



Major-General (Militia) Sir John Morison Gibson, KCMG, MA, LLD (Hon), LLB, KC

Grand Master (1892-1893 and 1893-1894) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free & Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario
Honorary Grand First Principal (1922) of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario
Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in Canada (1904 – 1913, and 1922 – 1923)



Photo provided by Grand Lodge

(1842-1929)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern, based on significant contributions by R.W. Bro. J. Lawrence Runnalls, and R.W. Bro. Michael Jenkyns.

The lifetime of accomplishments of John Morison Gibson are well documented. There is an extensive entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, another in the

Canadian Encyclopedia, as well as Wikipedia.org. Another published biography appeared in *Who's Who and Why* (1915 – 1916).

The legacy of John M. Gibson is noted in several places. His boyhood home, now known as the Gibson-Alderson House at 4830 Highway 6, was designated as a heritage property by Haldimand County. The City of Hamilton installed a plaque to his honour as a citizen of Hamilton. The Ontario Historical Plaque at Cumberland House in Toronto recognizes John Morison Gibson as a Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario. The name of Gibson is remembered by being attached to a named neighbourhood and a street in Hamilton.

One who is interested in appreciating the man and his times will be well-rewarded by reading the aforementioned biographies. This short biography will summarize his family life, business career, and political life as recorded by others. Then this biography will repeat the Masonic career of M.W. Bro. Gibson as previously researched and published by Runnalls and Jenkyns.

Family Background and Education

John Morison Gibson was born on January 1, 1842, in Toronto Township, Peel County, Upper Canada, the son of William Gibson and Mary Sinclair, who were farmers. His father had emigrated from Glamis, Forfarshire, Scotland, while his mother was born in Nelson Township, Halton County. His boyhood home on Highway 6 is designated as an Ontario Heritage Site. His father died when John was three years old and the family moved to Haldimand County where he first attended a small rural school. In a short time, they moved to Hamilton and John entered Central School. He did so well here that he was elected head boy of the Hamilton schools. As such he was chosen, in 1858, to assist in the opening of the Hamilton Waterworks at which the Prince of Wales officiated. John turned on the first faucet.

On completion of secondary school classes at age 17, he entered the University of Toronto, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in June 1863 as well as winning the Prince of Wales Prize together with medals in Classics and Modern Languages and a prize in Oriental Languages. The following year he completed and received a Master of Arts degree.

On graduation, he joined the firm of Burton, Sadler and Bruce to read law. He was called to the Bar in 1867 and then returned to University to study law, graduating in 1869 with an LLB with honour as the gold medallist for his year. Both his Alma Mater, University of Toronto, and McMaster University, Hamilton, later conferred on him the degree of Honorary LL.D. in 1902 and 1909 respectively.

John Gibson was married three times. On October 26, 1869, he married Anne Emily, daughter of Ralph Birrell, a merchant of London, Ontario. She died on June 3, 1874. Two years later, on September 26, he married Caroline, daughter of Honourable Adam Hope of Hamilton. One year later she too died. In 1891, he took as his third wife, Eliza (1849 – 1934), daughter of Judge Malloch of Brockville.

To the third union were born six children, John Gordon, Eugenia Elizabeth, Mary Margaret Stewart (Meta), Archibald Hope, Colin William George and Francis Malloch. On the day his son John Gordon received his Bachelor of Arts degree, at the University of Toronto, his father was awarded an honorary LL.D. John Gordon died shortly afterward.

Francis, with the rank of lieutenant, served in the 48th Highlanders in World War I and was killed at Armentieres in 1915. Colin William George served at the same time with the Royal Fusiliers and was twice wounded. After the war he received his University education at Royal Military College, Kingston, and Osgoode Hall, Toronto. He followed in his father's footsteps, being called to the bar in 1915 and twenty years later was appointed a K.C. He entered politics as a member of parliament for Hamilton West, for 1940 – 1950. In the latter year he was appointed a judge for the Supreme Court of Ontario.

Eugenia did not marry and remained at the family home in Hamilton. Meta married Robert S. Waldie. Archibald Hope followed his family by becoming a barrister. He died during the influenza epidemic in 1920.

John M. Gibson was a life-time member and active worker in the Presbyterian Church. He worked hard for Church Union, but in 1925, when the United Church of Canada was formed, his Church remained outside the union and so he remained with it.

John M. Gibson also supported education and causes for the well-being of the community. He was a Director of the "Homewood Retreat" of Guelph and the Toronto Conservatory of Music. He became a member of the Hamilton Board of Education which he served for many years: first as a member and for two years as chairman. He helped to organize the Hamilton Art School and served as its first President. He became a Director of the Hamilton Health Association and a Vice-president of the Ontario Lord's Day Alliance. He helped found the Hamilton branch of the St. Andrew's Society and was President in 1890-91. As an outstanding graduate of the University of Toronto, he became President of its Alumni Association. During the Boer War, he became very active in the Canadian Red Cross and then its first President. In 1901, for his service as President of the Canadian Red Cross Society, he was made a Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

Given his work in education and his commitment to Hamilton, it must have given John Gibson great pride when the City of Hamilton used a grant from Andrew Carnegie to build a new public library. As Lieutenant-Governor he officiated at the opening of the new building on May 5, 1913.

Eliza, his third wife, was always active in the local women's organizations serving for some time as President of the Local Council of Women. As Lady Gibson she promoted many endeavours and was recognized in 1916 with the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

Business Life

John M. Gibson practised law for sixty years in Hamilton. On graduation, he entered practice alone. Within a year he joined the firm of MacKelcan, Gibson, Gonsby and Maclean. Shortly after he organized the firm of Gibson, Osborne, O'Reilly and Levy of which he was senior partner and with which he remained for the rest of his life. John Gibson specialized in business law. The firm was named the solicitor for the City of Hamilton. He was one of the most successful members of his profession, handling many cases of note. In 1890 he was made a Queen's Counsel, reflecting his high standing in his chosen profession. That same year he was named a Bencher of the Upper Canada Law Society.

He branched out into many avenues of business. Early in his career, he took a special interest in the long-distance transmission of electrical power. To this end he helped organize Hamilton Cataract Power, Light and Transmission Company, and became its first president. This company contracted for water from the Welland Canal and dug a canal to carry it to the DeCew power plant on the escarpment above St. Catharines. This led to a second company, the Dominion Power and Transmission Company, of which he was the first president.

His services and wisdom were in demand in other financial circles, and he became a director of the Canadian Bank of Commerce and the Canada Life Assurance Company. He served as President of the National Steel Car Company and the Hamilton Connaught Hotel Company. It is said that it was he who was in large measure responsible for the Canadian Westinghouse Company establishing in Hamilton and he served as a director of that company.

In addition to these major industrial efforts, John Gibson was the founder of several small companies. Among them were the Peddie Rifle Sight Company (1902), the Canadian Screw Company (1907), the British and Colonial Land and Security Company (1911) and the British Canadian Shipbuilding Company (1911).

Early in his life John Gibson became interested in target shooting and soon gained prominence in this sport. From 1893 to 1907 he was president of the Dominion Rifle Association.

On three occasions, 1874, 1875 and 1879, he was a member of the Canadian Bisley Team that entered the Wimbledon competition. In 1879, he was the winner of the Prince of Wales Prize which amounted to £200 and was accompanied by a distinctive badge.

In 1876, at Creedmore, he entered the Great Centennial of Small Bore Competition. In this event, representatives from England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, United States and Canada took part.

In 1907 he was captain of the Dominion Bisley team. One year later, Bisley was the site of the 1908 Olympics.



Military Interests

John Gibson joined the Canadian militia as soon as he entered university in 1860. His interest continued for the remainder of his life. His first unit was the Queen's Own Regiment. In 1863 he joined the 13th Regiment, with which he served for thirty-two years, retiring as Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel in 1895. His only active service was in 1866, at Ridgeway during the Fenian Raids. In 1921, he was made a Major-General. During the terms of their Excellencies the Earl of Aberdeen and Earl of Minto as Governor-General of Canada, he was appointed an Honorary Aide-de-Camp. At the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 he was selected by the Military Department to proceed to London as its representative.

Political Life

John Gibson was a life-long Liberal. He headed the Hamilton Liberal Club for many years. He contested a seat in Hamilton West in 1879 and was elected a member of the Legislative Assembly. It is notable that he defeated Hugh Murray; another Mason and the Grand Master for the years 1884 to 1886. For nineteen years he retained this seat. Then he ran in East Wentworth and was successful. In 1890, he was defeated by T. H. Stinson, but his opponent was unseated allowing him to return in 1891. In 1905 he retired because of ill health at the time of the defeat of the Ross government.

From 1889 on, he held cabinet posts and by 1905 had served in three governments under Premiers Mowat, Hardy and Ross.

He was Provincial Secretary from 1889 to 1896, Commissioner of Crown Lands from 1896 to 1899 and Attorney General from 1899 to 1905.

A minister of such prominence in the government could not help but leave his mark upon the legislation of the province. One of his most famous enactments is known as the "Gibson Act" or "An Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to and Better Protection of Children". In essence, this Act established the Children's Aid Societies of Ontario on a sound basis.

It must have been quite satisfying to him when on June 4, 1914, and in his capacity as Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, Sir John Gibson formally opened the Children's Preventorium at the Queen Alexandra Sanatorium in London. This children's health care facility was used to treat children infected with tuberculosis, and also to care for the children whose parents were being treated for tuberculosis at the Sanatorium. The facility is now known as the Child Parent Research Institute. His legacy of attention to the needs of children continues.

For fifteen years, he was named Chairman of the Private Bills Committee of the Legislature. This always was a hard-working group.

He made great changes in the mining laws. An Act in 1890 changed the liquor licensing laws which made provision for local option, meaning that municipalities

could choose to allow licenced drinking places, or remain 'dry'. He helped re-organize the Ontario insurance system. This made the registration of Ontario insurance companies and friendly societies compulsory. He reviewed and improved game and fisheries laws for better preservation and propagation. He sponsored the Ontario Companies Act and Loan Corporations Act revised and modernized business practices in the province.

These were the outstanding accomplishments credited to him during his several ministries.

Honours in Civil life

In 1890 he was made a Queen's Counsel. This reflected his standing in his chosen profession. In 1901, for his service as President of the Canadian Red Cross Society, he was made a Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

On January 1, 1912, on his seventieth birthday, he was made Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George. Henceforth he was known as Sir John Morison Gibson.



During his lifetime it was normal, even expected, that those who were afforded such rank and privilege would be granted a personal Coat of Arms to be registered with the heraldic authority. The Arms of John Morison Gibson are shown here. The motto "PETIT ALTA" is a Latin phrase meaning "He aims high." While there is a certain irony for a champion marksman, the motto certainly applies to all other aspects of his life and his contributions to mankind.

John M. Gibson received signal honours at the hands of three sovereigns: Queen Victoria, King Edward, and King George V. By special invitation he attended Queen Victoria's Garden Party in June 1897. He was present at the coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra in August 1902, and that of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. He was presented at St. James's Palace on both occasions.

Because of his prominence in every branch of Life, he was named Lieutenant-governor of Ontario in 1910 and served until 1914.

Both his Alma Mater, University of Toronto, and McMaster University, Hamilton, conferred on him Honorary LL.D.'s.

These comprise an unusually large array of honours for any man.

Masonic Career

M.W. Bro. John M. Gibson took an active part in every branch of Freemasonry.

In 1867, Confederation year, and the year he was called to the bar, he was initiated in the Lodge of Strict Observance No. 27, Hamilton. He took his three craft degrees on November 19, 1867, January 21, 1868, and March 17, 1868. He immediately took office and in two years from his raising was Installed Worshipful Master, serving in that office for the year 1872. Four years later, he was elected D.D.G.M. for Hamilton district. This led to other offices in grand lodge. For two years, 1890 – 1892, he held the office of Deputy Grand Master, serving as deputy to M.W. Bro. John Ross Robertson. He succeeded to the high office in 1892 and was Grand Master for two years.

A Mason of such high repute was in demand to assist in organizing other Masonic bodies. In 1875 he helped to establish Temple Lodge No. 324, Hamilton and served as its first Master. In 1910, he did the same for University Lodge No. 496, Toronto.

He was elected an honorary member of Zetland Lodge No. 326, Toronto. On February 12, 1919, he affiliated with Barton Lodge No. 6, Hamilton being the 365th affiliated member on its register.

In 1925, Grand Master John Albert Rowland appointed him representative of the Grand Lodge of England near the Grand Lodge of Canada. For the remainder of his life, he held this post.

The year after his taking the sublime degree, he received his M.M.M. degree in St. John's Chapter No. 6, Hamilton, on February 24, 1870. He was received and acknowledged on the same day and exalted on March 10 of the same year. He was elected and installed First Principal for the years 1875 – 1876 and in 1879 was elected Grand Superintendent for the Hamilton district.

He did not proceed any farther in the Royal Arch. However, for his great interest in Masonry, he was elected an honorary Grand First Principal on February 22, 1922.

Going on with the York Rite, in Knights Templar he joined Godfrey de Bouillon Preceptory No. 3, K. T., Hamilton, on November 7, 1874. There is no record of him becoming Preceptor of this order.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to Masonry was in the Scottish Rite branch. Scottish Rite Freemasonry was formally organized in Canada on May 14, 1868. On September 27, 1870, Bro. John Gibson became a member of Murton Lodge of Perfection, and, on December 18, 1870, a member of Hamilton Sovereign Chapter of Rose Croix of HRDM. Moore Sovereign Consistory was warranted at the same time as its subordinate branches, but it was not until March 7, 1872, that any candidates were advanced. At that time ten Sovereign Princes were advanced to the thirtieth degree. Among them was M.W. Bro. Gibson. He immediately took an active part in Scottish Rite. He did not preside over a Lodge of Perfection but he became Most Wise Sovereign of the Hamilton Chapter of Rose Croix for the years 1877 – 1883.

On October 15, 1884, he was elevated to the Supreme Council as an honorary 33-degree member. Two years later, on October 21, 1886, he was made an active member of the Supreme Council.

He was the fourth Commander-in-Chief of Moore Sovereign consistory following W. J. B. MacLeod Moore, Thomas Douglas Harington and John Walter Murton.

In 1897, M.W. Bro. Gibson took on the office of Grand Chancellor for Scottish Rite. A year later he became the Lieutenant Grand Commander. He held the office of Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in Canada for two periods. The first was for a nine-year period from October 27, 1904, to October 23, 1913. Due to the illness of J. Alex. Cameron he served for another year October 26, 1922 to October 25, 1923, even though he then was over eighty years old. It was during this second period of service that he officially opened the Scottish Cathedral at Hamilton May 7, 1923.

While Supreme Commander, he attended world conferences of the Scottish Rite at Brussels in 1907 and at Washington in 1912.

He also became a member of the Royal Order of Scotland.

As Grand Master

Our 15th Grand Master saw slight growth in the fraternity during his term. There were 347 Lodges with 21,428 Masons during 1892, with growth to 348 Lodges with 22,064 Masons in 1893. M.W. Bro. Morison traveled extensively as there were 5 cornerstone-laying ceremonies and 17 dedications or consecrations of lodges during his term. While he did not issue formal rulings of jurisprudence, he did set out two rules to assert jurisdiction over persons rejected for initiation, and also to assert jurisdiction over Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts who petitioned for advancement.

M.W. Bro. Morison warned the Brethren to wear Masonic clothing properly. He also lectured regularly on the necessity of putting into daily practice the lessons learnt in the lodge room.

We can get a sense of his wit in the anecdote that in 1924, in introducing an old friend to Grand Lodge, he said in part: "I well recollect, Brother Adam Brown coming up to Central School to see what we were doing and how we were getting on, and all that sort of thing on a Queen's birthday. We were presented on such occasions with oranges, and I received an orange from Brother Brown on the Central School land sixty or seventy years ago. That orange has gone, but the donor of it here appears to me as young today as he did then".

Conclusion

This remarkable man lived to the ripe old age of eighty-seven. His death occurred at his Hamilton home, Ravenscliffe, on June 3, 1929. *See appendix regarding*

Ravenscliffe. He was buried with full military honours from Central Presbyterian Church, Hamilton. He is interred in a family plot at Hamilton Cemetery, 777 York Blvd, Section C5, Lot 15. While the monument at his grave cites his civil honours, it does not include his rank as Grand Master.

John Morison Gibson was truly a great Canadian, living during some of the most formative years of this country's history. At the time of his death the Hamilton Spectator said of him, "John Morison Gibson was one of those men who flit across the pages of history in a glamour created by their own talents. The volumes of Macaulay or Froude have to be opened to find the parallel of the rise of this barefoot farm boy to the lieutenant-governorship of the banner province of the Dominion."

At the time of his death, the Toronto Globe in an editorial stated: "He was a man with the highest qualities of judgment, of a marked degree of enterprise, and with a reputation of sterling solidity and ability unsurpassed in the province."

In the *History of Barton Lodge* (Page 170) it states: 'It is not easy to do justice to the character and services of Brother Sir John M. Gibson. He did things so easily and well. There were no half measures with him. He gave himself unhesitatingly to worthy causes, and performed whatever he thought it was his duty to do, nor left he any work unfinished. Faithful in small things, industrious in great causes, clear in thought, precise in judgment. No wonder his wise counsel was so widely sought. Prominent in public life, yet withal so modest and retiring and humble. In every respect he was a true leader of men.'

In an address given in 1926, he summarized up own life in these words: "It is not necessary for a man to have arrived at his life's goal to be able to give of himself, his time and means for the betterment of his community, its business life, its social life and political life." These words are an epitome of his life, revealing the idealism that impelled the manifold activities of a man whose passage through the world left it better than he found it.

IMPORTANT DATES

January 1, 1842	John Morison Gibson born, Toronto Township, Peel County
June 1863	Graduated from University of Toronto with B.A.
June 1864	Obtained an M.A. degree, University of Toronto
November 19, 1867	Initiated, Lodge of Strict Observance No. 27, Hamilton
January 21, 1868	Passed to the second degree
March 17, 1868	Raised to the sublime degree
October 26, 1869	Married Anne Emily Birrell



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February 24, 1870	Took M.M.M degree in St. John's Chapter No. 6 R.A.M.
February 24, 1870	Took M.E.M. degree
March 10, 1870	Exalted to sublime degree
September 27, 1870	Took degree in Murton Lodge of Perfection, Hamilton
December 18, 1870	Took degrees in Hamilton Sovereign Chapter of Rose Croix
1872	W.M. of Lodge of Strict Observance, Hamilton
March 7, 1872	Joined Moore Sovereign Consistory, Hamilton to 30 degree
October 2, 1872	Took 31 degree
October 1 1873	Took 32 degree
June 3, 1874	Anne Emily, his first wife, died
November 6, 1874	Joined Godfrey de Bouillon Preceptory No. 3, K.T., Hamilton
November 18, 1874	Charter W.M., Temple Lodge No. 324, Hamilton
September 26, 1876	Married Caroline Hope
October 9, 1877	Second wife, Caroline, died
May 3, 1881	Married Eliza Malloch
October 15, 1884	Received honorary 33 degree
October 21, 1886	Received active 33 degree
1890	Made Queen's Counsel
July 1892	Elected Grand Master, A.F. and A.M.
October 27, 1893	Affiliated With Zetland lodge No. 326, Toronto
October 20, 1897	Turned first sod for Cataract Power Co., St. Catharines
1902	Received honorary I-L.D. decree, University of Toronto.
October 27, 1904	Elected Sovereign Grand Commander.

1906	Joined Royal Order of Scotland
1909	Received Honorary LL.D. degree McMaster University, Hamilton
1910	Appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.
June 14, 1910	Charter W.M., University Lodge No. 496, Toronto
January 1, 1912	Knighted K.C.M.C.
February 12, 1919	Affiliated with Barton Lodge No. 6, Hamilton
February 22, 1922	Named honorary Grand First Principal, R.A.M.
October 26, 1922	Elected Sovereign Grand Commander (second term)
May 7, 1923	Officially opened Scottish Rite Cathedral, Hamilton
June 3, 1929	Died at Ravenscliff House, Hamilton.

Appendix: Ravenscliffe

By Bruce Forsyth; March 2021

<https://militarybruce.com/ravenscliffe-castle-hamiltons-other-castle/>

Accessed December 2022; permission to use this was granted May 2023

“Ravenscliffe Castle is a 12,000 square foot, three-story estate in Hamilton’s west-end Durand neighbourhood. Built in 1881, on a nine acre estate, it was designed architect James Balfour, who designed many of Hamilton’s historic buildings, including the aforementioned Scottish Rite.

Built using as a mix between Romanesque and Gothic styles, the Scottish stone exteriors, dramatic roof lines, tall windows, turrets, and decorated bargeboard create a unique and striking home that features 12 bedrooms, 8 bathrooms, 12 foot & 17 foot ceilings, 8 fireplaces and a five-storey tower known as a “castle keep”; a structure traditionally used as a fortified refuge during battle.

Interior design features include carved woodwork, trim, wainscoting, doors, mouldings, and ceiling medallions.

Ravenscliffe Castle is the centrepiece of Ravenscliffe Ave, a street that was originally the estate’s private laneway. The land surrounding the home was gradually sub-divided and sold, with several other luxury homes being built along the road.

One of the early owners of Ravenscliffe Castle was Sir John Morrison Gibson, KCMG, KC.”

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- (20) Appendix; Ravenscliffe: website militarybruce.com used with permission