

## Fraternal: Shriners

The Shriners, or Shrine Masons, are one of this country's most famous, and most popular, fraternal organizations. Most people, even kids, can at least tell you that the Shriners are those guys in the funny little hats who drive the little cars and buggies in almost every parade down the main street of town. Of course, there's a lot more to the Shriners than that.

The Shriners belong to the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America (A.A.O.N.M.S.). The Shrine is an international fraternity of approximately 610,000 members who belong to Shrine Temples throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, and The Republic of Panama. The group was founded in New York City in 1872, and the organization is composed solely of 32nd degree Scottish Rite Masons or Knights Templar York Rite Masons.

Many leaders of the Shrine, in the years since Dr. Fleming wrote his Ritual, have tried to describe just what the organization is. One of the best of these descriptions came from the pen of the late Dr. Hubert M. Poteat, Wake Forest University Professor and Past Imperial Potentate. He wrote: "The Shrine appeals to the strong manhood of North America for a variety of reasons. In the first place, the oriental pageantry and the magnificence of costumes and regalia appeal to men who may be old in years but who, are still young in spirit. Little boys play cops and robbers; Shriners play Moslems and infidels. In the second place, the Shrine provides opportunity for fun and play and mirth on a truly magnificent scale. Shriners are apostles of good cheer and happiness and as such are performing a very vital function in this tragic modern world of ours. Indeed it may be said that we have been "called into the Kingdom for such a time as this."

Although Shriners may be best-known for their colorful parades and the distinctive red fez, the real "shine" in the Shriners is its truly wonderful philanthropic activities, centering around the Shriners Hospitals for Children, a \$5.4 billion charitable endowment and a program which is often called "the heart and soul of the Shrine." Indeed, it may well be the greatest philanthropic enterprise in the world.

Shriners Hospitals for Children is a network currently numbering 22 hospitals that provide absolutely free state-of-the-art medical treatment for children suffering from burns and spinal cord and orthopaedic disorders. One of their newer hospitals, an 80-bed, \$112 million facility, opened right here in Sacramento. In their first 75 years, Shriners Hospitals have treated more than 550,000 children.

Cover-wise, there don't seem to be that many, but certainly there are enough to build a small, but nice, representative collection. The largest collection reported was that of Bill Hubbard, TN, who had 93 back in 1996. Almost all are 20-strikes, with a few 30s and four 40s. A number of these covers are dated (1941 is earliest I know of).

