



ILLINOIS SUPPLEMENT

Editor: John T. Riedas, Sr. REPGC
john-olvr@att.net



Auston E. Smith
Grand Commander

Pro Deo et Patria

WARNING – BEWARE OF LOWER BAR (Part 1)

Greetings Sir Knights,

Hopefully I grabbed your attention with the header! First, my definition of “bar” in this context is a level of performance required in a specific field, such as Knights Templar or Freemasonry in general. My opinions are drawn from my background as a professional military officer and a historian. Of course, you have a right to your own opinion and history will decide who was correct.

Earlier than recorded history allows us to determine, a group of individuals defined themselves by their expertise in stone working. These skilled laborers, later to be defined as “Stone Masons,” perfected their abilities to build magnificent structures from stone by working the stones into perfect angles. For example, a stone mason had to be able to make a perfect right angle every time; an angle of 87 degrees one time and 93 degrees the next time was unacceptable, it had to be 90 degrees each time. As a result of their ability to repeatedly reproduce these “perfect” angles, their services were in high demand by the Kings and other noblemen. By the early 10th century AD, these individuals had organized themselves into craft Guilds to protect their reputations as skilled labors and to prevent Cowans. Their “bar” or standard of performance required absolute perfection! These skilled stone masons later became what we now know as the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, but their bar of excellence remained “perfection.”

In the late 12th Century, a group of Knights and French noblemen organized themselves into a brotherhood dedicated to protection of the pilgrims traveling from Western Europe to Jerusalem to observe the Holy sites. These Knights established themselves at the site of Solomon’s Temple in old Jerusalem which earned them the title Knights Templar. These Templars established a code of conduct which emphasized loyalty to a brother Sir Knight beyond all else. A Sir Knight devoted his life to the Order and vowed to risk his life to protect the life of another Sir Knight! The valor and bravery of these Knights earned them a reputation of being unwavering in their standards of excellence - leave the battlefield as the victor or die trying!

It was from these two groups, the stone masons and the original Knights Templar, that we modern Masonic Knights Templar adopted our standards of excellence. What changed? Well, herein are my opinions.

The first Europeans to arrive in America were neither aristocrats nor bureaucrats, they were working-class people who produced something from their labors, making the world a better place! These early American standards were high and produced quality! If you are over 70 years of age, you probably remember when items “Made in America” were considered the best in the world. Why did our standards change?

After the American Revolution, we added a new class of citizens in America, that of government-leaders. President George Washington is the most famous of this new class of Americans, but he was a reluctant participant, preferring to return to his status as a gentleman farmer rather than being a King or a “President for Life” as was offered him.

Unfortunately, there soon arose another professional class in America, the politician. This latest class actively sought the role of being a professional government-leader. These politicians produced nothing, most had no leadership ability, and their goal was simply to live off of the public taxes for as long as possible. Thus began the lowering of our standards, our bar of excellence. This decline gained new speed when greedy unscrupulous people discovered they could make more money by producing more items if they simply lowered the quality. Politicians allowed this to happen by lowering the regulations that controlled quality, many times in exchange for votes. Too many Americans soon become accustomed to lower quality standards.

Unfortunately, these lowered quality standards began to infect our Fraternity by the late 1960s. The rapid growth of Knights Templar following the World Wars I & II slowed when these veterans began dying from war injuries, old age and natural causes. In an effort to maintain membership, Commanderies became lax in their standards of excellence.

Finally, in 2021 after a long year of not being able to meet in person or confer the Orders of Templary, we can see hope for the immediate future! I have issued General Order No. 6 (Amended) which authorized in-person conclaves and conferring of the Orders effective 15 May 2021. My concern, and the reason for the “Lowered Bar” article, is I fear that in our haste to accommodate the backlog of candidates waiting to join our ranks we will fall into the trap of lowering the bar of excellence in ritual and uniform requirements. In my July article, I will convey my specific concerns on what we should avoid as we reopen.

(to be continued in the July article)

Auston E. Smith, G.C.