

*The Gibson Family  
Anecdotes.*

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Rosemary Carter (Gibson grand  
daughter)

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## The Gibson Family

My father, George Middleton Gibson was born in Nottingham, England on the 28th of November 1880. He came to B.C. in 1904 aged 24 with Mr. "M.P." Williams, a family friend who was returning to his sheep and cattle ranch in Winfield.

My father had attended Wye Agricultural College in England, so to gain some experience he first worked on two small farms at Pritchard and Ducks. One of his employers had gone to England for a holiday and left my father in charge. On his return, he had no money left to pay wages, so in lieu of money he gave my father a horse and saddle and he set off for Vernon. When it became dark, he rode towards a house with a light. There he was able to stable and feed his horse and sleep in the house on the floor with other travellers.

On arriving in Vernon, he made inquiries of farm land for sale. He was directed to some property for sale on Okanagan Lake opposite Nahun, forty five acres with about a quarter mile of lake front. It was the early spring of 1906 and it looked so beautiful with spring flowers in bloom that he pitched his tent and decided to stay. The Indians had a name for this place. They called it Cussasonyx which means Paradise Point. For many years, the Indians had built fires at night on the shore to attract the Kickaninnies (Kokanee) over the reef out to the island so that they could be speared, netted and dried on racks in the sun. My father had a nice collection of arrow heads and skin scrapers that he found when he ploughed.

For seven years my father batched there in a small four room house he had built. During that time, he spent one threshing season at the O'Keefe Ranch. There were no frills there and he thoroughly enjoyed his new experience of sleeping on the ground beneath the threshing machine with fellow workers of different colours and creeds.

At the turn of the century, the Okanagan area was changing from cattle ranching to fruit orchards, so after clearing his land, he planted about half of it with apples (Jonathans and Wagners) on the hill sides and soft fruits (pears, plums, apricots and peaches) on the flat. The orchards were irrigated with lake water pumped into a large wooden box at the top of the hill. From there it travelled in wooden flumes which had adjustable openings to allow the water to pour into ditches to the rows of fruit trees. This method of irrigation required a lot of flow regulation and keeping the ditches hoed.

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My mother Grace Chapman was born in Tonbridge, England on the 31st of

December 1889. In 1911 aged 22, she came with Mr. and Mrs. Ward to Okanagan House at Sunnywold (or Carrs Landing).

One day she was asked to take a phone message to the Gibson place and that is how they met.

In 1912, our family home was built by Mr. Teddy Hare. Mr. Jim Gleed, a stone mason built the pink granite fire place in the sitting room and also the rock wall to contain the lawn and garden above the beach.

My mother and father returned to England to be married in Tonbridge on the 27th of February, 1913.

On the 16th of September 1915 their first daughter Pamela was born in Vernon Jubilee hospital.

In 1916 my father joined the Canadian Army and trained at the Vernon Army Camp.

My mother and sister went to England for the rest of the "Great War". My father followed on a troop ship with the 172nd battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

In England, my father transferred to the British Army and was assigned a commission with the 122nd Northumberland Fusiliers. He was taken prisoner by the Germans near Lille in France on the 5th of September 1918 and sent to Karlsruhe on the Rhine. On the 12th of October he arrived at Pillau and was marched two miles to Kamstigall, a prisoner of war camp on a small promontory into the Baltic Sea. The area was then East Prussia.

On the 5th of November 1918, their second daughter Joan was born in Berkshire England.

In early 1919 our family was repatriated to Canada. My father was in very poor health due to near starvation as a prisoner of war. He kept his last day's ration - a half slice of black bread. The German civilians too were hungry as there was so little food left.

My parents' return to our home was a heart breaking situation. Mr. McAllister, the caretaker of our small farm had neglected irrigation so that nearly all of the fruit trees had to be pulled out, the launch was sunk in the lake and much of the farm equipment was broken.

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My father turned to mixed farming. He raised pigs, had milk cows and chickens and some soft fruits but no apples. I can remember "helping" to separate the milk, churn the cream and make butter. The butter and eggs went to Vernon on the paddle wheel boats. Later on, my father planted an apricot orchard and sold the fruit through the Vernon Fruit Union.

Both my parents were active in the badminton and tennis clubs. My father and some of his friends started the tennis club at Okanagan Centre before the First World War. He was president for 30 years. Miss Winnie Wentworth took over when he was in the Army. There is a tennis trophy cup in his memory which may still be an annual event at the Kelowna Tennis Club.

In the 1930's ice hockey became a very popular sport in Vernon and my parents became great fans of the game.

My parents were also active with St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winfield; my mother as a member of the women's guild and my father as a people's warden. My mother was also a member of the Women's Institute and a school trustee. For a number of years, they invited the Kelowna Sea Cadets and Girl Guides to use part of the shore for their annual summer camps.

After my father's death on the 10th of June 1950, my mother sold the property and bought Frank Grey's apricot orchard on the south corner of Lakeshore and Sixth Street in Okanagan Centre and had a small house built there.

My sister Pamela Wentworth died on the 17th of September 1979 aged 64 and my mother died on the 25th of October 1979 aged 89. She was a hockey fan to the last!

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## Anecdotes

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#### Shooting in the Victoria Hotel, Vernon BC - 30th of December 1907

The killing was an awful deed, the result of a drunken altercation between Joseph Ethier, known as "Joe Itchy" a French Canadian and George McCalla a Yankee. These men were acquaintances and both were having supper in the Hotel dining room. Both men had been drinking and Ethier was pretty drunk. He started indulging in strong language which was probably meant for good natured banter against the Americans and extolling the superior qualities of French Canadians.

Later in the evening they met again in the hotel bar where Ethier continued to exasperate and enrage McCalla. Ethier taunted McCalla and said "you shoot". McCalla replied that he was not going to be put upon any longer. Almost immediately, the shooting occurred. McCalla pulled a 32 calibre revolver from his pocket and as he did so a warning bullet hit the ceiling. Ethier turned and ran for the door and then McCalla fired at him. The bullet struck Ethier below his right shoulder breaking a rib and entering his lung. He died two days later just after 1:00 A.M. on the 1st of January 1908 in the Vernon Jubilee hospital. Before his death, Joseph Ethier aged 62 said "I'm all in" and that he had no quarrel with McCalla.

On the 28th of May 1908 at the the Spring Assizes and after hearing a number of witnesses, the Judge reduced the charge of murder to manslaughter. He sentenced George McCalla to only 10 years in jail as he was then 66 years old!

George McCalla commissioned my father George Middleton Gibson to sell his property which is now known as Whiskey Cove. It was sold to Fleetwood Wilson. McCalla was my father's next door neighbour. In 1912 the commission was put toward the building of our family home, now called Gibson House in Kopje Park.

#### The Mail Must get Through

At the time when my father bought his land, the mail travelled by stage coach. He picked up his letters and parcels left in a wooden box nailed to a big tree where the Okanagan Centre Road meets Ocoola. Mail could be left there for several days and nobody would touch it! When the stage coaches stopped being used, the mail came on the paddle-wheel boats to Carr's Landing, named after the postmaster Andy Carr who ceremoniously put on his spectacles, sorted the mail

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and handed it out to people waiting on the wharf.

Later on, we got our mail at the Post Office in the Glead's store at Okanagan Centre. In winter time in the early 1920's, I can remember travelling there with my mother by horse and cutter, such as you see only on Christmas cards today. We had a charcoal heater at our feet and a buffalo coat as a rug over us.

### The Minister on Horse Back

During the time my father was batching, it was not unusual for ministers on horse back to call in at meal time. One day a minister turned up at lunch time so my father invited him in. The minister said that he would like to say a few prayers so they spent quite a while kneeling on the floor while he prayed aloud. After lunch the minister asked if there was someone else close by who would like him to visit. Immediately my father, who had a keen sense of humour, said he thought George McCalla the Yankee next door would be pleased to see him. Knowing George's fiery temper, he allowed ample time for the dust to settle. Then he went over and found McCalla still storming about. Innocently, my father asked what had upset him and McCalla told how a preacher had come and had him down on his knees "the first time in 40 years God damn it to Hell!"

### Nahun

Nahun is an Indian name meaning the mother of a child and the island is called Nahun Weenox - the child of the mother with a child. The Indians told the story that the island has a chamber of air in it and that it floated away and grounded where it now is. The island would fit into a spot at Nahun where there are the same rock formations like sharp knives piled side by side. During the late 1930s, Mr. Cools who was living at Okanagan House bought the island for two bottles of whiskey and back taxes, so it became known as Whiskey Island.

### Mr. McDonald

Mr. McDonald who lived at what is now called Coral Beach used to walk down to Okanagan Centre and carry home a 100 pound sack of flour on his shoulder. He would stop for a chat with my father and never take the sack off his shoulder to rest. When I was young, I remember Mr. Mitchell telling me that he could have bought the McDonald place for \$400!

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### The Trusty Eaton's Catalogue

My father was coming home from Vernon on one of the paddle-wheel boats and my mother was to meet him at the Okanagan Centre wharf. To do this, she had to catch a horse, harness it and drive there in the buggy. All went well until she was trying to put the collar on. She couldn't decide which way it should go. Remembering a picture of a horse in harness in the Eaton's Catalogue, she ran up to the house to get it. With the catalogue propped open on a tall oat barrel, she was able to complete the harnessing and meet the boat on time!

### The Original Fuller Brush Man

The only salesman to come to our home was the Fuller Brush man with a team of horses and a wagon. The wagon had shelves built up on either side to display his wares and hinged covers closed it all from the weather!

### Collecting on Horseback

In the early 1920s I remember a cowboy named Floyd who worked for the Ford family then living on the McCalla place coming on horse back collecting money for the Okanagan Centre Children's Christmas party held in the Community Hall.

### Okanagan Centre Children's Christmas Party

First we played games and then sat down to eat our party treats. There was always a problem with Santa's reindeer and he was always late in arriving. Mr. Pixton was an excellent Santa for many years. He came in and joined us in our games for a while before giving each child a gift from the large Christmas tree. This was the only event in the community that I can remember at which the Japanese families were included. That was special as several of the children became my friends.

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## Grace and George Gibson and Friends

