

## Albert John "A. J." Gibson (1862-1927)

The Missoula architect who designed the Missoula County Courthouse, the University of Montana's Main Hall and many beautiful Missoula homes. Mr. and Mrs. Gibson's lives are remembered with unusual grave markers.

- **1862-Birth.** April 1, 1862 on a farm two miles from Savannah in Ashland County, Ohio.
- **1889-Marriage.** Maud Lockley on January 30, 1889. She was the daughter of Frederick Lockley, a veteran of the Civil War and a pioneer newspaperman.
- **Education.** A few months a year in a country school. However, he was a genius with the use of tools, but the problem to be solved was how to obtain the tools. To purchase his first set of tools, he

trapped mink and sold their furs. Building and mechanics came naturally to him (according to Helen F. Sanders, and early biographer).

- **1880.** At age 18, A J hand cut the family barn where every log and timber fitted perfectly. This was the first witness to neighbors of his talent.
- **1883.** Arrived in Butte Montana after his father's death.
- **1889.** Arrived in Missoula to enter into the carpenter business opening a short-lived partnership with E.C. Selander. Later he also partnered with Robert Mentrum, but this partnership also was short-lived.
- **Projects.** (not all inclusive)
  - St Patrick Hospital—built, but not designed by Gibson; demolished
  - The Greenough Mansion—lost to fire
  - The first five buildings on The University of Montana—two of which were demolished
  - Numerous private homes and commercial buildings in downtown Missoula, Hamilton, and Stevensville.
  - Hawthorne School
  - Lowell School
  - The Sacred Heart Academy--demolished
  - The Carnegie Public Library—now the Missoula Art Museum
  - The Missoula County Courthouse
  - Hellgate High School—only its central core is by Gibson
  - The Daly Mansion near Hamilton—the last major remodeling of the largest home in the state of Montana
  - First Presbyterian Church
- Purchased many business lots and constructed the Gibson Block made of brick on the NE corner of North Higgins Ave and Broadway (then Cedar). This was considered quite a folly in a time of economic depression. It was demolished in the 1950s.
- 1909. Retired to travel with his wife in one of the first automobiles in Missoula. As an automobile enthusiast, he helped form the local automobile club. They traveled extensively on the west coast, but also visited Washington D.C.
  - 1910. First Montanans to drive across the Canadian and Mexican borders. Made the first cross country trip by automobile from Montana to New York, although some of it was done by rail. This was quite historical as automobiles were novelties and roads were no more than trails.
  - **1927-Death.** December 31, 1927. A J and Maud were killed instantly when their automobile was struck by a train in Missoula. The local Missoulian newspaper reported that A J was partially deaf at the time,

preventing him from hearing the oncoming train and the windows of the automobile were frosted over, preventing him from seeing the train approaching.

Information provided by: Jim McDonald, historical architect. For more Gibson history and see photos of his architectural masterpieces, read Raphael Chacon's book: <u>The Original Man: The Live and Work of Montana Architect A. J. Gibson.</u>

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