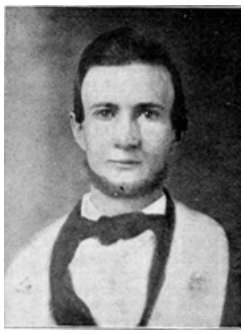
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# Knights of the Golden Circle [1]

# Knights of the Golden Circle



"The origins of the Knights of the Golden Circle can be traced to Cincinnati con man George Bickley." Image courtesy of the University of Cincinnati. [2]

by Thomas C. Parramore, 2006

The Knights of the Golden Circle [3] (KGC) was a secret military organization created in 1859 by George W. L. Bickley [4] in Cincinnati, Ohio. Its stated aim was to sponsor and conduct military expeditions into the Caribbean region (the "Golden Circle") for the purpose of bringing new slave territories into the Union. Jingoistic [5] newspapers that supported American intervention in Mexico and similar initiatives included the *Norfolk Day Book* [6], which enjoyed some popularity in northeastern North Carolina, especially among subscribers to the *Murfreesboro Citizen* [7]. Maine native Charles Henry Foster [8], editor of the *Citizen* during 1859 and most of 1860, had been associated with the *Day Book* for a year or two before taking over the *Citizen*. Through him, the KGC was introduced in North Carolina. On a visit to Norfolk [9] in early 1860, Foster was initiated into the KGC by Virginius D. Groner, a Norfolk militia colonel and ardent supporter of the KGC. (Groner later delivered the order to fire the first gun at Fort Sumter [10] at the start of the Civil War [11] in April 1861.)

Foster returned to Murfreesboro and began promoting the KGC through his newspaper and organizing KGC "castles" at Murfreesboro and nearby communities. Bickley held a KGC convention at Raleigh [12] in May and addressed an audience at Murfreesboro in July. A *Citizen* editorial warned that acquisition by the federal government of Cuba, Nicaragua, or parts of Mexico by force, purchase, or other means would be accompanied by abolitionist colonization that would exclude slavery from such territories, as in the case of Kansas. The South, therefore, should support only territorial acquisitions that occurred outside federal authority. Like Texas, only these could be reliably settled as slave regions and presented as such for annexation.

During much of 1860, newspapers devoted considerable attention to KGC preparations in Texas for an invasion of Mexico. Some KGC members and groups traveled to Mexico that summer, but it soon became evident that Bickley's claims were much overstated. The confidence of his followers had been seriously eroded before Abraham Lincoln's [13] election as president in November 1860 diverted the nation's attention to the secession crisis. During the Civil War, Gatling gun inventor Richard J. Gatling [14], a native of Murfreesboro, was suspected of participation in the KGC, but the allegation appears to have been unfounded.

**References:**

Ollinger Crenshaw, "The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley," *American Historical Review* 47 (1941).

Frank L. Klement, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War* (1984).

**Image Credit:**

"The origins of the Knights of the Golden Circle can be traced to Cincinnati con man George Bickley." Image courtesy of the University of Cincinnati. Available from http://www.uc.edu/news/NR.aspx?id=13035 [2] (accessed August 1, 2012).

**Additional Resources:**

Knights of the Golden Circle, Texas State Historical Association: http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vbk01 [3]

Ollinger Crenshaw, The Knights of the Golden Circle: The Career of George Bickley: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/1838769 [4]

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