
Pioneer Klan No. 15: The Ku Klux Klan In Roswell, 1924-1934

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Roswell, New Mexico's chapter of the Ku Klux Klan has not been written about or discussed much in the past. However, there was indeed a local Klan in Roswell which was active from 1924 to 1934, reaching its peak in 1927.¹

The first Ku Klux Klan started in Tennessee in 1865 to intimidate the freed slaves and to resist government by scalawags and carpetbaggers. The Klan pretty much died out in the 1870s. Some say it just went dormant, and arose again fifty years later – the “second” Klan.

Nationally, historians believe that the second Klan started in response to the hit silent movie, “The Birth

of a Nation,” in 1915. That film portrayed former slave men as evil sexual predators, and it glorified the first Ku Klux Klan. The second Klan was chartered in 1915 and continued until 1944. It used the same code words and costumes as the first Klan, plus it introduced the burning of “fiery crosses.”

No records exist that indicate exactly when some Roswell men got together to form a Klan, but it likely was sometime in 1923. They chose about a dozen men to fill the various offices and then applied to the national organization for a charter. The following excerpts are from the charter, which was approved on 5 February 1924:

IMPERIAL PALACE, INVISIBLE EMPIRE KNIGHTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

To All Who Read and Respect These Lines, Greeting:
Whereas, The Imperial Wizard has received a petition from the following named citizens of the Invisible Empire,

[There follows a list of all offices and the names of the men who will fill the offices.]
praying for themselves and others and their successors to be instituted
Klan of the Order under the name and number of
Pioneer Klan No. 15, Realm of New Mexico,
and same to be located at Roswell, in the County of Chaves, State of New Mexico,
United States of America...

Now Know Ye, that I, the Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, on this the Fifth day of the Second Month of the Year of Our Lord Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-four... issue this CHARTER to the aforesaid petitioners, their associates and successors...

In Testimony Whereof, I, the Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, have caused to be affixed hereon the Great Imperial Seal of the Invisible Empire
and do hereunto set my hand and impress my official seal, and same is duly attested –
Done in the executive chambers of his Lordship, the Imperial Wizard, in the Imperial Palace in the Imperial City of Atlanta, Commonwealth of Georgia, United States of America, on the day and date above written.
BY HIS LORDSHIP,/s/H.W. Evans, Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the
Ku Klux Klan

The charter was activated on 15 February 1924:

This certifies that above Charter was read to and duly adopted by above named Klan in session assembled with all stipulations and conditions herein stated or implied on the 15 day of February, A. D. 1924, Signed
...Exalted Cyclops... Witness /s/2

Rumors abounded for several months in Roswell that national and local organizers were working to form a local Klan chapter, according to newspaper accounts. In early January 1924 a large number of cars "...came down from South Hill at 1:30 o'clock in the morning. It is believed now that this was a meeting of the Klan," the *Roswell Daily Record* reported. All doubt was removed on 2 February 1924, when a "flaming red cross" was burned on South Hill; that is, just east of S. Main Street between Summit and McGaffey streets.³ A large number of cars were observed in the vicinity, which the *Alamogordo News* declared was the first known meeting of the Klan in Roswell.⁴ However, the *Roswell Daily Record* found that the cars were those of on-lookers and not Klan members. It could be speculated that the cross-burning was in celebration of the imminent granting of the Roswell Klan's charter, which was approved in Atlanta three days later.

Roswell's "fiery cross" was made of iron pipes wrapped in burlap and saturated with oil. The fire department went out to check on it because it had been reported as a burning telephone pole.⁵

The *Roswell Daily Record* report of the Klan activities in its 4 February 1924, edition seemed to carry a disapproving tone:

Local and city officers this morning repeated their warning that the state law prohibiting hooded or robed persons gathering or parading will be enforced to the letter.

Just what a Klan organization hopes or expects to accomplish in Roswell is not known, since no official statement has come from the body.⁶

The New Mexico Legislature in 1923 passed a law, referenced in the article, which made it unlawful to appear in the Klan's uniform in public places. However, the law did not "...prevent the burning of fiery crosses on privately owned or leased premises or in halls rented by the organization," according to the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 3 March 1925.⁷

Newspaper accounts collected by Professor Richard A. Melzer, Ph. D., of the University of New Mexico – Valencia Campus, show that several other towns preceded Roswell in activating Klan chapters. The local Klans in New Mexico were evidently numbered in the order in which they were chartered, thus giving the

Roswell Klan the No. 15. With the records of Klan No. 15 are lists of the charter members of about two dozen local chapters in other towns in the state.⁸

The Roswell Pioneer Klan No. 15 had sixty charter members when it accepted its Charter on 15 February 1924. The requirements to become a member were set forth in the by-laws as follows:

No person shall be naturalized in this Klan unless he be a white, male, Gentile, native-born citizen of the United States of America, who owes no allegiance of any nature to any foreign government, nation, ruler or person, and who is at or above the age of eighteen years, and a believer in the tenets of the Christian religion, and whose allegiance to the government of the United States of America to the exclusion of all other governments, kings, potentates, powers and influence whatsoever, is unquestionable.⁹

As a group, Klan officers were referred to as "Ter-rors." The national Klan leaders devised many words starting with "Kl," to make the work and the offices of the Klan seem unique and mysterious. The place of meeting, for example, was called a "Klavern"; a regular meeting was a "Klonklave"; dues payments levied on members was a "klectokon." An officer called the "Kligrapp" (recording secretary) made quarterly reports to national as well as local Klan officials.¹⁰

It is possible to generalize about the size of the Roswell Klan's membership because all of the quarterly reports from 1924 through 1934 are in the records. Members in good standing by the end of the first quarter of 1924 numbered 102. The number kept rising until it exceeded two hundred in the first quarter of 1926. Then about half the members were suspended for non-payment of dues, but there were provisions for reinstatement. The Klan record keepers devoted a lot of time and space to accounting for the payment of dues and other levies. The qualified membership for the remainder of 1926 fluctuated considerably, from 130 in the third quarter to 264 in the fourth quarter.¹¹

The Roswell Klan's image of itself was that it was something like a lodge. In Klan literature and correspondence, there are frequent references to and comparisons with the Masons. However, the Grand Master of New Mexico Masons issued a statement disclaiming

any connection with the Klan, maintaining that Masons of New Mexico were in no way in sympathy with the work or aims of the Ku Klux Klan, nor of any kindred organization. The Grand Master was Lucius Dills, who was formerly of Roswell and the first editor of the *Roswell Record*. His statement, published in the *Albuquerque Journal* on 1 July 1922, declared:

Freemasonry has always been the champion of orderly legal processes, and utterly condemns the Ku Klux Klan and all other activities that seek or assume to substitute anarchy or mob violence in the stead of constitutional government and law.¹²

The Roswell community seemed to consider the Klan to be a patriotic organization, and indeed its meetings and ceremonies abounded with references to the Constitution and the flag. Evidence that the Roswell Klan was accepted as a patriotic organization is a photograph of the Klan's entry in the Cotton Carnival parade in 1926. The float featured people clad in white

told each of the officers what to say and do, with little room for individual interpretation. Many of the booklets have numerous scriptural references, as demonstrated by "The Klan Creed":

I believe in God; Ineffable; Infinite; Eternal; Creator and Sole Ruler of the universe; and in Jesus Christ His Son our Savior, who is the Divine Word made manifest in flesh and demonstrated in life.

I believe that all men are free moral agents, each responsible for his every act, free from subservience to potentate, prelate or priest; each entitled to direct communion with God and accountable to Him.

I believe that God created races and nations, committing to each a special destiny and service; that the United States through its White, Protestant citizens holds a Divine commission for the furtherance of free government, the maintenance of white supremacy and the protection of religious freedom; that its Constitution and laws are expressive of this Divine purpose.

I believe that it is the duty of men of kindred thought, in fulfillment of these Divine purposes, to unite fraternally; that by so doing they increase the fellowship of men and more effectively carry out the will of God; that the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is an Order in all ways conforming to these great principles.¹⁴



Ku Klux Klan's entry in the Cotton Carnival parade in 1926

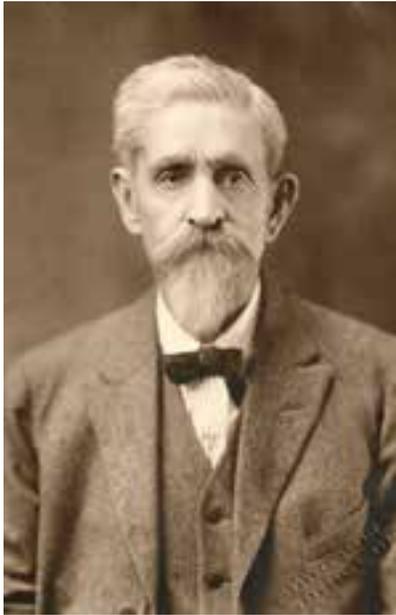
– in violation of the 1923 law prohibiting such displays. There were also several U. S. flags. On the side of the float was the message "Knights and Women of the Ku Klux Klan." The float also had slogans on the front and rear; the front is illegible, but the rear one reads "100% American."¹³

The national Klan furnished booklets to the local organization which provided detailed instructions for various ceremonies, including funerals. The booklets

This emphasis on God was found throughout the Klan's ceremonies and to some extent in their actions. A long-time church member related how the Klan once interrupted a Sunday evening service at Roswell's First Baptist Church. The Klansmen, in full regalia, marched down the aisle and presented an envelope with \$500.00 in it to the pastor. The entire episode was carried out in silence.¹⁵

A prominent name associated with the Roswell Klan – indeed, a patriarch of the Klan – was Captain

Jason W. James. He was a leading citizen in the community, and he frequently made speeches to the Klan.



Captain Jason W. James

James was born in Missouri in 1843. During the Civil War, he fought in several Confederate armies, including short stints with the guerrillas led by W. C. Quantrill. He became a close friend of Captain J. C. Lea, and they both were captains of their own units in Louisiana, at times under the command of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest. After the war, James stayed in Louisiana and tried a number of occupations, none of which succeeded.¹⁶ He joined the Ku Klux Klan when it started in 1865 and was a leader of forces who – among other activities – roamed the countryside at night intimidating former slaves in an effort to prevent them from voting.¹⁷

Captain Lea moved to New Mexico Territory where he became the “Father of Roswell.” In 1892, James also moved to Roswell. He succeeded in several economic pursuits, mostly agriculture. When New Mexico Military Institute was re-established in 1898, James took a great interest in the school and furnished rifles and medals for the rifle team. The Institute dedicated the 1918 Bronco annual to Captain James in appreciation of his efforts on behalf of cadets.¹⁸

James was no doubt involved when the Roswell Pioneer Klan No. 15 was organized. The members were assigned numbers which were written on their membership cards instead of their names. Captain James’ number was “one,” he was the only “old Klansman” from the 1870s, and he was not required to pay dues. He was about eighty years old when Klan No. 15 was established, and he was eighty-three when he became the Exalted Cyclops (leader) of the Roswell Klan in the fall of 1926. In order to show him their appreciation and respect for his past and present actions, the Klan on 4 November awarded him the gold “Hero Cross,”

which had General Bedford Forrest’s likeness engraved on one side and the fiery cross on the other.¹⁹

James often made speeches to the Klan, the Masons, and New Mexico Military Institute. He published some of his speeches, including those to the Klan, in his second book, *Memories and Viewpoints*, which came out in 1928.²⁰ The role of James in the Roswell Klan was something like “resident philosopher,” and a brief examination of his speeches reveals the theme of white supremacy throughout. Merton L. Dillon, a history professor at New Mexico Military Institute, wrote an article about James in the April 1956 edition of the *New Mexico Historical Review*. Some of the words Dillon uses to characterize James perhaps shed some light on James’ beliefs: anti-Democrat, no systematic or original thinker, extraordinary perceptiveness, essentially artless, arch-conservative, etc.²¹

James’ speeches to the Klan include an undated one called “The Paramount Aim of the Klan.” The titles of his speeches are good indications of their content. A speech he called “Conditions Making the Klan Necessary” was delivered to the Klan in August 1926, while he was the Exalted Cyclops. The following are some excerpts from it:

I see so few who view our national conditions as I do. The Anglo-Saxon people in the United States seem to have been asleep for seventy-five years, and now they have awakened with a pang... They see today the African negro ..., after serving a short probation as a slave of the Southern planter, made a full-fledged American citizen, with the legal right to vote, hold office, sit on a jury, or testify before a court. They see universal suffrage under the law given to woman and practically every one within our borders... They see now the effect of opening our immigration doors to the world. They see the activities of the Roman hierarchy in this country to bring it under the rule of the Pope of Rome, as it has ...a large part of Europe. The priests and Knights of Columbus in the United States have... in many places... committed outrageous crimes...²²

Captain James delivered a talk on 8 June 1926, called “The Menace of the Military Machine of the Catholic Church.” His subject on 30 June 1927, was “The Klan’s

Duty to the Children of Our Community.”²³

The membership spiked in 1927, hovering around 350 with a peak of 362 in the second quarter.²⁴ This sudden growth was apparently a result of the Roswell Klan buying its own place. The location of their meeting place before this is not indicated in the records.

Exactly when the Roswell Klan incorporated as a legal entity is not known because no records exist for that at the Chaves County Clerk’s office. By June 1927, the Roswell Pioneer Klan No. 15 had formed a corporation called “Roswell Benevolent Association.” This name, and not that of the Klan, was used in all legal matters. The trustees of the Roswell Benevolent Association purchased land on 6 June 1927, two miles east of Main St. on East Pine Lodge Road at Calumet Road. It is legally identified as “Lots 3, 4, 5, & 6, Block 14, Berrendo Irrigated Farms,” according to records at the county clerk’s office and at Landmark Title Company.²⁵ The forty-nine-acre place included a lake which is now dry. The Klan had a Klavern building; but whether it was a new building or remodeled is unknown.

Captain James’ residency in Roswell was punctuated by extended periods away from the area. He bought a ranch in Brewster County, Texas, in 1904 and spent much time there operating it. He bought another ranch near Uvalde, Texas, in 1932; despite his advanced age and deteriorating health, he operated the ranch himself. Jason W. James died at his Uvalde ranch on September 14, 1933, at the age of ninety.²⁶

James’ death was reported in an article that appeared in the *Roswell Daily Record* the next day after his death, demonstrating the unmistakable esteem in which the Captain was held:

Captain James was one of the most prominent and most useful citizens Roswell ever had. He was a man of great energy, both of mind and body and played his part in the development of the West. He was a high type southern gentleman, gallant and dignified and yet tender and kind and generous. Although he lived on a raw frontier, he was nevertheless a great scholar, and a fine writer and orator. He had a strong and fine character and high principles from which he did not swerve.²⁷

Remarkably, none of the several newspaper articles that were written about Captain James over the decades

mentions the Klan at all.

Membership lists show that 508 men were members of the Roswell Klan at one time or another. The numbers of members in good standing suddenly fell from 350 in the last quarter of 1927 to 237 in the first quarter of 1928. There were some brief rallies in 1928-29, but the trend was mostly downward.²⁸

Excitement stirred in Roswell on 19 March 1928, when three fiery crosses appeared in various parts of town. The most ominous one was placed in front of St. Peter Catholic Church on South Main Street. Another one was behind the Elks Lodge on West Second Street, and the third was in a vacant lot next to the Armory on West Fifth Street. The burnings took place the night before the city primary election, creating a sensation that overshadowed the election. The newspaper surmised, “It was expected that a number of votes would be changed because of the cross burning.” It seems that one of the “imitation cross burnings” was near the home of a man who had been actively promoting one of the tickets in the primary election. The burnings were “... generously described as a ‘rank outrage,’” according to the *Daily Record*. Further, “...It was generally regretted this morning that an attempt had been made to inject religious prejudice in the city primary.”²⁹

Despite public opinion to the contrary, the Roswell Klan officials issued a proclamation that

...states emphatically that it had nothing whatever to do with the burning... It has information which will probably lead to the apprehension of those who were responsible for it. The imitation cross was burned to discredit the Klan by those whose lives do not measure up to that standard required by the Klan for membership therein.

Roswell authorities had already concluded that perpetrators other than the Klan were responsible for the burnings even before the Klan issued the denial.³⁰

The Roswell Klan was quite honored by the Imperial Wizard on May 21, 1930, when one of their own – Frank Talmage, Jr. – was appointed as Grand Dragon for the Realm of New Mexico. The Grand Dragon was the only man who represented the entire state in national klonklaves, and Roswell was delighted to have one of their own to be appointed to such a high position.³¹

Though quite different from Captain Jason James,

Frank Talmage Jr. was another patriarch of the Roswell Klan. He is not to be confused with his distinguished father of the same name, who had careers as both a minister and a physician before the family came to New Mexico. The father served as pastor of Roswell's First Christian Church from 1913 to 1915. Even in his old age, he was active in the community and highly esteemed by the residents. He died in 1929.³²

Born in February 1880 in Milford, Indiana, Frank Talmage Jr. at an early age had a funeral business in Caldwell, Kansas. He sold out in 1901 and visited the Pecos Valley, where he bought the Hedgecoxe Ranch at Greenfield. About 1913, Talmage established a wholesale alfalfa business in downtown Roswell, which he operated for several years. In 1922, he and C. W. Tilton started a funeral home, but he still maintained the wholesale alfalfa dealership for a while: "Talmage & Tilton Mortuary and Wholesale Alfalfa Dealer." After a few moves and name changes, the Talmage Mortuary was established at 121 W. 4th St. by 1928. Talmage's two sons had life-long careers with their father's mortuary as embalmers and funeral directors. Talmage Mortuary relocated to 414 N. Pennsylvania Ave. around 1933, where it remained until sold at the end of World War II. The entire extended family resided in the same house with the mortuary.³³

Frank Talmage Jr. was "naturalized" into the Roswell Klan on 16 December 1924.³⁴ He was the Exalted Cyclops for much of 1927, 1928, and 1929. Even when he was not the official or acting Exalted Cyclops, he served as the acting leader in his role as Imperial Representative – in which office he represented New Mexico to the Imperial Wizard in Atlanta in the absence of a Grand Dragon for the state. Talmage was to a great extent the "backbone" of the Roswell Klan, working hard to make the organization function. During his tenure, 379 men became members of the Roswell Klan.³⁵

Talmage apparently held the office of Grand Dragon for a year, because he was referred to as the "Past Grand Dragon" in a resolution dated August 13, 1931. It seems that the Roswell Klan lacked capable leaders, and the Terrors appealed to Past Grand Dragon Talmage to serve as the Exalted Cyclops for the Roswell Klan again, because he had been Exalted Cyclops when the Klan enjoyed great growth a few years earlier.³⁶

Suspensions for non-payment of dues, followed by re-instatements, were the main cause of the fluctu-

ations in membership. Nothing exists in the records to explain the long-term decline in membership, but it is known that there were scandals associated with the national Klan and that some national leaders were discredited. By the end of 1932, the Roswell membership was down to thirty-five. At the conclusion of the third quarter of 1933, only fifteen men qualified. The number was up to twenty-five at the end of 1933.³⁷

There are some minutes of klonklaves in the existing records, but they cover only three years: 1932-34, the first being for August 18, 1932. Mostly the minutes are routine and mundane, written in the cryptic style typically used by recording secretaries. The minutes always mention the sick and report their prognosis, especially their revered Captain Jason W. James:

17 August 1933: "Sick Committee reported Klansman Jason W. James in Hospital at Temple, Texas."

7 September 1933: "Sick Committee reports Capt. James at his ranch."

5 October 1933: "Capt. James passed away... Klansmen stood in silent prayer in mourning of our departed Klansman Captain James."

7 December 1933: "Resolution on death of Capt. James read and ordered opened on record of this Conclave."³⁸

On 1 September 1932 the minutes report: "Social evening including ladies (and was enjoyed by all). Splendid talk by Kl. (----), meeting was closed, refreshments were served and a large cross was burned. Ladies present 11, men 25." This is the only mention in the surviving records that the Roswell Klan burned a cross.³⁹ Of course, the Klan was notorious in the South for burning crosses as a terror technique. When a cross was burned in front of St. Peter Church in 1928, the Roswell Klan emphatically denied any connection with it.

In an article he wrote for the *Roswell Daily Record* in May 1991, the late Clarence Adams, local historian, mentioned a burning cross he saw as a boy growing up on the Berrendo near the Klan's headquarters:

...We talked about the mystery connected with the Ku Klux Klan, which was located at the head of the North Berrendo Creek.

No one seems to know much about the organization, but a number of people were there

– as least one night a week.

On a certain night...a huge cross attached to a tall steel pole with red electric light bulbs shining brightly could be seen from a long distance...⁴⁰

This suggests that some of the Roswell Klan's "fiery crosses" were actually electric lights and not fire. The literature indicates a place for the "fiery cross" inside the Klavern for ceremonies, which implies that it could have been electric for safety's sake.

The klonklave on 5 January 1933 passed a motion to "...have a social meeting, with each Klansman to bring his wife if he so desires." This was not unusual for the Roswell Klan, who were no doubt doubly careful to observe the rules regarding mixing with women.⁴¹ The group had been in trouble with the Imperial Wizard in 1931 because he had heard that the Roswell Klan was meeting together with the Women of the Ku Klux Klan – which was prohibited. In a letter to Exalted Cyclops Frank Talmage Jr. dated 14 October 1931, Imperial Wizard H. C. Spratt wrote,

I am forced to complain to you of the activities of your Klan with reference to information that I have received. I have had justified complaints that the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and the Women of the Ku Klux Klan have been authorized to meet together. This is not so....

Please convey to your Klansmen the thought that it is only to prevent a discontinuance of the splendid record at Roswell Klan that I write this letter of ruling.⁴²

The Klan in other places was known to use "floggings," tarring-and-feathering, or other techniques to correct and punish the behavior of wife-beaters, drunkards, bootleggers, and other miscreants. It is not known if the Roswell Klan used any of those methods, but a few notations in the minutes suggest that they did deal with some law-and-order issues. The minutes for 2 February 1933, state, "The Law Enforcement Committee is working on a case out by the Compress. The Law Enforcement Committee ask(ed) for volunteers to help handle the case. A number volunteered their services." No further information is given concerning what this "case" concerned. Another notation about "law enforcement cases" is in the minutes for 7 De-

cember 1933: "Law Enforcement Committee reported on two cases which had been handled."⁴³ This brief declaration provides no clues as to what the cases were about, so the question of whether or not the Klan took law-breakers to the wood shed remains moot.

In his 1991 newspaper article, Clarence Adams wrote, "... I'll never forget the alligators that were kept in the lake on the Klan's property. They escaped from the place now and then, and I always watched for them when I went fishing on the creek."⁴⁴ This seemed incredible until the following was found in the Klan minutes for 6 July 1933: "Discussion on fish and lake and alligator. Motion the Building & Grounds Committee be allowed to dispose of alligator if place can be found where he will be cared for. Carried."⁴⁵ This appears to be the first mention of the lake, the fish, and the alligator in the records.

The minutes for Thursday, 17 August 1933, reveal how the alligator question was resolved. "Building & Grounds Committee reported that the alligator had been given over to the City and was comfortable at the Park." Roswell's zoo was located in the old "Haynes' Dream" park, which became Cahoon Park in 1935, just west of the swimming pool.⁴⁶

Attendance at the klonklaves of the Roswell Klan declined in 1933 and 1934. No minutes exist for the period between 3 May and 1 November 1934. The minutes for the latter date read, "Conclave not opened in regular form account small attendance. Informal discussion on current events and conclave dismissed by the E. C." The November 1 meeting turned out to be the last. Records dated 8 November 1934, state that the last meeting of the Klan was held 1 November, and that the Klan was to be suspended as of 1 January 1935 by the state Grand Dragon.⁴⁷

It appears that the organization reverted to its legal name, Roswell Benevolent Association, and did not use the Klan's name any more. None of the records indicate what happened to the Klan's building, land, and lake. There are hints in the records that the board of trustees of the RBA held meetings on an irregular basis, but no minutes have surfaced for such meetings.

Finally, after a long period of silence, several documents bearing the name of the Roswell Benevolent Association and dated November and December 1944 appear in the records (written on the pre-printed forms of the Klan). Letters dated 7 November 1944,

went out to all members of the RBA imploring them to attend a meeting at the Knights of Pythias hall on 16 November. At that meeting, members were informed that the Trustees "... have an offer for the purchase of the real estate owned by the Association... for the sum of \$2,650.00..."⁴⁸

The land described is that which had been purchased by the RBA in 1927. The Association authorized the Trustees to accept the offer. Another meeting was scheduled for 7 December 1944, in which the Trustees reported that they had carried out the wishes of the Association.

Another resolution was passed at the 7 December meeting:

WHEREAS, That this Association having been in a dormant or inactive life for some time past and the judgment of the members being that it would be well to dissolve the association, therefore, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Trustees be instructed to receive or collect any amounts that may be owing to the Association,

to pay any and all claims against the Association, and if there are not enough funds to pay all claims that an assessment be levied upon the members to defray same, or when all claims are paid, any amount remaining in the Treasury be divided equally between the members of the Association. When such matters are completed the Trustees are requested to dissolve the Association.⁴⁹

A financial statement indicates that the RBA had \$10.71 when it was suspended on 1 January 1935. In 1939 and continuing every year through 1944, former Grand Dragon Frank Talmage Jr. took it upon himself to pay the \$10.00 annual fee for insurance and for other charges associated with the sale of the land. At the 7 December meeting, he was reimbursed in the amount of \$117.00 to clear the account. That left \$2,533 in the Association's account. Seventeen members in good standing received checks for \$149.00 each.⁵⁰

The dispersal of the funds was the end of the Roswell Pioneer Klan No. 15 and the Roswell Benevo-

This study represents an important part of Roswell's history that up until now has pretty much been an unmentionable subject.

The philosopher George Santayana famously stated, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Studying history may give present generations some guidance on where they have been, where they are now, and where they want to go in the future.

This study reveals that the Klan in Roswell was not unique, but part of a very broad state and national movement. The Roswell Klan was one of about two dozen local Klan chapters in New Mexico, and it also had ties to the national organization headquartered in Atlanta.

This study perhaps shows how local communities can be affected by national movements, how people will follow charismatic leaders no matter how extreme or radical their views, and maybe it will show present-day New Mexicans what they are capable of given the right circumstances.

ENDNOTES

lent Association.⁵¹

1. Pioneer Klan No. 15, also known as Roswell Benevolent Association. *Records*. Confidential Repository. This article is based primarily on secret records of the Roswell Klan, which the author was allowed to examine. In order to protect the privacy and identities of descendants of the Klan members, no names are divulged except those of patriarchs Jason James and Frank Talmage, Jr.

1. Pioneer Klan, *Records: Charter*. "Exalted Cyclops" was the title

of the top officer, or president, of local Klan chapters.

3. *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 February 1924.

4. *Alamogordo News*, 2 February 1924

5. *Roswell Daily Record*, 4 February 1924.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 23 March 1928.

8. Pioneer Klan, *Records: Klan Charter Members, New Mexico Towns*.

9. Ibid., *By-Laws*.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., *Kligrapp's Quarterly Reports*, 1924-1926.
12. *Albuquerque Journal*, July 1, 1922.
13. "Ku Klux Klan Float in Cotton Carnival Parade, 1926"; Image in Archives, Historical Center for Southeast New Mexico, Roswell. The "Women of the Ku Klux Klan" were an auxiliary to the Klan, and their leader was called "Excellent Commander." There are no records of the women's organization with the Pioneer Klan No. 15 records.
14. Pioneer Klan, *Records: Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Atlanta: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, 1928)*, 5.
15. Evelyn Kyle, interview with the author, February 7, 1978.
16. Ernestine Chesser Williams, "Captain Jason W. James," in Elvis E. Fleming and Ernestine Chesser Williams, *Treasures of History II: Chaves County Vignettes* (Roswell: Chaves County Historical Society, 1991), 64-68; Elvis E. Fleming, *Captain Joseph C. Lea: From Confederate Guerrilla to New Mexico Patriarch* (Las Cruces: Yucca Tree Press, 2002), 31-36.
17. M. L. Dillon, "Captain Jason W. James, Frontier Anti-Democrat," *New Mexico Historical Review*, April 1956, 90-93.
18. J. R. Kelly, *A History of New Mexico Military Institute*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953), 151; William E. Gibbs and Eugene T. Jackman, *New Mexico Military Institute: A Centennial History*. (Roswell: New Mexico Military Institute Centennial Commission, 1991), 101, 105, 261, 420.
19. Pioneer Klan, *Records: Kligrapp's Quarterly Reports, First Quarter, 1925*; Dillon, *New Mexico Historical Review*, 101.
20. Jason W. James, *Memories and Viewpoints* (Roswell: By the Author, 1928), 145-162.
21. Dillon, *New Mexico Historical Review*, April 1956, 90-93.
22. James, *Memories and Viewpoints*, 152-155.
23. Ibid., 149, 158.
24. Pioneer Klan, *Records: Kligrapp's Quarterly Reports*, 1924-1934.
25. Chaves County Clerk, *Deed Records*, Chaves County Administrative Center, Roswell; Landmark Title Company, *Plat Books*, 109 West Third Street, Roswell.
26. Williams, *Treasures II*, 64-68; *Camp Wood (Texas) Messenger of Light*, 22 September 1933.
27. *Roswell Daily Record*, 15 September 1933.
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41. Pioneer Klan, *Records: Minutes of Klunklaves, 5 January 1933*.
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47. Pioneer Klan, *Records: Minutes of Klunklaves, 1 November, 8 November 1934*.
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49. Ibid., *7 December 1944*.
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51. Frank Talmage Jr. sold his funeral home to O. R. Westrum, L. M. Westrum, and F. E. LePell and retired about 1945; he died