



The Grand College of America
Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests
HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE ORDER

These introductory notes have mainly been drawn from : The Knights Templar Priests by Harold V.B.VOORHIS, 1957; What is the Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests, by Wylie B.WENDT, 1962; O.S.T. Reports, Vol. I, Grand College of America, 1935; and The Order of the Allied Masonic Degrees, by Harold H.C.PRESTIGE, 2nd edition by Frederick SMITH, London, 1998. (Reference: www.glmfff.org/hraktp/historique.htm)

The Order should not be confused with the System of “Temple Clerics” established in 1767 by Johann-Augustus VON STARCK who probably took his inspiration from the degree of Magnus Sacerdos Templarium or Clerc of the Temple, fourth and last degree of the system created in Russia by Count MELESINO, an Officer of Greek origin who had joined the Tsar forces. Count MELESINO in his time also possibly took his inspiration from a Higher Degree brought into Russia by Baron de TSCHOUDY, a native of Metz, France, who in 1760 was Orator in a Lodge in Petersburg.....

It is not clear when the Order first appeared, but the date is probably between 1770 & 1780 in Ireland firstly, and then in Bristol in a particular version of the Sovereign Rose Croix Princes of the Mountains of Calvary and of Heredom. (VII° Degree of the Baldwin Rite)

At that time, it was customary, when a Lodge had too few members holding a particular degree to work it autonomously, to join with another or several other Lodges and thus form a Union Band in order to be able to confer the Degree.

In the early years of the 1800's, the degree was known in Lodges on the Eastern coast of England . . . and then Scotland, by means of the Early Grand Rite, but only on reaching Newcastle upon Tyne did it achieve a haven where to settle and survive with some stability. Thus was formed the Illustrious Order of Knights Grand Cross of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

After a first period in history, from 1820 to 1830, it seems the Order almost completely disappeared except in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

A re-birth was attempted by some Brethren, apparently more enthusiastic than competent, in the years 1850-1870 in the Manchester region. This renewal died almost as fast as it had started.

By the end of the 19th century, the Illustrious Order of Knights Grand Cross of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem controlled a number of Degrees, probably inherited from the “Antients” Grand Lodge.

The Order was maintained in The Royal Kent Tabernacle in Newcastle, which originated at least in 1809, together with several other Degrees. The complete series amounted to some forty or so Degrees . . . many of which had totally disappeared. This Tabernacle had been working the Red Cross of Babylon along with the Royal Arch from 1822, and the Cryptic Degrees of Royal, Select and Super-Excellent Masters since 1830. Noteworthy, a variant of the Order , the Order of High Priesthood was retained within the Concord Tabernacle, holding a warrant from the Peace, Truth and Light Tabernacle in Manchester.

When in 1893, Cryptic Masons members of the Royal Kent Tabernacle petitioned, rather belatedly, the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters in London, founded in 1873, the then Grand Recorder, Charles Fitzgerald MATIER discovered to his surprise that other Degrees he had no knowledge of, were also worked there.

Forty-one odd Degrees were being communicated without any central warranting authority. Paramount amongst them was the Order of Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests or Order of Holy Wisdom. Eighteen of them seemed to descend from the Early Grand Rite of Scotland and five only could be traced to the United States, another six were mere Side Degrees conferred without fee or registration, while the remainder can now only be found in the United States, without the least trace of them in England. On 1st January 1897, an agreement was reached, placing the Order of Knight Templar Priests with an imposing array of other Degrees, under the jurisdiction of The Grand Council of the Allied Masonic Degrees, while the Tabernacle in Newcastle retained the right to confer the rank and dignity of Knight Grand Cross of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, a privilege it still possess but scarcely exercises.

In 1920, Colonel C.W. NAPIER-CLAVERING became Grand Master of the Grand Council of the Allied Masonic Degrees who, renouncing the prerogatives of the Grand Council over the Order of The Secret Monitor, brought to a happy end thirty seven years of feud, and recommended to the Royal Kent Council, heir to the similarly titled Tabernacle, to erect itself as a Grand College for England, Wales and the Colonies and Dependencies of the British Crown of The Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests. This was done on either 23rd May 1923 or 15th May 1924, the date being uncertain. The Allied Grand Council officially resigning all claims over the Order on 17th November 1924.

In the United States, the first mention of this order dates back to 1829, in Rhode Island State.

Five Tabernacles were subsequently constituted between 1840 and 1931, but none remained active for long.

On the 31st October 1931, the Knight-Priest Sidney Clifton Bingham of Christchurch, New Zealand, having had no news from his English Grand College for several years, thought it must have closed down. He therefore admitted to the Order John Raymond Shute II, John Edward Allen and Luther Thompson Harstell Jr., three Knights Templars from North Carolina. He justified his action by quoting Article 3 of the Antient Constitutions of 1813, which Article permitted such an act in case of emergency. He also granted three Warrants, constituting Tabernacles in North Carolina.

On the 14th May 1933, the Preceptors of these three Tabernacles met at a Convention in Raleigh, North Carolina, and agreed to form themselves into a Sovereign Body, which they did on the 27th of the same month, constituting the Great Priory of America, Priestly Order of the Temple.

In 1934 the Knight-Priests learned that the Order they had thought extinct was in fact still active in England. Seeking an exchange of representatives, they were informed that the circumstances of their Constitution were considered irregular.

A delegation was sent to England during 1935, and it was suggested to the English Body that they might Regularize the American Grand College.

John Edward Allen, an American Knight-Priest, was in consequence received on the 16th August 1935 by the Royal Kent Tabernacle (T.I.). He was Installed, and presented with a Warrant to form the United States Tabernacle, No. 9.

On his return to the United States, he re-consecrated the existing Tabernacles using the English ritual, and on the 27th October 1935 qualified all adherents of the previously organized Tabernacles.

The actions of the American Great Priory were confirmed, and at the Annual Ingathering of 1936 the Patent confirming English recognition could at last be displayed. It was explained that the English Jurisdiction was entitled the "Grand College for England of the Order of Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests, or Order of Holy Wisdom" and a similar nomenclature was adopted for America.