

## “One Man Can Make a Difference”



*Geo. C. Perkins*

How many times have you heard the phrase “one man can make a difference?” I’m sure you have heard it many times, and here I am today saying it again . . . “One man can make a difference,” but this time I am going to give you an example of such a man who changed the course of history in America, and especially, California. Naturally he was a Mason, and as you all know so well, that is not unusual, because Masons have been changing the course of history all over the world since the time they were founded.

The year was 1880 and Bro. George Perkins was a Past Grand Master of Masons in California and now serving as the Grand Commander of the Grand Commandery. In his spare time, he was the Governor of California.

As the governor of California, he realized that the centers of power in America were on the East coast, and California was considered by them to be part of the Wild West . . . full of Indians and desperados . . . a place you read about but wouldn’t want to visit . . . and certainly not a safe place for women and children. Furthermore, the only way to get to the west coast was by ship, train or horseback . . . a long trip by any means. Plus it was expensive . . . so who would want to go to California anyway. Without this movement of people to California, the state would not grow and prosper, business, real estate, commerce etc would not grow and everything would remain stagnant. Remember, California had just become a state in 1850.

Bro. George had a great idea. If he could only get those stuffy Easterners to come to California and see for themselves that San Francisco was a great city, as modern as any on the east coast, and that bullets and arrows weren’t flying around, that it was safe for women and children, that it had all the modern conveniences of any city in the East, that it was a law abiding state, had some of the finest restaurants and hotels, modern paved streets, and above all, that the people were friendly . . . . if only he could get those Easterners to see for themselves.

Governor George decided that it was high time that California be put on the map, that for the first time in history, Americans were going to find out what a wonderful state this was, and what a grand city San Francisco was. Sir Knight George decided that the Knights Templar would lead the way as only they could. First he had to convince the Templars of California that they could achieve this formidable task . . . remember that in 1880 there were only 1000 knights in California! Convincing the knights was no easy

matter . . . how could they afford this endeavor . . . how could only a few knights do so much in such a short period of time, this had never been done before and so on. All of you have heard these arguments many times. Leadership came naturally to this man, and he managed to convince his fraters that all was possible, and if anyone could do it, it was the Templars of California.

Sir Knight George and 145 Sir Knights and 88 of their ladies departed for Chicago for the 21st Triennial of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America. They hired a military band, the 2nd Regimental band to go with them to Chicago. A Grand Standard for California was purchased specially to be taken with them and a special train exclusively for the Knights Templar and their families was arranged. If they were going to Chicago, they would go in style. They had to convince the world that Californians were not a bunch of uncivilized cowboys.

Cowboys boots, hats and Bermuda shorts were not packed on this trip. The correct Templar uniform was worn, swords were polished, and plumes were fluffed up . . . they were going to change the Easterners concept of the Wild West.

At the 21st Triennial Conclave of the Grand Encampment, Sir Knight George offered to host the 22nd Triennial in San Francisco! His leadership qualities and persuasive personality overcame the fears and tribulations of the Eastern Templars . . . promising them Templar hospitality and knightly courtesies for one and all. Safety for women and children was guaranteed, special trains and escorts would be provided, horses for the Sir Knights, carriages for their ladies, the finest food and lodgings and the best whiskey for the banquets would be theirs for the asking. After much deliberation and soul searching, a motion was made, seconded and carried to hold the 22nd Triennial in San Francisco in 1883.

Sir Knight George and his fellows knights had accomplished the first phase of their plan to open the West. They came back to San Francisco feeling pretty proud of themselves, and rightly so. They also came back \$2,304 in debt. This sum was made up by subscriptions from the 1000 Sir Knights. To help finance the 1883 Triennial, each Sir Knight was assessed 50 cents. The Grand Commander also admonished the membership to be vigilant and not lower their standards for admission in the Order that "stands pre-eminent above any other human organization." At this time, it was Templar law that it would be unknighthly conduct if a Sir Knight solicited members for the Orders!!!

It should be noted here that before one could become a Knights Templar, that is to say, before he received the Order of the Temple, he had to purchase his own uniform and equipment. After receiving the Order of the Red Cross, if the candidate did not purchase his uniform, he would not be knighted. There was no Order of Malta in those days. Initiation fees in 1880 was \$100 . . . a very considerable sum of money, equivalent to \$15,000 in today's dollars!!! The uniform and equipment would cost another \$100 and a horse would be extra. One had to be serious about becoming a Knight Templar in those days. The Orders were conferred on one candidate at a time. Commanderies conferring the Orders on more than one candidate were severely reprimanded!

Now that Grand Encampment had agreed to come to San Francisco in 1883, Perkins and the Grand Commandery had to convince the people of San Francisco of what a wonderful thing the Knights Templar had done for them. They need the total commitment of the public; they needed their homes, their horses and carriages, their donations and their resolve to decorate the city and make the Easterners and their families feel welcome. The people of San Francisco responded, with their hearts and pocketbooks with great enthusiasm. This was going to be the first time in the history of California that any convention or any large group of people would come to the West Coast, and they were determined to give them the best of everything they could offer. If it worked, more would follow, business would pick up, people would come from the East and buy houses, and shops would open, and schools would be built, and money would start flowing into the State, and more roads would be built, and more hospitals, more hotels, more stables, more carriages would be needed, new trains would be needed to accommodate the increased passenger load, and all this translated into more jobs and more money and so on. The average citizen soon realized what Sir Knight George and his Templars had done in Chicago. They had a golden opportunity to show off the Golden State and the beautiful city of San Francisco, and they were going to do everything in their power, in their own little way to show the Easterners that the West had grown up and was a match for anything the East had to offer, maybe more.

George and his committee left no stone unturned. They convinced the railroads to offer a 25% discount for any Templar and his family from the East. The railroad magnates also had an eye on the future and they could see what profits lay in the not too distant future for them. The citizens responded by providing carriages and horses for the visitors from the East, and decorated every building in the city with bunting and banners, the likes of which had never been seen before. After all, Governor and Sir Knight George had told them that this was the most important event in Templar history in California and also for the State. They were not going to let him down.

George did one other thing to ensure success. It was not enough for the visitors to have a good time, he wanted everyone in America to know what a wonderful place and how safe it was, and how modern and what a good place it was to raise a family. So he invited all the Eastern newspaper editors and writers to be the guests of the city, and they also responded and they came West with the Knights.

George covered all the bases, as he early on realized that it was not enough to just get the Templars involved, he had to have every man and woman in California involved too. Hence the whole community insisted on claiming a share of the honor, and spontaneously resolved to make the occasion a season of unrestricted hospitality, civic display, happiness and social cheer.

Trainload after trainload of Templars, their families and newspapermen arrived in San Francisco, and were met at the railroad station by the various mounted patrols from the Commanderies and escorted to their hotels. Bands played and Sir Knights in full uniform presented swords for the visiting dignitaries. Finally, the Grand Parade took place, ten

divisions strong with swords glistening in the sun, marching pass the review stand, a pageant never before seen in California, and witnessed by the public from the sidewalks, balconies and windows all along the parade route.



Grand Encampment  
1883 Triennial Conclave Medal  
San Francisco, California

The 22nd Triennial was everything Sir Knight George had promised, and the Grand Commander was justly proud in claiming that it was the most notable event in Templar Masonry in California. This feeling was shared by all who attended and California Templary won the esteem and affection of their fraters, as the newspapers on the East Coast attested. The West had won the hearts and minds of the Easterners, and nothing would ever be the same again. Not one visitor had been shot by an arrow, no train was held up and robbed, and all went home safe and sound.

The Grand Commandery did rather well financially, not one cent of its funds were used. Donations paid for everything and left a balance of \$7,000 . . . . a considerable sum of money in 1883. This money left over from the Triennial was invested as a permanent fund called "The California Grand Commandery Knight Templar Drill Fund."

Tuesday, August 21, 1883 the Grand Encampment opened for business meetings and lasted until Friday. The Divine Service was a new feature at the Triennial and was "The greatest feature of the Conclave." Seventy banners of different Commanderies hung in the Grand Asylum. There was entertainment every evening in the pavilion, with a different program each night. The ladies provided a "Garden of Welcome" for the visitors, and was one of the most pleasing features of the Conclave. There were excursions around the bay by boat, and by rail to the vineyards and wineries of Napa Valley, to Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Monterey and other areas. The Grand Master was greeted by the Mayor of San Francisco and other officials. The Grand Lodge laid a cornerstone to the Garfield monument in Golden Gate Park, and the military took part in that too, including veterans and government officials. The Grand Banquet was held at the Palace Hotel and was "everything the heart could wish." 3000 rooms were taken up by the Sir Knights. The San Francisco police cooperated fully with every wish and the grand parade had no interruptions, and the knights marched down the broadest and finest avenues in the city, which were cleaned the night before!

San Francisco, California and the West Coast have never been the same since the 22nd Triennial of the Grand Encampment. One man made a difference, and he was a Master Mason and Knight Templar.

The above narrative shows what a person with vision, determination and a positive attitude can do. Sure the odds were high, and sure the opposition was great. There was

little or no money and very little time. The entire concept in the East was anti West. But they can be and were overcome. We Masons today need to have a vision of tomorrow, a determination and positive attitude to make our fraternity significant to the next generation in a world that does not know how desperately our principles of brotherly love are needed if there is ever going to be peace in the world.

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