

A
CAPSULE CHRONICLE
OF
TEMPLARY

A condensation of the Templar background by

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Introduction to Original Printing

If you are a new member of our Order, I extend to you a hearty welcome to Templary. If you are already a Knight Templar, I express my official greetings and good wishes.

And to both new and present Sir Knights and to Templar friends and prospective Knights, I offer the suggestion that this condensation of the background of our Order may prove helpful and informative. It was not designed to be a detailed study of our history, (there are many volumes of research and in-depth accounts available) but, rather, a synopsis to acquaint or re-acquaint you with our origin and our present status as the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America.

It was written by our Grand Recorder, Sir Knight Paul Rodenhauer, to present a generalized summary of our Order, to "make a long story short," and to give each of us a source of quick reference about the background of Christian Masonry.

It is made available, at no cost, as another service from your Grand Encampment.

G. Wilbur Bell

Grand Master

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KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE – FOUNDED 1118

Many are the historical accounts of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Jesus Christ, or Knights of the Temple – or, more commonly, Knights Templar. Even more numerous are the histories of the Crusades, mostly factual but some of them leavened with fiction.

This is an informal commentary on highlights of the two subjects. They are intertwined because Christian fervor of the 11th century and the Crusades which grew from that fervor form the background of the original Knights Templar.

If you stop to think about it, I believe you will agree that the most remarkable thing was the spontaneous decision throughout Europe and England – an overwhelming commitment by diverse peoples, of different languages, of different customs, different dress and manners – to wage a "Holy War" against the Moslems, take Jerusalem from their hands and make it a Christian possession. Without newspapers, without radio or television, this spirit of Christian unification swept the land and brought about the Crusades.

There was a personal as well as a spiritual reason for enlisting under the banner of the Cross to do battle against the Infidels. These Christians, some recently weaned from paganism, needed physical evidence to bolster their faith. They needed reassurance – to touch, to inspect; they needed to visit in person and examine with their own eyes the relics in the city made sacred by the presence of Christ a thousand years earlier. For those Christians, the pinnacle of religious accomplishment was a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

This city so revered by these 11th century Christians was in the possession of the Moslems, followers of Mohammed, and they quite matched the Christians in fanaticism. And although many pilgrims made the arduous journey to Jerusalem without serious harm, large numbers of others never reached that shrine – and of those who did, some never returned. Harassment, robbery and murder grew as the century progressed. Then, seemingly in one simultaneous upheaval of spiritual indignation, this mixture of people – made up of weavers and scholars, farmers and wives, bishops and soldiers, freemen and serfs – united in a Crusade to seize the Holy Land from the Saracen.

This they did. On July 15, 1099, the First Crusade brought about the fall of Jerusalem. As Historian C. G. Addison says in his 1842 account: "The Holy City, half a mile square, flowed with the blood of its defenders. Its streets – only lanes in width as compared with those of modern cities, for such is the Oriental manner – were piled with their bodies."

The battle was savage. Neither sex nor age was considered. No quarter was given. The brutality of that day was a characteristic of the whole succession of religious wars – practiced alike by those who fought under the banner of the Cross and those who battled under the sign of the Crescent.

Jerusalem fell. The Holy City belonged to the Crusaders and all Christendom rejoiced. In Europe and England, the zeal of pilgrimage soared anew. Crowds of men and women, of boys and girls, pressed forward to the sacred city – only to find that although Jerusalem was in Christian hands, the Moslems still controlled Palestine.

The highways and byways leading to Jerusalem were unprotected. The ferocity of the Moslems seemed to increase with the fall of the city, and mutilated bodies and bleached bones of pilgrims soon became a common sight along the roadways. To add to the vulnerability of the pilgrims, thousands of the Crusaders, their primary objective accomplished, returned to their own lands – leaving the countryside to the Moslems uncontested.

This was the circumstance that set the stage for Templary. A small band of Crusaders remaining after the conquest recognized the plight of the pilgrims and bound themselves in a holy Brotherhood in arms, embracing a solemn compact, as Addison describes it, to aid one another in clearing the highways and in protecting the pilgrims through the passes and defiles of the mountains to the Holy City.

In 1118 A.D., nineteen years after the successful Crusade, these Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Jesus Christ, as they termed themselves, were officially recognized and sanctioned and were given for their headquarters a building on Mount Moriah, the site of the former Temple of King Solomon. Consequently, they became known as the Knights of the Temple, or Knights Templar.

This was the era of chivalric ascendancy. Much as outstanding athletes receive the hero-worship and admiration of the public today, so did those Knights of old capture the hearts – and the wealth – of the public of their period. Their fame spread like wildfire. Rulers hastened to be identified with Knights Templar and to present gold and property to the Order.

King Richard the Lion-Hearted was a prime example of the attraction exerted by the Crusader Knights. As Winston Churchill wrote in his *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, "This task seemed made for him. It appealed to every need of his nature . . . to charge as a king at the head of knightly squadrons in a cause at once glorious to man and especially acceptable to God . . ." Richard in a reign of 10 years spent only a few months in England. This did little for his country, except impoverish it, but it did illustrate the appeal of the knightly

warfare in the near East.

It is a matter of history that the warriors who fought for Christianity as Knights Templar had their vicissitudes – with more downs than ups on the battlefield through the centuries. However, their wealth and their prestige remained undiminished. On the contrary their treasury became too large to escape the notice of some financially embarrassed rulers – especially Philip the Fair of France.

He with Pope Clement (whom Philip pretty well influenced) arranged for a Convocation of the Grand Master of Knights Templar, Jacques DeMolay, and his officers at Paris. It was this Grand Master's dedication and integrity that influenced the members of the Frank S. Land movement, six centuries later, to adopt the name, DeMolay, for their Order.

The Convocation was held, but Grand Master DeMolay and his officers never left – at least not with their lives. In 1314 Jacques DeMolay was burned at the stake for alleged heresy and dozens of other accusations; all Knight Templar wealth was seized, and Templary “moved underground.”

Some have written that after the death of Grand Master DeMolay there was an unbroken succession of Grand Masters and a constant Templar organization without a lapse. This is difficult to believe and it is even more difficult to read the many treatises written to support or disprove the theory.

To simplify the story without attempting to elaborate or quote various researchers, all we know is that when Templary emerged in the early 1700's it was a part of Freemasonry. It exists today as the top ranking Order in the York Rite – the branch of the family that requires membership in a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons – and, in some jurisdictions, membership in a Council of Royal and Select Masters.

The Chapters and Councils are identified with, and their ritualistic work based upon, the Old Testament. In Templary, the transition is made from the Old to the New Testament – to Christian belief and practice, to symbolic emulation of the sacrificial spirit of the Knights of the Temple when they took their solemn vow more than eight and a half centuries ago.

There are two major roads to Masonic teaching after the Symbolic (or Blue) Lodge – the York Rite and the Scottish Rite. The York Rite is the older and, as noted, is climaxed by the Order of Christian Knighthood. The governing Knight Templar body is the sovereign Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the U.S.A. There are similar governing bodies, usually called Pories, of Knights Templar in Canada, in England and

Wales, in Scotland, and in Switzerland. The Scottish Rite – divided into two sovereign Supreme Councils in the United States, the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction and the Southern Jurisdiction – has Degrees identified by numbers. The York Rite Degrees and Orders are designated by name.

In the United States history records that Templary was a Masonic Degree or Order shortly after the middle of the 18th century. Paul Revere was a Knight Templar, by the way – so were numerous others of our nation's founding fathers.

In 1816, the various individual bodies of Templars – after some years of effort toward this goal – met in New York City to band themselves together under a sovereign national administration, the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America. Later the "General" was omitted and the sovereign body became the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the U.S.A.

Dewitt Clinton, of Erie Canal fame – a leading statesman and administrator – became the first Grand Master. He served until his death in 1828. A number of leaders followed thru the intervening period of more than a century and a half – some of national fame – all motivated by a praiseworthy dedication to Christian Masonry. Templary survived the anti-Masonic period in the 19th century – it survived the Civil War, when Brother fought Brother and Knight Templar fought Knight Templar with equal belief in the justice of their cause. It prospered generation after generation, thru booms and depressions, from the days of the stagecoach and the canal barge to the age of space travel.

It is a neighborhood type of Masonry. You find the Commanderies of Knights Templar – 1600 of them – in communities throughout the nation – and beyond. They are bodies which help to support the Masonic Temple in your home towns. They meet in those Temples and their dues and assessments (with those from other bodies) help keep the Temples in repair for meetings of Symbolic Lodges – and, in many instances, for other groups such as DeMolay Chapters.

Christian fraternalism has its cycles. It waxes and wanes but never disappears. Directly or indirectly, it makes its views and influences felt in towns and cities, and in civic organizations, throughout the country.

From a depression membership of 240,000 in the 1930's, the Grand Encampment now has in its jurisdiction some 340,000 Christian Masons.

It will continue to advance. If you will pardon the paraphrase, **TEMPLARY IS ON THE GROW.**