

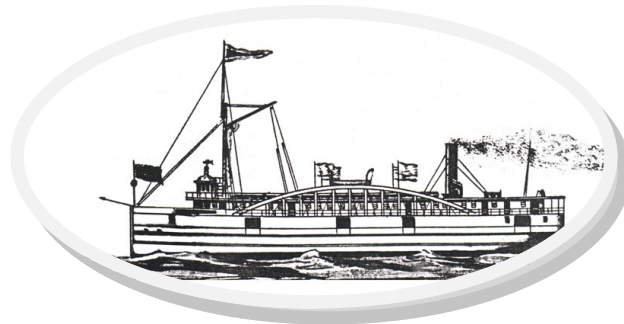
The Murder Mystery

A graphic featuring the title "The Murder Mystery" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The text is partially overlaid by a circular magnifying glass. Inside the magnifying glass, a detailed fingerprint is visible. To the right of the magnifying glass is a simple line drawing of a magnifying glass handle.

The Death of William Gibbard

STEAMBOAT STORIES

A collection of stories featuring vessels and events on the Upper Great Lakes in the 19th and early 20th centuries



The Murder of William Gibbard

One of a series of

Steamboat Stories about the Upper
Great Lakes



The gravestone of William Gibbard at All Saints Anglican
Cemetery, Collingwood Ontario

Murder on Georgian Bay

Part 1

William Gibbard Comes to Canada

Eleven years after the government of Upper Canada sent detailed instructions to Charles Rankin to survey the southern shores of Georgian Bay (1833), William Gibbard arrived in Collingwood from England. Gibbard was one of several sons of John Gibbard, an English landowner in Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire. John Gibbard was a major in the Bedford militia and a local magistrate. The family home, Sharnbrook House, was set in a Victorian pastoral estate of landscaped gardens, ponds, and cultivated fields. It was a home for a family of high social status. A person of privilege, an Anglican, and a sense of entitlement fit well into who William Gibbard was. Like many of his class there was an embedded belief in empire and a disdain of “lesser breeds.” William Gibbard embodied those values.



Sharnbrook House, the Estate of John Gibbard in Berwickshire, England. William Gibbard grew up as a member of the privileged class of landed gentry in the early 19th century. His values reflected those of his station in life.

It was customary for many young men of the landed gentry without inheritance

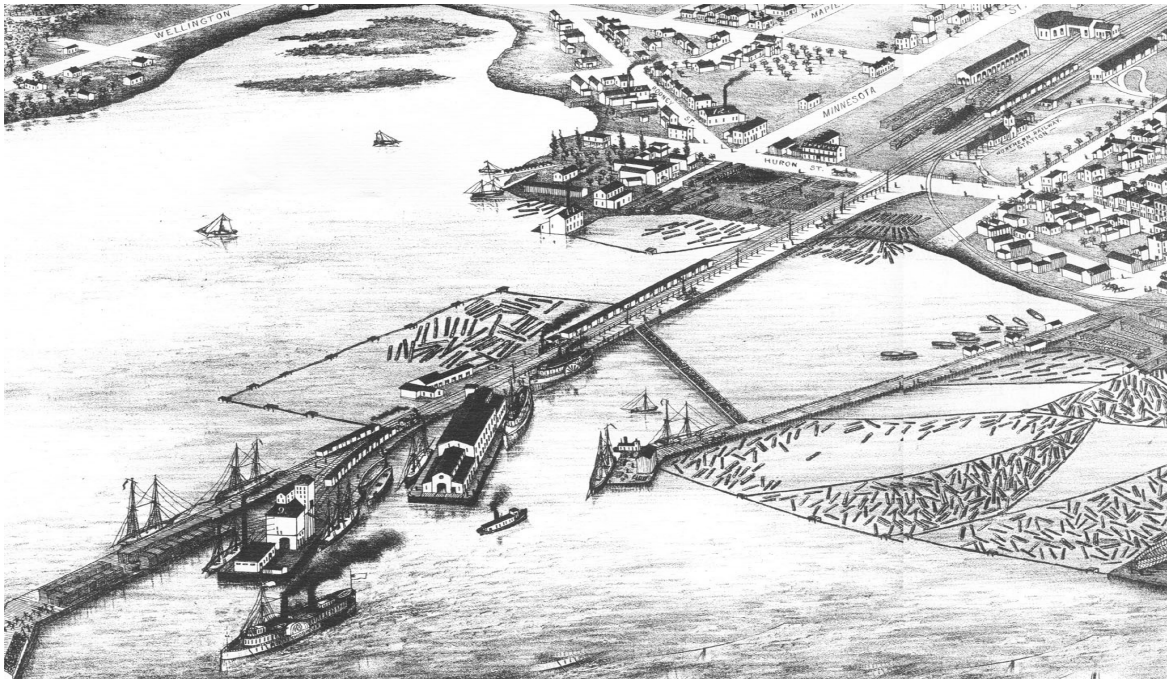
to follow a career in the military, government bureaucracy, or foreign service. As a younger son of John Gibbard, William was without inheritance. His choice was the military. He was admitted as a gentleman cadet to the East India Artillery and Engineer Seminary in 1833 where he attended for two years when he was fifteen. His curriculum included everything from Hindustani grammar to trigonometry. His Bible and prayer-book were as important as his personal kit. The program was rigorous and typical of British public schools (similar to established private schools in North America).

In 1836 he was posted to the British India Company's Bombay Infantry. He was given the rank of a lieutenant until 1840 when he was charged in a British court of law with the murder of four Indian prisoners; "aliens" or "rebels" as the court referred to these men who were natives of Sawunt Warree an independent state near Goa, India. There was some question at the hearing whether he committed the murders or directed his soldiers to shoot the victims. There was also some question whether Gibbard was acting to quell civil disobedience in the region or to control a riot. In the end a grand jury found that Gibbard could not go to trial because his actions were taken against "unhappy sufferers" not entitled to the protection of British law. Gibbard however was dismissed in disgrace from the regiment.

William Gibbard returned to England and entered Cambridge in 1840 where he graduated with a surveyor's qualifications and subsequently moved to Canada. In 1844 he was hired as a surveyor in Simcoe County, Canada West (Ontario). His survey of Collingwood in 1854 laid out a future city on the shores of Georgian



Bombay Infantry Regiment 1863



Collingwood was the terminal end of the Northern Railway (officially called the Ontario, Simcoe & Huron Railway). The railway was built in 1855. It carried mail, material, and people from Toronto to Collingwood several times daily. At Collingwood, passenger ships continued the journey to the north shore of Lake Huron, Manitoulin Island and Lake Superior. The locks at Sault Ste. Marie were completed in 1855 thereby opening the west for both Canadian and U.S. commerce. In 1856 there were 5 trips weekly from Collingwood to Chicago.

The above bird's eye view of Collingwood is dated 1870.

Bay, modeled after John Nash's plans for the city of Bath in England. It was a remarkable vision of urban parks and curving promenades that unfortunately was never realized by the colonials of Collingwood. He also surveyed the town of Thornbury, naming it after the town of Thornbury near Bristol, England. He laid out the street plans for Meaford too with street names like Nelson, Sykes, Trafalgar, and Boucher to echo the British victories in the Napoleonic Wars.

In 1858, William Gibbard was elected to Collingwood's town council where he became embroiled in a dysfunctional municipal government in which he attempted to remove the mayor from office. He appears to have been at the root of the dysfunction. His obstreperousness earned him disapproval among other councilors and the local Collingwood newspaper. He left the council shortly thereafter.

There is no question that William Gibbard was a driven man. In September 1858 in a feat of sheer strength and determination he managed to deliver mail overland from the Red River to Fort Francis in less than 13 days. The mission involved dozens of portages with heavy loads in a large canoe and long days of paddling through the chain of lakes.

In 1859 Gibbard left his surveying career when he was appointed Fisheries Officer for Georgian Bay and Lakes Huron and Superior. This was a huge task which he attacked with the ferocity of one possessed. The territory under his responsibility involved thousands of miles of coastline. He boarded, inspected, and documented over 50 vessels in one year (1862) to look for violations of the new fishing regulations and breaches of the liquor laws pertaining to Indians.

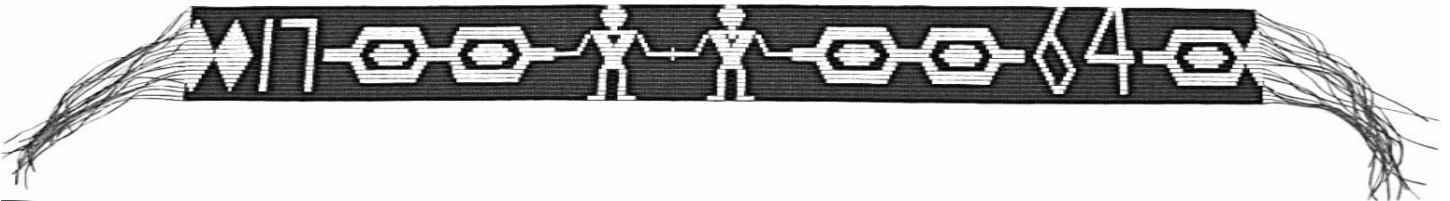


William Gibbard (1818-1863)
Overseer of Fisheries

Part 2

Gibbard and the Indians

In 1836 Sir Francis Bond Head, the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, visited Manitowaning to take part in a ceremony that dated back to 1763. It was the annual presentation of gifts to the Indians as part of a solemn covenant recorded by a wampum belt made of shells on a cloth background. Head's visit was a reaffirmation of Britain's peaceful relationship with their First Nation allies who fought alongside the British in the War of 1812. But, Sir Francis Bond Head had a problem. He was under pressure from settlers in the south to open more land for farming, on land that was Native land. Head wanted to protect the Native people from the ever expanding non-Native arrivals. Manitoulin Island was remote and a logical place for Indians to be protected from the influences of the white man.



Wampum Belt (above) showing the holding of hands by two equal partners, the British and the Indians, in 1764.

This belt was a symbol of the ongoing good will between the two nations.

To watch an excellent internet on Wampum by Alan Corbiere see:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVvE6EItv_M

The Manitoulin Island Treaty of 1836 was made to accomplish just that. It was solemnized with the exchange of goods and a wampum belt. Although the treaty did not say directly that the Indians controlled fishing rights it did mention the importance of the fishing islands around Manitoulin. At the time only Indians fished the area. The Anishinaabeg oral tradition had it that the Natives had exclusive

rights. By 1848, white fishermen began moving in on the fishing areas and were seen as a threat to the First Nation's growing economic dependence on commercial fishing. The population on the island was increasing and the issue was an important one for the Anishinaabeg at Wikwemikong on the eastern side of the island.

By 1850 the perceived pressure on land for settlement in south western Ontario was intense and another treaty to deal with those issues was needed. William Robinson was appointed as the government's negotiator to open more land to farmers while at the same time allowing the Anishinaabeg to keep their traditional activities like hunting and fishing. It was guaranteed in writing that the Anishinaabeg would have the privilege to "fish in the waters as they have been in the habit of doing..." In 1851, faced with what the Anishinaabeg regarded as non-Native fishermen trespassing on their exclusive domain they petitioned the government for support. When the government did not respond they made an appeal directly to the Governor General. He granted the Anishinaabeg exclusive control over the shoreline but not the water.

The technology of fishing in the mid 19th century necessitated land based operations for salting fish, repairing nets, and packing barrels. By 1855, a number of non-Native fishermen with leases from the government set up land based operations on a few islands and bays near and on Manitoulin Island. The tension between the Anishinaabeg and non-Native fishing rights grew over the next four years

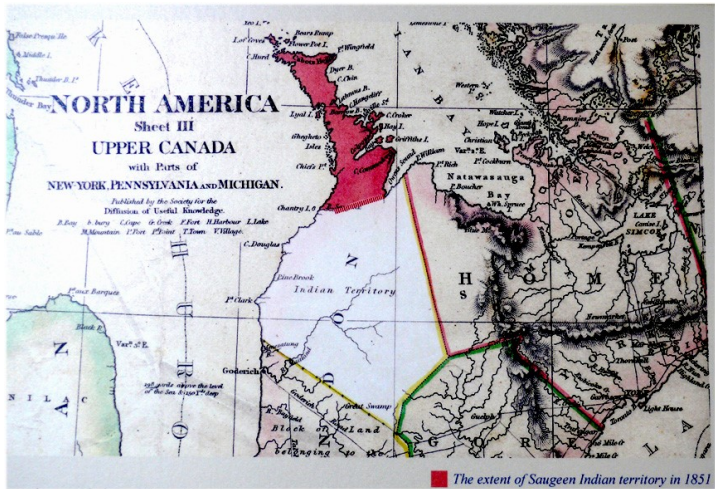
An 1857 Fisheries Act of the Canadian Government was aimed at preserving the fishery in the lower lakes. Under that legislation, the government could lease parts of the lakes that were not designated to First Nation fishers. If the First Nations fishers remained in their specified area there was no fee to be charged. The government made the assumption that this legislation should be applied to the upper lakes as well.

Shrinking Native Land 1831—1861

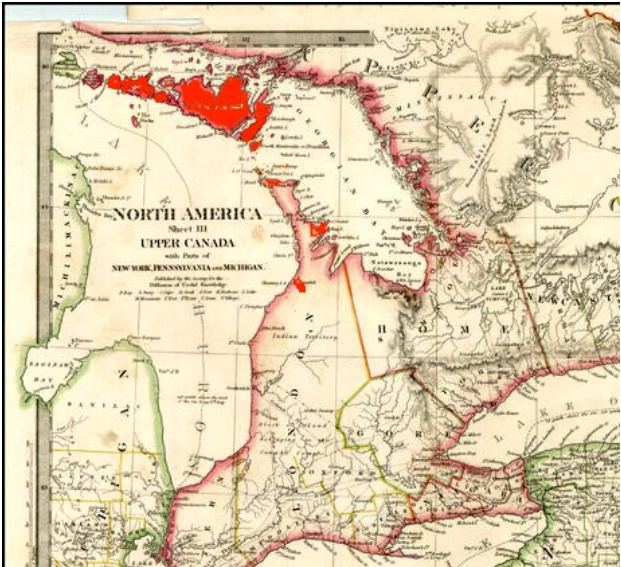


The above map shows Indian territory in 1831. The land encompassed the entire Saugeen Peninsula and well into the heartland of Grey and Bruce Counties

The government did not have a good record in dealing with Indians in the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula. By negotiation, deception, and underhanded means a series of treaties reduced Indian Territory of two million acres to less than a few disconnected reserves between 1835 and 1861.



Native Land existing in 1851 included the Saugeen Peninsula north of a line between Sauble Beach to Owen Sound



By 1860 the Indian reserves had been reduced to three small areas at Cape Croker, Saugeen, and the tip of the Bruce (Saugeen) Peninsula. Manitoulin Island remained as a reserve, and this was seen as possible future settlement land.

William McDougall was charged with the responsibility of treating with the Manitoulin Indians in 1862 under new terms that might just possibly convince the Indians to give up land for certain guarantees, land rights, and financial considerations.

Part 3

William Gibbard enforces the law

When William Gibbard was appointed as the fishery overseer for Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, and Lake Superior in 1859 he threw himself into this new responsibility with a gusto that was typical of a man driven by the sense that he had the authority of the Crown to enforce the law and manage the fishery as he saw fit. The Anishinaabeg did not see it quite that way. They believed that they had Treaty Rights that were to be preserved by agents of the Crown. They believed that their rights were guaranteed in perpetuity. Gibbard on the other hand believed that there were parts of Georgian Bay particularly around smaller islands that were not included in the 1836 treaty. Under the direction of his superiors in the summer of 1859 he informed George Ironside, the Manitoulin Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Wikwemikong that new fishing regulations were now in place for Georgian Bay and he intended to call for a tender to rent the waters near Lonely Island to the highest bidder. The Anishinaabeg would still have the right to fish for their personal use but would be restricted from commercial fishing or landing in designated unutilized areas.

The Anishinaabeg and Ironside were caught off guard and realized the import of Gibbard's actions. Their livelihood was under threat. Much of the economy of the Indians on Manitoulin Island and the Bruce Peninsula was in the fishery. The annual commercial sale of fish was their most important income. There was vocal opposition to Gibbard and appeals were made to the government. According to the *Globe* newspaper Gibbard became known as "Eshkamejwanoke" (Gatherer of Fish Guts) to the Anishinaabeg.

This was a sentiment that rang true to Indians in general and in particular those involved in the fish business. Gibbard for his part proclaimed that “Indians would be far better off if they attended to their farms instead of dabbling in fisheries.” He saw them as “unwashed” and “lazy.”

The tensions were not restricted to Manitoulin Island. The Nawash of Cape Croker threatened to drown Gibbard when they learned he had leased several of what they said were their islands.

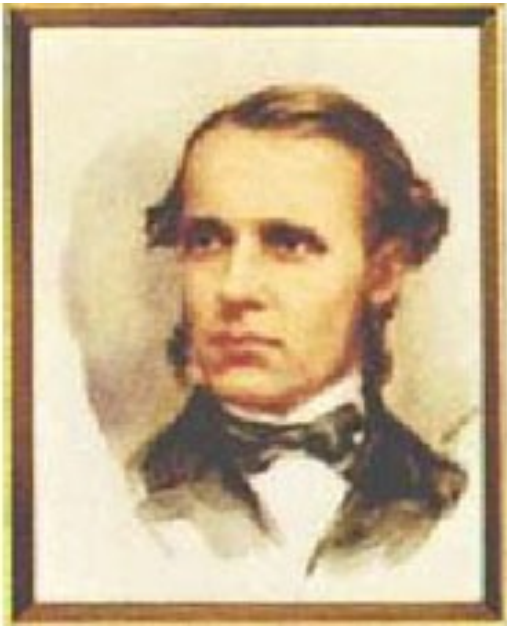
The Anishinaabeg of Manitoulin had the support of two outspoken Jesuit priests, Father Jean Pierre Choné and Father Auguste Kohler of the mission at Wikwemikong. Gibbard told Jesuit Father Kohler in 1859 that “the Indians were a nuisance, and as such should be driven out of the country.” Gibbard’s attitude was the sum of his belief in English moral and intellectual superiority. It revealed his disconnection with the First Nation’s community and their legitimate rights as well as his disdain for the people themselves.

In Canada West (Ontario) there was an unfounded belief that land for settlement was in short supply in the late 1850’s. The government eyed the “unused” and “vacant” lands of Manitoulin Island as the logical location for an expansion of the province’s agricultural economy. Gibbard believed that a proper survey of the island would reveal an opportunity to expand farming and settlement into a productive part of Canada West. The government thought it was time to renegotiate the 1836 treaty.

The government did not have a good record in dealing with Indians in the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula. By negotiation, deception, and underhanded means, a series of treaties reduced Indian Territory of two million acres to less than a few disconnected reserves between 1835 and 1861. The Indians on Manitoulin had every reason to resist attempts to negotiate a land transfer treaty to settlers in order to alleviate the perceived expansionist pressure to add more farming to a region they thought was guaranteed to them by the 1836 treaty. Despite the tensions, relations between the British and the Indians remained generally positive.

However, tensions were heightened on Manitoulin Island when, in 1861, an attempt was made by the Government of Canada to renegotiate the arrangements made in 1836 whereby Manitoulin would remain exclusively Indian land. The attempt ended in a failure for a variety of reasons. The Indians saw no immediate or long term benefits in a new treaty. They thought a land grab was planned. They saw what had happened in the Saugeen Peninsula and to the north and it was not good. They believed that the 1836 treaty ensured their rights in perpetuity. Negotiations collapsed when the government negotiators, William Bartlett, Superintendent of Indian Affairs and Charles Lindsey, a government commissioner offered little in return for turning over the land for settlement.

In May 1862 there was a change in the government. The Conservative government of John A Macdonald/ Etienne Cartier was replaced by the Liberal government of John Sandfield Macdonald/ Antoine-Aimé Dorion. Following that change, a lawyer, William McDougall was appointed the new Commissioner of Crown Lands. He was charged with the responsibility of treating with the Manitoulin Indians under new terms that might just possibly convince the Indians to give up land for certain guarantees, land rights, and financial considerations.



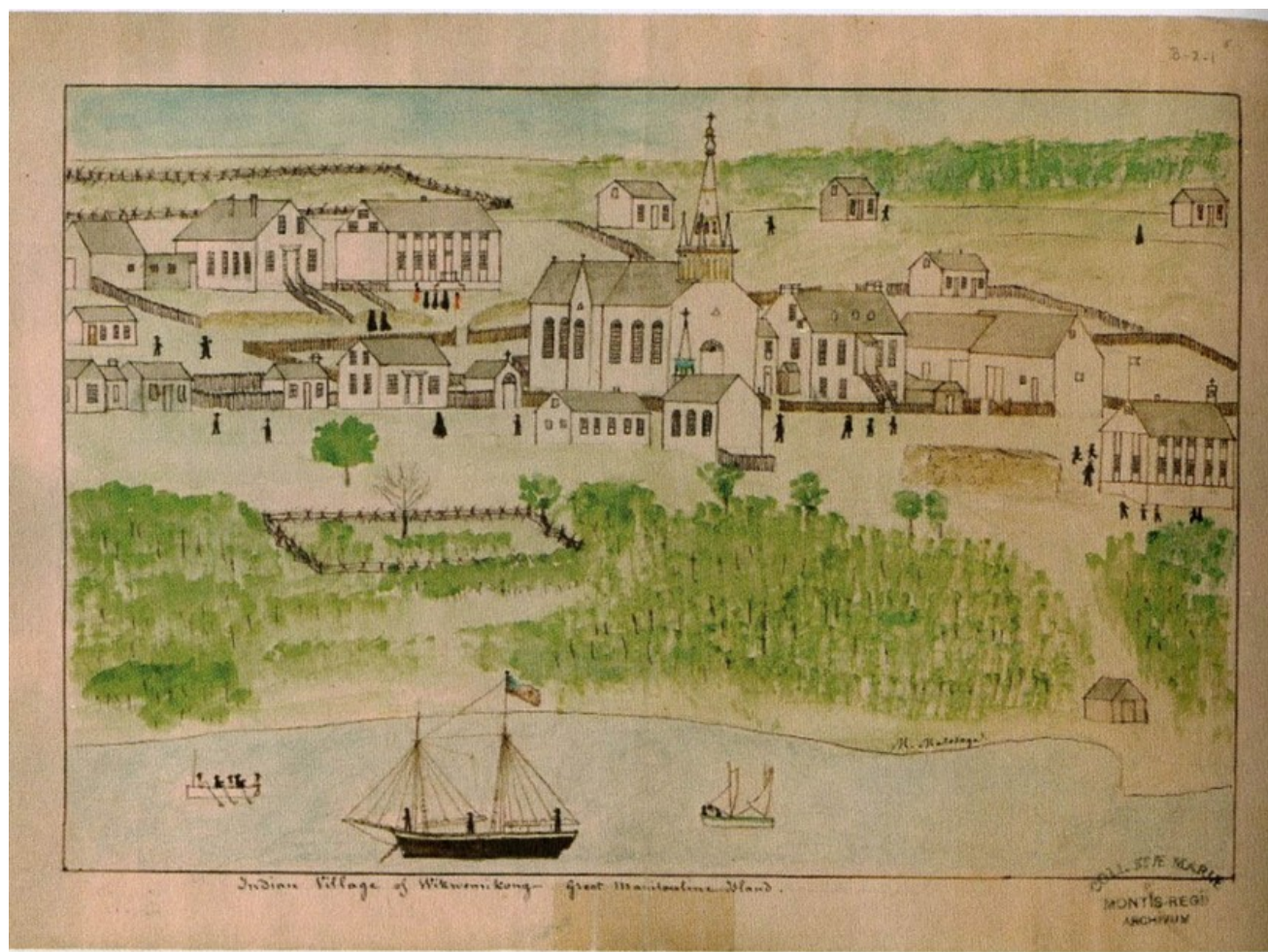
William McDougall, Commissioner
of Crown Lands

MacDougall and a few other dignitaries, including a land speculator and a journalist met William Gibbard in Collingwood where they all boarded the *Clifton*, a paddle wheel steamer owned by William H Smith of Owen Sound. They arrived in Owen Sound and stayed in a local hotel prior to boarding the *Ploughboy* the next morning for a trip to Manitouwaning on Manitoulin Island. Gibbard for his part told MacDougall some of the issues that he thought were to be considered in negotiations. Gibbard believed the fishery was underutilized and the land was being wasted on the Indians when it could be turned into productive and arable land.

Meanwhile the Jesuit missionaries at Wikwemikong counselled the Indians to reject any treaty that opened land to white settlement. They saw a threat to the Native way of life and possibly a loss of influence in their Christian missions.

Gibbard was involved in the 1862 negotiations and was a witness to an inconclusive treaty that involved only the secession of the western end of Manitoulin Island. The treaty ended up splitting the Manitoulin Indians. Those in the west were in favour of white settlement in return for financial remuneration and land considerations. Others were not. Wikwemikong in the east remained unceded Indian land and remains so today. The treaty was very restrictive in that Natives could not have land where potential mills could be built alongside a river nor were they able to own property around the bays where steamers could land.

According to a report in the Globe July 27, 1863, at a meeting back on October 31, 1862, one of the Jesuit priests at Wikwemikong, Father Auguste Kohler, accused Gibbard and MacDougall of highway robbery and villainous cruelty in taking the Indian lands. He said he had advised the Indians not to accept and if need be help the Indians to drive every white man (except priests) off the island by bloody war if necessary. Gibbard was not ready to forget the incident.



Wikwemikong in 1863 showing Holy Cross church. The church is still active in the village.

PART 4

The Treaty is Made

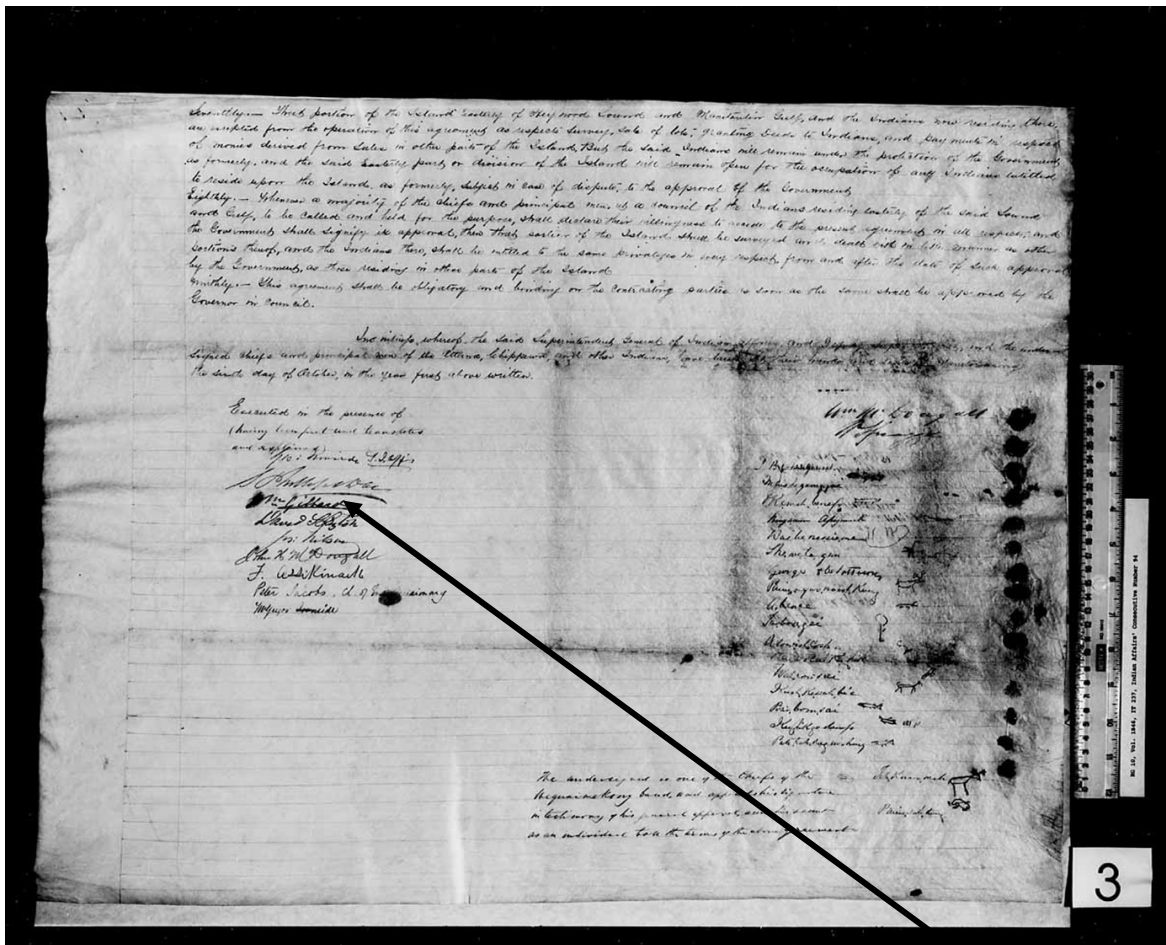
One of the immediate reactions to the treaty was that two white men, Philemon Proulx and Charles De la Ronde who were married to Indian women and living at Wikwemikong, were ordered by the chiefs to leave Wikwemikong in December. Possibly Father Kohler was behind the actions by the chiefs. Eventually agreements were made that they would move a short distance from the village and leave the island in the spring.

On May 28, 1863, in the course of his duties, Gibbard granted fishing leases on the south side of Lonely Island, a favourite fishing ground for the Anishinaabeg of Manitoulin, to Philemon Proulx and Charles De la Ronde. It was a poke in the eye for Kohler. While at Wikwemikong Proulx and De la Ronde freely fished in the waters around the island. However, because they accepted a lease from Gibbard, the Indians at Wikwemikong saw them as abandoning the band's claim to control the fishing grounds. This was seen as a form of treachery. Now that Proulx and De la Ronde had a lease on the waters south of Lonely Island Manitoulin Indians were forbidden by Gibbard to fish in an area they considered their own as guaranteed the 1836 treaty.

Proulx, with license in hand, moved to Lonely Island and set up a fishing camp in June 1863. The Manitoulin Indians from the village of Wikwemikong visited Proulx on Lonely Island and told him to cease fishing there even although Gibbard had granted him a license. The Anishinaabeg claimed their 1836 treaty rights extended to Lonely Island as well. It appeared that the Indians were prepared to remove Proulx and De la Ronde by force if necessary.

There appeared to be no immediate solution. In response Gibbard wrote to Father Kohler and personally delivered his note to Wikwemikong on June 28, advising Kohler that those Indians who wanted to push Proulx out of the leased land on Lonely Island would be penalized under the terms of the law. To drive home his point Gibbard sailed to Wikwemikong to tell the Anishinaabeg in no uncertain terms that they must accept his decision to lease the fishing rights to Proulx and De la Ronde. The meeting did not go well. Father Kohler apparently said that if he were not a priest he would have Gibbard's blood.

In the wake of this meeting, Chief John Ozawaninimiki (Yellow Thunder) from Wikwemikong was designated to go to Lonely Island to evict Proulx. Gibbard found out about the proposed eviction and sailed to Lonely Island to support Proulx.



William Gibbard's signature on the 1862 Treaty

Part 5

Tension at Lonely Island

On June 30 a delegation about 25 Anishinaabeg arrived at Lonely Island in two boats beating drums and shouting. A number carried “Skull Crackers”. They carried an eviction notice for Proulx and De la Ronde. Gibbard warned Chief Ozawaninimiki that if he took the law into his own hands he would be punished. Chief Ozawaninimiki replied he did not recognize British law. The land and fishery belonged to the Anishinaabeg. After a heated argument both left the island; Gibbard to return to Collingwood to enlist more forces and get instructions from Commissioner McDougall; Chief Ozawaninimiki to return to Wikwemikong to hold a council with his band.

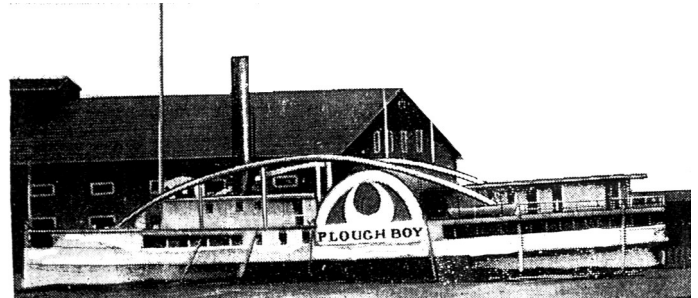
By July 24 Gibbard had employed a group of “specials” to return to Wikwemikong with the approval of the

Commissioner to arrest the ringleaders. The special force comprised regular constables from Toronto, Barrie, and Collingwood as well as 2 fishermen, a grocer from New York, and a tailor. With such an assorted crew it was a recipe for trouble. The force left Collingwood on the



Toronto Constabulary 1863

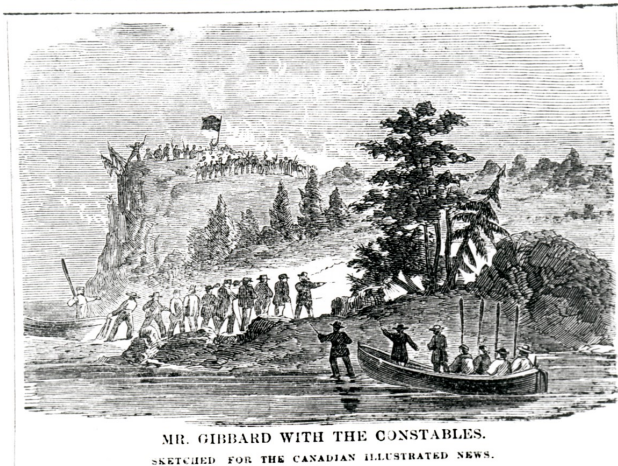
Ploughboy, stopping at Owen Sound then later at Lonely Island hoping to find some of the persons named in the arrest warrant. None of those named was there so they headed out to Manitoulin Island arriving there on Friday, July 24 before noon. As the *Ploughboy* anchored off shore they could see about 300 Indian men amassed on a hill above the landing place. The men and women on the shore had been advised ahead of time that Gibbard was coming to hold a council with the chiefs. Almost the whole community was out to observe.



The Ploughboy

When Gibbard saw what awaited him he ordered his specials to load their revolvers, secure their handcuffs, and get batons ready for any eventuality. He then ordered his force to go below deck except for Adam Duggan, the Chief Constable from Collingwood, Joseph Rogers the Chief Constable from Barrie, and Patrick Cummins a Sargent major from Toronto. The crew lowered a small

THE CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.



MR. GIBBARD WITH THE CONSTABLES.
SKETCHED FOR THE CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.

Gibbard lands at Wikwemikong

boat and rowed to the shore with a British flag flying and Gibbard's men at the ready. Gibbard's instructions to those still on the *Ploughboy* were to come at once if the flag was lowered. On arriving at the beach, the Indians met him cordially and informed him that there was a council going on in the residence of the priest Father

Choné. Gibbard and company walked a half mile to Choné's house and informed those present that the purpose of his visit was to arrest those who had counselled and participated in the eviction of Proulx from Lonely Island.

That arrest warrant included Father Kohler and Father Choné.

A heated discussion ensued. The Anishinaabeg maintained that Gibbard had no legal right to arrest anyone. Gibbard argued that he had every right within his position in the Government of Canada. As the discussion turned to argument, Gibbard ordered Cummins to arrest the Chief. As he attempted to put his hands on him, the other Natives moved in for the defense. Rogers tried to put the handcuffs on Father Choné. At this point the remaining specials arrived yelling at Rogers to release the priest just as one of the Natives wielding a stick lunged for Cummin's head and threatened to kill him if he did not let go. By then the whole community became involved and Gibbard and his men retreated to the beach in order to escape. In the process Rogers had his revolver pulled out of his hands.

Before blood was spilled, Gibbard had his men release the prisoners with a promise that the Indians involved would meet him in Shibenawaning (Killarney) on his return trip from Sault Ste. Marie. One writer described the retreat of the specials back to the *Ploughboy* as a scene from a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.



Gibbard and specials engage the Indians as depicted in the Canadian Illustrated News

Part 6

Arrests and Appearance before a Judge

Gibbard then carried on to the Sault accompanied by Father Kohler. On the upbound trip the *Ploughboy* stopped at Bruce Mines. One of the rebellious leaders from the earlier incident with Proulx, Chief John Ozawaninimiki, was recognized, arrested, and taken on board the *Ploughboy* in handcuffs. He was delivered to court in the Sault to stand before magistrate John Prince. Prince released Chief Ozawaninimiki after a bond was placed by David Blain, a lawyer, who happened to be on board. Chief Ozawaninimiki returned with Gibbard to Little Current on Monday, July 27.

It was openly known that Gibbard was carrying a lot of money. He had over \$2000 for the annual payment to the Indians of Lake Superior, but because of the incidents at Manitoulin, he returned from the Sault without distributing the money. The money had been placed in the safe of the purser, Herbert Parks, when they left Collingwood but that was not well known.

While at the Sault Gibbard's interpreter James Boyer heard a number of people "talking against him (Gibbard)". He was concerned about Gibbard's safety because of all the money Gibbard was reputed to be carrying.

On the return trip down from the Sault the specials drank heavily and played cards. Around the table the constables, particularly those from Toronto (who happened to be Irish Roman Catholics) were critical of Gibbard for attempting to arrest a priest. They did not think that was appropriate to apprehend a priest. Earlier in the evening James Colgan, a detective from the Toronto constabulary had an argument with Gibbard about his wages. He believed that Gibbard was not going to pay what had been agreed upon when he was recruited. He and

Gibbard parted bad friends.

In fact Gibbard was paying the Toronto men differently than the others.

Meanwhile Constable Dudgeon gathered up the batons that had been issued to the constables (except for two left in the saloon). Joe Rose a civilian constable kept one.

Chief Ozawaninimiki was below deck, now without handcuffs. He had 2-3 glasses of brandy given to him between 9 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. by Daniel Calahan, a blacksmith and special constable from Toronto.

About 12:30 a.m. Sargent Major Cummins left the promenade deck to check on Chief John Ozawaninimiki below. After talking with him for twenty minutes and satisfying himself that all was in order he went to bed. Ozawaninimiki found the fire hole too hot for sleeping so he went up to the main deck right after leaving Little Current. There he saw three men talking; an old man, a middle aged man, and a young man, all deck passengers. Ozawaninimiki did not go to the upper deck where the cabins were.

William Bannister the saloon keeper went to bed at 1:30 while several of the constables kept drinking from a limited amount of whisky left on the tables.

Father Kohler meanwhile had gone to bed about 10:30 p.m. and got up after midnight and stayed up until 2:30 a.m. In that time space he talked with Chief Ozawaninimiki who was working in the fire hole stoking the boilers. He noticed nothing unusual.

Father Kohler's verbal war with Gibbard spilled over into the trip on the *Ploughboy* when it was revealed that there was a serious dispute earlier that day between the two over a letter instructing Kohler to go to Quebec. Two passengers reported that Kohler said that if he was not a priest he would shoot him or rip out his heart.

Part 7

Gibbard Disappears

Just before 3 a.m. the *Ploughboy* arrived at Little Current. It stayed there for about 15 minutes before leaving for Killarney. A few minutes after leaving James Noble and James Hayes both fisherman and special constables from Collingwood, and special constable Daniel Calahan went to fetch William Bannister, the saloon keeper, to awaken him to get another drink. Bannister told them the Mate, Duncan Mclean, had the key but they were unable to find him so they decided to call it a night. They observed that nobody was out on deck. When Noble and Calahan went to bed Hayes strolled around the deck once more and found Gibbard standing by himself at the starboard side just behind the paddle box. They said “Good Night” then Hayes went to bed leaving Gibbard alone.

A few of the passengers noticed that Gibbard had appeared distracted and even “melancholy” on the downbound trip. He was “not quite himself,” said Mr. Francis Gribbon. Constable Duggan observed that Gibbard was “not in such spirits as he was going up.” Others noted that he stood apart and alone looking over the rail as they sailed into the night. The lawyer, David Blain mentioned that several people remarked that Gibbard was in a “troubled state of mind.”

As the *Ploughboy* left the wharf at Little Current most passengers who were still up went to bed. A few remained awake in their cabins. Mr. Rogers the High Constable from Barrie did not sleep. He left his lamp on and read; all the while his cabin door was open. He heard someone pass the door about half an hour after leaving Little Current but he did not see him. At this point the ship was approaching Strawberry Island.

Constable Duggan, The Chief Constable of Collingwood, was still up for twenty minutes after leaving Little Current. He was on the upper deck talking to Mate Mclean. Gibbard approached Duggan and asked a question then walked aft on the Another one of the special constables, Mr. Gribbon, a grocer from New York, thought that he saw someone that looked to him like an Indian rush past him while he was on the promenade deck after leaving Little Current .

The *Ploughboy* arrived at Killarney about 5:30 a.m. July 28. Everyone went down to the dining saloon for breakfast. That is, everyone but William Gibbard. A search was immediately begun. The door to his cabin on the upper deck was open. His satchel was on the floor and his books were in order. A closed drawer held a set of keys. All seemed to be in order. A cap that looked like his was found on the main deck.

Captain W. H. Smith of the side-wheeler *Clifton* who just happened to be on board with his wife convened an inquiry. Several passengers were interviewed and questioned. Then the *Ploughboy* headed for home port, Collingwood. It then turned around, again heading for Killarney on Saturday, August 1, with the Mayor of Collingwood, Mr. John McWatt, Archibald McNabb a surveyor, and three others aboard. They had a small boat with them intending to search for Mr. Gibbard. Gibbard's body was found floating upright about a mile off shore near Clock Island. His pockets were filled with air and his necktie was askew. They found his knife, a toothpick, handkerchief, eye glasses, pocket watch, and a compass in his trousers. He had no shoes on. His coat was unbuttoned. His wallet was missing. When Gibbard's body was pulled aboard, McWatt noticed a swelling the size of an egg over his temple and another over his nose.

The \$2000 in cash for treaty payments was still in the Purser's safe on board the *Ploughboy* where it had been all along since the departure from Collingwood days before.

The Indian chief, John Ozawaninimiki and Father Aguste Kohler were immediately suspected of foul play because Gibbard was to be a witness when they appeared in a Quebec court later concerning the Manitoulin incident. Possibly they did not want him to appear? Possibly Kohler was carrying out one of the threats he reportedly made against Gibbard?



Shebahonaning (canoe passage) later named Killarney, was first settled in 1820 by a French Canadian fur trader and his Anishinaabeg wife who established a trading post. It was a routine stop for steamers sailing to Sault Ste. Marie and beyond.

Part 8

The Autopsy and Inquest

The body was returned to Collingwood where an autopsy was performed by Doctor Adoniah Vallack. Part of his report is printed below.

I examined the body of William Gibbard and so far as external appearances go on the greater part of the body, I saw nothing to lead me to suppose violence had been committed, but on the right side of the head, from the temple downwards a great deal of decomposition had taken place, and effusion of blood from an external angle of the right eye back towards the ear, and in all directions on the right side of the face, which in my opinion resulted from more than decomposition, probably a blow: no fracture. There was no cut or incised wound.... I am of the opinion that the mark on the right side was from a blow, not decomposition. Had he received a blow sufficient to cause effusion to have deprived him of consciousness I could not say from the confused spot by what the blow had been. I think a fall from the upper deck, striking the boat would cause such an appearance found here.

The lungs and heart were sent to Toronto for examination by Professor Henry Holmes Croft, the leading pioneer forensic pathologist of the time. He observed that there was no water in the pleura and lungs, leading him to state that Gibbard did not drown. He was dead when he hit the water said Croft.


At the inquest that was held in the weeks immediately after finding Gibbard's body the jury came to its conclusion.



Professor Henry Holmes Croft was a pioneer in forensic science

We the jury are of the opinion that the late William Gibbard was foully and cruelly murdered on the 28th day of July last when on board the steamboat Ploughboy somewhere between Little Current and Sheganawning after which the murderer or murderers threw the body overboard into the lake; it is further the opinion of the jury that the said murder was committed on the main deck of the said steamboat, near the foot of port side of said boat, but by whom the jury have not sufficient evidence to show. After a careful examination of the facts as laid before the jury they are of the opinion that that the ends of justice may be further offered by the offer of a suitable reward for the discovery of the murderers of the deceased William Gibbard, and they respectively recommend the Government to offer such reward...

A reward of \$200 was offered and eventually boosted by an additional \$400 but was never collected.



\$200 REWARD!

WHEREAS, in the month of JULY LAST WILLIAM GIBBARD, Superintendent of Fisheries on Lake Huron, and then returning from business at Manitowlinj connected with some Indian affairs, was missed from the steamer *Ploughboy*, and his body was found subsequently under circumstances which induce a belief that he was murdered

And whereas a Coroner's Inquest was held upon the body of said WILLIAM GIBBARD, and the Coroner's Jury returned a Verdict of WILFUL MURDER against some person or persons unknown

And whereas His Excellency the Governor-General, in the month of October last, issued a Proclamation offering a Reward of Four Hundred Dollars for such information as should lead to the discovery and conviction of the perpetrator or perpetrators of said crime.

And whereas the County Council of the County of Simcoe, being also anxious for the apprehension and punishment of the person or persons by whom said murder was committed, have resolved to offer a further Reward to the premises.

Now, in pursuance and under the authority of the Resolution of said County Council, in that behalf, I hereby offer and will cause to be paid the sum of TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS (in addition to the said sum of \$400 offered by His Excellency as aforesaid), as a Reward for the discovery or such information as will lead to the discovery and conviction of the person or persons guilty of the murder of the said William Gibbard.

Witness my hand at Cookstown, in the said County of Simcoe, this 12th day of January, 1864.

THOMAS R. FERGUSON,
Warden Co. Simcoe

NORTHERN AMERICA

Part 9

Who murdered William Gibbard?

The Suspects

1. Father Aguste Kohler had previously threatened Gibbard. On more than one occasion he was quoted as being so angry that he would kill William Gibbard were he not a priest. Kohler appears to be an impetuous man capable of irrational and violent outbursts.
2. Chief John Ozawaninimiki who was arrested at Bruce Mines had a motive. The Chief was being summoned to Quebec to appear before the government to plead his case. He did not want to go and was being forced under duress to travel there. He believed that his case was clear. The Anishinaabeg had guaranteed rights. Suspicions were high that the Chief did it.
3. It might have been one of the dissatisfied specials who thought Gibbard was cheating them on their pay. Colgan from Toronto had barged into Gibbard's room (although he denied it) to confront Gibbard about pay.
4. Because there was heavy drinking, one of the constables may have had a grudge to settle. Indeed William Watts of Collingwood testified that he heard a number of the Toronto men laughing and cheering when they heard Mr. Gibbard was missing.
5. Joseph Rose the civilian constable managed to keep a baton. Why?
6. Many people thought Gibbard had the \$2000 on his person.
7. It is interesting that the porter, Adam Collins and William Benninger, the saloon keeper, disappeared to Buffalo for 2 weeks after the *Ploughboy* returned to Collingwood. Did they deliberately disappear?

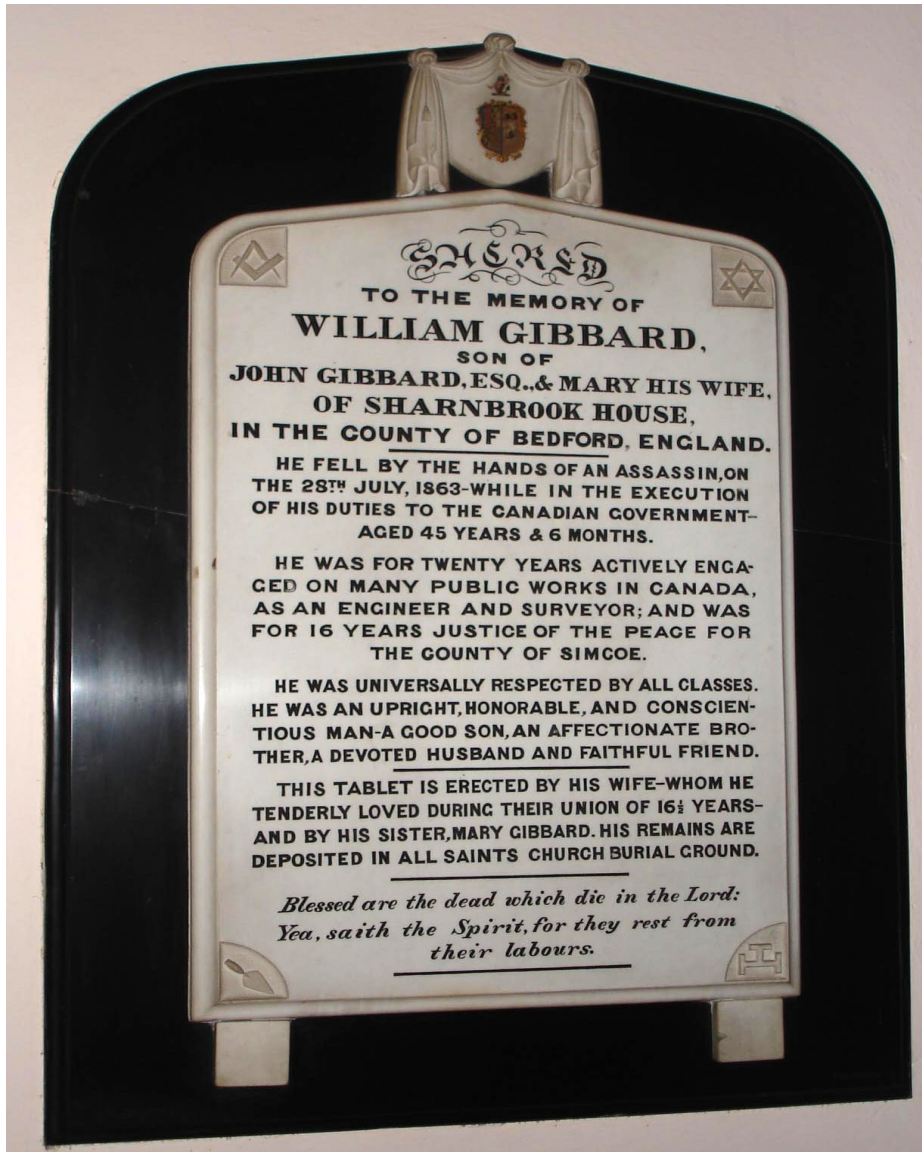
And the Other Theory

The writer and historian Shelly Pearen in her book Four Voices has raised another possibility other than murder. She speculates that Gibbard may have committed suicide. In her research she found that Gibbard's secret discreditable conduct in India was revealed in the Sault before the *Ploughboy* left to return to Killarney on July 27. The stories of the murders in 1840 were out of the bag, she says.

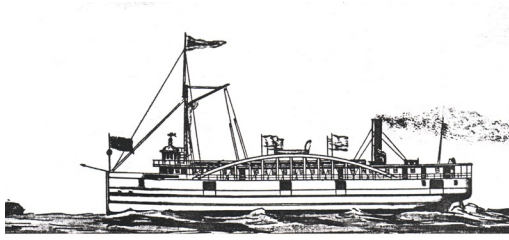
Gibbard's sad demeanor on the trip down to Killarney might have indicated a sense of depression. Would this revelation of a shameful dismissal from the army two decades earlier be a basis for blackmail? Would the disgrace of a reputable family name have made this haughty functionary think it face saving to have a heroic end of life?

Certainly about a half-dozen credible persons remarked on Gibbard's behaviour saying that he was unlike his normal self. There were others at the inquest who observed nothing.

It is possible that Gibbard could have leapt overboard near the paddlewheel of the *Ploughboy* and struck his head on one of the paddles as he jumped overboard? The paddles were close together as they rotated thereby creating the possibility that the two blows to the head were done as the wheel turned.



Memorial Plaque to William Gibbard in All Saints Anglican Church, Collingwood, ON.



Materials for this booklet were sourced from:
The Community Waterfront Heritage Centre in
Owen Sound

The Owen Sound Sun Times

The Globe and Mail

The Manitoulin Expositor

The Meaford Monitor

Four Voices by Shelly Pearen

Personal files of the author

