



**John Peter Shindel Gobin
Fifteenth Grand Master
1889-1892**

**23rd in a series on our past grand masters
By Sir Knight George L. Marshall, Jr., PGC**

Author's Note

Some Sir Knights have been kind enough to inform me that biographies of the Grand Masters are available at the Grand Encampment Website. I am quite aware of this but hasten to add that those were largely extracted from Scully's Grand Encampment History, published in 1952. Much more material is available now on many of these Grand Masters than was available in Dr. Scully's day, particularly on the Internet. I have done considerable additional research on these Sir Knights, and believe my articles should give us more complete biographies of these remarkable men. – GLM

John Peter Shindel Gobin was born in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, on January 26, 1837, the son of Samuel Shoemaker Gobin (1812-1893) and Susanna M. (Shindel) Gobin (1814-1878), and he was the oldest of the four Gobin children. His father was a wheelwright by occupation and during part of his lifetime was engaged on the Union and Schuylkill canals, building locks and doing other heavy carpentry work. His grandfather was Edward Gobin, a veteran of the War of 1812, and his great-grandfather was Pennsylvania native Captain Charles Gobin, a patriot and leader of the 6th Company of the 6th Battalion, Berks County Militia. Serving during the American Revolution, Charles Gobin fought in the Jersey Campaign before continuing to serve his nation by performing frontier duty in 1780.

John was educated in the public schools and learned the printer's trade while employed by the Sunbury American. He served as the unsuccessful publisher of the Philadelphia Star of Youth, a journal sponsored by the Junior Sons of America. After a less than rewarding attempt at a career in journalism, he returned to Sunbury as a schoolteacher. He later studied law under General John K. Clement and M. L. Shindel, joining the Bar of Northumberland County in 1859. He continued his practice until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

He entered the United States Army in 1861 with the rank of lieutenant in the 11th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteers. He subsequently recruited Company C, 47th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, in which regiment he was rapidly promoted for conspicuous service and gallantry. Promoted to captain of Company C, 47th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, he participated in the capture of Jacksonville, Florida, and the capture of the Confederate War Steamer "Governor Milton"

(the only steamer captured by infantry during the war). He fought with his unit at the Battle of Pocatigo, South Carolina, in the Red River Campaign, and at the Battle of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana. Promoted to major and commander of his regiment, he led the 47th Pennsylvania in the Shenandoah Campaign that culminated in the Union victory at the Battle of Cedar Creek. Promoted to lieutenant colonel on November 24, 1864, and to colonel on January 3, 1865, he was brevetted brigadier general, U.S. Volunteers on March 13, 1865, for "faithful and meritorious services during the war." He commanded the 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, 19th Army Corps in operations around Lynchburg, Virginia.

He married Miss Anna Maria Howe (1841-1913) in 1865. She was a native of Key West, Florida, and it was there that she first met Colonel Gobin, and their romance which culminated in their marriage was begun. As Miss Howe, she took a deep interest in the treatment of the sick among the Union soldiers stationed there, and it was in the hospital that she visited the recovering Colonel Gobin. The result was that when he was ordered to South Carolina as judge advocate general, he and Miss Howe first journeyed to Brooklyn, New York, where they were wedded at the home of her brother. There were no children born to this union.

From the close of the war until January of 1866, he remained with his regiment in Charleston where he acted as provost judge. He was commissioned colonel of the 8th Regiment of the Pennsylvania National Guard in 1874, was commander of the third brigade of the Pennsylvania National Guard from 1885 to 1907, and finally attained the command of the troops of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. His post-war career included leading the Pennsylvania National Guard in actions against railroad and coal miner strikes and civil unrest caused by the "Molly Maguires."

During the Spanish-American War, he served as brigadier general of volunteers. In 1898 he was appointed to command his brigade when it was federalized for that war. He led his brigade during mobilization and training near Augusta, Georgia, but resigned in order to run for lieutenant governor, and returned to National Guard service in Pennsylvania.

He was commander in chief of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in 1897 and was a high-ranking officer in the Military Order of the Loyal Legion (MOLLUS).

He was distinguished in the legislative and executive offices of the state. Early in his career he was county solicitor of Lebanon. He was elected state senator in 1884 and served honorably for fifteen years. He became president pro tempore of the Senate in 1892 and 1893. In 1898, he was elected lieutenant governor, serving from 1899 to 1903.

General Gobin was officially connected with many business corporations, being a member of the board of directors of the First National Bank of Lebanon, the local gas lighting company, the City Mutual Fire Insurance Company, and the Cornwall & Lebanon Railway Company, solicitor for both of the latter corporations, and was associated with various philanthropic and fraternal organizations. He was prominent in the Odd Fellows and had been head of that order as grand patriarch in Pennsylvania. Gobin served as a trustee of the Erie Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, commissioner of the Soldiers' Orphans Schools, and head of the Gettysburg Monument Association. Relevant to the latter, he delivered the dedication of the impressive Pennsylvania Monument.

Sir Knight Gobin was made a Mason in Sunbury Lodge 22 in 1859. He received the capitular degrees in Northumberland Chapter 174 at Sunbury in 1865. He was a member of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and received the 33° in 1906. He was made a Knight Templar in Crusade Commandery 12 at Bloomsbury, Pennsylvania, in 1866. He was elected grand commander of the Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania in 1879. The next year he attended the Conclave of the Grand Encampment in Chicago in 1880 and was elected grand captain general. He was advanced at each Triennial, and in 1889, he became grand master. During his term in office the following events occurred: the Grand Commandery of North Dakota was created, the controversial matter of rituals was finally and definitely settled and adopted, the custom of exchanging Christmas greetings with the grand master was officially recognized, the recommended observance of Ascension Day was adopted, and the right of a Grand Commandery to recognize other branches of Masonry was sustained.

He died at his home in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, on May 1, 1910. "Death came at 1 o'clock Sunday afternoon," read the news account the following day in the Reading Eagle. He had lingered after having been struck down by paralysis (stroke) on February 25. "His entire left side was affected, and

from the first, his condition was regarded as hopeless by the attending physicians.” He had rallied periodically during his convalescence only to relapse. A final “sinking spell” caused him to lapse into unconsciousness the night before his passing. Holding vigil at his bedside were his wife, Anna; sisters, Anna Maria (Gobin) Shaw and Susan Abigail (Gobin) Case; his nephew, William Gobin of Colorado; and his wife’s niece, Mrs. Margaret Allen of Connecticut.

The funeral was held in Lebanon on May 5th. The services were conducted by Reverend Dr. William E. Stahler of the Zion Lutheran Church of which Sir Knight Gobin was a member. The funeral was attended by representatives of the Bar, State and Military officials, Civil War Veterans, and prominent Knights Templar. Interment was in the Gobin family plot in Mount Lebanon Cemetery. On his grave was placed a large white floral pillow with the Salem Cross of the Grand Encampment in purple flowers.

Thus, as a soldier, public official, lawyer, and citizen, Sir Knight Gobin had a brilliant and quite successful career. As a young man he abandoned his chosen profession at its threshold to go to the front and serve his country with an ardor that patriotism alone inspired, there to win laurels and fame; as a public official he displayed wisdom, conservatism, and executive ability, winning merited recognition and promotion at the hands of his fellow-citizens and his state at large; as a lawyer he won a place at the head of the Bar of both his county and state; and as a citizen, he did his duty and more.

It is said of him that he had a pleasing personality; kind and courteous to all, of commanding figure and magnetic temperament, and he impressed favorably all who met him. His character was strong and rugged – a staunch friend, a good fighter, but a generous foe, warm hearted and charitable. Sir Knight Gobin had a most attractive personality. He was skilled in oratory and was an interesting conversationalist. He was a great reader of history and was fond of travel. He was devoted to his family and friends and had a ready sympathy for the affairs and interests of others.

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.

SOURCES

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- Photo of Sir Knight Gobin in Templar Uniform courtesy of Sir Knight Douglas Rowe, Grand Recorder, Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania