

THE SHIRLEY TEMPLE OF HAMILTON MOUNTAIN

By Robert Williamson

Mabel Ruth Summers was a very precocious child. She made her stage debut in 1896 at the age of three in Youngstown, Ohio. Like a "Shirley Temple" of her generation, she sang and performed between acts of her parent's plays. This month not only marks the 120th anniversary of her debut, but her birthday as well. This is our story for International Women's Week.



Mabel Ruth Summers Kompass Collection HPLSC

Born in Toronto on **March 23, 1893**, she was the eldest daughter of George and Belle Summers who operated the Summers Stock Company Theatre. Located on Hamilton Mountain next to the upper terminal of the East End Incline Railway, the theatre offered summer season performances daily from May to September. George fell in love with this mountain brow theatre. The novelty of the incline railway transportation system fascinated him, as it did many people. Unquestionably the magnificent vista of Burlington Bay and Lake Ontario was without equal and the cool summer breezes provided relief from the torrid summer heat in the city below before the advent of air conditioning. The family lived at 91 Mountain Park Avenue.

When George gained full control of the theatre in 1905, Mabel Ruth took on an ever-expanding role on the stage. She had inherited a generous amount of

singing and acting talent from her parents. Her voice gave her a leading role in her father's 1912 production of "**45 Minutes From Broadway**" a famous George M. Cohen musical comedy.



Mabel Ruth age 21, 1914 Kompass Collection HPLSC

At the age of 21 in 1914, her acting career had reached its zenith and her father had high hopes for her future on the stage. All that came crashing down when she fell in love and married a handsome stage-door suitor, James Keenan. Her theatrical situation was compounded by a fire that destroyed the theatre on December 21, 1914.

Thereafter, Mabel Ruth devoted her life to raising five children along with charitable work at St. Stephen-on-the-Mount Anglican Church. She resided in her mountain community at 128 Alpine Avenue within a few blocks of her mother's home.

On her 38th birthday, March 23, 1931, Mabel Ruth wrote the following poem of appreciation to her mother:

*Knowing the pangs of motherhood
And what we must go through,
Who'd think it strange that on this day
That I should think of you.
And think of you in gratitude
For your love profound at birth,
And all your self-effacing love
Which sheltered me on earth.*

Mabel Ruth died on July 5, 1948 and is buried next to her mother in Burkholder Cemetery on Mohawk Road East, between Upper Wentworth and Upper Sherman.

Mountain Memories is written by historian **Robert Williamson** for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. It appears monthly in *The Mountain News*.
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