

Early Life of David Gibson, First City Surveyor for Toronto

by S. Eldon Gibson, O.L.S.
(Great Grandson)

David Gibson was born March 9th, 1804 in the Parish of Glammis, Forfarshire, Scotland, the only child of James Gibson, Farmer, and his wife, Margaret. On May 15th, 1811 the young lad's mother died, leaving the father with a seven year old boy to bring up, as all James' sisters were married. The parents of James were still living, but he tells us in a letter dated September 8th, 1811 to a cousin Patrick Milne in New York, that while they were pretty healthy, they were failing.

In this letter he is concerned with the prospect of war breaking out between the two countries and that it will be a serious evil. Also their correspondence will cease. He also mentions that he is a Corporal in a regiment of twelve hundred men in the district of Glammis, and that the whole country is alike armed. He wrote, "Trade is very bad, but provisions is not that high which makes us all to toil on."

Later James Gibson again married and provided David with three half brothers and a sister.

Apprenticeship

According to the story that has come down in the family, a Wm. Blackadder, land surveyor, was surveying one day near James Gibson's farm and asked if he could have the young son to help him. After the survey was finished, Mr. Blackadder told James that the boy was a bright lad and asked if he would allow David to be apprenticed to him as a student surveyor for a period of five years from Whitsunday 1819. It may be of interest to present students to learn some of the conditions in the contract:

He was not to absent himself without liberty or he would at the end of his term have to serve an additional two days extra for each day absent, or pay 5 shilling sterling for each day he may be so absent. Mr. Blackadder obliges himself "to support his said apprentice in Board and Lodgings in a decent way and conform to his station in the service of his master, but no washing to be afforded except when the apprentice is employed in the service of his master at a distance from Glammis in which event the Master is to defray the expense of such washing as the apprentice may have occasion for during his stay from home."

David kept a diary and the earliest date recorded is March 28th, 1820, Estate of

Belmont. During that year he entered that he was calculating, making hay, digging potatoes, surveying — sometimes mixing surveying and haying on the same day. So at the age of sixteen he was already busy working at his future profession in Scotland. Every Sunday he notes "Went to Church at Glammis."

Off to Canada

Having completed his apprenticeship, David had the contract returned to him by Wm. Blackadder with the statement that David Gibson had satisfactorily completed his term and dated it June 1824. Then with letters of recommendation from Mr. Blackadder, his Minister and the Factor of the Estate of The Earl of Strathmore, he went to Dundee, accompanied by friends to see him off. On March 27th, 1825, he boarded the Brig, **Gratitude** for passage to Quebec. They set sail Monday morning March 28th with the morning tide. The weather was calm.

After almost two months on shipboard, he landed at Quebec Wednesday, May 25th, 1825. At 11 a.m. he delivered some letters sent in his care, called on a Lt. Col. Bouchette and showed him the letters of recommendation. The next day he called at the Surveyor General's office and "Shewed him a few specimens of my workmanship, which pleased him very much."

Sunday, May 29th he attended the Scotch Church in Quebec and makes a note that the text was 1st verse, 3rd chapter of Hebrews.

Monday he started work and Tuesday was copying a plan.

He looked for lodgings and found one at these terms: "2 dollars per month to have a room, bed, victuals cooked and clothes washed." On June 9th he started to work for a Mr. William Ware, a Land Surveyor, and was occupied for the next few months. He notes in his diary: "Working, reading and learning the French language."

Move to Upper Canada

He received a letter from a friend in the Upper Province soliciting him to go up to York as there would be employment.

On October 12th, 1825 he waited on the Governor, The Earl of Dalhousie and was informed that no situation was vacant at present. So with letters of recommendation from the Governor to Sir Peregrine Maitland and the Rev. Bishop Strachan, he set

out by steamboat for Montreal Nov. 24th, took the stage from Montreal for Prescott arriving at Kingston on Saturday, November 26th, 1825, where he found he could not get passage by water to York.

At 4 p.m. the same day he left Kingston and travelled 8 miles. Then the next day got a ride in a Dutchman's waggon and thus by various means — mostly walking — he arrived in Markham on Saturday, December 3rd at 3 o'clock, where his cousins and future wife lived.

He rested for a few days and then on December 15th, 1825 presented his letters of introduction and a petition for a commission as a provincial surveyor. After spending a few days being examined by a Mr. Chewitt for the Surveyor General, he returned to Markham on December 28th with his commission as a surveyor for Upper Canada.

This was the founding of the family firm in Canada — all this before he was 22 years old. Early in January, according to his diary, he was out making surveys almost every day.

Surveyor of Highways

April 6th, 1826 — "Got my notification and sworn in as a Surveyor of Highways for the southern division of the County of York." The next two years were spent working at his profession.

Christmas Day, 1827 he went to Markham to the home of his Uncle Alex. Milne and told his Aunt Jean, who was a sister of his father, "That Elizabeth and me had made up our mind to get married if she had no objection. She granted it."

January 25th, 1828, politics entered the picture. He notes: "Went to Markham, was appointed secretary of a meeting of the inhabitants to elect or nominate a candidate to support the ensuing election."

January 29th, 1828. "Attended a meeting at John Montgomery's Tavern."

Married Life

On Saturday, March 1st, 1828, he went to York with his Uncle William and A. Milne and got a license to be married to Eliza Milne. On Tuesday at about 5 p.m. he was wedded to Eliza Milne and had a merry evening. He notes that day in his diary, "Us both worth about £150." There was no honeymoon and he was back at work the next morning drawing a plan.

During the period from the time of his marriage, his daily life was surveying and

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David Gibson

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attending to the building of his house which they moved into on Sunday, March 1st, 1829. It was built at the rear of Lot 5 in the second Concession east of Yonge Street in York Township where Edward's garden now is. On March 27, 1829, their first child was born and named Elizabeth.

August 25th, 1828, "Called at the Canada Company's office and was informed to call at the Surveyor General's office and get instructions for the survey of the Township of Goderich in Huron tract. From September 1828 through to January 1829 he was surveying the Township of Goderich working right through Christmas Day. He could not spend his first Christmas married with his bride.

On October 15th, 1829 for £400, David Gibson took up a deed for the south half of Lot 18, Concession 1, west of Yonge Street, Township of York and on October 20th, he moved to his new place.

There is much missing concerning his two homes. We do not know why, after just building and moving into the first home, March 1st, we find a diary note, August 22nd, 1829, "went after hours with Mrs. Gibson to see my farm on Yonge Street." However, this was the one burned during the rebellion.

May 17th, 1831, their first son James was born. This son later became a Land Surveyor, but gave up the profession after eleven years and retired to Oshawa. There he ran a jewelry store until he died in 1908.

Political Involvement

February 10, 1834. "Came to York and saw Mr. MacKenzie reprimanded for taking his seat in the house." Thus we see politics again coming into his life.

February 27. "Went to York to a Meeting of the Delegates for the purpose of nominating candidates for the County of York." He was nominated for the first riding. On April 4th, 1834, he saw Wm. Lyon MacKenzie elected Mayor of the City of Toronto. During July he attended many

political meetings and on July 30th his diary tells us "There was a meeting held by the Tories this afternoon at 3 o'clock. Where the speakers stood a platform gave way and killed three or four and wounded a number."

The week of October 6th, 1834 was a political one ending with David Gibson defeating Thomas Hogg two to one and thus was elected to the Upper Canada Legislature.

On June 27th, 1836 he again appeared as the candidate for the first riding and July 2nd was declared duly elected. November 8th he took his seat in the House of Assembly. During the balance of the year, when he was not in the House of Assembly, he was surveying.

On January 10th, 1837, Peter Silas Gibson was born, who also became a Land Surveyor and carried on the line of Gibson surveyors into the 20th century, and having three sons who also became surveyors. One of these, Wilbert S. Gibson, carried on the family business into the fourth generation. His two sons, my brother, Charles W. Gibson and I, also became Land Surveyors, and now continue under the incorporated name of W. S. Gibson & Sons Limited.

The Rebellion

During 1837 there was little in David Gibson's Diary to show the tense political build up ending in the rebellion of 1837. He does note that on August 18th, 1837, there was a political meeting in his own home.

The last item was dated the morning of the rebellion: "Left with 400 followers to take up arms against the government." After the brief battle at Montgomery's Tavern located on Yonge Street three blocks north of Eglinton Avenue, the rebels were defeated. The government troops went on up to Willowdale and burnt the original Gibson House which was on Part of Lot 18, Concession 1 west of Yonge Street. His wife with the baby, Peter, fled the house taking with her the works of the grandfather clock to the manse

north of the property. This clock is still in the family.

Escape to U.S.A.

David escaped and was hidden by friends for some time in Scarborough and finally went by schooner from there to Rochester, N.Y., and thence to Lockport, N.Y. There he obtained an appointment as an engineer on the widening of the Erie Canal. His family joined him later.

He was able to rent his farm in Willowdale and his wife returned spring and fall to manage the renting of it. He wrote his father in 1840 that he did not think it would be confiscated or steps would have been taken before then. Meanwhile he purchased a brick house in Lockport and was looking for a farm in case he would be out of employment. However, it looked as if he would have three or four years work ahead on the Erie project. He also was trying to have his father come to Canada and spend a summer with him.

Repatriation

In 1842 a number of petitions were being presented for a General Amnesty. On May 29th, 1943 a petition was presented to Sir Charles Metcalfe for the pardon of David Gibson and a letter dated May 30th, 1843 informed him that "It was acceded to that you can come to Canada any moment you please." The official Patent of Pardon is dated May 30th, 1843 and recorded June 9th, 1843. In 1848 he was back in Willowdale and in 1851 was building the present Gibson House.

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