



THE GRAND COMMANDERY OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SEPTEMBER 2023 NEWS

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Gentlemen, Sir Knights, Brethren,

As Masonic Knights Templar we are heirs to an especially impressive, important and dare I say righteous legacy. The original Knights Templar or The Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon were an institution that not only defended the Christian faith in every way they knew how but who also were dynamic in the principals they introduced to European society. They had an extremely rigorous Rule of Conduct that most of us could not and would not wish to take on. They were very brave and while living austere, quiet monastic lives in their presbyteries, preceptories and commanderies, continuously trained for battle. A Templar Knight was expected to be able to overcome any three opponents. Beyond attention to the Rule, and observance of Holy Rites, brotherhood was foremost. What we gained from them most was something all society benefits from now. We all know a bit about it from our lives in Masonry, the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. These sacred principles they introduced to all of our society.

The Templars received as their own great properties all over Europe from the many nobles that joined them. If you were born to a wealthy family and wanted to become a Templar, you would give over to the Order titles to properties you owned or were to inherit. This included farms, mills, bakeries, fisheries, smitheries, armories, mansions, and castles. The majority of serfdom owned little. Great lords commanded towns and villages as fiefdoms. Because all of the people thought so highly of the Order, even barons and dukes who had no sons to offer the Order would donate much of what they had to the Temple.

Consequently, the Temple became the owners of much of the lands, properties, and businesses in Europe, especially in France, Great Britain, Spain and what would become Portugal. They became administrators of those properties. They also had holdings in further climes like Norway, Cypress, and those in Outremer, The Holy Land.

You may be familiar with the Order's history in the Middle East from Christmas 1118 AD until the fall of Acre and the end of the crusades. What follows is a brief overview of their demise. In the late summer of 1307 King Philip the 4th of France, or Philip the Fair as he was known, was providing a *sumptuous feast for his daughter Isabella who was to marry Edward II of England the following year. Jacques De Molay was her godfather and was honored with a wedding invitation, perhaps to lower the Grand Master's guard. De Molay and Grand Master of the Hospitallers Foulques De Villaret had traveled to Poitiers at the behest of the Pope who was in favor of officially merging the Temple and the Hospital or the Order of St. John of Jerusalem AKA the Knights of Malta. There was little to recommend another crusade, but Grand Master De Molay wanted both the King and the Pope to hear his case. He was concerned that if the Temple had no Military function overseas that they would become no more than landlocked Barons overseeing domestic business matters.*

The king asked to be made an honorary Templar. He also wanted the Orders merged. His goal was twofold. If the King was a member of a merged Order, he might seek the Pope's blessing to become the War King. His coffers were running low and having seen the treasure in the Paris Temple it was more than likely he wanted unrestricted access to the gold, silver, and jewels from the Temple's vaults.

Sometime before the dreaded day of Friday October the 13th, 1307 sealed orders were sent out to the offices of France's gen d'armes to be opened that fateful morning. Upon opening the king's orders officials were informed they were to round up all the Templars in France. Many were found, arrested, and imprisoned on charges ranging from accusations employed for prosecution of witches to others including worship of cats, and of a head or heads, and a triple headed skull, and bearded head some have suggested was the head of John the Baptist. The heads were significant in that they supposedly communicated with the Knights, told them secrets that gave them unfair advantage over others; that the heads blessed the Templars with health and wealth, victory in battle; and endowed their fields with rich harvests and making their garden's flowers bloom. The heads supposedly represented Baphomet, a demon that the author Eliphas Levi made famous again, ascribing the name to a gargoyle he found on a church. Why Levi thought the gargoyle shared the name of the supposed daemon of the Templars is not clear. Baphomet is the word arrived upon when the Atbash Cipher Templars used is applied to the name Sophia, which can be taken to mean Goddess of Wisdom.

Six hundred Templars were arrested and imprisoned, the main charge leveled at them being Heresy. They were accused of having secret rituals which were perversions of the Holy Rites of the Catholic Church, the church they were supposed to be servants of. The trials the Templars endured were biased against them in the extreme. Eventually all imprisoned Templars relented to the cruel inhuman tortures they suffered, rivaled in Western memory only by Crucifixions under Roman rule and the later Inquisitions of the Dominicans. They confessed to the charges levels at them in hopes of ending the merciless torture, and perhaps to render the king complacent and unprepared for what came next. Although the Pope absolved them of heresy in 1308, in 1312 the Order was officially dissolved. In 1314 The Grand Master and the Preceptor of Normandy recanted their confessions and were burnt at the stake. From the pyre Grand Master De Molay issued a curse upon the King and the Pope; both were to meet with him before the Judgement Seat of God within one year. A year later Philip the Fair and Clement the 5th were dead.

Many Templars fled, escaping France. Philip went to the Paris Preceptory to plunder its riches but found none there. Seventeen galleys departed from Marseilles before dawn on Friday the 13th. It is unclear where some were bound but some went to Scotland where they were accepted with open arms. The knights became the Order of Andrew, and the sergeants, builders and tradesmen became operative masons, beginning the transformation from stonecutters and bricklayers to Speculative Masons, our fraternity's forbears. On St. John's Day 1314 Templars helped Robert the Bruce's forces win the Battle of Bannockburn against King Edward II and his Shilton's. In Portugal, the Order was renamed The Order of Christ. Portugal became a Templar stronghold. To this day in Tomar Patee Crosses decorate the sidewalks. I have heard the name Portugal comes from the phrase Port du Grails. Quebec and Switzerland are Knights Templar legacies. Montreal was to be a New Jerusalem where all could live in harmony. The Templars were great administrators and their safe passage to the Holy Land bore the seeds of their becoming the world's first banking institution. As the Swiss they are still the world's most successful bankers.