



22nd in a Series on our Past Grand Masters  
By Sir Knight George L. Marshall, Jr., PGC

Joseph Kyle Orr was born in New York City on February 21, 1857. After completing the public schools, he entered the commercial department of the College of the City of New York in 1870, and after this, he entered into the wholesale dry goods business. In 1873 he moved to Columbus, Georgia, and in 1884 organized the J. K. Orr Shoe Company. In 1897 the firm was removed to Atlanta, where it developed into one of the largest manufacturing plants in the South. He began the manufacturing of shoes in Atlanta in 1906. More about this later in the article.

Sir Knight Orr never held any political office but kept up an active interest in civic and educational work. He was chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Agnes Scott College in Atlanta and a member of the board of George Peabody College for Teachers at Nashville, Tennessee, and of the Martha Berry College near Rome, Georgia. He served as president of the Chamber of Commerce in Atlanta. In October of 1883, he married Miss Frances "Fannie" Bradley (1861- 1929) of Oswehee, Alabama, and two children were born to them, Hattie Orr (1885- ??), daughter, and Joseph, Jr. (1886-1942), son. Sir Knight Orr was chairman of the Committee which raised six hundred thousand dollars for the erection of the Young Men's Christian Association Building in Atlanta. He was also active in several other organizations of that city, such as the Atlanta Freight Bureau and the Atlanta Credit Men's Association. In recognition of his activity as a civic leader, he was known as the "First Citizen of Atlanta."

The J. K. Orr Shoe Company building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995 for its contributions to the early 20th-century industrial activities in Atlanta as well as being a good example of an early 20th-century factory, designed by architect Arthur Francis Walker. The following is a synopsis of its nomination:



"The J. K. Orr Shoe Company was established in 1897 and located at 30-32 Auburn Avenue. In 1907, an architect, A. Francis Walker, was hired to design a new factory building at 101-103 Yonge Street (the street numbers changed in 1927). By 1908, construction of the building by the W. Bensel Construction Co. was complete. The company manufactured all kinds of shoes for men, women, and children. It was particularly known for its popular "Women's Sport Welts." In the 1920s, it temporarily manufactured luggage. The company marketed their product primarily in the Southeast, however; shoes were also exported to Cuba and South America.

The factory was owned by Joseph Kyle Orr, Sr., a native of New York. In the late 19th-century, Orr joined his uncle's general merchandise company, the Joseph Kyle and Co. in Columbus, Georgia. In 1897, he established the J. K. Orr Shoe Company and moved his business to 30-32 Auburn Avenue in Atlanta. The operation then moved to the new building on Yonge Street in 1908. In 1924, the company produced Red Seal Shoes and was known as the Red Seal Shoe Factory. The factory employed between 200 and 400 people.

During the Depression, Orr kept the factory open three days a week in order to aid his employees. He rented space all over town in order to store the surplus production. The factory continued production under the name J. K. Orr Shoe Company until Orr retired, and General Shoe Co. of Nashville bought the business in 1937.

During the early 20th-century, there were only a few shoe factories in the Southeast. Southern states were not listed in the twelve principal shoe cities of the United States from 1879 to 1933. Orr purchased most of his raw leather in Boston.

Sir Knight Orr became a Master Mason in Mount Hermon Lodge 304 at Columbus, Georgia, in May of 1878. A few years later he served as worshipful master. He was exalted a Royal Arch Mason in Darby Chapter 7 at Columbus, Georgia, in 1882. He was greeted a Select Master in Jason Burr Council 13 in Atlanta in 1905. He received the degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in Atlanta Consistory in November of 1910. He was a member of Yaarab Temple of the Mystic Shrine.

He was knighted in St. Aldemar Com-mandery 3 at Columbus, Georgia, in January of 1883 and was eminent commander in 1887. That same year, he was elected grand warder in the Grand Commandery of Georgia. He served as Grand Commander in 1895.

At the Triennial Conclave in San Francisco in 1904, he was appointed grand sword bearer of the Grand Encampment and in 1919 was elected grand master.

He was deeply interested in the education of young men and women and while Grand Master, visualized and brought into being the Knights Templar Educational Fund, now known as the Knights Templar Educational Foundation, which had, at the time of his death, assisted approximately twenty-five thousand young men and women in completing their college educations in the various jurisdictions of the Grand Encampment. It was his great joy throughout the remaining years of his life to watch its progress and accomplishments, as well as his pleasure to be able by his wise advice to assist in furthering this splendid work.

He died on September 18, 1938. On that Sunday, he had attended church services as was his custom. Later he attended a meeting to arrange for the purchase of a site for a boy scout camp. Soon after leaving there, he passed away suddenly.

The funeral was held on September 20, at North Avenue Presbyterian Church, Atlanta. Orr had been an elder in this church for many years. The funeral was attended by many prominent Sir Knights of the Grand Commandery of Georgia. Interment was in West View Cemetery.

Right Eminent Sir Knight Marshall, KYGCH(3), KCT, 33°, is a past grand commander of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Alabama. He is a member of the Editorial Review Board of the Knight Templar magazine and has published several articles in that magazine as well as in the Royal Arch Mason magazine. He can be reached at [geomarsh@yahoo.com](mailto:geomarsh@yahoo.com).

#### SOURCES

Dr. Francis J. Scully, History of the Grand Encampment, Chapter XXIII, Biographies Of The Grand Masters, as published in the Knight Templar magazine, January 1995 Edition, page 16

Josiah T. Clarke, Knight Templary in Georgia, 1943, by C. Danny Wofford in July, 2013 GA Supplement to Knight Templar Magazine Photo of JK Orr Shoe Factory, at

<https://www.google.com/>

[maps/@33.754371,-84.375435,3a,37.5y,159.18h,100.3t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1smXCymWLL5Jci8rDIa6b7eA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656](https://www.google.com/maps/@33.754371,-84.375435,3a,37.5y,159.18h,100.3t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1smXCymWLL5Jci8rDIa6b7eA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656)

Collection Number: 03054-z , Collection Title: Joseph Kyle Orr Papers, 1922-1925

National Register # 95001135, 1995

Orr tombstone photo from <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=109075536>