

Gibby's Field Final Research Report

Prepared for Gibby's Field Group by Arn Keeling

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[From the Gibby's Field website: <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/gibbys>]

This report is divided into three main themes: Moses Gibson (the original owner of the properties), the Cedar Cottage area, and area creeks. It focuses on the information gleaned from archival sources, although some published works have been consulted. It should (hopefully) prepare you for Phase 2 of your Research Plan. The report is accompanied by a brief chronology and a list of sources consulted. It is not footnoted, but represents an early synthesis of the sources consulted. Where appropriate, the source will be referred to in the text; otherwise, consult the annotated source list.

1. **Moses Gibson** – As noted in the previous report, biographical info on Moses Gibson comes in dribs and drabs. He immigrated to Canada from Ireland in 1870, and moved to Vancouver from Ontario just before the fire in 1886. He appears in the City Clerk of Vancouver inward correspondence rolls regarding his handling of the mysterious death of a seaman. At that point, he was the proprietor of the Queen's Hotel, a business started shortly after his arrival. In 1893, he left the hotel business to settle at a homestead in Cedar Cottage (then "Epworth") with his wife and family. His holdings came from a Crown grant of lands in District Lots 643, 649, 748, 749, and 750 (reportedly totalling around 19 acres). He built his farmhouse at the corner of Knight Road and what would become Gibson Road (later 20th Ave.), beside the largest tributary of China Creek, what would be called Gibson Creek.

The memoirs of Reuben Hamilton (*Mount Pleasant Early Days*) illuminate some aspects of Gibson's life, although the impressions are at times contradictory. Gibson is referred to as a dairyman in *The Days Before Yesterday in Cedar Cottage*, and Hamilton's repeated references to the Gibson "ranch" may substantiate that claim. Dairying was a popular choice for Mt. Pleasant and Cedar Cottage pioneers, such as Samuel Garvin and "Black" Jones. A document chronicling the history of District Lot 301 (Vancouver Horticultural Society) notes Gibson's role as one of the first three school trustees for DL 301 School. It must have been an unhappy introduction to public life: after a fallout over the termination of the first teacher, a Mr. Phoenix, Gibson resigned and sent his kids to Mt. Pleasant school. He doesn't seem to have done a lot else publicly. A photo from DL 301 dated 1897 includes Moses' son, Sam.

Not much is known about his family, except Hamilton's recollection about the children's names, and which survived childhood. Hamilton refers to Moses' son Isaac often, as the two were close in age, and a clipping file with Isaac's golden anniversary notice and obituary turns up in the archives. Hamilton also claims Moses married once he got to Canada; only the name of his wife, Jane, not her place of origin or the wedding date, are noted on Moses' death registration.

The circumstances of his loss of the property are unclear. The letter to Gibson in the South Vancouver fonds at the City Archives indicates he lost some or all of the title to his properties in 1915, possibly because of unpaid taxes. During this period, the rapid demand for the expansion of services such as water and sewerage, and roads, were forcing municipalities to dramatically increase or expand their tax bases (one reason, I suspect, for the amalgamation with Vancouver). This put a lot of pressure, no doubt, on local ratepayers. Gibson maintained an

option on the remainder of the property up to 1921, which he never exercised.

The rest of his life seems to have been spent at 1415 20th Ave., all that was left of the ranch. Searches through the city directories are initially confusing, since the street numbering was different before amalgamation, and Gibson was at times listed under South Vancouver, Epworth, Cedar Cottage, and Vancouver (and sometimes absent all together)! Also, there is another Moses Gibson (junior?) listed, a hack driver living downtown.

The elder Gibson died on July 23, 1937, of prostate cancer (see death registration). His obituary indicates he was buried in Mountainview Cemetery.

2. Cedar Cottage – There are a number of good sources listed in the bibliography which give an overview of pioneer times in the area, and its general pattern of development. However, they should be used with some caution, as even a cursory view shows contradiction and error. One colourful account, *The Days Before Yesterday in Cedar Cottage*, was completed by high school students. A series of copied photos from the Vancouver Archives documents this development visually. Only a couple of relevant photos appear in the VPL collection: a picture of the dedication of Robson Memorial Methodist Church in 1908; a view west northwest from 17th Ave. on Dumfries (showing the development of the area north of the properties in 1954); and a shot of a house front listed as 1453 East 18th Ave from 1971.

The heart of Gibson's Cedar Cottage properties was DL 748 and 749. This area extended from the south side of 18th Ave. to the north side of 20th Ave. between Knight and Fleming. Before harmonizing the street names with Vancouver City around 1910, the roads were named Flett Road (18th) and Gibson Road (20th, after Moses). A BC Electric Railway Co. Plan of the Municipality of South Vancouver (1909) shows Gibson Road running east from DL 301 to the Isaac Hayes properties near the present Victoria Diversion. The Archibald Moir and Co. map from 1911 at UBC library is quite large, and gives a very detailed view of the lots. DLs 748 and 749 are shown as not yet subdivided or surveyed. No streams are shown (despite the fact that, at this time, they are probably still free-flowing). Nor is 19th Ave. surveyed; it did not exist until some time in the 1920s (the city directory listing for 1925 lists "bush here" [after two listings] between Knight and Nanaimo).

The Goad's fire underwriters map for 1912-13 (copied at Vancouver City Archives) shows DL 748 and 749 subdivided, but shows few structures. Interestingly, there is a wooden bridge on 20th Ave. (Gibson Rd.) at Knight which shows a free-running creek (probably Gibson). Another creek runs through the northwest corner of DL 746 towards DL 749 (probably Davy?).

Development of the area was uneven, and may have taken place largely after Gibson lost control of the area in 1915. But before 1925, there were still no addresses listed on the south side of 18th Ave. On 20th Ave., subdivision occurs earlier but notably, "Even around 1930 people called what had previously been his property Gibson's Field." (*Days Before Yesterday*, p. 28). Relevant sections from British Columbia Fire Underwriters Association map series, surveyed July 1926, show no structures on the relevant lots. The remainder of DL 748 and 749 (south side of 18th Ave. to north side of 20th Ave.) is sparsely inhabited indeed, showing only a few dwellings. The extant lot numbers do indicate, however, that the streets have been renumbered at some point, since the blocks in DL 748 and 749 are numbered 1200 and 1300 respectively.

By 1950, the south side of 18th is filling, but for the rest of the century, no one occupies the lots between 1448 and 1474. They are also never listed on the city's property tax assessment rolls.

Finally, the fire insurance maps from 1954 do not show the residential area in question. City sectional maps showing the layout of the lots in 1952 and 1964 are available in the City Archives reading room, but show little detail.

3. Creeks – This theme emerged partly because of the inherent interest and importance of the creeks that once fissured the areas, but also because the remnant of Gibby’s Field contains an exposed sewer drain in which you can hear the living creek beneath the surface (see below).

Regarding China Creek: see the Major Matthews card file entries, as well as the Reuben Hamilton memoir “Three Creeks of the Forest: Now Vancouver.” It seems there is some confusion as to just which creek was the “real” China Creek, since several area creeks had Chinese people living or working in their vicinity. Hamilton and others provided colourful accounts of salmon and trout fishing, and life along the creeks. It appears that somewhere on Gibson’s property, China Creek did split into two creeks: the principal stream, Gibson Creek, extended south almost directly parallel to Knight, right beside Gibson’s farmhouse, and up past Westminster Road (Kingsway). Thus, it is almost certain that the Cedar Cottage Brewery, established circa 1902 at Westminster and Knight, brewed its beer with Gibson Creek water. The other stream was probably what Hamilton calls Davy Creek. The other major tributary of China Creek was Canoe Creek, called Jones Creek by Hamilton and others, that flowed from the southwest, joining China Creek near the Maddams Ranch. Gerry Harris collected some of the stories of the “lost streams of Vancouver” in a number of publications, and the Northwest Collection at VPL has some clippings regarding stream daylighting, etc. Most maps showing the old creek system of Vancouver don’t reveal the detailed location of the streams.

The richest source as to the precise location of area creeks is the reports of the Vancouver Joint Drainage and Sewerage Board. The board was established in 1913 to share the cost of sewerage and drainage works amongst the municipalities. Its first project, in 1914, was the China Creek/Canoe Creek extension, which extended the sewer lines from 11th Ave. in Vancouver southwest along the Canoe Creek tributary and south along the China Creek mainstem up to and including where it split into two smaller creeks (including Gibson). The other extension ran southeast from China Creek all the way to Central Park in Burnaby (Still Creek). Notably, its 1919 review of these projects described a “smaller branch following [China] creek between Woodlands and Clark Drive to where it divides into two smaller branches *just south of 18th*. ... At 18th the branch turns east for a half a block and then south again to what is known as Gibson’s Meadows, terminating in a chamber with two outlets, a 3 ft. 6 in. And a 3 ft. at the junction of the two small creeks previously referred to.” [italics mine] To me, this indicates the possibility that the exposed drainage works on the undeveloped property may be this junction. Enquiries to the GVRD would no doubt confirm or deny this. While many of the board’s maps are small, schematic, and a bit unclear, a GVRD 1939 drainage map, available only on microfilm and also somewhat unclear, shows the sewer lines along with the topography. It appears from this map that this junction is on or very near the vacant properties. Photos documenting the construction of the sewers are interesting, as are some of the construction-related files in the city archives (which include a compensation claim made by Moses Gibson for damage to property during construction).

Key Dates and Events
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- 1851 Moses Gibson born in Ireland, March 6.
- 1870 Gibson immigrates to Ontario (and marries?).
- 1886 Gibson arrives in Vancouver on April 12 (before the great fire).
- 1886 Gibson buys or builds the Queen's Hotel on Water Street at Abbott.
- 1888 Williams' Vancouver directory lists Moses Gibson as proprietor of Queen's Hotel. An exchange of letters in the City Clerk's files documents Gibson's provision of burial for a dead seaman (revealed to be Joseph Evans) found on the shore near Carroll Street. Gibson was repaid.
- 1889 On November 13, Crown grants lands in District Lots 643, 649, 748, 749, and 750 to Moses Gibson.
- 1888 Arthur Wilson establishes his "Cedar Cottage" nursery on his spread near Westminster Road (Kingsway) and Knight.
- 1891 Interurban tram service established between Vancouver and New Westminster, including a stop at "Cedar Cottage." N.b.: the area was, at this time, also known as "Epworth."
- 1893 Gibson moves his young family out to his homestead in what was then the District of South Vancouver. He builds his ranch house at the southwest corner of D.L. 749.
- 1894 Gibson becomes one of the three first trustees of DL 301 school, located just across Knight Road on 20th Ave. between Clark and Inverness. A photo of D.L. 301 School from 1897 shows Moses' son, Sam, amongst the class. Shortly, however, Gibson resigns from the position amidst a controversy surrounding the dismissal of the teacher, a Mr. Phoenix. The children are sent to Mt. Pleasant School.
- 1899 Williams' British Columbia Directory lists M. Gibson, farmer, in Epworth, "a suburban settlement of Vancouver district ... situated on Westminster Road near the Interurban tramway."
- ca. 1900-1930 Golden age of Cedar Cottage, centered around the business district between 15th and 20th along Cedar Cottage Road (Commercial).
- 1902 (ca.) Cedar Cottage Brewery established by John Benson at Westminster Road (Kingsway) and Knight, on the banks of Gibson Creek at the site of the present-day Safeway building.
- 1904 A Moses Gibson, possibly junior, is listed in Henderson's Directory as a teamster boarding at 209 Prior St.
- 1908 Robson Memorial Methodist Church (East 18th Ave. and Fleming) built and dedicated.
- 1914 Vancouver Joint Sewerage and Drainage Board approves and constructs two sets of extensions to its China Creek sewer line south of 11th Ave, which includes portions of Gibson Creek.
- 1915 On January 28, Gibson appeals for compensation for damage to his property during sewer construction. Such claims, the records reveal, were not uncommon. The board moves to offer Gibson \$150 in lieu of the \$195 he demanded. Unsure of outcome.
- 1915 Gibson sells some or all of his ranch at a "tax sale." Hereafter, the land begins to be subdivided in earnest, with the exception of the strip on the south side of 18th Ave..
- 1921 After extending Gibson the option to repurchase his sold lands, the District of South Vancouver takes full ownership of DLs 748 and 749.
- 1929 South Vancouver municipality amalgamates with Vancouver. All city properties revert to Vancouver ownership, including the properties in question.
- 1937 Gibson dies July 23 at Burnaby of prostate cancer, aged 86. He is buried on July 28 at Mountain View Cemetery.

Annotated listing of relevant sources

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This is not an exhaustive list, rather a key to the best and most important locations of information contained in other areas of the report.

Books, articles, pamphlets

Davis, Chuck, ed. *The Vancouver Book*. 1976.

The entry on Cedar Cottage (copied) provides useful background.

Matthews, J.C., ed. *Mount Pleasant Early Days*. City of Vancouver Archives, 1957.

Contains the collected correspondence of "old-timer" Reuben Hamilton and Vancouver city archivist Matthews, which is distributed amongst relevant files in the Archives. Contains several references to Gibson, and the ranch, as well as life in Cedar Cottage and Mount Pleasant generally. Sometimes of dubious accuracy, but the impressions are there. At VPL.

Harris, Gerry, and Sharon Proctor. *Vancouver's Old Streams*. Rev. ed. Vancouver Public Aquarium Association, 1989.

Documents Harris's research on the old salmon and trout streams in Vancouver. Mentions China Creek but, as in earlier versions, does not mention tributaries. Includes a map called "Vancouver's Old Streams."

Mayhew, Barry W. *Local Areas of Vancouver*. United Community Services of the Greater Vancouver Area, January 1967 (VPL)

This small report, and its companion, *A Regional Atlas of Vancouver*, provide a snapshot of Vancouver's neighbourhoods in the 1960s. Based on 1961 census data, Cedar Cottage appears to be a fairly stable, but growing working-class community with low unemployment, below-average household income, and lots of families.

Reid, Glen and Alan Lysell, eds. *The Days Before Yesterday in Cedar Cottage*. Gladstone Secondary School, 1968.

This high school history project contains an impressionistic history of the area, focussing on social life and economy. It does mention Gibson as a dairyman (the only reference we have to this detail). Available at VPL.

Vancouver Joint Sewerage and Drainage Board. *Annual Report*. The Board, 1919.

This expanded report contains a retrospective on the board's history and activities since its formation in 1913.

Vancouver Joint Sewerage and Drainage Board. *Report by R.S. Lea to the Burrard Peninsula Joint Sewerage Committee*. The Board, 1914.

Actually a compilation of three reports from 1912-14 documenting the development of

the sewerage “scheme.” Contains useful planning maps, including a small hydrographic map of the Vancouver area.

Archival sources

“Cedar Cottage.” Notecard in topical and categorical files of Major Matthews collection, City of Vancouver Archives.

Copied.

“China Creek.” Notecard in topical and categorical files of Major Matthews collection, City of Vancouver Archives.

Copied.

Gerry Harris collection. City of Vancouver Archives.

Contains two of his earliest published articles on streams in Vancouver (some of which I copied) from the “Georgia Strait Salmon Head Recovery Program” bulletins in 1977, as well as a source list (copied) and a wonderful photo, which I was not allowed to copy, of two boys showing off the salmon they gaffed in China Creek in 1911.

Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District fonds. City of Vancouver Archives.

Add MSS 1257. See especially 63-G-5 file 10, “South Vancouver municipality 1914-1919” and 63-B-2 file 4, “South Vancouver Municipality 1920-22.” Also, see the Minutes of the Burrard Peninsula Joint Sewerage and Drainage Board for 1913-14; 63-B-4 file 2 “Construction”; and 63-B-4 file 3, “A.D. Creer/” These files all document aspects of the administration and construction of the China Creek sewers, though the 1919 annual report does a good job of summarizing most of this material.

Jaeggle, G.E. “Everyday life in early Cedar Cottage: based on the reminiscences of Samuel (Tuck) Wright, resident of the area for 52 years.” Northwest History Collection, VPL.

This Douglas College history essay (copied partially) gives some relevant background on the character of the area in the early days, including the hunting and fishing along its waterways. Notably he refers to fishing in “China Creek (Gibson Creek), Gladstone Creek and Trout Lake.”

“Moses Gibson.” City of Vancouver Archives.

Add. MSS 54, 504-A-6 file 126. Contains a couple of items relating to Gibson: a short article on his son, Isaac, as well as the latter’s obituary; and a short note from Cecil Scott, the Province Magazine editor, from 1932 passing on information (some of it wrong, as it turns out) about Gibson gathered in his research on those here “before the fire.”

Vancouver Horticultural Society Fonds. City of Vancouver Archives

Contains a short history of D.L. 301 (Add. MSS 131, 512-B-5 file 7) prepared by or for Charles Dickens school, entitled simply “To 1912.” This document notes Gibson’s role as school trustee, and also confirms the locations of the creeks. It also shows a copy of an 1897 photo of D.L. 301 school that includes Moses’ son, Sam.

Maps and plans

Archibald Moir and Co. South Vancouver Municipality. Vancouver, 1911.

This map at UBC library is quite large, and gives a very detailed view of the lots. DLs 748 and 749 are shown as not yet subdivided or surveyed. Nineteenth Ave. is not surveyed. No streams are shown (despite the fact that, at this time, there are active).

Canada. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Habitat Management. *Lost Streams of the Lower Fraser River*. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 1995.

I obtained a copy of this map and text for the group. Marginally helpful.

B.C. Electric Company. Plan of Municipality of South Vancouver. 1909. UBC Special Collections.

Shows Gibson Road running east from D.L. 301 to the Isaac Hayes properties near the present Victoria Diversion, but does not indicate DLs 748, 749.

British Columbia Fire Underwriters Association, "Greater Vancouver, British Columbia, Vol. VII: Municipality of South Vancouver." 1926. UBC Special Collections, City Archives.

Copied relevant sections.

Goad's Fire Underwriter's Maps, 1912-13. Vol. 2, No. 91. City Archives.

Copied relevant sections.

Vancouver Heritage Advisory Committee. Site #93 – Tyee (plan). City of Vancouver Archives.

A revised plan of the school and grounds. Of note are the "public utilities easements" which may denote the path of the sewer system.

Photos

I copied the relevant photos from the archives, which are accompanied by their CVA reference numbers and descriptions. At VPL, the numbers for the photos I described are: 7367 (Robson Church dedication); 29161 (neighbourhood view ca. 1954); 50949 (1453 East 18th ca. 1971).



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