

New collecting opportunity . . .

Swords of the Masonic Orders

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(Photo courtesy Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.)

“Five ball” pillow pommel with Masonic square and compasses applied to the guard.

Detail of Five ball Masonic hilt.



A FIELD OF ARMS COLLECTING currently offering potential for development and investment is that of the ornamental regalia sword, often referred to disparagingly as the "Lodge" sword. Interest is emerging in these non-combat weapons as other swords become more scarce and costly. They were made by nearly all leading sword manufacturers of the late 19th and early 20th century, and provide the collector with a prime vehicle for the study of American social history. Ideally, they encompass iconography associated with a wide spectrum of fraternal, social, political, patriotic, mystic, religious, and bigot organizations that proliferated in the post-Civil War period.

Standard reference books on American swords deal mainly with identification of military edged weapons and fail to touch on the regalia sword. Theodore T. Belote included several Masonic presentation swords in *Smithsonian Bulletin* 163, but only inasmuch as they were associated with a historic personage whose swords had been given to the National Museum as a group gift. Such information as is available must be gleaned from rare manufacturers sales catalogues published by the Ames Sword Co.; Schuyler, Hartley & Graham; Henderson-Ames; Lilley-Ames; Pettibone Brothers; Ward-Stilson; and the C.E. Ward Co. There were also makers, such as C. Roby of West Chelmsford, Massachusetts, whose limited production did not warrant a printed catalogue. Other firms whose names appear on regalia swords were invariably agents for the aforementioned manufacturers. The grand-daddy of these catalogues was published by the Ames Sword Co. in the late 1880's, during the heyday of fraternal societies. Ames illustrated over 480 different swords whose designs were prescribed by more than eighty organizations.

The variety of regalia swords is seemingly endless and allows the collector wide scope for specialization by organization, hilt design, manufacturer, or technological development. Rarity factors exist which, with statistical research, will provide zest to the chase and reward for finding that "sleeper."

The last decade of the 19th century marks the high water mark of fraternal order fervor in America. Memberships in 1897 stood at over 7.7 million for the twenty-six leading secret societies. Nearly 115,000 members were Knights Templars. Slightly more belonged to the militant order of Odd Fellows. Many organizations, formed to espouse a specific cause, had small memberships and limited lives. Others with more universal appeal were venerable, altruistic, and continue to thrive.

In Freemasonry, the world's oldest and largest fraternal society, the sword has been employed for centuries as a visible symbol alluding to moral concepts. Sword symbolism, used in conjunction with a heart, serves to remind brethren that justice will prevail although ones' actions may be hidden from others in the



Masonic Tyler's sword, c. 1811-1830. Mother of pearl plaque grips, silver plated hilt, blade marked P. Knecht, Solingen.

innermost recesses of the human heart. It is illustrated in a guardian role, with the Book of Constitutions, reminding brethren of the confidentiality of ritual. A sword is incorporated in the insignia of many higher degrees in York Rite (Commandry Knights Templars) and Scottish Rite (Consistory), where it is used in ritual degree work as a symbol of the virtues of Justice, Fortitude, and Mercy. The double-edged aspect of the blade, cutting in both directions, alludes to equality inherent in justice. In a more mundane and physical context, sword exercise, or drill evolutions, are a part of Commandry and Consistory etiquette for honors, ceremonies, and parades. In the hand of the Tyler, an office in the lodge equivalent to Sergeant At Arms, the sword is ever drawn and ready to defend the portals of the lodge against intrusion by the uninitiated. Traditionally, the Tyler's sword has a wavy or "flamberge" blade, recalling, as recorded in the book of Genesis, the flaming sword that guarded the entrance to Paradise.

The most historic sword in Masonry is perhaps the Sword of State, belonging to the Grand Lodge of England. It is traditionally borne in procession, before the Grand Master, by the Sword Bearer. This "great sword" is representative of several state swords in the collection of the English Grand Lodge that are on exhibit at Freemason's Hall, London. The blade originally belonged to Gustavus Adolphus II, King of Sweden (1611-1632), and was carried by him during the Thirty Years War. The sword was presented to the Grand Lodge in 1731 by Thomas, 8th Duke of Norfolk (1683-1732). In the 18th century, the philosophical or "speculative" side of Masonry appealed to many of the nobility and their rulers, including Frederick the Great, Rochambeau, DeGrasse, LaFayette, and Sir William Johnson. At the time of presentation, the blade, made by Heinrich Binger of Solingen, was remounted in a silver-gilt hilt and scabbard by George Moody, armourer to King George I and II. It represents an early functional sword, adapted for ceremonial use at a later date. Of special interest is the cross-guard, whose ends terminate in Corinthian order chapter. Symbolic allusion to architecture recurs in Masonic sword decoration. The scabbard panels and hilt were embossed and engraved with the "working tools of a Mason" and the figures of a Grand Master and his Wardens.

A military sword, identified as the Inner Guard's sword of Shakespeare Lodge No. 426, is basically a British Dragoon sabre belonging to the time when the lodge was warranted in 1793 at Stratford-on-Avon. (*Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol X, 1897). The position of Inner Guard corresponds somewhat to that of Junior Deacon in American lodges. His duties include admitting visitors and receiving candidates for the degrees. The hilt, with half-basket guard of fine cut-steel work, is pierced in a design of the arms of the Grand Lodge of England. These arms were often used in colonial America whenever decoration of a Masonic nature was desired, e.g. punch bowls, silver tableware, furniture, etc. The urn, an element embodied in classical design advocated by English architect Robert Adam (1728-1792), was a shape adapted for sword pommels in the last decades of the 18th century. The engraved blade bears a likeness of Shakespeare, heraldic arms of the Grand Lodge, together with about twenty symbols generally associated with the symbolic degrees (the first three degrees in Masonry, hence the basic degrees).

In the 18th century, civilian style hunting swords (*couteau de chasse*) and small swords were decorated with Masonic symbols for reasons that either the owner was a Mason, or the sword was intended for ritual degree work. The small sword was more adaptive to the latter use. Wearing a small sword was so much in vogue in the mid-18th century that no gentleman with any pretention to the name was considered well-dressed without one.

However much wearing a sword was socially acceptable (in England and Europe more so than America), its appearance in the Masonic lodge was prohibited except as a symbol to all save the Tyler, Junior Warden, and the sword bearer. Rare prints of lodge meetings depict small swords being used during the introduction and initiation of candidates until late into the 1830's.

A late 18th century small sword, with macabre skull and cross-bones hilt, is a variety of Masonic sword that alludes to our frail mortality and the inevitability of death. Its early use in American lodges may have appeared in Scottish Rite degrees worked in the French emigre lodges in New York or Charleston. The partially blued, triangular blade is engraved with symbols of Jacob's Ladder (three rungs — each alluding to the compassionate acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity), the square, and the six-pointed star of interlocking triangles known as King Solomon's Seal. This star has been incorporated in the blade mark of the famous Wilkinson Sword Company. Three varieties of the skull and cross-bones hilt were illustrated in the Ames Sword Co. catalogue, where they were identified as being for use in Consistory degree work. The Ames hilts are one-piece, with the blade tang being shortened, threaded, and screwed into the cross-guard rather than passed through the length of the grip and secured at the pommel by riveting.

A non-military sword of neoclassical style, with trilobate pommel and cross-guard, is decorated with symbols of the symbolic degrees. The silvered pommel is embellished with a distinctive form of combined cross-braced-square and plumb (Niveau) associated with symbolism found on French Masonic certificates and aprons. The blade, of double-edged, diamond section, is signed "P. Knecht, Solingen", a sword manufacturer active from 1811 to 1830. Nearly a century later, a similar Tyler sword was offered by the Ward-Stilson Co., of Anderson, Indiana, in their illustrated lodge goods catalogue of 1913.

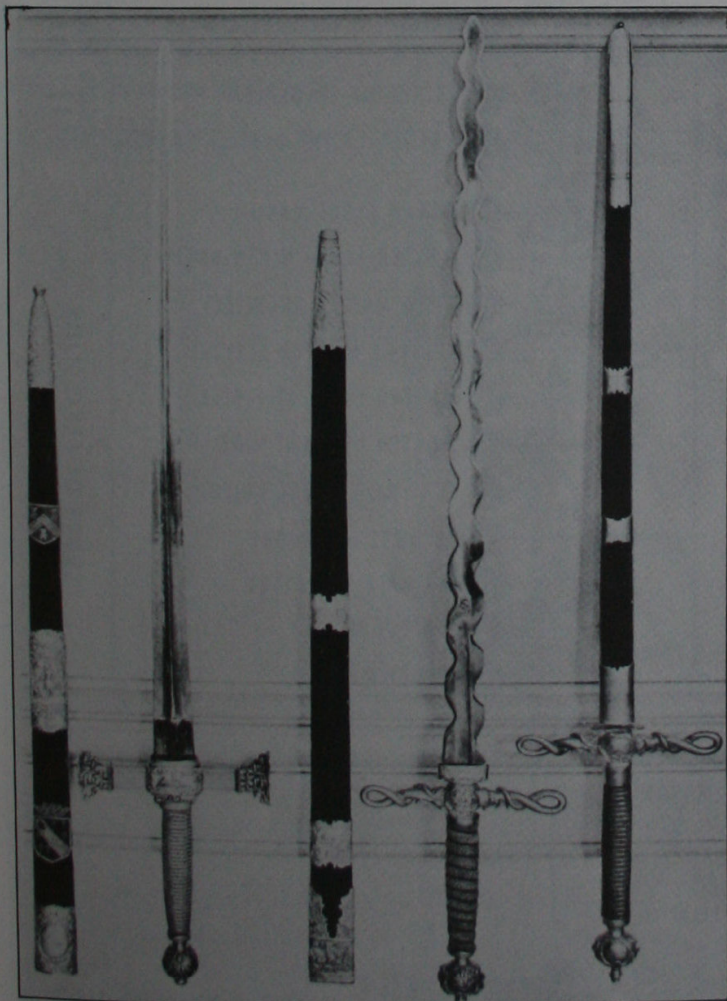
American sword cutlers of the 18th and early 19th centuries were not sufficiently diversified to manufacture regalia swords in addition to the more urgent production of military edged weapons. With few exceptions, ceremonial swords followed contemporary design trends set by foreign military and civilian weapons. Many early blades, having Masonic symbols engraved on them, reflect alteration of a real weapon to ceremonial use. When Masonic symbols are found on hilt or scabbard, it is usually the result of remounting a treasured blade in an appropriate Masonic setting or adding embellishment of a Masonic nature.

The collection of the Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts, includes a silver hilted officer's sword with beaded "five ball" knuckle guard, that has had the Masonic square and compasses added to the guard. The

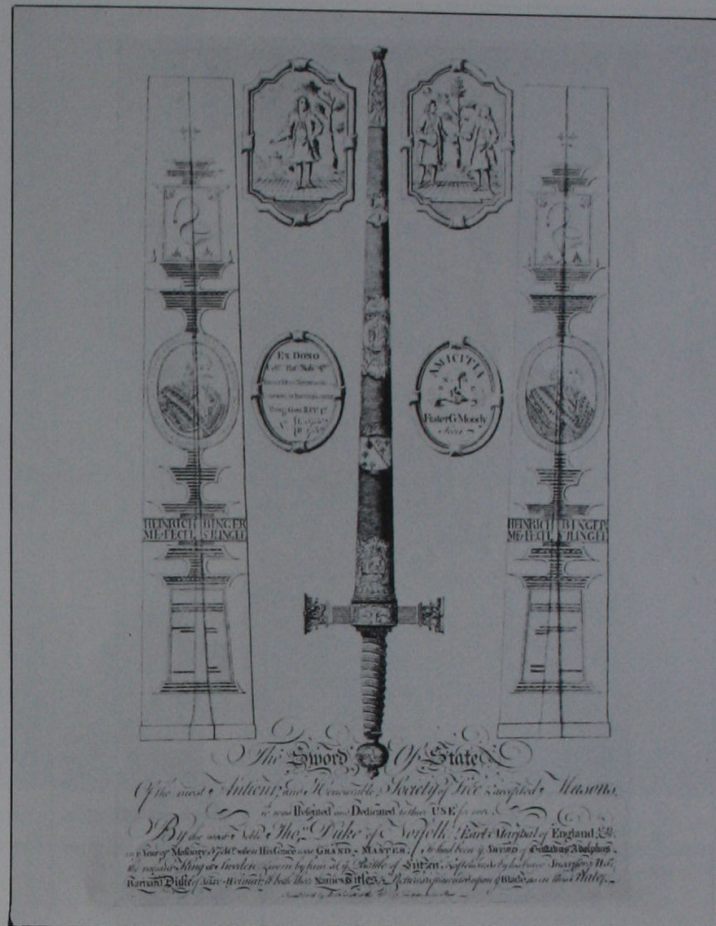
pillow pommel was a design as popular among the military in the Federal period prior to 1810 as the eagle head became shortly thereafter. This weapon could either have been carried by one of the Masonic bretheren as a uniform sword or made for lodge use as a Tyler sword. The hilt is related in workmanship to similar hilts made by Connecticut silversmiths, active from 1800 to 1810. The blade is a typical cut-and-thrust type. The hilt has an unusual feature of a silver rim soldered to the underside of the guard, intended to seal off moisture when the blade was returned to the scabbard. No hall mark or silversmith's touchmark appears on the hilt. English law required that such assay marks be placed on all silver other than toywork (articles so small that to mark them with a die-struck stamp would cause deformity), therefore, the hilt may be presumed American in origin.

Traditional use of a wavy blade eventually degenerated to any straight bladed sword a lodge might obtain for use by its Tyler, including contemporary military weapons. The records of Eagle Lodge in Hillsboro, North Carolina, reflect that in 1823 an officer's dress sword,

THREE SWORDS OF STATE in the Grand Lodge of England from l. to r.: blade by Heinrich Binger, solingen, c. 1632, hilt and mounts by George Moody, c.1730; hilt and scabbard by Jno. Beckett, St. James, c.1741; blade by Peter English, London, (1620-60).



(Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, Vol X, London, 1897)

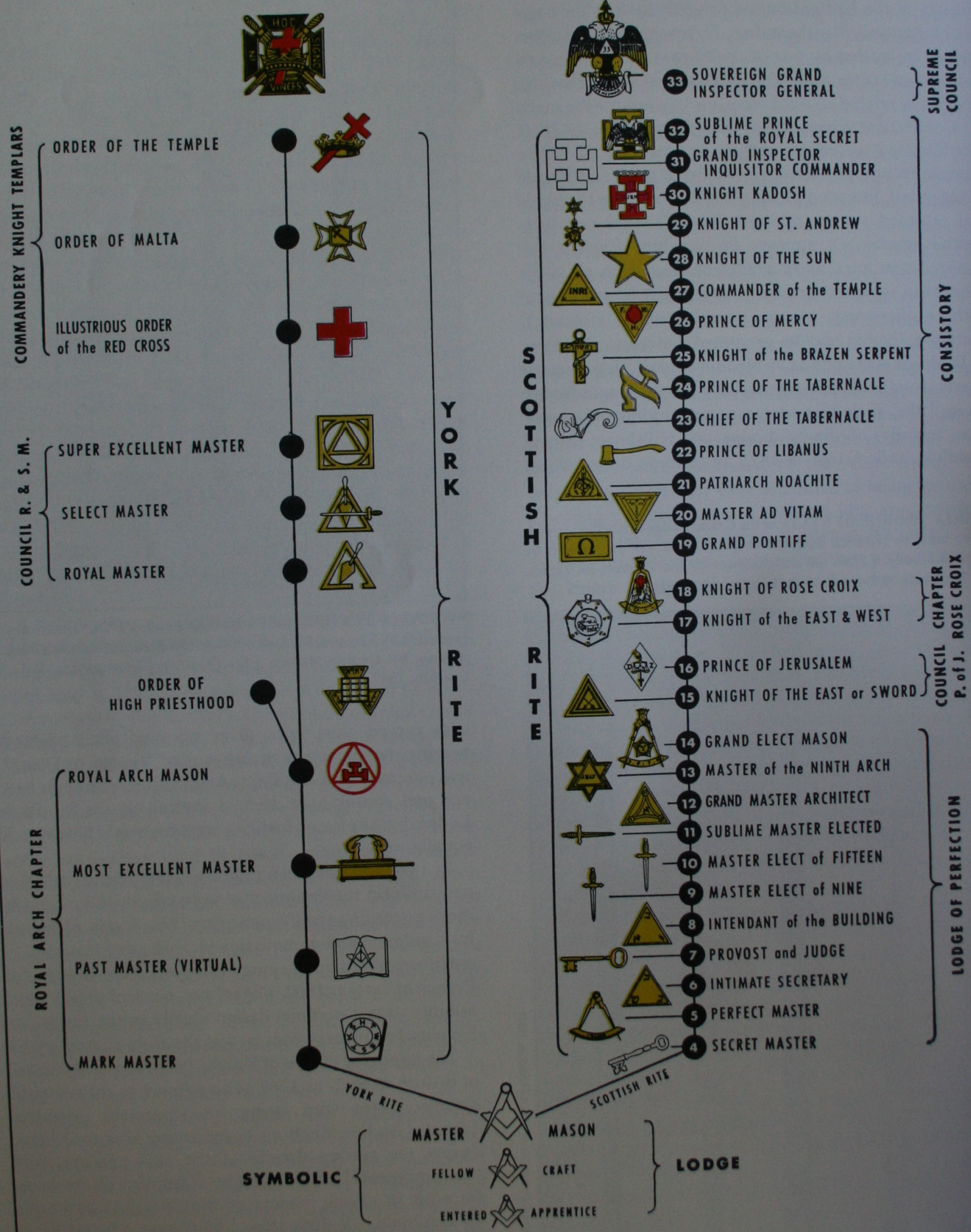


SWORD OF STATE, Grand Lodge of England, c. 1730. "Great sword" presented by Thomas, 8th Duke of Norfolk. Blade by Heinrich Binger, mounts by George Moody. (*Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. X, London, 1897.)

with carved ivory grip, silver mounted hilt, and blade bearing the uncompromising motto "Victory or Death", was purchased for the Tyler. Acquisition of an eagle head pommel would have been a logical choice for Eagle Lodge, but the Essex Institute weapon would have served equally well.

In 1840 the American military establishment adopted new uniform regulations that were heavily influenced by those governing the French army. The design of swords for militia non-commissioned officers included a cruciform guard and helmet head pommel favored by the French as early as 1800. The helmet, mark of chivalry and nobility, was a pommel design ideally suited for use on Knights Templars swords, as was the cross-shaped guard.

The honorary degree of Knight Templar was conferred in Boston as early as 1769 as an adjunct to the symbolic degrees, there then being no separately organized Templar bodies. Such an organization was to develop during the closing decade of the 18th century, with "Encampments" of the Knights Templars Order being founded in strong centers of Masonry in Charleston, Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, New York, Hartford, Providence, and Boston. A national governing body, known as the Grand Encampment of the United



PLAN OF THE ORDERS OF MASONRY



Knight Templar Sword, c. 1859, Ames Mfg. Co. Chicopee, Mass. Converted from militia neo sword.

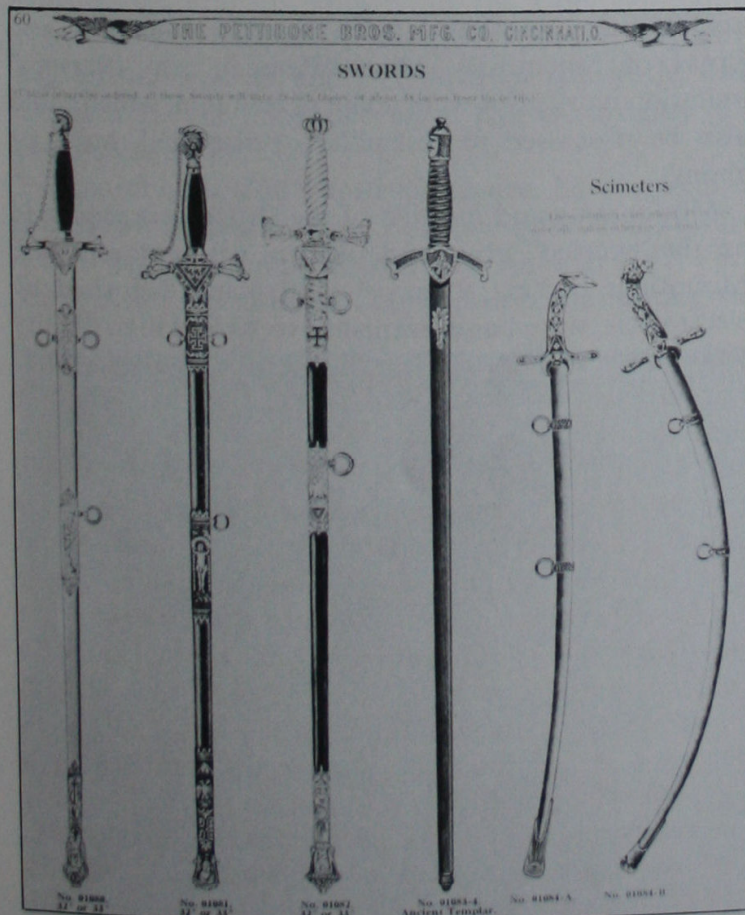


Consistory Sword, 18th Century, with skull and cross-bone hilt and small sword blade engraved with Masonic symbols.

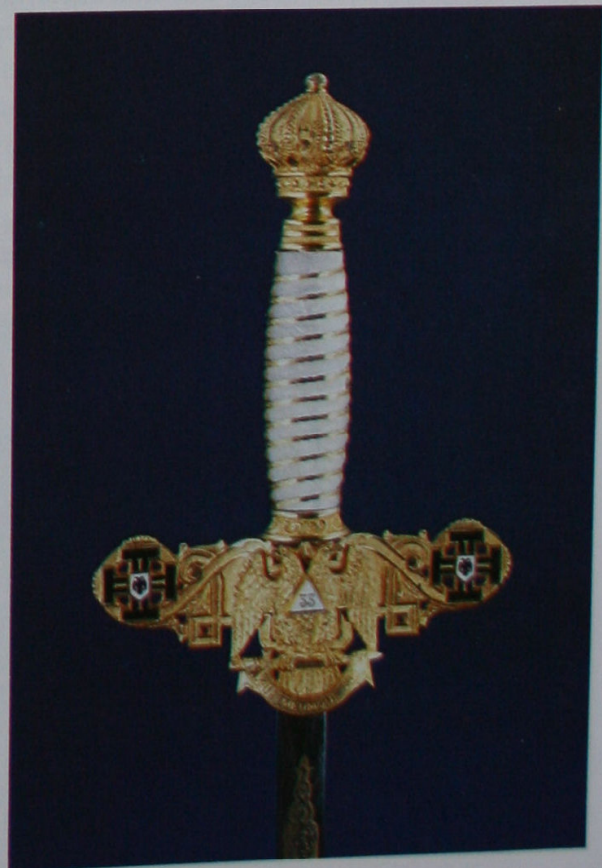


Ceremonial Sword, Sovereign Grand Commander, Supreme Council 33^o, Scottish Rite, Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, c. 1905.

SWORDS FOR SCOTTISH RITE. A page from the Pettibone Bros. Mfg. Co. catalogue of c. 1908.



Ceremonial Sword, Supreme Council 33^o. Hilt has Teutonic cross and double-headed eagle, symbols of the Scottish Rite.





INNER GUARD'S SWORD, SHAKESPEARE LODGE No. 426.

MASONIC SWORD BLADE, English, 18th century. Wavy or flamgerge-shaped blade engraved with Masonic symbols, figures representing Faith, Hope, and Charity; Shakespeare; Master Mason. (*Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. X, London, 1897.)

States, was formed in 1816, but nomenclature of the order's bodies changed in 1856 from "Encampment" to "Commandery." Thus, by whichever term was current, blades were often etched with the owner's name and the name of the body to which he belonged.

In 1841, Templar costume included a straight sword with mountings of gold for officers and silver for all others. This distinction in the color of mountings still generally holds true. Regional progress in defining sword styles only went so far as to further specify that Templar swords be cross-hilted. At the national level, the final word in costume edicts was issued in 1859 and 1862, confirming adoption of a militia NCO style sword by prescribing that blades be "... thirty-four to forty inches, inclusive of scabbard, helmet head, cross-handle, and metal scabbard." (At that time, regulation military and militia scabbards were normally of black leather.) Grips were to be black for all below the rank of Commander, and white (ivory) for all others. As for mountings, rank and file Sir Knights were to wear white (silver) metal wherever metal appeared; Commanders and Grand Commanders were to use gold.

Subsequent statutes passed in 1934, pertaining to hilt decoration, reflected general practices followed after the 1862 edicts. Swords worn by Grand Masters were to have

a white ivory grip bearing the owner's monogram and Cross of Salem. By 1900, "Parisian" or "Persian" imitation ivory grips were made of celluloid, which could also be processed to resemble tortoise-shell, horn, or ebony.

Monograms and insignia of the Order were engraved on the "ivoried" grips and filled in with colored wax. Mountings of "extra heavy" gold plate, deposited by electrolysis, were hand-burnished to yield a high quality appearance similar to gilding. Other officers of the Grand Encampment were to substitute a Patriarchal Cross for the Salem Cross. Commanders were to use gilt mounts also, but with a Passion Cross with rays on the white grip. Generalissimos were restricted to the use of silver mounts, black grip without owner's monogram, and Passion Cross without rays. A metal device of the appropriate cross was applied to black grips that simulated ebony. At no time were chains for hilts generally authorized, unless prescribed by the states on an individual basis. Each state Grand Commandery had control over prescribing regulations for costumes worn by those belonging to its own jurisdiction, hence, minutia variations are found in basic Templar sword hilt designs. The Ames Sword Co. catalogue illustrated over 150 Masonic hilt and scabbard designs.