

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Cotton Mill

Numerous rumors have been afloat for some time past respecting the intentions of Alex. Gibson, to put in operation at Marysville a cotton mill or some other industry that would furnish employment to a large number of people. By the investment of some of his wealth in factories, Marysville will in a few years grow to be a large and prosperous town or city.

- Fredericton Reporter, January 19, 1881.

BANKING \$800,000 FROM the sale of the New Brunswick Railway, Gibson was now faced with the pleasant prospect of what to do with all this cash. Around this time he was invited to join a syndicate headed up by Sir William Howland to build the trans-Canada railway to British Columbia. This idea went nowhere, and in January, 1881, the *Freeman* reported that Gibson had offered to take half a million in stock in the newly formed Canadian Pacific Railway Company. This offer also was never finalized. Then the idea for a cotton mill for Marysville came to mind. Murray Young makes the intriguing suggestion the idea for the mill was not just a hard business investment, but at least partly an act of philanthropy resulting from a spiritual crisis in which Liberal leader Edward Blake encouraged him to do some extraordinary work for the people of his town.

Blake's role in this story is told in an anonymous typescript. Strolling in Gibson's garden one morning, he found his host sitting on a bench with his head in his hands, crying. "Sandy," said Blake, "your load of sorrow is hard to bear and you have my deepest sympathy, but are you the only one in tears in this busy town of Marysville? How many homes are there here where there is sorrow and want, in how many homes is the flour barril [sic] empty, why are so many children going about without shoes? Is it because their mother is a widow? Take my advice, go down to the store and from your abundance help those in need. For as you minister to the wants of those people your burden will be lessened and gradually disappear. It was the Master's way." According to this account, Gibson later told his friend Bert Lint that "when the world looks blue and you are troubled you do what the late Honorable Edward Blake told me to do."

There are some facts to back up this tale. Edward Blake did visit the Maritimes in July 1881 and may well have been Gibson's guest while in Fredericton. And there had indeed been a load of sorrow in the Gibson house at that time. Gibson's parents, probably because of ill health, had moved from Oak Bay to Marysville in 1878, and Gibson's father had died shortly after in July 1880, aged 86. Following hard on this event was the death of Gibson's eldest son John T. in October at the young age of 35. According to legend, relations between the two had not been the most congenial. Stories tell of shouting matches on the office steps, the son's drinking habit, anathema to a man like Gibson; his insistence, apparently against Gibson's own opinion, that the company should diversify into pulp and paper, coupled with the suggestion that perhaps it was time for the old man to retire. It is easy to believe that his son's untimely death left Gibson with a store of guilt, and this would have been aggravated with the death of John's two children, Florence and Frederick, aged four and two, early in the next year. And then Gibson's mother, with whom he seems to have been very close, died in February 28, 1881.

While the encounter with Blake may have given Gibson a particular impetus to act, the idea for a large local industry seems however to have predated it. In January 1881 it was reported that Gibson had just returned from a trip through Massachusetts for the purpose of inspecting that State's paper mills. As a result, affirmed the *Toronto Globe*, "In the spring Mr. Alexander Gibson will erect large paper mills at the village of Marysville, on the river Nashwaak, a tributary of the St. John river emptying into that stream opposite the city of Fredericton. He will employ a considerable number of workmen in the manufacture of the finer kinds of writing and printing papers."

Eighteen months after Blake's visit, in December 1882, Gibson filed a Memorandum of Association in the *Royal Gazette* for the Marysville Paper Company but by the spring of 1883 cotton had replaced paper as his manufactory of choice. Under Macdonald's protectionist National Policy, there were now good business incentives to open a cotton mill. Macdonald had been re-elected in 1878 with broad support from industrial concerns in Quebec and Ontario who felt with him that the future of the country lay not in the staples trade, the hewing of wood and drawing of water, as it were, the traditional industries of lumber and fishing, but in manufacturing. In Quebec, there was strong lobby pressure from cotton and textile manufacturers such as Andrew Gault, whose factories at Cornwall, Valleyfield and Hochelaga had done very well in the 1870s and bid fair to make Gault the cotton king of Canada. Under new tariff barriers foundries, sugar refineries and cotton mills began to spring up in what historian Michael Bliss has described as "a distorted, hothouse growth in manufacturing." "It seemed easy," writes Bliss,

“to get up a company, negotiate a deal for a municipal bonus, import machinery and managers from the United States, and start marking money.”

Cotton manufacture was offered special protection under the National Policy. Cotton-related tariffs in 1879 rose to an average of 17.5 percent, and would reach 29.6 percent by 1890. There were selective tariffs as well: 35 percent on cotton clothing and 49.5 on cotton shirts.

At the other end, raw cotton and most cotton yarns were admitted duty-free, while the tariff on machinery not manufactured in Canada was reduced. As a result, imports dropped as Canadian cotton mills sprang up to fill the void, and the woollen industry was displaced as the primary textile industry in the country.

Between 1878 and 1883 invested capital in the cotton sector increased from 2 to 8 million, and production from 38 million yards of cloth to 115 million. By 1885 seventeen cotton mills had gone up: five in Quebec, which with its already established mills gave it the lion's share of 45 percent; six in Ontario, four in New Brunswick and three in Nova Scotia. The cotton mill at Marysville was exactly contemporaneous with the building of three other New Brunswick mills. The St. Croix Mill at Milltown laid its cornerstone in June, 1881 and by the time Gibson began excavations had already opened for business. Gibson visited this mill in February, 1882, while it was still under construction, and reputedly turned down an offer to invest in the business - evidence, perhaps, that he had plans for a mill of his own. The Moncton Cotton Mill opened in 1882. In Saint John, businessman William Parks, who had built a cotton mill called the New Brunswick Mill as early as 1861 during the cotton crisis created by the Civil War, opened a second mill nearby, called the Saint John Mill, in 1883.

Just as Gibson would build no ordinary schoolhouse or church, so he would build no ordinary cotton mill. The dimensions of the main building would be 418 feet long by 100 feet wide. By no strange coincidence, this was exactly one foot longer and two feet wider than its St. Croix rival. At four stories in height and with a capacity for 60,000 spindles and 1,000 workers, it would also rival the size of the larger mills in Quebec and Ontario.

The architects were the Boston and New York firm of Lockwood and Green, a long-established and leading company in mill design who were also the architects of the St. Croix mill. The building would be of the most modern and approved design. That meant relatively thin brick walls with large banks of windows to let in the maximum amount of light, strengthened by brick piers let into the walls at regular intervals between windows. Spanning the building from side to side, and connecting pier to pier, were heavy transverse wooden beams. These beams supported the floor, and were themselves supported every 8 to 12 feet by tapering wooden pillars connected to each

other on the floors above and below by base plates and iron pintles. Beams were not bolted to piers but tapered and let into niches so that in the event of a floor buckling or collapsing they would not take down the walls with them. Both beams and pillars were of imported Southern Pine, known to be both strong, elastic and straight, and less liable to warp or curl than any other wood on the market. Wood was preferred to iron in this method of construction because, even if charred to the thickness of an inch, it would retain most of its strength, while iron beams and pillars were known to bend and melt even in low-grade fires.

The floors and the mill in general would be of the new "slow-burning" type of construction. Textile mills, whether woollen or cotton, were notoriously prone to fires. C. J. H. Woodbury, in his *The Fire Protection of Mills* (1882) estimated that 37 percent of all mill fires were caused by friction and combustion of flammable oils, made the more deadly by the presence of large masses of textiles and floating lint. Designers such as Woodbury, and fire insurance companies in general, were moving towards construction which would lessen the likelihood of fires, and make it easier to extinguish them, by eliminating or reducing hollow spaces. In traditional, hollow-floor design, for example, 3 x 12 joists were run lengthwise to the building on 20 inch centers, nailed over with one-inch hardwood boards, and underneath with one-inch tongue and groove pine. The result was a hollow floor with numerous spaces in which fire could propagate but not be reached with water, and in which rats could build nests with flammable materials such as rags.

In the slow-burning type of construction floor joists were eliminated altogether. The floor consisted of a layer of 3- to 4-inch thick spruce deals nailed over with a planks of 1 ¼ inch Southern Pine or some sort of hardwood, resulting in a solid floor approximately six inches thick. In the best construction a waterproof and oil-proof material such as mortar was sandwiched between these two layers, and the underside of the planks was grooved to accept hardwood splines, nailed on one side only, so that shrinkage would not reveal gaps in which fire could take hold. Aside from being more fire-resistant and impervious to rodents, solid floors were less prone to deflect under the weight of heavy machinery, more easily perforated for shafts and belt holes, and less subject to vibration caused by rapidly spinning machinery.

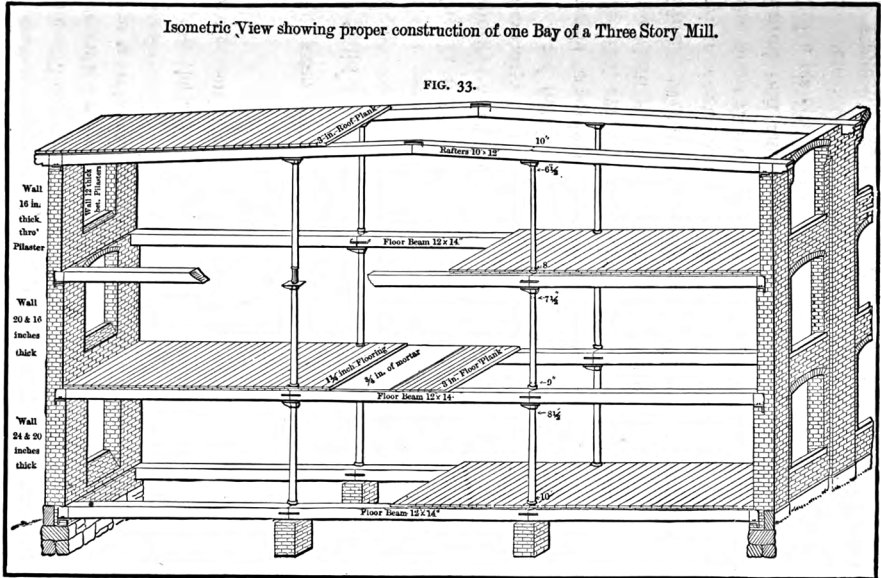
Reduction of hollow spaces extended to roofs, which were flat or nearly flat. Gibson's mill would have an external, central tower, 22 feet square and 120 feet high, a typical feature of the modern textile mill, as it kept the stairwells (vertical flues were anathema in fire-resistant construction) out of the main building, while containing a large water tank (unable to be fitted under the small space of a flat roof) which fed the building's extensive sprinkler system - again, an insurance requirement.

In the interests of fire prevention, the picker room or area in which the raw cotton was separated from basic impurities by picker machines, would be housed in a separate building, in this case 284 feet long by 98 feet wide, connected to the main building by a corridor 18 feet long. According to Woodbury, sparks from stones and nails striking the blades of picker machines were the single-greatest cause of mill fires, and for that reason he recommended blades of phosphor-bronze, less liable to emit sparks, and fire doors of a double thickness of tongue and groove boards laid diagonally and sheathed in tin.

Construction began in earnest in June, 1883. The project was superintended by a Captain Kelsey, an engineer with Lockwood and Green, while B. Mooney and Sons of Saint John had the contract for all excavation, stone-and brickwork, a job employing 200 men alone. The project was unusual in that not only the capitalization but most of the construction materials were provided by Gibson himself. The brickyards, for example, were located on site. They were overseen by John Parkes of Ontario, an international expert in the business, and the clay was dug nearby. This part of the operation alone was of significant proportions, as it was estimated that millions of bricks would be required. By July five steam-powered brick-making machines were in operation, moulding 50,000 bricks a day and firing 30,000 per kiln, the work overall of 100 men. The Southern Pine for the beams and columns was imported, but the heavy deal planks for the flooring and the wood for framing came courtesy of Gibson's own mill. A sash and door factory was also constructed on site.

Like most textile mills, even those located directly on rivers, Gibson's mill would be steam powered, as the mill had to run at a consistent speed throughout the year and could not be subject to the uncertainties of fluctuating river levels. Water would be brought in via an eight-inch main from Campbell Brook, one mile distant, at which a cedar dam was being built.

By fall the basement for the main and picker buildings had been completed, carpenters were setting up the hard pine columns, laying flooring, and the brick walls were rising. Ernest White, son of Elias White whose property Gibson had purchased to make way for the mill, remembered a few anecdotes from this period relating to Mr. Mooney of Saint John. Having been home for a week, Mooney returned to discover that one of the third storey walls was out by 1 ½ inches. He ordered it torn down and done over, wiping out the work of 80 men for seven days. Another time, being master mason as well, Mooney bet that he could lay as many bricks as he could strike (or remove from moulds) in one 8-hour day. He won his bet by striking and laying 1,400 bricks, but was himself laid up for three days afterwards, so sore that his meals had to be brought to him in bed.



W. H. Dabney, Jr, Del.

The cotton mill was roofed in by December, 1883, and by the spring the machinery was beginning to be installed. The Providence Water, Stove and Gas Pipe Company was hanging water pipes for the sprinkler system, the nodes of which would emit a five-foot spray and be activated by a temperature of 150 degrees. Water would be supplied by a huge water tank 15 x 20 x 8 feet in size now being installed in the central tower, and the *Reporter* offered to publish the name of any boy who could name the capacity of this tank.

The monster powerhouse for the mill, a 1,400 horsepower, 100-ton Harris-Corliss double steam engine fabricated in Providence, Rhode Island, arrived by steamer in July of 1884. This engine came equipped with what was noted to be the largest fly-wheel ever manufactured by the company, having a diameter of 23 feet and depth of 10 feet. It was connected to the engine by a 20-ton shaft. Typically for mill construction of this period, each floor would receive its power by a long secondary shaft extending the length of the ceiling, connected by belt to the main drive wheel and powering machinery by smaller belts along its length. The boiler room would contain ten boilers. These were fabricated by Fleming and Sons of

Slow-burning or mill construction.
C. H. Woodbury,
The Fire Protection of Mills, 1882.



Installation of the great drive wheel, December, 1884.
PANB
Assorted Photo Acquisitions #5: P61-66.

Saint John, and each bore the monogram "A. G." As the mill would burn refuse from the Gibson mills, each boiler was fitted with the Jarvis patent furnace for burning wet slabs and sawdust.

By the fall of 1884, the mules (spinning machines imported from England) were being installed, granite steps laid in front of the main doors, and a large, oval brick sewer built from the mill to the river. Interestingly, during the excavations for the waterworks, a number of large fossils were discovered. What these fossils were, or what happened to them, is not recorded.

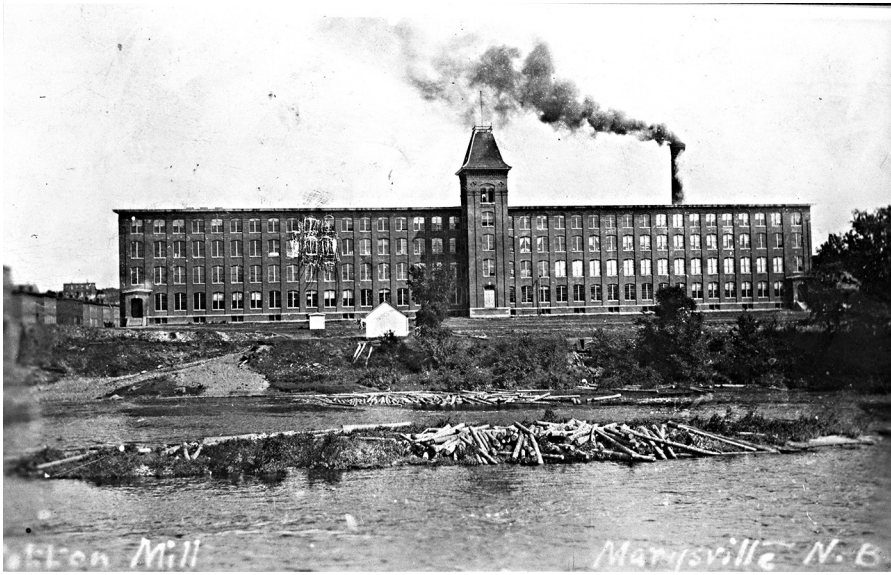
In October of 1884 the cotton factory was visited by the newly minted Governor General of Canada, the Marquis of Lansdowne, who thought its size unusual for a tiny town. A more important event occurred in January, 1885, when Mr. Gibson turned a steam valve connecting the boiler room and engine, setting in motion the great powerhouse and drive wheel, which began smoothly to revolve at its normal operating speed of 60 revolutions per minute. According to the *Reporter*, "This important

act was witnessed by several of our citizens and by hundreds of residents of Marysville and the Nashwaak, whose cheers resounded with increasing force throughout the building. The owner was as unconcerned over the operation as he would be in giving a donation towards the erection of a church.”

By March all the machinery, including 272 looms, 12,000 spindles, and 132 carding machines, had been installed, and Gibson had set off on a trip to Tennessee to purchase raw cotton. In June the new cotton mill turned out its first cloth, which was shown in son-in-law Charles Hatt's store and pronounced by those in the know to be finer than any material they had yet handled in this line of fabric. And in October the steamer “David Weston” sailed for Quebec and Ontario with a load of 126,500 yards of grey or unbleached cotton. The working capacity of the mill was being upgraded at the same time, with an order for 375 additional looms beginning to arrive, along with a flannel machine from Germany.

In one area the new mill was not immediately state-of-the-art. For a few months at least the building was lit only by the 1,200 windows that lined its walls. In order to keep the factory running during the winter, Gibson would soon install incandescent lights. Gas, by which Fredericton and just about all of the province was lighted at this time, was of course out of the question. Insurance companies were no longer willing to insure factories lit by gas.

If Gibson found an outlet for his benevolence in his cotton mill project, that was nowhere more evident than at the Christmas banquet which doubled as the mill's grand opening. Where it had been his wont to distribute Christmas boxes for the Marysville children and turkeys for its families, this year the benefactions were on a much larger scale, with every person in Marysville, and a number from Fredericton as well, totaling about a thousand, invited to Christmas dinner in the factory. Guests began to arrive around five o'clock, and Gibson was at the door with a smile and a handshake for each individual. The hall was ablaze with electric lights and adorned throughout with flags. Alexander Gibson Jr. along with son-in-law and mill superintendent Charles Hatt and other men were on hand to assist with the seating. An unbroken row of thirty tables reached from one end of the room to the other, each capable of seating thirty-four diners. The servers included Gibson's daughters and other Marysville ladies. One turkey was provided for every four persons, and the tables groaned under a weight of hams, mashed potatoes, turnips, with other vegetables and fixings, including plum pudding, pastries, oranges, apples, grapes, tea and coffee. At six o'clock, with everyone in place, all rose for grace, and during supper the Marysville Band discoursed a varied programme, superintended by James Gibson, and there were speeches to help or hinder digestion. The Band and staff had eaten beforehand, so there was no hurry to clear the tables. The editor of the *Fredericton Reporter*,



The cotton mill
under steam.
**PANB Mary
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one of the many invitees, declared this banquet to have been one of the most extensive ever held in New Brunswick, one that would linger long in the memories of all present.

BANQUET OVER, IT was time to work, a new kind of work for the people of Marysville, Fredericton and the Nashwaak Valley, one with a somewhat dubious reputation in the manufacturing business. One of the black marks against the cotton trade was its extensive use of women and children. In the 1880s, women comprised about 45 percent of all employees in the cotton sector, 18 percent of whom were under 16 years of age. In general, women filled the lowest-paid positions, the usual excuse being that the men did the heavier work, therefore deserved the higher pay. Mule spinning, requiring more skill, tended to be male domains as well and paid the best of the various weaving positions. Supervisory jobs were reserved exclusively for men. The cotton business was egalitarian only in that, compared to the manufacturing sector generally, it paid relatively low wages to both men and women alike.

Cotton work was not hard physically but required long hours of careful attention to fast moving machines. When the Gibson mill opened typical work days in Can-

ada were 11 hours with a half-day on Saturday for a total of 60 hours per week. This was a recent reduction from what had been a standard 66 hour week. Some mills allowed only three holidays a year - Christmas, New Year's and Easter. Because a great deal of the work was automated, the skill level in many departments was quite low - hence the employment of children for menial tasks such as sweeping and doffing (removing empty bobbins). In Canada, America and England it was not unusual for children as young as 9 years old to begin working at cotton mills, in extreme cases (and sometimes at the parents' bidding, as for instance in large French-Canadian families) putting in the same grueling hours as adults for less than a dollar a week. Fines for poor work, mostly in the weaving department, were a normal part of the cotton business, and were usually small but cases were known in which they sometimes outstripped a girl's meager wage and left her in debt at payday. Beatings of children and adolescents were not unknown, sometimes for offenses as trivial as speaking on the job. Finally, cotton mills were noisy workplaces, so much so that operatives, especially in the weave room, had practically to shout in their co-workers' ears to be heard. Some operatives at the St. Croix mill remembered hearing the looms clacking and banging years after retirement.

In general, cotton mills had a bad reputation. In 1882, the *Reporter* ran a series of articles by a certain "True Bluenose" against a Mr. Risteen, a local boy who was now in Fredericton recruiting girls for mill work in a Massachusetts cotton factory. "True Bluenose" took it as axiomatic "that the social position of the factory girl is the lowest in the States," that cotton lint from the looms is injurious to the lungs, that girls are crowded into rooming houses like sheep, that they are turned out of work at a moment's notice, and that living in a distant land, they are watched over only by the overseer, "who grinds them down to the dull monotony of their slavery."

Perceived abuses in the manufacturing and especially cotton sector gave rise in 1887 to a Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour, which sat in major manufacturing centers in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The Commission published its findings in several large volumes in 1888. The Commissioners' concluding remarks were little less than damning, finding "no bond of sympathy . . . between the capitalist of the large mill and his employees." On the contrary, they wrote, "To arrive at the greatest results for the smallest expenditure the mills and factories are filled with women and children, to the practical exclusion of adult males. The reason for this is obvious. Females and children may be counted upon to work for small wages, to submit to petty and exasperating exactions, and to work uncomplainingly for long hours. These are the inducements to employ this class of labor and why it is being utilized so largely." In all of this it blamed not



Employees at Marysville Cotton Mill. Cotton manufacture in Canada proliferated under Macdonald's protectionist National Policy of 1878. The cotton mills introduced the large-scale employment of women and children to the manufacturing sector.

PANB George Taylor Fonds:
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individual employers so much as the lack of governmental regulation in a system in which cut-throat competition ruled the day.

A number of recommendations were made with regards to the improvement of working conditions: chiefly, that women and children should not be employed for more than ten hours in one day or fifty-four in one week; that the employment of children under fourteen years of age be strictly forbidden; that the beating and imprisonment of children be made a penal offence; and that the system of fines in place at almost all factories, described by the Commissioners as "an instrument of petty tyranny by foremen," be done away with, the manufacturer having at his disposal "ample means to enforce discipline and secure good workmanship without depriving his hands of any part of the wages lawfully due."

Interviews at Andrew Gault's Hochelaga mill in Montreal showed the cotton business at its largest and most impersonal. It employed 1,100 workers, including

several hundred children, some as young as 8 years old, some observed working barefooted. Under the Quebec Factory act, children under 12 could not work more than 12 ½ hours a week except during the summer, when an exemption allowed 12 hours a day for 6 consecutive weeks. Mr. Gault stated that it was a pity that children had to work such long hours, but with the caveat that “The work is very light and there is not much labor about it, and probably they are sometimes just as well in the mills as they would be about the streets.” Asked whether these children might not be better off in school, Gault replied: “That class of children do not seem to go to any school; I don’t know why it is.”

At Hochelaga, girls averaged 75 to 80 cents a day, men 80 cents to a dollar. Hours were the standard 60 per week, though sometimes days were extended to 13 hours. Pay was bi-weekly, with one week in arrears. The company’s policy regarding dismissals was harsh: employees could be fired without notice, but were themselves required to give a full two weeks notice to quit and work those two weeks in full, or run the risk of forfeiting all pay owing. There were reports of children being beaten; of 25 cent fines for dropping a tube on the floor, or for a girl curling her hair with a worthless scrap of paper. As with most other mills, there were fines for poor weaving. Fines at the Hochelaga mill for the previous five years totaled \$6,009 but only \$2,279 for the nearby St. Anne mill, also a Gault property, though the payrolls were the same. Gault could not explain the discrepancy. There was a 45 minute break for lunch, but none at any other time of the day. Employees were expected to work all holidays, even religious ones, except Christmas and New Years Day. Overtime was compulsory upon pain of dismissal, but paid only regular wages. Gault said honestly but startlingly that he took absolutely no interest in the daily running of his mills, but left that entirely to his superintendents and various department overseers.

The Commission visited Marysville in its tour of New Brunswick. The interviews conducted with Gibson, his foremen, weavers, female and child employees show that while working conditions in the Marysville mill compared somewhat favorably with, say, Hochelaga, they were pretty much in the main stream of those existing in Canada at that time. In the Marysville mill as at Hochelaga and elsewhere, women and children occupied fully two-thirds of the work force. Hours were the same, 60 per week, with the slight difference that whereas in most mills hours were 11 per day with a half day on Saturday, the Gibson mill worked 15 minutes less per day and knocked off at 4:30 on Saturday. The only holiday was Christmas, though one employee stated that extra holidays were available upon request.

Men earned more than women, even for similar work. Children as young as 12 were employed in the Gibson mill, some observed bare-footed, though

this was passed off as a personal preference in young boys. Like all other employers questioned by the Commission no admission was made to corporal punishment of any sort. Gibson believed seriously in education, of course, but as at Hochelaga and in other mills, children being interviewed for work typically were not asked if they could read or write.

One of the department heads interviewed claimed that the mill payed "big wages" but in fact they were very ordinary for cotton mills in Canada. Children earned from 40 to 60 cents a day, skilled weavers up to \$1.75. Some operatives stated that they could live a bit more cheaply in Marysville than elsewhere. Even so, the difference was a matter of opinion; many did not notice any particular difference in wages, living expenses, or living conditions between Marysville and American or English mills in which they had worked.

Gibson may not have been telling the truth on the subject of fines, stating that though there had been system of fines in place, the amount collected was so small that he figured the mill could swallow it. This is a curious statement, as the *Reporter* ran an article two years later in 1890 in which it noted that "A large number of weavers employed at the cotton mill in Marysville went out on strike last Thursday. The employees complain of the system of fines at present in force, which they say has the effect of seriously lowering their wages." Gibson was away at the time, and it is not known what was the outcome of this strike, but it seems either the Commission was not told the absolute truth about fines, or a system of fines - at least for weaving - was put back in place. As for strikes, this seems to have been the only one the mill suffered, unlike the St. Croix mill and Montreal mills, which were more active in the union movement and experienced a great deal of labour unrest.

Typically for its day, there was nothing at the Marysville mill that could be called workplace compensation, though Gibson stated that injury on the job might be compensated by the company, even though there was no obligation to do so. Certainly textile mills, with their miles of belts and fast-moving machinery, were notoriously hazardous workplaces, and the Gibson mill was no exception. On this question Superintendent Googhan told the commissioners there had been only one accident in the mill since he started, adding rather evasively that he knew of it only through a newspaper report, and that "for some reason which I cannot explain," he had never thought to ask the overseer about it. This was possibly the case of a young boy named Walley who got his hand caught in a carding machine and had four of his fingers amputated. In 1894, a young man named John Allen almost died after falling into a vat of boiling dye. The next year two young men had their hands crushed and lost fingers in the mule room. Such events were not uncommon for their day, however, and it does not seem as though Gibson's mill was out

of the norm in this regard. What compensation, if any, was made to these employees, is not known, but it is not difficult to believe that Gibson personally would have done something charitable for the sufferers.

Typically for a mill town, Gibson provided accommodation for his operatives. Between 1885 and the sale of the mill in 1907, fully 53 brick tenements and a large hotel were erected on site, a bit of a reduction from Gibson's original plan for 100 structures, determined no doubt by the less than stellar performance of the cotton business in Canada and a mill that never operated at more than half capacity. Like the factory, these were designed by Lockwood and Green, and built by Mooney and Sons of Saint John. The hotel was the first to go up. A three-story structure meant to house 50 girls in 27 bedrooms, it was finished in 1887. In that year and in just about every year thereafter until 1891 a number of double or single tenements, sometimes as many as a dozen at a time, were built to accommodate the ever-increasing demand for housing. Of these tenements 39 were doubles and 14 were single buildings. The doubles were four, four-room dwellings, two up and two down; the singles were symmetrical five-window dwellings with a centre hall, living room and four bedrooms upstairs. A Parks Canada report notes that a number of decorative elements in the brickwork tied the tenements and cotton mill together and help give the town in an attractive, unified look.

Gibson was certainly not ashamed of his tenements. He invited the Commissioners to view them in person, and described them as "all just as like one another as eggs," suggesting perhaps that they gave the mill town a communal feeling. In his tenements, Gibson said, "There is a cellar all around each house, and the cellar is divided up so that each house is separate, and they do not come together at all. Each person can have his fuel at the cost of hauling the wood from the mill. A great many of the tenants keep a cow, and some of them have two, for which they get free pasturage."

As for the image of the mill drudge working long hours for little pay, Gibson himself said he knew of families who had earned enough money at his factory to build a handsome house and buy a farm, and even of those who "after being a few years on the farm, have rented it and come back to work in the mill again." The elderly, he said, preferred mill to farm work. "I know that this whole settlement could be populated," he stated, "if I could give the people the accommodation they want. You see the cotton factory and the mill gives employment to a great many hands, and they give more employment to the families than a farm would. I think there are some families here who earn over a \$100 a month, between what comes in from their own wages and those belonging to their families."

Of course, all the employers interviewed by the Commissioners put the best possible face on their operations. Workplaces would have been tidied up before the arrival of the Commission, and all would have understood the possible consequence to telling too much truth, hence the reason why some few chose not have their names divulged in the printed interviews. As noted before, Gibson may not have spoken truthfully about a system of fines. Still and all, in some very important ways, Marysville was not Hochelaga and Alexander Gibson was not Andrew Gault. Far from being the dark, satanic mill town of Dickensian England, Marysville was actually something of a tourist attraction in its day. A traveller in 1893 wrote of her surprise in first encountering it. Expecting a “dingy factory, with crowded and dusty rooms, and the small crowded tenements of the employees,” she found one of the prettiest places she had yet seen in Canada. In fact, if the mill were hidden, she affirmed, “the visitor would at once infer that Marysville was the summer home of the busy people who work the machinery in that immense brick cotton factory and the big sawmills.” Gibson, she wrote, could be justifiably proud of his manufactories, “but he has greater reason to be proud of that most enchanting town which is has built up. Of its beauty, cleanliness and picturesqueness, too much cannot be said. It is a fit home for the artist, the philosopher, as well as the merchant and manufacturer.” It is difficult to believe that many of the mill towns in Quebec and New England were receiving the same accolades.

As for Gibson himself, he did indeed take a personal and benevolent interest in his cotton mill and staff. In 1891, for instance, he declined to take action against the father of five children who had been discovered to have been stealing cotton. His imprisonment, Gibson said, would have thrown the family onto the public. The man was allowed to continue work on a promise of better behaviour, and this verdict was upheld even when it was discovered that he had stolen more cotton than was originally suspected. It is doubtful that such leniency would have been granted in the larger, more impersonal mills where the company was owned by foreign interests, and employees were unknown outside the factory gates. ❀