

The moving spirit for the Elks was an Englishman named Charles Algernon Sidney Vivian. Born October 22, 1842, this son of a clergyman was a successful comic singer and dancer in the music halls of London. In November 1867, Vivian arrived in New York City to try his fortune.



Other actors and entertainers soon gravitated toward his magnetic personality. With everything closed on Sunday because of New York City Blue Laws, a group of theatrical people began meeting for their own amusement under Vivian's leadership. A loose organization was formed to make sure the larder was well-stocked for these gatherings. They called themselves the Jolly Corks, a name derived from a trick introduced by Vivian in which the uninitiated purchased a round of refreshments.

When one of their members died shortly before Christmas in 1867, leaving his wife and children destitute, the Jolly Corks decided that in addition to good fellowship, they needed a more enduring organization to serve those in need.

On February 16, 1868, they established the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and elected Vivian to head it. Its social activities and benefit performances increased the popularity of the new Order. Membership grew rapidly. Elks traveling to other cities spread the word of the Brotherhood of Elks. Soon there were requests for Elks Lodges in cities other than New York. In response to these appeals, the Elks asked the New York State legislature for a charter authorizing the establishment of a Grand Lodge with the power to establish local Lodges anywhere in the United States. When the Grand Lodge Charter was issued, the founders then received the first local charter as New York Lodge No. 1 on March 10, 1871.