

# HISTORY OF BENI KEDEM

## **The Year was 1986**

Tuesday, June 23, 1896 was a beautiful summer day in Charleston, West Virginia. A city of about 8,000 people located on the banks of the Kanawha River. It would have been just like any other day in West Virginia except for a Historic Event. It was the day Beni Kedem Temple was founded.

## **Success at Last**

On July 22, 1896 a Disposition was issued for a new Temple to be located in Wheeling, West Virginia and to be called "Osiris" This was the beginning of Shrinedom in West Virginia. Osiris Temple became the 29<sup>th</sup> Temple and West Virginia joined the 18 states and the District of Columbia with Shrine Temples. The first Ceremonial in Southern West Virginia was held by Osiris Temple in Charleston on November 26, 1891. Among the 23 Candidates elected were such notables as E. Willis Wilson and W.A. MacCorckle, who became Governors of West Virginia and Judge G.W. McClintic and A.B.C. Bray who became Grand Masters of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of West Virginia.

From time to time other Ceremonials were held by Osiris Temple in Southern West Virginia, as a result the number of Shriners steadily increased and soon the desire for a new Temple in Southern West Virginia became the goal of Shriners in the area. Several petitions were submitted to Osiris Temple for its consent to form a new Temple, but each petition was rejected. Committees were elected and sent to Imperial Council Sessions, but they were unsuccessful in overcoming the representation from Osiris Temple. In June 1896, a committee consisting of Past Grand Masters John McConihay, George Davis, and Neil Robinson with Nobles Evan Powell and E.W. Knight presented a petition to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Imperial Council Session held in Cleveland, Ohio. On June 23, 1896 the proceedings of this Imperial Council contain the following. Imperial Recorder read a petition from Nobles at Charleston, West Virginia for the dispensation to open and form a new Temple to be called Beni Kedem, which petition was referred to the Committee on Charters and Dispensation. "The Report of such Committee reports, after a full investigation of the application for a dispensation to open a new

Temple at Charleston, West Virginia, that the same be granted under the name Beni Kedem Temple, with concurrent jurisdiction in the State”.

So Beni Kedem was born. The Shrine had come to Southern West Virginia after a difficult, but successful struggle. Beni Kedem means “Sons of the Desert” named Neil Robinson as its first Potentate. Potentate Robinson served Beni Kedem as Potentate for three years.

## **Our Dispensation**

The Dispensation granted by the Imperial Council and dated June 2, 1986, presently hangs on the wall of Beni Kedem temple located at 100 Quarrier Street in Charleston. This Dispensation, which bears the handwritten names of all 103 Charter Members, reads as follows” To all Illustrious Nobles to whom these presents shall come know ye that we, The Imperial Council of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, do hereby authorize and empower our Illustrious Nobles Theodore Arter, John Armstrong, John Alderson, J.K. Anderson, and 99 others shown in the margin hereof, to form and open a Temple of the Mystic Shrine in the City of Charleston, in the State of West Virginia, Under the title Beni Kedem.

## **Early Days**

In the early days of Beni Kedem, all sessions including Ceremonials were held in the old Masonic Temple building. A lot was subsequently purchased at the corner of Virginia and McFarland Streets, where Center College is now located, with the intention of building a new Temple. When the Masonic Temple was rebuilt, following a fire in 1914, Beni Kedem purchased a 25% interest in the new Masonic Temple and held all of its meeting there for several years. In 1920 Beni Kedem purchased a lot on Kanawha Street where the Riverview Terrace Apartments are presently located, and plans were made for a million dollar Temple. Efforts to sell stock to the members’ did not succeed and the project was abandoned and the property sold. In 1931 Beni Kedem purchased the Scottish Rite Temple on Capital Street and held its meetings in this building until March, 1965.

## **The New Temple**

Beni Kedem took a big step in 1962 toward the building of a new Temple. In that year it sold the old Temple to the Scottish Rite Bodies. Potentate R. Glenn Lilly appointed a committee at this time to locate and acquire a site for a new Temple, but the committee was unable to locate a suitable property. In 1963 Potentate A. Bruce Aker appointed a committee and the property located at the corner of Quarrier and Reynolds Street was purchased. Plans for a new Temple were approved by the Nobility and the old buildings were removed from the site. Contracts were made for the construction of the new Temple in 1964, while J. Stuart Ervin was Potentate. Ground was broken on April 16, 1964, The Cornerstone Ceremony was held on June 27, 1964 and the Stone was laid by Deputy Imperial Potentate O. Carlyle Brock. The new Temple was completed March 15, 1965. Beni Kedem later acquired approximately one acre of land adjacent to the Temple where the Fifth Quarter Restaurant is located.

## **Growth and Progress**

Since its humble beginnings in 1896, Beni Kedem Temple has Shown an increase in membership during most years. During the recession years 1930-1940 a drop in membership occurred. Membership has increased for the most part over the last few decades. In 2001, Beni Kedem's Membership was 4,271 Nobles and was 34<sup>th</sup> in size among the 191 temples in North America. In 2013 Beni Kedem was recognized by the Imperial Council as having a Membership growth one of only 23 Temples to accomplish this. In 2014 Beni Kedem was awarded a Certificate of Recognition from the Governor of West Virginia for our extraordinary service to the citizens of west Virginia in the field of Civil Rights.

Good Things are happening at Beni Kedem, Thanks for being a part of it