

GASTON J. FERCKEN

Grand Master, Order of the Crown of Thorns, 1891-1893

COPYRIGHT. 2003 BY F. C. SPATARO

Born 10 June 1855 in Aleppo, Syria, the son of Dutch missionary William E. Fercken¹, a colleague of Rev Eli Smith (1801-1857) of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM)² and translator of the bible into Arabic.³

Educated in Beirut, Lebanon, Smyrna, Turkia, Geneva, Switzerland, Middleton, CT.

1884: Ordained a priest on June 8, by Rt Rev Abraham N. Littlejohn, Episcopal Bishop of Long Island, N.Y. (1868-1901). Also in around 1884 he got married to Céline (Phébee) Roberdeau Sheber, from Salisbury, North Carolina. She was the daughter of congressman Francis Sheber.

1884-1892: Rector of Emmanuel Church, 320 Great River Rd., Islip, NY. Around that time, he came into contact with Mgr JR Vilatte through the Rt Rev. Arthur C. Coxe (+1896), Episcopal Bishop of Western New York. In 1891, he got from the Syriac Patriarch the authority to re-establish the Order of the Crown of Thorns (OCT) and took office as Grand Master (GM) on June 1. By mandate from him Mgr Vilatte invested as Knights Commanders, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on May 30, 1892; Syriac Archbishops Mor Julius Alvarez (Colombo), Mor Athanasius Kadavil (Kottayam), Mor Gregorius Geevarghese (Niranam) and US Consul William Morey. Expenses for the ceremony were paid for by the US Consulate at Colombo.

1892-1893: Rector of St. Stephen's Church 1432 SW 13th Avenue, Portland, OR 97201. (503) 223-6424. Lost baby boy *Gaston Jr.* (b Feb 10, 1891, d Aug 11, 1892) buried in Greenwood Hills Cemetery, Portland.

1893: Resigned his parish work and as GM of OCT to become a missionary with the Church of the Brethren.⁴ On May 30 and June 1, he made the following declarations: *After 2 years of service, we feel ourselves forced (for entirely personal reasons) to transfer our honorable charge of Grand Master of the Chivalrous and Religious Order of the Crown of Thorns to His Grace J. Rene Vilatte, Primate and Archbishop of the Christian (Old) Catholics in America, whose wisdom, influence, and social position will shed a greater lustre upon an Order still young, but destined to rival those of a glorious past... We have transferred our charge and function of Grand Master to His Eminence and to his successors in the episcopate, with all powers to confer the grades of the Order, and to make such modifications in them as he may deem fit for the well-being, honor and perpetuity of the Order.*⁵ Mgr Vilatte succeeded him as GM and took office on the feast of the Crown of Thorns (August 11) 1893.

Rev Fercken published the following books: (1) *Twelve Letters to My Son*, Philadelphia 1903 (letters dealing with biblical questions.), (2) *Even Thine Alters*, or Prayer and Bible Prayers, Philadelphia 1904 (Prayers for different occasions.), (3) *The Divine Philosophy*, Philadelphia 1905 (letters on theological and philosophical questions.).

¹ His mother was French

² Congregational and Presbyterian foreign missions were under the direction of ABCFM located in Boston, MA.

³ Rev Smith was stationed in the Middle East, briefly in Malta (1826) and until his death in Beirut, Lebanon.

⁴ Then called German Baptist Brethren. He administered an orphanage and worked in evangelism in Smyrna, Turkia. From 1899 to 1906, he worked in Lancy, France, Geneva, Switzerland and Cayennax, France.

⁵ Published in *Statutes of the Chivalrous and Religious Order of the Crown of Thorns*, James Kerr & Son, Port Howard, Wisconsin, 1893, p. 6-7.