

MOUNTAIN RESIDENT, A FOREMOST CANADIAN  
RADIO PERSONALITY

by Robert Williamson

Last month we revealed in this column how George and Belle Summers captured the local world of theatre entertainment from their home and theatre located on the escarpment edge of Mountain Park Avenue during the first decade of 1900. The focal point of the Wentworth Street Incline Railway helped to attract 73,000 patrons to their open air theatre every summer.

As impressive as that sounds, can you imagine that their youngest son, Raymond Ambrose (Beau) Summers, born and raised on Hamilton's Mountain Park Avenue became one of Canada's foremost Radio Personalities with a considerable listening audience on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) from coast to coast.

Through his mother's genes, Beau inherited a beautiful resonant voice and superlative diction. Considering that his mother taught elocution, it was understandable that Beau chose the new entertainment medium of radio for his profession. Beau Summers was described as a "born entertainer", just like his older sisters, Mabel Ruth and Hazel, known for their outstanding musical and acting talent.

His career began on Hamilton's Radio Station CKOC in 1929 at the age of 21. To broaden his experience he became a popular announcer on Station CJRC in Winnipeg where he married, Evelyn Millard, in 1935.



Raymond Ambrose Gates Summers c. 1929

*Hamilton Public Library Archives*

He joined the CBC in 1937 at Station CBLT in Toronto where he became well known for announcing popular soap operas, and war programs such as "Road to Life, Along the Air Waves, The Woman in White, Ma Perkins, Carry On Canada, War Savings Programs, Percy Faith, Theatre of Freedom, Canadian Theatre of the Air, and Our Family".

He also became a national name in sports broadcasting for hockey, baseball, boxing, golf and tennis. Here are a couple of examples of his scripts that I found in the Summers Papers of the Toronto Reference Library. You will note that for sophisticated programs he referred to himself as "Raymond" but for sports broadcasts he was "Beau".

*"Singing Stars of Tomorrow is presented by York Knitting Mills Ltd. who call your attention to their products and brand names: Zimmerknit, Harvey Woods and Lancaster. This is Raymond Summers speaking and inviting you to another Singing Stars of Tomorrow broadcast next Sunday. This is the Trans Canada Network of the CBC".* (Note: Zimmerknit was established in Hamilton in 1907 and occupied the entire block on the northwest corner of Dundurn and Aberdeen producing hosiery and underwear until taken over by Harvey Woods and moved to Woodstock in 1958.)

*"This is Beau Summers, your Wandering Reporter speaking to you tonight from ringside at Maple Leaf Gardens where Joe LeDuc and Jimmy McCracky are slated to fight ten rounds".*

Opera singing, horseback riding and tennis were his hobbies. In 1940 he won the Canadian Senior Tennis Championship. At age 50, he retired to Daytona Beach where he could play and teach tennis year round. He died suddenly on November 24, 1975 at the age of 67 after a strenuous game of tennis.

Although his gifted voice was stilled, we are able to admire the beautiful city view from the former Summers home, called Buena Vista on Mountain Park Avenue, and correlate it to the grandeur of the roles played by the entire Summers family in Canadian entertainment.