

Warren LaRue Thomas, 17th Grand Master of the Grand Encampment (Ninth in a series on our Grand Masters)

By

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Warren LaRue Thomas was born in Elizabethtown, Hardin County, Kentucky on January 25, 1845, and was the first of seven children born to Joseph Hardin Thomas (1818-1900) and Amanda (La Rue) Thomas (1824-1897). When he was fifteen years old, his father, who was a mail delivery contractor, moved the family to Danville, Kentucky. Warren received his education in the public schools and attended Centre College in Danville, joining Alpha Kappa Phi fraternity there in 1863 and graduating with honors in 1865. In 1866 he married Mollie Wardroper (1845-After 1914) of Woodford County, Kentucky.

He engaged for a few years in merchandising but in 1873 went into the life insurance business. In 1886 he moved to Louisville and was connected with the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and worked exclusively in Kentucky. He later became an agent of a New York company for the states of Kentucky and Tennessee.

As soon as he became of age, he petitioned the Masonic order for membership and was made a Master Mason in

Hopkinsville Lodge No. 67 in Hopkinsville, Kentucky in 1867. In 1869 he became a member of Franklin Lodge No. 28 in Danville and was Worshipful Master there in 1874. He was High Priest of Franklin Chapter No. 22, Royal Arch Masons at Danville in 1878 and was Illustrious Master of Danville Council No.

48, Royal and Select Masters in 1877 and was that same year elected Most Illustrious Grand Master of the Grand Council of Kentucky. Progressing through the Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter lines, he was elected Grand Master of Masons in Kentucky in 1880 and was elected Grand High Priest of the Grand Chapter that year as well.

In October of 1872, he received the Knight Templar Orders in DeMolay Commandery No. 12 in Louisville, Kentucky. In February of 1873, he assisted at the formation of Ryan Commandery No. 17 in his hometown of Danville and was the first Captain General of that Commandery, afterward holding the office of Eminent Commander for two years. In 1874 he was elected Grand Senior Warden of the Grand Commandery of Kentucky and



was elected Grand Commander in 1878. In 1874 he attended the Conclave of the Grand Encampment in New Orleans as proxy of the Grand Commander of Kentucky and in 1880 at the Triennial Conclave held in Chicago was elected Grand Jr. Warden and progressed through the Grand Encampment line, being elected Grand Master in 1895 at the 26th Triennial Conclave held in Boston.

At this Conclave, work was resumed where it had been left at Boston. The amendments and revisions to the *Constitution* proposed at Boston were taken up and largely completed here. One of the most important of the new regulations adopted in the light of later events was "Section I, Title XXXV, Non-affiliation," which read as follows: "*Hereafter voluntary non-affiliation in Lodge or Chapter for six months shall deprive a Knight Templar of his membership in the Commandery.*" This proved to be one of the most difficult rules ever framed. In Pittsburgh, as at Boston, the Conclave and its attendant ceremony and pageant proved to be a great attraction.

This display of Templary's power, beauty, and discipline was no less important and effective in its own way than the deliberative, legislative, and judicial work of the Grand Encampment itself. Templary was increasing by thousands and tens of thousands throughout the United States. New members were gained, new Commanderies were formed in the old States already part of Templary, and the remaining States and Territories of the Union were rapidly coming into line.

Previous to the Boston Conclave, Arizona had organized a Grand Commandery in 1893, and just before the sessions opened in 1895, Florida completed the

organization of its Grand Commandery. Then in the Triennial Period following, Indian Territory (1895), the District of Columbia (1896), and Oklahoma Territory (1896) completed the preliminaries of organization of their respective Grand Commanderies so that they were ready to receive charters at Pittsburgh in 1898. This now brought the total number of Grand Commanderies to forty-three, so that, excluding Alaska, and reducing the Indian and Oklahoma Territories to one State (done later), there remained at that time only seven States or Territories out of forty-nine which had no Grand Commanderies of their own. Remembering that Massachusetts and Rhode Island had one in common, this left but six in which such a result was desirable.

Other Masonic memberships of Most Eminent Sir Knight Thomas include receiving the 32° of the Scottish Rite in Louisville in October, 1877, and being coroneted a 33° Sovereign Grand Inspector General Honorary on January 23, 1889. He was also a member of Kosair Temple of the Shrine, located in Louisville.

In 1896, he ran for Congressional Representative for the Maysville district as a Democrat but was not elected. Possibly for health reasons, he and his wife moved to Tucson, Arizona later in life, and he died there on November 23, 1914. Excerpts from his obituary read as follows: "*Warren LaRue Thomas, formerly a leading citizen of Maysville, died at his home in Tucson, Arizona, at 6 p.m. last Monday...(the news) was received with sincere regret by the scores of friends who valued his magnetic acquaintance. He is survived by his wife but no children....No arrangements have been given out, as yet, as to his burial but that his remains will be brought to*

Kentucky for final interment."

He was originally interred in Bellvue Cemetery in Danville on November 30, 1914, but cemetery records state that his body was later exhumed on October 19, 1916, and removed to Russellville, Kentucky. Further research and information beyond this has proven unsuccessful.

MEPGM Thomas' feelings upon being elected Grand Master were fittingly

expressed in the closing lines of his acceptance speech:

"I shall do all in my power that the order may sustain the proud position it has achieved. At the end of three years, if I can have as my reward 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' then, and not till then, will the height of my Masonic ambition be reached. Then will my cup of joy overflow."

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Right Eminent Sir Knight Marshall, KYGCH(3), KCT, 33°, is a Past Grand Commander of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Alabama. He is a member of the Editorial Review Board of the *Knight Templar* magazine and has published several articles in that magazine as well as in the *Royal Arch Mason* magazine. He can be reached at geomarsh@yahoo.com.

"Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But then I repeat myself." -- Mark Twain

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