

Who's Who In Wisconsin Rapids

The Who's Who column will be run each Saturday in the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune. It will include a brief sketch of the life of citizens who have helped make history for Wisconsin Rapids.

James Gibson



JAMES GIBSON

James Gibson, first chief of police of this city, was born in Belfast, Ireland, June 23, 1840. He emigrated to this country from Belfast in the summer of 1859 with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. William John Gibson, who settled on a farm two and a half miles north of Ripon, Wis., where he attended the country school. He worked for his clothes and board for nine years on the farm of A. A. Loper.

Mr. Gibson continued his labor for two and a half years as farm hand on the John R. Martin farm near the Loper place. He next moved to Omro, Wis., where he worked at the carpenter trade and farming until the fall of 1872. His next place of residence was in Vesper where he was employed by the Gerard & Drake Lumber Co., working in the woods during the winter season.

In the spring of 1873 he took a team of horses and walked with them from Vesper to Omro, a distance of 90 miles. The trip took two days and a half. Arriving at Omro he got a lumber wagon in which he conveyed his family, consisting of his wife, their son Charles and his step-daughter, Sarah Hackbarth, and also his household goods, and drove back to the Sam Carl Mill, two miles south of Vesper. He was employed there two summers and one winter until the mill burned to the ground during the month of February, 1874.

The Gerard & Drake Lumber Co.

built a new mill at Vesper where Mr. Gibson was employed until the fall of 1885. During the construction of the new mill Mr. Gibson conveyed all mill machinery and other apparatus from the Patrick & Mahoney foundry located where the present swimming pool now is.

In the fall of 1885 Mr. Gibson and family moved to Centralia where they bought a home situated on the lot in the rear of the First National Bank, where the Winona Oil Station was recently built. After coming to Centralia he was employed for two years as teamster for T. E. and L. M. Nash who owned a grist mill located north of the swimming pool.

During the winters of 1886 and 1887 he resided at Hansen where he was "boss" of the logging crew of M. R. Hansen, one of the earlier lumbermen of Wood county. At the same time his wife was cook for the crew.

During the years of 1888 and 1889 Mr. Gibson was superintendent of the Wood County Poor Farm, two miles southwest of this city. In the year 1890 he returned to Hansen where he and his wife conducted a boarding house until 1894.

On his return to Centralia in 1894, Mr. Gibson was appointed street commissioner for the city of Centralia for two years. In 1896 he was appointed by Mayor Nels Johnson to fill the office of city marshall following the resignation of W. H. Carey who resigned in favor of Mr. Gibson. He remained in that office until the consolidation of the cities of Grand Rapids and Centralia, when he became the first chief of police of Grand Rapids, by appointment of Mayor B. R. Goggins.

The earlier duties of the chief of police consisted not only in looking after the peace of the city, but also included cleaning of sidewalks in the winter time and other laborious work. For the first nine years of his service, Mr. Gibson was paid a salary of thirty-five dollars a month, which steadily increased to double the amount.

During the late W. E. Wheelan's first administration as mayor of this city, Mr. Gibson was succeeded by Jack Garrihee as chief of police, but upon his second election to the mayorship, Mayor Wheelan again appointed Mr. Gibson as chief. Mr. Gibson held the office for twenty-one years, after which he was retired and pensioned.

During the Civil War, Mr. Gibson

enlisted January 1, 1865 with Co. I of Ripon, serving on guard duty until August 25 the same year when he was honorably discharged from the service. He is a member of the local G. A. R. Post No. 22 and has occupied the offices of senior vice-commander and also as chaplain. The ranks of his post have decreased from a large number of members until at present only fifteen "boys who wore the blue" are left.

On March 25, 1866 James Gibson was united in marriage to Mrs. Catherine Rodebusch of Ripon. They are the parents of a son, Charles Gibson, who is married and has resided with his father since the death of Mrs. Gibson, October 25, 1918.

Mr. Gibson has resided at his home at 1120 Grand Ave. since 1899. He loves to recall incidents of early times and war adventures, and is enjoying a well earned happy life.