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Our Templar Heritage in the United States

by **Ned E. Dull**, Most Eminent Grand Master, 1982-1985
Grand Encampment of Knights Templar, U.S.A.

United States Templary has existed in one form or another for going on 239 years. The first date of record for the conferring of the Order of the Temple in the North American continent is August 28, 1769, when Captain William Davis, a Past Master, received the honor. On December 11 of that same year Paul Revere was Knighted, and on May 14, 1770, General Joseph Warren received the Order of the Temple. Following is a capsule history up to approximately 1985, when the volume was first printed, of Templar years in America.

During the early years of Templary in North America, no sovereign body was formed, and no homologous unit was achieved among the fewer than 500 known Knights throughout the colonies (and later the states). But in the 1790s, after the Treaty of Paris was signed and the United States looked to the future and more friendly relations with Great Britain, Templar voices were being raised and the question of consolidation proposed.

The oldest "Encampment" for which records are extant was in Charleston, South Carolina, active in 1780 and perhaps earlier. Other Encampments were located along the Atlantic coast.

In 1797, almost 30 years after the Knighting of Paul Revere and Joseph Warren, Thomas Smith Webb, our Templar progenitor in the United States, identified a Grand Encampment in Philadelphia, an Encampment No. 1 in Philadelphia, one other Philadelphia Encampment, and others in Harrisburg, Carlisle, Stillwater, and New York City. In 1800 Knights Templar of New London, Connecticut, participated in ceremonies of eulogy for General George Washington, and history records conferral of the Orders in the same year in Philadelphia and New York.

An Encampment of Knights of the Red Cross was organized in Boston in 1801. In 1802 an Encampment of Knights Templar was organized in Providence, Rhode Island. In succeeding years, new Encampments were formed in Massachusetts, Maine, Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and other southern and northeastern states.

Knight Templary in the United States first became a supreme body in 1816. It was called the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar, and its first meeting in Philadelphia was unsuccessful. The delegates then met in New York on June 20 and 21, 1816, when representatives from "eight Councils and Encampments of Knights Templars and the

Appendant Orders" met to adopt a Constitution and to elect officers to serve until the next meeting in 1819. DeWitt Clinton (former U.S. Senator and at that time Mayor of New York) was elected General Grand Master and was given sovereign control of Templary in the United States.

According to Dr. Francis J. Scully, Chairman of the Committee on Templar History of the Grand Encampment in 1952 and the man who compiled the accepted history of our Order, this was a "Period of Organization." Between 1816 and 1832 the powers and authority of the Grand Encampment were recognized. There were, of course, a few Encampments who remained at first outside the General Grand Encampment, but as the new supreme body grew, these lessened and eventually sought and obtained membership in one sovereign body. The Constitution adopted in 1816 called for a meeting of the General Grand Encampment every seven years. In 1819, however, the second Conclave assembled on September 16, and a resolution to amend the Constitution and change the time between meetings from seven to three years was introduced and laid aside until the next Conclave, set for September, 1826. At the third meeting in 1826, the Triennial Conclaves were established. The years 1832-1835 Scully calls the "Period of Anti-Masonic Activity." William Morgan disappeared soon after the publication of his Exposition of Masonry in 1826, and this disappearance -blamed on the Freemasons - constituted one of the major controversies of the day.

But other things were happening in the young country. The year was 1827. On July 4, only one year earlier, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, second and third presidents of the United States, had died on the 50th anniversary of America's birth. We had only recently finished our second war with Great Britain, and President Monroe, in his annual message to Congress in 1823, had declared that the Western Hemisphere was no longer open to colonization by European powers. His Doctrine-America for Americans- helped place the United States alongside the European countries, and there began a far-reaching sense of nationalism-a developing pride in the young country which was daily exhibiting its right to be ranked with the old world. No new Grand Encampments were formed between 1827 and 1843. For a long time following the Morgan affair, Freemasons were fearful of their lives should they attempt to attend Lodge or any Masonic meeting. In fact, a number of Grand Encampments lay dormant during this period. At the fifth Conclave of the General Grand Encampment held November 29, 1832, only 14 Knights were present. However, in that same year, Andrew Jackson, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, was elected president, and the Anti-Masonic Party knew that it had failed. A later Grand Master, looking back over these tempestuous days, spoke for all of Masonry when he said, "the agony was over-the nation had repudiated anti-Masonry and had elected as President, Andrew Jackson, an acknowledged, outspoken, well-known Freemason."

From 1835 to 1856 Masonry in general and Templary in particular witnessed a "Period of Expansion." The West opened up to settlers, and it was inevitable that it would also be opened to the influence of Masonry. By 1853 Templary had reached California-had spanned the entire continent. The supremacy of the General Grand Encampment was settled as the sole governing body of Knights Templar in the United States. By 1856 membership had increased to the startling figure of 4,710 souls, as opposed to 500

members 40 years earlier. Then in 1856 came the "Period of Revision," and Grand Master William Blackstone Hubbard. Under Hubbard the Constitution was revised. This revision did not reject the original Constitution, says Scully-"All the main prerogatives and powers under which it had been acting were retained. The revision, while maintaining the authority and power of the officers, set forth more clearly their limits and application. There were other changes, though the ones most readily observed were the changes in the names of the Grand Bodies and their officers." The General Grand Encampment was now to be known as the Grand Encampment, the State Grand Encampments as Grand Commanderies, and subordinate Encampments as Commanderies.

From 1862 to 1874 was the "Period of Civil Strife and Reconstruction." This time it was the Civil War pitting brother against brother, but the Craft was in less danger of dissolution than the republic.

1877, and the country had survived its family feud. Thomas Edison was busy in his workshop perfecting the electric light, and the scars across the nation were healing. A new period of growth took place from 1874 to 1916.

In 1916 at the Grand Encampment's centenary celebration, the "Period of Maturity," as Scully calls it, began. And for the last many years Templary has achieved a place of respect along with the other major branches of Masonry in the world. It is especially important to note that this Christian Order has never succumbed to momentary deprecating influences but has continued to maintain its sovereign rank and status.

Of course, the Grand Encampment has had its peaks and valleys. From 1816 to 1877 membership increased steadily; in 1877 there was a momentary and slight decline. But this was immediately reversed and a steady rise continued unabated for 50 years. Membership took a considerable leap in the post World War I years, reaching its highest in 1927 when the membership totaled 453,836. It then declined during the Great Depression, tallying 219,368 in 1943. Again the post World War II years brought a new impetus to the membership rolls which once again increased continuously until 1960 when 398,564 members were listed on the annual returns. Since 1960, Templary has experienced a decrease.

One of the great highlights in our more recent history was the sesquicentennial of the Grand Encampment at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City during June of 1966. The former Secretary of the Army, former Secretary of Defense and former Governor of Michigan, Wilber M. Brucker, was Grand Master during this observance. It was attended by thousands of Templars from all parts of the country and beyond. The General Chairman for this 150th celebration was C. Byron Lear, Past Grand Generalissimo of the Grand Encampment.

The Grand Encampment and those who have served as its Grand Masters have created and perfected a tradition for the generations of Templar Sir Knights to come. Perhaps Masonry and Templary will continue because they must continue. Because as long as

there are men who believe in the Trinity and who see and are willing to correct the problems in the world, Templary and all of Freemasonry will proceed.

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