

BACK IN TIME

UNEXPECTED GUESTS SURPRISE WORSHIPPERS

By **DICK SHEARER**

Churches usually roll out the welcome mat for visitors in hopes they will see the light and join the flock.

But we have to wonder what the congregants at Lansdale's First Baptist Church were thinking on an early June Sunday in 1925 when 84 members of the Ku Klux Klan arrived for services.

Advised ahead of time that seats should be reserved for a body of men, the Rev. Samuel B. Williams had no idea who this group of visitors would be until they filed into the pews just as the service was about to begin. So hot was it on this June evening that the Klansmen removed their hoods.

The Reporter described the men's garb as follows:

"The leader of the organization's regalia was somewhat different from that of the other members. The leader wore a robe which was decorated with red stripes and on his hood there was an insignia. The others wore robes of plain white which had as their one decoration a red tassel on the top of the hood."

During the course of the service the Klan leader presented an American flag and a Christian flag to members of the church as he explained the principles of his organization. He said the Klan was of Christians who are also one hundred per cent Americans.

Rev. Williams, who was obviously caught off-guard by the Klan's appearance, launched into his sermon, "Faith of Our Fathers", which he prepared without knowledge of who might be included in his audience. But he stood his ground and invited any among them who hadn't yet identified with the Christian Church, "to do so tonight."

Following the service, the Klansmen donned their

hoods and filed out of the church and immediately departed in automobiles to parts unknown although it was later believed they came from Norristown and Ardmore.

If nothing else, the members of First Baptist Church had something to talk about for years to come.



It should be noted that the Klan's presence was a frequent occurrence in this area during the Twenties and Thirties. Tales of rallies on farms, in wooded areas and along creeks were prevalent and an occasional cross-burning or two was not all that unusual.

Just about two years earlier a cross was burned on the front lawn of Charles Kischbaugh, 806 W. Main St. (the house

adjacent to Domino's Pizza today). Kischbaugh later said that he had no idea why his property was targeted but the reason may have been as simple as location: His house was on the town's main drag where a cross-burning would get plenty of attention.

Regardless, here's what happened. At about 1 a.m. when the streets were all but deserted a wood cross saturated with oil was fastened to a tree in front of the house and set on fire, attracting a small crowd. Just as the fire was lighted, firecrackers were placed on the trolley tracks on Main Street which brought out even more people.

At about the same time, a car was seen speeding out of town but no one was able to catch up with it. Now, 90 years later, this is another story for the ages, just one from the Roarin' Twenties that fascinates us today.