

A History of George Gibson seen through the eyes of daughter Joan Shaw

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Submitted by:  
Shannon Drought  
to the  
Lake Country Heritage and Cultural Society

George Middleton Gibson's chronological record of events, as of his life and development, has unfolded through the eyes of his daughter Joan Shaw Gibson. History itself has a long-range perspective, as does the formal systematic account of George Middleton Gibson, his wife Grace and two daughters Pamela and Joan. The life experienced by George Gibson and his family is told through his daughter's memory, Joan Shaw.

An annual Strawberry Tea was held at Kopje Park again this year and the Gibson home and their history was open to the public. Joan Shaw (nee Gibson) Jack McCarthy and myself sat down together and discussed her past. She shared her memories of her father George Gibson, her mother Grace and sister Pamela. We laughed and enjoyed out time spent together.

Joan spent much of her time with her father; he told his past in great detail, sharing with her his trials and tribulations, his successes and exciting finds. She also shared with us her past, outlining the ups and downs throughout her childhood and adolescence.

Joan was born during the disease era in England on November fifth 1918. The Gibson family traveled back to Canada after the First World War when Joan was in arms. Joan's health was not strong, but with the wonderful aid of Dr. Knox she was able to recover to her full potential. As the years passed Joan had to occupy herself while everyone was hard at work. Joan developed a great imagination. As a child Joan had a small horse which quickly, without thinking, became her pet puppy that didn't leave her side. Joan also had a playhouse located in the back corner of their property near the gigantic tree that still stands today. Joan can recall the tree being gigantic as she grew up which was in the thirties, and until the tree is taken down no one will know the exact age of the tree. When Joan was older she built a wharf for herself out of the balcony railings. The railings were taken down to put up bug netting so the children could sleep on the deck at night. She would paddle herself out and just float while her imagination ran rampant. At night while sleeping on the deck she could hear the paddle wheelers go by like swans gliding on the lake. Joan can remember that the family would never drink the lake water, they had to boil it. Joan had found cats drowned in old potato sacks and the paddle wheelers dumped their garbage straight into the lake, the packinghouse would also dump their apples straight in the lake. In later years the packing house would put the apples up on the cattle range, but then discovered that the cattle were getting drunk, they were finally given to Sun Rype. The lake water was used to water the garden and kitchen garden; this pipe ran from the lake up the hill to a 9000-gallon tank that pumped the water back to the house. As Joan grew up and became responsible she had more freedom. One summer was spent hiking in the Rockies with her friends Bob Wentworth, Bob and Nancy Goldie, and Sid Land. As Joan grew to be school age she had to start attending lessons. Up the hill from the Gibson's, on the Commonage road there were two

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schools. The first, was Sunnywold that was situated right before the Thompson's, and the second school was located farther up the Commonage Road. That is where the youngest of the Thompson's, Mary Bailey, attended school with her two brother's Archie and Angus Bailey. There were approximately nineteen students in the early 1920's. There weren't that many school options for Joan, she would have to travel to Okanagan Centre, but during the winter she would have never made it. Joan attended a few lessons at Mrs. MacFarlane's and then lessons at the Robinson's; they were located on the rocky point with the log house. She then proceeded to attend St. Micheal's in Vernon at the age of nine, where she began grade three. She had a harder time than the others did because she hadn't had any continuous schooling in grades one and two. She spent one year at St. Micheal's then she and her sister went to boarding school in Victoria; they attended St. Margaret's. To get to Victoria, Joan and her sister Pamela would have to travel to Vernon then to Sicamous on train then from Sicamous to Vancouver. The girls would then jump onto the Princess boat across to Victoria. Joan and her sister would travel home at Christmas and during the summer.

Christmas at the Gibson house was very nice and cozy. The family would go up behind the house in the bushes and hunt for a Christmas tree. They would have Hilda and Rex Cheeseman over for a nice lunch. Every year Okanagan Centre would have a children's Christmas party held by the community. Joan can remember playing games and eating treats at the Christmas Party. There was always a problem with Santa's reindeer; they were always late in arriving. Mr. Pixton was Santa and he was great at it. He always thought of himself as an amateur actor and comic.

(The Pixtons lived down by Pixie beach until their home burnt. Then they moved to the end of Pow Road, then resided at the bottom southeast corner of Camp Road. See map for exact location.) He joined in all the activities with the children especially the handing out of gifts. To Joan's recollection this was the only activity in which the Japanese families were included. That was special for her because many of the children became her friends.

Pamela and Joan would return to school and they loathed every minute spent there, especially in Victoria. They had to share the school with a great number of Yankee classmates, as she put it. The girls attended school at a time when there was a great depression and the Canadian dollar was not worth much. The Americans were sending their children up to Canada because it was cheaper. Joan attended St. Margaret's until the age of seventeen. She then traveled back and worked for her father for 25 cents an hour, which was the going rate at that time. After working for her father and the Okanagan Centre packing for a short while Joan applied to Kings College in London where she would study to become a physiotherapist. Soon enough her acceptance letter arrived, so the family went to Vernon to find out when the next train to St. John's departed. They arrived at the train station and the next train was leaving that evening. So the family hurried home to collect Joan's things and to say goodbye to friends and family. On the

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way home Joan bought her dear friend Anne Goldie a wedding present for she was to be married in 1939 to Sid Land. She went to Anne's home and had tea and with that took off to find her sister in Okanagan Centre, so that she could some time with her before she left for London. She packed and was off to Vernon for her long journey to St. John's Newfoundland. From there Joan would board a ship to England. When she arrived in St. John's her luggage was no where to be found. The ship wasn't going to leave until they found her luggage, then to her great surprise it was found in an empty train cart. When she boarded the ship she went to her quarters to settle down and once again to her surprise she was put in men's bunks. The trip was long with a few complications; nevertheless, Joan made it to England safely to begin her education in physiotherapy.

While she was attending college in London, as a physiotherapy student, the Second World War began and it was just as awful as the first. She was assigned to Epsom Hospital in Germany, as part of the Canadian Army. The hospital was filthy and the food was not edible. Joan worked here as a P/A (physiotherapy assistant) for a few months. She can remember mealtime to be the worst scramble. The only way to get a half-decent meal was to break into groups of fours. When the meals were served they were served in a small cafeteria for hundreds of hungry nurses. One would go for bread, another for tea another for butter and the last for anything else that could be found. It was the only way to get meals otherwise you would break ribs, arms and ankles. As Joan traveled from hospital to hospital she can remember eating child size meals because she knew she was able to live with that much in her stomach. She was always thinking of her father and the amount of food he received during the war. She knew that by eating only a small portion there would be more food for others. Conditions were horrid; there were thirty people to one bath and no soap. At one time Joan and a colleague had two-thirds the casualties which was approximately 300 patients through the day. The nurses were treated like servants but fortunately most of the Canadians had status. Joan was a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant for 6 months. The war continued with vengeance and the day of the invasion was clearly remembered by Joan, she could not hear her own voice over the voices of the planes. The sky was so full of aircraft's a person could barely see, the sun would shine, but it felt dark and gloomy.

At last Joan was able to return home to Canada. On her return a woman asked her to bring her three children back with her. Joan had to think long and hard of this responsibility, she wasn't used to children. She asked if she could meet the children and get to know their personalities, just to make sure that she was able to carry on to Canada with all three. She met with the children and took on the responsibility; and brought them to Canada. The family, the Gilberts, gave her money for taking their children and Joan bought a warm beautiful jacket. Joan and the children boarded on the first ship, but ended up switching to another. Later Joan found out that the original ship that they were on was taken captive and most people died or drown. They received three meals a day until they

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Joan's stories did not end there, she continued to tell the stories of her father and the way she remembered him, generous and peaceful.

George Middleton Gibson was born on November 28, 1880 in Nottingham England. He belonged to a family of three brothers and sisters. The oldest was Annie Rose Gibson, James Bailey Gibson, William G. Gibson and George Middleton Gibson, being the youngest. In his era it was very common for people to mature and then find work in New Zealand. George followed that pattern until one unexpected day when he decided to move to Canada with a man by the name M.P. Williams in 1904. M.P. Williams was a very wealthy man, not with money but with land. He was very involved with the Kelowna Agricultural Society and was a good friend to Gibson. Before traveling to Canada George Gibson had studied at Wye College of Agriculture, thus moving to Okanagan Centre was a good decision because it put his knowledge and skills of agriculture to use. The first farm he gained experience from was the Pritchard and then the Dereks. He took over the farm for the Pritchards while they traveled back to England. When they returned that year money was tight and they paid him in horse and saddle. That is when he took off for Vernon and when dark hit he traveled towards the nearest light, he then spent that night on the floor with many other travelers. At that time Gibson was looking for property to purchase. He made inquiries of property for sale and was guided to a property opposite Nahun (see map). Nahun is an Indian name meaning the mother of a child and the island is called Nahun Weenox- the child of the mother with a child. The Indians told the story that the island has a chamber of air in it and that it floated away and grounded where it is now. The island would fit into a spot at Nahun where there are the same rock formations like sharp knives piled side by side. During the late 1930's Mr. Cools who was living at Okanagan House bought the island for two bottles of whiskey and back taxes, so it became known as Whiskey Island.

Gibson camped at this point for a while then purchased the property in 1906. Gibson bought it from a white man and not the government. The amount he paid for the land was not discovered but Gibson paid forty dollars a year on taxes. The property had already gained a name from the Natives; it was called Cussasonyx, which meant paradise point. This point was used by the Natives to build fires to attract the Kickaninnies (Kokanee). Gibson knew there were Natives at this point because he had found fire pits with arrowheads and skimmers. Also some old fishing gear was found near the lighthouse. (see map) (The lighthouse was

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situated near Whiskey Cove to the left of the Paddock on a small island. The Paddock was named by Evi and Doug Cools, who ran a summer arts school for children.) Mr. Brixton was in charge of the maintenance and changing the light in the lighthouse every year. Mr. Brixton was an English man and a veteran of the Boar War. He sold fish to Mr. Gleed, and Mr. Gleed sold it through his store or to Kelowna. At the time Gibson bought his land, the mail traveled by stagecoach. He picked up his letters and parcels left in a wooden box nailed to a big tree where the Okanagan Centre Road meets Oceola. Mail could be left there for several days and nobody would touch it. When the stage coaches stopped being used, the mail came on the paddle-wheel boats to Carr's Landing, named after the postmaster Andy Carr who ceremoniously put on his spectacles, sorted the mail and handed it out to people waiting on the wharf. Later on, we got our mail at the Post Office in the Gleeds store at Okanagan Centre.

After camping out under the stars on his newly purchased property George Gibson built a four-bedroom house just left of the Gibson family home. He lived here as a bachelor for seven years. Throughout the years George Gibson became good friends with a group of bachelors. They had many tennis tournaments and sailing races that took place on the other side of the lake. At the end of a tournament the group would have a delicious meal provided by George Gibson, he had a great talent in the kitchen. When all the single men got together they had to make due with what they had. At that time butter came in cans from New Zealand, so to weigh their food Gibson used a full can of butter on one end of a stick and the other he would fill with water, it would rest on a straight edge chair and worked like a normal scale.

Throughout his time as a bachelor he also spent a season at O'Keefe Ranch which he said was the most interesting experience. He slept beneath the machinery with fellow workers of every color and creed.

Gibson had a lot of land, some of Cotton Wood Flats up until Whisky Cove. Cotton Wood Flats is where the Sea Cadets and Girl Guides had their yearly campouts. Gibson allowed the campers to have a shed so that they could store their campout utilities. Gibson sold a portion of Cotton Woods to a man of the name McNaire, he was a Scottish bachelor. This property was sold to McNaire for two hundred dollars, which was very inexpensive, he sold it to the man so that he could begin to establish and stabilize his life. It says a lot for Gibson; he was a generous and honest man. He kept in touch with McNaire often and one day Gibson and some friends went to visit him because his health was very poor. When they reached the McNaire home he was not moving, he had passed away. The men took McNaire to Campbell's Furniture Store; this is where the morgue was located. When they brought McNaire into the morgue he moved, in fact McNaire was not dead. Immediately they brought McNaire to the hospital and he died shortly thereafter.

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George Gibson did not have many neighbors, but Joan remembered being told stories of two men. One that stuck out in her memory very clearly, was one of a Yankee man named George McCalla. On December 30 1907, George McCalla was having dinner with an acquaintance of the name Joseph Ethier, also known as Joe Itchy, a French Canadian. After much drinking an argument issued and they shortly separated. Later that evening they met again and Joe Itchy kept pursuing McCalla. George McCalla pulled his 32-caliber revolver and shot Joe Itchy below the right shoulder puncturing his lung. Joseph Ethier died at 1:00am on the first of January, but before he died he said, "I'm all in" and that he had no quarrel with McCalla. McCalla was then sent to prison and after many witnesses he was sent to jail at the age of sixty-six. George McCalla commissioned George Gibson to sell his property, which is now known as Wiskey Cove. It was sold to Fleetwood Wilson in 1910.

One day a woman, Grace Chapman, was sent to Gibsons house to bring a telephone message, this was the day that Grace and George met. They were married back in England on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 1913. Grace Chapman was born in Tonbridge England on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December in 1889. When she was twenty-two Grace accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Ward to their Okanagan House at Sunnywold. George took the boat down to Vernon on occasion and he would get Grace to pick him up at the Okanagan Centre wharf. This one specific trip that he made to Vernon was noteworthy for Grace. To meet George down at the Okanagan Centre wharf Grace had to fetch a horse, harness it and drive there in the buggy. All went well until she was trying to put the collar on. She couldn't decide which way it should go. Remembering a picture of a horse in harness in the Eaton's Catalogue, she ran up to the house to get it. With the catalogue propped open on a tall oat barrel, she was able to complete the harnessing and met the boat on time. (The Okanagan House was built in 1908 for Dudley Wards by James Gleed, Curly Carter and Teddy Hare. After the Wards lived there the Stanfords lived there then the Coolies. Neufield bought the home in 1975 from Doug and Euy Middleton. The house was in very poor condition. It was filled with all kinds of junk as well as dead animals. It was noted for having Oak Wood pig sties. It was also known as the piggey at Irrawara now Wiskey Cove.) In 1912 George got Teddy Hare to build the family home so when they returned home from England it would be completed and livable. Jim Gleed, a stone mason, built the rock wall in the front and a granite fireplace in the sitting room. Soon enough their first child was born on September 16<sup>th</sup> 1915, her name was Pamela and she was born in the Vernon Jubilee Hospital. The following year George Gibson joined the Canadian Army and trained in Vernon. Grace Gibson and her new child Pamela went to England for the rest of the war. George Gibson was part of the 122<sup>nd</sup> division arranged to be transferred to the English Northumberland fusiliers; he went across to France in 1918 and was taken prisoner near Lille. He was a low ranking officer and as a prisoner he was lead through Lille and then through Rhine. Gibson has a diary of when he was a prisoner of war, it was given to Joan Shaw's son. Gibson can remember when he was on a cattle train in Pilau, where

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Poland and Russia joined, seeing a girl standing in the middle of an onion field. She picked up the raw onion, at that moment he realized the starvation was incredibly awful and it was going to get worse. Throughout the war Gibson received acorn purée and 1/2 piece of black bread. When Gibson got out of the war he was unrecognizable. When the family returned to Canada, they returned to nothing. The man that Gibson left in charge of his property had gotten married to avoid inscription. He didn't irrigate any of the land and it was dehydrated, it would take a lot to be farmable again. At that time Gibson decided, instead of staring over, he would reside to mixed farming. Raising pigs and making butter and selling it in small quantities. Gibson would sell his butter and soft fruit to Vernon. He built the fruit boxes in the shed and would load up his boat and ship it down to Okanagan Centre, and from there it would get on the bigger boats and be shipped to Vernon. Gibson would take his own boat, the Tortoise, to Okanagan Centre. He named it the tortoise because it was so slow. The war effected George Gibson for the rest of his life, in later years the starvation that he experienced during the war ruined his circulation, eventually effecting his brain in the reading and writing areas. He was a broken man but within a few years time he re-gained life. Although the land was not in good shape they returned to a warm house, to what Gibson called Eversley. The Eversley house was the original name of the house (used by Gibson), it is where George grew up, Eversley village New Hampshire. Everone else knew the home as the Gibson home. (Teddy Hare, Curly Carter and Jim Glead built the house in 1913. It was built for George Gibson, who lived there until the 1940's when Ernie Broome of Vancouver purchased it. He ran Eversley as a summers childrens camp and called it camp Kopje after the hill behind the property. Kopje was named after a battle in the Boer War, though it is not known whom.)

George and Grace Gibson were very active members in the community. Grace was member of the St. Margaret's guild, in the parish of Woodsdale, a school trustee and part of the Women's Institute. George was a people's warden and enjoyed playing tennis. Every Saturday the family would travel to Okanagan Centre to play tennis Both Grace and George were devoted fan's of ice hockey, which became popular in Vernon in the thirties.

George Gibson passed away June 10, 1950. After his death in 1950, Grace bought Frank Gray's apricot orchard in the south end of Lakeshore (Okanagan Centre Road West) and 6<sup>th</sup> street; it was a small house that straddled two properties.

Pamela was married to Frederick Robert Wentworth and had two children named Rosemary Ann Carter and Micheal Wentworth. Pamela died in 1979 at the age of sixty-four.

Joan settled down with Robert Shaw and they had three children of their own, Robert Shaw, Christine Shaw and Susan Shaw.

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June-23-11  
11:34 AM

*As a final question of the intriguing interview, I asked Joan what her father would have to say about his home being a great part of our history. She responded in saying "George Gibson was a very amiable human being and would have been delighted and very gladdened for the entire acknowledgement and respect his history and home has received throughout the years."*

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# MAPS

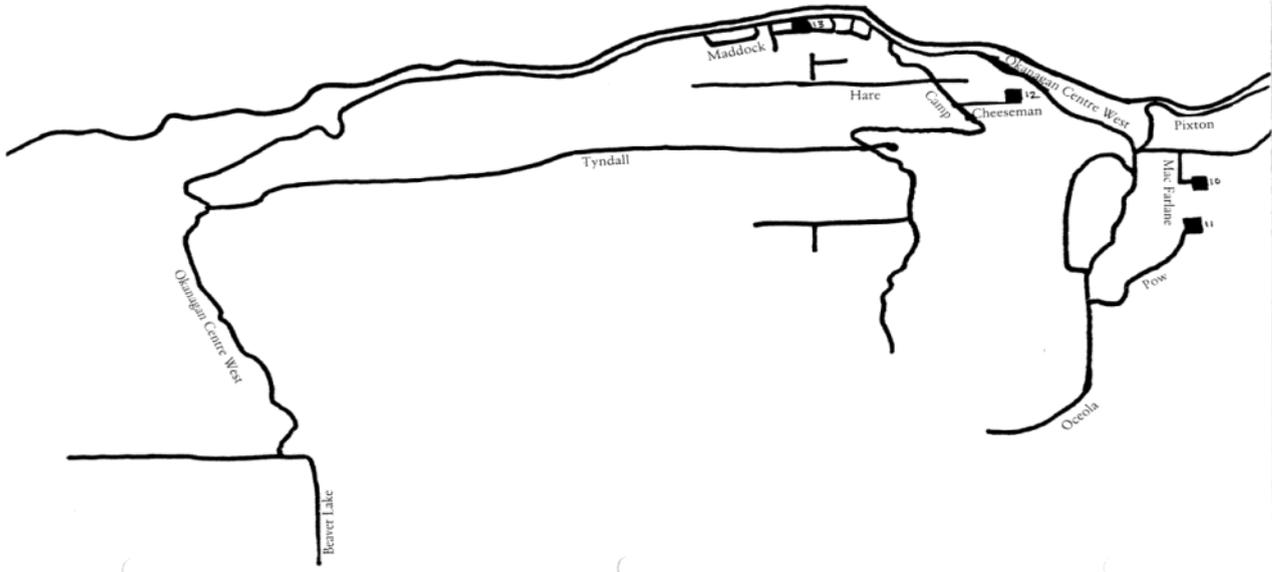
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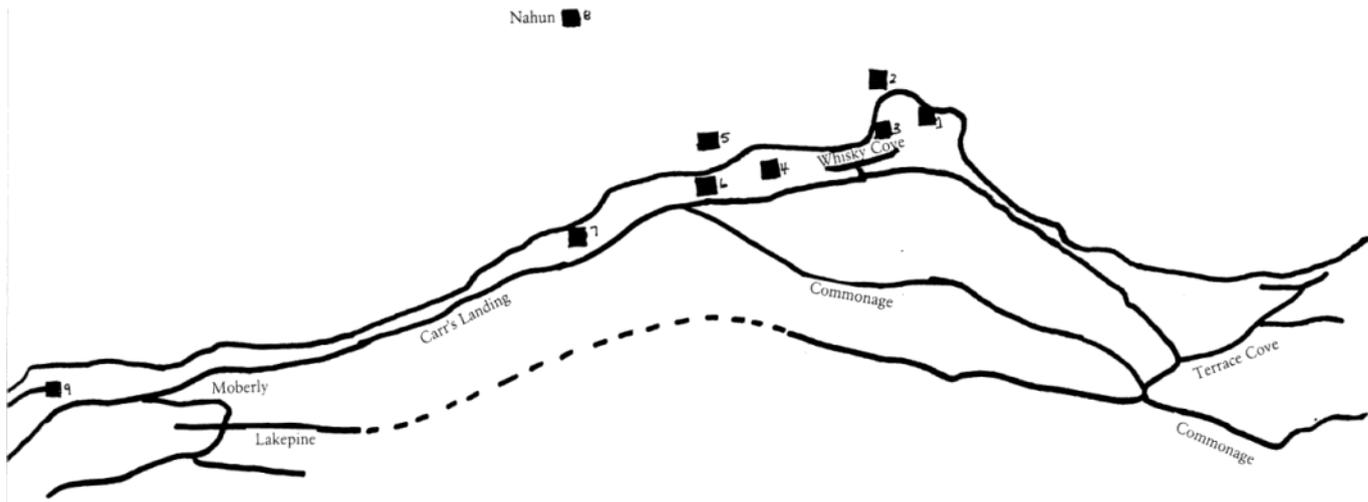
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- 2- Lighthouse
- 3- Whisky Cove- Mr.McCalla's property which Gibson commissioned
- 4- Okanagan House- Wards home
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- 6- Gibson Home
- 7- Cotton Wood Flats- Mr. McNaire's property, now Camp Arbuckle
- 8- Nahun
- 9- Pixton's first home
- 10- Mrs. MacFarlane's- Joan attended school lessons here
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- 12-Rex and Hilda Cheeseman
- 13-Brixton House

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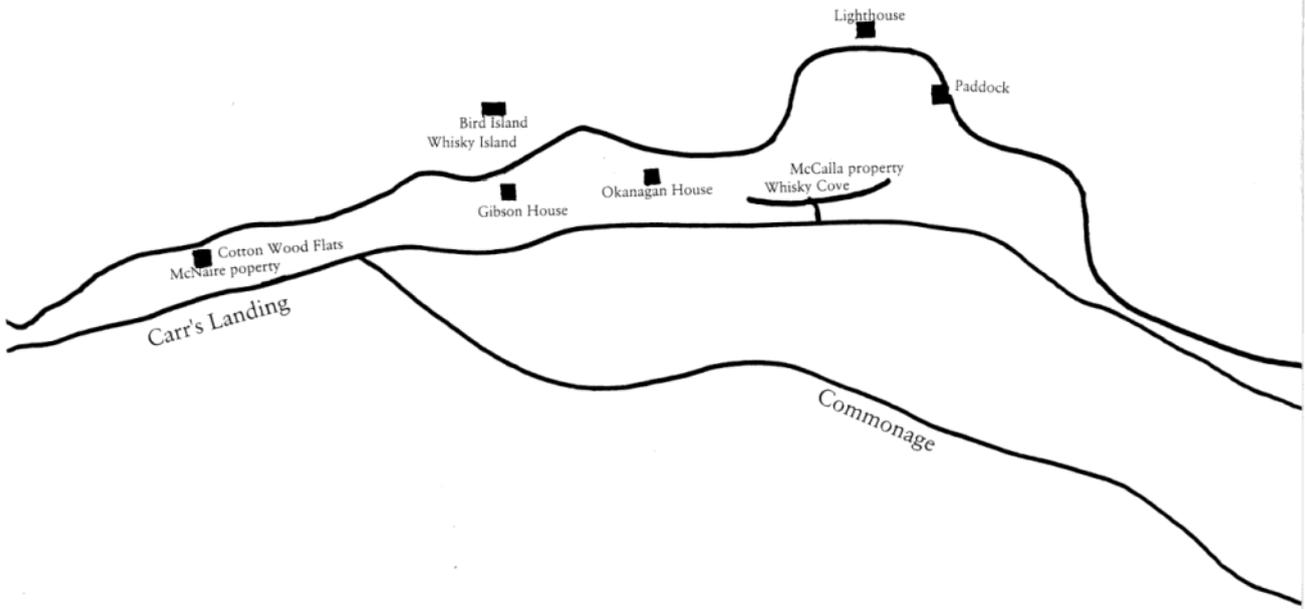
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George Playing Tennis With Friends