

COTTONWOOD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Press Release

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Program at the Cottonwood County Historical Society:

Join us for an interesting and educational presentation “The Not-So Invisible Nation: The KKK in Southwest Minnesota in the 1920s” by Dr. Anita Talsma Gaul on Monday evening, April 27 at 7:00 p.m. Light refreshments will be served.

The 1920s was a period of rapid change, causing many Americans to feel a sense of nostalgia and fear – nostalgia for an idealized, simpler past and fear that America was in a state of moral decline. This prompted the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, particularly in the Upper Midwest. Klan activity in southwest Minnesota began in 1922, peaked in 1924, and virtually disappeared by 1927. Dozens of cross burnings occurred, but there were also Klan rallies, parades, picnics, meetings and speakers.

What attracted rural Minnesotans to this organization? How and why did it become popular in this area? And what accounts for its sudden demise? The brief but intense presence of the KKK in southwest Minnesota is a hidden chapter in the regions’ history and one that merits closer scrutiny.

About the Presenter: Dr. Anita Talsma Gaul is an historian who currently teaches at Minnesota West Community & Technical College and whose work focuses on local and regional history. Her published works include *The Women of Southwest Minnesota and the Great War* (2018) and an article entitled “Living in Perfect Harmony: A Multiethnic Catholic Parish on the Minnesota Prairie, 1881-1910” in the *Journal of American Ethnic History* (2010). She was named the 2026 Minnesota West Outstanding Educator and is the winner of the 2026 Minnesota Board of Trustees Educator of the Year Award for Excellence in Teaching.

For more information contact the Cottonwood County Historical Society at (507) 831-1134.