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Elder of Witnesses, 99, Dies of Heart Attack

Frederick William Franz
Was Scholar, Linguist

Frederick William Franz, president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, died after a heart attack Tuesday morning at the Society's world headquarters in Brooklyn Heights. He was 99 years old.

A noted Bible scholar, Franz was versed in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. He traveled extensively, speaking to vast audiences around the globe.

His largest audience consisted of 253,922 persons from 123 countries present for the 1958 convention of Jehovah's Witnesses held at Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds.

Franz was born in Covington, Kentucky, on September 12, 1893. He was class valedictorian at his graduation from Woodward High School, where he had taken the Classical Course and pursued a study of Latin. From 1911 through 1914, Franz attended the University of Cincinnati. Although chosen to receive a Rhodes scholarship, he left the university in May 1914 to devote his full time to the ministry. He had been ordained as a minister on November 30, 1913 in Chicago.

Accepting an invitation to become a member of the international headquarters staff of Jehovah's Witnesses, Franz came to Brooklyn in June of 1920. His first position was in the pressroom where the Society's magazines, *The Watchtower* and *The Golden Age* (now *Awake*) were printed.



Frederick William Franz
1893-1992

Soon he was transferred to the desk that handled the Society's full-time field representatives. In 1926, he joined the editorial staff as a Bible researcher and writer for the Society's publications. Franz remained involved in literary work

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The headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses, erected in 1949 at 124 Columbia Heights, was the first new building put up by the organization in Brooklyn Heights.

Photo by Honrik Krogus

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until the end. He also served as a member of the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Franz would often sing tenor solo or as a member of a choral group on the Society's radio station, WBBR. He also gave many Bible lectures over the radio. At an international convention on 1926 at the Royal Albert Hall in London, Franz was the featured singer to the accompaniment of the hall's famous organ.

In 1945, Franz became the vice-president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania and remained in this office until 1977. Upon the death of Nathan H. Knorr in that year, he became the fourth president of the Society. Although plagued by loss of vision in his mid-nineties, he served in this capacity until his death.

Aging Governing Body

The all-male members of the dozen-man governing body of the Witnesses reportedly had averaged about 83 years of age, with the youngest more than 70 years old. All of them were said to be members of the "anointed"—the heavenly-elect who had come to the faith before 1935. Because of the aging nature of the leadership, the Watchtower Society within the past year named governing "helpers" from among the "great crowd" of Witnesses who have converted to the religion since 1935.

According to two former Witnesses, David T. Brown of Phoenix, Arizona, and Randy Watters of Manhattan Beach, California, the new "helpers" did not take part in executive administration work that previously had been the sole province of the governing body. As of last March, Brown and Watters wrote, there were 4,278,820

active Witnesses, of whom 8,850 could claim "anointed" status.

They wrote further that spiritual writings may come only from the "anointed" class, and that Watchtower publications had given no hint "how such spiritual writings will continue once the aging leadership had passed."

Some 3,000 of the Witnesses live and work in Brooklyn Heights, where, according to a report last month in the *New York Times*, the society owns more than 30 properties now valued at \$186 million. The newspaper said the Watchtower properties take \$7.3 million off the city's tax rolls, while Heights real estate as a whole produces \$35.6 million in taxes. At the same time, the Witnesses have been credited with contributing tremendously to the upkeep of the area, and their conversion into society living quarters of such decaying hotels as the Bessert, the Towers and the Standish Arms has been regarded as a boon for the neighborhood.

Established in Pittsburgh in the 1870s, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society began publishing Bible literature that was sold door to door, and as it grew, the need for editorial, printing and warehouse space led it to the waterfront near the Brooklyn Bridge, where old warehouse and industrial buildings were available for little money, and from where its literature could be shipped around the world. In 1949 a new headquarters and Kingdom Hall building was erected at 124 Columbia Heights.

The Brooklyn Heights complex, known to Witnesses as "Bethel," has grown since, both through the conversion of older buildings and the construction of new ones. The Witnesses believe that Armageddon—the end of the world—could come at any time.