

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

### The Nashwaak Potentate

*We have no desire to decry Mr. Gibson's importance in a political contest. He wields a large influence no doubt, but we have yet to learn that all the electors must sneeze every time he takes snuff.*

- Herald, Feb 16, 1895.

**I**N 1893 A curve was built on the Nashwaaksis side of the river allowing Canadian Pacific trains from Woodstock to bypass the Canada Eastern Railway station at Gibson, prompting a melancholy observation from the *Herald* that "Railroading does not appear to have many advantages to offer this city but rather the opposite." Gibson senior must have been feeling the same thing. The CPR's decision to drop the Fredericton - Salisbury section of the Short Line seemed almost to have doomed the Fredericton Railway Bridge from the start, and the Canada Eastern Railway was not turning enough of a profit to pay even for basic maintenance.

It was understood that obtaining Gibson's support at election time was of critical importance. Gibson himself had never felt the need to run for political office, being able to work his will sufficiently behind the scenes. He had been very fortunate to have unloaded the New Brunswick Railway on George Stephen and the projectors of the Canadian Pacific Railway. This time, however, things were different. He needed to maintain for at least the time being the more than favorable terms secured for the railway bridge while he endeavoured to sell both it and the Canada Eastern Railway to the federal government. That was now his most pressing project, and it would take ten years of political maneuvering to accomplish it.

In the run-up to the Federal election of 1896, it was revealed that not since 1888 had the Fredericton Bridge Company paid any interest on its original \$300,000 loan. Not, that is, since Charles Eulas Foster, Conservative member for Kings, had become Finance Minister and Gibson himself had deserted the Liberal party for the Conservatives. The Liberal *Herald*, Gibson's former supporter, struck the first blow in February of 1895 when it accused Gibson, the "Nashwaak potentate," of parachuting his own personal candidate, for his



Thomas Temple (1818-1899). A lumberman, businessman and close associate of Alexander Gibson, Temple served as High Sheriff of Fredericton, was President of the Fredericton Branch Railway, Director of the "Gibson Branch" railway to Edmundston, and Conservative M. P. for York from 1884 to 1896. He was appointed to the Senate in 1896.  
LAC PA 033696.

own personal reasons, into the contest for York. "We have no desire to decry Mr. Gibson's importance in a political contest," stated the paper. "He wields a large influence no doubt, but we have yet to learn that all the electors must sneeze every time he takes snuff." Gibson was defended by the conservative *Gleaner*, his former enemy. Mr. Gibson left the Liberal party at the same time, it retorted rather speciously, "when Mr. Edward Blake, their then leader, was obliged in justice to his reputation as a statesman and a thoughtful, prudent, farseeing man to sever connection with the party."

Gibson's position on the National Policy came up for discussion. The Conservatives pointed out that a few months previously, when Mr. Fielding, Maritime leader of the Liberal party, was in Fredericton attempting to curry favor with Mister Gibson, he stated that the Liberal free trade policy would not hurt Gibson's business, as he

George Eulas Foster, M. P. for York. New Brunswick born, Foster was educated at the University of New Brunswick where he served as Professor of Classics, later Member of Parliament under seven consecutive Prime Ministers, mostly in conservative governments. Appointed to the Senate in 1921. LAC PA 027771.



was too strongly situated that way for any change in tariff to much affect him. So why, it argued, does Gibson now support a policy which even the opposition has acknowledged he does not need to continue healthily in business? Because it is the best thing for the country as a whole, it concluded, that's why. The *Herald* countered that yes Gibson was once quoted in the words of the *Gleaner* itself that he "does not consider the National Policy necessary to the prosperity of his cotton business, but believes that he can manufacture cotton and hold his own against all comers in a fair field." But just a few days previously, in a speech at City Hall, did not Mr. Foster state in no uncertain terms that "No cotton industry would be able to continue its operations for a single three months if the duty was taken away, even against Great Britain alone." How then is Mister Gibson not actuated by self-interest in his switch to the Conservative platform? "They declare

that the National Policy is a good thing for the country," chimed in the *St. Andrews Beacon*, "but to our mind it simply proves that pelf, not patriotism, is the actuating motive in Mr. Gibson's case. He sees in the continuance of the National Policy an opportunity to add a few more millions to his pile."

Forced to defend himself, Foster took the rostrum at City Hall in March, praising Gibson as a producer and developer of resources without parallel in the county, and claiming for his own policy "a perfect right for it to appeal to men like Mr. Gibson," as well as a perfect right for himself "to have the political friendship of Mr. Gibson, if he chooses to give it to me." Meanwhile, in Parliament, dirty laundry was beginning to be aired. Mr. McMullen and other Liberals noted that the Bridge Company had paid only one year's interest on its \$300,000 loan - \$12,000 for 1887 - and since Mr. Foster became Finance Minister in 1888, not one penny. Now fully \$72,000 was outstanding, and this in spite of letters to the Bridge Company from the Auditor General, none of which had been answered. When Mr. Hazen, Conservative member for Saint John and quondam political opponent went out his way to praise Gibson as a citizen to whom New Brunswick never owed a greater debt of gratitude, Mr. McMullen retorted that Mr. Gibson was doubtless as prudent as he was wealthy. The paid-up stock of the Bridge Company was only 10 percent of the \$200,000 maximum, a mere \$20,000, divided among five directors. While Gibson could have financed the whole project out of his own pocket, "It would be much safer, from his standpoint, to be merely a small stockholder, and utilize his friend, Mr. Temple, to secure from the Government a loan at a very low rate of interest. In this he was successful. They obtained this loan in 1887, and in return Mr. Gibson joined the ranks of the Tory party, and has supported them ever since." Sir Richard Cartwright, while making the same point, was rather more delicate in his phraseology. "Mr. Gibson," he said, "as well as other people, possibly desires to obtain for himself a little larger gratuity, shall we say, or assistance shall we say, or recognition shall we say, from the public treasury, than, perhaps, citizens of less wealth are likely to secure."

Gibson had some reason to be confident in Foster's success. In February, a provincial election had returned Blair's Liberals to power with almost a complete sweep, the only victors for the Conservatives being the contestants in Saint John and to no very great surprise the four Conservative candidates for York: John Black, William T. Howe, Herman H. Pitts and James K. Pinder. "The adverse result in York," wrote the *Yarmouth Herald*, "is attributed mainly to Alexander Gibson, of Marysville, a wealthy lumberman and cotton manufacturer, who practically dictates the votes, though not the opinions, of the large majority of electors in many of the parishes. For instance, in the village of Marysville, which is owned almost entirely by Gibson, and where

almost every elector is his employee or tenant, the vote stood for the government 17 against 355.”

To no one's very great surprise Foster won in York, but the country as a whole swept Laurier into power, and Gibson, in whatever business dealings he was now contemplating with regard to the bridge or the Canada Eastern Railway, now found himself on the wrong side of the aisle in both the provincial and federal chambers. With government assistance now unlikely, he turned his attentions first to the CPR. That summer saw him at Covenhoven in St. Andrews, the palatial summer estate on Minister's Island of CPR President William Van Horne. Doubtless, speculated the *St. Andrews Beacon*, Mr. Gibson is in town in regard to railway and bridge matters. That is, since Charles Tupper was no longer in a position to advocate for the Canada Eastern Railway as a “feeder” of the Intercolonial Railway, as he had once seemed to promise, those to whom such promises were made “will either have to go without the promised favors or seek help in other quarters.”

Whatever possibilities lay with the CPR, Gibson was not one to put all his eggs in one basket, and he now looked to his former opponents and friends, the federal Liberals, as a second option. Opportunely, the long-standing Premier of New Brunswick, Andrew Blair, had taken the federal post of Minister of Railways and Canals in July, and newspaper reports the following year suggested that he favored incorporation of the Canada Eastern Railway into the Intercolonial Railway. Van Horne himself took a turn over the railway in 1897 but the *Gleaner* was not convinced that the great man's denial that the Canadian Pacific Railway had any real interest in the line was anything more than a ruse. York county would much prefer the line to stay in the hands of Gibson himself, it stated, rather than have it pass into the power of a soulless corporation, and measures should be taken to force Blair to exert himself a little more on the matter. “Until this is done,” it said, “the public will be satisfied that Mr. Blair is either insincere in his professions or is utterly without influence in the Federal cabinet.”

Rumours of a possible buy-out by either the federal government or the Canadian Pacific Railway persisted through 1897, and anxiety was ratcheted up a notch in December when Gibson took a trip to Montreal, presumably Canadian Pacific Railway related. Such was provincial interest in the matter that early in 1898 representatives from along the line of the Canada Eastern Railway met to formally advocate for incorporation of the line into the Intercolonial Railway. Their reasoning passed party lines; they took the perhaps dubious position that the Canada Eastern Railway would be a way of lessening the Intercolonial Railway deficit, and, more strongly, that federal ownership would protect them from higher freight rates, such as had been the case when the Gibson Line of the New Brunswick Railway had come un-

der Canadian Pacific Railway control. York County Council passed a motion strenuously recommending federal purchase of the railway. The Fredericton Board of Trade made a trip to Marysville concerning the Canada Eastern Railway, and early in February, along with delegations from Newcastle, Chatham and other stops along the railway line, took its argument to Ottawa.

Meanwhile, on February 8, 1898, Gibson lost his wife. According to the newspaper report, after having been stricken with a severe attack of sciatica several months previous, she died a few days after being struck by "paralysis of the brain." Evidently, Mrs. Gibson had been ill for some time. Land records for 1889 are signed by her daughter, "Mrs. Gibson being disabled." It may have been a continuation of this infirmity which prevented her from attending the last of the Marysville religious revivals in 1895. In the account of her death and funeral, Mrs. Gibson was remembered chiefly for her piety and good works, in particular her strong connection with the Methodist church, her home often being the residence of the clergyman, and it being chiefly through her influence, according to an obituary, that the church had been erected in the first place. She like her husband had a philanthropical side. For instance, in 1892 she and her daughter Annie were reported to have taken a particular interest in a proposed reformatory for Saint John, and collected and forwarded to Lady Tilley \$108.50 by way of contribution from the people of Marysville.

Moving forward early in 1899, Gibson incorporated the Alexander Gibson Railroad and Manufacturing Company partly for the purpose of acquiring the Canada Eastern Railway. Impatient with the CPR and the federal government, or planning to play one off against the other, Gibson now went ahead with a decision which was to determine the content of a good part of York politics for the next half decade. He - or rather, he through his son, Alexander Gibson Jr. - made a complete about face, or rather his second such, and came out publically in support of the Liberals. This took place first at the provincial level. Gibson Jr., then Mayor of Marysville, was chosen as the Liberal standard bearer in the election for 1899. His opponents, of course, were quick to capitalize on this hypocritical switch of loyalties. Mr. Black, a Conservative candidate, said he would not care to judge his worthy opponent on why he had come out so suddenly in support of the governing party and would let him explain this for himself. As for his father, the great man of the Nashwaak, he was a private citizen he said who was a credit to his country and worthy all the honors that had been heaped upon him. However, he felt that when it came to politics, "a man's course should be marked by manly and consistent conduct, and he apprehended that the voice of the intelligent, independent electors of York County would on the 18<sup>th</sup> instant be found to be stronger than all the influence of Mr. Alex. Gibson."

As for Gibson Jr., he took the whole thing rather lightly. In a five-minute acceptance speech he said he was a man of many titles, the most recent being Mayor of Marysville, Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot, and intended to add M.P. P. to the roster. He could no more frame a bill than make a speech, but he had helped his father in the lumber business and knew as much about that end of the economy as any man around. He was neither farmer, lawyer, statesman nor orator, to be sure, "but he was a son of Alexander Gibson, who had a concern at Marysville which paid out \$20,000 a month in wages. He wanted the votes of the people, wanted them bad, and knew he was going to get them."

He did just that. The province remained as Liberal under George Emmerston as it had been under Andrew Blair, but by a very strange turn of events, York County, which had been Conservative under the previous two administrations, during the time when Alexander Gibson senior had leaned that way, was now magically Grit terrain. The Conservative members, Black, Howe, Pinder and Pitts, the latter three of whom were also victorious in the 1893 elections, were gone, and in their place were Alexander Gibson Jr. and three Liberal compatriots, William T. Whitehead, John A. Campbell, and Frederick P. Thompson.

That evening Gibson Jr.'s house was lit from cellar to attic. While the Marysville band played "Marching Through Georgia," four hundred guests assembled for coffee, supper and congratulatory speeches until, at midnight, the strains of the National Anthem sent them reluctantly off to bed. The memory of these festivities was dampened a few days later when enemy newspapers in Quebec and Ontario began to report of improper proceedings in the late election: that Minister Blair had made a secret deal with Gibson senior to purchase the Canada Eastern Railway for one million dollars in exchange for his son's standing for election in York. The conservative *Gleaner*, allowing that Blair would not be above crooked dealings, as was his wont, nevertheless defended Gibson as a man too honorable to be knowingly party to a corrupt bargain. "Mr. Gibson's willingness to sell," it declared, "with Mr. Blair eager to buy, does not imply that Mr. Gibson is doing anything improper. It is his right to sell if he is willing; and if, as he may believe, with the care of an enormous business upon his shoulders in his advanced years, the government can better develop the business interests and the resources of the country through which the road runs than he, he does well in the public interest to agree to sell; and it is his right to make the best possible honorable bargain." Defending the need for local development, and arguing that the incorporation of the Canada Eastern Railway into the Intercolonial Railway would benefit all of Canada, it carefully skirted the touchy subject of influence peddling.

Gibson had some help from the neighbouring counties. In April 1899 Lemuel Tweedie, Liberal member for Northumberland, proposed a resolution recommending that the federal government seriously consider incorporating the Canada Eastern Railway into the Intercolonial Railway, as the forest, farm and sea products of Chatham and Newcastle made this railway an important feeder of the government system. The central part of the province, he argued, received relatively little assistance in railway development at the federal level, and yet its tax revenue had contributed largely to the development of the Ontario canal system. His own section had developed wonderfully under the operation of the road in both freight and passenger traffic; the Prince Edward Island railway would receive traffic along the line to the steamer terminal; the coal industries of Sunbury and Queens would use the railway. Mr. Porter, Liberal member for Victoria, thought all branch lines in New Brunswick would be better served by federal ownership. The avenues of commerce, he said, should not be controlled by "grasping private corporations." Better to add to the debt, he said, than pay excessive rates to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

In August 1899, Thomas Temple, recently appointed to the Senate, passed away. Gibson was a pallbearer. In the fall of 1900, the *Gleaner* reported the rumour that Mr. Blair and Mr. Gibson senior had reached an understanding "temporarily satisfactory to the latter in reference to the purchase of the Canada Eastern Railway by the government; and that as a result Mr. Alexander Gibson Jr. will accept nomination as the Liberal candidate for York in the approaching election." Such proved to be the case. Later that month, Mr. Blair nominated Alexander Gibson Jr. for the seat in York, and George Eulas Foster, realizing perhaps that formidable forces would be arrayed against him in York, decided instead to contest the seat in Saint John against Mr. Blair himself.

Before the campaigning got underway, Gibson senior decided to make a return visit to his old hometown in Oak Bay and Milltown, taking the Canadian Pacific Railway train from Fredericton in the company of Rev. W. W. Brewer, who was scheduled to preach in the Milltown Methodist church. The event was not reported in the *St. Croix Courier*, a Conservative journal supporting Gilbert Ganong in the present election, but was noticed by Robert E. Armstrong, editor of the *St. Andrews Beacon* and the Liberal contender for Charlotte, formerly a Gibson critic but now an outspoken ally. Armstrong remembered the event on the occasion of Gibson's death, writing coyly that Gibson, "whose sympathies for the most part [were] with the Liberal party," assisted "by his presence" in the campaign of 1900, "when a St. Andrews man was the standard-bearer." Apparently Gibson had forgiven the twentieth of thirty theses which in the election of 1896 Armstrong had given as reasons

not to vote for the Conservative party: namely, "Because it has allowed the St. Mary's Bridge Company to default to the extent of \$66,000 in interest, in order to purchase the support of Mr. Alexander Gibson."

Gibson returned to Fredericton in time to hear his son speak in the opening of the campaign for York. By his own admission not a public speaker, the younger Gibson outlined his accomplishments in an acceptance speech which, perhaps gratefully, was as brief as it was plain. "When I get to Ottawa," he concluded, "I'll show you what I can do there. I'm going to Ottawa, sure, and I'll do my best for York county every time. I don't know what the Liberal policy is but the Minister of Railways can talk all right and he'll explain it to you. If you'll excuse me for not talking any longer I'll be pleased to take my seat." This performance was followed up by a torchlight procession featuring the Fredericton and Marysville bands, with McNutt's kazoo band bringing up the rear. Every man involved received twenty-five cents, and a stop was made *en route* at the curling rink, where, the *Gleaner* noted sarcastically, "emergency rations" were distributed at the country's expense.

Gibson's opponent was Rev. Dr. Joseph McLeod, a man of the cloth who knew the Gibsons personally, having assisted at the Marysville religious revivals. The three planks in his platform were Purity, Prohibition and Patriotism, in that order of importance. McLeod advocated Patriotism as opposed to the Liberal preference for free trade; and in a county and country favoring temperance as opposed to outright abolition of all use or traffic in alcohol, he stood for Prohibition. But these issues hardly made it into the debates. Foremost in this contest, and the thing that would make it a different sort of campaign, was the issue of Purity, or freedom of choice. Dismissing Alexander Gibson Jr. as a mere puppet, McLeod directed his public pronouncements to the father, who he implied owned, or would like to own, the electors of York, body and soul. In his acceptance speech, he asked his audience if they were the chattels of Alexander Gibson, "to be sold by him for his own personal gain the same as he sells a bundle of laths or a bale of cotton goods from his mill or are you free, independent electors?"

McLeod's sneering and abusive tone, with accusations of bribery bordering on libel, prompted Gibson senior to take a public stand on the issue of electoral freedom. At a rally held in the cotton mill, with free train fare for all who chose to attend, planks stretched over shingle bolts and the room blazing with incandescent lights, still something of a novelty in Fredericton, Gibson followed a speech by Mr. Blair with one of his own. He took offense at McLeod's accusations. The assumption that his men were serfs he called a lie. He never used a man worse for voting against him. As for the notion that behind this election was a deal to sell the Canada Eastern Railway, that was a lie too. He wouldn't have spent \$40,000 on it last year if his plan had been

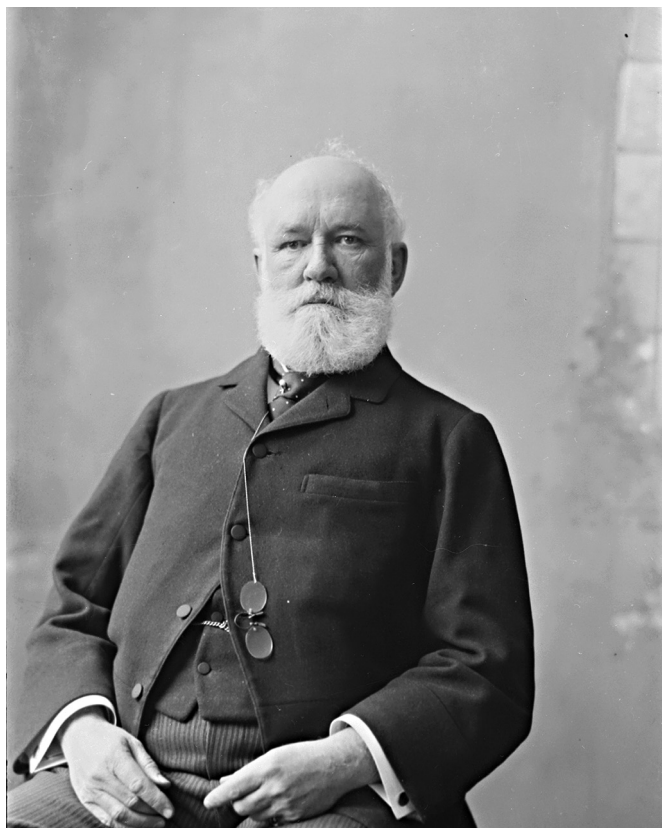


Alexander Gibson Jr. Mr. Gibson served as Mayor of Marysville, M. P. P. for York and M.P. under Laurier. In his day he was viewed generally as a political proxy for his father who, eschewing political office himself, preferred to work behind the scenes.  
**PANB P70-22.**

to sell it. His business was buying and selling, he said, and he would sell the railway, cotton mill and sawmills and anything else he owned if he could get enough for them. As for the idea that an employee owes nothing to his employer at election time, he didn't accept such a doctrine as that. He is most definitely under obligation, he affirmed, in the same way he would be expected to help out if there were a fire in the cotton mill. It is a moral obligation that every employee accepts or should accept as a given.

When the votes were tallied in November, the Blair government was sustained with about the same number of seats as before, and not surprisingly Alexander Gibson Jr. won in York, but the race had been close. His victory was only 76, and the results in most of the polling stations had been very tight, as though the moral approach had almost worked. Not content with an honorable loss, however, McLeod, incensed by perceived voting irregularities

Andrew George Blair (1844-1907), Fredericton native and Liberal Premier of New Brunswick. A long-standing associate of Alexander Gibson, Blair supported the construction of the Fredericton Railway Bridge and later, as Minister of Railways and Canals, the incorporation of the Canada Eastern Railway and accompanying bridge into the CNR.  
LAC PA 026000.



- that is, the use of money and, he implied, alcohol - filed application that he would pursue charges against those who had been known bribers in the campaign. Notice was served against Alexander Gibson Jr. himself, who seems to have made efforts to avoid it and whose protestations of innocence were overruled in court. A trial date of June 3, 1901, was set for corruption charges to be heard, but on that day McLeod and Gibson Jr. agreed to a "saw-off," Gibson admitting to irregularities and McLeod agreeing not to pursue charges. The election was voided and a new one scheduled for the fall.

Though conservative, the *Gleaner* predicted disaster for McLeod, fearing that the electorate was not in the mood for yet another election, and in December, 1901, such proved to be the case. Gibson came in with about the same number of votes as before, but McLeod dropped from a deficit of 76 to 823 votes, the result of many Con-

servative abstentions. It was not a Conservative defeat so much as the defeat of a faction who would have their way, regardless of public sentiment. On the upside, this particular campaign did seem to have been conducted on the purity principle, more or less. Reported the *Gleaner*: "One voter who always makes a specialty of getting a good price for his vote hung around the City Hall for some hours waiting to be approached, but neither party seemed to want any part of him. At last he approached an agent, or gentleman that he thought was an agent, and said, 'You know I've got the goods, if you want them they are yours for five; if you don't I'll keep them.' He kept them, for he did not vote."

WITH ALEXANDER GIBSON Jr. in Parliament, Gibson senior now possessed some needed leverage in selling the Canada Eastern Railway, though reports in the fall of 1902 of its imminent sale to the Canadian Pacific Railway proved to be unfounded. Feeling apparently in desperate straits, Gibson went ahead in November with plans to further recapitalize his company, calling in John F. Stairs of Halifax. Stairs, the scion of a wealthy and powerful business family, was president of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, president of the Eastern Trust Company, and a very successful financier, having consolidated the cordage companies of Canada under the Consumer Cordage Company, of which he was also president, and also the sugar refineries of both provinces. Stairs arrived with a young employee in tow, Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, and R. E. Harris, later Chief Justice of Nova Scotia. The three men, along with Gibson, Col. H. H. McLean, secretary of the company, and David MacLaren of Liverpool, a director representing Gibson's timber brokers, had several meetings in Saint John and Fredericton late in the month. According to the *Daily Sun*, these meetings seemed almost the final stages in a reorganization of the company that would see the entire Gibson concern - Canada Eastern Railway, timber limits, and cotton mill - transformed into a new company with Gibson as president, the old directors retaining their posts, but with the addition of new blood in the form of Mr. Stairs and his business associates of Nova Scotia. Bonds, preferred stock and common shares would be issued in an amount totaling more than six million dollars, and the securities would be listed on the Montreal stock exchange.

It was not to be. One of these meetings took place in the Gibson mansion, and Beaverbrook later remembered it vividly in *My Early Life*, the old man's long white beard and long black shoes giving him a patriarchal look, and reminding the writer somewhat fancifully of a cross between Brigham Young and Buffalo Bill. Beaverbrook had had Gibson's businesses audited beforehand, during which it was shown that the company was heavily indebted in complicated loans to many banks, but it became quickly apparent that

Mister Gibson would eat his cake and have it too. Although he had called these men in for their expertise and influence, not to mention money, he did not like them inquiring into his business activities; neither did he have much use for the ordinary way in which banks operated; and most important of all, wrote Beaverbrook, "Mr. Gibson would not relinquish his authority and my friends would not venture under his control, which on account of his years had become somewhat confused." If this meant that Gibson refused to step down as President, that was not surprising. All his life he had marched to the beat of his own drum, and he now refused at all costs, it seems, to march to someone else's, evidently believing that, in the end, as had always been the case, he would find his own way out of the impasse. But in the end, concluded Beaverbrook, "The Bank foreclosed on the old man. It was a sad day."

But that day was not yet at hand, and Gibson proceeded in concert with his son to prosecute the sale of the Canada Eastern Railway and accompanying bridge. Whatever negotiations were going on behind the scenes between the Gibsons and Laurier are not known but in the early part of 1904 events proceeded quickly. In January former Premier Henry Emmerson was appointed Minister of Railways and Canals, replacing Mr. Blair, and in February he took a tour of inspection of government buildings in Fredericton and also the line of the Canada Eastern Railway, an event which attracted particular attention in the press. In April the *Moncton Transcript* announced that the question of the acquisition of the Canada Eastern Railway might soon come before the House. After a series of premature announcements that the railway had been acquired by either the Canadian Pacific Railway or the Intercolonial Railway, in July Mr. Emmerson formally advanced the resolution that the Canada Eastern Railway, the main line and all its branches, be acquired by the Dominion Government for \$800,000, along with the Fredericton Railway Bridge, it having defaulted on payment of both loan and interest.

With a majority in the House, the Liberals were certain to pass the bill, but first Emmerson had to weather the required debate on the subject. From a purely fiscal point of view, he was on rather weak ground. The opposition could see from the statistics tabled that since its inception in 1884 the railway had averaged only \$40,000 net profit per year. Between 1901 and 1903, profit had sunken drastically, with an operating loss in 1902 of \$9,000 and net profit in 1903 of only \$2,400. The builders, he offered rather lamely, "did not anticipate that, after the road was built, there must be necessarily efforts made to keep up the standard of the road to retain traffic or to manage the road from the standpoint of creating business." And so for the last three years the wooden bridges had had to be replaced by steel ones, and various other essential maintenance had to be performed, consuming all profits.

On the upside, he continued, he was sure further upgrades to make the Canada Eastern Railway a quality feeder to the Intercolonial Railway, such as heavier rails, would cost only about \$1,000 per mile, and that with the towns along its line developing apace, in a few years the road might be worth 1 million, especially operating it in connection with the Fredericton Railway Bridge, also to come into full possession of the government. His strongest arguments hoped to play into fears of the Canadian Pacific Railway. As the Intercolonial Railway presently had no access to the heart of the province around Fredericton, allowing the Canadian Pacific Railway to take control of this line would compromise its interests in that area, which included the coal fields around Grand Lake, and also take away normal Intercolonial Railway business from the Canada Eastern Railway, as the Canadian Pacific Railway would ship along its own lines in preference to using the government road. Finally, making the case for government infrastructure, he noted that railroads were given subsidies not necessarily because they were meant to be financially successful transportation companies, but because they were designed to assist in the development of the country, and it is normal for there to be operating deficits in the early years. "Therefore," he concluded, "you cannot properly base the valuation of a road on its earning power."

"Fancy the rivalry between the Canadian Pacific Railway and the government of Canada," retorted Mr. Haggart, Conservative member for Winnipeg, "as to who should assume possession of that road of 136 miles, with an earning power of \$2,400 per year." No railroad that earns less than \$850 a mile per annum can possibly pay operating expenses, he affirmed, and none earning less than \$1,700 a mile per annum can ever make a profit. "Yet this is the magnificent bargain the people of Canada are going to get for \$800,000. . . . I say it would be better that this \$800,000 were pitched into the sea, or made a present of to the provinces down there and let them keep the road, than that we should enter into any such bargain as this." Mr. Borden inquired delicately whether the proposed acquisition was a special case or part of a larger plan to incorporate New Brunswick railroads into the government system. It was a special case, said Mr. Emmerson.

The official transfer of the Canada Eastern Railway and Fredericton Railway Bridge to the Crown was effected on Sept. 29, 1904. At the grassroots level, reviews were positive. There was a general sigh of relief that the CPR was out of the running, though under the Intercolonial Railway rates must necessarily rise. There were expressions of regret, as well, that Mr. Gibson was no longer in charge. Even the *Gleaner* allowed that under his management the patrons of the road "enjoyed advantages which they could not enjoy from any other manager than Mr. Gibson." The *Miramichi Advance* echoed these sentiments, remembering that while Gibson and Snowball were in charge, no

attempt was made to take advantage of monopoly power. Gibson especially, wrote the editor, "was ever generous in responding to calls for accommodation and at times gave concessions which must have cost him more than they ever returned to him." It was not for him alone, it affirmed, that the railway was built, but to develop the Miramichi and Nashwaak valleys.

The \$800,000 payment for these properties did not go into any Gibson pockets. That amount was struck off the much larger debt to Farnworth and Jardine, Gibson's Liverpool timber brokers. The unloading of the railway bridge itself was almost a win-win situation. Its promoters had stood to gain large with the construction of the Fredericton - Salisbury section of the Short Line, and in the end lost comparatively little. Interest owing by 1904 was \$299,000, not to mention the principal part of the loan at almost \$300,000. What the projectors of the bridge actually paid for construction, though undetermined, was considerably less than this. At the end they leaped nimbly from the train, before it slammed into a wall.

It might be thought that the federal election for 1904 would be a walk-over for Alexander Gibson Jr. and the Liberals in York. In his public addresses he drew particular attention to the acquisition of the Canada Eastern Railway as a part of the Intercolonial system, describing it as an "event which, in commercial importance to the business men of central New Brunswick, has not been surpassed by any other single event that has occurred during the last quarter of a century." At this point in history, New Brunswick news was being monopolized by debate over the proposed path of the Grand Trunk Pacific, and one of the proposed routes through New Brunswick was down the Saint John River near Fredericton. Gibson promised that just as he got the Canada Eastern transferred, he would get this railway to come down the valley of the Saint John. "All I ask of you now," he said, "is to pile up a good big majority for Alexander Gibson Jr."

His opponent was a man by the name of Oswald Septimus Crockett, a young lawyer of ten years standing. (His father was a former professor of classics who named all his children with a Latin ordinal to indicate their position in the family chronology.) Crockett reminded the electorate that in previous debates on the Grand Trunk, Gibson had voted against the Saint John Valley route, and that as for the matter of the Canada Eastern Railway, while everyone was glad of its acquisition, none were more glad than the Gibsons, as they stood most to gain from it, it being largely a victory for them and not for the populace generally. "Mr. Gibson had represented the interests of Alexander Gibson at Ottawa," he stated, "and that is about all he claims credit for. Is it not time now to send a man there to represent the people of this county?"

Sensing a crisis, the Gibsons put all the electoral machinery at their disposal to oppose him. It was reported later that for the first time in Marysville, every mill and factory was suspended for voters to attend the polls. The Canada Eastern Railway was enlisted for all concerned, federal survey parties were noted to be conspicuously busy working on a possible line for the Grand Trunk valley line, and prominent cabinet ministers were called upon to speak on Alexander Gibson Jr.'s behalf.

To no avail. When the final tally was made, Crockett was the surprising victor by the slender margin of 162 votes, carrying every parish but Kingsclear with majorities in 23 of 28 polling sub-stations. How to explain the inexplicable? This was the first time since Temple's Conservative victory in 1884, when Alexander Gibson senior was Liberal, that his wishes had been thwarted in York. The *Gleaner* put it down to Crockett's persistence and determination, being familiar with every part of the county and backed by an organization without a single dissenting voice. The *Toronto Daily News* saw it as a victory of youth, Crockett's organization being composed mostly of young men, his meetings largely attended by young men, and his appeal being principally to the youth of town and country.

As for Gibson Jr., he was less than gracious in defeat. Bewildered, no doubt, by the outcome, he refused to shake Mr. Crockett's hand and later threatened to "smash the face" of a Marysville employee who had hired a Conservative to do some small work for him, dismissing the man to boot. "It is unfortunate," wrote the *Gleaner*, evenly, "that Mister Gibson Alexander Gibson Jr. cannot suppress himself. His conduct is calculated to give the appearance of truth to the very erroneous opinion so frequently expressed that the rights and privileges of the people of Marysville are no better than those of the dogs on our streets. It can be said truthfully that it is not the people who are at fault, and the outside world must not misjudge because of the action of one whose name will soon be forgotten, whose influence has already been wiped out, and who was a local political factor merely through accident."

It is hard to account for Gibson's churlish behaviour. Perhaps as a scion of Alexander Gibson senior, he had come to believe himself invincible, all of his efforts in the political arena thus far having been attended with such remarkable success. Or perhaps after so much labour having secured the acquisition of the Canada Eastern Railway he felt entitled to at least this reward for his troubles. Whatever the reason, he didn't feel inclined to renew the struggle, at either federal or provincial level. His mission over, he returned to his office as Mayor of Marysville, for which he was perhaps most suited after all. 🍀