

GRAND COMMANDERY OF GEORGIA  
KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

*“Sword and Banner”*

Official Newsletter

In Hoc Signo Vinces

**JANUARY 2026**

Sir Knight  
**Daniel C. Ricketts, KCT**  
Grand Commander



**FIFTY YEARS**

By. PREGC (Hon.) JOE TURNER



It is 1972 , I am twenty four years old and fixing to graduate from night school at Georgia State University. Freemasonry was the farthest thing from my mind. I saw how much time Daddy spent going and coaching and I said NOT me. I am working for an insurance company in Atlanta and a drug store in Hampton. I come home one evening and my boss at the drugstore hands me a lodge petition and says sign this. I said I don't want to, he said that wasn't the question, so I reluctantly signed it. He said we are going to read that for your Daddy's birthday on July 30. They read it on Friday night July 28, 1972. Daddy was excited, me however, not very much! In October, I was raised and by

then I was in Mercer Pharmacy School in Atlanta. That was a short lived career; in the Fall of 1973, I was taking biochemistry, and the instructor said we were going to learn the chemical structures of all the sugars. I told him no customer at the drugstore had ever asked for that silly information, all they wanted to know was how much was their 30 Valium. So the hard headed one withdrew from school on October 25, 1973 and went back to the insurance company.

I had no lodge station in 1973, but in 1974, the lodge decided I needed to be the Senior Deacon, whatever that was. So I did that for a year and then the lodge jumped me to Senior Warden for 1975. The Worship Master had a major heart attack in January or February and was out most of the year, and I served as acting master most of that year. Then in 1976, I served as the real Master. During those couple of years, I got to meet and get to know many of the Past Grand Masters and current Grand Lodge officers, Hooper, Bullock, Pope, Barrineau, Moseley, Lester, Whitlock, Knowles, etc. In 1983 I was District Deputy to Grand Master Charles Knowles (there were only three DDGMs in the Sixth District and 36 lodges) and Worshipful Master of the Sixth District Masonic Convention.

It is now 2026 and a different lodge wants to give me a chance to open govern and close. Maybe I will get it right this time.

In August 1974, I joined the Eastern Star. I am unsure what the reason was, but I am still there. I also joined the Scottish Rite in October, 1974 in a two and a half day class that started at 5:00PM on Thursday. They gave you a sandwich and coffee at 6:00PM and continued until 9:30PM. On Friday there was breakfast? at 7:00PM and degree work till 9:00PM. Same thing on Saturday till 8:00PM. They conferred the 4, 6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 26, 30, 31 and 32 degrees. This was back in the days when the active degree ritualists and most of the members were not York Rite Members and certainly not active if they were.

Several of my lodge members convinced several of us to join the York Rite in 1975. You can get the Chapter degrees in September in Griffin.. Really??? So on Wednesday, September 24, 1975, at the Twenty Ninth Annual Session of the Sixth District Royal Arch Convention at 2:00PM, I joined. The business took about two hours and the degree work was scheduled to start at 4:00PM. Back in that day, there were 9 chapters in the district that stretched from Monticello to Fayetteville and south to Macon and Thomaston. Almost every chapter could confer at least one degree and several



could do all four at the drop of a hat. On this particular day, Worthville is doing the Mark, Fayetteville is doing the Past, Macon is doing the Most Excellent and Griffin is doing the Royal Arch at 7:00PM. They have assistance if need be: Willie Hammond, Buck Holcomb, Sheffield Thompson and others I am sure. The Grand High Priest Lewis Lester and several Grand Chapter officers were there. If you were a Grand Chapter officer in 1975, you were told it was necessary for you to attend all twelve Royal Arch District Conventions. Not so much so any more.

During the Royal Arch Degree, we like Moses, were told to remove thy sandals, because the place where thou standest is holy ground. The river route from Babylon by way of Anath, Tadmor and Damascus was a lot hotter than it should have been for September weather. Even the Euphrates was ice cold! We finally arrived at Jerusalem and there was discussion about having to remake the trip. I don't know why you would want to make that second trip.

The Griffin York Rite bodies met in the Masonic Temple in downtown Griffin at the intersection of Hill and Solomon Streets and it was an old three story building with Meridian Sun Lodge and the York Rite bodies being on the third floor of course. There was no elevator, but many many steps to climb. In May of 1980, the Secretary resigned because they took a candidate to Thomaston without the proper paperwork and I was elected Secretary. Pythagoras Chapter had 300 members then and four or five Secretaries in four or five years. What a mess. In 1982, I served as High Priest and Secretary. When I became Secretary, whatever the fee was for the chapter degrees included the council degrees at no further charge. I think the dues then were \$4.00 for the chapter and \$2.00 for the council and I finally got them raised to \$6.00 and \$4.00 with a lot of whining.

After being elected as High Priest, I drove to Jim Stanley's office at the Dekalb Police center and told him since he was going to be Grand High Priest in April, he needed to appoint me as his District Deputy for the Sixth District, because the one who held the office had never been seen at any chapter in the district except his own. He did so and then I had the nine chapters to visit. There was only one District Deputy in most districts then.

I joined Griffin Commandery in October, 1975 and again met some active Sir Knights including Hammond and Holcomb and Thompson again. The council degrees were not required then, but I wanted them too so I had to wait till March, 1976 to get them and then I had to go to Douglasville to get them. Of course Hammond and Holcomb and Thompson are there too. They sure go to a lot of meetings. Bill Hutcheson, Bill Hall and Joe Suttles did too, as I would find out a little later.

By the mid or late 1980's I was on the state degree team and spent a lot of time going to a lot of places with John Perry and Ruben Martinez and Willie Hammond and others doing one day festivals. Rufus

Johnson, PGHP and PGC, could cause a one day class to happen in Albany about every month, cause he was big in the Shrine and needed new members. You had to belong to York Rite or Scottish Rite then to join the Shrine. We would leave at dark thirty to get to Albany about 730PM maybe, and somebody from Albany would come let us in and they would leave. Somebody from Albany would show up around lunch with bread and mystery meat , clean up the few dishes and tell us to be sure and turn the lights out when we left. There was NEVER anybody from Albany that came or participated (Rufus belonged in Fitzgerald) and all them new members were going in the Albany York Rite Bodies. Rufus loved to do the Order of the Temple and he used the same thing for all the libations and sometimes he was hard to understand up in the Order. But we loved him anyway. Finally Leon Lee got active down there and then his son Sam and they helped a lot.

We had two events that happened back then that stick out, and fortunately the Grand Masters back then might have been a little more forgiving then than maybe now. We were doing a one day in downtown Valdosta before they moved to the new location. The Grand Lodge of Georgia had withdrawn recognition of Idaho because Idaho and Washington State had some disagreement over some Prince Hall matter between them, and we didn't have no dog in that squabble 2500 miles away, but we just had to get in it. Valdosta has a military base and soldiers came, stayed and went. Yep, you guessed it. one of the candidates belonged to an Idaho lodge. We continued on with him in the class and when we got home, somebody on the degree team called the Grand Master and told him and he said you boys ought to be a little more careful. No ranting and raving, no charges for being stupid, etc



The second event happened some times later after that one and we were back in Albany doing a one day. We were fixing to confer the Royal Arch degree and I was going to confer it or do the Captain of the Host. So I asked if any body belonged to Idaho. Nobody did. So I asked if every body had been in the lodge at least six months or had stood proficiency on the Masters degree. This ol boy in the second row said” I was just raised last night” We continued on down the road with him too. And later somebody again called the Grand Master, might have been the same one or a different one, and got the same request to be a little more careful in the future. And we tried to be, but sometimes the candidate investigations were non existent or weak at best.

When I was elected Captain General in Griffin Commandery in 1981, Gene Turner was Generalissimo and Sammy Turner was Commander and O. B. Turner who had just served as Grand Tyler of the Grand Lodge was probably Treasurer. The commandery was in good hands. Also during those years Grand Encampment required every local commandery in its Jurisdiction, every state, to meet on Good Friday every year and hold their election. Kinda glad we don't do that anymore.

I was finally elected Grand High Priest in April 1995. We had 107 chartered chapters and 15,000 Royal Arch Masons. Buford Brand who had lived in Savannah but had moved to McCaysville was elected Illustrious Grand Master. Lloyd Odom would soon be elected Grand Commander from Fort Valley. Each Grand presiding officer and his local body was responsible for his Grand Family reception or whatever, if there was to be one. Thanks to my wife and some local Hampton ladies we had a humdinger at the Methodist Church in Hampton. Many people came, but one person I had never met and who I really wanted to come surprised every body and came. Jimmy Head, who had served as Grand High Priest in 1965 but had been inactive for at least fifteen or more years because of his wife's illness came. His wife died and he got back active and was serving as Commander of Griffin Commandery when he died in March of 1999. We were good friends those four years and he kept saying, along with others, these one day festivals are going to kill the York Rite because soon there wont be a handful of folks who can do degree work. Do you reckon??

Back in those days The Grand Chapter and Grand Council met in Macon together in April for their annual convocation and assembly. One of the things they did at the annual meetings was to appoint Grand Representatives to a state or jurisdiction. That gave a lot of people a title. I was appointed Grand Representative to Ohio in 1999 for the chapter. North Carolina in 2008 for the council, and Oklahoma in 2004 for the commandery. I am the last person to hold these positions because Georgia and most states don't do them anymore.

The Grand Commandery was different. It met in May at wherever the Grand Commander lived and belonged. Two or three times it met at the Georgia Baptist Conference Center on Lake Louise at Toccoa. That was an experience. The rooms had no locks on the doors and no TVs in the rooms, but the food was pretty good. Finally about 2001, with Jim Moseley out of the Grand Secretary's office after thirty five years of loyal service, the leaders adopted legislation to meet together in Macon for a combined three day meeting. One



day for each body including the chair degree and the installation of its officers. Everybody looked forward to the commandery day and the religious service at the Presbyterian Church down the street from the Grand Chapter Building. Sir Knights in uniform marching into the church with chapeaux but no swords. And then the meal at the church.

One of the most important Grand Commandery sessions held during my Fifty years was the 126th annual conclave in May, 1987 with Sir Knight Joe Sutles presiding as Grand Commander. At 3:47 PM on May 13, 1987, the Grand Junior Warden, Horace Whitlock announced to those in attendance that Georgia had just become the FIRST STATE in Grand Encampment to have every member in Georgia a Life Sponsor in the Knights Templar Eye Foundation. That took a lot of hard work and donations from a lot of places. Georgia contributed \$126, 571.85 during that 19 th Voluntary Campaign. Donald H. Smith, the Grand Master of Grand Encampment was present to witness this historic event.

In 1990, the Mollie S. Mosely Foundation Trust, Inc., a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation was formed to generate, acquire, and administer funds and properties, and a lot of our Knights Templar Eye Foundation, Inc. donations now go to this fund which is administered here. That's probably a good thing.

In my Fifty years, I have seen a lot, done a little, and had opportunities that some other folks didn't have. I got to meet and know Past Grand presiding officers in all four masonic bodies, some as far back as the late 1940s. Nobody has those opportunities today. There is only 1 Past Grand Master before 1990 and many of you have never met him. Only 1 Past Grand High Priest before 1990, only 2 Past illustrious Grand Masters before 1990, and only 2 Past Grand Commanders before 2000. I also got to know and work with almost every Grand presiding officer in all four bodies since I joined and their friendship has been a blessing indeed!!!!!!!!!!

When I became a mason in 1972, the ONLY honorary appendant bodies in Georgia were the KYCH bodies in Macon and Atlanta, the Red Cross of Constantine in Atlanta, Savannah Albany and Macon and the HRAKTP in Macon. We did have the Shrine, the Jesters and the Grotto that you might join or get invited to. Now we have a plethora of honorary invitational bodies that you can get invited to and spend just about every weekend at a meeting. I know; I am in some of those and enjoy them.

Sadly in these Fifty years, I have also seen the loss of many members and the consolidation of many of our masonic bodies. Such is life, but carry on, we must.



## **UPCOMING IMPORTANT DATES**

**April 18 - Grand Master's York Rite Class**

**7:30 AM Grand Chapter Building, Macon, GA**

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**May 1-2 - Grand York Rite Bodies of Georgie Annual  
Communication**

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**JUNE 12-23 - Southeastern York Rite**



SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL YORK RITE FESTIVAL

# MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER'S CLASS

APRIL 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Grand Chapter Building  
811 Mulberry Street  
Macon, GA 31201

CLASS HELD IN HONOR OF OUR PRESIDING OFFICERS

- ◆ *Most Worshipful Grand Master William F. Shepard*
- ◆ *Most Excellent Grand High Priest Joseph F. Oelgoetz*
  - ◆ *Most Illustrious Grand Master John C. Miller*
  - ◆ *Right Eminent Grand Commander Daniel C. Ricketts*

ALL DEGREES & ORDERS OF THE YORK RITE WILL BE CONFERRED

- ◆ *Pre-Registration Requested*
- ◆ *Registration Fee: \$20.00 for All*
- ◆ *Registration: 6:30 AM – 7:30 AM*
- ◆ *Work Begins Promptly at 7:30 AM*



Scan To Register

## THE YORK RITE

◆ *Your Path to "Pure Ancient Masonry"* ◆

For more information contact John Flener [jtflener1@gmail.com](mailto:jtflener1@gmail.com) 229-425-8770

PETITIONS FOR THE YORK RITE AND TO FIND YOUR NEAREST CHAPTER / COUNCIL / COMMANDERY  
VISIT [YORKRITEOFGA.ORG](http://YORKRITEOFGA.ORG)

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PAST  
MASTER

MOST  
EXCELLENT  
MASTER

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CRYPTIC  
DEGREES

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MASTER

SELECT  
MASTER

SUPER  
EXCELLENT  
MASTER

CHIVALRIC  
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ILLUSTRIOUS  
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