

# Excellent Fellows From Canada

by  
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## Part One

*"My life is gliding downwards; it speeds swifter to the day  
When it shoots the last dark Canyon to the Plains of Far-away,  
But while its stream is running through the years that are to be,  
The mighty voice of Canada will ever call to me."*<sup>1</sup>

"Watson, 'I should like to see a bit more of Canada before we sail Holmes.'  
Holmes, 'So should I Watson. Canada the linchpin of the English-speaking world. With those relations of friendly, affectionate intimacy with the United States on the one hand and with her unswerving fidelity to the British Commonwealth and the Motherland on the other, Canada the link which joins together these great branches of the human family." These lines come from the end of my all-time favorite Sherlock Holmes film, "The Scarlet Claw" (1944) starring Basil Rathbone & Nigel Bruce. The setting for the film was the French Canadian village of La Mort Rouge, and Holmes gets drawn into the case from nearby Quebec. Yet, we all know the film was really made at Universal Studios, California, and the stars were British (even though Rathbone was born in South Africa, and Bruce was born in Mexico).

In the rest of this commentary, we will be viewing photos, and discussing facts of Sherlock Holmes performers with real Canadian connections. This commentary is in no way intending to claim to be all-inclusive, but simply commentary on who I'm aware of, for your information and enjoyment. "On the death of Sir Charles we inquired for this young gentleman and found that he had been farming in Canada. From the accounts which have reached us he is an excellent fellow in every way."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Doyle, Arthur Conan, 'The Athabasca Trail', 1914

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, Arthur Conan, 'Hound of the Baskervilles', 1902

So now let's view photos of these excellent fellows of Canada and learn a few tidbits of information about each along the way. The William Gillette play "Sherlock Holmes" is the source of the first two Canadian Holmes performers I'm aware of.

**Cuyler Hastings (1863-1914)** was born in Parkhill, Ontario, his father was Canadian and his mother was American. From Oct., 1900 through Mar., 1901 Cuyler Hastings performed in the Gillette play as Holmes, for the touring company in the Western U.S. States and Canada. However, Mr. Hasting, it



A SENSATIONAL SCENE FROM "SHERLOCK HOLMES."

seems, achieved his greatest fame in the role in Australia, touring there from 1902-1904. Dr. Derham Groves, of the University of Melbourne, has written an excellent article on Cuyler Hastings from which these first few photos came<sup>3</sup>.



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<sup>3</sup>Groves, Dr. Derham <http://derhamgroves.com/harry-plimmer-and-cuyler-hastings-australias-first-and-second-sherlock-holmes/>

**Reuben Fax (1862-1908)** born in Canada of Scots-Irish parentage, had the role of John Forman in the Nov., 1899 - June, 1900, "Sherlock Holmes" at the Garrick Theatre in N.Y.C. What is significant about this is that Fax was



the understudy to the great William Gillette. A little known fact is that when Gillette became sick in April 1900 for a short period of time Reuben Fax played the Holmes role<sup>4</sup>, thus making him Canada's first Sherlock Holmes.

**Mack Sennett (1880 -1960)** was born Michael Sinnott, in Danville, Canada. Known as the innovator of slapstick comedy in film and as the 'King of Comedy', how could Sennett possibly miss on lampooning the master



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<sup>4</sup> "Examier" (Launchston, Tas.) 4/21/1900

detective. The answer is, he couldn't. A major distinction in his acting career, often overlooked, is the fact that Sennett, along with running mate Fred Mace (1878 - 1917), played Sherlock Holmes, albeit as parodies, an unknown number of times between 1911 and 1913. The films I'm aware of are, "The \$500 Reward" (1911), "Trailing The Counterfeiter" (1911), "Their First Divorce Case" (1911), "Caught With The Goods" (1911), "At It Again" (1912), "A Bear Escape" (1912), "The Sleuth's Last Stand" (1913), "The Sleuth's at The Floral Parade" (1913).

**Fraunie Fraunholz (1876 - 1938)**, from Alberta, is another silent film Canadian actor. In 1913 Fraunholz played Burstup Holmes in a number of silent film shorts, which included "The Case of the Missing Girl", "The



"Mystery of the Lost Cat", "Burstup Holmes' Murder Case", and of course "Burstup Holmes. In an interesting sidenote, director Alice Guy (1873-1968), of "Burstup Holmes, was the film industries first female movie director.

**Raymond Massey (1896 - 1983)**, of Toronto, is the first 'talkies' Canadian Holmes that I know of. His father was the wealthy Canadian, Chester Massey, owner of the Massey-Harris Tractor Company and his mother was



American. Massey served on the Western Front for the Canadian Army in WWI. Raymond Massey's very first screen role was as Sherlock Holmes, in the "The Speckled Band" (1931), with Athole Stewart as Dr. Watson. In an interesting side-note, Arthur Conan Doyle in 1894, his first of four visits to Canada, lectured at the new Massey Hall in Toronto, a building financed by Hart Massey of the Massey-Harris Tractor Company. Furthermore, Anna Massey, Raymond Massey's daughter was Jeremy Brett's wife, and their son David was Raymond's grandson. Jeremy and Anna married May 26, 1958, and were divorced Nov. 9, 1962. Their son, David, was born Aug. 14, 1959.<sup>5</sup> Raymond's popularity is attested to by the 'Raymond Massey', a cocktail made of rye, ginger syrup, and champagne, once very popular in Toronto from what I've heard.

**John Neville (1925 - 2011)**, was English by birth, but Canadian by choice. The 'Well-Manicured Man', John moved his family from Britain to the country he loved, Canada in 1972, where he would dedicate his later career to the Canadian theatre, and be awarded a prestigious Order of Canada, before



passing on in his home city of Toronto. I was lucky enough, as a youth, to have seen John Neville portray Sherlock Holmes in the RSC Revival Production of William Gillette's "Sherlock Holmes", when he replaced John Wood in 1975. Tim Pigott-Smith was Neville's Dr. Watson in that play. Ten years earlier in the film "A Study in Terror" (1965), Donald Houston played Dr. Watson to Neville's Sherlock Holmes.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.jeremybrett.info/jb\\_massey.html](http://www.jeremybrett.info/jb_massey.html)