Klan Once Flourished

(Mr. Hornaday was chief of the News' Washington Bureau until his retirement in 1960).

By WALTER C. HORNADAY

The Ku Klux Klan is not what it was 30 years ago, at least not in Texas.

In the early 1920's, Texans joined the Ku Klux Klan by the thousands. Some 800 robed, hooded and masked Klansmen paraded through darkened streets in downtown Dallas. Similar parades were held in many other cities and towns.

On one single night in October, 1921, The Dallas News reported Klan parades through the streets of Ennis, Bryan, Mineola and Nacogdoches while citizens, mostly sympathizers, lined the streets to watch the spectacles.

The Klan's public display of power was only surface evidence of its influence those days. The Knights of the Invisible Empire formed a feared organization which threatened to take over the state's political authority as well as being a menace to law and order.

PRESENT DAY efforts to revive the Klan, feeble in comparison to operations around 45 years ago, appear doomed to failure. The hysteria that swept many states, north and south, in the post-World War I period hasn't broken out again.

Klan activities during its heyday, as recalled from personal experience and from reviewing newspaper stories of the time, make the record of its success seem today an unbelievable travesty on the common sense and decency of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who joined the order.

Take a look at one of the early day publicity blurs, a folder that was circulated to recruit members.

On the front was a picture of a white robed, hooded and masked man holding aloft a flaming torch and riding a white-robed horse.

"The Ku Klux Klan. Yesterday, Today and Forever," proclaimed the document. Below, by-lined by "William Joseph Simmons, Imperial Wizard" was a statement of the purposes and aims of the Klan.

SIMMONS EXPLAINED the Klan wasn't fighting the Roman Catholic Church as a religious institution, but opposed its attitude toward the public school system. Jews, the imperial wizard explained, weren't eligible because they would be uncomfortable in the Klan. The order believed in Jesus Christ's teachings, Simmons stated, and at every Klan meeting a Jew would find himself out of harmony with his religious convictions.

As to the Negro, Simmons said the Klan was not an enemy of this racial group, but opposed organizations preaching and teaching social equality. The white supremacy creed of the Klan was stated by Simmons in these words:

"We hold it is obligatory upon the Negro race and upon all other colored races in America to recognize that they are living in the land of the white race and by courtesy of the white race and that the white race cannot be expected to surrender to any other race, either in whole or in part the control of its vital and fundamental governmental affairs."

APPLICATIONS for "citizenship" in the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, were addressed to:

"His Majesty, the imperial wizard, emperor of the invisible empire of the Ku Klux Klan."

There was no initiation fee as such, but applicants were required to accompany the request for "citizenship" with a "dotation" or donation of $10. Regional organizers called Klansmen took 4% of this amount, the remainder apparently going to the imperial palace in Atlanta, Ga. Klansman also were able to purchase robes for $6.50.

The Klan, claiming to be the "original, genuine" KKK organized in 1868 in the South following the Civil War, was formed in Georgia around 1915. Prior to 1920 the membership reportedly did not exceed 5,000. Imperial Wizard Simmons declared some 800,000 to 650,000. C. Anderson Wright of New York, a former chief of staff of the Klan, said at an early congressional committee hearing on a resolution to investigate the Klan:

"Practically all the smaller cities of Texas are absolutely controlled by the Klan from mayor on down."

WRIGHT ASSERTED that Texas instead of Georgia should be headquarters for the KKK "because in Georgia they all look upon it more as a joke."

But the Klan was no joke in Texas.

In his testimony before the congressional committee, ex-Klansman Wright told of the parade in Dallas he said was arranged by city authorities, reporting that about the time the marchers in full regalia appeared the street lights were all extinguished.

The writer watched this parade down Elm Street, impressive on the shadowy streets. The eerie solemnity was broken occasionally when a sidewalk watcher would recognize a marcher.

"I know you Charley Brown by those yellow shoes on your big feet, one man called out.

The marching Klansman turned his head and waved.

THE DALLAS NEWS, which denounced the Klan movement as un-American, had this comment on the march:

"The spectacle of 800 masked and white-gowned men parading the streets of Dallas under banners proclaiming them Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and self-appointed guardians of the community's political, social and moral welfare has its ridiculous aspects.... But it also has a serious significance which will not be lost on the minds of men who cherish the community's good name and have the intelligence to understand how well designed that exhibition was to bring it under reproach.

"It was a slander on Dallas because only by circumstances which could be given to..."
in Many Texas Cities

Curiosity, a desire to find what the Klan was all about, attracted some persons, including employees of newspapers. As its political power became evident, others became members to foster their office-holding ambitions.

IN THE FALL of 1921, New York World investigating reporters prepared a series exposing the Klan. The Dallas News carried the articles. In October of that year, the Texas Chamber of Commerce condemned the KKK with only four dissenting votes. A Fort Worth man opposed, saying that some of the very best men of his city were members and that the Klan existed because there had not been proper enforcement of law.

A widespread impression was created in Texas that the Klan was tied in with the Masonic order, some even believing it was Masonic-sponsored or, at least, tolerated. The situation caused Andrew L. Randell, grand master of Texas Masons, to issue a statement in mid-October, 1921, repudiating the Klan as having any Masonic connection.

The New York World exposure led to the congressional committee hearing. Here Imperial Wizard Simmons described the order as a moral teaching fraternity whose purpose was evangelical.

The Klan seemed to thrive on the uproar of opposition from many quarters. Its political authority in particular gained immensely.

Late in 1921, the word went out that the late Earle B. Mayfield of Tyler was the Klan-supported candidate for United States senator. A meeting of the Dallas membership was held at Kirkland Park, an interurban stop near Richardson on the Dallas-Denison line, at which Mayfield's name was given as the candidate all good Klansmen should support.

The Klan's influence in Texas reached its peak in the United States Senate race culminating in Mayfield's election. Former Gov. James E. Ferguson, barred from holding state office, took to the stump against Mayfield. Mayfield didn't reject Klan support, while Ferguson bitterly attacked Ku Kluxism.

After Mayfield won the Democratic nomination over Ferguson, there was fear among Democratic leaders he would be beaten in the general election. Mayfield declined to resign the nomination. There was a court fight to keep Mayfield's name off the ballot, as well as the name of the late George E. P. Fackey, Houston attorney, who entered as an independent. During the court fight Mayfield admitted former Klansman membership.

Flushed with its United States Senate victory, Klan leaders moved to take over the state government. In the 1924 Democratic primary Dallas Dist. Judge Felix D. Robertson entered the race as the Klan-backed candidate for governor. Jim Ferguson got into the political fray again by running his wife, Miriam A. Ferguson, Robertson led a field of nine in the first primary, with Mrs. Ferguson second. In the run-off, Texas' first woman governor won by almost 100,000 votes.

TEXAS REPUBLICANS, seeing a chance for an upset, induced Dr. George C. Butte, a highly respected professor of law at the University of Texas, to be the GOP candidate for governor.

The Dallas News had opposed Ferguson in the past. But it had also bitterly fought the Klan, losing thousands of subscribers because of its stand.

THE FIRST Klan whipping in Dallas was planned as a publicity stunt, to draw attention to the organization and to bring in members. Selected newspaper reporters were to be on a downtown corner one night if they wanted a story. A Negro bellboy, on the excuse he was parking for white women, was removed from the hotel, taken into the country, whipped, branded with KKK on his forehead, taken back to town and released.