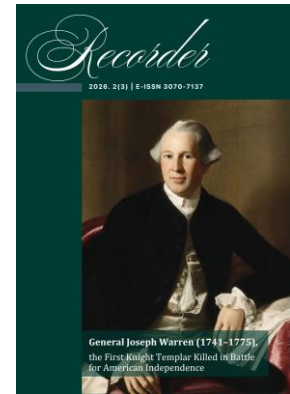




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"What the Photograph Kept Silent About": Reconstructing the History of Beauseant Commandery No. 7 (Brattleboro, Vermont) from a Single Photograph

Konstantine V. Taran ^a

^a Cherkas Global University, Houston, USA

Abstract

This article attempts to reconstruct the historical circumstances surrounding the creation of a single museum photograph and to provide the historical context necessary for its interpretation.

The study draws upon four groups of historical sources: artifacts preserved in the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar (Houston, USA), published documentary collections, contemporary periodical publications, and reference works.

The study concludes that the museum artifact (MHAKT CGU. Collection 4. Photo Materials. Exhibit No. 081), depicting a group of Knights Templar from Beauseant Commandery No. 7, is the official photograph of the Commandery taken during the Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave held in Boston in 1895. The Commandery was located in Brattleboro, Vermont, and belonged to the Grand Commandery of Vermont and, at the national level, to the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America. At the time the photograph was taken, the office of Eminent Commander of Beauseant Commandery No. 7 was held by Daniel P. Webster (1846–1904), one of the most distinguished figures of his generation—a surgeon, member of the Vermont House of Representatives, state senator, Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Vermont (1881–1886), and Right Eminent Grand Commander of the Grand Commandery of Vermont (1902).

Keywords: Beauseant Commandery No. 7, Knights Templar, Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America, Grand Commandery of Vermont, historical photography, historical reconstruction, Daniel P. Webster (1846–1904).

1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2026, the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar received a large-format photograph for permanent preservation. The photograph depicts a group of Knights Templar standing with their Commandery banner bearing the inscription "Beauseant Commandery No. 7, Brattleboro, Vt." It was unaccompanied by any explanatory notes or identifying information. Owing to its professional quality and exceptional level of detail, the photograph provides an opportunity to reconstruct the historical circumstances under which it was taken.

2. Materials

The study is based on several groups of historical sources, including artifacts preserved in the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar (Houston, USA), published documentary collections ([Proceedings..., 1904](#)), contemporary newspaper publications ([The Burlington Free Press, March 14, 1904](#)), and reference works ([Catalog..., 2026](#)).

The first group of sources deserves particular attention. As noted above, the present study is founded upon a single museum artifact—a photograph preserved as MHAKT CGU. Collection 4. Photo Materials. Exhibit No. 081. Despite the absence of accompanying documentation, this photograph contains a considerable amount of historical information that makes it possible to reconstruct the circumstances surrounding its creation and to identify many of the individuals, objects, and events depicted.



Fig. 1. Beauseant Commandery No. 7, Brattleboro, Vt. (MHAKT CGU. Collection 4. Photo Materials. Exhibit No. 081).

The photograph is mounted on a 14 × 17-inch cardboard backing, while the photographic print itself measures 10 × 13 inches, providing sufficient resolution to examine numerous details.

The lower row consists of eight Knights Templar. Behind them stand an additional fifty-one members of the Commandery, two of whom are dressed in civilian attire. The upper row includes fourteen women, who were most likely the wives of the Knights Templar, although some may have been their sisters. In total, the photograph depicts seventy-three individuals. At the top center is the Commandery banner bearing the inscription "Beauseant Commandery No. 7 (Brattleboro, Vt.)." This evidence provides the first reliable information about the photograph, allowing it to be identified as depicting members of Beauseant Commandery No. 7, a Knights Templar Commandery located in Brattleboro, Vermont.

3. Results

It should first be noted that although the Grand Commandery of Vermont was established as early as 1824, the number of subordinate Commanderies within its jurisdiction remained relatively small. Beauseant Commandery No. 7 of Brattleboro was one of these constituent Commanderies. By 1924, the Grand Commandery of Vermont comprised only fourteen Commanderies (Catalog..., 2026: 117). Beauseant Commandery No. 7 received its charter in 1864.

A detailed examination of the photograph reveals that nearly all of the Knights Templar are wearing an identical badge on the left side of their uniforms, indicating that the Commandery was participating in a particular event (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Badge worn on the uniforms of the Knights Templar.

A visual comparison demonstrates that the badge worn by the members of the Commandery corresponds to the official badge of the Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America, held in Boston in 1895. For comparison, see Fig. 3, which illustrates an original example from the badge and ribbon collection of the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar.



Fig. 3. Badge of 26th Triennial conclave. Boston, 1895 (MHAKT CGU. Collection 3. Badges and Ribbons. Exhibit No. 106)

The identification of the badge makes it possible to determine the occasion on which the photograph was taken—the participation of Beauseant Commandery No. 7 in the Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America, held in Boston in 1895.

Following the Conclave, a commemorative photographic volume entitled *Photographical Souvenir: Grand Encampment of Knights Templar Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave Held at Boston, Mass., Aug. 26–31, 1895* was published. On page 241 of this lavishly illustrated publication, the same photograph appears as the official portrait of Beauseant Commandery No. 7 taken during the Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Official photograph of Beauseant Commandery No. 7 at the Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave, Boston, Massachusetts, 1895 ([Photographical Souvenir...](#), 1895: 241)

In addition, page 240 of the *Photographical Souvenir* contains a separate plate featuring four officers of the Commandery, illustrations of the ribbons worn by its members during the Triennial Conclave, and biographical information on the Commandery's officers and Past Commanders (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Officers of Beauseant Commandery No. 7, Commandery ribbons displayed at the Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave, and biographical information on the Commandery's officers and Past Commanders ([Photographical Souvenir...](#), 1895: 240)

Although the officers in the *Photographical Souvenir* are depicted in civilian dress, a comparison of the officer's badge shown in the publication with the badge visible in Fig. 2, together with the close visual resemblance of the individual portrayed, makes it possible to identify him as the Eminent Commander of Beauseant Commandery No. 7 (Fig. 6).

Furthermore, the *Photographical Souvenir* incorrectly records Daniel Webster's middle initial as "H." In fact, his middle name was Peaslee, and his full name was Daniel Peaslee Webster ([Proceeding...](#), 1904: 67-68).



Fig. 6. Sir Daniel P. Webster – Eminent Commander of Beauseant Commandery No. 7

The biography of Daniel Peaslee Webster deserves closer attention, as he was one of the most distinguished public figures of his generation. Webster was born on December 7, 1846, in Northfield, Washington County, Vermont (*The Burlington Free Press*, March 14, 1904). After graduating from the Medical Department of the University of Vermont, he began practicing medicine at the age of twenty-one. Sixteen years later, he relocated to Brattleboro, where he continued his medical career. In 1898 he was appointed Postmaster of Brattleboro and was reappointed to that office in 1902. Dr. Webster represented Putney in the Vermont House of Representatives in 1872 and 1874 and, in 1878, was elected State Senator for Windham County. He also served as Chief Surgeon on the staffs of several governors and was a member of the Brattleboro Town Council for a number of years.

Daniel P. Webster was equally distinguished in Freemasonry. He was raised to the degree of Master Mason in Golden Rule Lodge No. 32 in March 1868 and was elected Worshipful Master on December 7, 1871. He was exalted in Fort Dummer Chapter No. 12, Brattleboro, on June 5, 1874; greeted as a Royal and Select Master in Connecticut Council No. 16, Brattleboro, on April 5, 1894; and was created and dubbed a Knight Templar in Beauseant Commandery No. 7, Brattleboro, on May 17, 1876. From 1876 to 1881, he served as Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Vermont. In 1893, Webster was elected Eminent Commander of Beauseant Commandery No. 7, a position he held for the next three years. During the same period, he advanced through the officer ranks of the Grand Commandery of Vermont, culminating in his election as Right Eminent Grand Commander in 1902 (*Proceeding...*, 1904: 67–68). Daniel Peaslee Webster died in Brattleboro on March 13, 1904 (*The Burlington Free Press*, March 14, 1904).

Figure 2 also reveals another noteworthy detail: the personalized Commandery plate worn by the members. The plate bears both the name of the owner and the number of the Commandery, making it possible to identify individual members when such badges have survived (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Personalized identification plate of Beauseant Commandery No. 7.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be stated that the museum artifact ([MHAKT CGU. Collection 4. Photo Materials. Exhibit No. 081](#)), depicting a group of Knights Templar of Beauseant Commandery No. 7, is the official photograph of the Commandery taken during the Twenty-Sixth Triennial Conclave held in Boston in 1895. The Commandery was headquartered in Brattleboro, Vermont, and belonged to the Grand Commandery of Vermont and, at the national level, to the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America.

At the time the photograph was taken, the office of Eminent Commander of Beauseant Commandery No. 7 was held by Daniel P. Webster (1846–1904), one of the most distinguished figures of his generation—a surgeon, member of the Vermont House of Representatives, state senator, Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Vermont (1881–1886), and Right Eminent Grand Commander of the Grand Commandery of Vermont (1902).

Thus, through the application of historical reconstruction and the analysis of complementary documentary sources, a single museum photograph has made it possible to identify the event at which it was taken, establish its date and provenance, determine the Commandery represented, identify its Eminent Commander, and reconstruct an important chapter in the history of Beauseant Commandery No. 7. In this sense, the photograph proved to be far more than a simple visual record—it preserved a historical narrative that had remained untold for more than a century.

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