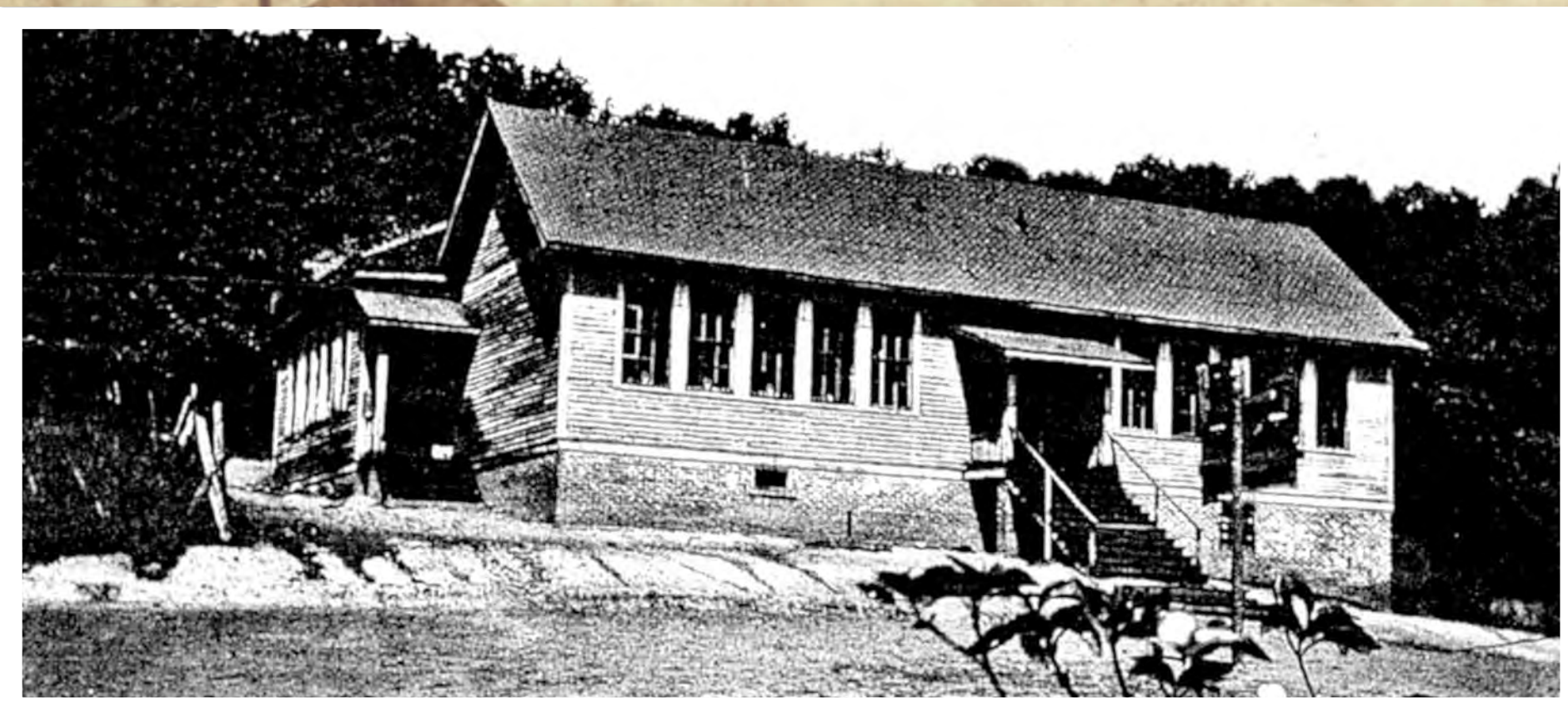


GEORGE GIBSON SR. - Legend and Leader

The Gibson Family

George Gibson Sr.'s parents, John Henry and Cora Lee Ingram Gibson, moved to Asheville in 1922 from South Carolina for better opportunities. John Henry worked as a caretaker for Dr. William Dunn, who owned many acres on Beaucatcher Mountain which adjoined South Asheville. Dr. Dunn provided a house for the Gibsons on his land. The doctor also gave lots to nearby residents to build homes.

George, born in 1928, attended South Asheville Colored School (SACS), Asheland Avenue Middle School, and Stephens-Lee High School, graduating in 1948. He remembers that the older boys of the SACS would sometimes be asked to help carry caskets from a hearse to a burial site in the South Asheville Cemetery.



The South Asheville Colored School (SACS) was located on North Dalton Street behind St. John "A" and adjacent to the SA cemetery. The building had four rooms for first through seventh grades. The school closed in 1948. Photo: 1938.

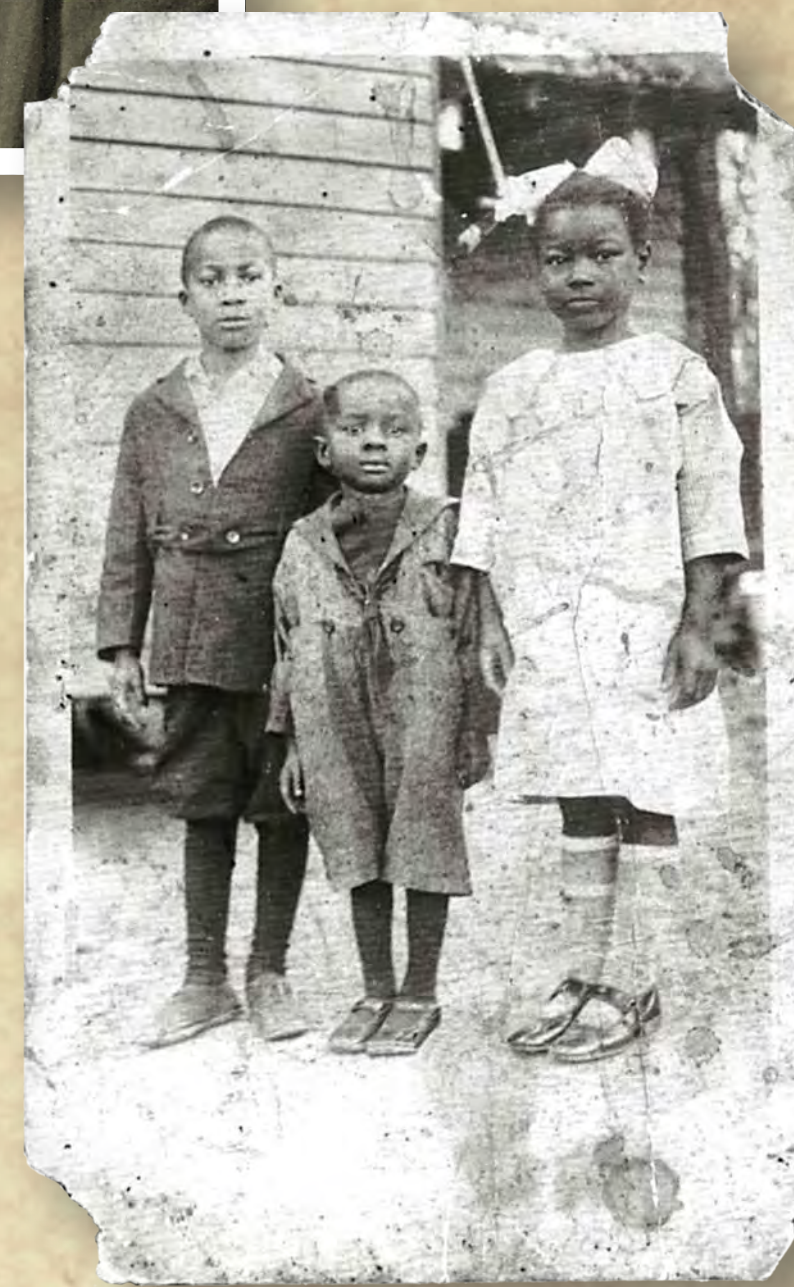


Cora Lee Gibson (1894-1968), wife of John Henry Gibson. After John Henry died in 1938, Cora supported the family by taking in laundry and day work. The children did odd jobs. Cora insisted they save some of their earnings and spend some rather than giving it to her.



George married Louise Mauldin (1929-2009) in 1950. They were married for 59 years. Both were born in Asheville. In the late 1950s, they purchased land around 12 Thurland Avenue. George and Louise had six children—three boys and three girls—and often opened their home to the community children. Always an activist, George was one of the first Black residents to sign his two youngest children up to attend Asheville's newly integrated schools in the early 1960s.

George had a varied career, first tending the property of Dr. William Dunn, from what is now Sherwood Street up to Reservoir Road and the location of the Dunn house. Later he worked construction, as a handyman, at the Chesterfield Mill, Colonial Baking Company and finally at the Red Cross as head custodian.



George had nine siblings. Pictured left to right is Columbus (1918-1986), Arthur (1921-1990) and Addie Lee (1919-1981) Gibson in the 1920s.



George has always been a Godly man, deeply rooted in faith, with a true passion for the betterment of his family, the church, and the community. He loves being part of St. John "A" Baptist church where he has held many positions including choir member, Sunday School superintendent and teacher, Deacon, and janitor. A fellow member once said that the most enjoyable part of attending church was listening to George "sing like an Angel." Photos 2012.



South Asheville Churches



St. John "A" Baptist church (St. John "A") was established in 1912. The original church structure was constructed in 1914 but burned down. The current building was erected in 1929 with many additions and a renovation in the following years. John Henry, Cora Lee, and family had been active members of St. John "A" and George, Louise and their family were also. The building was fully paid off with monies collected at John Henry's funeral.



St. Marks was established in 1890. Many South Asheville residents attended services at St. Marks and St. John "A" on alternate Sundays. In 1910 the first deed containing the name South Asheville was filed for the South Asheville AME Zion Church (St. Marks) at 104 Wyoming Road. The church closed in the early 1990s.

The South Asheville Cemetery (SAC)

Next to St. John "A" was the SAC with an estimated two thousand graves. It was founded in the early 1800s as a burial ground for people who had been enslaved by the Smith and McDowell families and was one of only a few cemeteries for Blacks in the region. Today it is considered the oldest public African American cemetery in Western North Carolina. The first known caretaker was George Avery (1844-1938) who had been enslaved by William W. McDowell. The last person interred in the cemetery was Robert C. Watkins in 1943.

After that the cemetery was neglected until George, in the 1980s, began to clear the overgrowth. He was joined by George Taylor, a trustee of St. John "A." The task was overwhelming. Soon word got out and they were joined by community members, AmeriCorps volunteers and Warren Wilson College students. The South Asheville Cemetery Association was incorporated in the 1980s to continue cemetery preservation. On Memorial Day in 2005 George participated in a ceremony to give proper burial to the "forgotten souls" buried in the SAC.

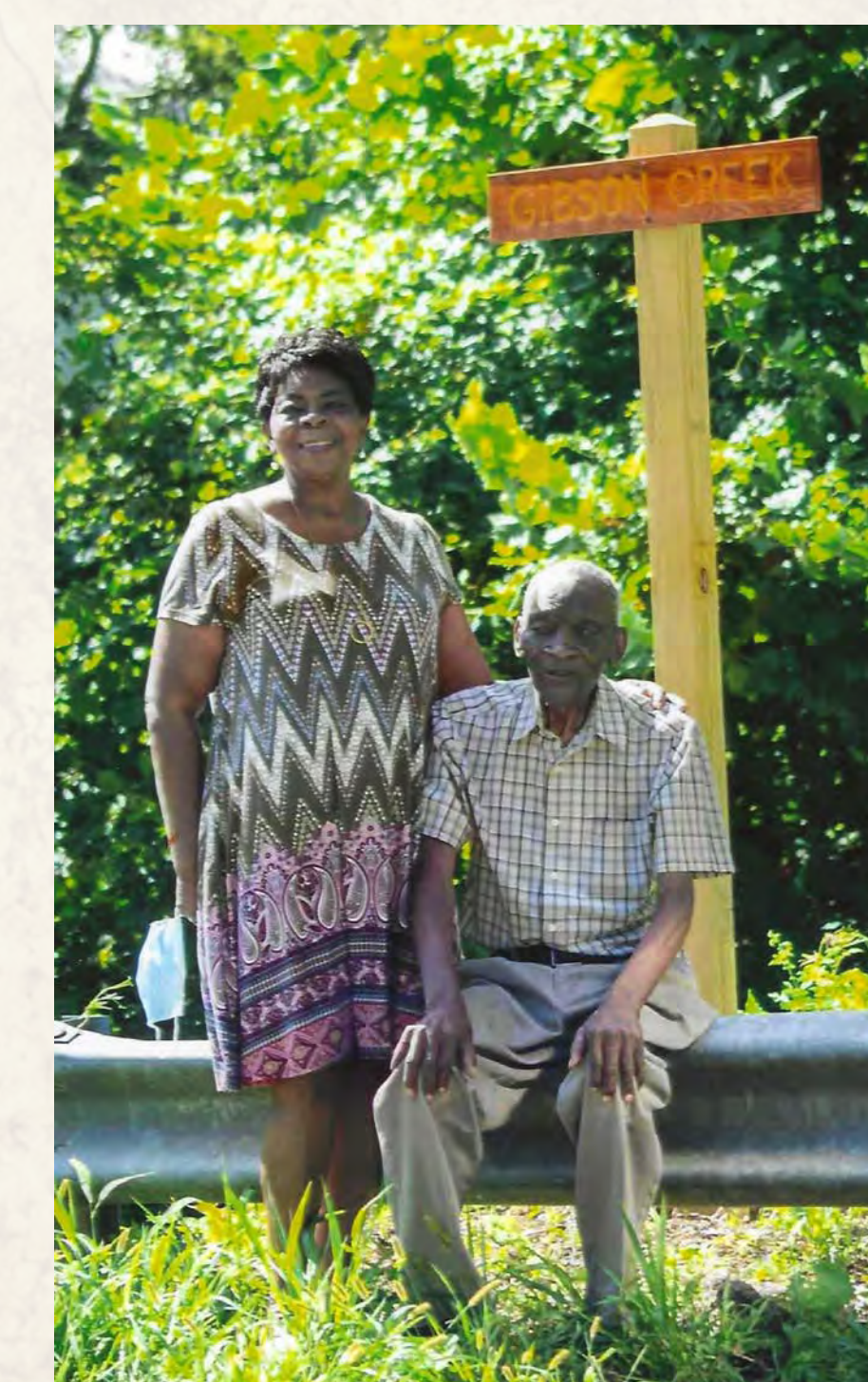


Butler and Nellie Goode, Nellie was George's oldest sister. Her husband, Butler, dug graves at the South Asheville Cemetery.



George worked tirelessly for 40 years to keep the South Asheville Cemetery in the public eye. In 2005 the South Asheville Cemetery was designated a Local Historic Landmark and added to the National Register of Historic Places in November 2021.

Gibson Creek



George Gibson and Olivia Gibson Metz. Photo: 2020

George loves to sit on his porch and share stories of growing up by the creek during segregation. Photo: 2015.

The Kenilworth Residents Association honored their beloved neighbor, George Gibson, and the neighborhood he loves with:

- Riverlink Name That Creek program designated the waterway flowing from the Gibson property through Kenilworth Park to the Swannanoa River, Gibson Creek.
- A Gibson Creek sign created by SAC was installed at the corner of Norfolk Street and Wyoming Road to identify the creek.
- The Kenilworth Residents Association along with a Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County grant erected a history panel in Kenilworth Park.

