



*Charles Gibson discovered Lake Minnetonka while seeking relief from the steamy summers of St. Louis.*

# *Charles Gibson's Lake Minnetonka Summers*

by Barbara McHenry Sykora

The beginning of the tourism industry at Lake Minnetonka can be traced directly to the growth and economic climate of Minnesota. In 1849, President Zachary Taylor appointed Alexander Ramsey governor of the new Minnesota Territory. The total population of the area was 4,780, and the first public school opened in Hennepin County that year. Western Hennepin County did not receive regular postal service until 1850. Settlers were dependent upon supplies brought from great distances. In the biggest town, St. Anthony, the population was less than 300. The only way to reach Minneapolis was by riverboat, then stagecoach. In 1851, Gov. Alexander Ramsey negotiated two treaties with the Sioux and secured 2 million acres of land west of the Mississippi River, including the Lake Minnetonka area. The lake was first surveyed by Minnesota Territory in 1854. The survey team wrote that the area was heavily timbered, the water clear and deep with a great variety of fish.<sup>1</sup>

Lake Minnetonka “pioneer” Charles Gibson played many roles, including those of husband, father of eight, lawyer, and landholder. He was a businessman, hotelier, and man interested in politics. As he once said in an interview, the only way to do anything in this world was to be ready “when the spirit troubles the waters.” In other words, when the current is going your way, take advantage of it.

A 19th-century opportunist, Gibson turned his self-interests to advantage. In an effort to escape the summer heat of St. Louis, he discovered Lake Minnetonka’s more moderate summer climate and subsequently made an annual journey to Minnesota for almost 50 years. He loved his summers at the lake, and he used his wealth and enterprise to improve the area.<sup>2</sup>

### Gibson in Minnesota

Charles Gibson first traveled to the Falls of St. Anthony and Minneapolis in 1854 for a few days’ visit. He wrote later, “We stopped at a frame tavern kept by Mr. Bushnell, opposite the Island and in the village of St. Anthony. Minneapolis was then a part of the Military Reservation of Fort Snelling. The officers allowed parties to stake off claims, but there was no law for it. Not a biscuit in Minnesota but was made out of St. Louis flour, brought up the river on steamboats. In the evening there was quite a discussion among the guests as to whether wheat could be raised that far north. One man said he had seen potatoes growing forty miles north of this place. He was considered a blatherskite.”<sup>3</sup>

Many of Gibson’s close friends and business associates from St. Louis also made a trip to Minnesota, one known as the Grand Excursion. The Rock Island Railroad Company invited 1,200 citizens from the east and middle states to celebrate the completion of the first railroad to reach the Mississippi River. The group of travelers included writers, business leaders, and politicians including Millard Fillmore, the 13th president of the United States. The trip, at the railroad’s expense, began on June 5, 1854, in Chicago by train to Rock Island, Illinois, and continued by steamboat on the Mississippi River to St. Paul and St. Anthony. The guests arrived in St. Paul on June 8, 1854. Minnesota’s Territorial governor Willis A. Gorman held a ball in honor of the president. Gorman spoke to Fillmore about the soil, climate, the advantages of Minnesota and the railroad connection that would bring settlers and tourists to Minnesota. With a powerful and influential audience listening to Gorman’s speech that evening, he felt many would go home with “enlarged ideas of the future greatness of Minnesota.”<sup>4</sup>

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Gibson spent several summers in Wisconsin and one in Colorado, but Minnesota became his favorite place for escaping the hot, humid summers of St. Louis. He was not afraid of travel. Born in Christiansburg, Virginia, in 1825, Charles was the youngest of five, and in 1836, when he was 11, his family moved west to central Missouri, bringing with them a family of Africans to work on his parents' farm. He left his family at 18 to study for the bar under Josiah Spalding and Edward Bates in St. Louis, and he passed the exam in 1846. He met Virginia C. Gamble at Edward Bates's home in 1849; they married in May 1851 and raised their family in St. Louis. A successful land-contract attorney, Charles was influential in keeping Missouri in the Union during the Civil War, and Abraham Lincoln appointed him solicitor of the United States for the Court of Claims (solicitor general) in Washington, D.C., in 1861.

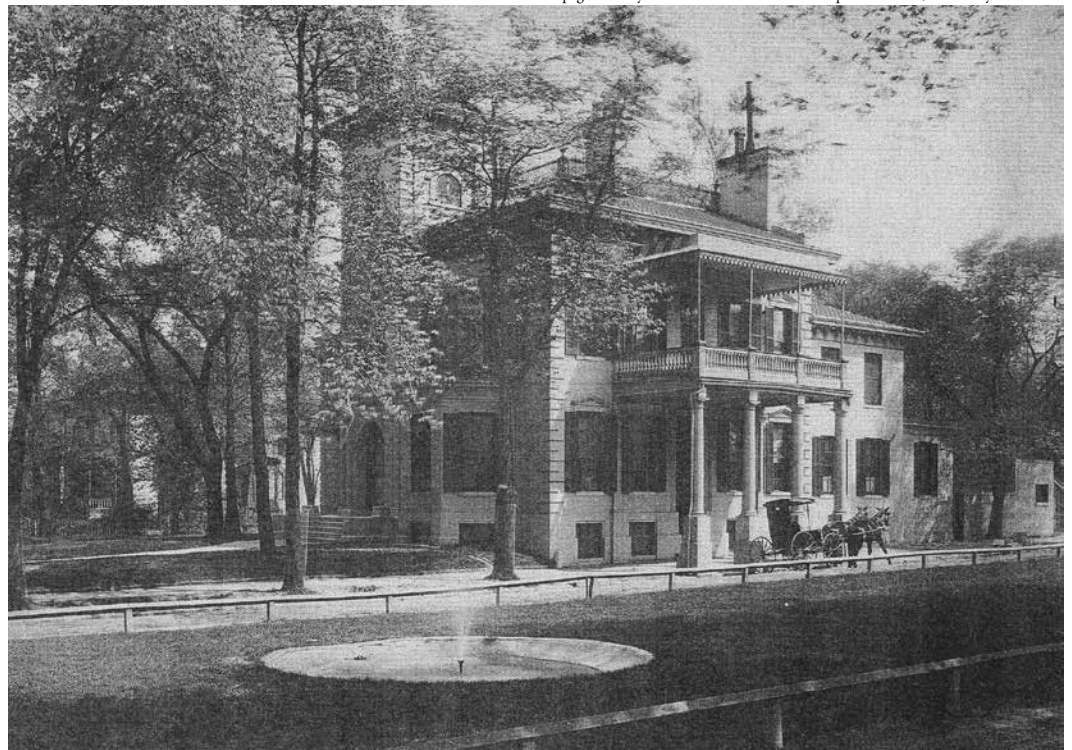
Always interested in politics, he represented the Democratic National Com-



mittee in 1870, traveling to Florida and Louisiana to witness ballot counts in both states. He also traveled to Washington, hoping to be chosen ambassador to Germany during both for President Grover Cleveland's administrations, only

*Charles Gibson married Victor C. Gamble (above) in May 1851. The Gibsons lived in the home (right) in St. Louis.*

Photos this page courtesy of Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri





*An early view of Northome:  
note the child on the lawn.*

to be disappointed twice. He also traveled to Europe, once to accept knighthood from the King of Prussia after he successfully represented members of the German court. He was proud of the relationships he built with the German and Austrian royalty.<sup>5</sup>

Prairie chickens and pheasants were plentiful within what are now the city limits of Minneapolis. In 1860 and 1861, Gibson visited Minneapolis again, staying at the Hotel Nicollet. He said he was taken with the city and that if he were not so solidly tied to St. Louis he would move permanently to Minneapolis. He loved Cedar, Calhoun, and Harriet Lakes as they were always full of fish. After several visits, the Gibson family decided to purchase land and build a summer home. In 1870 Gibson bought 140 acres on Lake Minnetonka between Carson's and Robinson's Bay as "a refuge for himself and family dur-

ing the heated term which annually blisters [St. Louis]."<sup>6</sup>

Charles and his wife, Virginia, brought their eight children—Louisa, Victor, Archie, Preston, Charles T., Lizzie, Gerolt, and Easton—to camp on their heavily timbered property. In August 1876, Gibson had a landing built at which the boat *Mary* could pick up his workmen. A large cabin was built for shelter; underbrush was cleaned from the site, which they reached via a winding walk through the trees. He wrote: "No occupation was more pleasing than to cut out the finest views of lake and forest from dense masses of timber, as a sculptor chisels his state from crude marble."

Above the front door of the Gibsons' new summer home, its name, *Northome*, appeared in stained glass. "It has always been a matter of surprise to me that in giving names to their places no one has ever



*The Gibson children before the youngest was born (l-r): Victor, Preston, Charles, baby Gerolt, Louisa, Archie, and Elizabeth*

called it a home. They call it 'Sweetwater Cottage' or 'Clover Dale' or some such romantic name as that, but this is the only country seat within my knowledge that is called, as it properly should be, a home," Charles wrote. He considered himself a pioneer in building one of the first great and beautiful homes on Lake Minnetonka.<sup>7</sup>

From the front door of the Gibson cottage, one could look straight into the mouth of Crystal Bay, five miles across the lake. From the window at the side of the front parlor one could see Wayzata Bay, while the window on the left gave a full view of Carson Bay. The construction was finished in 1877 from plans made by well-known Minneapolis architects Long & Haglin. The completed plan was a gothic house 40 by 70 feet, with two stories, an

attic, and verandas on two floors. Cauvet and Company furnished plans for the plumbing. A local builder from Excelsior, R. B. McGrath, and 12 carpenters built the house at a cost of \$3,000. It had all the conveniences of the time including a nearby icehouse. The house was spacious, with high, airy rooms and broad verandas. The Gibsons had one of the loveliest spots on Lake Minnetonka; its lawns adjoined the Hotel Saint Louis. In 1884, Charles rehired R. B. McGrath to add bay windows to the home. On May 18, 1884, *Northwestern Tourist* listed it as the most expensive home on Lake Minnetonka, at \$10,000.<sup>8</sup>

Charles Gibson enjoyed life on the lake. He loved to entertain, and he loved being first. His family spent many summers at

Northome and enjoyed entertaining there. The society pages of local newspapers often noted the Gibsons as attending a party, visiting a friend (usually someone socially or politically important), or entertaining at the Hotel Saint Louis (after 1879). Gibson was the first to build a great hotel on Lake Minnetonka, and he claimed he was first to have a naphtha launch—developed because regularly used steam engines had a reputation for blowing up—on the lake. The U.S. Coast Guard required licensing even of experienced operators, precluding the use of engines by the owners of small

boats. A naphtha launch gave the wealthy a way to zip around the lake without hiring an operator. The June 29, 1889, *Minneapolis Tribune* predicted that the naphtha launch would revolutionize navigation on the lake. Gibson's launch, which cost \$1,100, was 21 feet long, 5 feet, 10 inches wide, and could carry 15 passengers comfortably. He christened the boat *Tatu*, as suggested by his grandson.<sup>9</sup>

In 1878, Gibson gathered leaders of commerce and industry from both Minneapolis and St. Louis at his summer home. Local business and political leaders of the

Courtesy of Bob Perry



*Gibson family and friends at Northome in a stereoptic view, some time after 1884*



*Gibson family on May 13, 1871, location unknown. Elizabeth Gibson Perry (far right) was the **great??**-grandmother of Bob Perry, source of many family photos.*

day, such as Minneapolis's Mayor A. C. Rand, W. D. Washburn, and Prof. William Folwell of the University of Minnesota, helped Gibson welcome the delegates from St. Louis and from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The managers of the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad wished to show their guest the grandeur of Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota's great agricultural district, and the thriving city of Minneapolis. About 150 men and women toured all the large manufacturing plants, the Falls of Saint Anthony, and the lakes of the region. They spent a day at Lake Minnetonka, the men having dinner outdoors under the trees at Northome while the women ate inside. Both heard speeches

on the attributes of Minneapolis and Lake Minnetonka. Bringing the men of the south to Minneapolis demonstrated a common interest in improving the Mississippi from the Falls of Saint Anthony to the Gulf of Mexico, in providing faster mail service from the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad, and in promoting Lake Minnetonka as the natural resort for those from the south.<sup>10</sup>

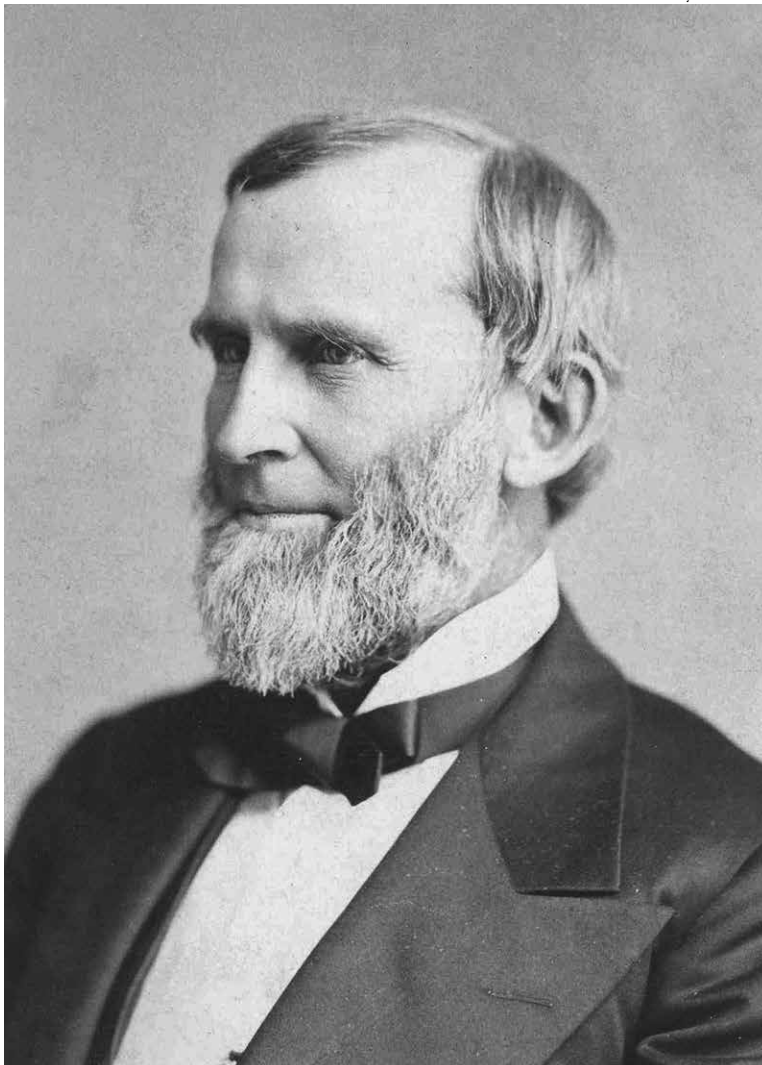
As early as 1883, local and summer visitors organized yacht and rowing races. The *Minneapolis Tribune* of July 12, 1885, mentioned that Charles Gibson and L. B. Stenson had challenged each other to a rowing race to determine the amateur champion of the lake. The two men raced

for a half-mile, and Stenson won by two boat lengths in four minutes and 30 seconds. The *St. Paul Daily Globe* of July 7, 1889, claimed that Charles Gibson and “others” would build a beautiful clubhouse on an island for the Minnetonka Yacht Club on Saint Louis Bay. The proposed site was a sandbar standing several feet above the water; Gibson was to turn the site into a one-acre island at the entrance to the bay. On January 25, 1890, he presented the club with “Lighthouse Island” and subscribed \$3,000 towards the new clubhouse. Plans prepared architect Harry Wild Jones called for an assembly room 50 feet long and 20 feet wide, and “ladies” and “gentlemen’s parlors and bathrooms.

All the rooms were to have large fireplaces. At the tip of the island would be a lighthouse 50 feet high with a revolving electric light illuminated the bay in various colors. The cost was projected at more than \$10,000, but the actual building came in at \$6,400. The club held its first regatta on July 1, 1890, with formal opening of the clubhouse on July 18. A live band entertained 263 members of the yacht club, and according to a report of the *St. Paul Globe* the next day: “After the program of dancing, an elaborate luncheon was served under the direction of assistant manager Howe, of the Hotel Saint Louis.”<sup>11</sup>

Charles Gibson was also involved in Lake Minnetonka politics. The October 5,

Courtesy of Bob Perry



*Charles Gibson in his mid-fifties*

1886, *St. Paul Globe* mentions an October 4 meeting of the Hennepin County Commissioners called by Gibson on behalf of citizens interested in improving navigation on the lake. He often entertained local Democrats at dinner parties under a tent on the lawn at his home. Always one to get himself in the newspapers, in 1889, Gibson allowed the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, which called him a modest and unassuming man, to name him one of the wealthiest men in the state (worth between \$2 million and \$6 million) and to say that as one of the greatest railroad attorneys, he had once received a single fee of \$275,000.<sup>12</sup>

In 1892, Gibson invited the 3rd U.S. Infantry from Fort Snelling to Lake Minnetonka. From Club House Point to Sunset Point on Robinson's Bay, white tents covered the land. The troops took two

days to walk to Lake Minnetonka, and 400 participated in extensive field practice and skirmish once they arrived. In the evenings, the wives of the officers accompanied Virginia Gibson to the Hotel Saint Louis for a reception at which they were serenaded by the regiment band.<sup>13</sup>

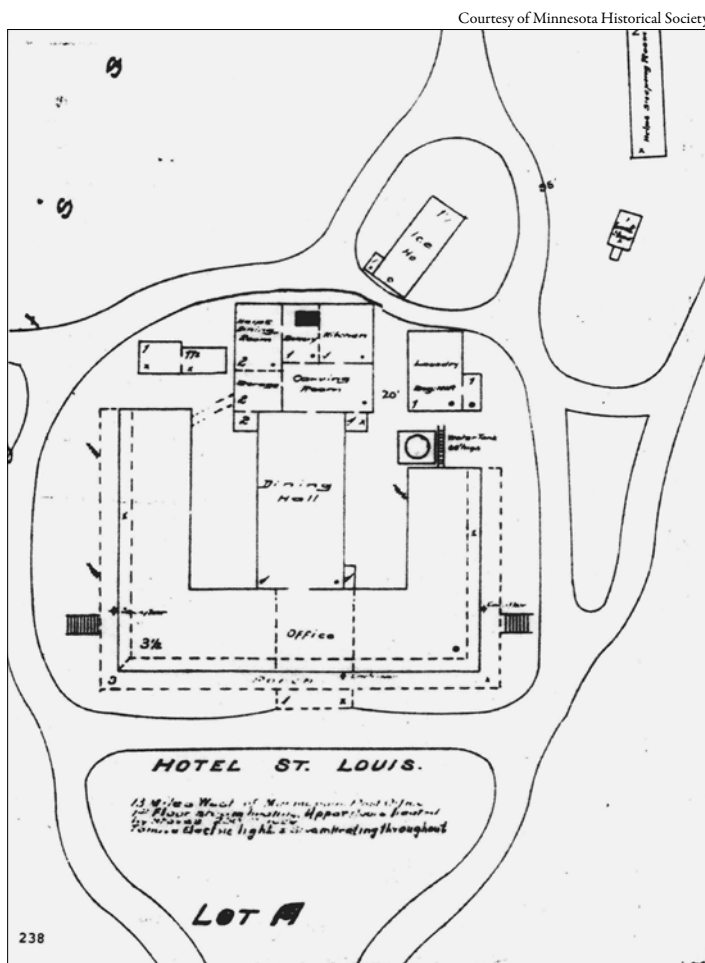
On Friday, October 20, 1895, at about 5:30 PM, a fire in a defective flue fanned by a brisk wind made quick work of the Gibson summer home—only the brick chimney remained. Two of Gibson's sons, at home at the time of the fire, survived. Valued at between \$15,000 and \$20,000, the house was insured for only \$10,000, and a couple of days later, Gibson offered to sell all of Northome to Hennepin County for use as a public park. A *Minneapolis Tribune* editorial suggested Sir Charles give the property to Hennepin County. Ironically, Gibson had suggested in an interview ten years earlier that the legislature authorize the purchase of a park on Lake Minnetonka. He thought it was a go, but at the last minute the county commissioners decided not to purchase land and instead use the funds to dredge the lake.<sup>14</sup>

A report in the May 10, 1896, issue of the *Minneapolis Tribune* mentioned that Charles Gibson was to build a handsome dwelling on the site of his burned-out home at Northome and that the new building would feature rough-log framing. Gibson did not rebuild his home.<sup>15</sup>

### The Hotel Saint Louis

As Minnesota and Minneapolis grew in population, Charles Gibson, with his vast experience as a land title attorney with hotels, recognized great opportunity on Lake Minnetonka. In one of his first hotel projects, Gibson had been involved with the Southern Hotel built in downtown to satisfy those who wanted a large, luxurious lodging place. He was able to puzzle out

*This schematic of the Hotel Saint Louis property appears in a Rascher Insurance map in the Atlas of Minneapolis & Suburbs, 1892.*





*Deephaven Park: Lot A (upper left) was the site of the Hotel Saint Louis.*

the land title, drew up a charter for the hotel, and organize a company to build the hotel, which was finished in 1865. At Lake Minnetonka, on October 26, 1878, his oldest son, Victor R. Gibson, purchased 108.55 acres from Elijah and Mariah Carson. It was legally described as "the west half of the northwest quarter of section nineteen, township 117, range 22 and lot two in section 24 in township 117, range 23, containing 108.55 acres of land." Total cost for the 108.55 acres was \$2,713.75 with \$1,150 to be paid to the Carsons upon purchase, \$800 to be paid

one year from the closing, and the balance of \$813.75 to be paid the following year. This land became the site of one of the first grand lake hotels on Lake Minnetonka.<sup>16</sup>

In 1878 Gibson and his investors sold the 108.55 acres to Thomas Eginton, Thomas A. Harrow, and George M. Jackson of Winchester, Kentucky. The hotel was built on high ground with commanding views of St. Louis Bay and Carson's Bay. The design was simple: Many of the rooms faced the lake to catch the view and the breezes off the lake. The austere building was painted gray with green trim; its



*The Hotel Saint Louis as it was  
being torn down in 1907*

galleries extended along the front of all three stories. The three-story wood building was 215 feet long, facing the lake. The Harrow House, after one of its investors, opened to the public on June 10, 1879. In 1879, Thomas A. Eginton died suddenly at the hotel. Upon his death, the other stockholders, Jackson and Harrow, had a falling out, and both fought for control of the hotel. Eventually, attorney Charles Eginton and his wife, Sarah (parents of the late Thomas Eginton), assumed control. Under Charles Eginton, the hotel became the Hotel Saint Louis de Minnetonka. In 1880, improvements included the addition of wings to each end of the main section of the hotel and expansion of the dining room. In 1882, the hotel landed back in Gibson's (and his investors') lap because of improvements that the Egintons did not care to provide. Gibson became responsible for a third of its mortgage.<sup>17</sup>

The season of 1885 was not successful. The hotel owed the bank \$2261.58 and Gibson \$968.44. It operated at a loss and thus had no means to pay its debts and expenses. Eginton could not procure a loan,

so Gibson bought the hotel and property and paid off its debt, becoming full owner. The hotel business in decline, Gibson wasted no time, and in 1887, he and his wife platted its 108.55 acres as lots to be sold as summer homes.<sup>18</sup>

On March 1, 1888, Charles and Virginia Gibson incorporated the Bay of St. Louis Syndicate in Ramsey County. The purpose of the syndicate was to "buy, own, improve, plat and sub-divide, sell and deal with land tenements and real mixed and personal estate and property." And it assumed a \$95,000 mortgage with an interest rate of 6 percent on the larger property—to be paid in five years as the lots sold. The first 20 percent of the profits was to go to the syndicate with 50 percent going to the Gibsons overall. Those who purchased lots were to build "suitable" homes. The lots ran in price from \$600 to \$2,500 for lakefront.<sup>19</sup>

In 1888, Gibson looked into the decline of Lake Minnetonka as a resort destination for southerners. He concluded that the railroads leaving the south were unfairly charging higher rates to go north than to

go east or west. He found out that in 1892, while more than 50,000 residents of St. Louis left their city on railroads for vacations, not more than 500 came to Minnesota. Gibson found that the railroad rates were increasing and travel to the north, decreasing. He noted that 20 years earlier until recent years Minnesota had been the favorite resort of residents of St. Louis and other southern cities. Lake Minnetonka was competing with Florida, California, and other winter-resort states.<sup>20</sup>

Gibson was not about to give up his share of the tourist trade. In 1889, he made 30 acres of wooded land into a picnic grove—Roswell Park, in honor of Roswell Miller, president of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. Fronted on St. Louis Bay, the park claimed one of the finest groves on the lake.<sup>21</sup>

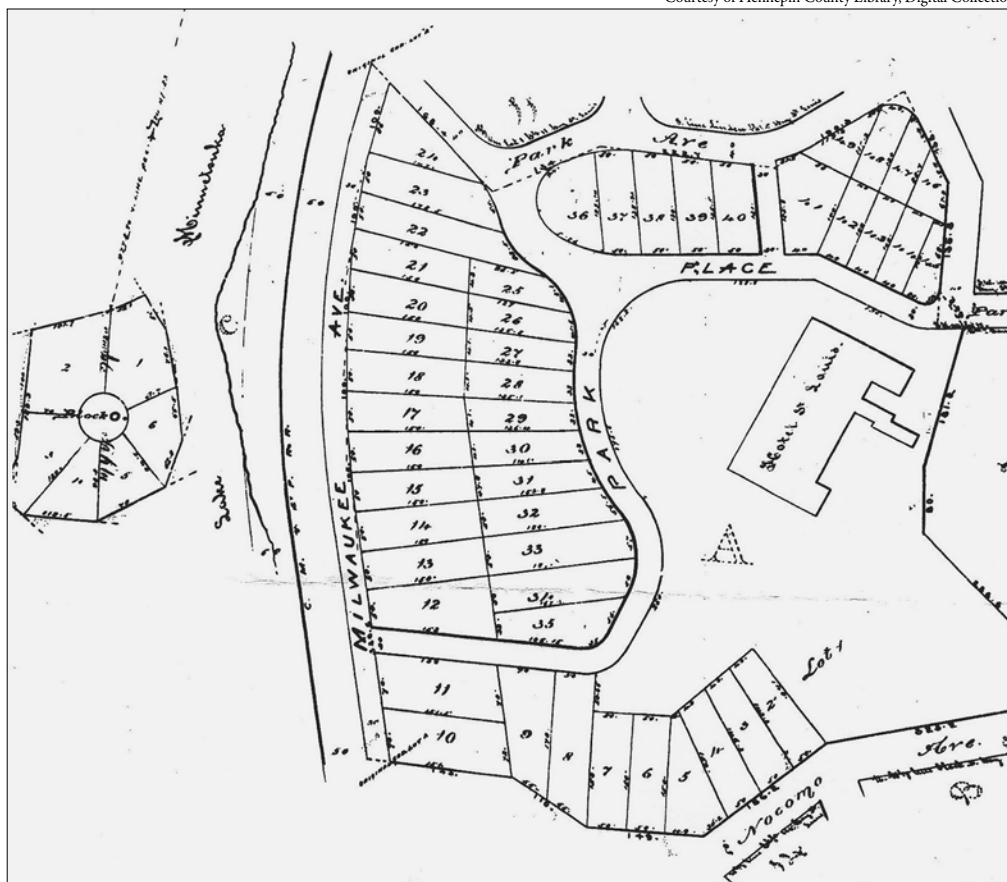
Not all ran smoothly at the hotel. In 1889, James H. Barnard took possession of

the hotel and furniture under of a writ of replevin issued by the U.S. Court, claiming Charles Gibson was in wrongful possession. In November 1889 Gibson filed a bond of \$2,000 and took back the furniture. He and his family spent the summer at the Hotel Saint Louis instead of at Northome. He claimed he did so because his housekeeper had sprained her arm, and his wife, Virginia, was too weak to care for the house.<sup>22</sup>

### Gibson and public parks

No matter where Charles Gibson lived, he felt the city government should purchase open land for future public parks. True to his word, he helped unite his neighborhood around improvements for Lafayette Park in St. Louis. He helped to settle the title, and in 1853 he tried to extend the park, though the issue was voted down. Nevertheless, the park and surround-

Courtesy of Hennepin County Library, Digital Collection



*Charles and Victoria Gibson platted the 108.55 acres of the Hotel Saint Louis property as lots to be sold for summer homes.*

*Gibson  
urged  
the acquisition  
of land  
around  
Lake Minnetonka  
for  
a great park.*

ing homes were a civic showplace before the Civil War. For many years Gibson was a commissioner for Lafayette Park, and he had placed there a bronze copy of Houdon's statue of George Washington in 1869.<sup>23</sup> In 1874 Gibson helped create a 1300-acre park, at the time outside the city limits of St. Louis; it contained a hippodrome, horseracing track, and wood bandstand. Today Forest Park is the crown jewel of the city's park system.<sup>24</sup>

In an 1885 interview, Gibson predicted that Minneapolis's population would nearly double in the next generation and urged the acquisition of land around Lake Minnetonka for a great park. In 1890, Congressman Samuel Prather (S. P.) Snider introduced a bill offering Lake Minnetonka to the City of Minneapolis to the tune of much public criticism from the commissioners of Hennepin County. In a letter to the *Minneapolis Tribune* on May 11, 1890, Charles Gibson revealed that he was the author of the bill that Snider had introduced. Gibson, who had long felt the lake was the "great Central Park of Minneapolis" and thought the City of Minneapolis would do a better job than the county commissioners in caring for the lake because the city could afford more costly improvements than the county. Gibson also felt it should be under direct control of a body that could make and enforce laws.<sup>25</sup>

In 1892 the *Minneapolis Tribune* interviewed Gibson on the subject of comparing him with Charles M. Loring, Minneapolis's own park planner and visionary. Gibson spoke again of the need for Minneapolis and the State of Minnesota to purchase land for parks, predicting that Minneapolis would grow to 2 million people in the next century:

"Take the experience of St. Louis; I have lived opposite Lafayette Park for the past 30 years. When the park was the only

one in the city, its 17 acres seemed to be enough for the city for all time. It seemed an immense area for trees and grass in the midst of a city. But St. Louis has since expended \$2,000,000 in acquiring parks, and its people would not give them up today for \$10,000,000!

"When Forest Park was acquired, the people of St. Louis nearly cursed me for saddling such a big burden upon the city. My best friends came to me and commiserated my part in the transaction, but they have since have come to the other way of thinking. Parks are a good moralizing influence in a community. This is not a generalization that cannot be demonstrated. A park system is one of the cheapest investments ever made by a municipality. It means good citizens and that is one of the highest objects to be attained by government.

"But parks should be parks and not boulevards. The boulevards are for the rich man in his carriage. It may be the beautiful drive of Kenwood or that skirting Lakes Calhoun and Harriet, but the poor can only look on and wish. The poor man wants the park where he and every other man walks; where there is something nearer a level.

"Minneapolis will be spared that expense of buying a park like Forest Park of St. Louis; they have Lake Minnetonka to fall back on. All over the country, among people who have traveled you hear the remark that Minneapolis is a big town and St. Paul is a little city. The fact is this is near the truth than one would like to admit. Minneapolis lacks the dash, the hauteur, the style and the display of a first class city.

"It is a great place but it is too modest. It ought to assume that it is to be the one great city of the Northwest. It should act upon this hypothesis and start with the parks and acquire ownership of Lake Minnetonka and Cedar Lake, as well as Lakes

**-- GIBSON ESTATE --**

**NORTHOME, BAY ST. LOUIS  
AND ROSLAND PARK.**

The new electric line will make this beautiful lake shore easy of access during the entire year. We have sold over \$30,000 worth of this choice property during the past two years, and still some of the best remains. Lots 100 feet on shore and 500 feet deep.

**Shore lots, 100 feet front, \$1,000 to \$3,000.**  
**Bay St. Louis lots, \$100 to \$500.**

*This ad apperaed in the  
Minneapolis Journal on  
May 13, 1905.*

Calhoun and Harriet and the Lake of the Isles. This should be secured by the state by an act of the legislature and then by an act of Congress. The first thing needed is a good road to the Minneapolis side of the lake. There is now one road to within a half mile of the lake but it has never been completed and one of the things I am here to see about now is the building of this road. The railroads ought to cut prices to the lakes.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1895, Gibson again urged the Hennepin County Commissioners to purchase Northome for a public park. But the board claimed it had no funds to secure purchase of the land for \$450,000. An editorial article in the *Minneapolis Tribune* on October 22, 1895, suggested Gibson come forward and donate the property to Hennepin County. With no sale to Hennepin

County, Gibson changed the plan for Northome to make it a private park for the wealthy based on a Tuxedo park. Every lot sold was to be deeded so that its use would be governed and the streets remain private. The first homes built were for Mr. and Mrs. (Hellen H. Harrison) Russell M. Bennett and his mother-in-law, Mrs. (Elizabeth W.) H. G. Harrison.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Charles Gibson's death**

On October 27, 1899, Charles Gibson died at 8:40 PM at the Hotel Nicollet in Minneapolis after an illness of only three days. The family had spent the summer months in Minnesota, staying in the last month at the Hotel Nicollet in Minneapolis. Although he was feeble, Gibson had been taking daily drives about the city. His wife became alarmed at his rapid

decline and contacted their daughter, Virginia Gibson Conn, and two of their sons—Gerolt and Charles T. Gibson—to come to Minneapolis. Diagnosed with hemorrhage of the bowels, Charles died with his family at his side. His relatives said later that his health was not at its best but his quick death caught family and friends off guard. All but his son Easton (serving in the U.S. Army in the Philippines) and his son Charles's wife (home ill in Burlington, Iowa) attended his burial at Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis. Charles and Virginia's son Archibald, a West Point graduate and in lieutenant in the army, had died at age 24 from cerebral meningitis on January 26, 1881.<sup>28</sup>

Courtesy of Bob Perry



Library of Congress Digital Newspaper Collection

#### A QUEER STORY.

Strange Cause of the Death of Lieut. Gibson, of the United States Army.

St. Louis, Jan. 26.—Archibald Gibson, second lieutenant of the United States cavalry, son of Charles Gibson, an old and prominent lawyer of this city, died at the residence of his father this morning.

Gibson died of inflammation of the brain, believed to be the result of an incident which occurred while he was at West Point. One day while on parade a spider got in one of his ears, which had already been injured by scarlet fever. By the rules he was not allowed to raise his hand, and he stood in the ranks more than an hour while the spider worked its way into his ear. When dismissed his ear was full of blood, and the insect could not be removed for two days. This caused a corrosion of the bone to the brain, and gave him a good deal of trouble. He went to his regiment in northern Dakota, however, and, after performing considerable service and suffering from a severe attack of sickness, he came home, expecting to resign, but as it proved only to die.

*This newspaper clipping of Jan. 27, 1881, informed readers of the death of Archie Gibson (right).*

On March 29, 1901, Virginia Gibson, executor at age 69, petitioned the probate court of Hennepin County to settle her husband's estate, consisting of \$250,000 in personal property. The court valued the hotel and grounds at \$19,130. There was virtually no furniture: 7 pictures, an elk head, parlor table, dining room table, 8 other tables, 8 lamps, 6 rocking chairs,

1 sofa and settee, 1 armchair, 4 heating stoves, 1 kitchen stove, 3 washstands, 1 writing desk, 1 sideboard, 34 bed sheets, 10 bedspreads, and some dishes, linens, and cooking utensils were valued at a total of \$250.<sup>29</sup>

Charles Gibson's left his wife, Virginia, one third of the property in Minnesota and their family home in St. Louis. His surviving seven children received one-seventh of the remaining two-thirds of the Minnesota property. His foreign awards and gifts were distributed among his children and wife.<sup>30</sup>

With 1895 the tide of southern and eastern tourism flowing elsewhere, the managers of the Hotel Saint Louis continued the struggle to keep it open. In 1901 and 1902, a Mr. Timberlake was the last to try. In 1903 the hotel was employed temporarily as a clubhouse for the Minnetonka Club (formerly the Minnetonka Ice Yacht Club), and in 1904 the hotel closed. In 1905, Charles Gibson's oldest son, Victor, supervised turning the Hotel Saint Louis grounds into a platted village. North of the hotel, between the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway and the Minneapolis Boulevard (Minnetonka Boulevard), six large blocks were laid out.<sup>31</sup>

Virginia Gibson, 78, died of heart failure in 1907 at the St. Louis family home at 2046 Lafayette Avenue.

Charles Gibson molded Deephaven Park and Northome into what they are today. He loved the Lake Minnetonka area and through his foresight had the area platted out into the neighborhoods now known. Though it has been more than 100 years since the streets were mapped, he would still recognize what he started there. Each summer Lake Minnetonka refreshed Gibson and his family with its natural beauty and climate just as it does residents and visitors today.<sup>32</sup>

## References

1. "Minneapolis Journal Silver Anniversary," *Minneapolis Journal*, Nov. 26, 1903, p. 12. Isaac Atwater, *History of Minneapolis and Hennepin County*, vol. 2 (New York: Munsell, 1893), 1452: "In these days, there was not a biscuit eaten in the state that was not made of S. Louis flour." Secretary of State Land Field Notes, 1854, 111.J.3.4F, MHC.
2. *Minneapolis Tribune*, Aug. 9, 1895.
3. Gibson's unpublished autobiography (hereafter *Autobiography*), of which 28 pages (42–54, several unnumbered pages, 65–68, 80, and 318) survive, p. 63, Gibson Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. A blatherskite is a babbling, foolish person.
4. Gibson's close friends from St. Louis—Francis Blair, attorney and politician who served in the House of Representatives (1857–62) and U.S. Senate (1871–73), and Edward Bates, former attorney general under Abraham Lincoln—were on the excursion. Steven J. Keilnor, *Grand Excursion, Antebellum American Discovers the Upper Mississippi* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 2004), 17. *Minnesota Pioneer*, June 13, 1854.
5. *Autobiography*, 49. The 1840 U.S. Census listed Charles Gibson's father, Hugh Gibson's family as one of seven free white people and nine slaves. The 1850 slave census showed Charles Gibson with a male slave, 25 years old. This person, considered manumitted (released from slavery), was still living with Charles, also age 25. "Hon. Charles Gibson," *World's Fair Biographical Dictionary* (N.c.: N.p., 1893), p. 12, Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, Columbia, University of Missouri. H. R. Gamble to Charles Gibson, July 22, 1861, Gibson Papers. Gibson left the solicitor general position in 1864 because of Lincoln's antislavery position. Though Gibson's family was not wealthy and came from the slave state of Virginia, he was sympathetic to the interests of pro-Union slave owners in the border state (slave states that did not declare secession from the United States before 1861: four slave states—Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri—never declared secession; four others—Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—did not declare so until after the Battle of Fort Sumter in 1861). "Col. Sir Charles Gibson: The Entertaining Story of Missouri's Knight . . .," *New York Times*, Apr. 19, 1885, p. 3.
- Gibson had the backing of Joseph Pulitzer, owner and editor of the *St. Louis Dispatch* and the *New York World*, for the ambassadorship to Germany. "End of Life Is Reached," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 28, 1900, p. 9. Gibson was vice president of the *St. Louis Dispatch* and confidential legal advisor to Pulitzer. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Feb. 27, 1890, p. 4.
6. *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 28, 1899, p. 9. *Lake Minnetonka Tourist*, Aug. 19, 1876, n.p. *Tourist and Sportsman*, July 20, 1887, p. 5.
7. Helen Hunt Bennett, "Northome," *Hennepin County History* (Summer 1961): 18. *Tourist and Sportsman*, Aug. 1876, n.p. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 17, 1887, p. 4. *Autobiography*, 66.
8. Architect Franklin Long and Charles F. Haglin, builder and engineer, built the first Minneapolis City Hall in 1872 and Central High School, corner of 11th Street and Fourth Avenue South in Minneapolis, in 1878. Larry Millett, *Lost Twin Cities* (MHS Press, 1992), 90. "Our Summer Resort Opportunity for Pleasure," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Aug. 28, 1876, p. 1. "At the Lake: A Delightful Day's Enjoyment . . .," *Tourist and Sportsman*, July 20, 1878, p. 5. Ellen Wilson Meyer, to various recipients, Excelsior Historical Society private collection. *Tourist and Sportsman*, May 17, 1884, p. 4.
9. *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 29, 1889, p. 5. "Breezes from Tonka," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 7, 1889, p. 10, and "District Court Briefs," July 10, 1888, p. 3. William W. Parker obtained a judgment against Charles Gibson for \$313.63 for labor performed in repairing a boat belonging to the defendant. Naphtha is a low-grade gasoline, and its vapor is explosive. It was used in a condensing engine, which required a lot of flowing water to cool it.
10. "At the Lake . . .," 5.
11. Virginia Brainard Kunz, *Minnetonka Yacht Club Centennial, 1882–1982* (Minneapolis: Minnetonka Yacht Club Sailing School, 1982), 29; "A Brilliant Affair: The Minnetonka Yacht Club's New Home Is Opened," *St. Paul Globe*, July 19, 1890, p. 3.
12. "Minnetonka Gush," *St. Paul Globe*, Aug. 18, 1889, p. 7. "Chit Chat Corner," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Aug. 26, 1888, p. 2.
13. *Minneapolis Tribune*, Sept. 25, 1892, p. 7.
14. "Serious Loss by Fire," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 20, 1895, p. 10. "No Tonka Park," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Oct. 22, 1895, p. 3. Auto-

Gibson  
molded  
Deephaven Park  
and Northome  
into  
what  
they are  
today.



*Gerolt and family pet Old Ben*

biography, 67. Gibson tells how sad he was to lose Northome to a fire and that less than seven months later, on May 27, 1896, he lost his St. Louis home on Lafayette Street to a tornado.

15. "Real Estate in Minneapolis and the Golden Northwest," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 1, 1896, p. 24.
16. L. U. Reavis, *St. Louis: The Future Great City of the World: With Biographical Sketches* (St. Louis: By order of the St. Louis County Court, 1870), 493. The Charter for the Southern Hotel was enacted by the Southern Hotel Company of St. Louis on Dec. 8, 1855. Charles Gibson's father-in-law, Archibald Gamble, was part of that corporate body. Charter and By-laws of the Southern Hotel Company of St. Louis, Adopted Aug. 13, 1860 (St. Louis: The City, 1860). 5. Deed Book 72, p. 305, microfilm deeds, Hennepin County Government Center, Minneapolis (hereafter HCGC).
17. Deed Book 79, p. 73, microfilm, HCGC. "Hotel St. Louis, Charles Eginton, Proprietor," *Tourist and Sportsman* (May 24, 1879): 2, and "Lower Lake" (June 10, 1879): 5. Hotel Saint Louis drawings, Leroy Buffington Collection, University of Minnesota, Northwest Archives, mB864, Deed Book 104, p. 424, available on microfilm, HCGC. "The Hotel St. Louis De Minnetonka, Eginton, Proprietor," *Tourist and Sportsman*, Aug. 5, 1879, p. 11; hotel name change ads, June 5, 1880, p. 7, and June 6, 1882, p. 7.
18. Also, \$20,000 was due on the principle mortgage, which the St. Louis Hotel Corporation (Gibson was a shareholder) was unable to pay. Deed Book 104, p. 273.
19. Plat Book 15, Oct. 18, 1887, p. 14, Office of Register of Deeds, HCGC.
20. "Cut Off by Rates," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1893, p. 5.
21. "Lake Minnetonka: News Gathered from All Quarters of Minnesota's Beautiful Resorts," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 29, 1889, p. 5.
22. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 13, 1889, p. 3. Replevin is a legal remedy for recovering goods unlawfully withheld from someone's possession. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Nov. 9, 1889, p. 3.
23. Houdon was a prominent French sculptor in the second half of the 18th century. He was commissioned by the Virginia legislature. The commonwealth authorized 33 bronze and plaster replicas of the sculpture. In 2000, conservation efforts revealed irreparable damage: breaks in the marble, probably caused by the plaster-casting process. In 1910 casting of the sculpture was outlawed so as to save it from further damage.

24. L. U. Reavis, *St. Louis*, 493. The Charter for the Southern Hotel was enacted by Southern Hotel Company of St. Louis on Dec. 8, 1855. Gibson's father-in-law, Archibald Gamble, was part of that corporate body. *Charter and By-Laws of the Southern Hotel Company of St. Louis* (St. Louis: The company, 1860), 5.
25. "Congressman Snider Exonerated," *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 11, 1890, p. 5.
26. "Make More Parks: A Visitor's View about Our Park System," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Dec. 16, 1892, p. 2.
27. "The Attractions of Lake Minnetonka to Be Added in a Substantial Way," *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 20, 1900, p. 12; first editorial, Oct. 22, 1895, p. 6. The idea was patterned after Tuxedo Park, New York City, an exclusive area attracting the city's upper crust from 1885 into the 1920s. Developed as a hunting and fishing preserve with a clubhouse, its beautiful homes were designed and built by prominent architects.
28. *St. Paul Globe*, Oct. 28, 1899, p. 3, mentions that the Gibson had been staying at Northome "cottage" during the fall. The Gibsons' summer residence, Northome, burned in 1895. "End of Life Is Reached," p. 9.
29. Hennepin County Probate Court Inventory and Appraisement #6547, June 16, 1900, HCGC.
30. Ibid. Will and Final Decree of Distribution on Charles S. Gibson, Docket S2, p. 478, HCGC.
31. "Lake Minnetonka," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 27, 1905, p. 4.
32. R. M. Bennett purchased property from the Gibsons in 1900 and built a Colonial-style home with a yellow exterior. Including a stable, coachman's house, and bathhouse, the improvements were to cost about \$15,000. "Real Estate Notes," *Minneapolis Journal*, Apr. 30, 1901, p. 7. In 1906, T. B. Walker purchased 8 acres for \$15,000, and J. W. Murphy bought 25 acres in the Northome district for about \$25,000. "Booming: Some Big Sales," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Jan. 1, 1906, p. 6.

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