The Ku Klux Klan started during the reconstruction period following the Civil War, when a group of young ex-Confederate officers from Pulaski, Tennessee, got together because they were bored. They chose the name “Kyklos,” meaning circle. They added the word “clan,” spelling it with a “K.” The present name of the group has remained for more than a hundred years. There are other stories that the mysterious order was named after an Indian Chief or the cocking sound of a rifle, but these are later variations.

The KKK first appeared in Kirkville in 1924. The “Flaming Circle,” the name of the Kirkville Chapter then, was anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, and anti-Negro.

Dr. Pauline Knobbs related a story of the Kirkville Ku Klux Klan.

Pauline Bates Dingle Knobbs, Ph.D., was born in Palmyra, Missouri, September 11, 1903. After attending Centenary Academy at Palmyra, upon its closing she transferred to the public schools from which she graduated as valedictorian of her class in 1921 from Palmyra High School.

In the fall of 1921 she began her college work at the Northeast Missouri State Teachers College.

Pauline began her teaching career in the Demonstration Junior High School of the Northeast Missouri State Teachers College in the fall of 1924. She transferred to the Kirkville Senior High School as head of the Social Science Department in 1925 and continued to teach there until 1939, teaching social science, history, government, and sociology.

In 1939 she became a member of the faculty of the NMSTC as an instructor in Social Science Education. Pauline Knobbs was granted a leave of absence from NMSTC in the fall of 1942 to work toward the doctoral degree at George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee. In June, 1943, she received the Master of Arts degree from George Peabody College and on August 9, 1946, she graduated magna cum laude with the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Social Science Education from George Peabody College.

On June 28, 1926, she married Wallace Joseph Knobbs, Professor of Agronomy and Soils, NMSTC. Mr. Knobbs died in Kirkville on December 18, 1940.

Dr. Knobbs had an interesting adventure during the revival of the Ku Klux Klan In Kirkville. This is the story she related:

In 1924, Pauline was living in a boarding house in Kirkville while she was attending college. She did not know that her landlord was one of the local leaders of the Ku Klux Klan.

One cool spring Saturday evening, Pauline noticed that they were having “company food” for supper. She also noticed that there was a very tall, good looking, stately man who had come to have supper with the boarders and the landlord of the home. Her landlord introduced the stranger at the table as the Grand Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan with headquarters in Montgomery, Alabama.

Laughing, Dr. Knobbs said she looked at one of the girls whom she roomed with at the boarding house and through their exchanging glances the girls realized they were in the hands of the Grand Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan. The Grand Cyclops, who talked with a definite southern accent, proceeded to talk all through the dinner of getting the Negroes,
Immigrants, and the Catholics out of important jobs in the country. He also told everyone at the table that the KKK was going to have a parade that night.

After dinner, when the others had retired to the living room, Pauline and her roommate decided they definitely must go to the KKK parade that night. She and her roommate went to their room while the others were in the living room talking. They wanted to devise a plan to see if their landlord was a member of the local KKK.

They decided that they would paint small white tempera crosses on the outside of their landlord’s overshoes. (Overshoes would be necessary because it had been raining earlier.)

The gathering place for the Klan was Kellogg Woods (now known as Kellwood Hills which is located in the northern section of Kirkville). Several of the students from the College and the High School had gathered together. The students went out to the Klan’s gathering but had to watch from a distance on what is now probably the south hill of the Kellwood addition, just above the railroad tracks. All that the students could see over in the woods from where they were standing was a number of fiery crosses and the pine torches the Klansmen were carrying.

Some of the Klansmen were on horses and a group rode over to the students and asked them what they were doing there. The students told them that they were just so interested in the KK and their activities that they were watching to see what they did at one of their meetings.

The Klansmen asked the students if any of them were members. The students told them no.

The Klansmen also asked if they wanted to be KKK members. One of the students asked how much the memberships cost and the Klansmen told the students that the membership fees were a dollar a piece. Pauline decided she would buy one because she thought it would be worth it to get in on the KKK. The Klansman asked her what church she belonged to and she told him that she was a Baptist and that her father was a Baptist minister. He told her that that was all right and that he would give her a card.

All the other students received cards that wanted them. The Klansmen told them they would have to leave because they were going through some of their secret ceremonies. Since that is what the students wanted to see, they pretended they were going to leave but instead they went down the railroad tracks (to about where the first railroad crossing is now) and then the students snuck back up and laid down flat on the bank and watched the KKK’s secret ceremonies until they were over.

When the secret ceremonies were over, the Klan then paraded downtown. They rode around the square several times throwing out leaflets of different kinds which everyone dove for.

During the parade, Dr. Knobbs and her roommate noticed the apparel of the KKK. The horses wore white sheets with red circles around their eyes and mouths. The men wore the traditional white hooded robes.

After the Klan rode around the square several times, they went to the third floor of the Heinzman-Swigert building (Beard’s Store) and had their meeting, then they dispersed.

Pauline and her roommate went home and read the literature the KKK threw out during the parade around town.

About the Photographs- These photographs, though from the 1924 Ku Klux Klan revival era, do not depict the Adair County Flaming Circle Chapter. We feel very fortunate to have original 1924 Klan pictures taken in the Midwest. Photographs supplied by Kim Scott.
which was very anti-Negro and anti-Immigrant.

The next morning at breakfast, the tall, stately man was still at the boarding house. He asked the boarders what they thought of the KKK parade the night before. The Grand Cyclops told them that the KKK was going to take the United States back from the Negroes, foreigners and the Pope.

The Grand Cyclops left the next day. Pauline and her friend watched their landlord from that time on to see the various movements that he made which were associated with the KKK.

There were a number of immigrants in town then that were newly come from the old countries—mainly Greeks and Italians. Some of these families had worked at the mines in Novinger. Dr. Knotts named several of the families and said that they knew that this was definitely pitted against them. Most of the people in town were all very fond of the immigrant children that she taught. She knew there was not any truth in the claims that the Klan had made against these immigrants. She also commented that they were perfectly good American citizens and that they intended to become citizens when they had been in the United States long enough.

There were only a few Negro families in town at that time, one of which was the Sherman Linn family. Sherm was an excellent bootblack and had a place in Hayward's Shoe Store, on the South side of the square where Brown's Shoe Store is now. Sherm was also the minister of the Black Bapt-

**Story by Rene Bonfoey and Michelle Bonfoey**