

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Marysville

Two penetrating blue eyes, not far apart, look out from under an elevated forehead. These eyes are not large globes for contemplating the heavens, but were made for looking right through men, right through and through life's many mixed problems, straight into the future, into the past and into the present. The mental machine in whose interests these eyes do their work belongs to the independent type of character. Make Alexander Gibson president of a railroad corporation, and he would let the other members go fishing or to bed or any decent place, rather than torture him with their notions. That railroad would go successfully, if success were possible.

- From "Our Lumber King," Correspondence to the Halifax Herald, Aug 4, 1887.

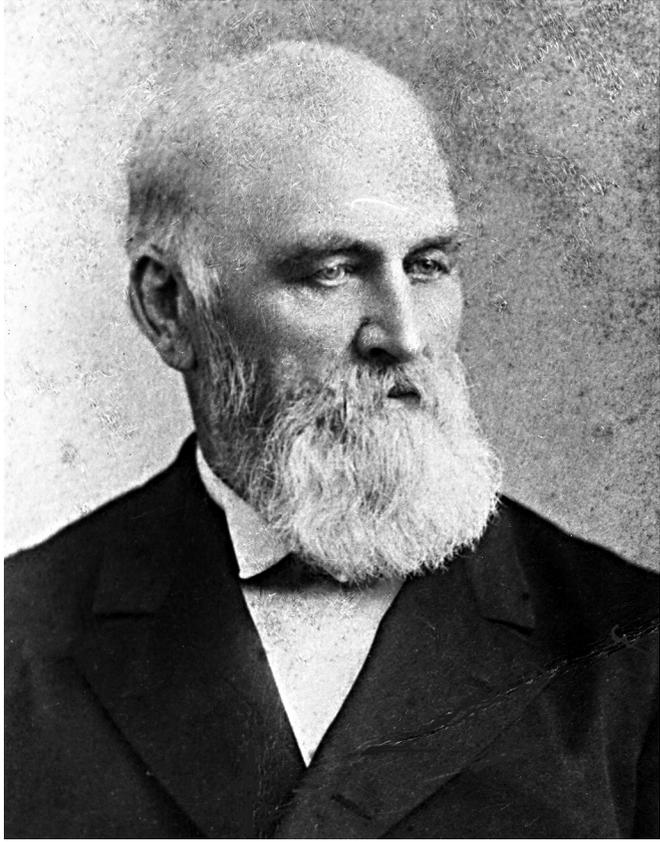
PROBABLY IF GIBSON was proud of any one part of his empire, it was Marysville, a town made largely in his own image. Marysville was in some ways a typical company town, in that all aspects of life were colored by the lumber mills, cotton mill, and railway, with top administrative positions controlled by the founder, family and friends. In 1892 the "Marysville's Bad Boy," a light-hearted correspondent to the *Miramichi Advance*, noted that "The site is Sandy. It is bounded on the north by ole Sandy, on the south by yung Sandy, on the east by Jim and on the west by Unkle John." In administrative terms for that year, the Mayor of long standing and councillor in Ward One was Alexander Gibson Jr., the eldest son, working his way into management of the lumber operations; in Ward Two was trusted lieutenant Charles Hatt, son-in-law and book keeper of the cotton mill; and in Ward Three son James Gibson, learning the intricacies of the cotton business, along with Alfred Rowley, book keeper for the lumber mill and an employee of Gibson senior since 1866. Also councillor in Ward Two was Hugh Alexander, a native of Milltown, former employee of Todd and Sons, like Alexander Gibson himself, and probably the son of the Hugh Alexander to whom Alexander Gibson, grandfather of the Boss, sold land at Oak Bay in 1827. In short, a close family friend. In the previous administration "Unkle John" served on council as well.

If Marysville was at all atypical it was in the extent to which its founder exercised personal and paternal control over work and daily life. This aspect of Gibson's character has been much remarked on. According to legend this

Alexander Gibson
(1820 - 1913).
One of only five
pictures of Mr.
Gibson, and of
only three formal
portraits.

PANB

**Assorted Photo
Acquisitions #4:
P37-100.**



tall, rather heavy-set individual, sharp blue eyes contrasting with white beard and soft felt hat, would often be seen strolling the streets, even into advanced age and in spite of all the pressures of his large business empire, making routine inspections at work places in what Susan Rosevear describes an unusually personal management style. Except for his railroads, Gibson was an old-fashioned entrepreneur who seems not to have speculated in the stock market, preferring rather to invest his money in community-based projects which he watched over as a parent watches over its child.

Such attention could be comforting or condescending, depending on whether you were being personally escorted to your church pew, or, as Minister, aware that Mister Gibson, humming or tapping his cane audibly during the service, was not especially happy with some



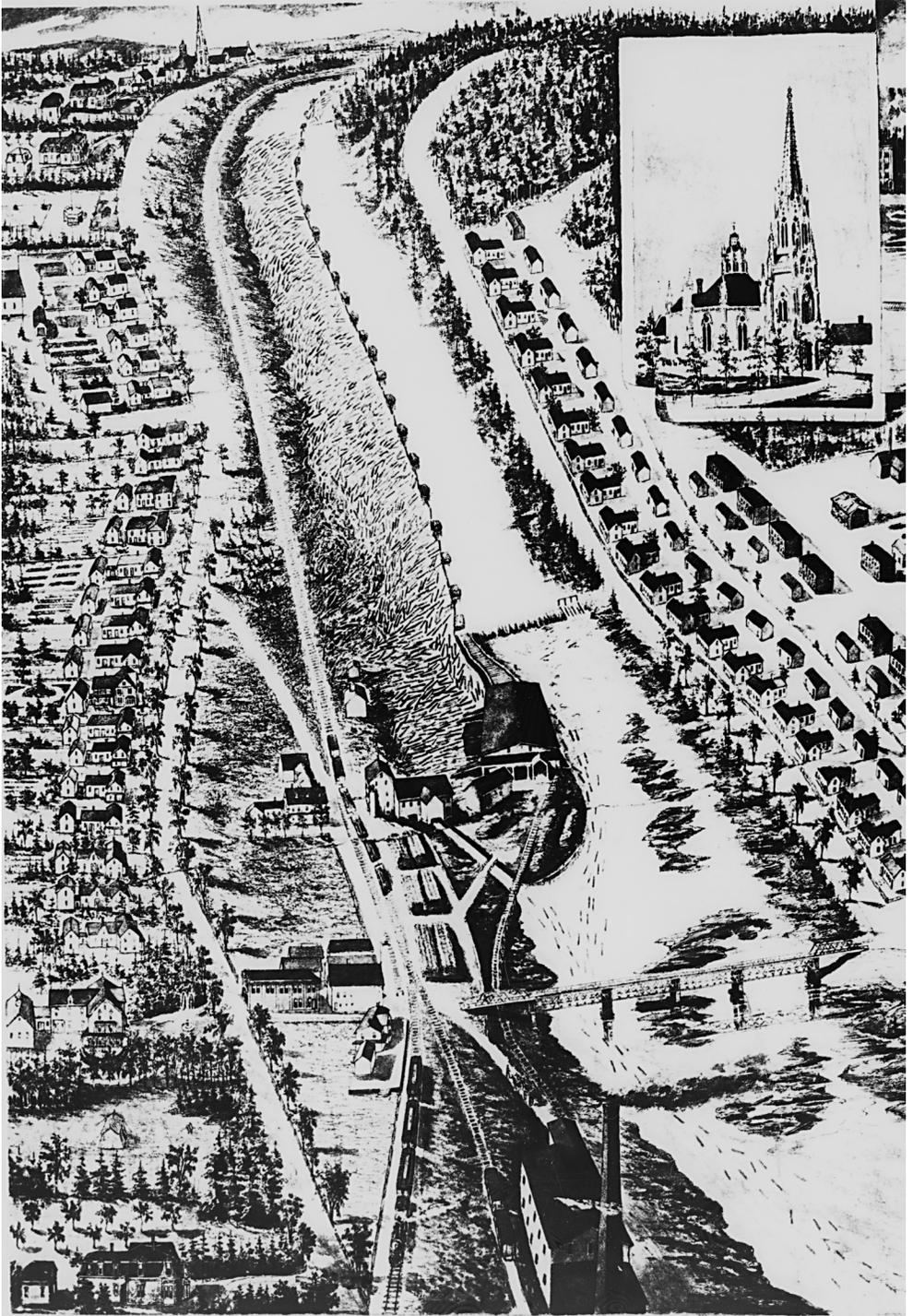
Charles Hatt (1857 - 1918). A native of Penniac, Mr. Hatt married Alexander Gibson's daughter Annie Watson Gibson in January 1883. He was long-standing superintendent of the cotton mill and also served as Mayor of Marysville.
PANB Doug Pond Marysville Collection: P70-23.

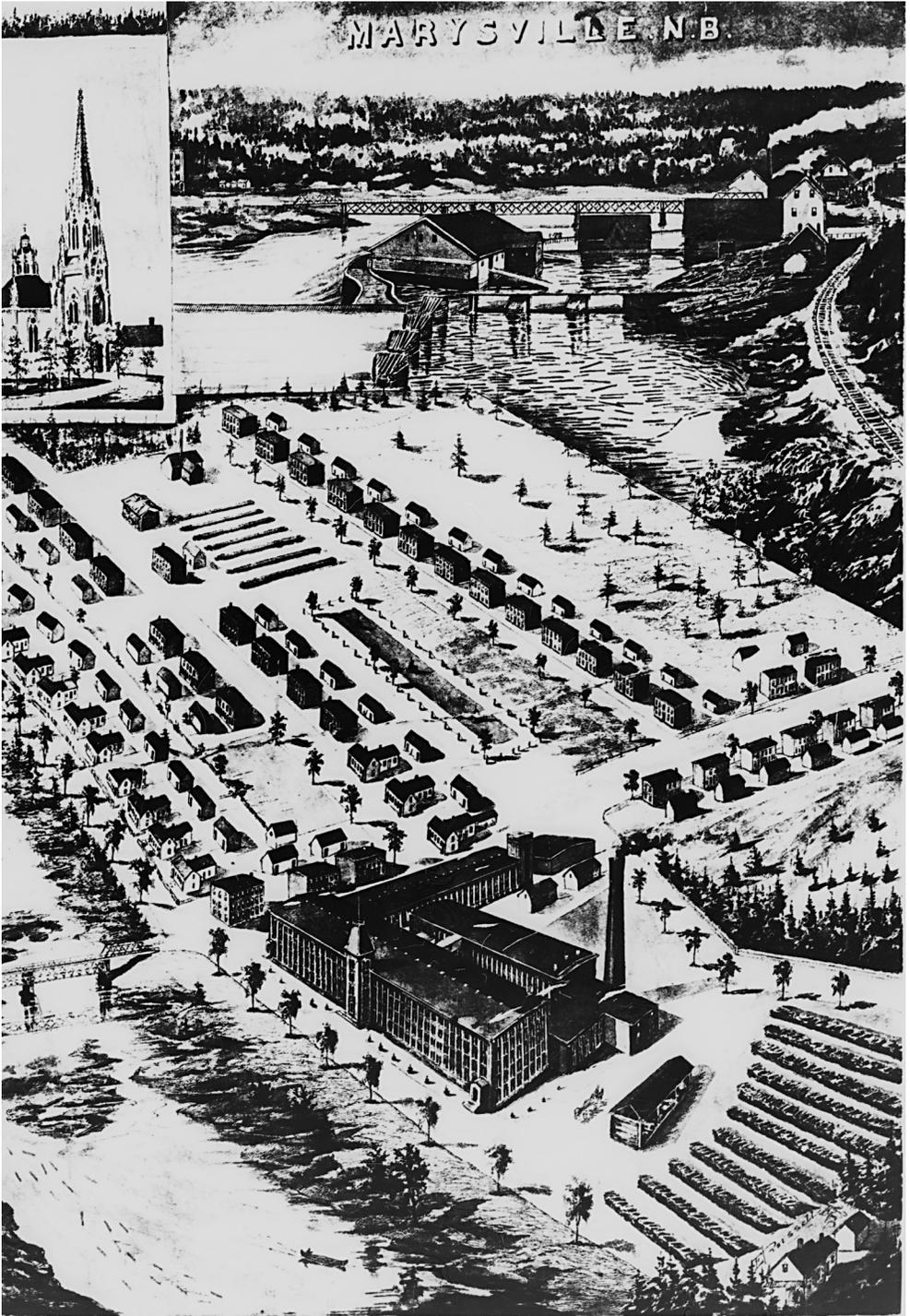
aspect of your sermon. Such at least is a tale told by Fred Phillips in an item for *Canadian Magazine* in 1936, one which has become part of Gibson folklore.

When Gibson was angry, the whole town knew it. If "Marysville's Bad Boy" is to be believed, the town had two big dams. "One is the mill dam wick can be herd morn a mile in fine wether; the other is old Sandy's dam wick can be herd in storm wether fer a mile and a half." It could be unwise to cross the master. The chief exports of the cotton mill at that time, wrote the "Bad Boy," "is cotton and cotton mill superintendents wick has rowed with old Sandy. Its leadin' imports is more cotton mill superintendents."

If there was anything Gibson drew a hard line on it was alcohol. He informed the Royal Commission on Capital and Labour in 1888 that "There has been no li-

Next Spread -
Marysville seen
from above, c.
1895.
LAC NMC 2231.





Marysville