

# Knights Templar Photographs at the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library

(Northern Jurisdiction)

By

Aimee E. Newell, Ph.D.

As the “historical society” for American Freemasonry and fraternalism, the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library in Lexington, Massachusetts actively collects objects and documents associated with fraternal groups from the 1600s through the present day. Our collection of more than 17,000 artifacts includes over 1,000 photographs from the 1800s and 1900s, many showing men and women in their Masonic and fraternal regalia.

Over the past two years, museum staff and volunteers have been working to digitize the entire collection of historic photographs. So far, we have over 600 images available for viewing on our website, [www.nationalheritagemuseum.org](http://www.nationalheritagemuseum.org). Visitors can browse and search these images by clicking on “Collections” and then on “Online Collections” and “Click here to start a search of our online collection.” This opens a new window where all of the photos can be accessed by typing “photo,” or searches can be performed for specific subjects, photographers, places, or any other term.

The photograph collection includes many images of Knights Templar dressed in their regalia, both individually and in groups. A photograph from 1889 shows members of Boston Commandery during a visit to Mount Vernon, George Washington’s (1732-1799) home in Vir-

ginia. The house fills the background with the men lined up in the foreground. When we first scanned the photo, we did not have any information about the date that the photo was taken, but with a little research, we learned that it depicts the group of Knights Templar who visited Mount Vernon during their attendance at the 1889 Conclave in Washington, D.C. A Boston newspaper account of the trip notes that on October 10, 1889, the group traveled to Mount Vernon on a boat and “from the wharf they marched to the tomb where resides all that is mortal of that most eminent Mason, Brother George Washington.” The newspaper also explains that “the knights then went to the portico of the famous old mansion and were photographed...” According to the Commandery’s 1895 published history, “on arrival [the Knights] formed a square about the tomb of Washington, when an impressive service was held...The old mansion was visited, and pleasant hours were spent on this historic estate.”

Pilgrimages to Mount Vernon seem to have been popular during the late 1800s. Another image in the Museum’s collection, taken in 1859, shows St. John’s Commandery No. 1 from Providence, Rhode Island during their visit to Washington’s tomb on the estate. According to a published account



Boston Commandery at Mount Vernon, 1889, unidentified maker, Alexandria, Virginia. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, gift of Harvey B. Leggee Collection of Shrine and Fraternal Material, 96.005.3.



St. John's Commandery No. 1 at George Washington's Tomb, ca. 1859, unidentified maker, Alexandria, Virginia. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, Special Acquisitions Fund, 93.019.



George S. Anderson, Grand Commander of Georgia, ca. 1875, Smith and Motes, Atlanta, Georgia. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, gift in memory of Jacques Noel Jacobsen, 2008.039.27.

of the visit, the men marched off the boat “to the sounds of mournful music” and first visited Washington’s tomb where they paused to take this photograph. They next visited the house itself, which had fallen into disrepair. The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association had purchased the estate the year before St. John’s Commandery’s visit in 1858 and would open it to the public in 1860 after a careful refurbishment.

Thanks largely to donor Jacques Noel Jacobsen Jr., who has donated nearly 1,500 items to the Museum & Library since 1986, the collection includes a fascinating group of carte-de-visite photographs of men dressed in their Knight Templar regalia. French for “visiting card,” carte-de-visites are small photos, approximately 2 ½ by 4 inches, that were invented in 1854 and became widely available during the early 1860s.

Multiple copies of carte-de-visites could be easily and affordably produced to be given as keepsakes. The photograph of George S. Anderson (1824-1901) in his regalia as Grand Commander of Georgia, has also been hand-colored after the photograph was printed. The Atlanta photographer’s name, Smith and Motes, appears on the back. Anderson served as Grand Commander in 1875.

Even when the subject is unidentified, these photos offer both an intriguing glance at the past and provide useful historical information about the history of the Knights Templar. While the subjects of two more photos are unknown, they are marked with the photographer’s name and location. An image taken by James F. Ryder of Cleveland, Ohio shows a Knight Templar standing with one hand resting on the back of a chair. He wears his Templar baldric, apron,



Unidentified Knight Templar, 1864-1866, James F. Ryder, Cleveland, Ohio. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, gift in memory of Jacques Noel Jacobsen, 2008.039.9.

gauntlets, and chapeau. A three-cent tax stamp on the back helps date the image to 1864 through 1866.

A cabinet card photograph, a larger-size format than the carte-de-visite, shows an unidentified man wearing his Knight Templar regalia and seated in a chair. The photo was taken by W. G. C. Kimball of Concord, New Hampshire in the 1880s or 1890s. The man wears his gauntlets, baldric, and apron, and holds his sword and his chapeau. These images are invaluable for teaching us about how late-1800s regalia was worn. While Knights Templar did wear regalia from the start in the late 1700s, it was generally governed by loose traditions until



Unidentified Knight Templar, ca. 1880, W.G.C. Kimball, Concord, New Hampshire. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, gift of Jacques Noel Jacobsen Jr., 92.033.43.

the 1850s. The Grand Encampment took steps to standardize the group's regalia at its 1859 meeting. On September 17, 1859, the Grand Encampment adopted the report of the Committee on Costume  
knight templar

and resolved "that the costume this day adopted...be worn by all Commanderies chartered at this communication, or that shall be hereafter established...and that no officer, member, or Knight be...al-



C. P. Chesley, ca. 1880, New York Gallery, San Francisco. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, gift of Jack Carpenter, 86.43.1.

lowed to sit in this Grand Encampment unless clothed in the uniform hereby prescribed..." However, these photos from the 1860s through the early 1900s show that men continued to include some variation in their uniforms, depending on rank and location.

Another cabinet card from the 1880s or 1890s depicts C. P. Chesley of California Commandery No. 1 in San Francisco. He stands in full view, wearing his hat, gauntlets, baldric, and apron as well as an elaborately decorated cape. Chesley's regalia shows a distinct difference from that worn by Eminent Commander J. B. Hill in a carte-de-visite taken in the 1860s. Despite the decisions made at the 1859 Conclave to standardize uniforms, these two photos show that significant variations continued over the next twenty years. Hill's apron, baldric, and collar show a more traditional style of black velvet with well-placed emblems. Chesley's regalia is richly decorated with extra borders around the various Templar symbols.

Hill's carte-de-visite was taken at Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries in Washington, D.C. Mathew Brady (1822-1896) opened a photography studio in Washington, D.C. in 1849. While Brady is well-known for his Civil War photographs, he actually took few himself. Instead, he financed a group of field photographers, sending them out to take the images while he acquired and published the negatives. Hill's carte-de-visite is just one of many photos taken at Brady's studio, probably by a photographer working for Brady rather than by Brady himself.

As the illustrations here attest, the Museum & Library collection includes knight templar



Eminent Commander J. B. Hill, 1860-1869, Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, Washington, D.C. Collection of the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, gift in memory of Jacques Noel Jacobsen, 2008.039.54.

all types of photographs taken over the past 150 years. One more image shows an example of a stereo card from 1895. Stereo cards, also known as stereographic or stereopticon cards, show two identical images side by side on one card. When viewed through a stereoscope, the two images project a single three-dimensional image of the subject. Stereo cards enjoyed widespread popularity from the 1860s through the 1930s. The card shown here depicts Apollo Commandery performing an exhibition drill