

Mensa's History

The meaning of Mensa

Mensa is an international society whose only qualification for membership is a score in the top 2 percent of the general population on a standardized intelligence test. The word *mensa* means "table" in Latin; similarly, *mens* means "mind" and *mensis* means "month." The name "Mensa" is reminiscent of "mind, table, month," which suggests a monthly meeting of great minds around a table.



The founding of Mensa

Mensa was founded in Oxford, England, in 1946 by Roland Berrill and Lancelot Lionel Ware. Berrill was an Australian expatriate licensed to practice law. Dr. Ware was a Ph.D. on his way to becoming a barrister who had become interested in intelligence testing while working at the National Institute for Medical Research. They met by chance on a train and subsequently corresponded, primarily about the possible formation of a club — a longtime dream of Ware's. Early in 1946, Ware administered the Cattell III test to Berrill, and Berrill went off in search of his constituency. On Oct. 1, 1946, Berrill had the first piece of Mensa literature printed, and the date is now the recognized founding date for the organization.

Today, with more than 100,000 members representing more than 100 countries, Mensa continues to provide social interaction and community involvement worldwide.



The founding of American Mensa

The first handful of American Mensa members joined between 1951 and 1959. They were mostly expatriated Britons or Americans who had learned about Mensa while visiting England. One such American was a reporter named John Wilcock, who attended a Mensa meeting while visiting England. He returned and wrote a column about Mensa for *The Village Voice*.

Peter A. Sturgeon, a medical writer in Brooklyn, fortuitously read that article, wrote to the Mensa Selection Agency on Mar. 8, 1960, and became a member as of May 1960.

In August 1960, Peter was authorized to start forming a New York City regional group and was sent the list of the 22 Mensans in the United States. This group was the first outside Britain to be recognized and has since evolved into American Mensa, Ltd.

The founding meeting took place on Sept. 30, 1960, at the Brooklyn home of Peter and Ines Sturgeon. Four other members attended. By 1963, the organization had grown to 1,000 members. By its 40th anniversary, American Mensa had approximately 47,000 members, and its headquarters moved from Brooklyn, New York to Arlington, Texas.

The purposes of Mensa

Mensa has three purposes, which are outlined in its constitution. They are:

1. To identify and foster human intelligence for the benefit of humanity.
2. To encourage research into the nature, characteristics and uses of intelligence.
3. To provide a stimulating intellectual and social environment for its members.

About Mensa

History of Mensa
General Mensa FAQ
Demographics
Mensa Foundation

[Print this page](#) 

[Text Only Site](#)

