

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Remembering Francis Eustis

Cincinnati native Francis Eustis was born in 1912 to Mr. & Mrs. George (Helen White) Eustis. His early years were spent at the family home located at 1960 Madison Avenue. His father died in 1915, and after losing her husband, his mother decided to raise her two sons (Francis and George, Jr.) in the country. She purchased 110 acres of land in current day Indian Hill in 1924 and built the English country manor house now known as Breezy Hill. When the 24 room house was completed in 1928, the widow and her children moved there. Here Mrs. Eustis established the renowned dairy farm, known all over the country for its Jersey cattle and modern dairy equipment. Legend has it that this enterprise began when her two boys consumed vast quantities of milk.

Francis graduated from Asheville School for Boys in North Carolina, though he admitted, “I was never a particularly outstanding student.” His favorite course was mechanical drawing. He attended the Yale School of Fine Arts for three years, but left to come back to the farm, where, following his mother’s legacy, he became an accredited farmer and livestock breeder. Active in the Indian Hill community, Francis participated in local minstrel shows and was a member of the Indian Hill Charter Committee of 1941 which established the Village’s Home Rule Charter. In 1944 he married his childhood sweetheart, “the girl across the street”, Viola Stevens at Armstrong Chapel. The couple produced a son and a daughter.

Viola and Francis moved to Lebanon where they operated Breezy Ridge Farm. Here they lived a quiet life, butchering their own animals for meat and consuming produce from their vegetable garden. Francis was Secretary Treasurer of the Ohio Belgian Breeders’ Association and was active in the Ohio Arabian Association. Also, he was on the advisory board of the Ohio State Fair Horse Show and President of the Ohio Jersey Breeders’ Association. In the 1950s, Francis took some horse drawings to New York where he met wild animal sculptor Louis Paul Jonas. From Jonas, he learned sculpting skills and the sequence of casting animal models. Eustis visited the Jonas studio twice a year thereafter to observe and confer about techniques.

His career as an animal sculptor took off in the 1960s. The couple sold their Lebanon farm in 1958 and moved back to Indian Hill where Francis converted a barn to an art studio. Here he created numerous pieces. After studying a particular breed, he sketched and then made a clay model. A plaster mold was poured over the clay model to produce a master casting. Then the piece got coated with shellac, finished, and hand painted. Accoutrements like riders, tack, and accessories were meticulously added and the sculpture was mounted. Francis’ studio had many reference books, a variety of tack, and numerous photographs of horses taken from various angles. This helped the artist to depict the muscle position and coloration of each sculpture. When he wanted to ascertain horse anatomy, Francis walked to a stable to view a real horse.



Sculpture by Francis Eustis

Eustis’ sculptures were sold in art galleries and sporting goods stores all over the country. While his specialty was horses, he sculpted other animals also. One of his commissions was a miniature of the Budweiser beer wagon and horse team, a project which took three years. In the 1970s, he sculpted reproductions of the Cincinnati Zoo’s famed gorilla, King Tut, as a fundraiser for the Zoo’s Great Ape Complex. Then he made and donated twelve models of odd-toed hoofed animals to the Zoo as a special educational display. He received a commission to do a portrait of an English Springer Spaniel, and later in life, he sculpted Native Americans. A gallery at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington features his draft horses.

Francis Eustis was a keen observer of the animal world. He was a Trustee of the Cincinnati Zoo for more than twenty years. He was a member of the Society of Animal Artists and the American Academy of Equine Artists. Locally he was a long time exhibitor at the Indian Hill Artists’ Annual Show. His sculptures were displayed in Santa Fe, Boston, and San Diego. The renowned sculptor died in 1996, but his artistic legacy endures in pieces owned by collectors.



Francis Eustis