



A History of Oasis Shriners

Oasis Shriners trace their history back to 1894, when Walter Scott "Daddy" Liddell petitioned Acca Temple in Richmond, Va., to organize a Shrine Temple in North Carolina, actually the first in the Carolinas, North and South. Those joining with Liddell were Belk department store founder William Henry Belk, Dr. J.F. Robertson, B. Swift Davis, John Farrier, C.L. Hopkins, W.B. Summersett, D.E. Allen and George Meredith. The Charter was granted on Oct. 10, 1894, by Imperial Potentate William B. Melish of Cincinnati.

Liddell served as Potentate (president) of Oasis for four years and was the state's highest-ranking Mason in 1904 and 1905. He was an Oasis national representative until his death in 1940.

The first meeting was held at what was called Shrine Hall in downtown Charlotte on January 18, 1895. The next day, with the assistance of Acca Temple representatives, 18 new Shriners were initiated into the newly-formed Oasis Temple.

One of the first applications received after the initial charter membership was formed came from J.M. Belk, W. Henry's brother.

As the Oasis membership grew, it spread across North and South Carolina, with initiates coming from Asheville, Raleigh, and Charleston.

The first Oasis Shrine parade occurred on May 17, 1898, at the Spring ceremonial in Raleigh. Oasis was 173 members strong and representation stretched across both Carolinas.

Oasis continued to grow as the Shrine of North America grew, with 82 temples and more than 55,000 members by the turn of the century, all represented at the 1900 Imperial Session in Washington D.C., where President William McKinley stood on the parade viewing stand.

In the 18 years following, the Shrine organization expanded into Mexico and the Republic of Panama and many of the organization's traditions began, such as the first Shrine Circus in Detroit in 1906 and the expansion of philanthropy. Shriners contributed \$25,000 to earthquake victims in San Francisco in 1906 and gave \$10,000 for the relief of European war victims, both considered enormous sums at the time.

Also during the growth of the Shrine in the 20th Century came expansion of the organization in the Carolinas. Omar Shriners was chartered in Charleston, S.C., in 1907, Sudan in New Bern, N.C., in 1917, Greenville's Hejaz in 1920, Columbia's Jamil in 1974 and Raleigh's Amran in 1976.

One of the most significant modern milestones for Oasis came in 1987, with the construction of its new headquarters building in the University City area of north Charlotte after spending virtually all of its first 90-odd years in downtown Charlotte. Ground was broken at the new building on March 20, 1987, in a ceremony attended by local government, civic and political leaders. A week later a commemorative plaque was installed by the Grand Lodge of AF & AM of N.C. by Grand Master Bud McCall and Oasis Potentate Tommy Arakas.

The completed 55,000 square-foot building, with its enormous auditorium, practice area, meeting rooms, offices and restaurant, was dedicated in June 1988.

Oasis, with some 7,300 members, stands as the second-largest of all the 191 chapters in North America, with some 440,000 members and general offices in Tampa, Fla.

Oasis is this year led by Michael K. Downs of Mount Pleasant, NC.