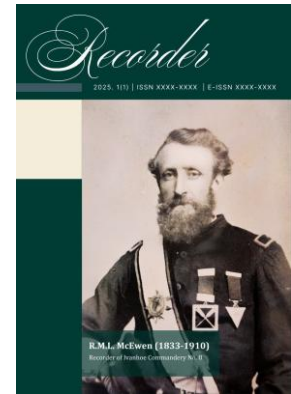




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### *New Publication*

#### **Review of the Book Alexander C. Cherkas, History of Bethany Commandery No. 28, Knights Templar (Mendota, Illinois). Houston, 2025**

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**Abstract.** A new monograph by Dr. Alexander C. Cherkas, *History of Bethany Commandery No. 28, Knights Templar (Mendota, Illinois)*, presents a comprehensive examination of the commandery's 127-year history, from its founding in 1868 in the post-Civil War era to its closure in 1995 due to declining membership. During its existence, more than 400 men belonged to Bethany Commandery No. 28, with over 100 maintaining long-term membership. The richly illustrated volume features numerous archival photographs and detailed biographical sketches of the commandery's members. The book offers valuable insights into local Masonic life and is intended for a broad readership.

**Keywords:** Bethany Commandery No. 28, Knights Templar, Mendota Illinois, Alexander C. Cherkas, Masonic history, biographical sketches, post-Civil War era.

In the book by Alexander C. Cherkas, the history of Bethany Commandery No. 28, a Knights Templar unit in the state of Illinois that existed for 127 years, is examined. The study is well structured, grounded in the available archival materials, and aimed at reconstructing the dynamics of membership, the social composition, and the institutional development of a Masonic commandery operating in a sparsely populated region of the American Midwest.

#### **Sources and Their State of Preservation**

The author correctly identifies the principal challenge of the research—an incomplete set of sources. The core materials are the annual reports of the Grand Commandery of Illinois preserved at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial. The absence of reports for several years—particularly from the later decades—along with the lack of private papers and visual materials, complicates the reconstruction of the final period of the commandery's activity. Nonetheless, the study demonstrates a careful and competent use of the available sources; the gaps are clearly identified, contextualized, and appropriately interpreted.

#### **Membership Analysis and Social Composition**

One of the most valuable aspects of the text is the demographic and statistical analysis. The author presents the total membership numbers, counts of members who died in service, and identifies distinct periods of growth and stagnation. The interpretation of the three notable waves of membership increase (1885–1886, 1927–1929, 1948–1951) is particularly convincing, as each surge is tied to broader socio-economic or political developments: institutional consolidation, the economic boom before the Great Depression, and the post-World War II resurgence.

Attention to the professions of members—intellectuals, farmers, veterans of the Civil War and World War I—provides insight into the social structure of a small Midwestern town at the turn of the twentieth century.

#### **Genealogical Value of the Study**

The text holds significant genealogical potential. The appended list of members, coupled with evidence of multigenerational involvement of numerous families (Smith, Tower, McIntyre, Harris, Davis, Hoffman, Cook, Gilmore, Hess, Knauer), illustrates the continuity typical of

Masonic organizations and reveals the long-standing social networks within the Mendota community. The inclusion of information on relatives and, in some cases, visual materials adds further value for historical demography and genealogical research.

#### Historical Development and Closure

The study effectively outlines the long-term trajectory of Bethany Commandery No. 28—its formation, periods of growth, prolonged stagnation beginning in the 1960s, and eventual closure in 1995 due to insufficient membership. This trajectory demonstrates the broader patterns experienced by many small Masonic bodies in the United States, whose mid-century vitality gradually declined in the context of shifting social priorities and demographic changes.

#### Scholarly Significance

The text is of considerable importance for several reasons:

**Regional History:** It fills a gap in the study of local Masonic institutions in Illinois.

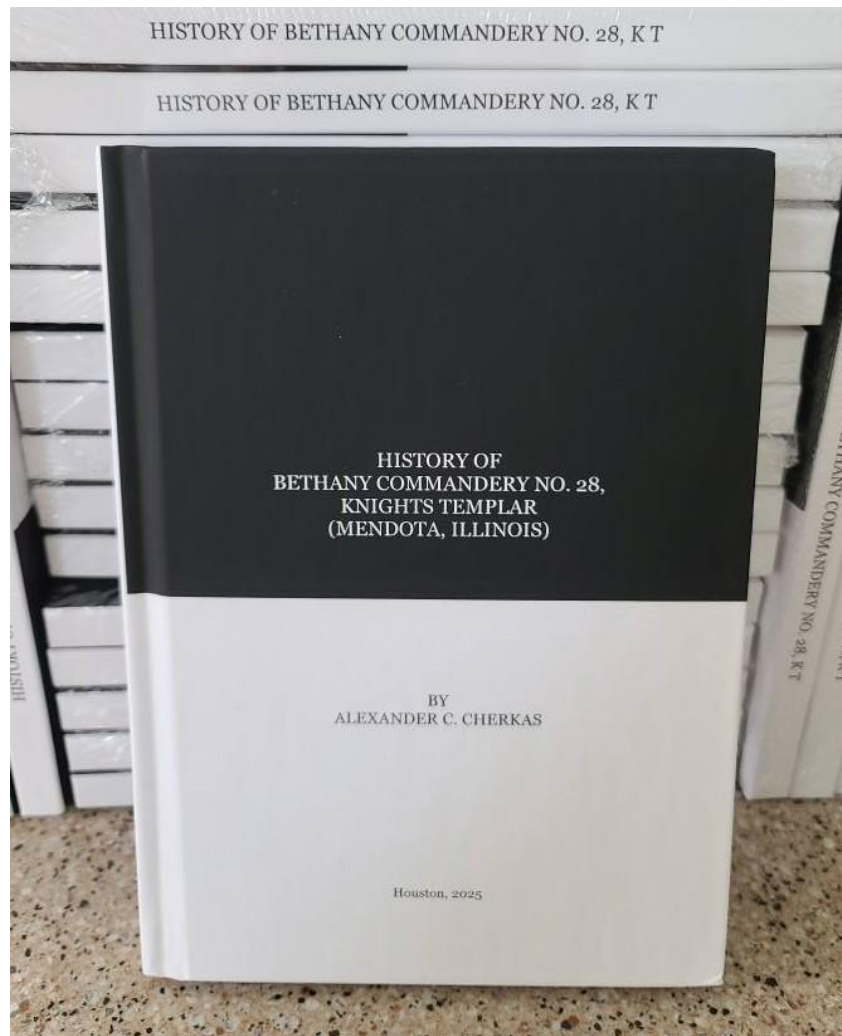
**Social History:** It sheds light on the interaction between fraternal organizations and small-town communities.

**Genealogy:** It provides a rich, systematic source for reconstructing family histories.

**Source Studies:** It exemplifies rigorous work with an uneven and fragmentary source base.

#### Conclusion

Overall, the text is a well-researched, methodologically sound, and valuable scholarly contribution. Despite the limitations of the surviving sources, the author succeeds in reconstructing a comprehensive picture of Bethany Commandery No. 28—its membership, internal dynamics, and place within the local community. This study offers an important addition to the historiography of American Freemasonry and to the social history of small towns in the United States.



**Fig. 1.** Book cover.