



Joseph Franz: A Renaissance Man in the Twentieth Century

Jo Humphrey

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His training has been that of an engineer, and he is a thorough businessman. He is a man of integrity with no axes to grind who assumed his duties toward the town at a personal sacrifice. -Gertrude Robinson Smith, socialite and philanthropist, on Joseph Franz. Joseph Franz was a precocious teenager when he arrived in America on October 16, 1897, determined to succeed at any undertaking. As an electrical engineer, Franz defied the most respected electrical names of the time, such as George Westinghouse, to experiment with untested methods of producing and providing electricity. After retiring from the electrical field, he dared to design and build two great cultural buildings in the Berkshires that are still used today. One provides shelter for the renowned Boston Symphony Orchestra. The other is the first theatre built specifically for dance at Jacob's Pillow, an old farm near Becket, Massachusetts that has become the first dance related institution in America to be designated as a National Historic Landmark. Through his European education, Franz learned that to brag about oneself was very unethical. Because of his modesty, few are aware of his tireless contributions and service to his community in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and the surrounding area. Franz's children are finally able to help him bring his accomplishments to light in Joseph Franz-A Renaissance Man in the 20th Century.

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