

## **A Brief History of Prince Hall Templarism**

Masonic tradition states that in 1818, the Grand Master of England, the Duke of Sussex, deputized Passey Benjamine, a seafaring man, and a native of French West Indies, authorizing him to establish commanderies in West Indies and North America. Benjamine had previously been made a Mason in St. George's Lodge No. 32, Liverpool, England. He became a resident of Philadelphia, PA and was made a member of the first African Lodge of Philadelphia. On June 12, 1820, Benjamine organized St. George Commandery in Philadelphia, PA with Joseph Smith chosen as Commander. The commandery was named after a patron Saint of England, who was martyred under Diocletian after confessing Christianity.

After other Commanderies were subsequently formed in Philadelphia, a Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania was organized on September 13, 1832 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with Sir Isaac Sullivan elected as Grand Commander. This Grand Commandery was under the auspices of the First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America for Pennsylvania. On June 8, 1844, the Grand Commandery of Pennsylvania evolved into the First Independent African Grand Encampment of North America with Sir Thomas Henderson elected as Most Eminent Grand Master. It was headquartered at the Masonic Temple, 409 S. 11th Street, Philadelphia, PA. In 1844, a Grand Encampment of Knights Templar affiliated with Hiram Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania was organized in Philadelphia, PA. It was headquartered at Union Hall, South 7th Street, Philadelphia, PA and later moved to the Masonic Temple, 10th & Hunter Streets in 1874 and subsequently to the Masonic Temple, 1227 Locust Street, Philadelphia, Pa in 1879. From these two Grand Encampments, Commanderies were rapidly organized & constituted throughout North America.

On October 20, 1881, the Grand Encampment of PA merged with the First Independent African Grand Encampment of North America to form the United Grand Commandery, Masonic Knights Templar of PA with Sir William H. Miller elected as Right Eminent Grand Commander. Masonic Knights Templary spread rapidly throughout Pennsylvania among Prince Hall Freemasons who are Holy Royal Arch Masons. The United Grand Commandery was headquartered at 1227 Locust Street and 409 S. 11th Street, Philadelphia, PA until the early 1950's when it moved to the Masonic Temple at 1632 W. Diamond Street. It is presently headquartered with Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand lodge of Pennsylvania located at 4301N. Broad St Philadelphia, PA.

As we are in the 21st Century, we can easily picture strides of rapid progress. We, the Sir Knights of this day, must contribute to that progress. We look to the future while commemorating the past, drawing lessons from the past for the future.

This article was edited from A History of Freemasonry Among Negroes in America by Harry E. Davis, 1946