

## A Brief History of the Shriners of North America

The Shrine, or more properly the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (A.A.O.N.M.S.), was founded in New York City in 1872 by Billy Florence, an actor, and Walter Fleming, a physician. The idea was to create a society that would provide a fun outlet. As they were both 32nd degree masons, they envisioned it as an extension to this body which elaborates on the basic tenets of Freemasonry. As it stands today, a man must first be a Mason in order to become a Shriner.



Our Founders

In setting up the new society, Fleming and Florence realized it needed a colorful exciting backdrop. As the legend goes, Fleming attended a party in Marseilles, France, hosted by an Arabian diplomat. At the end of the party, the guests became members of a secret society. Florence realized this might be the ideal vehicle for the new fraternity, and he made copious notes and drawings of the ceremony. When Florence returned to the States, Fleming agreed and together they created the elaborate rituals, designed the emblem and costumes, and formalized the salutation. Though the Shrine is not itself a secret society, it still retains much of the mysticism and secrecy of its origins.

As part of the requirements for membership, Florence and Fleming decided that all members must be either a 32nd degree Scottish Rite Mason or a Knights Templar York Rite Mason. These groups are concordant bodies of Freemasonry which is the oldest and most widely known fraternity in the world. It dates back hundreds of years to when stonemasons and other craftsmen on building projects gathered in shelter houses or lodges.

The basic unit of Masonry is the Blue Lodge, where members earn the first three Masonic degrees. There is no higher degree than that of Master Mason but for those who wish to further explore the allegory and symbolism learned in the Blue Lodge, the Scottish Rite and York Rite elaborate on the basic tenets of Freemasonry.

Charity was a part of the Shrine almost from the beginning, but over the years Shriners kept looking for something more as an even greater purpose. In 1920 the organization voted to adopt its own official philanthropy, dedicated to providing free orthopedic

medical care to children in need, and the first Shriners Hospital was built in Shreveport, La., in 1922. There is never a charge to the patient, parent or any third party for any service or treatment received at any of the hospitals. The Shrine's philanthropy now consists of 22 "Centers of Excellence" including three Shriners Burn Institutes.

This is just a brief synopsis of the History of the Shrine. For more detail on both the Shrine and its philanthropy, you can go to the [Shrine page](#) at the Shriner's HQ Web Page.