
CHARLES FRANCIS SUMMERS— BIOGRAPHY

Born in Richmond, Victoria in 1858.
Died in 1945. His father, Charles Summers, also a trained sculptor, arrived in Australia from England in 1853 and went to the goldfields for a short period. One of his major works in Melbourne is the Burke and Wills Monument in the City Square. Summers returned to Europe in 1867 and settled in Rome.

The son, Charles Francis Summers went to Rome in 1870 and trained under his father. He returned to Australia in 1884/85 selling sculptures and gaining commissions for the Sydney Botanic Gardens. It is possible that he made his Ballarat contact at that time. Summers returned to Australia on his third visit from 1900 – 1918 and visited Ballarat in 1900, when he talked about the sculpting of the "Flight from Pompeii".

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THE STATUARY PAVILION



Ballarat Botanical Gardens
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THE STATUARY PAVILION

The statuary in the Pavilion was unveiled on the 3rd August 1888 by the premier of Victoria, the Honourable Duncan Gillies, who years before had been a fellow miner working shoulder to shoulder with the donor, James Russell Thomson. This friendship had been recorded especially when they were in the mine on the present site of the Base Hospital. Thomson blamed the dampness of this mine as the cause of his deafness.

The centre piece "**Flight from Pompeii**" is almost as well known as Ballarat itself. This statue represents the flight of a family – father, mother, and child from the ill-fated city of Pompeii (Italy) about to be covered in ash and lava from Mt Vesuvius which erupted in 79AD, completely burying the city and inhabitants who failed to escape. Day turned into night as the sky was obscured by a dense pall of ash and cinders. Visitors to Pompeii today will have seen the excavations commenced in the mid 18th Century.

The four marble relief panels at the base of the main statue depicting various scenes of the flight were by the Australian C.F Summers. The panels depict confusion and flight:

- The Roman Sentinel who remained at his post.
- The blind girl, Nydia, unaffected by the dark, leading her friends to safety.
- A priest seeking to escape with his treasure and his slaves, is overwhelmed by the falling buildings.
- The general confusion, aggravated by the earthquake which occurred during the eruption.

The design for "Flight from Pompeii" was by Benzoni, but contrary to popular belief the statue was not sculpted by him. On a visit to Ballarat in 1900 the sculptor Charles Francis Summers (born in Victoria), disclosed that the original, standing only 4 feet 6 inches (approx. 1.5 metres) was in his studio in Rome. Summers said in an interview that shortly before his death Benzoni decided to reproduce the group in "heroic proportions". Work had already commenced to 'rough out' the larger statue when Benzoni died. Mr Summers went on with the work which he said was his, although the design is by Benzoni.

Mr Summers claimed that the "Flight from Pompeii" was to have been bought for the Sydney Art Gallery, but the negotiations were protracted and the Trustees for the Thomson Bequest stepped in and procured it for Ballarat. This is quite possibly correct because Summers had been in Australia and had secured commissions for the Sydney Botanic Gardens which number eight copies from the antiques.

A group of gentlemen, appointed to administer the bequest, were one day examining some photographs when they came upon the "Flight from Pompeii" by an Italian artist of high repute who had just died. The party exclaimed "This would be the very thing!". It so happened that at this time, Mr James Service (of Ballarat) was in England and he was asked to get the best opinion on Benzoni's work, which was then being exhibited in the studio of Mr Charles Summers in Rome. Satisfactory opinions were received by the 19th June 1887.

The four lovely individual statues in the pavilion were also sculpted by Charles F. Summers.

Susannah from the Apocrypha, with two reliefs, one showing Susannah being surprised at the bath; the other showing the pleasure of her friends at the demonstration of her innocence. (Her accusers were later condemned instead.)

Ruth in a sitting posture. The two reliefs show the Old Testament story of Ruth and Naomi. One showing the return of the two widowed women to the country of Naomi, the other gleaning in the field of Boaz.

Rebekah depicted shading her eyes to see Joseph in the distance as she approached her future home.

Modesty that lovely veiled figure, so expressive.

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