

Does Your Commandery Have Templar Treasures?

by Sir Knight Robert Bettencourt

If your Commandery was established in the 19th century, you just may have a treasure trove of history at your fingertips - and a golden opportunity to display the light of Christian Masonry to men of quality within your community.



In 2004 I became a Sir Knight on the central coast of California and have regularly attended our Stated Conclaves ever since. However, until last year I had no idea how many founding men of San Luis Obispo were also members of our magnanimous order since the Commandery was established in 1886. In fact, San Luis Obispo Commandery No. 27 has boasted a number of locally well-known pioneers, sea captains, law men, publishers, mayors, and state politicians. Photographs shown here include sea captain James Cass (ca. 1886), California State Treasurer Levi Rackliffe (ca. 1889), local newspaper editor Benjamin Brooks (ca. 1897), longest-serving Grand Secretary in history of California Masonry John Whicher (ca. 1899), Civil War veteran P.F. Ready (ca. 1903), County Sheriff S.D. Ballou (ca. 1904), California Assemblyman J.H. Hollister (ca. 1912), and the annual Easter observance at our historic lodge building in 1914.



Sir Knight James Cass, sea captain and "Founding Father of Cayucos" on California's central coast (ca. 1886).



Longest serving Grand Secretary in history of California Masonry John Whicher (ca. 1899)



County Sheriff S.D. Ballou (ca. 1904)



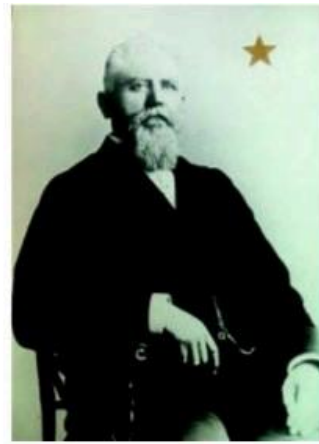
Civil War veteran Phillip F. Ready (ca. 1903)



**California Assemblyman
J.H. Hollister (ca. 1912)**



**Local newspaper editor
Benjamin Brooks (ca. 1897)**



**California State Treasurer
Levi Rackliffe (ca. 1889)**

We have a photo album with portraits of these men, but I found that our album had fallen into disrepair over the years, so I set about restoring it.

This labor of love, which involved "sleuthing" to put names with loose photos, led me to research the archives in the vault below our 100-year-old lodge building where many priceless yet infrequently viewed documents have lain quietly going back to the very founding of our Commandery in 1886. I have spent happy hours in that vault and also in our county's History Center which has helped me identify many of these photos and has led to connection with local historians. One of those historians is a professor emeritus of history at our local college, Dr. Dan Krieger of California Polytechnic State University, who recently made a free public presentation at our Lodge about several of our locally famous Knights Templar; his speech brought renewed credit and esteem to our institution.

Several of us have also found that our issued swords are engraved with the names of these esteemed Sir Knights of the past, making our experience of Templary the more meaningful because of this closer connection to our ancient brethren.

If your Commandery dates back to the 1800s, you too may find a connection to such awesome men who can once again serve as an inspiration - this time to a new generation of Sir Knights. You might find younger Knights within your ranks who would consider it an honor to research one or more of our departed brothers, perhaps to make presentations about the history of those men at a stated conclave, or you could invite a local historian to tell their story. I trust that a little effort on your part will greatly benefit you, your Commandery, and your community as a whole.

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