

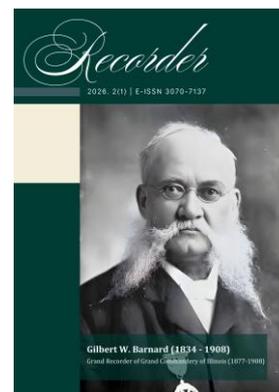
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## “Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the State of Illinois” as a Historical Source (based on the holdings of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial Library)

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### Abstract

This study, based on materials from the library of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial, examines the annual publications of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the State of Illinois as a historical source. These annual reports have been published continuously since 1857 and remain in publication to the present day.

In conclusion, the author notes that the materials of the Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the State of Illinois constitute a valuable historical source not only for the history of the Grand Commandery of Illinois itself, but also for the subordinate commanderies under its jurisdiction. The Conclave materials preserved in the library of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial reveal numerous aspects of the life and activities of the Knights Templar within the state and may serve as an important source for genealogical research, especially for the period from 1857 to 1973. Many sections introduced more than 150 years ago continue to be used in the preparation of annual reports today.

**Keywords:** Grand Commandery of Illinois; Masonic Order of Knights Templar; Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the State of Illinois; historical source; source studies.

### Introduction

The Masonic Order of Knights Templar was established in the United States in 1816. Its full official name was General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States. The subordinate bodies were known as Encampments, while at the state level they were designated as Grand Encampments. In 1856, a reorganization of the Order took place: the supreme governing body became known as the Grand Encampment of the USA, the state-level bodies as Grand Commanderies, and the local bodies as Commanderies.

The Grand Commandery of Illinois of the Masonic Order of Knights Templar was established in 1857. At that time, it consisted of only three commanderies—Apollo Commandery No. 1, Belvidere Commandery No. 2, and Peoria Commandery No. 3. The total number of Knights Templar at that time was fewer than 200 members; specifically, in 1857 these three commanderies together counted 183 swords<sup>1</sup>. Sixty years later, by 1927, the Grand Commandery of Illinois comprised more than 80 commanderies with a total membership exceeding 36,000 swords<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, commanderies such as Chicago Commandery No. 19, Englewood Commandery No. 59, and Humboldt Park Commandery No. 79 had memberships ranging from 1,912 to 2,155 swords<sup>3</sup> and, in terms of their size, were comparable to full military regiments. Such a rapid growth in the membership of the organization predetermined our interest in this topic and led us to examine

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Convention and Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 23-25.

<sup>2</sup> Seventy-first Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 1927. P. 253.

<sup>3</sup> Seventy-first Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 1927. P. 252-253.

the materials of the annual conclaves of the Grand Commandery of Illinois as a historical source. For this purpose, we drew upon the materials of the annual conclaves preserved in the library of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial (Washington, D.C., USA).

Any source-study research presupposes the application of both external criticism (external features of the source, such as whether the text is manuscript or printed, the type of ink used, etc.) and internal criticism (internal features of the source, including the determination of the date of compilation, the content of the text, and related issues).

#### *External Criticism of the Source*

From the moment of its establishment in 1857, the Grand Commandery of Illinois began to prepare annual materials for its Annual Conclave. The first such annual report comprised only 25 pages<sup>1</sup>. In addition to current information about the activities of the Grand Commandery, it also included the Constitution of the organization<sup>2</sup>.

Ten years later, in 1867, the materials of the first eleven annual Annual Conclaves were published together in a single volume (Fig. 1). This volume consisted of 346 pages, while the materials of the most recent conclave alone already amounted to 70 page<sup>3</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** The first collected volume of the annual conclaves of the Grand Commandery of Illinois. Chicago, 1867.

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Convention and Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 3-25.

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the Convention and Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 13-18.

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois, at their Tenth annual conclave. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 278-346.

From this point onward, the annual reports began to be published on a regular yearly basis. The only exception was the year 1867, when two volumes were issued simultaneously for 1866 and 1867, since the volume containing the materials for 1866 had not been published in time during that year.

#### State of Preservation of the Materials at the George Washington National Masonic Memorial

The library of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial (Washington, D.C., USA) holds a substantial collection of the annual reports of the Grand Commandery of Illinois. The reports from the second half of the nineteenth century, specifically from 1857 to 1899, are preserved in full.

The first half of the twentieth century (1900–1949) is represented with several gaps: the library lacks the conclave reports for the years 1934, 1940–1941, and 1943. The second half of the twentieth century (1950–1999) is the least completely represented; the annual reports for 1974–1979, 1988–1989, and 1992–1999 are missing.

Materials from the conclaves of the twenty-first century are entirely absent from the collection, although the Grand Commandery of Illinois continues to publish them. For example, the existence of annual conclave reports for 201<sup>1</sup>, 2020<sup>2</sup> and 2023<sup>3</sup> is known.

For clearer visualization of this information, data on the state of preservation of the materials have been summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** State of preservation of the annual conclave materials at the George Washington National Masonic Memorial.

Periods	Years	Missing Conclave Materials
Second half of the nineteenth century	1857-1899	Materials Fully Preserved
First half of the twentieth century	1900-1949	1934, 1940, 1941, 1943
Second half of the twentieth century	1950-1999	1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999
Early twenty-first century	2000-2025	Materials are completely absent

Thus, the holdings of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial most fully represent the materials for the period from 1857 to 1973. For this span, only four volumes are missing, which makes it possible to trace the history of the Grand Commandery of Illinois, or of one of its subordinate commanderies, almost in its entirety.

#### *Internal Criticism of the Source*

##### Compilers

The work of collecting information from the commanderies and compiling the annual reports was entrusted to a special officer of the Grand Commandery of Illinois whose office was known as the Grand Recorder. It should be noted in advance that the position of Grand Recorder was one of the least subject to rotation, as it involved a substantial and continuous workload.

During the period from 1857 to 1899, only five individuals served as Grand Recorder. The first, William H. Turner, held the office for three years (1857–1859). He was followed by George W. Deering, who served for the shortest term—only one year (1860). The third Grand Recorder, Henry C. Ranney, served for four years (1861–1864). The fourth, James H. Miles, held the position for twelve years until his death (1865–1876). Finally, the fifth, Gil. W. Barnard, assumed office in 1877 and continued his service through 1899<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the fourth and fifth Grand Recorders occupied their posts for more than ten and more than twenty years respectively.

##### Composition of the Materials

The materials of the annual conclaves of the Grand Commandery of Illinois may be divided into two main parts. The first part pertains to the internal affairs of the Grand Commandery of Illinois itself, while the

<sup>1</sup> 163rd Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 2019. P. 1-182.

<sup>2</sup> 164th Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 2020. P. 1-143.

<sup>3</sup> 167th Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 2023. P. 1-190.

<sup>4</sup> Forty-third Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Bloomington, Ill.: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 1899. P. 123.

second part relates to its interactions with the Grand Encampment of the USA and with the Grand Commanderies of other states.

The foundational documents—specifically the Constitution of the Grand Commandery of Illinois—were first presented and approved in the materials of the inaugural conclave of 1857<sup>1</sup>. As amendments and revisions were introduced, the Constitution was republished. Updated versions appeared, for example, in the materials of the 1862 conclave and in subsequent years<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the Constitution of the Grand Commandery of Illinois was also published<sup>3</sup>.

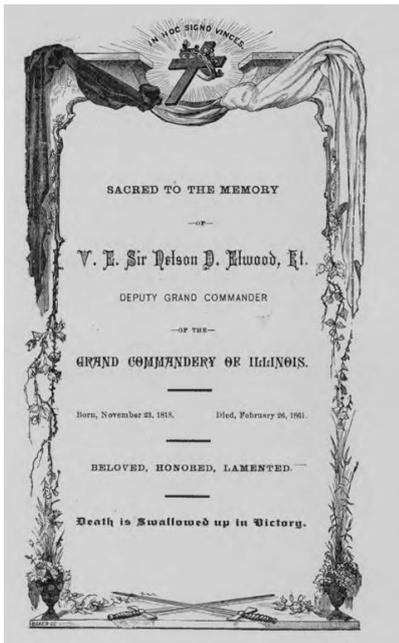
### Genealogy

The materials of the annual conclaves of the Grand Commandery of Illinois constitute a valuable source for genealogical research, as they contain extensive personal information about the Knights Templar. Complete membership lists of the Grand Commandery of Illinois and its subordinate commanderies were published beginning in 1857<sup>4</sup>. The reports recorded information on all individuals knighted during the year, as well as changes in status, such as Dimitted, Suspended, Reinstated, or Deceased.

In addition, the reports provided information on the officers of both the Grand Commandery and the subordinate commanderies, who were elected annually, with their respective offices specified. As a result, the study of the complete corpus of annual reports makes it possible to reconstruct the service record of a Knight Templar who served within the jurisdiction of the Grand Commandery of Illinois.

Complete membership rolls were published every three years during the triennial conclaves of Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States.

In 1861, one of the senior officers of the Grand Commandery of Illinois, Deputy Grand Commander Nelson D. Elwood, passed away. From that time onward, a tradition was introduced in the conclave materials of dedicating special pages In Memoriam (Fig. 2). Beginning in 1862, obituaries of high-ranking members of the Grand Commandery also began to be published<sup>5</sup>.



**Fig. 2.** In Memoriam page dedicated to the memory of Nelson D. Elwood<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Convention and Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 13-18.

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois, at their Sixth Annual Conclave. Chicago: F. Fulton & Co., Printers, 1862. P. 67-70.

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois, at their Sixth Annual Conclave. Chicago: F. Fulton & Co., Printers, 1862. P. 63-66.

<sup>4</sup> Proceedings of the Convention and Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 23-25.

<sup>5</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois, at their Sixth Annual Conclave. Chicago: F. Fulton & Co., Printers, 1862. P. 59-61.

<sup>6</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois, at their Fifth Annual Conclave. Chicago: F. Fulton & Co., Printers, 1861. P. 23.

Beginning in 1860, the conclave materials started to include standardized forms of various documents, such as the Form of Petition, Form of Demit, Form of Certificate of Election, Form of Certificate for Proxy, and Form of a Petition for a Dispensation<sup>1</sup>. This was done in order to systematize the documentation and bring it into a uniform standard. From that point forward, all documentation within the jurisdiction of the Grand Commandery of Illinois was required to be prepared in accordance with the established forms.

By 1861, the number of commanderies within the Grand Commandery of Illinois had reached eleven. As a result, the Grand Recorder began to consolidate information on changes in membership within the commanderies into tabular form (Fig. 3).

NAME OF COM- MANDERY.		NO.	PLACE OF MEET- ING.	RETURNS TO	NO. OF ACTIVE MEMBERS.					HONORARY MEMBERS.	Sir Knights returned in these Commanderies, in addition to the No. of members who are also members of other Commanderies.	
					CREATED.	ADMITTED.	DIMITED.	SUSPENDED.	DECEASED.			
Apollo.....		1	Chicago.....	Sept. 30, 1861.	114	7	1	1	3		Sir Knights returned in these Commanderies, in addition to the No. of members who are also members of other Commanderies.	
Belvidere.....		2	Alton.....	" " "	27	1						
Peoria.....		3	Peoria.....	" " "	45	5		3		10		
Joliet.....		4	Joliet.....	" " "	45	2		2				
Blaney.....		5	Morris.....	" " "	35	7			1			
Elwood.....		6	Springfield.....	" " "	28	8		3	2			
Freeport.....		7	Freeport.....	" " "	20							
Galesburg.....		8	Galesburg.....	" " "	26	4						
Beaumanoir.....		9	Decatur.....	" " "	18	1	1					
Ottawa.....		10	Ottawa.....	" " "	14	9						
Beauseant.....		11	Quincy.....	Oct. 22, "	14	12						
Waukegan.....		12	Waukegan.....	" " "	13	11						
					399	67	2	9	1	6	10	11

Fig. 3. Table of membership changes within the jurisdiction of the Grand Commandery of Illinois<sup>2</sup>.

Tables of this type, with minor modifications, continued to be published for more than one hundred years. For example, a table recording membership changes can still be found in the materials of the 1973 conclave<sup>3</sup>. However, during the 1980s the Grand Commandery of Illinois discontinued this practice.

In 1864, the first table listing all officers of the Grand Commandery of Illinois by year was published (Fig. 4). This tradition has been maintained to the present day, for more than 150 years<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 205-208.

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois, at their Fifth Annual Conclave. Chicago: F. Fulton & Co., Printers, 1861. P. 33.

<sup>3</sup> 117th Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 1973. P. 73.

<sup>4</sup> 167th Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 2023. P. 183-186.

OFFICERS OF THE GRAND COMMANDERY OF ILLINOIS  
SINCE ITS FORMATION.

	GRAND COMMANDER.	DEPUTY GRAND COMMANDER	GRAND GENERALISSIMO.	GRAND CAPTAIN GENERAL.	GRAND TREASURER.	GRAND RECORDER.
1857.....	J. V. Z. Blaney.....	C. B. Stebbins .....	B. F. Barry.....	H. A. Johnson.....	R. H. Foss.....	W. H. Turner.
1858.....	J. V. Z. Blaney.....	J. Hunt.....	B. F. Barry.....	H. A. Johnson.....	R. H. Foss.....	W. H. Turner.
1859.....	Josiah Hunt.....	H. A. Johnson.....	N. D. Elwood.....	F. K. Hulburd.....	R. H. Foss.....	W. H. Turner.
1860.....	H. A. Johnson.....	N. D. Elwood*.....	F. K. Hulburd.....	W. H. Turner.....	R. H. Foss.....	G. W. Deering.
1861.....	H. A. Johnson.....	F. K. Hulburd*.....	W. H. Turner.....	D. C. Martin.....	R. H. Foss.....	H. C. Ranney.
1862.....	G. W. Deering.....	W. H. Turner.....	J. H. Hibbard.....	N. F. Prentice.....	R. H. Foss.....	H. C. Ranney.
1863.....	W. H. Turner.....	J. H. Hibbard.....	N. F. Prentice.....	P. A. Armstrong.....	R. H. Foss.....	H. C. Ranney.
1864.....	N. F. Prentice.....	P. A. Armstrong.....	V. L. Hurlbut.....	G. C. Lanphere.....	R. H. Foss.....	H. C. Ranney.

\*Dead.

**Fig. 4.** List of selected senior officers of the Grand Commandery of Illinois<sup>1</sup>.

Beginning in 1871, a tradition was also introduced of placing a portrait of the incumbent Grand Commander in the conclave materials<sup>2</sup>. This tradition has been preserved in Illinois to the present day.

#### Inspections

An important component of the annual materials consisted of reports on inspections of the commanderies. The inspectors were officers of the Grand Commandery, and the jurisdiction was divided into districts, with inspectors assigned to the commanderies within each district. Beginning in 1873, inspectors' reports started to be published in the materials of the annual conclaves<sup>3</sup>.

These reports were compiled in a free narrative form, and inspectors shared any information they considered significant. As a result, these reports became one of the most important sources for studying the social life of the inspected commanderies.

Unfortunately, by 1891 the inspectors' reports ceased to be published, most likely in order to conserve space within the volume, as the conclave materials for that year already exceeded 250 pages. As a result, this innovation reduced the amount of information available on the internal life of the commanderies. In 1922, a new (scoring-based) evaluation system was introduced in their place<sup>4</sup>.

#### Charity

In the United States, the Knights Templar Educational Foundation was established in 1922 by the Knights Templar to support financially disadvantaged students pursuing higher education. Knights Templar of the State of Illinois also contributed funds to support this initiative<sup>5</sup>. In addition, Knights Templar made donations to other charitable organizations, such as the Knights Templar Eye Foundation<sup>6</sup>.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that the materials of the Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the State of Illinois constitute a valuable historical source for the study of not only the Grand Commandery of Illinois itself, but also its subordinate commanderies. The extensive holdings of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial Library reveal numerous aspects of the life and activities of the Knights Templar within the state and may serve as a significant source for genealogical research, particularly for the period from 1857 to 1973. Many sections and practices introduced more than 150 years ago continue to be applied in the preparation of annual reports to this day.

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois, at their Tenth annual conclave. Chicago: Jameson & Morse, Book and Job Printers, 1867. P. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Fifteenth Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Horton and Leonard, printers, 1871. P. II.

<sup>3</sup> Seventeenth Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Chicago: Knight and Leonard, printers, 1873. P. 15-28.

<sup>4</sup> Sixty-sixth Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 1922. P. 121.

<sup>5</sup> Ninety-second Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 1948. P. 86-87.

<sup>6</sup> 113th Annual Conclave the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the state of Illinois. Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 1969. P. 96.

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