

**THE HISTORY OF THE IMPERIAL
COUNCIL ANCIENT ARABIC
ORDER NOBLES OF THE MYSTIC
SHRINE FOR NORTH AMERICA**

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The History of the Imperial Council Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America by William B. Melish

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WILLIAM B. MELISH

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The
History of the Imperial Council
Ancient Arabic Order
Nobles of the Mystic Shrine
for North America

SECOND EDITION

1872-1921

FIRST EDITION

1872-1919

Compiled and Edited by

THE COMMITTEE ON HISTORY

WILLIAM B. MELISH,

Past Imperial Potentate, Chairman

PRESTON BELVIN, JAMES MCGEE, GEO. S. MEREDITH,
and FRED C. SCHRAMM

BY THE DIRECTION AND UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE
IMPERIAL COUNCIL, NOBLES OF THE MYSTIC SHRINE, 1919

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WILLIAM B. MELISH,

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Chairman History Committee
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FOREWORD

IN his Annual Address to the Imperial Council Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America, at its Fortieth Annual Session, held in the city of Atlanta, Georgia, in 1914, the Imperial Potentate, Illustrious Noble William W. Irwin, made the following recommendation and suggestion:

"That the Imperial Council should authorize the publication of a complete and authentic history of the early origin and records of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, and also a history of the Order from which our Order emanates. These data are in the possession of Dr. Saram R. Ellison, of Mecca Temple, New York, and I would suggest the propriety of engaging him to write the history."

See Printed Proceedings, 1914, Page 140.

The Committee on Jurisprudence and Laws (Wm. B. Melish, Chairman), made the following report on this recommendation and suggestion:

"Our Committee learns from Representative Saram R. Ellison, who is the Recorder of Mecca Temple, of New York City, that the work upon which he is at present engaged is a history of the early days of Mecca Temple, as shown by its records, and that he intends to present this history to Mecca Temple for such disposition as it may desire to make. Noble Ellison says that when this is done he will be glad to place the result of his investigations at the disposal of the Imperial Council through the Imperial Potentate.

"We call attention to the fact that a printed history of the early origin of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine was published as early as 1878, and reprinted about 1893, and that many copies of the same are still in existence. We are of the opinion that this history should be verified by a competent Committee, and compared with the early minutes of Mecca Temple, as that body was the possessor of the data concerning the introduction of the Order into the United States.

"We therefore recommend that the incoming Imperial Potentate be requested to appoint a Committee of three members of the Imperial Council, and that he instruct said Committee to prepare a concise history of the Ancient Arabic Order from which our Order emanates, and to add thereto a short history of the Imperial Council from date of its inception up to the year 1915, and to present the same in manuscript form to the Imperial Council at its next Annual Session for its consideration.

"We further recommend that such expenses of the Committee as may be approved by the Imperial Potentate shall be paid from the Imperial Council funds, but that the compensation for services rendered by the Committee, or any one else, in the compilation of the historical matter shall be fixed by the Imperial Council."

See Printed Proceedings, 1914, Page 215.

But little progress was made by the Committee prior to 1918, although it reported each year to the Imperial Council that the work was progressing as rapidly as possible, and asked and was granted further time to complete its work. Prior to the Annual Session of the Imperial Council in 1918, our now lamented Noble Saram R. Ellison, who had served as Chairman of the Committee since its appointment, and who had gathered much valuable information and data relative to the early history of Mecca Temple in New York, and the organization of the Imperial Council, because of advancing years, asked to be relieved of further work on the Committee. This, and other reasons, necessitated a change in the personnel of the Committee, which was made at the Annual Session of the Imperial Council in 1918.

At that Annual Session the newly appointed Committee on History of the Order made the following report:

"TO THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL, N. M. S.:

"Your Committee on History of the Order regrets that it can only report progress in the work devolving upon it. At the last session of the Imperial Council, Noble Saram R. Ellison asked to be relieved as Chairman of the Committee. This was done, and Noble D. C. O'Flaherty was appointed Chairman by the Imperial Potentate, and Noble James McGee was added to the Committee. The historical matter that had been collected was taken in hand by the new Chairman, who called to his assistance Noble Jas.

McGee and Noble Wm. B. Melish. In January last Chairman O'Flaherty and Noble W. J. Thornby resigned from the Committee, their membership as Representatives to the Imperial Council having ceased. The Imperial Potentate thereupon appointed Noble Wm. B. Melish as Chairman of the Committee, and also appointed Nobles Preston Belvin and George A. Pettigrew as members of the Committee. During the last three months a large amount of work has been done in the preparation and compilation of matter from original records and from the Proceedings of the Imperial Council. This work has been largely done by Noble James McGee, of New York City, where the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine was instituted in America in 1872.

"In the preparation of historical matter the Committee was authorized by the Imperial Potentate to employ a Noble to assist the Committee and to have typewriting done, and to go to the expense of not to exceed five hundred dollars for the work.

"A good deal of this work has been done and has been in the hands of this Committee at this session. Much of this matter has to be carefully revised and compared with the official records of the Imperial Council. We have divided this work among the members of the Committee and will undoubtedly complete the work during the coming year.

"Your Committee asks that it may be continued for another year in order to carry on and complete its work.

Yours in the Faith,

WM. B. MELISH,
PRESTON BELVIN,
JAMES MCGEE,
GEO. S. MEREDITH,
GEORGE A. PETTIGREW,
Committee."

The report was accepted and the request granted.
See Printed Proceedings, 1918, Page 165.

At the Annual Session, 1919, of the Imperial Council, the Committee presented what is contained in the following pages as the result of their labors, and the same was accepted, approved, and adopted as the History of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America, and of the Imperial Council of said Order from its inception to the present time.

In the preparation of the History of the Imperial Council, the printed Proceedings of its Annual Sessions have been the source from which the information and data have been secured, the thought being that its best history is its own record as published by its authority.

While we have not attempted to publish herein the Laws, Rules, and Regulations of the Imperial Council, for these are embodied in its Constitution and By-Laws, we have occasionally quoted in full an amendment to the Constitution or By-Laws, for the purpose of showing the changes from time to time in the Jurisprudence of the Imperial Council.

PREFATORY

THE history of any fraternal order, organization, or society consists mainly in an answer to the three questions: What was its origin? What are its purposes? and What has it accomplished?

It frequently happens that it is quite difficult, and sometimes absolutely impossible, to establish beyond cavil the origin of organizations or fraternities that are not really old in point of years. This is not difficult to understand when we know that almost without exception such organizations are formed by a few enthusiasts who are more deeply interested in perfecting the organization, and promulgating its principles, than they are in preserving a complete and correct record of their proceedings. There are but few, if any, fraternal societies, except those of recent organization, whose origin is not enshrouded in more or less uncertainty, and some of them have nothing upon which to base their origin but legendary love.

Even the great Fraternity of Free Masons, the oldest fraternal institution in the world, and of which every Noble of the Mystic Shrine is a member, has an origin completely enshrouded in doubt and uncertainty.

While it is generally agreed that Freemasonry as it now exists, in its speculative character, dates back many years beyond the organization of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, and that it is founded upon, or was suggested by, certain societies or guilds of operative Masons that existed at a very early date, and whose members were the architects and builders of the olden time, yet it is not definitely known when the change from the operative to the speculative system was made, or who were responsible for it. Some Masonic students contend that the origin of Freemasonry can not be traced back beyond the sixteenth century, while others contend that its origin can be traced by its emblems, symbolisms, and teachings, through the operative, or stone masons' guilds, back to the building of King Solomon's Temple. Both theories may be wrong, but the fact remains that this great Fraternity, which now encircles