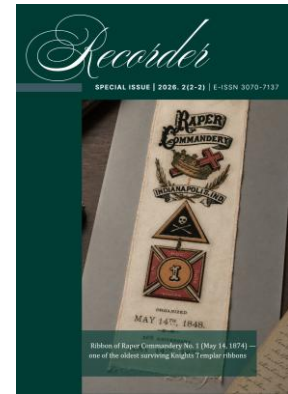




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Original Research

Early Ribbons (1874) of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America

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Abstract

Based on museum artifacts introduced into scholarly circulation for the first time, this study examines the history of the emergence of ribbons in the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America. The source base of the study consists of exhibits from the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar, Houston, USA.

In conclusion, the author notes that, as of 2026, the oldest ribbon in the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar remains the ribbon of Raper Commandery No. 1, which was made and presented on May 14, 1874. This ribbon may be regarded as one of the oldest known ribbons in the Order.

In the summer of 1874, information about the use of a commemorative ribbon spread throughout the Order. The leadership did not object, and on December 1, 1874, commanderies and grand commanderies presented their ribbons on a large scale at the Triennial Conclave of 1874 in New Orleans.

Thus, the first conclave at which ribbons were widely used was the conclave of 1874, rather than that of 1877, as previously believed.

Keywords: ribbons, Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America, 1874, Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar.

1. Introduction

In 2025, Alexander Cherkas published the article *"Ribbons in the American Masonic Order of Knights Templar (Second Half of the Nineteenth Century): Their Emergence and Evolution"* (Cherkas, 2025), in which he systematized the ribbons of the Masonic Order of Knights Templar dating from 1874 to 1895. The study analyzed ribbons on the basis of the ribbon badge collection preserved in the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar.

Based on the museum holdings available in 2025, the author correctly concluded that one of the earliest ribbons in the history of the Order was that of Raper Commandery No. 1, which was produced on May 14, 1874, to commemorate the 26th anniversary of the Commandery (Cherkas, 2025: 1476). However, the author's further conclusions—that the initiative was adopted by other commanderies only in 1875 and that the first Triennial Conclave at which ribbons were widely displayed was the 1877 Conclave—require revision.

This revision has become possible because, in 2026, the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar acquired an extensive collection of 79 ribbons at auction, 76 of which belonged to the Knights Templar. The collection includes 21 ribbons produced in 1874. This substantial body of newly available museum artifacts makes it possible to refine our understanding of the origins and early development of Knights Templar ribbons during the pivotal year of 1874.

2. Materials

The source base of this study consists of artifacts preserved in the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar (Houston, Texas, USA), specifically Collection 3: Badges and Ribbons. At present, this collection contains more than 370 artifacts, including 23 ribbons dating from 1874.

The first ribbon to enter the museum collection was the Anniversary Ribbon of Raper Commandery No. 1, Knights Templar, 1874 (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Anniversary Ribbon of Raper Commandery No. 1, 1874. KT. (MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 138)

Soon afterward, another ribbon entered the collection: the Ribbon of Ivanhoe Commandery No. 8, New Orleans, 1874 (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. Ribbon of Ivanhoe Commandery No. 8, KT, New Orleans, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 157](#))

A major expansion of the collection took place in 2026, when 21 ribbons were acquired at once. Among them were:

Ribbon of Grand Commandery of Missouri, Grand Encampment of US, December 1st, 1874, New Orleans (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Ribbon of Grand Commandery of Missouri, Grand Encampment of US, December 1st, 1874, New Orleans ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 298](#))

Ribbon of Iowa Grand Commandery, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Ribbon of Iowa Grand Commandery, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 301](#))

Ribbon of Chicago Commandery No. 19, New Orleans, 1874 (Fig. 5).

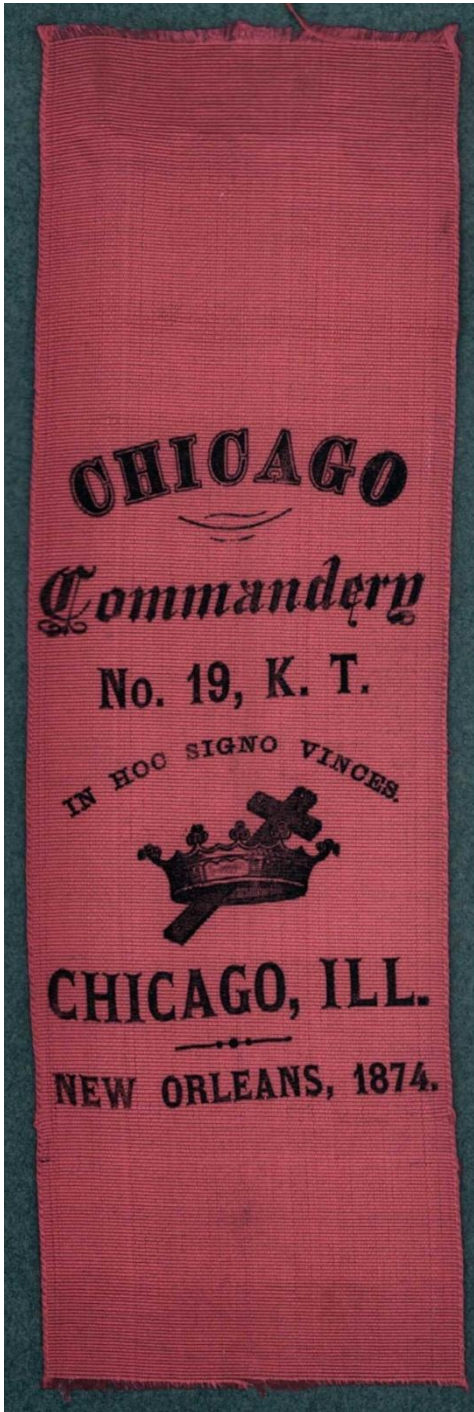


Fig. 5. Ribbon of Chicago Commandery No. 19, New Orleans, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 303](#))

Ribbon of Michigan KT, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 6).

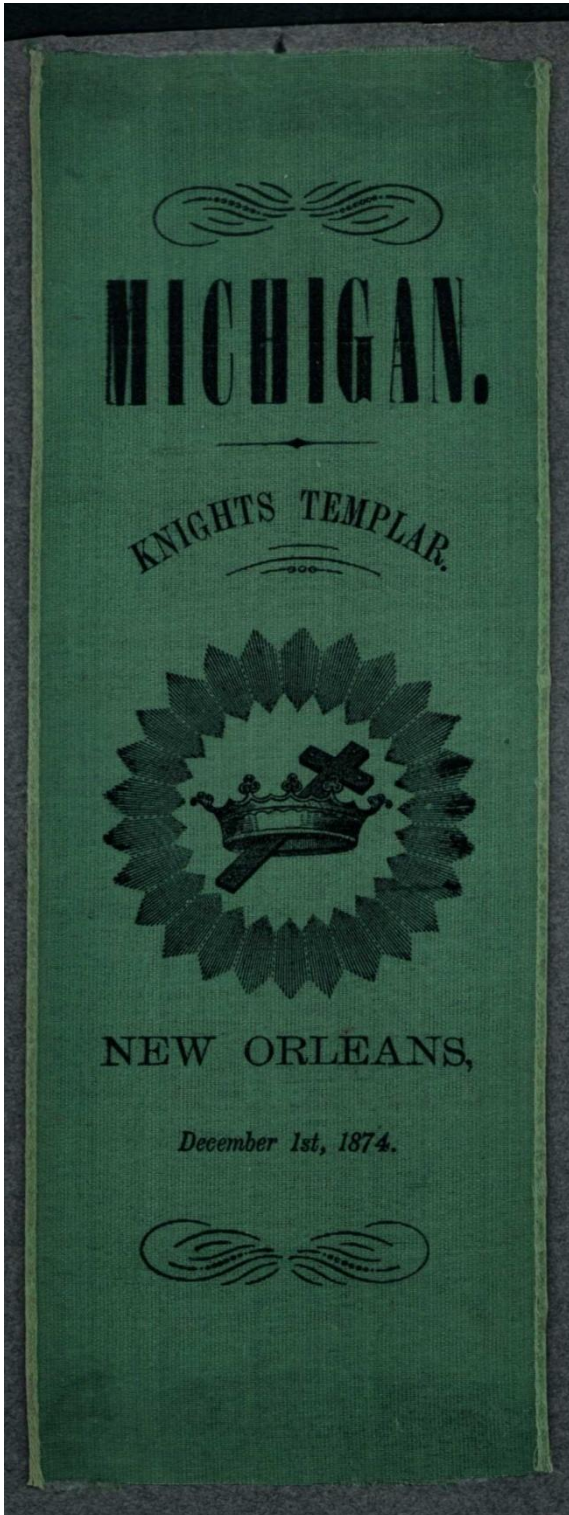


Fig. 6. Ribbon of Michigan KT, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 310](#))

Ribbon of St. Louis Commandery No. 1, The Old Guard, 1874 (Fog. 7).



Fig. 7. Ribbon of St. Louis Commandery No. 1, The Old Guard, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 311](#))

Ribbon of Momento KT, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Ribbon of Momento KT, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 314](#))

Ribbon of Lancaster Commandery No. 2, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 9).

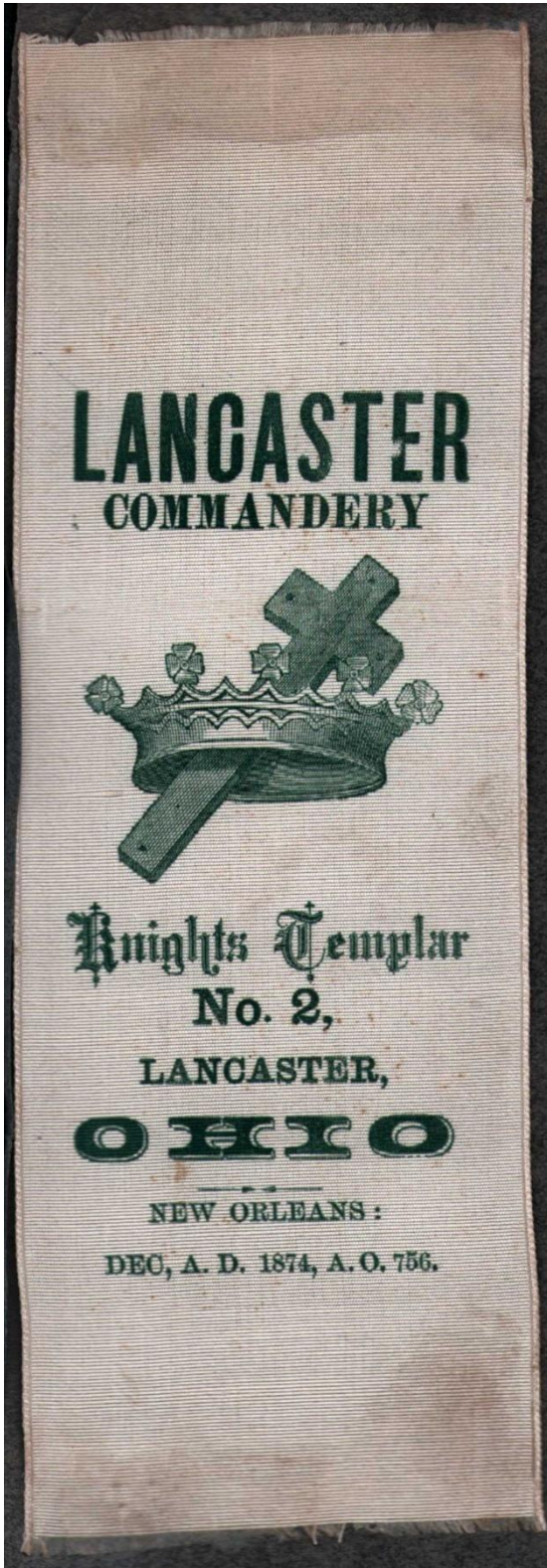


Fig. 9. Ribbon of Lancaster Commandery No. 2, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 317](#))

Ribbon of Cyrene Commandery No. 7, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 10)



Fig. 10. Ribbon of Cyrene Commandery No. 7, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 318](#))

Ribbon of Ivanhoe Commandery No. 17, 1874 (Fig. 11).

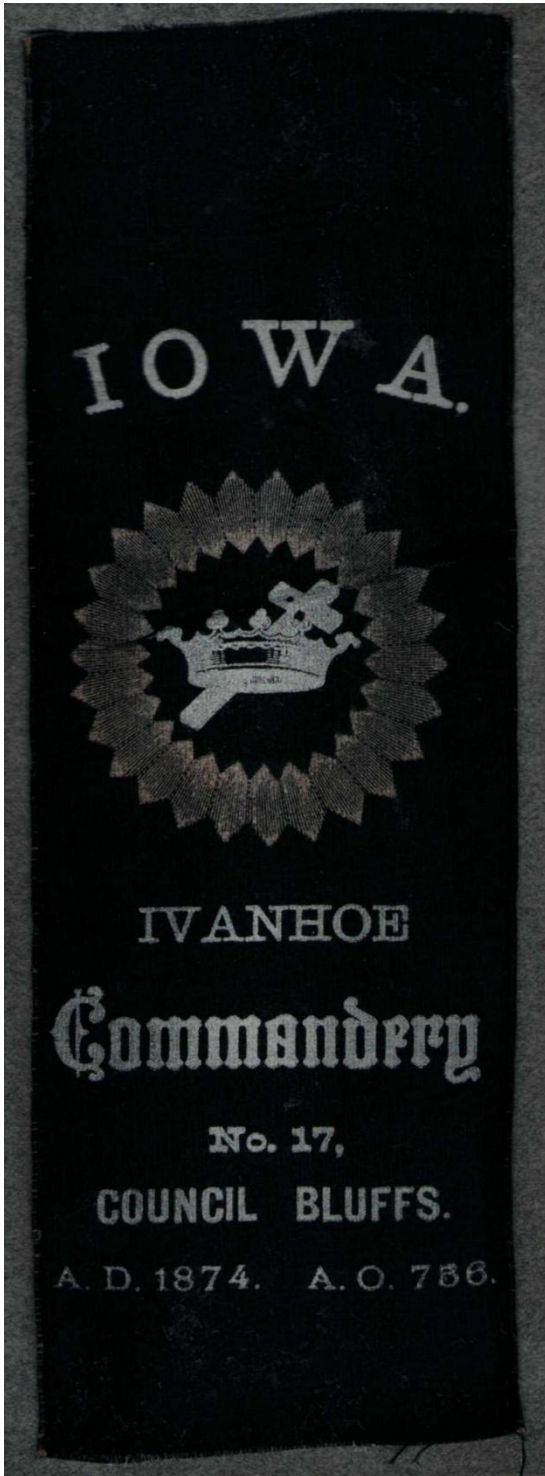


Fig. 11. Ribbon of Ivanhoe Commandery No. 17, 1874 (MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 320)

Ribbon of Grice Commandery No. 16, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 12).

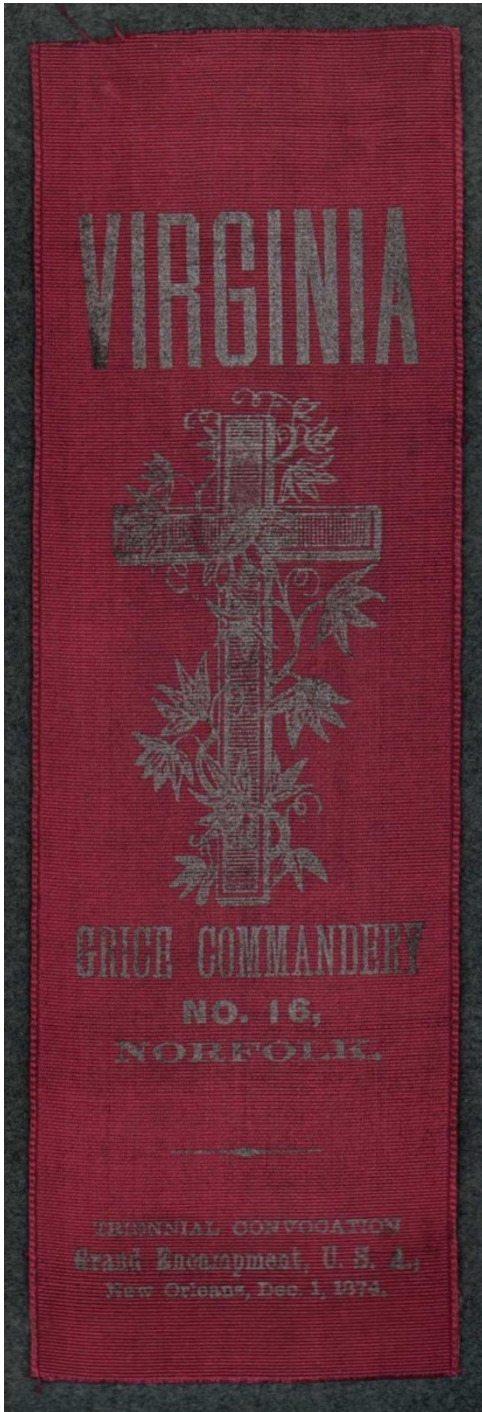


Fig. 12. Ribbon of Grice Commandery No. 16, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 328](#))

Ribbon of Grand Commandery of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, 1874 (Fig. 13).

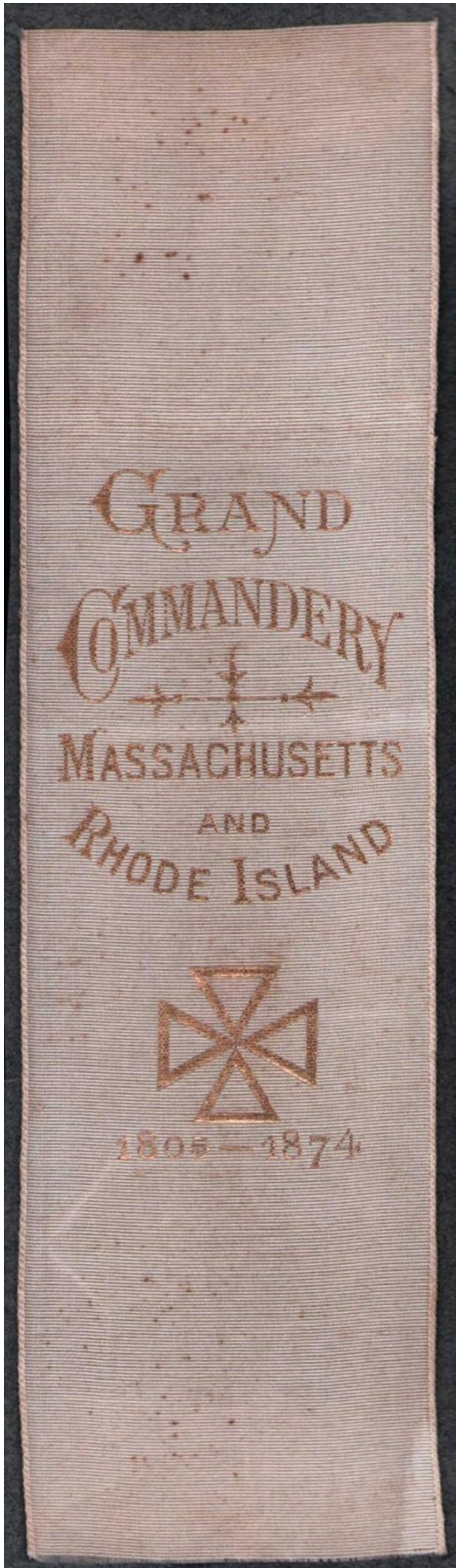


Fig. 13. Ribbon of Grand Commandery of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 331](#))

Ribbon of Maryland Commandery No. 1, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 14).

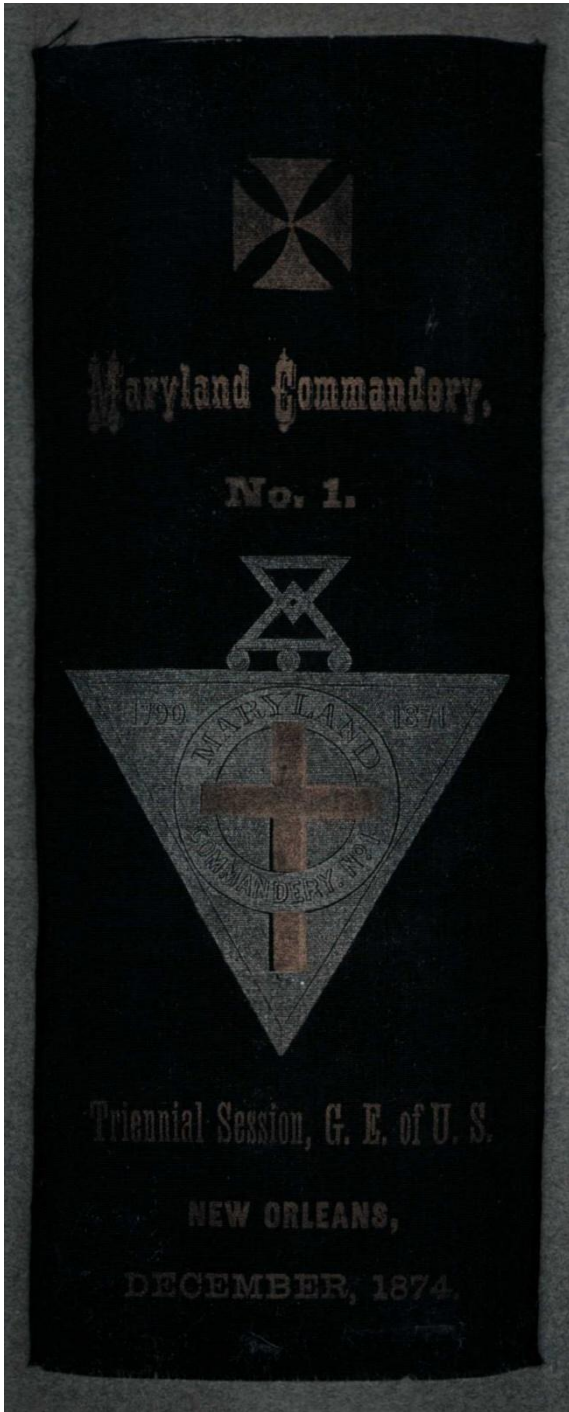


Fig. 14. Ribbon of Maryland Commandery No. 1, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 336](#))

Ribbon of Coeur de Lion Commandery No. 4, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 15).

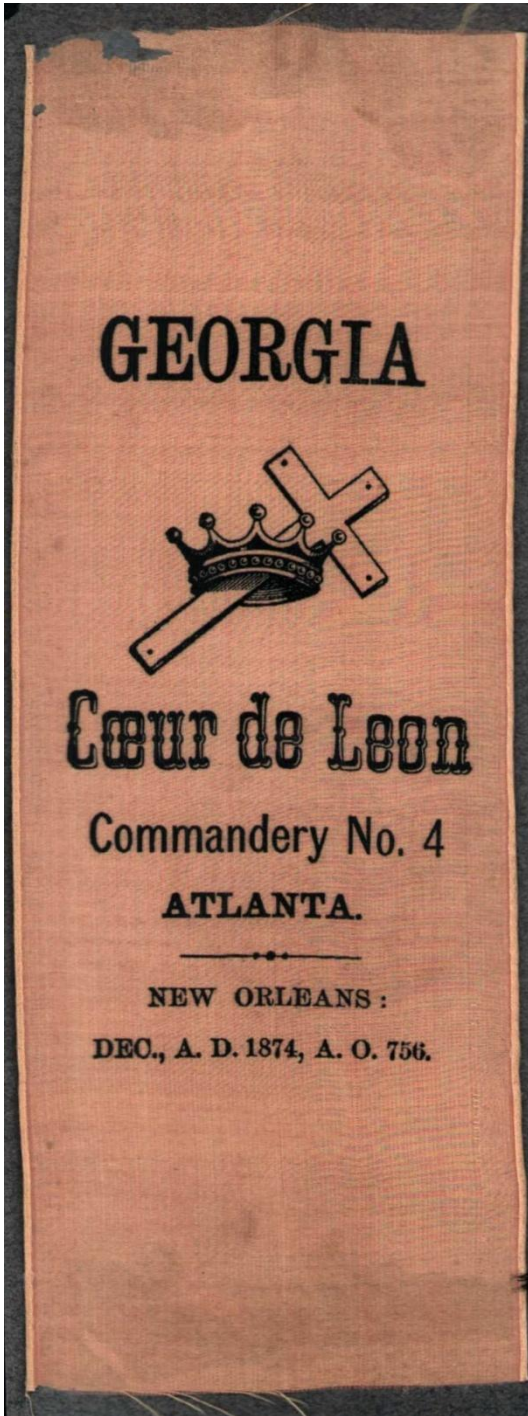


Fig. 15. Ribbon of Coeur de Lion Commandery No. 4, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 339](#))

Ribbon of High de Payens Commandery No. 29, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 16).

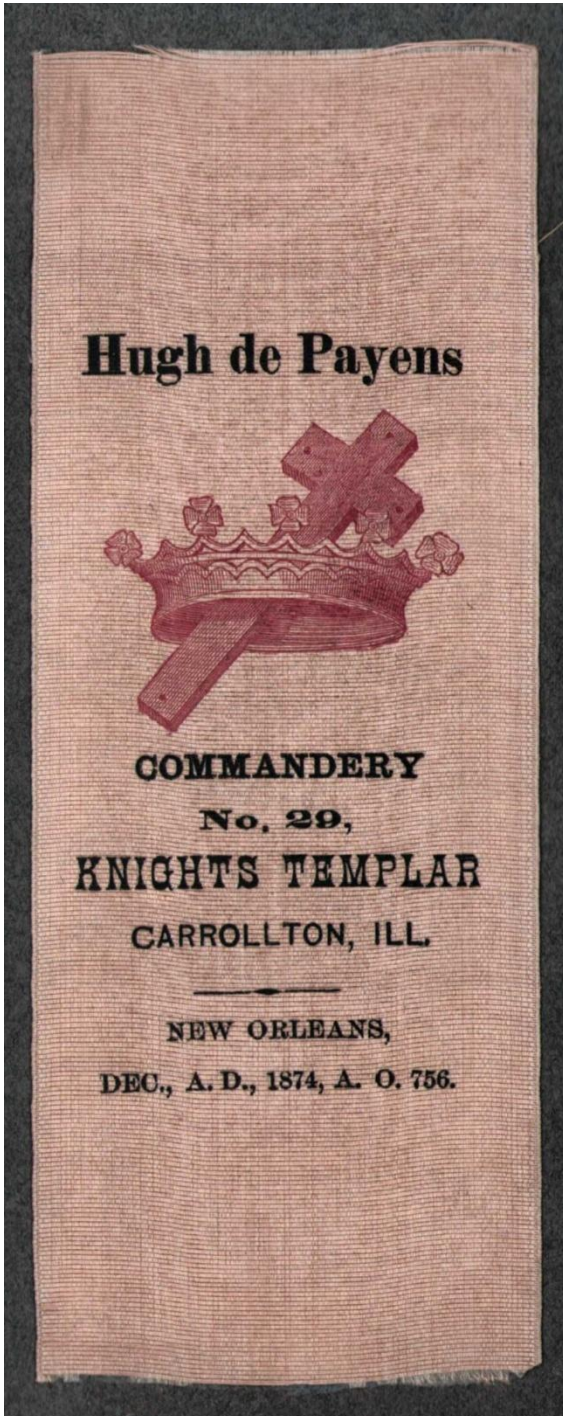


Fig. 16. Ribbon of High de Payens Commandery No. 29, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHA KT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 342](#))

Ribbon of St. Cyr Commandery No. 6, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 17).

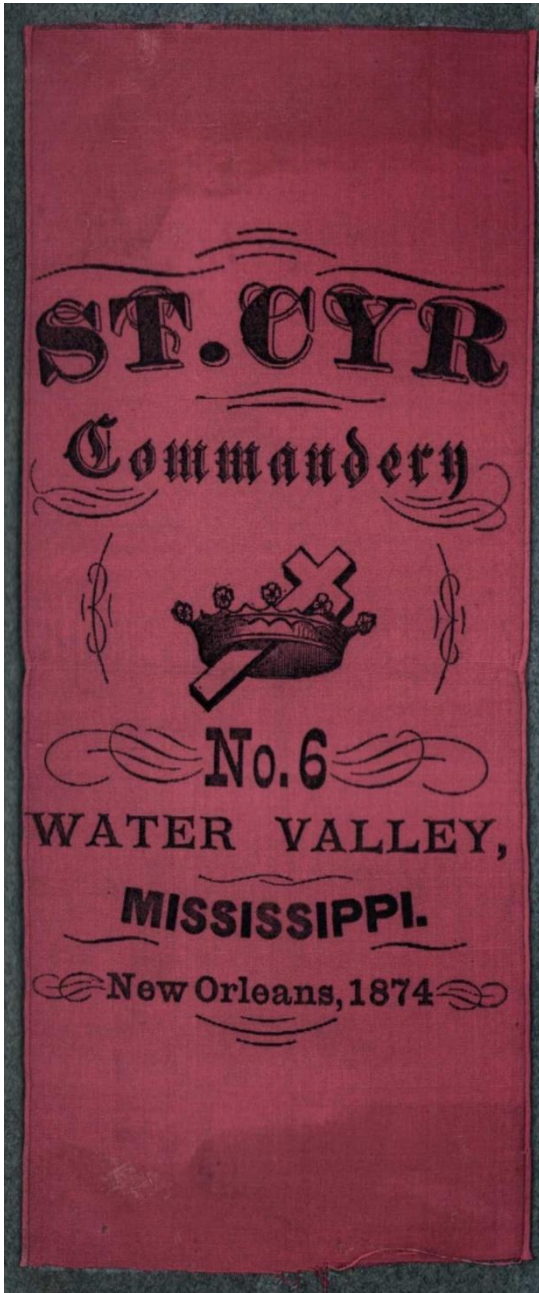


Fig. 17. Ribbon of St. Cyr Commandery No. 6, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 346](#))

The collection also included a Ribbon of Raper Commandery No. 1, May 14, 1874, one of the earliest known Knights Templar ribbons, preserved in significantly better condition (Fig. 18) than the example shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 18. Ribbon of Raper Commandery No. 1, May 14, 1874 ([MHA KT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 349](#))

Ribbon of Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 19).

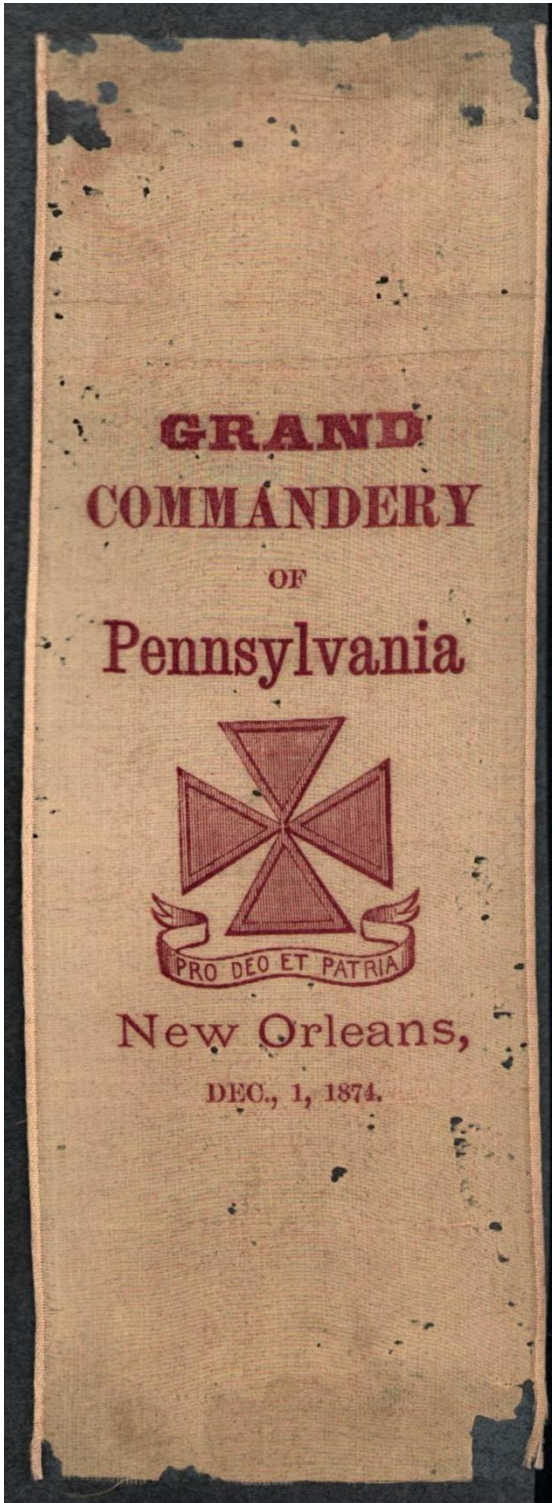


Fig. 19. Ribbon of Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 353](#))

Ribbon of Mt. Calvary Commandery, 1874 (Fig. 20).

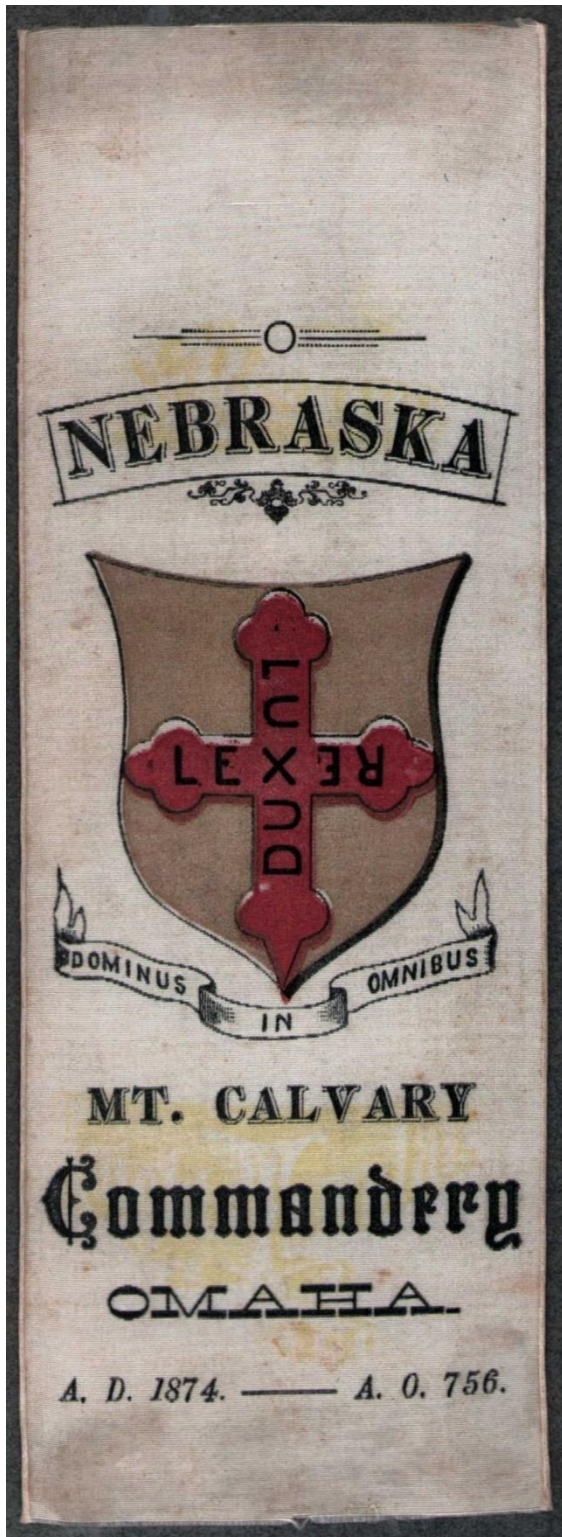


Fig. 20. Ribbon of Mt. Calvary Commandery, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 358](#))

Ribbon of South Caroline Commandery No. 1, 1874 (Fig. 21).

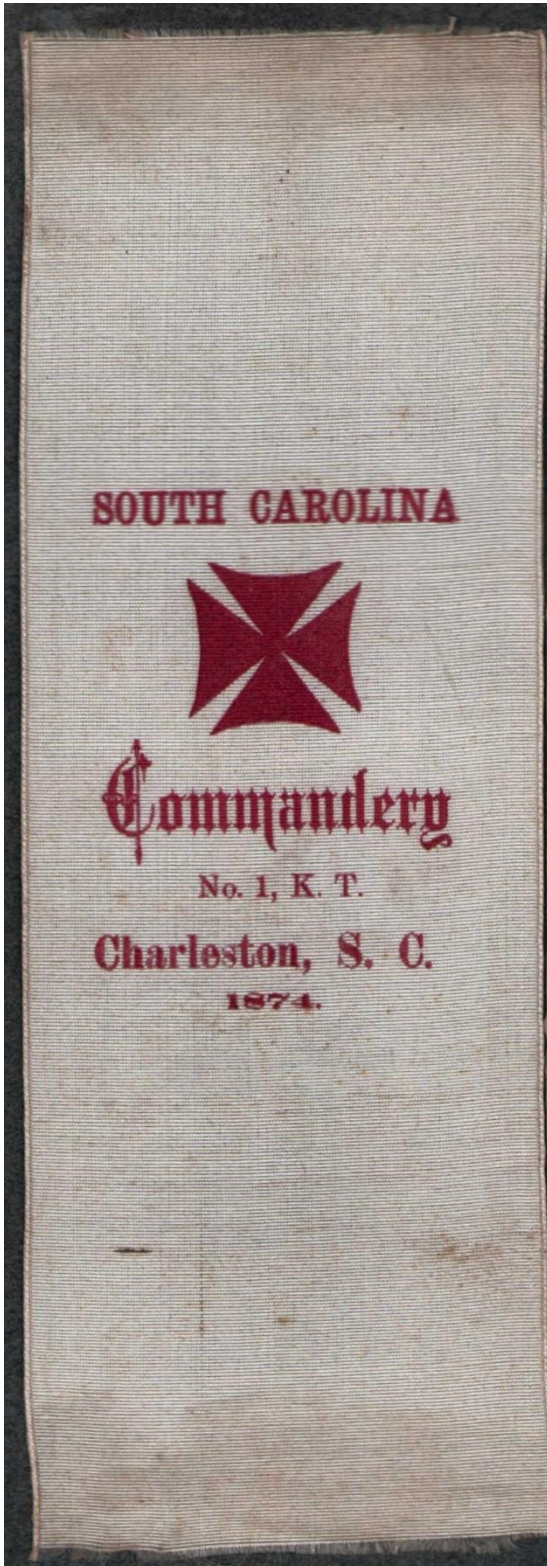


Fig. 21. Ribbon of South Caroline Commandery No. 1, 1874 ([MHA KT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 359](#))

Ribbon of Mt. Vernon Commandery No. 1, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 22).

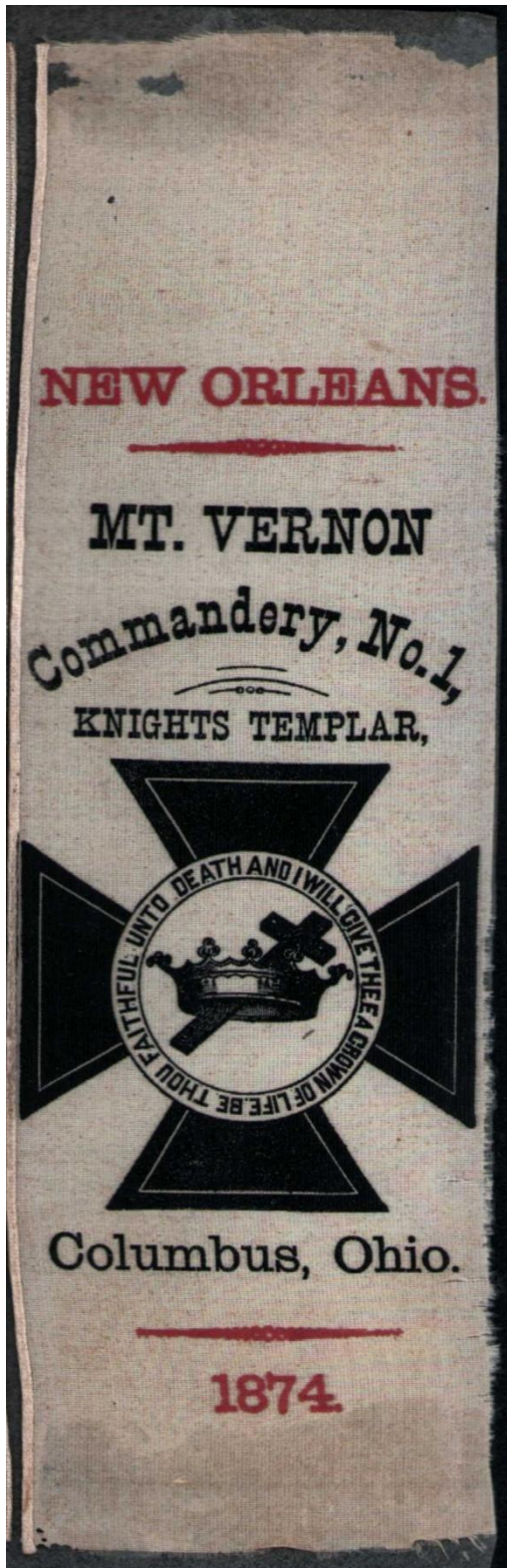


Fig. 22. Ribbon of Mt. Vernon Commandery No. 1, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHA KT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 360](#)).

Ribbon of Frankfort Commandery No. 4, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 (Fig. 23).

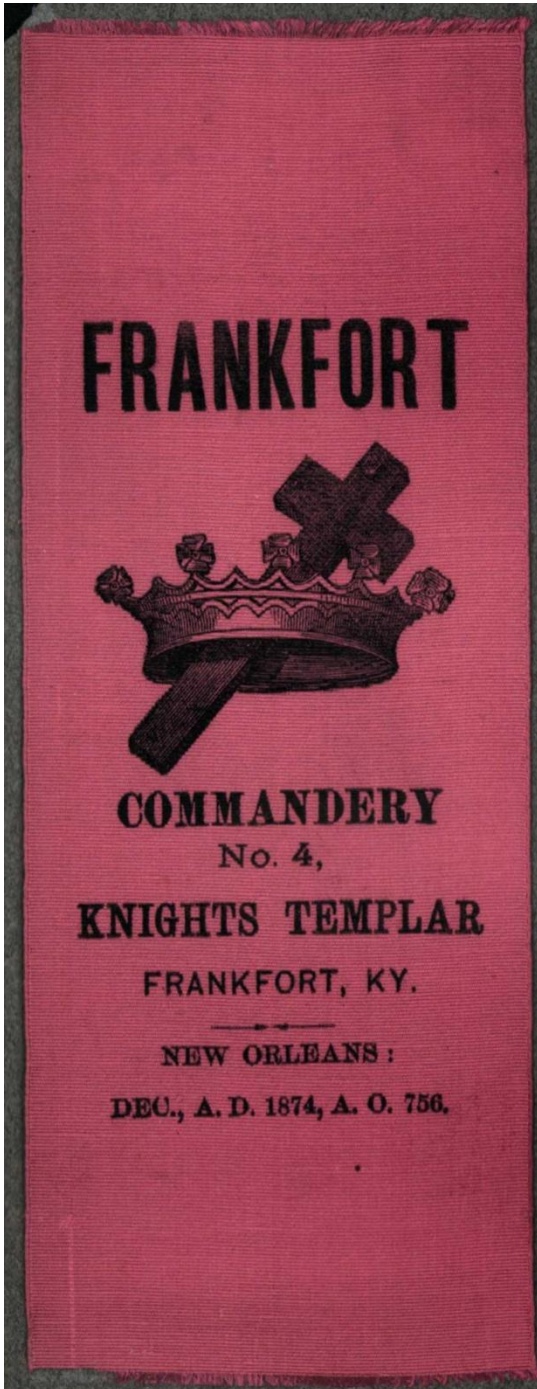


Fig. 23. Ribbon of Frankfort Commandery No. 4, New Orleans, December 1st, 1874 ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 373](#))

3. Results

Among the 23 ribbons examined, the earliest is the Ribbon of Raper Commandery No. 1, produced to commemorate the 26th anniversary of the Commandery on May 14, 1874 (Figs. 1, 18). Sixteen ribbons (Figs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, and 23) explicitly state that they were issued for the Triennial Conclave, held in New Orleans on December 1, 1874. Five additional ribbons (Figs. 7, 11, 13, 20, and 21) bear only the year 1874 without specifying the event they commemorated. Since these ribbons do not identify the occasion for which they were produced, and several of them belonged to Grand Commanderies (Fig. 13), we consider it highly likely that they were likewise issued for the Triennial Conclave of December 1, 1874.

The Circumstances Surrounding the Appearance of the First Ribbon

As noted above, the first ribbon acquired by the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar was produced on May 14, 1874, and belonged to Raper Commandery No. 1. This Commandery was established in Indianapolis, Indiana ([Catalog..., 2026: 37](#)). It was organized on May 14, 1848, through the efforts of Rev. William H. Raper. According to the *Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the State of Wisconsin*, the Commandery was originally known as Indianapolis Commandery No. 1 ([Proceedings of the Grand Commandery of Wisconsin..., 1860: 33](#)). It was later renamed in honor of its founder, becoming Raper Commandery No. 1.

On May 14, 1874, in celebration of its twenty-sixth anniversary, the Commandery issued a commemorative ribbon. By the summer of 1874, news of this initiative had spread throughout the Order, and Raper Commandery No. 1 became the pioneer of a new tradition—the wearing of commemorative ribbons within the Knights Templar Order.

It would, however, be unfair not to acknowledge that the earliest known reference to ribbons in the official records of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar dates to 1871. During the Triennial Conclave, the procession was led by a "*Troop of mounted Red Cross Knights, with prancing steeds gaily caparisoned, and lances decorated with gray ribbons*" ([Proceedings of the Grand Encampment..., 1871: 202](#)). The purpose of these ribbons was different from that of the later commemorative ribbons. Nevertheless, their use during the official procession of 1871 appears to have inspired the members of Raper Commandery No. 1 to create a distinctive commemorative ribbon for their own Commandery in honor of its anniversary.

In other words, commemorative ribbons as a component of the memorial culture of the Knights Templar originated as a grassroots initiative, which was subsequently accepted and supported by the leadership of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar.

In our opinion, the sequence of events may be reconstructed as follows. On September 21, 1871, during the Triennial Conclave parade in Baltimore, the lances of one of the mounted units were decorated with gray ribbons. On May 14, 1874, Raper Commandery No. 1 introduced the first personalized Knights Templar ribbon, bearing the Commandery's name, symbolism, and commemorative inscription, to mark its twenty-sixth anniversary. The idea was well received by the leadership of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar, and commemorative ribbons were subsequently permitted to be worn at Triennial Conclaves, including the next conclave held on December 1, 1874. At the same time, we have found no evidence that the use of ribbons was ever formally established through legislative or constitutional action.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, our study demonstrates that, as of 2026, the earliest ribbon preserved in the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar remains the Ribbon of Raper Commandery No. 1, which was produced and first presented on May 14, 1874. This ribbon may be regarded as one of the earliest commemorative ribbons in the history of the Order.

By the summer of 1874, information about the use of this commemorative ribbon had spread throughout the Order. The leadership of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar did not object to this innovation, and on December 1, 1874, numerous Commanderies and Grand Commanderies presented their own commemorative ribbons at the 1874 Triennial Conclave in New Orleans.

Thus, the first Triennial Conclave at which commemorative ribbons were used on a large scale was the 1874 Conclave, rather than the 1877 Conclave, as had previously been believed.

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