was at the zenith of its power in Grand Junction at that time. It had elected four, and perhaps five, Klansmen or Klan sympathizers to a City Council of seven men. The City Manager seems to have cooperated with the majority, although he did survive the changeover two years later. Since men who were defeated in the 1925 election were to run as Klan candidates for the City Council two years later, it is hard to see how the Klan could have lost. This may have been one reason why Walker did not choose to fight the election on a Klan-anti-Klan basis. Another reason may have stemmed from the fact that city elections were not related to the two major political parties and a Democratic paper had no party slate to support. Whatever the reasons, the atmosphere of city elections two years later was certainly different.

The decline of the Klan in Grand Junction seems to have come gradually over the next two years and was accompanied by some personal confrontations. Following the Grand Junction election, the Klan could claim control of the city's government, as well as the state legislature and the governor's office. Locally, the cementing of this

power seems to have been planned through several different activities. On June 2, 1925, a news story told of the formation of a Women's Auxiliary to the Klan.⁴⁷ A schedule for the meetings of this Auxiliary did not appear, however, until the middle of the following September.⁴⁸ An announcement on May 13, 1925 told of plans to start a daily paper. This news story in *The Daily Sentinel* credited D.B. Wright with the announcement and stated that the purpose of the paper was "to disseminate Klan news and bring financial disaster to *The Daily Sentinel*."⁴⁹ A June 17 news story, under the heading, "Here in Hopes of Starting a Daily for Ku Klux Klan," told of a visit to Grand Junction by the former editor of *The Swastika*, a Democratic weekly, in Des Moines, New Mexico.⁵⁰ Then, on August 31, 1925, a front page story in *The Daily Sentinel* appeared under this heading, "Klan Paper Starts Soon in the City."⁵¹ The following day a front page story told of a speech given by the Reverend George Rossman to the Grand Junction Lions Club. It was headed, "Yes It Is a Klan Paper."⁵² A letter from Rossman appeared September 2 in which he claimed that his proposed paper, *Big Brother*, had been falsely reported from his address to the Lions Club.⁵³ A final notice regarding such a publication appeared in *The Daily Sentinel* the following May.⁵⁴ Under the heading, "Klan Paper Incorporated in this City," the story identified D.B. Wright and Fred C. Martin as the persons responsible for its incorporation. One can only speculate as to which of these efforts was successful and for how long a time the paper was published. Former Klansmen do remember that there was such a paper, but no copies are known to exist at this time.

A third effort at extending the power of the local Klavern, gaining control of the city police force, produced far more controversy. While most of the evidence in this manuscript comes from *The Daily Sentinel*, the letter from Charles Thomas, quoted above, states that the aims of the Klan were "to elect men . . . to enforce the Volsted Act and check bootlegging." Thomas was a member of that police force. A front page news story appearing on July 23, 1925 reported that a young man who wished to become an officer was turned down because he would not join the Klan.⁵⁵ Ten days later another front page story under the heading "Crime Grips City: Officers Suppressing Facts To Hide Their Inefficiency" told of the Klan's control of the city police.⁵⁶

A more sensational story appeared two days later. The headline read, "The Bloody Toll of Incompetency," and told of the killing of a Mexican bootlegger by a city policeman. The accompanying article charged that the city government "is being run by a secret organization" which would hardly have come as a surprise to most readers. The article also



Photo courtesy of The Museum of Western Colorado (84.0.10)

Grand Junction's leading department store. Charles F. Thomas, Jr. alleges that Walter Walker was expelled from the Klan in a meeting over The Fair Store.

quoted an unnamed Klan leader as saying about the victim: "It was only a damned Mexican."⁵⁷ At least five additional articles were to appear in *The Daily Sentinel* during the remainder of August and the month of September telling of various "raids" and "invasions" of stores and private homes. One of those involved a one-man store operated by L.J. Eliopoulos, a man with a Greek name.⁵⁸ In each case it was reported that no liquor was found and often that no warrant was shown.

The most climactic event, so far as Walker was personally concerned, was reported September 2, 1925 in *The Daily Sentinel* under the heading, "Klan Terror, All Supreme by Grace of Exalted Cyclops, Rules with Ruthless Hand."⁵⁹ This news story told of police stopping a car on Main Street. The auto bore a California license and was occupied by two women and two or three children. The car was taken to the police station, searched, and released. The description of the policemen conducting the arrest and search was, apparently, the cause of a personal confrontation the following day:

Charles F. Thomas, Jr., Klan gunman, who holds the office of Terror in the local Klavern of the Invisible Empire and who by the grace of the Exalted Cyclops [D.B. Wright] is all powerful in his police authority.⁶⁰

After relating the events summarized above, the story referred to Thomas as "a two-fisted brute" and concluded with this further description:

Charles F. Thomas, Jr., perhaps the most radical and violently talking Klansman in Mesa County, is the most arrogant and officious individual ever armed with police power in this part of the state. He is the personal and official representative of the Exalted Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan.⁶¹

The day after this story appeared, Walker was walking on Main Street when he was accosted by Thomas. The events which followed were reported in a front page story of that afternoon's edition of *The Daily Sentinel* under the banner headline: "KLAN GUNMEN HAVE BEGUN CAMPAIGN OF VIOLENCE." The next line stated, "Editor Who Dares Expose Klan Tactics Pays Penalty in Blood."⁶² The story reported that Walker was knocked down two or three times and continued with this additional information:

To add to the viciousness of the scene, John G. McKinney, city treasurer and Klan leader, B.M. Bengé, Main Street shoe merchant and prominent in Klan ranks, and Ted Jones, member of the younger Klan set and clerk in the Bengé shoe store, shouted their acclaim to Thomas.⁶³

THE DAILY SENTINEL.

VOL. XXXII. GRAND JUNCTION, COLO., THURSDAY EVENING, SEPT. 3, 1925. No.

KLAN GUNMEN HAVE BEGUN CAMPAIGN OF VIOLENCE

Charles Thomas Brutally Assaulted Walter Walker On Main Street Early This Morning

EDITOR WHO DARED TO

EXPOSE KLAN TACTICS

PAYS PENALTY IN BLOOD

Two-Fisted Brute, Who As Chief Henchman To D. B. Wright, Exalted Cyclops, Has Led Terror Reign In

MELLON PAID

\$1,182,680 AS HIS INCOME TAXES

Secretary of the Treasury Paid the Largest Personal Tax Recorded In Pittsburgh District.

(Associated Press.) Pittsburgh, Sept. 2.—Secretary of the Treasury Andrew W. Mellon paid federal income taxes of \$1,182,680.25 for 1924. His income tax was the largest recorded in the Pittsburgh district. That of the previous year was \$1,000,000.

SHENANDOAH

(Associated Press.)

The Shenandoah was constructed in 1924 at the cost of approximately \$1,000,000. It is 100 feet in length, with a maximum diameter of 78 feet, and contained 10 sea wells with a capacity of more than two million cubic feet. Its price was \$1,000,000.

500 FAMILIES

ARE HOMELESS IN ELI

Flood Condition Worsened Many Years; Last Year \$400,000 Already Spent on Streets Raging To

Courtesy of Mesa County Public Library

The confrontation between Charles F. Thomas, Jr., and Walter Walker produced this dramatic headline story in The Daily Sentinel on September 3, 1925.

NO

Walker reportedly then sought help in the Palace of Sweets, next door to the shoe store, and was assisted by Sam Cardman who operated that store and by Ed Brunner whose office was upstairs over the Palace of Sweets. It was further stated that an on-duty policeman was just across the street when the assault began, but that he turned and went down a side street.

A slightly different version of this event was related by Al Look in the taped interview mentioned earlier.

Now this story about Thomas, Charlie Thomas, . . . accosting Walker on the street. I was across the street and saw all of that. . . . It was in front of Benges Shoe Store. Charlie Thomas came up and started getting after Walker about the way he was publishing things in the *Sentinel*. . . . I saw Thomas grab Walker by the coat. Now he did not hit him but he gave him a damn good shaking up with both hands . . . And then he [Walker] went down on the street and Thomas let go. And then he [Walker] got up and ran into Benges's Shoe Store, and Thomas went along his way. Now that is what happened.⁶⁴

In this statement Look did not say why he did not go to the assistance of his employer. Thomas, in a letter to the writer, made no mention of the newspaper stories of the assault.

Newspaper stories on succeeding days told of Klan leaders signing Thomas' bond,⁶⁵ of the Klan lauding Thomas for his "brutality,"⁶⁶ of Thomas being fined \$150 and being sentenced to thirty days in jail,⁶⁷ and later of the fine being reduced to \$50,⁶⁸ and finally of Thomas being released early because of family hardship.⁶⁹ Editorial comment on the incident appeared in *The Daily Sentinel* three days after it occurred under the heading, "By Acts, Not Words, We Are Judged."⁷⁰ The obvious thrust of this comment was that the Klan's own acts of violence negated their insistence on strict enforcement of the law.

Eighteen days after the Walker-Thomas confrontation, another incident involving the Walker family added coals to the fire. Monday evening, September 21, 1925, Preston Walker, the thirteen-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Walker, was returning from the Avalon Theater to his home at 952 Ouray Avenue on his bicycle in the dark. When he arrived home, he was badly shaken and incoherent and his parents called a doctor. It was determined that he had suffered a blow on the head which probably caused a concussion. This accident was reported on the front page of *The Daily Sentinel* two days later with the explanation that Under Sheriff Talley and Police Chief Clifton had requested no publication until they had time to investigate.⁷¹ The investigation revealed:

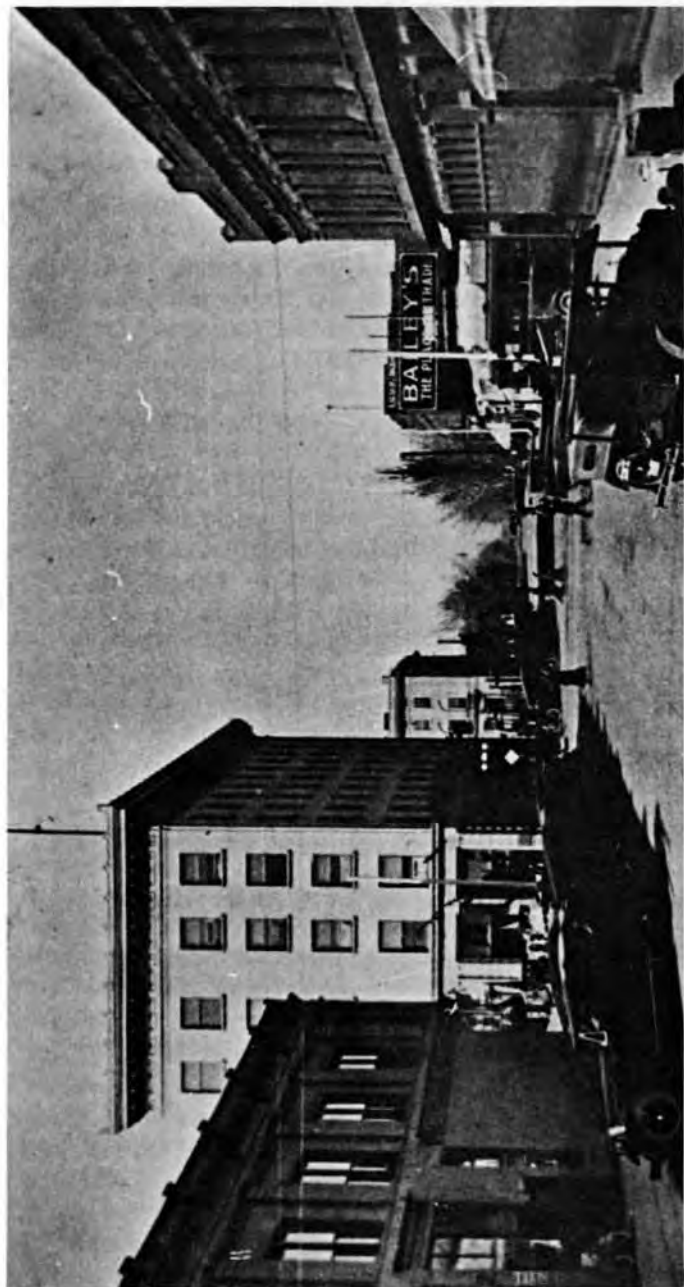


Photo courtesy of The Museum of Western Colorado (F935)
Fifth Street, between Colorado and Main looking north to Main and beyond. The confrontation between Walker and Thomas took place at Fifth and Rood, just east of the northeast corner on the north side of Main.

Rev. Rossman was coming from the library and he heard a boy moaning in the timbers, lying on the ground between the library and the county jail; that he went to the boy and helped him get up and tried to talk to him but he could not talk coherently and could not tell his name or where he lived; that the boy got on his wheel and rode off toward Grand Avenue and Eighth Street: that he did not know who the boy was.⁷²

The city block between Grand and White Avenues and between Seventh and Eighth Streets was occupied, at that time, only by the library on the northwest corner and by the county jail on the south side. Rossman's home was near the corner of Eighth and White Streets.

Al Look recalled that a pile of creosoted logs, placed there by either the power company or telephone company, occupied the center of the block, and that a path crossed from the southwest to the northeast corners of the block.⁷³

No additional stories on the accident appeared in the daily paper. The presence of a noted Klan leader at the scene of the accident to Walter Walker's son undoubtedly sparked much speculation in the community because it was still a topic of occasional conversation when this writer came to Grand Junction nearly thirty-five years later.

Gilbert Baylis was a boyhood friend of Preston Walker and often visited in the Walker home. In a taped interview in 1972, Baylis made the following statement:

I was a little bit intrigued by it [the accident] at that young age, that, while the headlines on one hand were speculating . . . how this accident occurred, I had a distinct memory of Pres sort of apologetically, sort of mumbling to me, not making a great deal out of it, but at some point in the conversation that he felt sure he crossed this lot. It was right back of the old public library between Seventh and Eighth and between Grand and White. There was a pile of creosoted logs there. But it was a perfectly natural thing for a boy in the darkness to run into that with his bicycle. And, as I say, Pres in his own obtuse or abstract way, realizing that if he said anything positively it would have been embarrassing to what else was going on.⁷⁴

This writer must add that, while first investigating the days of the Klan, he was asked by several persons if he had heard of the Klan preacher who tried to tar and feather Preston Walker. What actually happened will probably never be known but it is not difficult to speculate as to community reaction in this tense and volatile situation.

The discrediting of Dr. Locke as Grand Dragon and his expulsion from the Klan in Colorado marked the beginning of the end of Klan influence in the state as a whole. No personal scandal such as this

occurred in Grand Junction until the Klan had ceased to exist as a political power in that city. Whereas a Klan-packed legislature led by a Klan governor was blocked by political maneuvering in the state, the City Council seems to have functioned in Grand Junction with an average efficiency. If the editorial policy is taken as a standard of organized opposition to the Klan in the time between October, 1924 and April, 1927, we may say that the philosophy and goals of the Klan and its opposition each remained pretty much the same.

The decline of the Klan in Colorado seems to have affected city organizations of the order all over the state. Other than Grand Junction, only Canon City, where the new state leader Grand Dragon Arnold lived, had a Klan ticket in the municipal elections of 1927.⁷⁵ The state Klan lost its control over the Republican Party in 1926 and the subsequent loss of power by the Republicans to the Democrats in that off-year election further weakened Klan power in most communities. In 1926, the Klan was greatly interested in one contest in Mesa County, that for the office of sheriff, a contest which the Klan lost decisively.⁷⁶ This time both major political parties opposed the Klan candidate and caused the newspaper editor to have no conflict of interests.

In the interviews with individuals already cited in this work, this writer received pretty much the same answers as to why the Klan declined and reasons for dropping membership. "I was disillusioned with the Klan." "Its literature was too virulent. I had many friends who were Catholic and did not really have anything against them." "I was young and the Klan was exciting and many were joining it." How many others of the hundreds who joined the Klan would echo these replies cannot be wholly known. One former member spoke of the Klan in Grand Junction in these terms: "I have thought of the Klan like a flower that comes into full bloom in a day and withers almost immediately."⁷⁷ The letter from former Klansman Charles Thomas, quoted earlier, gives the largest estimate of total Klan membership in Grand Junction. He placed this at nearly 1,400. He does agree with *The Daily Sentinel* as to the size of the Grand Junction Klan when it marshalled its forces for the 1927 municipal election. Both place Klan membership at 150 at that time.⁷⁸

A rally of the Grand Junction Klan on March 28, 1927 was attended, as we have said, by Grand Dragon Arnold from Canon City. The purpose, as reported by *The Daily Sentinel* the next day, was to explain a new plan of organization and a new secret oath. Klansmen were also exhorted to an active participation in coming municipal and school board elections.⁷⁹ It was reported that D.B. Wright would continue

in his post as Grand Titan and G.P. Rossman as Exalted Cyclops of the local Klan.

A story relating to the calling of the Klan meeting first appeared in *The Daily Sentinel* on March 21 and, from that date until the municipal elections on April 5, there was never any doubt that the newspaper was taking a most active and partisan interest in the election of councilmen this time and the main purpose was to defeat Klan-supported candidates. In 1925, voters had accepted a rotating council and thus there were, for the first time, carry-over councilmen. One of these was a Klansman. It would be necessary for the Klan to elect three more to maintain control of the Council. But this was not 1925. Candidates were announced, without equivocation, as anti-Klan. The lines were clearly drawn. The headline on the election story on April 6 left no doubt as to the outcome: "Klan Hold in This City Is Broken."⁸⁰

The editorial which appeared in the same issue as election results pointed up the direction which Klan and anti-Klan opposition had taken in the two years just past.

As the fight was centered against the *Sentinel*, the result, we feel free to say, is a vindication of the rightness of its position and in this there is glory enough for us to be compensated for the malicious attacks made by the Klan leaders and of a few individuals who, falling even below Klan standards, are willing to serve his Satanic Majesty, if such service promises achievement of their purpose or brings grist to their mill.⁸¹

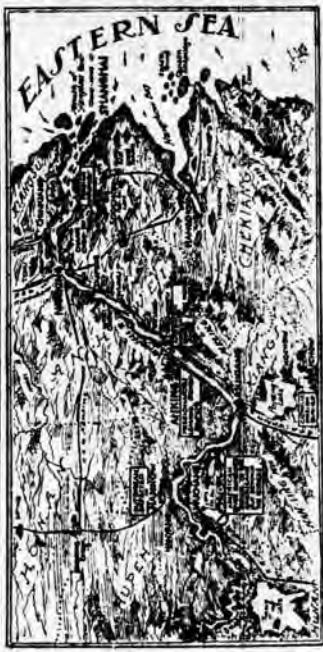
This quote indicated the level to which local Klan and anti-Klan controversy had descended during the months just past. The years 1925 and 1926 had seen fist fights on Main Street, accusations, charges, counter charges, and personal vilification. The most pointed of these personality clashes in the latter day of the Klan was between Walter Walker and Reverend Rossman. Sometime after the 1925 municipal elections, the weekly notices of activities at First Christian Church ceased to appear in *The Daily Sentinel* and did not reappear until Rossman left the city in May of 1927. By whose instigation this change was made, Walker's or Rossman's, cannot now be determined. Rossman came in for his share of attack in the paper from time to time and we may be sure that Walker was not neglected by the Klan leader. Former Klansmen interviewed have expressed the opinion that this conflict first arose because Rossman secured the leadership of the local Klan which Walker desired and did not get. The letter from Thomas indicated this possibility. Rossman's family destroyed all his papers. If it is worthy of determination, the further truth of this clash may be determined in a later study. The writer mentions it here because the latter part

THE DAILY SENTINEL.

VOL. XXXIV GRAND JUNCTION COLO. WEDNESDAY EVENING, APRIL 6, 1927 NO. 134.

KLAN HOLD IN THIS CITY IS BROKEN

Clip This and Follow Chinese News!



For this map, it will help make clear the news from China. Movements of Communists, at left. U.S. Nationalities or Shantungites, in their counter-attacks against Northern, or Chinese troops.

HALL, ROGERS, PENBERTHY ON AN ANTI-KLAN TICKET ARE ELECTED TO COUNCIL

Klan No Longer Controlling Factor in City Government; Men Elected Well Qualified to Serve; New Council May 2nd

Tuesday's election resulted in the complete and final overthrow of the Ku Klux Klan as a controlling factor in the Grand Junction city government. Frank R. Hall, candidate for councilman at large; Fred A. Rogers, candidate from the Second ward, and Roland Penberthy, candidate from the West Third ward, all recognized as anti-Klan candidates—were elected over George W. Sivert, C. L. Dixon and Frank Loedson, Klan candidates and who had the whole

Courtesy of Mesa County Public Library

The defeat of Klan candidates in the April 5, 1927 City Council election brought forth the boldest headline in The Daily Sentinel of any news item related to the Klan.

THE RESULT.

The result of the city election yesterday tells its own story, and the tale of the sweeping victory for the anti-klan ticket needs little adorning. The grim figures speak for themselves.

The whole ticket, bolstered by every device of cunning and darkness, was defeated by decisive majorities, and let it be writ that Rogers and Penberthy, the anti-klan candidates for district councilmen, carried every ward in the city.

From Fifteenth street on the east to the West Side park, and from Orchard avenue on the north to the Colorado river on the south, the whole of Grand Junction registered itself against the Ku Klux Klan domination.

In the contest for councilman at large, Messrs. Hall and Gilman, the two anti-klan candidates, dividing the anti-klan vote between them, polled near twice as many first-choice votes as the klan candidate, and in second- and first-choice votes they had 1,940 to 803.

This means a complete and effectual breaking down of klan control in this city, and marks the final passage of the "invisible empire" as a disturbing factor in Grand Junction.

In unmistakable figures, the city writes its condemnation of an un-American anti-American and un-Christian organization.

As the fight was centered against The Sentinel, the result, we feel free to say, is a vindication of the rightness of its position, and in this there is glory enough for us to compensate for the malicious attacks made by the klan leaders and of a few individuals who, falling even below klan standards, are willing to serve his Satanic Majesty, if such service promises achievement of their purpose or brings grist to their mill.

This election again demonstrates the good sense and sound judgment of the people of this city, and their falling into line with the rest of the state of Colorado shows that they only need to think things over to escape the fallacies of klanism or any other ism that leads away from the true and tried American spirit and purpose.

With malice towards none and charity for all, The Sentinel congratulates the people of this city upon the choice they have made of men who are to act for them as councilmen, and it finds much solace for itself in the thought that it had some small part in their selection.

And we congratulate the three vigorous, clean, upstanding young men who are called to the arduous task of service for a city that has expressed its confidence in their fairness, ability and integrity.

Courtesy of Mesa County Public Library

This editorial following the 1927 City Council election equates the election results with a complete vindication of The Daily Sentinel's opposition to the Klan.

of May, 1927 saw Rossman leave Grand Junction and give up his pastorate. The Klan's power had been broken as a political force in the city on April 5. The departure of the Exalted Cyclops apparently brought the dissolution of the organization in Grand Junction. Needless to say, *The Daily Sentinel* reported Rossman's departure and the hint of hidden scandal with much relish. Two lengthy front page stories, one on May 23 and the second on May 25, told of a possible correspondence Rossman was supposed to have been carrying on with a young girl in his congregation. Members of the congregation denied the allegation. *The Daily Sentinel* stories also indicated that state officials of Rossman's denomination had removed him. This could not be true since the minister's denomination was committed to strict congregationalism in church affairs. Church Board minutes of First Christian Church settle and explain this question.

The purpose of this meeting was to get an expression from the board as to the Board's attitude towards the questions which have risen as to alleged rumors, and reports, which have caused reflection to cast on Bro. Rossman. On a/c [sic] of the illness of Bro. Rossman he would be unable to take care of services on next Sunday. The question of payment of Bro. Rossman during his vacation was then brought up. After an article respecting Bro. Rossman published in the *Daily Sentinel*, the feeling of the Board toward same was discussed.

Brother Griffin presented the following motion: "We the undersigned members of the Official Board of the First Christian Church of Grand Junction, Colo., after careful consideration of everything pertaining to present rumors, insinuations, and facts wish to state the following going back the five years of the pastorate of Geo. P. Rossman, we find his life to be consistent with the spirit and teachings of the great Leader and Master, the Christ. In as much as certain, indiscreet actions came at the beginning of a complete mental and nervous breakdown, we completely exonerate him, and unite in praying for his speedy recovery and return to assume his activities among us as our Leader and Pastor." Motion passed by the unanimous action of the 32 members of the Church Board present. . . . The Board hold themselves [sic] responsible to Bro. Rossman for 3 months salary during his 3 months vacation. Motion carried.⁸²

Following a six months' leave of absence, including the vacation mentioned, Rossman sent his resignation to the church and returned for additional graduate study. The congregation seems not to have suffered any undue setback by these events. The circumstances left room for speculation and gossip in the community and probably aided in bringing about a final discrediting of the Klan in the community. As we have seen, there was not much left to discredit. Thus another

movement promising a hope to a sizeable portion of Grand Junction's population had come, grown almost unbelievably, and died dramatically in a space of less than three years.

NOTES

- ¹Interview with William W. Chapman, August 1970, Grand Junction, Colorado.
- ²Adam Keith, "KKK Klose Kall in Kolorado," *Denver Magazine* (August, 1965) pp. 24-27.
- ³Interview with Ferdinand Ferguson, November 1970, Grand Junction, Colorado.
- ⁴Chapman interview.
- ⁵*The Daily Sentinel*, 12 November 1923.
- ⁶*Ibid.*, 18 September 1923.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, 12 November 1923.
- ⁸Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 221-222.
- ⁹*The Daily Sentinel*, 22 January 1924.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, 25 January 1924.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*, 7 February 1924.
- ¹²*Ibid.*, 4 April 1924.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, 28 May 1924.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, 10 June 1924.
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*, 20 May 1924.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26 June 1924.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, 27 June 1924.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, 25 June 1924.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*, 26 July 1924.
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, 18 August 1924.
- ²¹Chapman interview.
- ²²*Ibid.*
- ²³*The Daily Sentinel*, 19 August 1924.
- ²⁴*Ibid.*, 20 August 1924.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, 18 August 1924.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*, 24 August 1924.
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, 20 September 1924.
- ²⁸*Ibid.*, 7 October 1924.
- ²⁹*Ibid.*, 11 October 1924.
- ³⁰Minutes of the Official Board, First Christian Church, Grand Junction, Colorado, 26 May 1927.
- ³¹Interview with Ethel Lamberson, August 1970, Grand Junction, Colorado.
- ³²Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan*, p. 217.
- ³³Interview with Ferdinand Ferguson, November 1970, Grand Junction, Colorado.
- ³⁴*The Daily Sentinel*, 16 October 1924.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, 2 November 1924.
- ³⁶Letter to author from Charles F. Thomas, 28 November 1970.
- ³⁷Mesa County Library, Oral History Collection (Walter Walker Series), Interview with Al Look (OH311 #5); *The Brand Book* referred to is *The 1961 Brand Book* Volume 17 of *The Denver Possee of The Westerners* (Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Publishing Company)
- ³⁸*The Daily Sentinel*, 6 November 1924.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, 16 January 1925.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*, 29 March 1925.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*, 16, 23, and 30 March 1925.
- ⁴³*Ibid.*, 19 March, 5 and 6 April 1925.
- ⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 8 April 1925.
- ⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 3 April 1927.
- ⁴⁶Thomas letter.
- ⁴⁷*The Daily Sentinel*, 2 June 1925.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 13 September 1925.
- ⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 13 May 1925.
- ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 17 June 1925.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*, 31 August 1925.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, 1 September 1925.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, 2 September 1925.
- ⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 9 May 1926.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 23 July 1925.
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 2 August 1925.
- ⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 4 August 1925.
- ⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 11 August 1925.
- ⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 2 September 1925.
- ⁶⁰*Ibid.*
- ⁶¹*Ibid.*
- ⁶²*Ibid.*, 3 September 1925.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴Al Look interview.
- ⁶⁵*The Daily Sentinel*, 4 September 1925.
- ⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 8 September 1925.
- ⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 14 September 1925.
- ⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 15 September 1925.
- ⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 2 October 1925.
- ⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 6 September 1925.
- ⁷¹*Ibid.*, 23 September 1925.
- ⁷²*Ibid.*
- ⁷³Al Look interview.
- ⁷⁴Mesa County Library, Oral History Collection (Walter Walker Series), Interview with Gilbert Bayliss (OH311 #1).
- ⁷⁵*The Daily Sentinel*, 5 April 1927.
- ⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 3 November 1926.
- ⁷⁷Chapman interview.
- ⁷⁸A news story in *The Daily Sentinel*, 29 March 1927 listed attendance at the last Klan rally in Grand Junction at 125 to 150. Charles Thomas quoted 150 as the membership in 1927.
- ⁷⁹*The Daily Sentinel*, 29 March 1927.
- ⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 6 April 1927.
- ⁸¹*Ibid.*
- ⁸²Minutes of the Official Board, First Christian Church, Grand Junction, Colorado. 26 May 1927.

CONCLUSION

The fact that the Ku Klux Klan achieved a tremendous revival in the second and third decades of the twentieth century is so well known that any claim to have added to a concept of the importance or magnitude of this resurgence through this study would be pretentious. The Klan in Colorado in this period has received attention as has been mentioned in this study. What then can the author claim for the study of the Klan in one rather small community? It is hardly sufficient to say that the study was worthy of making because it happened and no one has examined it previously. The same might be said about many peas in many pods.

It has been my intention to make this examination partly because so many in the community seem to know a little about the events having happened and practically no one seems to have asked who, what, or why. The author is convinced, with the writing now completed, that the answers achieved can only be taken as sign posts pointing to the need for further study. For this writer the study has also meant the discovery of many other areas needing examination, not only because they are interesting, but because they might lead to an understanding of the uniqueness of the city and its problems, past and present.

The Klan in Grand Junction, as a phenomenon of about three years' duration, is not so important as is a fuller understanding of why this movement and so many others have been grasped so eagerly by so many when they occurred. In a day when so much is made of "outside agitators," we need to be reminded that it is extremely hard to agitate contented and satisfied people. The author has tried to indicate that Grand Junction became agitated by movements promising hope, economic and/or social, three times in just over thirty years. An interest in the Progressive Party was being manifested in this city while the Klan was still a power.

Perhaps the most important area of examination regarding the great growth and strength of the Klan in Grand Junction lies in the absence of abrasive social conditions as they existed in many other cities in the decade following World War I. Certainly there were some foreign born residents, but there was no "color" group, no ghetto, and, on the positive side, there was a town with just over 40 years of history, all spent in the innovative and experimental atmosphere of the last frontier. This writer is thus led to the conclusion, in spite of the lack of any great amount of recoverable evidence, that movements such as the Klan were welcomed in Grand Junction because they offered some hope of relief from specific and indigenous economic problems. This conclusion is probably more firmly impressed in the mind of the writer because he has lived in Grand Junction for almost three decades and

has seen the same problems constantly recurring. Fringe groups still make a claim to loyalties in the Valley although now they all seem to be those usually classified as "right wing." That none attract any sizeable or lasting following may be attributed to the conservative bent of both the major political parties as they seem to manifest themselves in the Valley. It is recognized that this last statement is simply a value judgement on the part of the writer, but it appears to be a piece that fits in the puzzle.

The manifestation of the Klan in Grand Junction will help any who wish to study it to come to a new understanding and appreciation for the meaning that the Klan held for those who joined it in its revival of 65 years ago. A tendency of many during the recent revival of the Klan to label all who join it as "bigoted racists" will be destroyed quickly. Either changes in attitude almost beyond belief have taken place in individuals and their immediate descendants during the past 60 years or those individuals were never hate-mongers nor greatly disrespectful of the rights of others. As the letter of one former Klansman explained, those who joined were the leaders of the community and respected by all. That an organization begun after the Civil War to keep the newly liberated Negro in line could be adapted to a national organization of such wide scope less than 50 years later is a witness to the innovative process at work as well as to the greatly felt needs on the part of so many at the time. In Grand Junction a very high percentage of those considered eligible by the Klan for membership were touched by the organization and responded, at least for a time, sympathetically.

To discover all the reasons that gave the Klan such appeal and such power will require additional work and the author closes with the hope that moved him at the beginning. Should this effort stir someone to that greater investigation, then this manuscript will have, at least partly, served its purpose.

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