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Articles

A Few Fresh Strokes to the Biographical Portrait of Sir Albert A. Marden (1824–1919): Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of His Birth

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Abstract

This work was produced to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Albert A. Marden (1824–1919), an esteemed Mason.

Use was made of the following three groups of documents: 1) documents from the archive of Cherkas Global University (specifically, *Register of De Molay Commandery No. 26*); 2) personal documents from commercial databases; 3) periodical press materials. The study relied on a set of methods – most importantly, the biographical method and content analysis. The combined use of these methods helped extract meaningful insights from the vast amount of information and introduce several new biographical details respecting A.A. Marden.

The study's findings revealed the following two noteworthy facts:

1) A.A. Marden was a fairly unique figure among the Masons of the state of Minnesota. At the beginning of the 20th century, his number on the registry of the Grand Commandery of Minnesota was 645, and he is highly likely to have been one of the movement's oldest members not only in the state of Minnesota, but in all of the United States.

2) A.A. Marden joined Masonry at a mature age, at 40 years old, in 1864. From then on and all the way through to his death in 1919, he remained an active member of the Masonic movement. At different times he held several important posts in the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. He served continuously as Recorder of De Molay Commandery No. 26 from 1901 to 1919.

Keywords: Albert A. Marden (1824–1919), biography, Mason, Knight Templar, recorder, De Molay Commandery No. 26, New Ulm, Minnesota.

1. Introduction

December 29, 2024, will mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Albert A. Marden (1824–1919). A brief biography of this esteemed Mason was presented in the form of an obituary on December 10, 1919, right after his death, in the newspaper *New Ulm Review* ([Death Summons Oldest Resident, 1919: 1, 8](#)). The obituary also contained the only available photo of him ([Figure 1](#)).

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Fig. 1. Albert A. Marden (1824–1919) ([Death Summons Oldest Resident, 1919: 1](#))

The present work commemorates the 200th anniversary of the birth of Albert A. Marden and seeks to add a few fresh strokes to his biographical portrait.

2. Materials and methods

The materials for this study included documents from the archive of Cherkas Global University (Washington DC, USA) – more specifically, *Register of De Molay Commandery No. 26* ([Figure 2](#)) ([ACGU. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 8](#)). This register was begun in 1901, at the time of the launch of De Molay Commandery No. 26, and was maintained up until 1955. Overall, the register spans the years 1901 to 1955 and lists 501 members of the Commandery. It contains the following personal data fields: Grand Commandery Registry Number, Commandery Registry Number, Names (Surname and Christian Name in Full), Age, Occupation, Born in State of, Lodge of which a Member, Royal Arch Charter of which a Member, Received Order of Red Cross, Received Order of Knight Templar, Joined (Affiliated by Dimit), Commandery Joined from (Last a Member of), Commandery Knighted in, Restored, Withdrawn (Demitted), Stricken from Roll, Suspended, Expelled, and Died ([ACGU. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 8. L. 10b.-2](#)).

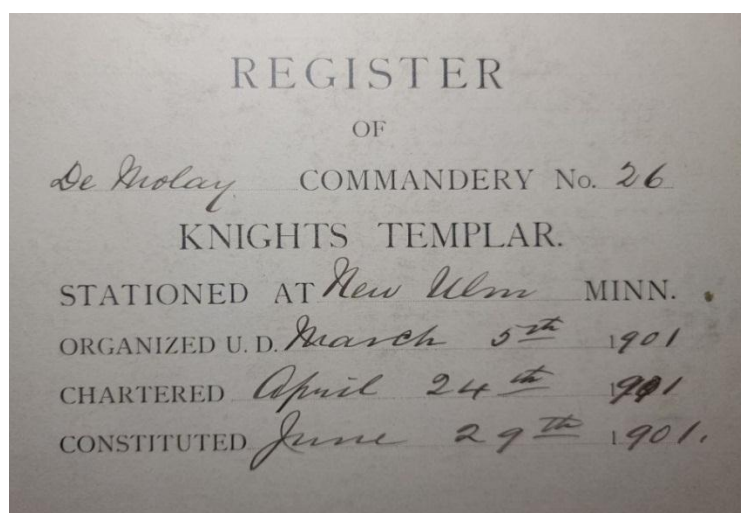


Fig. 2. Cover page of *Register of De Molay Commandery No. 26*

In addition, use was made of biographical information from the commercial database Ancestry.com and from the newspaper *New Ulm Review*, which carried an obituary of A.A. Marden on December 10, 1919.

The study relied on a set of methods – most importantly, the biographical method and content analysis. The combined use of these methods helped extract meaningful insights from the vast amount of information and introduce several new biographical details respecting A.A. Marden.

3. Discussion

The historiography on the subject is relatively thin. A. A. Marden is mentioned only in the book ‘History of Brown County, Minnesota: Its People, Industries and Institutions’ ([History of Brown County, 1916](#)). However, it is fair to note that biographical works on members of the Masonic order of Knights Templar came out quite often between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the works produced in the late 19th century, of particular note are J.D. Richardson’s ‘Tennessee Templars: A Register of Names, with Biographical Sketches, of the Knights Templar of Tennessee, and Brief Histories of the Grand and Subordinate Commanderies’ ([Richardson, 1883](#)) and E.T. Carson’s ‘A Historical Sketch of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States. Also, a Historical Sketch of the Formation of the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States in 1816’ ([Carson, 1892](#)). Among the works that came out in the period between the early and middle 1900s, worthy of special mention are G.A. Lawrence’s ‘Sir Knight Lee Stewart Smith, Most Eminent Grand Master of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America, 1916–1919’ ([Lawrence, 1920](#)) and ‘Eugene F. Falconnet, Soldier, Engineer, Inventor’ by H.L. Swint and D.E. Mohler ([Swint, Mohler, 1962](#)). Historical research on the topic has been conducted in the 21st century too ([Cherkas, 2024](#)).

4. Results

The biography of A. A. Marden published in the newspaper *New Ulm Review* over 100 years ago, in 1919, is provided below, unabridged:

“Dr. Albert A. Marden, pioneer dentist and this city’s oldest inhabitant, is no more. Death ensued at a local hospital Friday night, where Dr. Marden had received treatment for about a week, and was caused by neuralgia of the heart. He had been ailing for about one month, and owing to his advanced age, no hope was held out for his recovery, although all that medical skill and devoted attention could do, was done to alleviate the aged patient’s suffering.

Dr. Marden was born in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, December 29, 1824. At the age of only five years he was bereft of a father’s protection and his mother was left to care for six children. He attended school in the good old days, when the boys had to build the fires and the girls swept the school room. There were no stoves in the school house, where he secured his youthful education – only a huge brick fireplace, large enough to burn logs three feet long. Goose quills were used for pens and writing ink was made by boiling maple bark with copperas.

At the age of 12 deceased was apprenticed to a baker, working at this trade for three years, when the firm by whom he was employed, went out of business, whereupon he turned his energies to the shoemaker’s trade. In March, 1843, in company with an older brother, who was a millwright, he went to Orono, Maine, but did not take to this kind of work readily, and for seven summers he was engaged in driving and rafting logs. During the winters he cooked for logging camps. Becoming afflicted with rheumatism, the young man was forced to give up this activity, whereupon he opened a drug store and studied dentistry.

Deceased left Orono, Maine, August 27, 1866, and arrived at St. Joseph, Mo., September 1. It was his intention to go to Pike’s Peak and hunt for gold, but becoming discouraged, wended his way to St. Paul on the old steamer “War Eagle,” landing in the Sainly City, October 1. From St. Paul he traveled east, west, north and south for two years, working at his chosen profession, as all the dentists were doing at that time.

April 10, 1868, he came to New Ulm, and this city became his permanent home until the end of his earthly career. For a great number of years he was the only dentist in this city and vicinity and enjoyed a large and lucrative practice. He was not given to worry very much and never attempted to accumulate wealth. He retained his mental faculties in a remarkable degree until the end and up to the time of his last illness he was well preserved physically as most men are when

they arrive at three score years and ten. His philosophy of life was: ‘If I can live to make one pale face brighter; to give a second lustre to a tear-dimmed eye; to impart one throb of comfort to an aching heart, or cheer some wayworn soul in passing by; if I can lend a strong hand to the fallen, or defend the right against a single envious strain, my life, though bare of much that seems so dear and fair to us on earth will not, have been in vain ([Death Summons Oldest Resident, 1919: 1](#)).

Dr. Marden entered the Masonic fraternity in 1864, when he became a member of Mechanics’ Lodge No. 66, Orono, Maine. He was made a Royal Arch Mason at St. Peter, August 27, 1873, was Knighted at Mankato, April 18, 1874, was made a Scottish Rite Mason, 32nd degree, at Sleepy Eye, October 7, 1893, and entered the Mystic Shrine at Zuhrah Temple, Minneapolis, October 10, 1902. In January of the same year he was elected a member of the Masonic Veteran Association at St. Paul. January 14, 1885 he was elected Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, and in 1893 he was appointed representative of the Grand Lodge in the state of Nevada, a position he occupied up to the time of his demise.

Deceased was the first Master of Charity Lodge No. 98, A.F. & A.M., of this city and served in that capacity for 21 years. He was a charter member of New Ulm Charter No. 57, Royal Arch Masons, as well as of De Molay Commandery No. 26, and was recorder of the latter organization from the date of its inception until his death.

He needs no slab of marble, with its white and ghastly head,
To tell travelers in the Valley the virtues of the dead.

Let the lily be his tombstone, and the dew-drops pure and bright

The epitaph that angels write in the stillness of the night.” ([Death Summons Oldest Resident, 1919: 8](#)).

As we can see, while relatively brief, the above account of the life of A. A. Marden is fairly detailed. It, however, says little to nothing about his family. The present paper attempted to fill this gap in the literature.

To this end, use was made of the commercial database Ancestry.com. According to that source, in 1846 Albert A. Marden married Abbie Marden in the city of Bangor, Maine. In 1860, he resided in the town of Orono, Maine. At that time, the couple was raising three sons: Winfield – 12, Fred – 9, and Charles – 2 years old ([The National Archives: 803446](#)). One of the possible reasons A. A. Marden’s family members were not listed in the aforementioned biography is that as the head of that family he survived not only his wife but all his sons too. There is also a photo of the monument to A.A. Marden, which is Masonic in style ([Figure 3](#)).

The Masonic symbol on the monument indicates that the deceased was a 32nd-degree Mason.

In addition, use was made of several biographical works dealing with New Ulm, Minnesota. These include ‘History of Brown County, Minnesota: Its People, Industries and Institutions’ ([History of Brown County, 1916](#)). The book contains some information on De Molay Commandery No. 26. It lists Albert Marden among the charter members of De Molay Commandery No. 26, organized in 1901, and states that he was its Recorder as at 1916 ([History of Brown County, 1916: 408-409](#)). As a reminder, as per the aforementioned biography of him, Albert Marden served continuously as Recorder from 1901 to 1919. A recorder is an officer whose job is to record proceedings, receive correspondence and petitions, and assist with agenda for the commandery he serves. Thus, it was established based on that information that *Register of De Molay Commandery No. 26* was maintained by Albert Marden personally.

Another valuable document employed in this study is *Register of De Molay Commandery No. 26*, which is part of the archive of Cherkas Global University. According to this unique document, Albert Marden’s number in De Molay Commandery No. 26 was 4, and in 1901 he was a fairly unique member of the Masonic order of Knights Templar, with his number on the registry of the Grand Commandery of Minnesota being 645. To put this into perspective, the next smallest number on the registry was 2713 (Fig. 4). According to that document, in 1901 Albert Marden, born in New Hampshire, was 50 years old. He was a member of Charity Lodge No. 98. He received the Order of the Red Cross and the Order of Knight Templar on April 4, 1874. Prior to the establishment of De Molay Commandery No. 26, he was a member of Mankato Commandery No. 4. Albert Marden passed away on December 5, 1919 ([ACGU. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 8. L. 10b-2](#)).



Fig. 3. Monument to Albert A. Marden

Of interest is the fact that in 1901 A. A. Marden wrote down his own age in *Register of De Molay Commandery No. 26* incorrectly – he was 77 at the time, not 50. He may have done so deliberately – possibly because he did not wish to be thought of as being too far removed from other members of De Molay Commandery No. 26, most of whom were much younger. [Figure 4](#) gives us an idea of what A.A. Marden’s handwriting was. It is also to be noted that sitting first on the list is Joseph Bobleter, an honored veteran of the Civil War and brigadier-general of the Minnesota National Guard. He was the very first Eminent Commander of De Molay Commandery No. 26 ([History of Brown County, 1916: 408](#)).

Furthermore, according to the 1879 records of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Minnesota, Albert Marden was one of the two Secretaries at its 26th Annual Communication ([Proceedings..., 1879: 4](#)). Also, in 1879 Albert Marden was in charge of 7th District, which comprised the following lodges: Antiquity No. 91, Keystone No. 94, Charity No. 98, Sunset No. 109, Granite No. 117, Delta No. 119, and Walnut No. 136 ([Proceedings..., 1879: 130](#)).

94224—Pioneer Press Co., St. Paul, Minn.

Grand Commandry Registry No.	Com. Reg. No.	NAMES		Age	OCCUPATION	Born in State of
		Surname	Christian Name in Full			
+ 3246/1		Bobleter	Joseph	47	Banker	Austria
2716/2		Olsen	Ole M	39	Druggist	Norway
2713/3		Strickler	O C	28	Physician	Can
645/4		Marden	Albert	50	Dentist	A. H.
2715/5		Crone	Theodore	27	Merchant	Minn.
+ 2949/6		Soot	Hayden R	33	Elevator	Nor
2950/7		Rothenburg	H R		Physician	N.Y.

Fig. 4. Personal data on members of De Molay Commandery No. 26

In the 1906 records of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Minnesota, Albert Marden is listed under 'Past Junior Grand Wardens' ([Proceedings..., 1906: 5](#)). As a reminder, as per the aforementioned biography of him, in 1885 he held the post of Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota ([Death Summons Oldest Resident, 1919: 8](#)).

5. Conclusion

The study's findings revealed the following two noteworthy facts:

- 1) A.A. Marden was a fairly unique figure among the Masons of the state of Minnesota. At the beginning of the 20th century, his number on the registry of the Grand Commandery of Minnesota was 645, and he is highly likely to have been one of the movement's oldest members not only in the state of Minnesota, but in all of the United States.
- 2) A.A. Marden joined Masonry at a mature age, at 40 years old, in 1864. From then on and all the way through to his death in 1919, he remained an active member of the Masonic movement. At different times he held several important posts in the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. He served continuously as Recorder of De Molay Commandery No. 26 from 1901 to 1919.

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