

Prince Hall Templarism

SK Michael Post

The first published written record of the investiture of the Masonic order of Knight Templar is dated August 28, 1769, the creation taking place in the Mason's Hall in Boston, under the charter of St. Andrew's Royal Arch Lodge, from the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Templar Masonry immediately became popular because of its distinctively Christian character, <and> its purpose being to perpetuate the teachings of Christ.ⁱ

Some writers believe that it was possible "that the degree of Knight Templar was conferred in Military Lodges and perhaps in other Lodges prior to the Revolutionary War". However, few if any records exist stating that the Templar degrees were in fact being worked at that time.

My research into the first instance of the Order among American Prince Hall Templarism has been difficult but what I have come up with two dates. The first is that of 1798 where one historian states that African lodge No 544 in Philadelphia, who obtained a charter from Germany, could work in the Royal Arch and *higher degrees* (This is interesting because at the time African Lodge No. 459 could only work in the "ancient craft" to include the Royal arch degree).ⁱⁱ The other date is 1818 when the Duke of Sussex, Grand Master of England gave a deputation to Passey Benjamine, a West Indian Mason, to establish Commanderies in the West Indies and the United States. It is said that Benjamine organized St. George Commandery in Philadelphia also in 1820.ⁱⁱⁱ

While this information has not been fully verified, what is known is that Commanderies were springing up all over world to include such places as: Jamaica (1794), Bermuda (1802), Haiti (1811), and St. Kitts (1812).

After other Prince Hall Commanderies were subsequently formed in Philadelphia, a Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania was organized on September 13, 1832 in Philadelphia, PA. This Grand Commandery was under the auspices of the First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America for PA. On June 8, 1844, the Grand Commandery of PA evolved into the First Independent African Grand Encampment of North America. During this time frame a split occurred within the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania causing the creation of the Hiram Grand Lodge within the State. The schism spawned two separate Grand Commanderies in 1844. Both existed separately for more than thirty years until merging on October 20, 1881 into the United Grand Commandery of Knights Templar.^{iv}

The current Grand Encampment, The Grand Encampment of Knights Templar United States of America and its Jurisdiction Prince Hall Affiliation Inc was formed in 1926 and on the 27-30 of June the 86th Annual Grand Conclave will be held in Ohio. On July 30, 2010 a historical meeting between the Most Eminent Grand Masters of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar for the United States of America and Prince Hall Affiliation occurred.

The historical encounter between MEGM William Koon, II and MEGM Homer Buchanan occurred during the 180th Grand Conclave of the United Grand Commandery of Masonic Knights Templar, PHA, Jurisdiction of Pennsylvania. The two MEGM's along with a portion of their delegation were officially received. The two national entities have been in existence for well over a hundred fifty years yet this was the first time that the two leaders have been officially received together at a Jurisdictional Grand Conclave.

Prince Hall Templarism, from its elusive beginnings to its present day glory has always upheld the ageless ideals of Chivalry and Christian religious commitment and protection We must rally to the call of the Beauseant, an army of Christian Masons who have sworn to *hold their swords ever ready to be drawn in the cause to which they have so solemnly consecrated it.*

As Masons we know we are part of a progressive art and as Sir Knights we must contribute to that progress. We need to look onward to the future while commemorating our past.

ⁱ Oration of Companion W. Sewall Gardner, at Centennial of St. Andrew's Chapter, pp. 42, 43.

ⁱⁱ the History of Philadelphia 1609-1884 by John Scharf, Thompson Westcott

ⁱⁱⁱ "Official History of Freemasonry Among the Colored People of North America"(1903) Grimshaw

^{iv} <http://www.princehall-pa.org/KnightsTemplar.htm> Sir Walter J. Sims, Jr. #2, Grand Historian