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Grand Commandery of Delaware



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State News for September/October 2023

Greeting my Fraters!

It seems that the heat of the summer is finally behind us, and cooler weather prevails. Autumn is always my favorite time of year – frosty mornings, the magnificence of mother Nature as she paints the trees red, yellow, gold and brown, sitting around a bonfire, or just enjoying time sitting in a hunting stand. I always said if I could find a state that had autumn year-round, I would be home.

As the Masonic year is now upon us, let us not forget to manage those calendars! This is of utmost importance, as I know, we all are pulled in many, many directions. It's hard to manage all the invites and requirements of the many offices many of us hold. You are not going to make every meeting or get-together, but do what you can do within the length of your cable tow.

I just attended the Grand Master of Delaware's Ball, followed by the annual sessions. Delaware continues its excellence in the Grand Staff elections and appointments and I always look forward to working with them. Congratulations to the newest Most Worshipful Grand Master of Delaware, Ron Ferraro, and many thanks to the Past Most Worshipful Grand Master Steve Tucker for your support of York Rite Masonry.

A few weeks ago I attended the Mid-Atlantic Conference for the Grand Encampment. Lots of good information was disseminated and seeing all of my fellow Grand Commanders was a true joy. Many thanks to Past Grand Commander Randy Mullen for joining the Grand Recorder Mark Irwin (also Past Grand Commander) and myself. It was an interesting weather day too, as a tropical storm was hitting as we were meeting. It was great seeing our Department Commander James Steele up and about, having been in a serious car accident earlier in the year. Our prayers are always with you SK Steele! And many congratulations to our incoming Department Commander, James Austin, outgoing Grand Commander of Maryland. Thank you for all of your support this year and allowing me to just "show up unannounced."

I have still other Grand Visitations lined up, as well as a few drop-ins planned, and I look forward to seeing you all out and about. Don't forget the Multi-Jurisdictional York Rite Assembly coming up 14 October at the Grand Lodge of Maryland in Cockeysville. Delaware is responsible for portraying the Past Master degree under the tutelage of Past Grand High Priest Randall Mullen (currently the Most Illustrious Grand Master of Cryptic Masons in Delaware). I will be there to help in any way possible.

So, here is our history lesson since today is October 13th, a Friday... Founded around 1118 as a monastic military order devoted to the protection of pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land following the Christian capture of Jerusalem during the First Crusade, the Knights Templar quickly became one of the richest and most influential groups of the Middle Ages, thanks to lavish donations from the crowned heads of Europe, eager to curry favor with the fierce Knights. By the turn of the 14th century, the Templars had established a system of castles, churches and banks throughout Western Europe. And it was this astonishing wealth that would lead to their downfall.

For the Templars, that end began in the early morning hours of Friday, October 13, 1307.

A month earlier, secret documents had been sent by couriers throughout France. The papers included lurid details and whispers of black magic and scandalous sexual rituals. They were sent by King Philip IV of France, an avaricious monarch who in the preceding years had launched attacks on the Lombards (a powerful banking group) and France's Jews (who he had expelled so he could confiscate their property for his depleted coffers).

In the days and weeks that followed that fateful Friday, more than 600 Templars were arrested, including Grand Master Jacques de Molay, and the Order's treasurer. But while some of the highest-ranking members were caught up in Philip's net, so too were hundreds of non-warriors; middle-aged men who managed the day-to-day banking and farming activities that kept the organization humming. The men were charged with a wide array of offenses including heresy, devil worship and spitting on the cross, homosexuality, fraud and financial corruption.

The Templars were kept in isolation and fed meager rations that often amounted to just bread and water. Nearly all were brutally tortured. One common practice used by medieval inquisitors was the "strappado," in which the hands of the accused are tied behind their backs, and then suspended in the air by a rope around their wrists, intended to dislocate the shoulders. As Dan Jones notes in his book, *The Templars: The Rise and Spectacular Fall of the Knights Templar*, one of the accused's hands were tied so tightly that blood pooled in his fingertips, and he was kept in a pit no wider than a single footstep. Many of the men were likely stretched on the infamous rack, or had their feet dipped in oil and held over a fire to burn. Given the extreme conditions, it's not surprising that within weeks, hundreds of Templars confessed to false charges, including Jacques de Molay.

Pope Clement V was horrified. Despite the fact that he'd been elected almost solely because of Philip's influence, he feared crossing the extremely popular Templars. The Knights coerced "confessions," however, forced his hands. Philip, who had anticipated Clement's reaction, made sure the allegations against the Templars included detailed descriptions of their supposed heresy, counting on the gossipy, salacious accounts to carry much weight with the Church. Clement issued a papal bull ordering the Western kings to arrest Templars living in their lands. Few followed the papal request, but the fate of the French Templars had already been sealed. Their lands and money were confiscated and officially dispersed to another religious order, the Hospitallers (although greedy Philip did get his hands on some of the cash he'd coveted).

Within weeks of their confessions, many of the Templars recanted, and Clement shut down the inquisition trials in early 1308. The Templars lingered in their cells for two years before Philip had more than 50 of them burned at the stake in 1310. Two years later, Clement formally dissolved the

Order (though he did so without saying they'd been guilty as charged). In the wake of that dissolution, some Templars again confessed to gain their freedom, while others died in captivity.

In the spring of 1314, Grand Master Molay and several other Templars were burned at the stake in Paris, bringing an end to their remarkable era, and launching an even longer-lasting theory about the evil possibilities of Friday the 13th.

So, as the Holy Land is once again in flames, I encourage all of you to embrace your freedom, remember the sacrifices of our forefathers, protect your family, and protect the orphans and widows where-so-ever dispersed. Call and check on each other, and be prepared and vigilant. Pray for peace, but prepare for war.

With that, here's to health and happiness as we move forward into the Autumn months. I look forward to serving you.

DEO VOLENTE

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