

About George W. and Kathleen I. Gibbs



GEORGE WILLIAMS GIBBS

September 9, 1884 (St. Augustine, Florida) –
March 1967 (Jacksonville, Florida)

George Williams Gibbs was born to a family who settled in St. Augustine in the early 1820s. He was both an inventor and pioneered Jacksonville shipbuilding. While at Georgia Tech, he began to design a 2-cycle gas engine twice as efficient as its competitors. (His design was the forerunner of later valve-in-head automobile engines.) Shortly after graduation, as a 24-year-old, he started the Gibbs Gas Engine Co. on the south bank of the St. Johns River. The company initially produced gas engines to his designs, but by 1910 had turned to the building of ships including U.S. Navy Sub Chasers and other naval vessels during World War I. It was later renamed Gibbs Corporation and built some 220 vessels and overhauled and repaired many more before the company was sold by his family in 1962. At its peak during World War II, the shipyards employed about 2,000 people.

In 1924, Gibbs bought and turned around the Florida Ferry Company that operated between Main Street and the Southside. Seeing the need for a second bridge, Gibbs was an early champion of building what became the Main Street Bridge. He had plans drawn up and was going to build it as a private toll bridge before the City pre-empted him by building it themselves. He was a visionary and an active influence on the development of Jacksonville during the first half of the 20th Century.

KATHLEEN MARIA INGRAHAM GIBBS

November 30, 1885 (Seminole County, Florida)
– January 31, 1968 (Jacksonville, Florida)

George Gibbs married his childhood sweetheart, Kathleen Maria Ingraham, on December 7, 1910. She was his bulwark and confidant throughout their 57-year marriage, and provided financial stability to the family during his company's early years. Kathleen was the daughter of James Edmondson Ingraham, who became Henry Flagler's general agent and moved to St. Augustine in 1892. Flagler gave Miss Ingraham 100 shares of the original Standard Oil as a wedding present.

Ingraham originally came to Florida in 1874, where he acquired and developed land, laid out the town of Sanford and built the South Florida Railroad under General Henry Sanford and extended it under Henry Plant. He then led the first expedition of the Everglades in 1892. Impressed with his work, Henry Flagler hired him as land commissioner to develop the land owned along the route of the Florida East Coast Railroad – some 400,000 acres of developable land in St. Johns, Brevard, Palm Beach, and Dade counties. In this capacity, he developed the first plans for the West Palm Beach and Miami communities. He was made president of the Model Land Company and Vice President of the Railroad in 1904, and later was elected Mayor of St. Augustine.