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In the Full Light of Day

The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Iowa

by Robert J. Neymeyer

The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s represents, for most Americans looking back, a resurgence of bigotry and violence. In that decade the Klan operated openly and defiantly in many midwestern and western states, as well as in

Ku Klux Klan hood drapes over dues ledger and account book for Waterloo-area klavern. Important documents such as these, which list names, occupations, and addresses of members, can be used with census information to construct profiles of Klan membership in Iowa communities. Occupations of the 198 members for 1925 to 1928 range from farmer and machinist to physician and manager. Note: the headings "Naturalized" and "Banished." The Klan would probably have wanted assurance that only "100% Americans" belonged; members might have been banished for bootlegging and other acts of moral turpitude. From 1924 to 1926, income entries include robe payments and tickets sales to Klan-sponsored events; expenses include advertising and other services from area businesses, imperial and realm taxes, and bands, drill teams, and, once, a "cross for aeroplane"—attractions that would pull in the public.

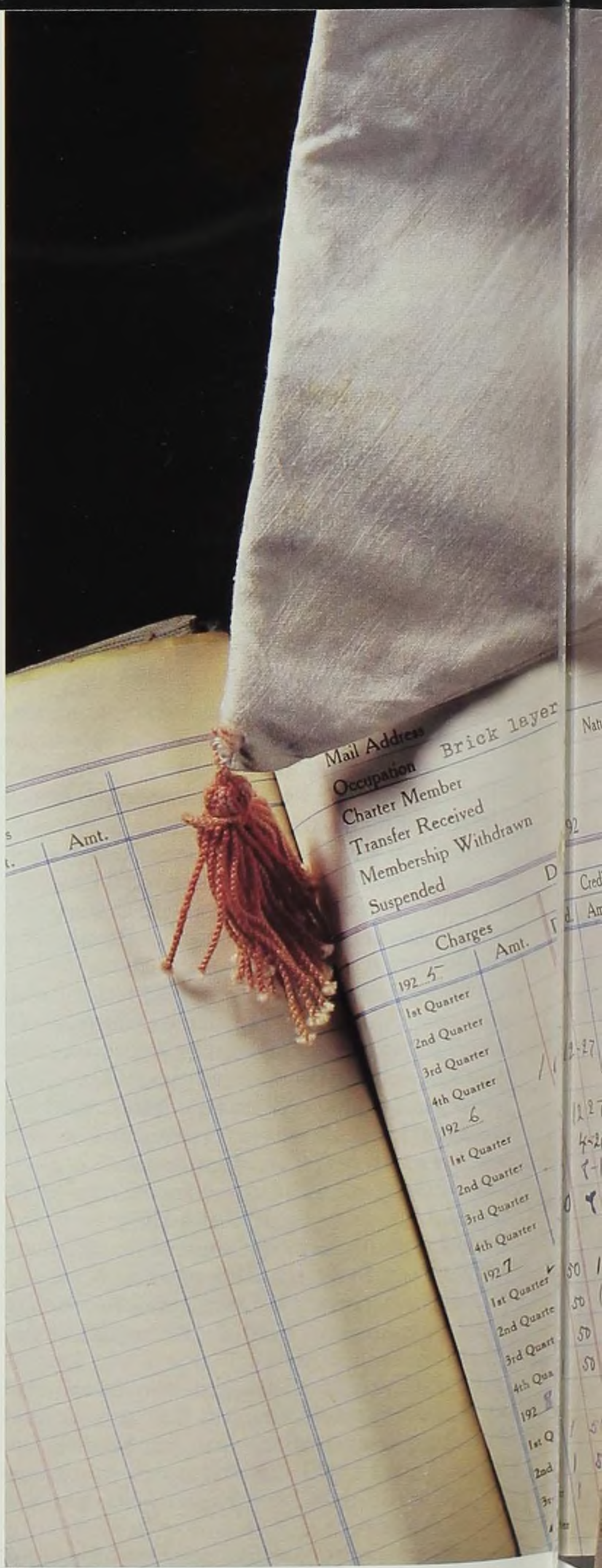


PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

Naturalized *Nov 9* 1925 - Died 192
 From 192 Transfer Issued 192 Reinstated 192
 Banished 192

OTHER ASSESSMENTS

Credits Amt.	Date To	Date	Charges Acct.	Amt.	Date	Credits Acct.	Amt.
			<i>K-Two obligation</i>		<i>7/10/28.</i>		

40 Klouklane Sept 19-1975
 Receipts

6484- Admission @ 12 1/2 *	
35% 8 Rides -	810.50
1057 cars Johnson's Garden at 12 1/2	190.08
190 cars Miller Parking 12 1/2	132.50
Ticket Sales at Booths 22134 Tlb @ 5¢	24.25
	1106.70
Total	2264.03

Due bu
Muscat
Rent on
Help on
Rent on
Rent on
18- Chicker
4- Police
Expenses pa
Auto- 371
Meris Prute

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PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

The Iowa Broadcaster

OWNED AND OPERATED BY

The Women of the Ku Klux Klan

Broadcasting From Station NSSA

Vol. I

STUDIO 1809 GRAND AVE., DES MOINES, IOWA, January 20, 1928

No. 16

IN LOVING MEMORY

We are grieved and sad to announce to the Klans of our Realm the death of the mother of our beloved Imperial Co... Gill
 passed away in Little R...
 It was the privilege of...
 to know personally this...
 anhood. Her life of s...
 benediction to her fan...
 her was to love her, ...
 only been transplanted...
 Garden where her...
 aside. Our hearts...
 to our dear Imper...
 hour and our pray...
 the comfort and s...
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CHICAGO E

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A CHALLENGE TO THE KLANSWOMEN OF THE REALM OF IOWA:

How many Iowa Klanswomen will make for the coming year her slogan and motto, "You can always depend on me." Your Realm Commander... now makes this her pledge to the cause... loyal soldier to line up for... being to give of...

THE KLAN EDITION OF THE
KOURIER
 MAGAZINE
 Vol. 5
 April, 1929
 No. 5 [n]

This is the new Klan Edition of the Kourier. It is for Klansmen only; subscribers can obtain it only from their Kligrapp. IT MUST NOT BE SHOWN TO ANY ALIEN NOR LEFT WHERE ANY ALIEN MAY SEE IT.

Official Organ of The KU KLUX

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 n to bar from our...
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 ent of an overwhelm...

RIAM

ilmore of Spirit Lake,
 cember 27th, 1927. To
 friends we extend sym...

ONSTITUTION and the
 keystones of Klan princi...
 threshold of a new year...
 to the preservation of these...
 nal life.

January 1928 issue of *The Iowa Broadcaster* "Owned and Operated by The Women of the Ku Klux Klan Broadcasting From Station NSSA" in Des Moines. *Kourier Magazine* was another Klan publication.

the South, claiming at its peak perhaps four million members. Iowa was not exempt from this wave, as the preceding memoir by Leanore Goodenow tells us. With the organization of the first "klaverns" (or local units) in 1922, Klan membership increased dramatically across the state. At its height of popularity in 1925/26, an estimated 40,000 persons were members in more than 100 klaverns.

The Klan had representation from the most urban centers in Iowa to the most rural. There were klaverns in nearly every county, in most cities, and in many small towns. There were many active women's auxiliary units. For a time there was a publication, the *Kourier*, a radio station, NSSA, broadcasting from Des Moines; and the station's newsletter, *The Iowa Broadcaster*. While most Klan activities and rites were secret in order to better intimidate or use violence, much of the Klan functioned in the full light of day, sponsoring picnics, parades, and other local entertainment that would draw large crowds. Public meetings (or "klonklaves") were a mixture of political rally and social event, used to recruit new members or educate existing ones. In those areas where membership was strong, the Klan was able to influence and even control local politics. The Invisible Empire was very visible on the Iowa landscape.

We might wonder why this organization, which had developed a reputation for lawlessness and racism during Reconstruction in the South, became so popular across America in the 1920s. Who belonged to this so-called "second Klan" and what motivated them to join?

These are difficult questions. The answers depend on the interpretation of available historical materials, and Klan records are rare. Initially, historians believed that the Klan of the 1920s was a fringe group composed of radical and disillusioned urban malcontents who were responding with both fear and anger to job and residential displacement by newly arriving ethnic groups. But more recent historical research, prompted by the discovery of Klan membership lists, strongly suggests that Klan members were more mainstream than marginal.

Bazaar

The Klevern Kumunity Klub have arranged for a bazaar and supper at the Klan Klavern on Monday night, November 18. Donations are solicited.

Klan Activities

Adair county klansmen, klanswomen and friends, nearly six hundred in number, congregated at the Klan Klavern on Thursday night, October 17, and listened to a very able address by Hugh S. Kelly national lecturer.

Hot weiner sandwiches were served free at the close of the meeting.

10/24/29

Clippings reflect the social nature of some klavern events, as well as the Klan's fixation with the letter "k." For example, within a local klavern, the offices of second in charge, chaplain, secretary, treasurer, conductor, and guard were called klaliff, kludd, kligrapp, klabee, kladd, and klexer.

This is the thesis of Leonard Moore's *Citizen Klansmen*, a study of the Klan in Indiana from 1921 to 1928. Along with other historians who have focused on the Klan in Youngstown, Memphis, Orange County, and Colorado, Moore believes that the movement was an outpouring of white Protestant nationalism concerned with improving the ability of the average person to impact the values of society and the actions of government. The new Klan members were socially and economically stable, civic minded, usually from mainstream Protestant churches, and likely to live almost anywhere, including in large cities. They were primarily concerned with local social problems rather than ethnic and racial issues. They called for the enforcement of prohibition laws, the elimination of gambling and prostitution, and the revival of what they considered quality education. In the Midwest, in the Klan's eyes, the villains were likely to be the commercial and industrial elite that had taken control of state and local government in the years after 1900, as



Child-size robes were also available. As in other women's clubs, Klanswomen sometimes took on charity work, such as wrapping bandages. The middle child's nurse's outfit may reflect such an activity.

America became more industrialized and American government and businesses more bureaucratized.

This new elite had allowed and often benefited from undermining traditional values; instead, they promoted profits over ethics under the guise of boosterism or economic progress. This new leadership became the focus for the anger of the middle and lower middle class, who believed they had lost control of their government and that government was no longer responsive to their needs or demands. Midwesterners in particular felt a loss of power. The Golden Age of Agriculture was over; the Midwest's political clout in Washington had ended; the region was considered a backwater. Midwesterners who felt their way of life threatened clung to certain

issues like patriotism and schools. Some citizens acted on their anger by joining the Ku Klux Klan.

Historians have discovered a common pattern in the rise of local Klan units, or klaverns. First, outside Klan operatives from national headquarters secretly recruited members, usually from among merchants, fraternal groups, or the clergy. Once a group was formed, these members brought in trustworthy friends and associates during a campaign highlighted by cross burnings, parades, and public meetings. Recruitment speeches were a mixture of patriotism, morality, and Christian values, as well as an appeal to intolerance and fear.

After a Klan organizer successfully started a klavern and received the lucrative new-members bonus, he left town with little concern as to what followed. And the national Klan, with its disreputable leadership of con artists and criminals, was content to collect robe charges and other fees. Its goal was to make money, and one way was by exploiting local klaverns. It did circulate a newspaper and hold inspirational rallies, but did little to impose any agenda on the local klaverns. Nor did the state Ku Klux Klan organizations have much authority. Most historians today contend that issues and control were localized.

Once established, the local klavern worked to gain respectability. It contributed to charities and churches and promoted 100 percent Americanism. When a klavern found that it could not implement its moral reform agenda without holding political office, Klansmen either ran for office or supported candidates, usually Republicans, who were willing to support Klan policies. From 1923 through 1925, Klansmen or their surrogates were elected to hundreds of offices across the nation, ranging from governor to school board member. Their influence and power were substantial.

A great deal of work needs to be done to provide a more comprehensive picture of the Ku Klux Klan in Iowa and to determine if it fits the pattern of the Klan in other states. Preliminary research on the Klan in Iowa in the 1920s suggests strong parallels with the

TWELVE KLAN POINTS

1. The immigration bars must be kept up.
2. The moral standard and the American home must be maintained.
3. The Protestant churches must be kept Christian and militant.
4. The public school must be fortified, strengthened and kept in the hands of Americans.
5. The Constitution must be respected.
6. The flag must be honored.
7. The laws must be obeyed and enforced.
9. Good men must not shirk jury service.
9. The courts must not be influenced or controlled.
10. The ballot must be cast as a sacred duty.
11. Big and good men must be selected for office.
12. Our Anglo-Saxon Protestant Christian civilization must be preserved.

Above: "Twelve Klan Points" from June 20, 1927 *Iowa Broadcaster*, a Klan publication in Des Moines. Right: The Klan's call for Americanism echoed the 1920s climate of nationalism, as reflected in this Jay N. "Ding" Darling cartoon from a 1924 *Des Moines Register*.

Klan in Indiana. In both states, the Klan appears to have focused little on the foreign-born population (which then made up about 8 percent of Iowa's population) or the African-American segment (less than 1 percent). In both states for some klaverns, anti-Catholicism was often an issue, but one that had already existed locally and that the Klan exploited when it arrived.

Many important resources have disappeared in the sixty-five years since the Klan was active in Iowa. Fortunately some membership lists have survived and become available to historians. By comparing names on membership lists to census data and city directories, socioeconomic profiles of members can be constructed. Newspapers, which often advertised and reported local Klan



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events, are also valuable sources.

But these kinds of sources do little to explain the reasons that motivated some Americans—including Iowans—to join the Klan. Personal accounts, such as the preceding one by Leanore Goodenow (pages 52-55), sometimes provide insights into human motivation, thereby confirming or contradicting other evidence.

Goodenow's recollection is set in the southeastern Iowa towns of Oskaloosa and Argyle. It captures the violence, intimidation, and intolerance that the Klan often used to recruit members and dominate communities throughout the state.

Klan organizers were particularly effective in manipulating crowds in order to gain membership pledges, and in distorting the truth in order to make their philosophy appear legitimate. Klan tactics at the Oskaloosa rally were repeated at rallies in Davenport and Cedar Falls. The attacks on Catholics in Lee County were not isolated instances; an Iowa Falls newspaper reported similar events. What happened in Argyle, where Leanore Goodenow taught school, is consistent with Klan actions in Des Moines, Greenfield, Sioux City, and Anamosa, to name only a few Iowa communities with klaverns. And the ideological concerns of the Klan-dominated Argyle school board were similar to those expressed in Lansing.

Evidence in Leanore Goodenow's account also supports the contention, drawn from Leonard Moore's Indiana study, that the Argyle Klan was not really concerned about ethnicity and race. While Catholics were attacked and beaten, this certainly was not introduced by the Klan. It was far too common an occurrence in a part of Iowa where the Catholic minority had long been discrimi-

nated against. The reference to the "lone black girl [who] drove [to school] whenever the roads were passable" does not suggest that any violence or animosity was directed towards her. From this, it appears the Argyle Klan did not introduce any new prejudices or use race as an issue. Likewise, the apparent willingness of armed school board members to listen to reason belies the idea that all Klan members were intolerant and irrational.

Goodenow's account makes it clear that the Klan appealed to those who would bully their neighbors and undermine democratic and legal principles to realize their goals.

Her account also represents the courage that many Iowans exhibited in standing up to the Klan. As a young female school administrator, she could have been excused for avoiding confrontation and possible violence threatened by Klan leaders. But this young educator, like many newspaper editors across the state, stood her ground and forced the Klan to retreat.

Material in the account by Goodenow also provides further insight into why the Klan agenda may have appealed to some Ameri-

cans who were angered by abstract changes in society's mores and power structure, and saw the Klan as one way of regaining that control, if only locally. First, consider the episode over the Knut Hamsun novel. Klansmen on the Argyle school board apparently considered the Hamsun novel an affront to the moral values of the community. There is also the suggestion that there was discontent with how the town leaders, as represented by the main street businessmen, ran Argyle. In the Klan's efforts to "gain influence" the Klan might have been expressing dissatisfaction with a business leadership that perhaps was



Embosser from klavern No. 101 in Butler County creates this raised symbol on paper.

lenient in supporting prohibition and more concerned with profits and customers than with the community's moral climate. The episode in which the telephone operator was terrorized could be viewed, in part, as male displeasure with women in the workplace as well as anger towards her non-Klan father. While all these points require further evaluation, the possibilities reveal the value of the personal recollection in helping learn more about Iowa klaverns and their appeal to Iowans.

As historians Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf explain in their recent book *The Midwest and the Nation*, after a century of success, midwestern small-town capitalism had been displaced by corporate industrialism. But the inhabitants failed to realize, or admit, that structural changes had taken place, and they continued to believe that the nation remained a mirror image of themselves—white, Protestant, middle class, and Republican. Even when they had to come to terms with reality, midwesterners thought they could recreate, much as they had done in populating the western frontier, a world that made sense and in which people had the power to effect change. When neither the Republican Party nor the Progressive movement responded to their concerns, many Iowans looked for another outlet to voice their disapproval.

The Iowa Klan's program reflects concern about this changing power structure in America and its failure to implement social reform. The Klan was particularly troubled by the election of officials who did not have their base in the old guard, by political corruption, and by the declining importance of small towns and rural areas. Klan members rallied behind social and moral issues—education, enforcement of prohibition laws, and adherence to their definition of Christian values and "100% Americanism." The Klan provided an opportune vehicle to express their anger and frustration.

After 1925, when the Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan was charged with kidnapping, drugging, and raping a woman, a discredited Invisible Empire began to disappear nationally. Why then in Iowa, we might ask, did the

Klan continue as an organization into the early 1930s? What motivated Iowans to join and to remain members, long after the movement had declined elsewhere? Was it because the Iowa klaverns continued to appeal to patriotism and local issues? Because membership did not carry the stigma for Iowans that it had acquired after the Klan nationally fell into disrepute? Because it was considered acceptable in some communities?

And there are more questions. Why did Iowa's most fervent Klan members not resort more often to vigilantism and violence, as Klansmen had in the South and West, but instead used the legitimate means of rally and ballot box? Why were Iowa klaverns not more successful politically? Were there differences between the Iowa klan in rural and urban areas, or in, say, southeastern Iowa and western Iowa? These and other questions will only be answered as more evidence and accounts of the Ku Klux Klan in Iowa become available to historians. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

Research materials for this article include Klan membership and ledger books and the following sources: Leonard Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (University of Illinois Press, 1992); Richard K. Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross: The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America* (Archon Books, 1991); Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf, *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (Indiana University Press, 1990). Brief portions of this essay also appeared in the author's "The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s in the Midwest and West: A Review Essay," in *Annals of Iowa* 51 (Fall 1992), 625-33. The author welcomes any additional information about the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s.

Turn the page for rare Klan-related materials, compelling visual evidence of how widely—and openly—the Ku Klux Klan operated in Iowa during the 1920s.