

The Revival of a Patriotic Order: Knights Templars in England and New York

A series about the origin and development of Masonic Templary
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Scholars of the development of modern Masonic orders have proven, beyond any shadow of even the smallest doubt, that there is no historical connection between the Medieval Knights Templar or Knights Hospitallers, and the Masonic degrees and orders of the same name that appeared in Britain, Europe, and North America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This disconnect was common knowledge in the eighteenth century, but in the disruption of Masonic traditions and learning that occurred during the American Revolution and the early years of the Republic, much of the institutional memory of modern Freemasonry on the American side of the Atlantic was lost, or at the very least mislaid. Subsequently, Freemasonry in America established its own traditions and degree systems, frequently based only tangentially on traditions and mythologies inherited from Grand Lodges in England and France, as well as those of Ireland, Scotland, and other obediences from across the Continent.¹



Thomas Dunckerley (c. 1720-1795)

Thus, North American members of the Masonic Knights Templar should look to their eighteenth century progenitors for the authentic roots of the modern order. Probably the single most important figure in the development of the order in Britain, the "father" of modern Knight Templarism in Britain and, arguably at least an important influence on its development in North America, was Thomas Dunckerley, the first Grand Master of the Masonic Knights Templar in England. If the name does not ring any particular bells, it is no great surprise. Dunckerley was a towering figure in late eighteenth century English Freemasonry, but the last full-

scale biography of Dunckerley was completed by Henry Sadler in 1891, and there has been little subsequent research.

Thomas Dunckerley (c. 1720-1795) was so influential in his day that he scarcely needs an introduction to students of English Freemasonry. Over the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Dunckerley was largely responsible for building up the provincial organization of the Premier (Moderns) Grand Lodge in southern England, serving as Provincial Grand Master for eight Masonic provinces in the 1790s, and establishing a model of local governance which has deeply influenced provincial Freemasonry in England to the present day. Dunckerley also took a leading part in the integration of the Royal Arch into the activities of the Premier Grand Lodge, presiding over Royal Arch Masonry in eleven counties. Dunckerley enthusiastically promoted other degrees, commanding both the English Knights Templar and the recently formalized Royal Ark Masons. There is even some evidence that he had in mind the creation of a women's order or English Adoptive Rite.³

Part of Dunckerley's appeal to contemporaries and subsequent generations of Freemasons was the romance of his life story. Though he was born the son of a royal porter at Somerset House and a physician's daughter, Dunckerley went on to consort with princes of the blood, and even claimed (almost) to be one. Few who were familiar with the man would have doubted Dunckerley's intellectual ability or that he possessed the energy and discipline necessary to accomplish great things in the Masonic realm. His colleagues and contemporaries are clear in that regard, and his surviving correspondence speaks eloquently to his capacity for creative organization. Still, in a society where rank and birth were so critical to success, these very achievements might have been beyond the reach of a man of only modest social background. Thus it must have seemed almost miraculous to Dunckerley's Masonic brethren when his "true" status as an unrecognized illegitimate son of George II was "revealed" by his mother on her deathbed.⁴ His discovery couldn't have come at a more propitious moment in either his personal history or that of the Craft. After a twenty-year career in the Royal Navy, Dunckerley retired and assumed a leadership role in a group of up-and-coming young Masonic reformers, and previous scholars have suggested that in order to push through some of his more dramatic ideas for the reform of a system verging on obsolescence, Dunckerley needed a bit more ballast.⁵ Being the son of George II promised to provide just that. The subsequent history of Freemasonry in England offers testimony to the profound effects of his discovery.

And so the story sat, enthroned and mostly unchallenged for over two hundred years. While his contemporaries sometimes expressed their doubts about Dunckerley's claims of royal paternity, after his death in 1795 it became enshrined in nineteenth-century Masonic literature. By the time of Sadler's 1891 biography, Dunckerley had been elevated to the position of a veritable (and venerated) Masonic hero, and his alleged royal birth was given much of the credit for his personal accomplishments—they were obviously bred in the bone. Recent research, to be presented next year at the Third International Conference on the History of

Freemasonry and also at Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, reveals that the romantic story of Dunckerley's birth and precocious childhood were useful fiction, concocted and promulgated by Dunckerley himself, beginning in the 1760s.⁶ Why would an honorable man do such a thing? That is a difficult question, and one that is frankly beyond our ability to answer. However, at least one Masonic historian has suggested that the serendipitous "discovery" was calculated to give the talented young Mason the leverage he needed to secure a royal pension, freeing him from the necessity of finding outside employment. And when that coveted goal indeed came to pass, the pension permitted Dunckerley to devote his considerable organizational talents to the reinvigoration of the Premier Grand Lodge, especially in the provinces, where it was rapidly losing territory and membership to the rival Antient Grand Lodge, established in 1751.⁷ Additionally, the claim that he was a royal bastard gave his otherwise modest social status a considerable boost, allowing him to travel in grander circles, to his own benefit, and that of Freemasonry.

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From early in Dunckerley's Masonic career and even before, the few personal writings he left indicate that he had a fairly conventional, even rationalist, approach to Christianity. He argued for broad religious toleration and for assuming personal initiative for moral behavior as befit the values generally espoused by eighteenth century craft lodges. As he grew older, both Dunckerley and surrounding English society changed, becoming more socially and politically conservative and embracing a more earnest form of Christian evangelicalism. The rise of tensions within English society that coincided with the French Revolution jolted many respectable Britons, Dunckerley among them, into a more sober frame of mind with regard to the dangers of enlightenment, liberty, and libertinism run amok. In response to these varied stimuli, Dunckerley turned his Masonic creativity toward overtly Christian paths, and he fixed his gaze on what was then the relatively obscure Order of Knights Templar and particularly their Encampment (also termed Conclave or later, Preceptory and in America, Commandery) at Bristol, in England, which he joined sometime prior to 1791.

When Dunckerley took "refuge in the Christian chivalric degrees," there was only a handful of Knights Templar Encampments scattered across England, many working in conjunction with Royal Arch Chapters.⁹ Most seem to have traced their roots to founding members who were initiated in Ireland or Scotland or while abroad with the military. The great wars of the eighteenth century, especially the Seven Year's War (1756-1763), moved vast numbers of men across seas and continents, exposing them to a variety of Masonic and pseudo-Masonic degrees and rituals. It would be surprising had English Masons not picked up a taste for exotic degrees. Thus, through paths we probably cannot retrace with any accuracy, there were eight known Knight Templar Encampments in England by 1790. Two asserted seniority. One was the so-called Baldwyn Encampment in Bristol (not numbered), whose Charter of Compact was dated (probably erroneously) 1780, with its claim of time immemorial status.¹⁰ The other was the Encampment of Redemption No. 5 at

York, in the north of England.¹¹ Other Encampments were London Encampment of Observance of the Seven Degrees No. 1, Bath Royal Cumberland No. 2, Colchester No. 4, Dorchester Durnovarian No. 6, and Biddeford (original spelling) Trine No. 7.¹² Most interestingly, one Encampment, Fortitude No. 3, was the Templar equivalent of a regimental lodge, being attached to the First Regiment of Dragoon Guards, stationed in Suffolk in 1791.

It is not clear when Thomas Dunckerley was initiated into the Knights Templar, though he was exalted in the closely related Royal Arch as early as 1754, and was one of the signatories to its Compact in 1767.¹³ However, in 1791 the Bristol (Baldywn) Encampment invited him to be their Grand Master. Dunckerley accepted and parlayed this apparently singular invitation into the creation of the Grand Conclave of the Royal, Exalted, Religious and Military Order of H.R.D.M., Grand Elected Masonic Knights Templar, K.D.S.H. of St. John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes, etc..., with himself as the first Grand Master.¹⁴ Probably for the sake of efficiency, the new organization shared both a Grand Master (Dunckerley), and headquarters (Dunckerley's apartments at Hampton Court Palace), with the Royal Ark Mariners, which some see as the naval counterpart to the Knights Templar. Under his careful and assiduous leadership, the eight original Encampments were joined within a year by Encampments in Portsmouth, Redruth, Hereford, and Salisbury.¹⁵ Others soon followed as the number of Knight Templar Encampments increased steadily until Dunckerley's death in 1795. In 1805, after a ten-year hiatus, the Order resumed its growth which continued through the nineteenth century.

In his enthusiastic, even nostalgic embrace of the Knights Templar, Dunckerley dug deeply into powerful memories from his childhood at Somerset House in the metaphorical shadows of Temple Church (consecrated in 1185). He alludes to this bond in his 1795 will in which he asks, "First I desire to be decently buried in the Temple Church near the Knights Templar if I should die in London or at Hampton Court." ¹⁶ As it happened, he died in Portsmouth and was buried there in a grave which has since been obliterated by renovations. Toward the end of his life, Dunckerley's Masonic ambitions went beyond merely an administrative reformation and reinvigoration of the Premier Grand Lodge and matured into a vision of a comprehensive system of complimentary degrees, preferably incorporated into the Grand Lodge, or at very least protected under its benevolent aegis. In his quest, he was motivated not only by love of the Craft or even by his own considerable ambition-but also by an abiding hostility to the Antient Grand Lodge and a growing fear of all external threats to the peace and stability of England, especially those coming from Revolutionary France. In his battle against the burgeoning popularity of the Antient Grand Lodge, Dunckerley's primary weapons were enthusiasm, versatility, and above all, an acknowledged genius for organization. His weapon against the French was to be the Knights Templar.

For those who know something of Dunckerley's previous approach with other degrees, notably the Royal Arch, his mode of operation with regard to the Knights Templar will sound remarkably familiar. Immediately upon his acceptance of Bristol's offer, Dunckerley began sounding out the other Encampments with the

suggestion that unity would certainly be beneficial for the Order.¹⁷ As he wrote in March, 1791 to the Encampment at York, "I suppose there are many more Encampments in England, which with God's permission I may have the happiness to revive and assist."¹⁸ By 1794 this not-so-subtle nudging established (or revived) twenty-four Encampments under his leadership.¹⁹ His enthusiasm for organization bordered on an obsession and was perhaps the greatest gift Dunckerley bestowed on Freemasonry and its appendant orders—he enforced unity, order, uniformity of practice, and, best of all for historians, Dunckerley mandated records. Already in the spring of 1791, he insisted on the issuance of warrants for Encampments, even those which had existed from "time immemorial."²⁰ Dunckerley laid out a schedule of fees to be paid for initiation, designated appropriate robes for himself as Grand Master, designed and printed certificates; requested lists of members, their ages, and occupations; and established regulations for the order.²¹ An indication of his great hopes for the prominence of the order can be found in his insistence that Knights Templar have full uniforms, not merely identifying accessories. "The coat will take 14 buttons—ten in front and four for the hips and skirts with two very small gilt buttons at the opening of each sleeve and a white Kerseymere waistcoat and white French basket buttons—with black breeches... cock'd hats and cockades are worn with swords and black velvet stocks."²² These were to be worn with sashes rather than aprons, and Dunckerley sent along fabric swatches and sample buttons to clarify his intent. In a notable departure from contemporary Masonic practice, Dunckerley adopted his wife, Hannah Dunckerley, as the "Lady Patroness" of the Order. She obligingly began signing her Masonic correspondence "Sister Dunckerley."²³

Thomas Dunckerley was, by this time, an old man—older than he admitted, as it turns out.²⁴ Thus it comes as a bit of a surprise for us to read the printed circular he sent to Encampments in April, 1794, asking all Knights Templar to ready themselves for battle in defense of the motherland, should Britain's enemies (France) stage an invasion.²⁵ He urged them to enlist as a body, under the name Prince Edward's Royal Volunteers, after Prince Edward (1767-1820), Duke of Kent and fourth son of George III, who was the Grand Patron of the order. They were to be distinguished in battle by wearing a token, the Knights Templar cross on a black ribbon fixed through button-holes. Dunckerley himself expressed his willingness to serve alongside them. While some historians have dismissed Dunckerley's appeal as high-flown rhetoric, this seems not to be the case.²⁶ Dunckerley was fond of noble-sounding oratory, but his patriotism was genuine, and the circular was such an unusual step that one is tempted to take him at his word. If called, he surely would have served.

What, one might well ask, has this to do with Knights Templar in America, where the first mention, albeit apparently unique, of a Knights Templar degree dates as early as 1769?²⁷ More than one might suppose, because even after the American Revolution and the Treaty of Paris, there was considerable travel and communication between Britain and the new American republic. It took some time for American lodges to sort out their obediences—the Antient lodges had long ago won the field over Moderns in America, but many other lodges held warrants from

Grand Lodges in Ireland, Scotland, and even places on the Continent. Additionally, the system of higher degrees introduced by Henry Andrew Francken which emerged in the early nineteenth century as the Scottish Rite, was being worked and developed across the former colonies. To further complicate matters, a number of loyalists who had left America during the war now began to filter back, many of them bringing their own personal Masonic connections. So it was that in 1805, Webb's Monitor, published in Providence, Rhode Island, reported that there were four Knights Templar Encampments in New York, and a further twelve, together with two Grand Encampments, scattered across New England and the Mid-Atlantic states.²⁸ At least three of those bodies, the Encampment at New London, Connecticut, that of Stillwater, near Saratoga, New York, and the Granville Encampment, also in New York, held relatively recent warrants from Dunckerley's successor as Grand Master of the Masonic Knights Templar in England, Lord Rancliffe, in the name of the "Grand Encampment of England."²⁹ What makes these warrants, and particularly the one for the Granville Encampment, most interesting, is not just the formal connection to Dunckerley's organization in England and the implications that holds for their ritual practices, but the identities of the officers named on the warrant.³⁰

The men named are Dr. Isaac Moseley, Rev. Samuel Peters, and Stephen Thorn, Esq. They were given broad powers to "assemble and hold lodges in all the superior degrees and sections in Masonry above symbolic," except the Royal Arch. These were all colorful characters, apparently intent on reinventing themselves just one more time in what then really was rather the wilds of upstate New York. All born in America, they were expatriates, who by the late 1790s were apparently lured back into American politics through their acquaintance with Ira Allen (1751-1814), brother of the more famous Ethan Allen of "Green Mountain" fame.

Every American schoolchild knows that there were "thirteen original colonies." Except, as Ira Allen's "Olive Branch Affair" of 1796-1800 illustrates, there weren't thirteen colonies, there were thirteen colonies and then something else. That something else was Vermont, which Rev. Samuel Peters, the second of our Granville officers, claimed to have named in 1770 while on a backwoods missionary expedition. In those days he referred to the region as "New Connecticut," but the area was most hotly contested by New Hampshire and New York, both of which made liberal land grants in the territory. In what proved to be typical Peters fashion, he reports that he christened the area "Verd-Mont" or Green Mountain, but claimed the ignorant locals corrupted it to "Vermont," or Worm Mountain.³¹

As it turns out, very peculiar things were afoot in what became the state of Vermont in the decades surrounding the American Revolution. Inhabitants of the New Hampshire "Grants," and the "Yorkers" who held titles from New York were understandably suspicious of each other, and of the validity of the other group's claims. In July, 1777, an assembly convened and declared Vermont to be a territory independent of both New York and New Hampshire and thus effectively a sovereign entity. Vermonters and some historians refer to the territory in the period

between 1777 and 1791, when Vermont finally ratified the Constitution and joined the United States, as the "Republic of Vermont." 32 While Vermont modestly called itself a state, it behaved in many ways as an actual republic, establishing a postal system and minting coins embossed with "Vermontis. Res. Publica." During this time, Ira Allen and his brothers-Ethan, Levi, Heman, Zimri, and Heber, opportunists all, saw the chance to create an Allen family fiefdom. An active freemason who even designed a Masonic coin for the new republic, Ira Allen soon caught up a number of other London and Paris based Masonic brethren in his drama.

The first man mentioned in the Granville warrant, Isaac Moseley, was the scion of an early Connecticut family, which settled in and around Glastonbury in the seventeenth century. Several of the men went on to attend Yale, and a few became physicians. Such was the path chosen by Isaac, who was born in 1734, and graduated from Yale in 1762. He married Lucretia Merrick in 1773. She apparently died young, leaving him a daughter, Jerusha, who married Edward Danforth. Their son, Isaac Moseley Danforth, was a leading silversmith and engraver in the young republic. One of his better-known engravings is of the poet-laureate of Freemasonry in Scotland, Robert Burns.

Isaac Moseley was by all reports an active and dutiful citizen, becoming a captain in the Connecticut Militia in 1768.³³ In June, 1774, the Glastonbury community was moved by the suffering of Bostonians under the Boston Port Bill. A Committee of Correspondence was formed, and Moseley took a lead in its efforts.³⁴ His militia company, the Volunteers in Glastonbury, also known as Moseley's Detachment of Militia, (led by Colonel Increase Moseley) applied to the Connecticut Assembly to be mobilized in 1775. Isaac Moseley later claimed he only joined the unit once it became clear that the peace was within sight, but this assertion is contradicted by existing pay orders, which identify him as being "in service" in 1776 and 1777.³⁵ Moseley was subsequently elected to represent Glastonbury in the Connecticut General Assembly in October, 1782.³⁶

It seems however, that Moseley's heart was with the motherland all along, and by his own deposition he was secretly an active loyalist, cooperating with the British during the war.³⁷ In his application for relief from the British government, Moseley claims that during the war he periodically left his family behind in Connecticut and surreptitiously smuggled goods to provision British forces, investing in a number of ships expressly for that purpose.³⁸ Contemporary accounts give him a base in Granville, New York during and after the war which would help explain his extensive later correspondence with another principal in the founding of the Granville Encampment of Knights Templar, Stephen Thorn, who was a Granville native.³⁹

Dr. Moseley went north in 1783, heading for Canada via Vermont where he resided for some time in Arlington.⁴⁰ He may have chosen that path because he already knew Ira Allen, an Arlington resident, or Moseley may have struck up an acquaintance with Ira on his way through. However it transpired, Moseley and Ira

Allen were both schemers, and by 1790 correspondence reveals Moseley was deeply involved in Ira's plot to carve out an independent republic, under his leadership, in what is now the state of Vermont and part of lower Canada.⁴¹

Moseley left Canada for London by mid-1790.⁴² To salvage the fortune he claims to have lost in British service during the war, including ships and buildings burned, ironically, by fellow Connecticut loyalist General Benedict Arnold, he filed compensation claims with British officials in New York in June 1783, in New Brunswick in 1786, and finally, in London in 1790.⁴³ Not one to miss the opportunity, he also filed claims with the Connecticut state government for properties valued at £500 lost in the Battle of Groton Heights in 1781-effectively filing doubly, with opposing sides, for Arnold's depredations.⁴⁴

Although there is no evidence that Dr. Moseley was a Freemason before he moved to England, he appears to have become an enthusiastic member shortly after settling in London. He became an intimate of Dr. Ebenezer Sibly, lieutenant to Thomas Dunckerley in the establishment of the Royal Ark Mariners, and himself a member of the London Encampment, Observance of the Seven Degrees. Moseley is one of the brethren whose name appears, along with those of Sibly, Charles Sinclair, and William Hannam, Deputy Grand Master of the Knights Templar, on a printed silk craft apron, dated 1794.⁴⁵ The apron lists Moseley as the printer, and gives his London address as "Bridge Road, Pimlico." ⁴⁶

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Isaac Moseley died in London in 1806-it really isn't clear whether he returned to New York in person in 1803 or not-and his obituary, appearing in a New York paper read in part, "A philosopher, Samaritan, and an Israelite indeed-he was benevolent and humane towards the whole Family of mankind, a sincere and valuable friend."⁴⁷ The implication is that Moseley was Jewish though none of the other records, sparse though they are, indicate his religious affiliation. While there were some Jewish settlers early in Connecticut's colonial history, there was no established community there until after the Revolution when some wartime refugees from New York decided to settle in the state permanently. Historian Jacob Marcus notes that many, perhaps even a majority, of the early Jewish settlers assimilated within a generation or two of coming into Connecticut, making them very difficult to trace.⁴⁸ If the earliest Moseleys were Jewish, intermarriage with the Roote, Newberry, Lyman, and Lawrence families seems to have hastened the path to assimilation. If Isaac Moseley was not a Christian in life, he finally became one in death, as he was buried in St. George's Fields burying ground, attached to St. George's Church, Hanover Square in London.

Samuel Peters and Stephen Thorn present similarly complicated biographies. Rev. Samuel Andrew Peters (1735-1826) of Hebron, Connecticut was a prominent Anglican clergyman who wrote the infamously unflattering and not terribly accurate, *A General History of Connecticut*.⁴⁹ In addition to earning a B.A. and M.A. from Yale, he claimed an L.L.D. from the University of Cortona in Tuscany-

an institution which didn't actually exist.⁵⁰ In 1756 he went to England to be ordained in the Anglican Church, and he was made a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts—namely, Connecticut. He was married, briefly, three times, each wife in succession dying shortly after being married to the clergyman.

Of the 153 Connecticut loyalists who made claims with the British government for indemnification of wartime losses, Peters leads the pack with £40,000 in losses, compared to almost half of the claimants who request £500 or less.⁵¹ Peters is the best-documented of the founders of the Granville Encampment, and history does him no favors. Described by one biographer as a "Yankee Munchausen," because of his propensity for exaggeration, Peters seems to have genuinely believed many of his embellishments, leading to several public embarrassments.

Like Isaac Moseley, Peters was a loyalist and fled to London in 1774, where he was one of Moseley's neighbors in Pimlico, living at No. 1 Charlotte Street.⁵² Peters was a member of Lodge No. 4 (later Royal York Lodge of Perseverance No. 7) in London. He was exalted in the Royal Arch in Royal Grove Lodge No. 240 in London in 1792.⁵³ Peters was also father-in-law to William Jarvis, Provincial Grand Master of Masons in Upper Canada. Peters returned to New York by 1803, when his love for England soured upon the loss of his government pension, and greener pastures beckoned.⁵⁴

The last of our trio, Stephen Thorn (1771-1813), was from a prominent Granville, New York family, some of whom were loyalists who fled to Nova Scotia during the Revolution. He was a child during the war and seems to have been infected with the spirit of revolution early on. Thorn first shows up in the records in the early 1790s as "Stephen Thorn, Philomath," involved in the publication of three frankly inferior almanacs, Haswell's Vermont Almanac and Webster's Calendar: or The Albany Almanack both from 1792, and Lyon's Vermont Almanac of 1794.⁵⁵ These are unusually slim volumes of sixteen to thirty-six pages containing barely more than monthly calendars, moon phases, and lists of state officers and other notables. Thorn became engaged to marry Martha Bishop (1771-1830) about this time as well, probably in 1794, though it seems unlikely that they actually married until 1801. Their son Stephen was born in 1808 and died in 1831.

In addition to dabbling in publishing, Thorn was described as a merchant-trader and surveyor.⁵⁶ His twin passions, however, were the military and intrigue. Thorn was captain of a "troop of horse" in the New York militia for Washington County in 1794, when he left, ostensibly for business, on a tour of southern Canada. The rather permanent nature of his departure is marked by the appointment of Silvester Rowley in his place in 1795.⁵⁷ Thorn was actually making an assessment of the mood of French speaking Canadians to ascertain whether they would welcome an army of liberation. He was acting of his own accord, prompting his biographer to argue that Thorn's freelance intrigues demonstrate, "that it was possible for a young American to think of himself as a participant in a revolutionary movement that transcended political boundaries. To him, the North Atlantic area was one large

theatre in which a democratic revolution was taking place, and he moved about in that theater supporting the cause of freedom." 58

Like many Americans, Thorn was thrilled by the outbreak of the French Revolution and responded enthusiastically when French minister plenipotentiary to the United States, Edmond Charles Genet, made an official visit in 1793, in hope of winning the United States to the side of revolutionary France in its war against Britain. Genet's heavy-handed dealings with the American government led to his recall, and he was replaced in 1794 by Jean Fauchet. Shortly after the new minister arrived in the country, Fauchet was contacted by Stephen Thorn who had promising intelligence. Thorn had not only reconnoitered the French-Canadians, but had organized a small network of English speaking radicals in lower Canada, New York, and Vermont, who were interested in promoting a rebellion against Britain in the region.⁵⁹ Thorn suggested to Fauchet that French Canada might be made a department of France putting little more at risk than a small expeditionary force aimed at the capture of Quebec.⁶⁰ If successful, such plan would liberate the French-Canadians, enrich France, and most importantly, distract the British from the European war.

The young man was persuasive, and before the end of the year, Thorn was in Paris actively working for the liberation of French-Canadians and contemplating a trip to Poland to help liberate the Poles as well. By August, 1795, Thorn had laid his Canadian plans before the Committee of Public Safety. In the brief, he suggested that his friend Ebenezer Allen (1743-1806), a Vermont pioneer and cousin of Ira Allen, be named adjutant general in charge of the Montreal arm of the expedition. Thorn's plan interested at least some members of the Committee, and he was put under the direction of Richard Pellevé, an intelligence agent with experience in Francophone Canada.⁶¹ In late August, 1795, Pellevé sent Thorn to England to gather information on British troop strength and movements armed with a list of towns to visit and pubs to frequent. Thorn's apprenticeship in espionage had begun.

While Stephen Thorn was focused on liberating French Canadians, another American arrived in Paris to pursue another sort of revolution in the same region. Webster asserts that Ira Allen and Stephen Thorn knew each other before they met in Paris, and it may well be that they met during Thorn's tour through the North Country in 1794. Allen had been in England since January, 1796, in what proved to be fruitless negotiations with the Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland. In Britain, Allen solicited British endorsement of a plan to build a canal that would open trade between the St. Lawrence and Vermont's Champlain Valley offering untold commercial benefits to both Vermont and the Empire.⁶² While in London, Allen relied on the Rev. Samuel Peters, an old friend, fellow Connecticut native, and sometime Allen family agent. Peters was not merely a disinterested friend, however. For his efforts, Allen promised him everything short of the moon including vast lands in the new republic, presidency of the University of Vermont, and backing in Peters' bid to become the bishop of a new Episcopal diocese based in Vermont.⁶³ Letters between Peters, Allen, and Thorn between 1796 and 1802, reveal the extent of Peters' involvement in the evolving conspiracy to liberate

Vermont and may ultimately have been its undoing as his indiscreet correspondence was likely intercepted by the government.⁶⁴ With or without Peters' indiscretions, the government was ultimately unimpressed, and after being kept on a string for several months, Allen abandoned the project and turned his face toward Paris.

Ira Allen arrived in France in June 1796, and quickly joined forces with Stephen Thorn. The two adventurers cooperated in wooing French sponsorship of a venture to liberate both French speaking Canada from the British and Vermont from the United States. This was an interesting twist, and it brought a new goal. The area was now to be created as an independent republic, United Columbia, a firm friend of the French, who would help guarantee its security from the United States to the south and the British Empire to the north and west. With Allen working as chief strategist, the plan was tweaked and developed until it finally met with French approval. In July, 1796, the Directory provided Allen with Batavian notes with which he paid for 20,000 muskets and bayonets, twenty-four brass four-pound cannon, six cannon carriages, and six cannon wagons. The contracts specified that the weapons were for the Vermont state militia, a legitimate if not plausible purchase. Thorn went to Ostend and there chartered an American ship, the Olive Branch, to take the goods home. There were delays, and the ship did not sail until November, 1796. By then the British had become suspicious, and the Olive Branch was seized. The plot was essentially over, though what became known as the Olive Branch Affair dragged on until 1800, as Allen challenged the seizure in British courts.⁶⁵

As the planned Vermont revolution fizzled, each member of the plot made his way as best he could. Allen faced political and financial ruin and eventually died a pauper in Philadelphia in 1814.⁶⁶ By 1801 Stephen Thorn returned to Granville, New York, married his sweetheart (he had complained to his parents that Martha didn't write to him when he was abroad), fathered children, served as a judge and member of the state Senate, took up a place in the militia, distinguished himself in the War of 1812, and died young in 1813.⁶⁷ The Rev. "Dr." Samuel Peters became bitter as his promised Vermont bishopric failed to materialize, but he returned to the United States anyway pursuing an equally elusive claim to ten thousand square miles of land in what is now Wisconsin which he was convinced would make him fabulously rich. He died in 1826 in Newark, New Jersey, having long outlived all his tormentors back in revolutionary Hebron but without realizing his dreams of real fame and astounding wealth. Isaac Moseley, as we have seen, died in London in 1806.

A diverting tale, but the subplot that connects them to Thomas Dunckerley's Masonic circle is even more intriguing. Allen, Thorn, Peters, and Moseley were united by more than their interests in Vermont and their involvement in the Olive Branch Affair. They were also Freemasons and were connected through lodge memberships and the development of high degree Masonry in England and the United States between 1790 and 1803. Traces of Freemasonry appear and disappear throughout the personal histories of these Olive Branch conspirators. Ira Allen was made a Mason in June, 1782, in the Vermont Lodge No. 1 which had been

established in 1781 by a warrant from St. Andrews Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.⁶⁸ However tempting it is to think that he met the other conspirators through the lodge, there is absolutely no supporting evidence. Curiously, none of the other men in this story-Moseley, Peters, or Thorn-appear in American Masonic records until the issuance of the 1803 Knights Templar warrant mentioned above. Thus their respective Masonic histories do not begin until they leave America though it is entirely possible that this is merely an accident of the haphazard survival of records.

Thorn's case is particularly intriguing and elusive. As we have seen, he was in France during their Revolution and at the time of his involvement with the Olive Branch Affair, was described by the British Lieutenant-Governor Sir Robert Milnes of Lower Canada as a Major in the French Army and as being part of a conspiracy "proceeding on the principles of Jacobinism and Illuminism."⁶⁹ While this might be a standard contemporary insult, the Jacobinism is not far off the mark-both Thorn and Allen had made extravagant claims of loyalty to republicanism in order to secure the support of the French Directory. There were no Masonic lodges in Thorn's part of New York State until 1793, and he left shortly thereafter.⁷⁰ It is likely therefore, though entirely unproven, that Thorn became a Freemason in France. Unfortunately, even Freemasons found it imprudent to keep records during the height of the French Revolution, so it is unlikely that we will discover any record of Thorn joining a lodge in Paris-though it is possible that he joined in England or the Netherlands during one of his junkets. Still, the reference to "Illuminism" is tantalizing given Thorn's involvement only a few years later with the Knights Templar. Finally, we have already noted the various known Masonic connections of both Peters and Moseley.

Our story comes full circle in 1803, with the survival of the warrant described above, authorizing the formation of a lodge working in the high degrees in Granville, New York, September 4, 1803.⁷¹ Masonic scholars in New York identify this warrant with the Granville Encampment which met from 1803 until about 1823.⁷² It declined to join Grand Encampment of New York in 1814, when other Encampments around the state organized.⁷³ Another warrant was issued by the same authorities on September 5, 1803, for an Encampment in New London, Connecticut.⁷⁴ Like the apron described above, the certificates were printed by "Isaac Moseley, Ebenezer Sibly, Charles Sinclair, and William Hannam."⁷⁵ The Granville Encampment was one of the earliest known Knight Templar bodies in New York outside of New York City.⁷⁶ Thus, curiously, it appears that amongst the earliest brethren to introduce Chivalric Freemasonry in upstate New York were two ardent loyalists and a Jacobin, all fresh from a genuine, if failed, "Masonic" conspiracy. Strange company for a Masonic body steeped in patriotism. Though in time of revolution, one man's

[\[Part 1:\]](#) [\[Part 2:\]](#) [\[Part 3:\]](#) [\[Notes:\]](#)

2 Henry Sadler, *Thomas Dunckerley: This Life, Labors and Letters*, (London: Diprose, Bateman and Co., 1891). Sadler's work is an invaluable resource, as it reproduces much of the collection of Dunckerley's correspondence held at the Library and Museum of the United Grand Lodge of England.

3 Andrew Prescott and Susan Mitchell Sommers, "'Sister' Dunckerley," *Les femmes et la franc-maçonnerie, des Lumières à nos jours*. 17-19 June, 2010.

4 Michel L. Brodsky, "Why was the Craft De-Christianized?" *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* (hereafter AQC), 99, (1986) 155. C. D. Rotch, "Thomas Dunckerley and the Lodge of Friendship," AQC, 56 (1943) 59-113. See especially 101-102

5 Rotch, AQC, 56 (1943) 59-113. The group included James Galloway, Thomas French, Rowland Holt, James Heseltine, Hon. Charles Dillon, and Henry, 5th Duke of Beaufort.

6 Arlene Shy, "The Confession of Mary Bolnist," *The Quarto* 1, 7, (April 1997) 7-8. Letter. Thomas Dunckerley to Major Edward Walpole, 9 June, 1766. Clinton Papers, 2:24, Clements Library, University of Michigan.

7 Letter. Pamela Clark, Registrar, The Royal Archives to Susan Mitchell Sommers, 12 January, 2010. Details of royal pension 1767-1782

8 Thomas Dunckerley, *Essays on various Subjects by Thos Dunckerley, (1750)* Library and Museum of the United Grand Lodge of England.

9 Brodsky, AQC, 99, (1986) 153.

10 Eric Ward, "The Baldwyn Rite-An Impartial Survey," AQC, 71 (1959) 37. Ward suggests the document was actually created around 1808.

11 Sadler, 261.

12 Sadler, 262, list of encampments and their numbers. See also lists in the Bridge Collection, Archives, Mark Masons Hall, London.

13 Sadler, 246-8.

14 Harry Mendoza, "The Articles of Union and the Orders of Chivalry" AQC, 93 (1980) 59-76. See especially John Hamill's response, on 72. Letter. Thomas Dunckerley to Richard Blake, 25 November, 1791, Library and Museum, United Grand Lodge of England, 8/A/45

15 As new encampments were added, Dunckerley reassigned numbers, so that by 1794 encampments in London, York, Bristol, and Bath, were considered "immemorial" and were left unnumbered. Their previous numbers were reassigned to other early encampments, and so on down the list, chronologically.

16 Thomas Dunckerley, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Prob 11/1268, will, 11 March, 1794, proved 13 December, 1795.

17 Ron Chudley, *Thomas Dunckerley, A Remarkable Freemason*, (London: Lewis Masonic, 1982) 100; Sadler, 260-1

18 Sadler, 262

19 Chudley, 100

20 He took it badly that his home encampment, Baldwyn at Bristol, neglected to apply for a warrant and failed to send the requisite fees. Letter. Thomas Dunckerley to Richard Blake, 25 November, 1791 Library and Museum, United Grand Lodge of England, 8/A/45

21 Sadler, 263; Chudley, 105

22 Chudley, 105

23 Chudley, 172

24 Although the traditional year of his birth is 1724, he was more likely born in late 1720, based on his 1735 apprenticeship to William Simpson, a peruke maker. TNA, IR 1/15 folio 72, Dunckley [sic] Thomas to Wm. Simpson of St. Mart/Flds. Barb & peruk. £10, Register of Apprenticeships, 1737. The 1737 dates reflects the payment of stamp duty, not registration date.

25 Sadler, 275-6.

26 A.C.F. Jackson, AQC, 93 (1980) 71. Response to Mendoza, AQC, 93 (1980) 59-76.

27 St. Andrews Royal Arch Chapter, one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary, 1769-1894, (Boston: published by the Chapter, 1894) 45-46

28 Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor*, (Providence, Rhode Island: Cushing & Appleton, 1805) For Connecticut, see: Washington Commandery No. 1, Washington Commandery Centennial, 1796-1896, (Hartford, Connecticut: R.S. Peck & Co, 1896) 21-22

29 Thomas Boothby Parkyns, first Baron Rancliffe, (1755-1800). Curiously, though signed by Rancliffe, the warrants appear to have been dated 1803-several years after his death. Here is, perhaps, yet another Masonic mystery. It appears likely that the warrant was actually procured before Rancliffe's death, when all three men named were still in London.

30 Peter Ross, *A Standard History of Freemasonry in New York*, 1 (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1899) 803.

31 Samuel Middlebrook, "Samuel Peters: A Yankee Munchausen," *The New England Quarterly*, 20, 1, (March 1947) 78.

32 John H. Long, ed., *New Hampshire: Consolidated Chronology of State and County Boundaries*, (The Newberry Library, 2007) http://historical-county.newberry.org/website/New_Hampshire/documents/NH_Consolidated_Chronology.htm. Accessed 10/11/09

33 Charles Hoadly, *The public records of the colony of Connecticut, 1636-1776*, (Hartford: Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1880) v. 9, 512; v. 10, 101.

34 G. H. Hollister, *The History of Connecticut from the first Settlement of the Colony to the adoption of the present Constitution*, 2 vols., (New Haven: Durrie and Peck, 1855) v. 2, 154.

35 *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1636-1776*, (May 1775-June 1776) v. 15, 163. Peter Wilson Coldham, *The lives, times, and families of colonial Americans who remained loyal to the British Crown before, during and after the Revolutionary War, as related in their own words and through their correspondence*. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000) Connecticut, 23, 7 June, 1777.

36 Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1896), v. 2, 764; *Roll of State Officers and Members of the General Assembly of Connecticut*, (Hartford, 1881) 32.

37 Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1864) v. 2, 109

38 Coldham, Connecticut, 23. Wallace Brown, *The King's Friends: the composition and motives of the American Loyalist claimants*, (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown

University Press, 1965) 69

39 Ethan Allen and John Duffy, ed., *Ethan Allen and his kin: correspondence, 1772-1819*, (University Press of New England, 1998) v. 2, 533

40 *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, 2 (1943) 29; New York Public Library, *Loyalist Transcripts* xii, 667-681

41 J. Kevin Graffagnino, "Twenty Thousand Muskets!!!: Ira Allen and the Olive Branch Affair, 1796-1800," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3, 48, 3 (Jul., 1991) 409-431. *Allen Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Vermont. Letters between Moseley and Ira Allen, 1790-1801.*

42 Coldham, Connecticut, 23; Virginia H. Olson, "Notes and Sources: Connecticut Loyalists Who Went to Canada", *Connecticut Ancestry*, 17:1 (September 1974), 52; *Allen Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Vermont, Issac Moseley to Ira Allen, 16 February, 1790.*

43 TNA, T 1/594/49-52, June, 1783. See also: 12/2/65, 57/65, 13/70B/3000, 327, 76/394-398-83/273-274, 746-747.

44 William Wallace Harris, *The battle of Groton Heights: a collection of narratives, official reports, records, etc., of the storming of Fort Griswold, the massacre of its garrison, and the burning of New London by British troops under the command of Brig.-Gen. Benedict Arnold, on the sixth of September, 1781*, (New London: C. Allyn, 1882) 153

45 John Byatt, "Exhibits," *AQC*, 22 (1909), 189-191. At the time of the article, the apron was in a collection in Melbourne, Australia. A similar apron is in the collection of the United Grand Lodge of England.

46 Byatt, *AQC*, 22 (1909) 188-191.

47 Dexter, v.2, 765; *New York Spectator*, May 21, 1806.

48 Jeffrey Gurock, ed., *Jacob Rader Marcus, "Light on Early Connecticut Jewry," American Jewish History, 1654-1840*, 1 (New York: Routledge, 1998) 169-218

49 Samuel Peters (pseudo), *General History of Connecticut, from its first settlement under George Fenwick, to its latest period of amity with Great Britain prior to the Revolution; including a description of the country, and many curious and interesting anecdotes. With an appendix, pointing out the causes of the rebellion in America; together with the particular part taken by the people of Connecticut in its promotion. By a Gentleman of the Province* (London, 1781)

50 Isabel M. Calder, "Samuel Peters," *Dictionary of American Biography*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934) v. 14, 511

51 Brown, 59, 61

52 Ira Allen, *Twenty thousand muskets!!! Particulars of the capture of the ship Olive Branch, in November, 1796, laden with cannon, ...* (London, 1797), 23

53 Robertson, *The History of Freemasonry in Canada*, v. 1, 463. Moseley also appears in the minutes of the Royal Grove lodge.

54 Calder, "Samuel Peters," *Dictionary of American Biography*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934) v. 14, 512

55 Stepehn Thorn, *Haswell's Vermont almanac, for the year of our Lord 1792* (Bennington, VT: Anthony Haswell, 1791), *Webster's calendar: or, The Albany almanack*, (Albany, NY: Charles R. & George Webster, 1791), *Lyon's Vermont Calendar*, (Rutland, VT: J. Lyon, 1793).

- 56 John J. Duffy, ed., *Ethan Allen and his kin: correspondence, 1772-1819*, (University Press of New England, 1998) v. 2, 502
- 57 Military minutes of the Council of Appointment for the State of New York, 1783-1821. (New York, 1901-02) 308. T.S. Webster, "A New Yorker in the Era of the French Revolution: Stephen Thorn, Conspirator for a Canadian Revolution," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1969) 251-72
- 58 Webster, 272
- 59 Webster, 253
- 60 Letter. Stephen Thorn to Jean A. J. Fauchet, Philadelphia, 12 November, 1794. Archives Canada: Archives du ministère des affaires étrangères, correspondance politique, Etats-Unis, supplement vol. xxviii, ff 445-46v
- 61 Webster, 257
- 62 Graffagnino, 415
- 63 Graffagnino, 416
- 64 Allen Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Vermont. Correspondence between Samuel Peters and: Levi Allen, John Williams, Stephen Thorn, Nathan Smith, John Graham, John Hitch, Andrew Peters, and Ira Allen, 1796-1802. Webster, 270
- 65 Graffagnino, 422-26
- 66 Graffagnino, 430
- 67 Webster, 272, 267. Military minutes of the Council of Appointment for the State of New York, 1783-1821. (New York, 1901-02) 722, 760, 1232, 1404
- 68 Lee Tillotson, *Ancient Craft Masonry in Vermont*, (Montpelier, Vermont: Capital City Press, 1920) 5-7, 11-12, 16
- 69 Douglas Brymner, archivist, *Report on Canadian Archives*, (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1893) xlvii-xlviii
- 70 John Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 140
- 71 Washington Commandery No. 1, *Washington Commandery Centennial, 1796-1896*, (Hartford, Connecticut: R.S. Peck & Co, 1896) 21-22
- 72 Peter Ross, *A Standard History of Freemasonry in the State of New York*, (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1899) 802. Other early encampments include Morton's Encampment, St. Peter's Encampment, and the Rising Sun Encampment, all of which predate the formation of the Grand Encampment of New York in 1814
- 71 Washington Commandery No. 1, *Washington Commandery Centennial, 1796-1896*, (Hartford, Connecticut: R.S. Peck & Co, 1896) 21-22
- 72 Peter Ross, *A Standard History of Freemasonry in the State of New York*, (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1899) 802. Other early encampments include Morton's Encampment, St. Peter's Encampment, and the Rising Sun Encampment, all of which predate the formation of the Grand Encampment of New York in 1814
- 73 Washington Commandery No. 1, *Washington Commandery Centennial, 1796-1896*, (Hartford, Connecticut: R.S. Peck & Co, 1896) 21-22
- 74 Ward St. Clair, "More Notes on Ebenezer Sibly," *AQC*, 71 (1958), 127.

Certificate now lost, but described by the editor of the Masonic Review of Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1861

75 St. Clair, AQC, 71 (1958), 126-127.

76 There are references to Knights Templar masons in New York City as early as 1785. Independent Journal, 28 December, 1785 account of St. John the Evangelist Masonic Procession. They may have been from the Morton Encampment, the earliest known KT organization in the state. Ross, 801-2.

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