



IDAHO KNIGHTLY NEWS

Barry E. Newell, KTCH, KCT, Editor
306 Maple St., Emmett, ID 83617
ksigmason@gmail.com

Editor's Note

If anyone would like to submit an article for the Idaho Knightly News, please email me your article as a Microsoft Word document. Keep it between 1 page and 1.5 pages.

Upcoming Events:

Montana Grand York RiteJun 4-6
Colorado Grand York Rite..... Sep 10-12
Wyoming Grand York Rite..... Sep 17-19

The Templar Uniform

By Barry E. Newell

From my earliest interest in the Knights Templar of the Crusades, I was always struck by the simplicity and symbolism of their garments. The white mantle of the knight and the red cross worn over the heart were not merely decorative. It proclaimed identity and purpose. The garment itself became a sermon in cloth.

When I first entered the Asylum in the Fall of 2008, I saw something quite different.

The Sir Knights were seated in black coats, feathered chapeaux, and armed with swords. Like many new Sir Knights, I found the contrast striking. Here was a Christian order bearing the name of the valiant knights of the Crusades, yet clothed in a uniform far removed from the mantle and cross we instinctively associate with medieval Templary. An important question is raised: how did we get here?

The medieval Knights Templar were governed by a Rule, as were other religious and military orders of the Crusading era. At the Council of Troyes, with the influence of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Templar Rule helped define the life, discipline, and garments of the Order. The white mantle symbolized purity and the religious vows of the knight. In 1147, Pope Eugene III granted the Templars the right to wear the red cross, traditionally placed over the heart.

Modern Masonic Templary, of course, is not the medieval Order continued in an unbroken institutional line. We are a Masonic Christian order of knighthood, governed not by the medieval Rule. The Grand Encampment regulates our uniforms, and they vary by rank, office, and jurisdiction. The familiar dress uniform

includes the black double-breasted coat, black military-style trousers, shoulder boards for officers, sleeve crosses, jewels of rank or merit, the sword, and the feathered chapeau.

The chapeau in particular has become one of the most recognizable features of American Templary. Its black and white plumes, rosette, gold lace, and naval appearance certainly give the modern Sir Knight a distinctive presence. In procession, the full dress uniform can be impressive, but it is a product of its time.

Early American Knights Templar did not always dress as we do today. The older American Templar appearance was much simpler, often consisting of a black triangular apron, a sash, and a sword worn over ordinary clothing. In the years following the Civil War, fraternal organizations flourished, and so did the regalia companies that supplied them. The modern Templar uniform developed in that Victorian environment, when elaborate regalia, military styling, and public procession were deeply admired. The black frock coat and feathered chapeau reflect 19th-century American fraternal culture far more than medieval Templar simplicity and principles.

This is not necessarily a criticism. Every age leaves its mark upon the institutions it loves. The uniform we inherited has served generations of Sir Knights. It has marched in public processions, honored the dead, adorned Easter services, and given visible dignity to Commandery ritual. Many Sir Knights cherish it, and rightly so.

We should also be honest. The full uniform is expensive. It can be difficult for new members to obtain. In some places it has become a barrier rather than an inspiration. Younger Masons and new Sir Knights may

admire the Order, but hesitate when faced with the cost of a uniform that is used only a few times a year. If our mission is to promote Christian Masonry, chivalric virtue, and service to our faith, we must ask whether our clothing supports that mission or sometimes stands in its way.

The authorization of the Templar apron in 2021 shows that the Grand Encampment has already recognized the value of older symbols and more practical alternatives. The continued use of the Cap and Mantle uniform also reminds us that simplicity can be both dignified and deeply symbolic. A mantle bearing the cross may, in many ways, communicate the identity of a Christian knight more directly than a Victorian frock coat and plumed chapeau.

This does not mean we should discard our heritage. Rather, it may be time to think carefully about emphasis. Perhaps the full uniform should remain available for those occasions where its grandeur is most fitting, while simpler, more affordable, and more historically resonant options are encouraged for regular Commandery use. The question is not whether we honor the past, but which past we are choosing to emphasize: the Victorian fraternal age or the older chivalric ideal.

The garments of the medieval Templar taught humility, purity, obedience, and sacrifice. The modern uniform teaches order, dignity, and discipline. Both have value. As we look to the future of Templary, we should ensure that our outward appearance reflects our inward purpose.

The sword, the cross, and the mantle all remind us that we are called to be Christian knights. Whatever uniform we wear, may it never become a substitute for the virtues it is meant to represent.