

Templar Treasures

By

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Many Masonic bodies across the United States have come into possession of various treasures over the years. These can range from simple minute books from bygone eras that bear the signatures of important men of the times to more awe inspiring items. For example, Norman Masonic Lodge No. 38 A.F.&A.M. proudly displays a Tyler's register from 1899 bearing the signature of James S. Buchanan who was the fourth President of the University of Oklahoma.¹ In the antechamber of Lawton Commandery No. 18 in Lawton, Oklahoma, another truly great Templar treasure can be found.

Old cannons will know the city of Lawton as being adjacent to Fort Sill which was constructed in 1869 by elements of the 10th U.S. Cavalry and the 6th U.S. Infantry. Eventually the School of Fire was established at Fort Sill in 1911.² Fort Sill and the military in general have long had a connection with the fraternity in Oklahoma. In December of 1917, over two-hundred soldiers from Camp Doniphan at Ft. Sill were given passes to journey to Guthrie for a special Scottish Rite reunion; it was the first time Oklahoma Consistory No. 1 conferred all twenty-nine degrees and with a class composed entirely of servicemen. Due to the number of soldiers interested in being made 32° Masons, the post commander issued an order limiting the number of passes that could be issued at any one time. With this restriction on the number of troops

that could leave the post, the Guthrie Scottish Rite Bodies erected a Masonic "club house" on site for the purpose of communicating the degrees to soldiers. Even Harry Truman, then a Lieutenant, is on record as having visited the Guthrie Valley A.A.S.R. during this time.³ In addition to this Masonic activity, the Fort Sill Masonic Club long had a presence on the post and could count men such a Brigadier General Dwight E. Aultman, a former post commander, among its members.⁴

General Aultman certainly was not the only general officer associated with the Masonic fraternity in Oklahoma though. Throughout its history a number of generals of the Oklahoma National Guard have been Masons. General Ewell L. Head of Muskogee served with the Guard prior to WWII and was an active member of both the Bedouin Shrine and the Knights Templar.⁵ General Hal L. Muldrow of Norman, the son of the first Grand Master of the State of Oklahoma, was a member of the McAlester Valley A.A.S.R. Generals William S. Key of Seminole and Frederick A. Daugherty of Oklahoma City both held the post of Sovereign Grand Inspector General in Oklahoma.⁶

It was in the late 1940s that an artillery officer stationed at Fort Sill, Major Ralph L. Paddock, Jr., presented a special gift to the Sir Knights of Lawton.⁷ As one enters the asylum they will notice a large shadow box hanging in the antechamber that contains what appears to

be a rather non-descript sword of Nebraska regulation, some letters, a photo, and two brass plaques. On closer inspection, the curious will find that this particular sword bears the name of one of this nation's great military heroes, General John



John J. Pershing's Knight Templar Sword.
Photo courtesy of Sir Knight Trasen S. Akers

J. Pershing. It is only fitting that such a memento would be deposited in a locale steeped in military history.

Pershing was born in Missouri in 1860 and had the privilege of growing up in an era of some of America's greatest generals.⁸ He graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1886 where his classmates recognized that he possessed a rare quality of leadership. Upon graduation, Pershing was assigned to the 6th U.S. Cavalry and sent to Fort Bayard, New Mexico. In 1891 he reported to the University of Nebraska to serve as Professor of Military Science and Tactics.⁹ Pershing had previously taken the degrees of Freemasonry in December of 1888 in Lincoln Lodge No. 19 of Lincoln, Nebraska. It was while posted at the University of Nebraska that he was exalted in Lincoln Chapter No. 6 on March 28, 1894, and was dubbed and created a Knight of the Temple on December 3, 1894, in Mt. Moriah Commandery No. 4.¹⁰

After serving in Cuba in 1898, Pershing left for Manila to fight the Moros. It was while in Cuba that Lieutenant Pershing earned a Silver Citation Star for his Spanish Campaign Medal; the Silver

Star Medal was not yet in existence. For his service in the Philippines, then Captain Pershing was recommended for promotion to Brigadier General.¹¹ The system of awards and decorations in the military was still in its infancy and brevet promotions for outstanding service were still very much a part of the American military.¹² His military career also brought Pershing to Oklahoma City for a short time as Assistant Chief of Staff of the Southwest Division in 1904. Pershing would go on to serve as Commander of the American Expeditionary Force in WWI and Army Chief of Staff in 1921. He even visited Oklahoma members of the newly formed 45th Infantry Division at Camp Wolf adjacent to Fort Sill shortly before his retirement.¹³ Pershing held the rank of General of the Armies when he retired in 1924, thus making him the only person to be bestowed that rank while living.¹⁴

One never knows what may await them in the archives of the various Masonic Bodies across the land; some truly contain hidden treasures. Even if that stack of papers in the back room does not yield up that rare signature or those

rusty old swords in the armory do not bear a notable name, the fellowship is always well worth the distance traveled and a treasure unto itself.

Special thanks are owed to Sir Knight Bob Stalnaker and the Sir Knights of Lawton Commandery No. 18 for preserving this unique piece of history.



General of the Armies John J. Pershing

End Notes

¹ Norman Lodge No. 5 AF&AM, Tyler's Register, 1898 – 1901, Private Collection, Norman Lodge No. 38, Norman, Oklahoma.

² "Fort Sill," Oklahoma Historical Society's Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/f/fo038.html>>, Accessed 6 April 2011.

³ *The Oklahoma Consistory* (January 1918), Vol. 3, No. 1.

⁴ Fort Sill Masonic Club, Memorial Plaque, Post Chapel, Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

⁵ Ewell Lewis Head, Photos, 1897 – 1936, Private Collection, David Greenshields, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

⁶ Robert G. Davis and James T. Tresner II, *Indians, Cowboys, Cornerstones, and Charities: A Centennial Celebration of Freemasonry in Oklahoma* (Guthrie: The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the State of Oklahoma Library and Museum, 2009), 156 – 161.

⁷ Department of the Army, *Official Army Register*: January 1951 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951), Vol. 1: 514.

⁸ William R. Denslow, *10,000 Famous Freemasons* (Richmond: Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., 1957), Vol. 3: 331.

⁹ "John Joseph Pershing, General of the Armies," Arlington National Cemetery Website, <<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/johnjose.htm>>, Accessed 6 April 2011.

¹⁰ Denslow, 331.

¹¹ "John Joseph Pershing, General of the Armies."

¹² William W. Savage, Jr., Class Lecture Notes, U.S. Military History to 1902, University of Oklahoma, Fall, 2005.

¹³ Larry Johnson, *Historic Photos of Oklahoma* (Nashville: Turner Publishing Co., 2009), 105.

¹⁴ "John Joseph Pershing, General of the Armies."

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