

Wherever Did You Get THAT?!!

Boston Commandery #2 - Commander's Jewel

by S.K. Richard W. Van Doren, P.C

It happened again. Another visitor to Boston Commandery was standing in the armory talking to the Eminent Commander and was peering closely at the Commander's cross suspended from a chain and hanging prominently from his neck.

"Wherever did you get that?!" he exclaimed. Wherever and whenever indeed? The cross had claimed another admirer as it has done for many years. It remains a jeweler's masterpiece and is a marvelous example of 19th century work. Perhaps to understand the history and the charm of this wonderful fraternal artifact, it would be well to give a description before one reads the story of how it came to belong to the oldest Commandery in continuous existence in America.



Description

The Boston Commander's cross is large, having an overall length of 10.5 inches long and 3.5 inches wide. It weighs approximately one pound in precious metals, exclusive of the jewels and the supporting chain. The cross is made of 16 carat, solid gold, with silver and platinum making up the skull and crossed bones device as well as parts of the triangle and emblazonment. The guard chain is approximately 40 inches long and is 14 carat gold and of solid links construction.

The center of the cross has a beautiful hand painted ceramic, attributed by the manufacturer to be a copy of a work by the famous Baroque artist Nicola Poussin. It was hand painted on vitreous enamel by the famed jeweler Garcia Cejalvo of Spain. Cejalvo was the jeweler to the Court of Spain and is renowned the world over for his incredible court and Masonic jewels.¹ The painting represents St. John the Evangelist who has a special significance for Knights Templar.

The painting is surrounded by 32 diamonds, 1/3 carat each, that are of the old European Rose cut design.

The reverse of the cross is inscribed with the words, "A Memorial of the Pilgrimage of St. John's Commandery No. 4 KT May 27th 1872."

The top of the cross is surmounted by a crown device of solid gold. It has in the center of the crown, the Templar Cross or Cross Pattee flanked by two angels and the side view of a Templar Cross on each side.

The entire cross is suspended and articulated from a triangle of 18 carat gold which contains 12 Russian rubies weighing 1.0 carat each (one of which has now gone missing). The center of the triangle contains a Templar Cross of silver and platinum in the center of which is represented "St. John's - Boston."

At the top, the cross is further suspended and articulated from a skull and crossed bones device of solid silver and platinum.² It is approximately 1.0 inches high and 1.75 inches wide. The back of the device includes a solid "U" clip which allows the main weight of the cross to be supported at the closure of the Boston Commandery uniform which is a high-necked frock coat. Behind the device at the nexus of the crossed bones is a connecting ring which unites the cross with the guard chain.



When not being worn, the cross resides in a wooden box, chamois clad on the inside, which was designed and constructed specifically for it.

The Story of Its Origin

"Would you believe that it was a gift to us?" the Commander asks his guest. The visitor shakes his head muttering to himself. "No, it's the truth," responds the Boston leader.

So it was. In order to comprehend what is being said, we must return to a much earlier time and a world that saw Knights Templar as the elite social class of the Masonic Fraternity. The year was 1872, and St. John's Commandery No. 4, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania had come to Boston on a fraternal pilgrimage. The entire event lasted from May 27th through May 30th of that year and was a gala affair by any account.

The following is an abbreviated storyline of that wonderful trip as outlined in the souvenir program seen in the image below.³

The Knights and Ladies of St. John's Commandery No. 4 arrived at the Boston and Providence Railroad Station on May 26th 1872, at 9:00 p.m. and were met by a contingent of Knights from Boston Commandery and their servants and baggage handlers. They were then escorted to the Revere House in Bowdoin Square.

The following morning, they were received by Boston Commandery at the hotel at 9:00 a.m. and then escorted to the Liverpool Wharf for boarding on two steamers, the Rose Standing and the John Romer. They proceeded to have an "excursion" around Boston Harbor, seeing the sites of Deer Island, Fort Warren, etc. At mid-day, they stopped for a collation at the Rockland House on Nantasket Beach, followed by a concert by the Gilmore Band, M. Arbuckle conducting. They returned to Boston at 5:30 p.m. and made a grand parade to the hotel accommodations.

On Tuesday, the 28th of May, the party continued with a series of concerts, plays, and other entertainment at the Globe and Boston Theaters on Washington Street as well as a visit to the Boston Museum on Tremont Street.

Wednesday's festivities included a carriage ride through the "suburbs" to visit "public institutions and other places of interest." That evening, St. John's Commandery was formally received by Boston Commandery at 7:30 p.m. in Gothic Hall of the Masonic building at 186 Tremont Street. The Commander's Cross was presented to Sir Knight Henry Endicott, the Eminent Commander of Boston Commandery, by Sir Knight Christian Hubbert, Eminent Commander of St. John's Commandery. Musical entertainment was provided at 8 o'clock in Sutton Hall and Egyptian Hall followed by a grand promenade to the music of Gilmore's Band on Boston Common. Refreshments followed in the banquet hall. Later, a grand ball was held in Horticultural Hall with music provided by the Germania Band. Transportation via carriages was "continuously supplied under the supervision of Sir D. W. Lawrence for conveyance between Horticultural Hall and the Masonic building."

The following day, the party of St. John's Commandery was received again at the Revere House at 8:00 a.m. and then escorted to the Boston and Providence Rail Station where a fond farewell was made to the band music and singing of "Auld Lang Syne."

To make this event a success, there was an overall Committee of Arrangements under the chairmanship of Sir Knight Samuel Crocker Lawrence, the secretaryship of Sir Knight George S. Eastman, and a general committee made up of 40 Sir Knights. Subcommittees included: Carriages, Baggage, Engraving and Printing, Invitations, Police, Finance, Music, Steamboat, Rockland House, Badges, Servants, Amusements, Excursion to Suburbs, Public Institutions, Health, Decorations, and Reception and Banquets. All were overseen by a seven member Executive Committee.

Epilogue

I could see that there was a question forming in the mind of the visitor. It was the same question that I was thinking: why would the Knights of Philadelphia feel compelled to present such a lavish gift to the Knights of Boston? For insurance purposes, the cross has been valued as high as \$250,000.

To express their gratitude for "all courtesies extended" to the Knights of Boston, the Bostonians had made a trip to Philadelphia in 1869 and presented St. John's Commandery No. 4 "a magnificent belt and sword to be used in their Knightings." The sword and belt are still in use by St. John's Commandery No. 4 today.⁴

The presentation of the sword was made by Sir Knight William Sayward, the Eminent Commander of Boston Commandery No. 2 to the then Eminent Commander of St. John's Commandery No. 4, Sir Knight Charles L. Hale. The "courtesies" were not specified, but they must have been extensive.

Should you be fortunate enough to visit Boston Commandery No. 2 on the third Wednesday of the month (visitors are always welcome), be certain and take a close look at the Boston Commander's Cross. No, you won't embarrass him, for all Commanders have proudly worn this object of artistic jewelry since 1872.



End Notes

1 The reader can see examples of Cejalvo jewels on various sites on the Internet. Specific information for this article was provided by Sir Knight John R. von Blouch, owner of Cejalvo, Inc., Madrid, Spain.

2 The reader should be aware that white gold was not available at the time, a mixture of silver and platinum being used in its stead.

3 Souvenir Program provided courtesy of Sir Knight George L. Herbolzheimer, IV, Past Commander, Boston Commandery, No. 2, Boston, MA.

4 According to the archives of St. John's Commandery and Sir Knight Jerry Hamilton, Very Eminent Deputy Grand Commander, Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania.

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