

*FROM THE MISTS OF TIME:  
THE HISTORY OF TEMPLAR MASONRY IN VIRGINIA*

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**Early Encampments.** Few of the old records of Templar Masonry in Virginia have survived the ravages of time. There is evidence that there was an Encampment working at Winchester, Virginia, as early as 1812. On March 24, 1816, St. John's Rising Star Encampment was organized in Richmond, Virginia, and received a *Charter of Recognition* and received a regular Charter from the General Grand Encampment on April 10, 1823, though it is recorded in the *1823 Proceedings* of the Grand Encampment of Virginia as May 5, 1823. In the same year, Winchester Encampment issued Charters for the formation of Mt. Carmel Encampment at Mount Carmel (location is not known) and Warren Encampment at Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

**Formation of the Grand Encampment of the State of Virginia & The Period of Organization.** On Thursday, November 27, 1823, an assembly of delegates from several Virginia Encampments of Knights Templar met in the Masons' Hall in Winchester, Virginia, to publish a resolution to establish a Grand Encampment of Sir Knights and the Appendant Orders (Red Cross and Malta) for the State of Virginia. On Friday, November 28, 1823, the resolutions were ratified by the delegates and the Grand Encampment of the State of Virginia was organized around Winchester Encampment No. 1, Warren Encampment No. 2, Mount Carmel Encampment No. 3.

Before the Grand Encampment of Virginia can apply for a regularly constituted Charter, Winchester, Warren, and Mount Carmel Encampments needed to obtain a Charter from the General Grand Encampment. Warren and Winchester did so and received Charters of Recognition on July 4, 1824; Mt. Carmel refused to do so and became extinct. At a Special Assembly of the Grand Encampment on August 11, 1824, in Winchester, Richmond Encampment was advised of the existence of the State Grand Encampment of Virginia and was invited to join, which it did, and the complication was resolved. Thus, the formation of the Grand Encampment of Virginia was healed, and the delegates acknowledged the jurisdiction of the General Grand Encampment of the United States of America and agreed to obey, abide by, keep, and perform all the constitutional laws, rules, and regulations of the General Grand Encampment. Winchester Encampment No. 1, Richmond Encampment No. 2, and Warren Encampment No. 3 were named Subordinate Encampments.

Before 1823, Virginia was a large rural and mountainous area stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The region was transforming from a farm-based economy to a more diversified economy with multiple business interests. Virginia transportation networks were major north-south corridors through the Tidewater, Piedmont, Blue Ridge Valley, and Western Mountainous regions with large distances between communities. The rivers, canals, roads, and railroads served local needs to move people, agricultural, mining, timber, and manufactured goods between farms, towns, and cities; the few east-west roads were used for western migration. With that setting and conditions, the years of 1823 through 1849 were years of formations and disposals, growth and re-organizations, and periods of stagnation for lack of quorums (1832, 1835-1838, 1840-1844).

**Period of Revision, Civil Strife, Reconstruction, and Maturity.** The Period of Revision, Civil Strife, and Reconstruction was about building; it was the turbulent era between 1855 and 1920. From the early history of the United States of America, Templar Masonry had been evolving into a national organization based on the faith-driven precepts of Christianity; and Virginia Sir Knights had been involved in creating a similar Templar state organization since the early 1800's. From United States' Manifest Destiny and its territorial expansion (1812-1860), civil strife from the American Civil War (1861-1865), the Spanish-American War (1898), and World War I (1914-1918), the reconstruction and nation building of the Reconstruction Era (1863-1877) and the Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914), to peace and stability efforts the second half of the 1800's to the early 1900's were characterized by unrest and violence.

From 1856 to 1859 the Grand Encampment oversaw changes in the names of the Grand Bodies and their officers: the General Grand Encampment was changed to the Grand Encampment of the United States; the name of the State Jurisdiction Grand Encampments was changed to Grand Commandery; and the name of Subordinate Encampments was changed to Commandery. The Grand Encampment of Virginia was reorganized into the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Virginia. At 4:30 AM on April 12, 1861, Fort Sumer was fired upon, the Grand Commander notified the Grand Commandery of Virginia was no longer under the jurisdiction of the Grand Encampment on April 27 (which was not recognized by the General Grand Encampment), and Virginia's secession from the Union was ratified on May 23. For obvious reasons, no business of importance was transacted during the War Between the States. From April 1861 to May 1865, two armies had occupied Virginia from beginning to end and battles raged devastating farms and towns along the corridor between Washington and Petersburg, in the heavily contested area of Northern Virginia, and in the Shenandoah Valley. Reconstruction among white Virginians was marred with poverty, disenfranchisement, violent resistance, political opposition, delays causing Virginia not to reconstruct itself in time to participate in the presidential election of 1868.

After the War Between the States some disconcertment among the Sir Knights to withdraw the Grand Encampment continue to manifest from time to time. In 1867 a resolution to that end adopted and again 1869, but there little to attain the desired end, but agitation rose again at the 1870 Stated Assembly when the members of a Committee on Separation made a lengthy oration on why the Grand Commandery of Virginia should be free and independent; the motion was adopted, and again the efforts were for naught. An address by the Grand Commander in 1871 provides some thinking among Grand Commandery leaders when it comes to separation from Grand Encampment: "The Grand Commander is not partial to General Grand Masonic organizations, but Templarism is different. It is a military and Christian institution, requiring a different organization, a central government, one general head, but representative in its charity, by which the sovereignty of each Grand Commandery is secured."

West Virginia seceded from Virginia and was admitted to the Union in 1863 but Grand Commandery of Virginia exercised jurisdiction over Commanderies located in West Virginia. At the Grand Session of Grand Commandery of Virginia a petition was presented from Wheeling Commandery No. 1, Palestine Commandery No. 9, and Star of the West Commandery No. 12 in West Virginia asking the dissolution of their allegiance to that grand body so that they might form a Grand Commandery in West Virginia. That was granted, and on November 21, 1873, the convention was held in Wheeling Commandery, West Virginia, and the delegates sent a petition to the Grand Encampment and on February 25, 1874, the Grand Commandery of West Virginia was chartered.

1874 to 1916 was a period of growth for the Grand Commandery of Virginia. It ushered in a period of peace, prosperity, and harmony throughout Virginian Jurisdiction. Commanderies were duly drilled, inspected, and encamped in solemn form; they were visible in full uniform escorting Grand Lodge and Symbolic Lodge Cornerstone Ceremonies and Masonic Funerals, marched in formation at several celebratory parades, and at divine services in the many community churches in Virginia. It welcomed a new nationalism and patriotic pride, but it broke with sorrow when Sir Knight James A. Garfield, President of the United States, was struck by an assassin's hand in 1881. Yet the calamity demonstrated that the United States citizens remained united and law-abiding.

"Remember the Maine" became the rallying point during the Spanish-America War when the United States battleship *Maine* exploded and sank in Havana Harbor, Cuba, February 15, 1898. Followed the saber-rattling, war drums, and storm clouds heralding World War I (1914-1918) and the Grim Reaper scratched though the names of valiant and magnanimous Knights Templar from the rolls of Virginia's Commanderies. As the *Versailles Treaty* officially ended World War I (June 28, 1919), the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Virginia boasted twenty-six Commanderies and 4,541 Knights.

**The Centennial – Templar Masonry on Parade.** World War I, the war to end all wars, ended June 28, 1919, and the American forces returned to home to the "Roaring Twenties", dramatic social and political change, migration from rural to a city setting, rapid economic growth and prosperity, and strong nationalist feelings. In 1919 Richmond Commandery No. 2 and St Andrew Commandery No. 13 were appointed joint hosts along with the Grand Commandery of Virginia for the One Hundredth Stated Grand Conclave and Centennial Ceremony. When the 1922 Stated Grand Conclave, the Grand Commandery of Virginia boasted twenty-nine Commanderies and 6,422 Knights.

At the 1922 Centennial Conclave and Ceremony of the Grand Commandery of Virginia, over 1,500 Sir Knights, their ladies, and other Masonic dignitaries gathered in Richmond to commemorate a century of Templar Masonry in Virginia. Among those attending was many Civil War, Spanish American, and World War I veterans, eager for the comradery and fraternal feelings they could find few places better than in the Templar Craft. Their parade down Monument Avenue was led by mounted riders followed with uniformed Knights Templar marching twelve knights across, Masonic and high school bands, and a motorcade, which was watched by thousands of people and the media of the day. *Templar Masonry on Parade*; what a wonderful scene it must have been to see. Twelve Companies of uniformed Knights Templar in column and fifty feet apart, with twelve Sir Knights across. Music from Masonic and High School marching bands made for a festival air. A motorcade finished the ceremonial review. A Grand Reception and Dance was held to celebrate One hundred years of Templar in Virginia. And finally, the Sir Knights were left with their memories of the past and their dreams of their futures.

**Honoring 200 Years of Templary in Virginia.** The 1920s was a period of peace, prosperity, and harmony throughout Virginia's templar realm. Commanderies duly drilled, inspected, and encamped in solemn form; they escorted Cornerstone Ceremonies for community churches and public buildings. They were visual presenting flag programs and wreath laying ceremonies, escorting Masonic funerals, marched in formation in parades, attending divine services in various community churches, pilgrimages to George Washington's tomb at Mount Vernon, and Commandery membership rolls grew. There were several Templary highlights during the decade: three Grand Encampment Conclaves (35<sup>th</sup> Triennial held in New Orleans, Louisiana; 36<sup>th</sup> Triennial held in Seattle, Washington; 37<sup>th</sup> Triennial held in Detroit, Michigan); the Grand Commandery of Virginia 1922 Centennial Conclave and Ceremony; and the two Grand Commandery of Virginia Encampment/Field Weeks were held in 1925 and 1926 near Cape Henry on the Chesapeake Bay. While the 1920s had their roses, the roses also had thorns. After forty-four years of membership increases, 1928 reported net loss of twenty members and 1929 a net loss of eighty-six; inspection reports since the mid-1920s showed a decrease in attendance in conclaves and templar events causing concerns over lack of interest and enthusiasm. But the 1929 Stock Market Crash dwarfed the decade and marked the beginning of the Great Depression.

Generally, the 1930s was the era of the Great Depression which affected the American people differently based on their socioeconomic status and Freemasons were not any different from other socioeconomic section of American life. Many Virginian Masonic Lodges experienced large membership losses from demits and suspensions which effected the Knight Templar Commanderies. Every Commandery experienced financial problems, several have quorum problems and were unable to open for months, and four Commanderies found it necessary to consolidate into two. From inspection reports and District Group Meetings, the Commanderies reported that they continue to experience decreases in attendance, a raise in deficiency of proficiency in ritual and tactics, and a shortage of good speakers and educational programs. But, many Commanderies continued to have regular conclaves, Full or Short Form, escort Grand Lodge or Symbolic Lodge cornerstone ceremonies and Masonic funerals, hold templar events and Ladies Dinners, and attending divine services in various community churches. Monthly letters, notices, and bulletins were used to maintain communications with the Sir Knights, Commandry Sweethearts, and other Commanderies.

The annual Joint Easter Sunrise Services held in the National Arlington Cemetery Amphitheater in the 1930s were the highlights in an otherwise somber and retrained decade. The joint sponsors of the Memorial service were the Grand Commanderies of Virginia and the District of Columbia and attended by the Most Eminent Grand Master, Grand Encampment Officers, and Sir Knights from other jurisdictions. The Sir Knights assembled at the West Gate of the cemetery and marched to the Amphitheater, led by the United States Marine Corps Band, and followed by the Grand Master and the Sir Knights. Often the Joint Easter Sunrise Services were attended by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, members of Congress and the Armed Forces, and many foreign Ambassadors.

In the early years American Freemasonry appealed to people who liked mystic ritual, esoteric symbolism, formal attire, and military uniforms, and to those who like to have somewhere to discuss ideas and meet like-minded friends. The 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s was a Period of Transformation for Freemasonry and Chivalric organizations as they migrated from fraternal to social interests where in the members joined to further their chances of promotion, enlarge business networks, or enhance employment opportunities. From Inspector and District Commander reports submitted in the early 1940s Templar Masonry needed early attention and a new approach to relieve the unfavorable situations found in many of the Constituent Commanderies. The all-out support of the war effort and the rise in patriotism was the profound conviction that Templar Masonry was needed, and the future held good times for Knights Templar: conditions were changing, almost overnight; the structure human society was undergoing a veritable modernization; and the Freemasonic structure was expanding to accommodate the social changes.

During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s period, most Commanderies rejoiced in net gains in memberships and, more importantly, the rise in emphasis on spirituality in Templar Masonry. Commanders were forced to shorten their conclaves and place opportunities which the expectations of returning veterans place on fraternal and brotherly friendships. Growth in population and Masonic structures in Northern Virginia led Sir Knights to request a dispensation to form a new Commandery which was issued in March 1946; Arlington Commandery No. 29 was chartered in May 1947. On the other side of the equation, after many years of deliberations by Richmond Knights Templar became a reality when Richmond Commandery No. 2, chartered June 23, 1823, and St. Andrew Commandery No. 13, chartered November 13, 1878, consolidated on November 10, 1952, under the name Richmond Commandery No. 2. As an incentive to improve Temper Masonry and to give recognition to Sir Knights who have been Templars twenty-five years and longer and to those who have been Templars fifty years and more, the Grand Commandery of Virginia began issuing emblems in September 1953. The 25 and 50-year program was to provide Constituent Commanderies the opportunity to highlight, and a special occasion, to increase attendance and create inspiration in any Commander's program.

The Committee on the Grand Commander's Jewel was appointed in 1952, the design and specifications were adopted in 1953, and Sir Knight Fred A. Morgenroth, Past Commander and Grand Representative near the Grand Commandery of New York, was commissioned to manufacture the special Grand Commander's Jewel. Sir Knight Morgenroth made the jewel by hand, himself, with all the love and care demonstrated the expert craftsman of Masonic jewel he was. It was most fitting that he was invited to attend the special ceremonies of investiture which place at the Norfolk Masonic Temple on the evening of September 25, 1954; Sir Knight Charles T. Morton was the

first Grand Commander to wear new gold and diamond Grand Commander Jewel. Sir Knight Morgenroth was then asked an appropriate gold and diamond jewel for each of the positions of the Grand Officers, which he did and delivered in 1955, 1956, and 1957.

The 1970s-1980s-1990s was a thirty-year roller-coaster ride to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The 1970's were a tumultuous time; in some ways, the decade was a continuation of the 1960s. The economic recession brought the first instance of stagflation and the "Middle Class", and the "Silent Majority". Daniel Patrick Moynihan, U.S. Ambassador to India, summed the decade as: "Nothing will happen. But then nothing much is going to happen in the 1970s anyway." The 1980s were the opposite of the 1960s and the years of protest and reform and represented a turning point in American history—a crucial era, marked by political conservatism and an individualistic ethos. Americans wanted to spend more time on their own personal interests, specifically in the areas of culture, education, and politics. Reaganism was central in the 1980s successes (foreign affairs and the Cold War) and failures (domestic affairs, raising poverty, worsening racial tensions). The 1990s was the "Good Decade." It saw a rise in multiculturalism awareness and advances in technology that included cable television, the World Wide Web, and the Internet. It was a decade of extremes and contradictions.

During this Templar roller-coaster ride, conditions were changing almost overnight, and the structure of human society underwent a veritable revolution; the tide turned to the benefit of Templary. In the 1970s Grand Recorder reported the Membership Rolls decreased by three-hundred-seventy Sir Knights. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial, located atop Shooter's Hill in Alexandria, Virginia, remembering that the memorial construction began in 1922, was dedicated in 1932, and the interior finally completed in 1970. (In July 2015 the building was designated a National Historic Landmark for its architecture and is one of the largest-scale private memorials to honor George Washington.)

The *District Orders Program* was established in 1983 and directed the District Deputy Grand Commander in each Chivalric District to see that all three Orders of the Knights Templar are conferred in his District at least twice a year. Every Commander was encouraged to obtain the necessary paraphernalia needed for the Orders and the Sir Knights were encouraged to learn and be proficient in all three of the Orders. Sir Knight George B. Yeates, Right Eminent Grand Commander, obtained permission from the Grand Commandery of New Jersey to utilize "The Order of Knight Preceptor" in Virginia and a resolution passed in 1984 to consecrate Present and Past Commanders in a new Order, "*Knight Preceptor*." The first class of Order of Knight Preceptor was conferred on forty candidates on August 13, 1984, at the Southwest Knights Templar School. The second class conferred seventy-two candidates on the Order of Knight Preceptor at its first Annual Meeting of the Virginia Charter, May 1985 at the Fair Oaks Holliday Inn in Fairfax. A resolution was also passed in 1984 establishing two *Charles Augusta Grice Meritorious Awards* per year to give proper recognition to those Sir Knights of the Knight Templar in Virginia who have made worthwhile and laudable contributions to the cause of Templar Masonry during each Grand Commandery year. The Grand Recorder's Office moved into the York Rite Building at the Masonic Home in 1984. Thomas S. Ely Commandery No. 30 was chartered in Jonesville in September 1985, and Penn-Neck Commandery No. 33 was chartered June 1988. As the 1980s closed, Education and Leadership Workshops helped focus problems and solutions within the Commanderies and the Knights Templar Schools. The District Deputy Grand Commander Program had helped improve ritual in Conclave openings/closings and conferring the Orders.

The 1990s and 2000 were not a bed of roses glowing in the sunshine as most Commanderies continued to decrease in membership and attendance, and some found it hard to open due to the lack of a quorum. But after a decade of work, inordinate hours on the computer, getting numerous drafts out, the *Grand Commandery Manual of Tactics* was printed in 1990 and the *1977 Grand Commandery Constitution and Statues* was updated and printed the same year. Both the *Manual of Tactics* and *Constitution and Statues* were incorporated into a single "*Digest*" for providing relevant information dealing with the principal aspects of the Order. In 1991, Grand Commandery Publicity Committee on copies the Grand Encampment *Guidelines of Publicity and Public Relations* to every Commandery in Virginia and the Committee reported a successful turnaround as the Sr Knights improved the public relations and public efforts on behalf of their Commanderies. A typical Citizenship and Public Affairs Report in the 1990-2000 period covered 110 speeches and patriotic programs to 54 Civic and Church Organizations, 37 Masonic Bodies, 12 Masonic Androgynous Bodies, 6 Retirement Homes, and a Military Reunion.

During the same period the Shenandoah, Southwest, Tidewater, and Northern Virginia Knight Templar Ritual and Tactics Schools were well attended, and the Sir Knights' ritual proficiency were greatly improved. The practice of moving the schools around in locations and holding them on Fridays and Saturdays, to make them more available to more Sir Knights, appeared to be successful. And the five area Leadership and Education Conferences, held yearly, were well attended, and covered leadership, organizations, peoples, education, and Chivalric Masonry discussion groups. The Right Eminent Grand Commanders' themes in 1999, *Enthusiasm Breeds Success*, and 2000, *Attitude, Commitment and Enthusiasm*, brought the Twentieth Century to a close and heralded positive enthusiasm for Templar Masonry in the Twenty-First Century.

As Virginia's Grand Commandery of Knights Templar and the Constituent Commanderies moved through the 2001-2022 period, the challenges of Templar Masonry in the Twenty-First Century loomed as an ominous cloud upon all. The decline in membership and attendance continued in a downward spiral to its lowest levels in decades. The sources of new candidates for the Orders suffered as Symbolic Lodge and Royal Arch Chapter rolls declined. The organization of Chivalric Districts and Constituent Commanderies was too large to support the membership with the financial base available. But Freemasonry and Templar Masonry is still relevant in the Twenty-First Century. Virginia Knights can still be found living by the ***Knight's Code of Conduct*** and Christian principles and engaging themselves in activities that unite them rather separating them. That includes a moral code that teaches personal decency and personal responsibility means something honorably, devotion to the welfare of all mankind—it is more blessed to give than receive and encourages expansion of the knowledge cultivates men's minds and physical senses. That is the spirit, beliefs, and aspirations as practiced in Virginia's Templar Craft. It is our Templar Ethos. Those who qualify for membership in a Virginia Commandery of Knights Templar, are offered an unequalled opportunity to serve with Master Masons who believe in Chivalric vows and strive to exemplify the sublime teachings of this magnanimous Order in their daily life and conduct

**Building Bridges: A Foundation for the Future and a Path to the Tricentennial.** We are at the end of our historical journey so far as *Honoring 200 Years of Templary in Virginia* is concerned. But be aware that we must constantly strive improvement in all personal ethical and moral precept areas. We must serve Truth, Faith, Honor, the People, our fraternal teachings, and our own destiny. The great secret of the universe is equilibrium, in Truth all things work in balance. When that balance is upset, it is our task to help set it right. Our duty is to understand and maintain balance and equilibrium in our life and Templar Masonry. Our world is ever changing, and Templar Masonry in Virginia must change as well. Today's Templary is different from our Father's Templary; it is not even the same Templary as when you took your knighthood vows. Masons are busy people and need to be convinced that time and talent to a Knights Templar Commandery has value. We must be resilient with eyes wide open to change and reality. In the words from Socrates: *"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."*

