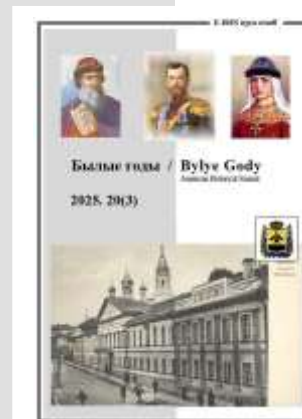


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## Ribbons in the American Masonic Order of Knights Templar (second half of the 19th century): Their Emergence and Evolution

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### Abstract

This work examines the emergence and evolution of ribbons in the American Masonic order of Knights Templar in the second half of the 19th century.

The study's source base incorporates a collection of ribbons at Cherkas Global University's Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar.

The study's findings revealed that one of the first ribbons in the American Masonic order of Knights Templar emerged in 1874 in connection with the 26th anniversary of the establishment of Raper Commandery No. 1. In 1875, as many as several commanderies presented their ribbons at the 62nd Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of New York. Subsequently, the order's leadership gave the green light to the use of ribbons at its triennial conclaves as well. The first triennial conclave to witness extensive use of ribbons was the one held in 1877 in Cleveland, Ohio.

Subsequent to 1877, all of the organization's 19th-century triennial conclaves, namely those held in 1880, 1883, 1886, 1889, 1892, 1895, and 1898, witnessed extensive use of ribbons. At that time, it became a common practice to adorn ribbons (e.g., with a fringe or tassel), as well as add artistic value to them. The order's tradition of producing ribbons endured for more than 50 years (there is a ribbon that was produced in connection with the Triennial Conclave of 1940).

**Keywords:** ribbon, Knights Templar, second half of the 19th century, museum, Cherkas Global University.

### 1. Introduction

The first known records of ribbons in American Masonic history date back to the late 18th century. Normally they were used in the context of commemorative activities, and also as part of the regalia of special personnel. A ribbon is a band with special text printed on it. There are ribbons adorned with a badge or fringe. M.C. MacDonald's 'Fraternal Regalia I: Knights Templar' describes ribbons as made "for field days and Conclaves" (MacDonald, 2008: 99). Despite the fact that such ribbons were produced in the tens of thousands, to date there has been no dedicated research on them. And that is what makes this study all the more relevant.

### 2. Materials and methods

The study's source base incorporates a collection of ribbons at Cherkas Global University's Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar. The museum's holdings are divided into four parts – the sword collection, the uniform collection, the badge and ribbon collection, and the photo collection. As of July 1, 2025, the badge and ribbon collection numbered 150, with half of those being ribbons.

Most of the ribbons in the collection were produced in the last quarter of the 19th century. Each is assigned a unique accession number.

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For the purposes of this study, some use was also made of the museum's photo collection.

### 3. Discussion

To date, there has been no dedicated research on Masonic Knights Templar ribbons. Nevertheless, ribbons of this kind are mentioned in several works, namely: 'Fraternal Regalia I: Knights Templar' by M.C. MacDonald, which mentions the ribbon for Corinthian Chasseur Commandery No. 53 (MacDonald, 2008: 99), 'Photographic Souvenir: Grand Encampment of Knights Templar, 26th Triennial Conclave, held at Boston, Mass., Aug. 26-31, 1895' by W.A. Mason, which mentions 14 ribbons belonging to the different committees concerned with organizing the event (Mason, 1895: 104), and 'Sir Frederick S. Rogers (1847–1908) in the Museum Collection of Cherkas Global University' by A. Cherkas, which mentions one of the ribbons featured in the present article (Cherkas, 2024: 1679).

As a side note, Cherkas Global University's museum collection has served more than once as a source for researchers interested in the history of the American Knights Templar. Specifically, A. Cherkasova offers in her work a detailed examination of all four of the museum's collections (Cherkasova, 2025). The museum's holdings have served as a valuable source for inquiry into the history of Bethany Commandery No. 28 (Cherkas, 2025), for research on rare Knights Templar publications from the first half of the 19th century (Cherkas, 2025a), and for research aimed at creating biographical accounts of the lives of prominent Knights Templar (A.A. Marden (Cherkas, 2024a), G.S. Blackie (Cherkas, 2024b), and A.E. Worthington (Cherkas, 2024c)).

### 4. Results

The more rare ribbons are exhibited in the second section of Stand 2 on the north side of the museum. (Each stand has five sections (counted top-down).) Figure 1 displays 10 ribbons below a set of three photographs.



**Fig. 1.** Ribbons exhibited in the Museum of the History of the American Knights Templar. North side, Stand 2, Section 2

Pictured fifth on the left in Figure 1 is the anniversary ribbon for Raper Commandery No. 1, the oldest ribbon in the museum's collection, which was produced in connection with the 26th anniversary of the establishment of that commandery, celebrated on May 14, 1874 (Figure 2).



**Fig. 2.** Anniversary ribbon for Raper Commandery No. 1, 1874 (Accession No. 138)

While the ribbon's state of preservation is relatively poor, all the dates are sufficiently legible to be able to attribute it to the original source. The ribbon is adorned with a silver fringe.

The 62nd Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of New York was held on October 12 through 13, 1875, in Albany, New York. The event was attended by delegates from at least two commanderies, Monroe Commandery No. 12 and Cyrene Commandery No. 39 (both based in Rochester, New York), with each bringing ribbons of their own to it ([Figures 3](#) and [4](#)).



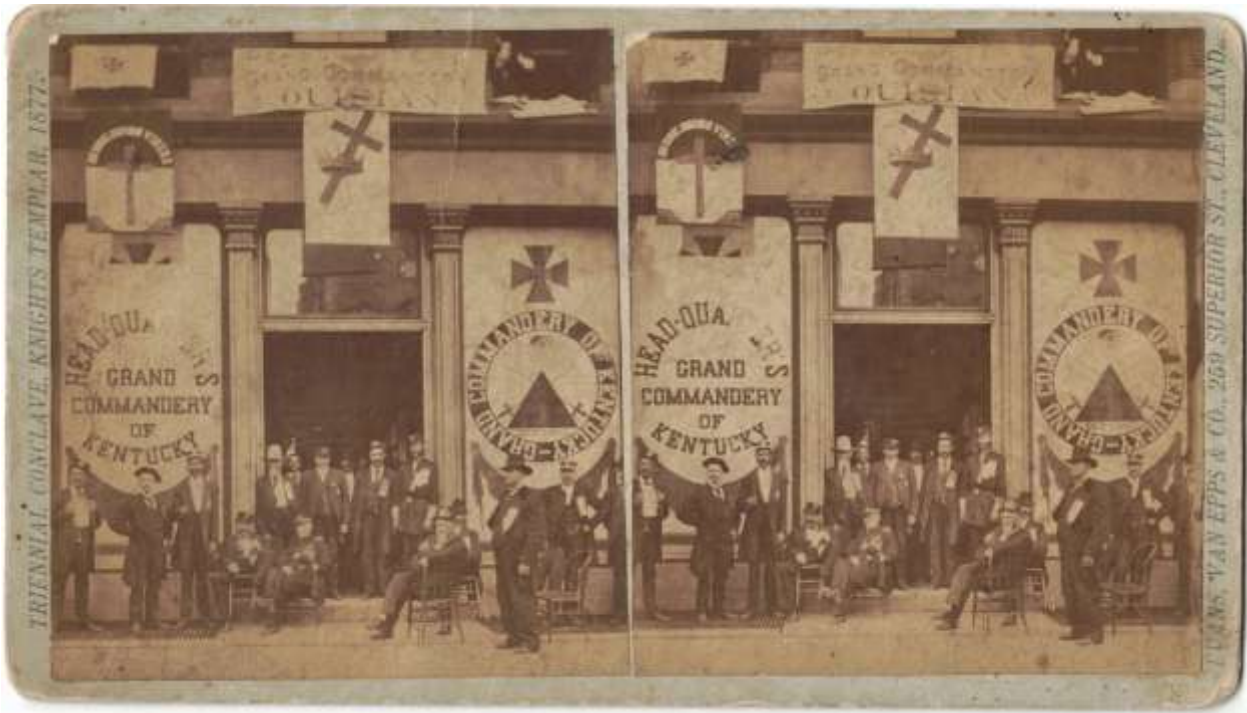


**Fig. 3.** Ribbon for Monroe Commandery No. 12 (No. 140)



**Fig. 4.** Ribbon for Cyrene Commandery No. 39 (No. 139)

At the time of writing this article, no other ribbons for the Grand Commandery's annual conclaves had been found. The idea of using ribbons must have been embraced by the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the USA as good, for in 1877 ribbons appeared for the first time at a triennial conclave – the one held in Cleveland, Ohio. [Figure 5](#) displays a photograph of that event, one of the earliest taken of a triennial conclave.



**Fig. 5.** Photograph taken during the Triennial Conclave of 1877, Cleveland, Ohio (No. 026)

Figure 5 displays a photograph picturing a group of Knights Templar in front of the stand of the Grand Commandery of Kentucky. A close-up of that photograph is provided in Figure 6.



**Fig. 6.** Close-up of the 1877 Triennial Conclave photograph (No. 026)

As can be seen in Figure 6, ribbons were always worn on the right side of the chest, as if in line with a prescribed procedure for wearing them.



Figure 1 displays as many as three ribbons related to the Conclave of 1877: the ribbon for St. Joseph Commandery No. 4 (Figure 7), the one for Texas (Figure 8), and the one for Tancred Commandery No. 48 (Figure 9).



**Fig. 7.** Ribbon for St. Joseph Commandery No. 4 (No. 064)



**Fig. 8.** Ribbon for Texas (No. 137)



**Fig. 9.** Ribbon for Tancred Commandery No. 48 (No. 142)

Worthy of special attention are the second and third of the three 1877 ribbons. Specifically, the ribbon for Texas ([Figure 8](#)) could be regarded as the intermediate version for all of Texas's commanderies and its Grand Commandery. Ribbons for specific Texas commanderies would be used as early as the following triennial conclave (the one held in 1880) ([Figure 10](#)).



**Fig. 10.** Ribbon for San Felipe de Austin Commandery No. 1 (No. 061)

The third ribbon (Figure 9) appears to have belonged to a commandery that acted as a special escort to the Grand Master of the United States. This confirms the idea of the order's leadership having been behind the decision to make the use of ribbons universal.

Subsequent to 1877, all of the organization's 19th-century triennial conclaves, namely those held in 1880, 1883, 1886, 1889, 1892, 1895, and 1898, witnessed extensive use of ribbons. By the end of the 19th century, the Knights Templar had amassed considerable experience producing ribbons, with this type of insignia having gone through an evolution.

The thousands of ribbons produced in the period under examination included commandery ribbons with no connection to a historical event (Figure 11), commandery ribbons linked with a conclave (Figure 12), and Grand Commandery ribbons (Figures 13 and 14).



**Fig. 11.** Ribbon for Monroe Commandery No. 12 (No. 006)



**Fig. 12.** Ribbon for Ivanhoe Commandery No. 8 (No. 043)





**Fig. 13.** Ribbon for the Grand Commandery of Texas (No. 149)



**Fig. 14.** Ribbon for the Grand Commandery of South Dakota (No. 070)

Some commanderies produced as many as two ribbons of different color for a single conclave. Such, for instance, are the ribbons for Milford Commandery No. 11 ([Figures 15 and 16](#)).



**Fig. 15.** Ribbon for Milford Commandery No. 11 (red) (No. 046)



**Fig. 16.** Ribbon for Milford Commandery No. 11 (black) (No. 047)

Some ribbons had artistic value. Such, for instance, is the ribbon for Jackson Commandery No. 9 (Figure 17).



**Fig. 17.** Ribbon for Jackson Commandery No. 9 (No. 050)

Knights Templar ribbons also differed in style, with some adorned with a fringe (Figure 14) and others with a tassel (Figure 18).



**Fig. 18.** Ribbon for the Pilgrim Commandery (No. 097)

Thus, the mid-1870s witnessed the laying down of the tradition of wearing ribbons in the American Masonic order of Knights Templar. The fact that this tradition endured at least up until 1940 is evidenced by the ribbon for the Triennial Conclave of 1940. The central idea about the use of ribbons within the American Masonic order of Knights Templar appears to have been to create symbolic commemorative souvenirs in connection with significant ongoing events in the life of that organization. Eventually, ribbons would become the order's most ubiquitous historical item. As a side note, in the first quarter of the 20th century, the American Masonic order of Knights Templar numbered more than 1,700 commanderies with a combined enrollment of over 450,000 members ([Proceedings of the Grand Encampment..., 1928: 172](#)). However, since ribbons were made from fabric, they were inferior to metal items in state of preservation.



## 5. Conclusion

Below are the main takeaways from this article.

1. One of the first ribbons in the American Masonic order of Knights Templar emerged in 1874 in connection with the 26th anniversary of the establishment of Raper Commandery No. 1. In 1875, as many as several commanderies presented their ribbons at the 62nd Annual Conclave of the Grand Commandery of New York. Subsequently, the order's leadership gave the green light to the use of ribbons at its triennial conclaves as well. The first triennial conclave to witness extensive use of ribbons was the one held in 1877 in Cleveland, Ohio.
2. Subsequent to 1877, all of the organization's 19th-century triennial conclaves, namely those held in 1880, 1883, 1886, 1889, 1892, 1895, and 1898, witnessed extensive use of ribbons. At that time, it became a common practice to adorn ribbons (e.g., with a fringe or tassel), as well as add artistic value to them. The order's tradition of producing ribbons endured for more than 50 years. (There is a ribbon that was produced in connection with the Triennial Conclave of 1940.)
3. At the time of writing this article, Cherkas Global University's museum collection devoted to the American Masonic Order of Knights Templar contained as many as 75 ribbons from the second half of the 19th century, with 15 of those presented herein.

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