

## **An Historical Account of the United Grand Commandery, M.K.T. of PA, P.H.A.**

The United Grand Commandery, Masonic Knights Templar, Jurisdiction of Pennsylvania, Prince Hall Affiliated, was organized as a Grand Commandery on December 12, 1830 and is the Mother Grand Commandery of Prince Hall Masonic Knights Templar.

The Knights Templar were the earliest of the Military Orders; and were strictly a religious group founded largely from the Monastic Order of the Benedictines, who professed the doctrines of the Living Christ. France, England and other countries formed Templar Knights Associations. Their dedication and consecration to the defense of the Christian religion are the Templars whose Christian principles we emulate and symbolically represent.

Masonic tradition states that in 1818, the Grand Master of England, the Duke of Sussex, deputized Passey Benjamine, a seafaring man, and a native of French West Indies, authorizing him to establish commanderies in West Indies and North America. Benjamine had previously been made a Mason in St. George's Lodge No. 32, Liverpool, England. He became a resident of Philadelphia, PA and was made a member of the first African Lodge of Philadelphia. On June 12, 1820, Benjamine organized St. George Commandery in Philadelphia, PA with Joseph Smith chosen as Commander. The commandery was named after a patron Saint of England, who was martyred under Diocletian after confessing Christianity. During this time, there was dissension as Union Lodge #4 was expelled from First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America for Pennsylvania in 1819. Union Commandery was established on October 12, 1820 with Caesar Thomas as Commander.

After other commanderies were subsequently formed in Philadelphia, with St. George Commandery #1, the First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America for Pennsylvania established the First African Grand Commandery, Masonic Knights Templar of Pennsylvania on December 12, 1830 in Philadelphia, PA with Past Most Worshipful Grand Master Peter Richmond appointed as Most Eminent Grand Commander. The First African Grand Commandery of PA was re-organized on September 13, 1832 as the First Independent African Grand Commandery, Masonic Knights Templar of PA, independently from the Grand Lodge, in Philadelphia, PA with Sir Isaac Sullivan elected as Most Eminent Grand Commander. On June 8, 1844, the First Independent African Grand Commandery of PA evolved into the First Independent African Grand Encampment of North America with Sir Thomas Henderson elected as Most Eminent Grand Master. It was headquartered at the Masonic Temple, 409 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Philadelphia, PA. Also in 1844, St. Andrews Grand Encampment of PA, affiliated with Hiram Grand Lodge of PA was organized in Philadelphia, PA with Union Commandery #1 and other commanderies. It was headquartered at Union Hall, South 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Philadelphia, PA and later moved to the Masonic Temple, 10<sup>th</sup> & Hunter Streets in 1874 and subsequently to the Masonic Temple, 1227 Locust Street, Philadelphia, Pa in 1879. From these two Grand Encampments, commanderies were rapidly organized and constituted throughout America.

There were conflicts between St. Andrews Grand Encampment of PA and First Independent African Grand Encampment of North America as a result of the formation of the National Grand Lodge on June 24, 1847. First Independent African Grand Encampment adhered to the National Grand Lodge and St. Andrews Grand Encampment adhered to the Independent or States Rights Grand Lodges. As Hiram Grand Lodge of PA merged with First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America for PA on January 19, 1848, albeit temporary, St. Andrews Grand Encampment apparently refused to merge with First Independent African Grand Encampment.

On October 20, 1881, St. Andrews Grand Encampment of PA merged with the First Independent African Grand Encampment of North America to form the United Grand Commandery, Masonic Knights Templar of PA with Sir William H. Miller elected as Right Eminent Grand Commander. Masonic Knights Templary spread rapidly throughout Pennsylvania among Prince Hall Freemasons who are Holy Royal Arch Masons. The United Grand Commandery was headquartered at 1227 Locust Street and 409 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Philadelphia, PA until the early 1950's when it moved to the Masonic Temple at 1632 W. Diamond Street. It is presently headquartered at the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of PA Masonic Complex at 4301 N. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA.

As we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we can easily picture strides of rapid progress. We, the Sir Knights of this day, must contribute to that progress. We look to the future while commemorating the past, drawing lessons from the past for the future.

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Past Most Eminent Grand Commander  
Eminent Grand Historian