

# COLORADO GOVERNORS

## Clarence Morley



### Scope and Content Note

The Clarence Morley Collection comprises 16 cubic feet of material, most of which spans his term of office from 1925-1927. One cubic foot covers 1935-1945 when Morley was arrested and sent to federal prison for mail fraud. Record series included in the collection are applications and appointments to office, correspondence, the Executive Record, extraditions and requisitions, reports, speeches and messages, newspaper clippings and ephemera, photographs, and a special series "U.S.A. vs. Morley/Mail Fraud Case and Correspondence." Most of the collection is in its original format and is in good condition.

Strengths of the material include documentation concerning the legislation that was introduced during his term, Prohibition, affairs of the various state agencies, and especially the court case surrounding his crime of mail fraud. Documentation concerning the Ku Klux Klan is found indirectly through such items as correspondence with Morley's constituents, speeches

and messages, and other records which reflect his political leanings.

### Biography

Clarence Morley, Governor of Colorado in 1925 – 1927, was born in Dyersville, Iowa on February 9, 1869. His public schooling in Cedar Falls, Iowa, was interrupted when his family relocated to Trinidad, Colorado in 1890. It was in Trinidad that Morley began his career in law as an official of the District Court. Five years later Morley attended the law school at Denver University. After nineteen years of private practice and serving on the Denver School Board, Morley was elected District Judge of Denver in 1918. He retained this judicial post until his gubernatorial victory in 1925.

Morley's political ascent paralleled an anti-minority, anti-foreign, anti-Jewish, and anti-Catholic sentiment that existed throughout the country during the 1920's. Proponents of these beliefs found many supporters in the Ku Klux Klan, which in Colorado came under the leadership of the charismatic and persuasive John Galen Locke. Locke focused less on the overt violence and racism that characterized many other Klan groups and more on creating one of the strongest political machines that Colorado had thus far seen. As the Denver Post wrote, "beyond any doubt the KKK is the largest and most cohesive, most efficiently organized political force in the state..." Under Locke's control, the Klan secured a variety of political seats and gained advantageous alliances, including one with Ben Stapleton, mayor of Denver. Taking advantage of weak leadership in the Republican Party, the Klan promoted Judge Morley as the party's choice for governor. The primarily conservative voters of Colorado tended to vote for a straight Republican party ticket, and thus also chose the Klan. The Republicans, top-heavy with Klan members, won the 1924 election by a landslide. The Klan instituted Morley as Governor, obtained a majority in the

House and Senate, elected the Secretary of State, and secured a Supreme Court Judgeship as well as seven benches on the Denver District Court. John Galen Locke's Ku Klux Klan now seemed to be in control of the Colorado political system.

Morley's administration was exemplified, however, by a growing dichotomy in the Republican Party. There was also considerable opposition from a small group of democrats, led by future governor Billy Adams, that successfully killed almost all Klan sponsored legislation in committee. In 101 days 1,080 bills were introduced under the statehouse dome. Of those bills, only fifteen percent made it as far as the governor's pen and only three of those were originally sponsored by Morley. Despite his apparent lack of legislative success, Morley was responsible for ratifying the Colorado River Compact, strengthening prohibition laws, developing a successful inmate labor program, and promoting legislation that allowed the state to carry its own insurance on its public buildings. Thus, while Morley was an active Klansman, his legislative successes had little to do with his special interest group affiliations. His connections to the Klan also failed to make him popular with many Colorado citizens who admonished him for his numerous acts of clemency, and for his development of a police force, that many felt, enforced the prohibition laws too aggressively.

Soon after his administration ended, Morley established C.J. Morley & Company, a stock brokerage firm in Indianapolis, Indiana. After three years in this endeavor, Morley returned to Denver in order to practice law again. His plans were interrupted, however, when he was arrested in 1935 for mail fraud. Specifically, Morley's Indiana investment firm was accused of knowingly sending false statements through the mail in order to defraud their customers. While he was found not guilty in Colorado, the Federal courts indicted him for twenty-one counts of mail fraud and for using his prestige and past public office connections to defraud his customers. Morley was found guilty on these charges, and was sentenced to Leavenworth Prison for five years. After he completed his prison term, Morley moved to Oklahoma City where he died three years later on November 15, 1948.

## **Governor Morley & the Colorado Ku Klux Klan**

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## **Series Descriptions**

### **Executive Record**

The Executive Record contains executive orders; appointments; legislative messages; pardons; extraditions and requests; honorary citations; and proclamations which were issued by Governor Morley during his term from 1925-1927.

### **Applications and Appointments**

Appointments; nominations; endorsements; notifications; and related correspondence comprise this series. Appointments are also documented in the Executive Record. Prohibition agents and civil service positions are especially well documented.

## **Extraditions and Requisitions**

This series includes documentation concerning the surrendering of alleged criminals to a different jurisdiction for trial. Documentation may include the application for extradition, the warrant for arrest, and correspondence from the Attorney General's office concerning the extradition.

## **Correspondence**

Included in this series is incoming correspondence with Governor Morley from his constituents, state agencies, and other public officials. There is important correspondence concerning pending legislation, civil service, Prohibition, and the 50th Anniversary of Colorado's statehood. Noteworthy correspondents include KKK member and U.S. Senator Rice W. Means, Benjamin F. Stapleton, and University of Colorado officials with whom Morley fought for political control.

## **Reports**

This series consists primarily of annual or biennial reports from state agencies. Other significant reports include "Coal Miners Mortality Statistics 1913-1925," "Colorado Geological Survey Summary 1925-1926," and "Affidavit Regarding Intoxications of State Prohibition Officers." The "Report of Hearing before Federal Power Commission Regarding Plan of James B. Girard to Develop Hydro-Electric Power on the Colorado River" was the plan for the construction of Hoover Dam.

## **Speeches and Messages**

Addresses and messages to the General Assembly comprise this series. Morley's political vision and beliefs are reflected through his public speeches making this series important Colorado KKK documentation.

## **Newspaper Clippings and Ephemera**

Included in this series are newspaper clippings, magazine articles, press releases, and memorabilia such as invitations, campaign posters, event programs, notes, and a few photographs.

## **U.S.A. vs Morley**

This sub-collection documents a period of Morley's life outside his term as governor when he was convicted and sentenced to 5 years in Leavenworth for mail fraud. It includes the court case with the briefs, transcripts, appeals and other legal records. Arguments for the defense, character documentation, financial records, and correspondence between Morley and his son, other family members, and friends are also available. There is also supporting documentation concerning this case which helps to provide a well-balanced reference source for a Morley researcher.