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Jordan had a passion for music



Tom
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Part Two

The Jordan twins, Jules and Julian, achieved a great deal of national fame, but they never forgot their Willimantic roots.

In September 1878, Jules Jordan was the star performer of a concert given in the Franklin Hall on Willimantic's Main Street. The following December, the Willimantic Linen Co. engaged Julian Jordan to conduct a singing school in the Dunham Hall library. In March 1879, the twins were involved in the formation of the Willimantic Vocal Society, which provided music lessons for cultured ladies and gentlemen. The term consisted of 10 singing lessons — the price for men was a dollar and women paid 50 cents.

In 1866, 16-year-old Jules Jordan learned to operate the telegraph, and during the last two summers of school he worked on the telegraph at local railroad depots.

In April 1868, Jules and Julian played in the Willimantic Cornet Band which, discounting the Civil War, was in existence from 1858 until 1877.

In 1868, Lyman Jordan de-

manded that the twins work on the family farm, on Jordan Road. Jules was herding cattle one day when his father called him and pointed to a telegram from the manager of the Western Union office in Providence, who requested that Jules take charge of the telegraph office in the large hotel at Rocky Point in Providence. Lyman gave Jules permission to go — and five dollars. Jules caught the next train to Providence and spent the summer of 1868 at the Rocky Point hotel.

D.W. Reeves and his American Band were playing at Rocky Point hotel that summer, and Jules was intrigued. This was the first time he'd heard a professional band. He saved his money, purchased a cornet, and asked Reeves to give him lessons.

At the end of the summer he was hired as the telegraph operator in the City Hotel at Providence, and one day bumped into Edgar F. Clarke the pastor of the Mathewson Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Providence. Clarke had been the pastor of the Willimantic Methodist Church, and knew the Jordan family well. He particularly recalled Jules' tenor singing voice, and after several introductions, Jules became the lead tenor singer in Providence's Grace Church. "Thus I came to Providence without a thought of making music a profession, but happily the profession found me, a fact that I have never

had reason to regret."

He studied singing in Paris in 1886 with a famous voice coach, Signor Giovanni Sbriglia. He sang on many of his European tours, and Italians found it difficult to believe that a Yankee was singing their songs so well.

Jules Jordan established himself as one of America's most established choral conductors and music teachers. In 1880, he created and sang the role of Faust in Berlioz's opera, "La Damnation de Faust" in New York.

He formed the Arion Club in Providence, a mass choir of 250 voices that met and performed for more than 40 years between 1880 and 1920. Jordan's most well known of his compositions was a romantic comedy opera, "Rip Van Winkle." He also wrote a large number of operettas, the most performed being "Stars of the Sea," "An Eventful Holiday," "The Buccaneers," "Princess of the Blood," "Her Crown of Glory" and "A Leap Year Furlough."

Vaudeville theaters across the land performed his comedy sketches, such as Cobbler or King and Managerial Tactics. Some of the greatest singers of the time, mainly forgotten other than Enrico Caruso, sang Jordan's compositions. He invited many of them back to the family farm on Jordan Road, such as Giuseppe Campanari, who was a regular performer at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.



Dr. Jules Jordan, center front, sits with other soloists performing at the Lisbon, N.H., music festival in 1890.

Jules Jordan's passion other than music was horses. He was brought up with them on his father's Willimantic farm. He had 11 horses. His favorite was "Ben" whom often rode into Willimantic, along with horses loaned to his well known musical guests.

Jordan's prolific and highly performed compositions saw him receive an honorary doctorate of music from Brown University in 1895.

After a long and illustrious career, Dr. Jules Jordan died at his home on Waterman Street in Providence on March 5, 1927. Jordan's body was returned to his hometown, and he is buried in the family plot in the Willimantic Cemetery. His youngest sister, Jennie Jordan, lived to be 89, and died in the Card Home on Pleasant Street in 1951. Take a look at

the Jordan family homestead the next time you drive down Jordan Road. It's the large, white house on the right, as you head to Lebanon.

This is Walking Weekend, so join me this afternoon at 2 p.m. to take a historic, outside tour of the Victorian mansions on Windham and Prospect streets. Be at the Willimantic Cemetery at 9 a.m. Among other landmarks, we'll look at the Jordan family grave. On Monday, Jeff Voce and I will be conducting a tour of Windham Mills at 11 a.m.

Also, join me on Oct. 17 for "Mills, Munchkins and Antiques," a bus tour of the Quinebaug Valley. For more information, call the Windham Recreation Department at 465-3046.