



WILLIAM MCKINLEY

KNIGHT TEMPLAR

by C. L. Rothwell

Sir Knight William McKinley, 25th President of the United States, was a man of peace. His entire political career had been marked by his conciliatory nature. He abhorred violence. Though conservative on business issues, he had won the hearts of the working class. His death on September 14, 1901, plunged the entire nation into a state of mourning.

There are Sir Knights who can recall exactly what they were doing when the word came that the President was dead. Many of their parents and grandparents were witnessing the third Presidential assassination in the short span of 36 years.

For the second time in twenty years, the Grand Commanderies of the District of Columbia and Ohio were called out to participate in the funeral services of a slain Templar President. The Proceedings of the District of Columbia report a notice was placed in the papers ordering out the Grand and Constituent Commanderies. Five Commanderies escorted the body from the White House to the Capitol on September 17. The Grand Officers were mounted.

In Ohio, 20 Commanderies 2,000 uniformed Knights-formed the 4th Division of the funeral escort in Canton. The Grand Master of the Grand Encampment, Henry Bates Stoddard, was unable to be present. Grand Captain General William B. Melish, later Grand Master, represented the Grand Encampment. Twenty-one Ohio Commandery officers, a Past Grand Commander of Pennsylvania, and DeMolay Commandery No. 12 of Louisville, Kentucky, were among the participants according to the Ohio Proceedings of 1901.

Grand Commander Foster issued General Order No.4 declaring a 60-day mourning period for Ohio with all banners, jewels, furniture, and emblems draped in mourning and crepe on the hilts of swords.

The actions of the Templars mirrored the grief and shock of an entire nation.

William McKinley, Jr., was born on January 29, 1843, in Niles, Ohio, the seventh child of William and Nancy Allison McKinley. His father was an iron manufacturer, whose grandfathers had fought in the Revolutionary War.

The future President received his education in Poland, Ohio, and at Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania. A devout Methodist, he seemed destined to fulfill his mother's fondest dream William would become a minister. Illness soon forced him to drop out of school, and when his health improved, financial difficulties prevented his return to college, so he taught school.

Fort Sumter fell, and McKinley enlisted in the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He impressed his Major, later Lt. Colonel, Rutherford B. Hayes. When McKinley became an officer, the two were closely associated. Hospitalized in Virginia for injuries received in battle, he was greatly impressed with the friendliness of a Union surgeon toward Confederate wounded. He discovered the men were Brother Masons, and marveling at the bonds which transgressed war, he made haste to join a Lodge. A Confederate Master Raised McKinley in Hiram Lodge No. 21, Winchester, Virginia, on May 3, 1865. He was given a demit, so he could take his membership back home to Ohio.

The war over, Major McKinley studied law in New York and returned to Canton in 1867. There he met and married Ida Saxton, daughter of the banker, in January of 1871. On the following Christmas Day, their first daughter, Katherine, was born. In the spring of 1873 another daughter was born, living only five months. Mrs. McKinley, already overly distracted by the death of her mother a few months earlier, became a feeble, nervous invalid, never able to live a normal life again. In 1876 Katie died.

Putting the tragedy of his family from the forefront of his mind, McKinley was active in the campaigns for Grant and Hayes. In 1876 he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving with fellow Ohioan, Templar, and future President, James A. Garfield, whose term in the White House would also end, ironically, < with an assassin's bullet.

McKinley served in the House until 1890, with the exception of 1882, where he led the fight for high tariffs to protect "infant industries." This issue caused his defeat in 1890, but he left the House a popular man. He had received some votes for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1888.

On August 21, 1867, McKinley had affiliated with Canton Lodge No. 60. He became a Charter Member of Eagle Lodge No. 43-later named William McKinley Lodge-in Canton on June 2, 1869. He received the Chapter Degrees in Canton No. 84 in December of 1883 and was Knighted in Canton Commandery No. 38 in

December 1884. On December 23, 1896, he became a Life Member of Washington Commandery No.1 in the Capital.

McKinley was elected Governor of Ohio in 1891. In 1892 he received 182 votes as a candidate for the Republican nomination for the Presidency. He was elected Governor in 1893. In 1896 he was elected President over Brother William Jennings Bryan on a protective tariff, gold standard platform. Ohio Senator Mark Hanna has been largely credited with the success of the McKinley campaign. While Bryan made a record number of speeches, McKinley sat at home with a "front porch" campaign. The people came to see him. Cooperating railroads offered low excursion rates to those visiting Canton.

The last President to have served in the Civil War, Sir Knight McKinley was basically opposed to intervention in Cuba. The loss of the battleship Maine in Havana harbor forced him to demand Spanish withdrawal from Cuba and, eventually, directed by Congress, lead to the Spanish- American War. He opposed annexation after the war but was convinced the people favored it.

The Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico were ceded to the U.S. in the peace treaty. Cuba came under American control until it could establish' its own government. The Hawaiian Island had been annexed during the war. America emerged as a major world power. McKinley's term of office marked the turn of century with a President who did indeed bridge the gap between the old and the new.

The campaign of 1900 was based on the prosperity of the country- "the full dinner pail." The vice-presidential candidate was Brother Theodore Roosevelt; fresh from fame in the Spanish- American War. Together they defeated Brother Bryan. The victory of his reelection was short lived. On September 6, 1901, while welcoming citizens at the Pan-American exposition in Buffalo, New York, the President was mortally wounded by Leon Czolgosz and died on September 14. Czolgosz was executed on October 29.

McKinley's last words summed up the philosophy he lived: "It is God's way. His will, not ours, be done."

Reprinted from Masonic Americana, 1976, pages 29-31 Third Templar President...

Published 080514 Updated: August 12, 2014

[Top](#)