

# THE NAMING OF THREE NEBRASKA YORK RITE BODIES

By Fred O. Wyant, KYCH, KCT

November 18, 2001

We were recently updating the by-laws of Sangre de Cristo Tabernacle L (50) Knight Templar Priests of Nebraska when our recorder came across the following article, which he forwarded to me. The author was the 7<sup>th</sup> pillar at the time of the writing, which would put the date of the article circa 1965 (he was elected and installed as Preceptor May 2, 1967). He wrote:<sup>1</sup>

[It has always been my personal feeling that any organization which stands for something of value or has in its make-up a characteristic or symbol which distinguishes and sets it apart from any other group, should have an appropriate name. For that reason I have always disliked "place-names" and have felt that they attach no significance other than geographical location, which too is the weakest sort of distinction.

So when I was honored by being asked to suggest a name for each of the appendant Masonic groups organized in this jurisdiction in recent years, I immediately began to hunt for something that I thought would be appropriate to the historical background, symbolic character or esoteric teaching of each of them.

The first name I was to select was for a Priory of Knights of the York Cross of Honour, which harks back to the days when "Knighthood was in flower", and almost immediately King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table came to mind. That valiant and courageous band of Chivalry had always thrilled me from early boyhood, and outstanding among them all was Sir Galahad, the Knight who is described as being without an equal, without fear and without reproach. I felt that to emulate his character and imitate his conduct would be a laudable ambition for every member of the new Priory, and "SIR GALAHAD PRIORY No. 7" was born in 1939, the first Priory west of the Allegheny Mountains and the progenitor of at least five or six other Priories which now cover the Mid-West.

In 1948 the opportunity was presented to form a Council of the Allied Masonic Degrees, a sufficient number of Nebraskans having already become members of Grand Master's Council A in Washington, D.C. When Albert Pike had completed his final reorganization of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, there were left as orphans a number of more or less legitimate Masonic Degrees, all of which were based on the Bible – some entirely on the New Testament. They were allowed to lie dormant and unsponsored for many years until a governing body was organized in England called "The Christian Degrees of Freemasonry", which assumed control for some time. In the 1920's the sponsorship of ten of these orphans passed to a new organization in the United States and the long-dormant rituals were brought to life. These councils were especially active in the Carolinas, New York and New Jersey, and once again it was the privilege and honor of Nebraska to bring to the Mid-West the first Council organized away from the Atlantic seaboard.

The degrees in the council being primarily based on the degrees of the Royal Arch Chapter, the search for a new name was easily directed to that great day when Moses turned aside from keeping his flock on the backside of the desert to see the bush that burned with fire but was not consumed – that day when God Almighty revealed His True Name to the man whom He had chosen to lead the Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt.

"The Burning Bush" seemed most appropriate for our new Council, but lest some other Council might select it before we could be constituted, by the assistance of a Jewish friend I consulted the Rabbi of the largest orthodox synagogue in Omaha, trying to get the Hebrew word which would translate the title I had selected. He assured me that there was no single word which would do it, but that "Sneh Bo' Aire" – "The Bush That Burns" - was taken right from the Torah, the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Copy of article in possession of author.

Book of the Law, and would convey the exact meaning I wanted. So SNEH BO' AIRE became Council No. 17 and I was very happy for his advice, since the next council, chartered just a short time later, selected the Burning Bush Council No. 18.

The third, and possibly the most important, of these appendant groups came late to Nebraska. For a number of years there had been a sufficient group of Knights Priests to erect here a Tabernacle of Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests, but the time did not seem exactly propitious. But I was sure that the day would come some time – and I hoped that when the opportunity presented, I would be asked to suggest a name. So when the day arrived, I was ready.

The Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests is truly a Christian organization. Its membership is limited to Past Commanders of a Commandery of Knights Templar, every one of whom has partaken of the Fifth Libation and has sealed his Faith in the Immortal Son of God. Every syllable of its beautiful ritual throbs with the life and teachings of our Blessed Redeemer and all its precepts keep us in step with the Great Captain of our Salvation. I felt that the name of our Tabernacle must be intimately connected with the Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of the Blessed Immanuel. And we who have received the forgiveness of our sins through the power of the Hallowed Sacrifice on Calvary know that without the Blood of Christ there can be neither redemption nor any hope of Eternal Life. None of the forty-nine Tabernacles erected before us had chosen that significant phrase for a name, and I have been very pleased that you have accepted the Spanish translation of it – SANGRE DE CRISTO – to properly designate Tabernacle No. 50, Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests.

(signed)  
HAROLD H. THOM  
VII Pillar.]

Who was this obviously highly regarded Companion and Sir Knight who named those three masonic groups, and what can we say about his life and his masonic history?

<sup>2</sup>Harold Hartzell Thom was born in Worthington, Minnesota, September 9, 1887. In November 1889, when he was two years old, his parents moved to Omaha, Nebraska where he resided until his death on June 14, 1974, less than two months short of his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was educated in the public schools of Omaha, Nebraska, graduating from what later became Central High School with the class of 1906. He worked some months in the Paxton & Vierling Iron Works and then for the Union Pacific Railroad accounting department. While at the U.P., he took the examination for the Railway Mail Service (later the Postal Transportation Service) and received his appointment July 29, 1907. He continued in that service until his retirement in 1956 to devote his time to Masonic work. He served in both World Wars, rising from private to the rank of Major. During World War II, he had charge of the Personnel and Supply of a Prisoner of War Camp housing about 12,000 German and Italian non-commissioned officers.

At an early age Harold became a member of the Immanuel Baptist Church of Omaha where he maintained his membership until his death. He was active in the church, serving as Organist, Choir Director, Trustee, Deacon, and Moderator at various times. Subsequently, he was made an honorary deacon for life. By unanimous vote of the church body Harold was licensed to preach as a lay minister, and frequently preached at his church and other churches in the area. He was also listed by the Nebraska Baptist State Convention as available for interim work throughout the State.

In High School, he had been active in debating and oratorical classes, and it was only natural that the speaking field should appeal to him. He was the possessor of many medals won in competition, including the Diamond, or District Championship of the Demorest series, sponsored by the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

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<sup>2</sup> Grand Council of Nebraska proceedings, 1959

On March 30, 1947, he married Dorothy Charlotte Craig of Des Moines, Iowa, a granddaughter of Frederick W. Craig, who was General Grand High Priest of the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, 1918-1921. This union was blessed with two daughters, Laurie Diane, and Bonnie Jean. He also had a son, Harold Craigin Thom<sup>3</sup>, by an earlier marriage.

Here is what two of the masons who knew Harold Thom had to say about him:

"I remember Harold H. Thom well. He was a perfectionist in his Masonry. He was a mail clerk on the railroad. He married late in life to a much younger lady. They had 2 daughters. Plattsmouth received their Council Charter from Tecumseh when they closed down. Harold H. Thom was our inspector in Plattsmouth. Many of us belonged in Omaha when we got the Charter. Harold was trying to help us get started on our own as he was familiar with the work and we weren't too familiar with the wording. He said, "Our work was "Putrid". He was right, although we were not too pleased to hear it." – (Raymond Lancaster, PGC, KCT, KYCH)

"During the short period of time that I knew S.K. Thom I considered him, among others of that period, a true leader of leaders. His devotional services and sermons were outstanding. He was of noble stature, friendly and supportive of all of his associates." (Viron E. Baxter, PGC, KCT, KYGCH)

As further evidence of the great esteem in which Harold was held by his contemporaries, the western Nebraska AMD council number 121 of North Platte, was named: Harold H. Thom Council.

#### MASONIC RECORD

LODGE: Raised November 23, 1916 in Nebraska Lodge No. 1, A.F. & A.M. Served as Worshipful Master, 1931-32. First Grand Historian, Grand Lodge of Nebraska, 1950 – 1960<sup>4</sup>. Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan, 1948 – 1961. Member of the Missouri Lodge of Research, the American Lodge of Research (of New York City), the Quatuor Coronati (of London, England) and member, Philalethes Society.

CHAPTER: Charter member of Delta Chapter No. 60, R.A.M. (Combined with Omaha No. 1, March 14, 1987). Exalted September 25, 1920; served as High Priest in 1932 and Secretary 1956 – unknown<sup>5</sup>. Appointed Grand Master of the First Veil in 1944 and was elected Grand High Priest, December 4, 1952. Chairman of the Committee on Fraternal Correspondence and Grand Reviewer for the Grand Chapter, 1953 – 1974. Grand Representative of the Grand Chapter of South Dakota from 1941 – 1974. Honorary member of the Past Grand High Priests' Association of Kansas and of the Grand Chapters of Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Member and contributor to the Ohio Grand Chapter of Research and of Recharam Chapter No. 117 of the Grand Chapter of Michigan.

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Craigin Thom was also a mason for a period of time. He was exalted Sep 30, 1946 in Delta Chapter 60; suspended for NPD, Dec 31, 1975. He was greeted in Omaha Council 1, Nov 7, 1947; suspended for NPD in 1951, reinstated Oct 20, 1956 and again suspended for NPD Dec 31, 1975. He was knighted on Nov 29, 1946 in Mt Calvary Commandery 1; suspended for NPD Dec 31, 1950, and never reinstated. This in a letter dated Oct. 28, 2001 from Wm. A. Cox, recorder, Mt. Calvary 1, Omaha, NE.

<sup>4</sup> email from John Parsons, current Grand Historian of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, Sep 25, 2001

<sup>5</sup> Listed as such in his biography, but not found in the Grand Chapter annual report for 1956 or later years.

COUNCIL: Greeted in Omaha Council No. 1, Royal and Select Masters, October 28, 1920. Served as Illustrious Master in 1928 and Recorder 1956 – unk<sup>6</sup>. Elected Grand Treasurer of the Grand Council in Nebraska in 1948, and appointed Grand Captain of the Guard in 1956. Elected Grand Illustrious Master in 1959. Grand Representative of the Grand Council of Mississippi, 1928 – 1974.

COMMANDERY: Knighted in Mount Calvary Commandery No. 1, K.T., May 19, 1922. Served as Eminent Commander in 1939. Grand Instructor – Inspector General (Grand Tactics Officer) of the Grand Commandery of Nebraska, 1939 – 1942, 1946 – 1947. Grand Prelate of the Grand Commandery of Nebraska, 1968-1973.<sup>7</sup> Grand Representative of the Grand Commandery of Iowa, 1939 – 1974. Grand Commander (Honorary) of the Grand Commandery of Nebraska, 1973.<sup>8</sup> Honorary member of the Grand Commanderies of Kansas, South Dakota and Wyoming.

ORDER OF THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD: Elected M. E. President of the Grand Convention of Anointed High Priest of Nebraska in 1936 and 1937. Served as Chaplain 1945 – 1972. Honorary member of the Grand Conventions of Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota and Wyoming.

THRICE ILLUSTRIOUS MASTERS' COUNCIL: Was the first Thrice Illustrious Master of record in Nebraska, serving 1946 – 1948. Recorder from 1950 – 1972. Honorary member of the Order of the Silver Trowel of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

PAST COMMANDERS' ASSOCIATION: Secretary-Treasurer, 1945 – at least 1961<sup>9</sup>. Honorary member of the Iowa Association and of the Missouri Order of the Yellow Dog.

KNIGHTS OF THE YORK CROSS OF HONOUR: Charter member of Sir Galahad Priory No. 7, September 1, 1939. Eminent Prior, 1941. Knight Grand Cross, December 4, 1952. Registrar, 1939-40 and 1941 – 1962<sup>10</sup>. Honorary member of Missouri Priory No. 18; Pike's Peak Priory No. 21; Minnesota Priory No. 14; Kansas Priory No. 33; Charles Clyde Hunt Priory No. 42; Wyoming Priory No. 44.

HOLY ROYAL ARCH KNIGHT TEMPLAR PRIESTS: Charter member, Sangre de Cristo Tabernacle L, July 1, 1964. Elected Preceptor Dec 2, 1967. (Was a member of the Grand Preceptor's Tabernacle before 1959.)

ALLIED MASONIC DEGREES: Charter Member, Sneh Bo' Aire Council No. 17, 1948. Sovereign Master, 1950. Secretary, 1948-49 and 1950 – at least 1961<sup>11</sup>. Grand Steward, Knights of the Red Branch of Eri. Member of Installed Sovereign Masters' Council; Paumonauk Council No. 32, and Grand Master's Council, Knight Masons of Ireland; Grand College of Rites of the United States of America; Order of the Bath; Order of Corks.

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<sup>6</sup> Listed as such in his biography, but not found in the Grand Council annual report for 1956 or later years.

<sup>7</sup> Ltr. From Raymond Lancaster received Sep. 20, 2001

<sup>8</sup> 1973 Grand Commandery of Nebraska Annual Proceedings.

<sup>9</sup> Records not found beyond this year.

<sup>10</sup> He apparently served as both the 3<sup>rd</sup> prior of Sir Galahad Priory 7 and as registrar as well in 1941. At the time of his death in 1974, he was the oldest and only charter member of the priory. (Letter from Viron E. Baxter, KYGCH, past registrar, dated Sep 26, 2001.)

<sup>11</sup> Information not found beyond 1961.

MASONIC SOCIETAS ROSICRUCIANA IN CIVITATIBUS FOEDERATIS: Member of the New Jersey College before 1959.

ANCIENT & ACCEPTED SCOTTISH RITE: Received 32 deg. in Nebraska Consistory, November 22, 1923. Served as Wise Master, Semper Fidelis Chapter, Knights Rose Crois, 1943 – 1945. Designated Knight Commander of the Court of Honour, November 30, 1935. Coroneted 33 deg, Inspector General Honorary, December 10, 1949.

ANCIENT ARABIC ORDER NOBLES OF THE MYSTIC SHRINE: Member of Tangier Temple, A.A.O.N.M.S. June 13, 1953. Served on Ritualistic Divan, 1955 – at least 1961<sup>12</sup>.

#### OTHER MASONIC RELATED ORGANIZATIONS:

Secretary Masonic Temple Craft of Omaha; Charter Member of Liberty Chapter No. 273, Order of the Eastern Star; Member of Nebraska Veterans Freemasons Association 1937 – 1974; Worshipful Master, Masters & Wardens Club of Omaha, 1932; President, Square & Compass Club of Omaha, 1935; President, Omaha Chapter No. 19, National Sojourners, 1940 & Secretary 1935 – 1937; Commander, Joseph Warren Camp, Heroes of '76, 1941-1945; Regional Vice President, 5<sup>th</sup> District, National Federated Craft 1949-1953; Member of Mutual-Guild of Secretaries, Recorders, and Fraternal Correspondents of Masonic Grand Bodies, 1953 – 1974; Dubbed and Created a Knight of the Royal Order of Scotland of Heredom and Kilwinning, February 22, 1960; member Philalethes Society.

CIVIC ACTIVITIES: In addition to his church work listed above, Brother Thom was the Vice President of the Omaha Council of Churches, 1954-1956 and was a Life Member and Treasurer of the Miller Park P.T.A. (in 1959).

#### SOURCES:

Undated paper in the records of the Recorder of Sangre de Cristo Council L, H.R.A.K.T.P. circa 1964.

1960 Annual report of the proceedings of the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of Nebraska, biography of Harold Hartzell Thom.

Records of the Grand Lodge A. F. & A. M. of Nebraska.

Records of Omaha Council No. 1, Omaha, Nebraska.

Records of the Grand York Rite of Nebraska, Grand York Rite Office, Omaha, Nebraska.

Letters from Viron E. Baxter, Past Grand Commander of the Grand Commandery of Nebraska and Past Prior and past Registrar of Sir Galahad Priory #7; Wm. A. Cox, Recorder, Mt. Calvary Commandery 1, Omaha, NE; Raymond Lancaster and U. Wesley Fox, Past Grand Commanders of the Grand Commandery of Nebraska.

Email from John Parsons, Grand Historian of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, 2001.

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<sup>12</sup> Information not found beyond this date.