

HISTORIC SITE LOST IN PLAIN VIEW

By Robert Williamson

Along Mountain Park Avenue, virtually on the edge of the escarpment, east of Juravinski Hospital, is a string of substantial apartment buildings with a magnificent view of the city. Unexpectedly, a landscape curiosity appears on the road side. It is an old crumbling garden wall with a wrought iron gate and driveway entrance going nowhere. These features are incompatible with the eighteen storey apartment building that stands on the property identified as Ben Lomond Plaza. What Mountain Memory is preserved here?



Ben Lomond Plaza tower on Mountain Park Avenue brow. Photo by Robert Williamson 2018.

The answer lies in the Hamilton Public Library's City Directories. In 1913, the prosperous owner of the Thomas H. Pratt & Co Department Store at 20-24 James Street North purchased a piece of farm land on Mount Hamilton and built a large home called "Rose Arden" on the brow. By 1915 it was identified as a house on the south side of the newly surveyed Mountain Park Avenue. The only other house on this quiet stretch of road was the Almas farm house, which in time would become the "City View" lunch counter at Mountain Drive Park.

In 1929 T. H. Pratt's Department Store disappeared from the City Directory, reopening as Zellers in 1931. Perhaps with advancing age and depressed finances, Pratt down sized by moving to the nearby community of Mount Hamilton. He chose a smaller brick house at 266 Mountain Park Avenue next door to Bishop Dowling's summer home, the present site of Sacred Heart Church. Although Pratt died in 1939, that house at 266 still bears witness to his Mountain presence as the ROSE ARDEN Bed and Breakfast.

While T. H. Pratt is remembered for building the grand estate of implied beauty with the name of "Rose Arden" at the aforementioned site of the stone wall and wrought iron gate, it is as the home of Hamilton's world famous surgeon, Dr. James McGregor that the mansion and its large swimming pool is remembered by more recent

generations.

Dr. McGregor (1881-1946) bought the Rose Arden estate that would eventually be identified as 456 Mountain Park Drive from T. H. Pratt in 1931. McGregor graduated from the University of Toronto Medical School in 1905 and studied in London, Edinburgh, Berlin and the Mayo Clinic. In 1922 he joined with other surgeons to form a clinic providing laboratory and radiology facilities to better serve the medical field. This became known as the McGregor Clinic on Main Street. He went on to become the Head of Surgery at the Hamilton General Hospital and the foremost authority in goitre/thyroid disease and surgery in North America.

The McGregor estate swimming pool was unique and probably the only one on the Mountain because bedrock close to the surface prevented excavation. Local children, war veteran amputees and disabled hospital patients with nurses were invited to use the pool. That may explain why the estate became a War Amps Club House in 1948 after Dr McGregor died. Its spacious building with a magnificent view and lots of parking space made it an ideal meeting, recreation and wedding reception hall.



Alan Cardwell and Shirley Gowers 1955 wedding reception overlooked the city and the garden stone wall at War Amps House. Photo courtesy Debbie Cardwell Johnson

Today we are reminded of the war amps period by annual fund raisers like the Key Tag Service and Address Labels. When the Ben Lomond Plaza apartment tower was built on this historic scenic site in 1971, it retained an outdoor above ground concrete swimming pool which reminds us of Dr. James K. McGregor as one of Hamilton's truly great surgeons and humanitarians.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. <Hamiltonheritage.ca>. Story source Lee Gowers HMHS.