

# THE GIBSONVILLE MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

VOL. 7 NO. 2 ~ WINTER 2016 / 2017

### Elizabeth Nicks Gibson Richardson Comes Home After 175 Year Journey

*By Jerry Nix*

Around 1841, Elizabeth Nicks Gibson, her husband Gideon Richardson, her parents, and other Gibson family members left Guilford County. They moved to several different states in search of relief from a severe drought and sickness that plagued both Guilford County and the country. Elizabeth Nicks Gibson was the daughter of Dr. James and Sarah Nicks Gibson. She was granddaughter of Andrew and Jane Freeland Gibson. Joseph Gibson, for whom Gibsonville was named, was her uncle. Prior to their relocation and

around 1827, an unidentified itinerant painter traveled through Guilford County and painted several limner (watercolor) paintings for both the Gibson and Foust families.

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Thomas Wolfe wrote a book entitled *You Can't Go Home Again*. Sometimes this may be true, but after 175 years Elizabeth Nicks Gibson Richardson's painting is back home in Gibsonville. On



November 8th, 2016, a gift of Elizabeth's painting was given by Mrs. Dorothy "Dot" Pourteau of Katy, Texas to the Gibsonville Museum. Mrs. Pourteau is a direct descendant of Elizabeth and also a charter member of the Gibsonville Museum. In addition to this painting, Mrs. Pourteau, also contributed an original copy of *The History of Guilford County (1902)* by Sallie W. Stockard, a book about the Freeland families, and a complete genealogy of the Gibson family (which took years to compile). Mrs. Pourteau's generosity is vastly appreciated by the GMHSI. The museum is excited and privileged to have received such

a significant contribution of Gibsonville history. It is notable that other limner paintings by this same unknown artist are on display at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) in Old Salem, Winston Salem, North Carolina.

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## Historical Spotlight: J.W. and Etta "P.T." Burke

You cannot tell the history of Gibsonville without talking about its founding and influential families. Some of these notable families were the Gibsons, the Davidsons, the Kivetts, the Owens, and the Burkes. Each of these families included civic and business leaders who impacted Gibsonville as it is today. Outlined below is a short history of one of these families, the Burkes. One unique feature about the Burke's participation in both the town and North Carolina's development is that this family included a power couple. Both J.W. Burke and his wife Etta "P.T." Mendenhall Burke made significant impacts in different arenas, as shown in the below separate time lines.

### J. W. Burke (1879 - 1961)

**January 2, 1879:** Birth of John William Burke to Joseph B. Burke and mother Sarah Dixon Burke. John William (J. W.) was born in nearby Chatham County.

**The Early 1900's:** Gibsonville had an incredible location. It had the benefit of 1) being a rail stop on North Carolina Rail Road, a primary form of travel, and also was 2) on Highway 10, the main east – west road across central NC. Traffic through the town included both local and regional traffic. This crossroads location allowed for growth of the town and its businesses. In 1901, Gibsonville had "80 homes, 2 cotton mills, 3 or 4 merchandise establishments and about 500 people." Surrounding Gibsonville at that time were Burlington's 3,692 persons (grown from 817 persons in the 1880's census due to the NCRR locating their Company Shops in downtown), Durham's 6,679 persons, and Greensboro's 10,035 persons.

**Before 1906:** J.W. "came to Gibsonville as a clerk at Gibsonville Store Company and later started his own retail business which he expanded into Burkes Department Store." This business was located in a two story brick building at the corner of Main and Lewis Street in our downtown. This building was torn down and redeveloped into Wade's Jewelry store in 1999.

**January 11, 1906:** Marriage of J.W. Burke (age 27) and Etta Mendenhall (age 21).

**1907:** Mr. Burke was one of the organizers and a member of the Board for the town's first bank, the Bank of Gibsonville. This bank had a presence in downtown until 1969 when it merged with and became a branch of First Citizens Bank & Trust Company.

**Aug 1908 – May 1909:** J. W. Burke was a Town Alderman. When Mayor Davidson was not in attendance, Mr. Burke acted as Chairmen and lead town meetings.

**1920:** "J. W. Burke was a respected Gibsonville merchant who founded and prosperously operated the J.W. Burke & Company Greater Department Store. Mr. Burke started his enterprise with a meager \$500, but by December of 1920 the mercantile's income had exceeded \$200,000." Mrs. Burke kept the books for her husband's store. To give context to the Burke's income understand that in 1920 a dozen eggs cost \$.36, a bicycle cost \$11.95, and an average worker made \$574 / year.

**Merchant Associations:** In his lifetime, Mr. Burke was a charter member and president of the Gibsonville Rotary Club and Gibsonville Merchant's Association. He was also a member of the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Merchant's Association.

**May 20, 1920:** Formation of the Gibsonville Development Corporation for "Insurance, Loans, Real Estate, and Lumber". This was the partnership of high net worth individuals D. M. Davidson (president and mayor of Gibsonville), J.W. Burke (vice president), A. B. Owens (secretary), and P. L. Kivett (assistant secretary). This group purchased, built, and owned many of the town buildings and expanded our downtown. This group also developed vacant land into neighborhoods and were an active part of the town's residential growth.

**1924:** The Gibsonville High School was built at 401 East Joyner Street. Mr. Burke was a Chairman of the Gibsonville School Board and helped obtain funds for this property's construction.

**December 31, 1930:** J.W. Burke became a Guilford County Commissioner. This was following the great stock market collapse in 1929 and when real implications of the Great Depression were becoming apparent. In 1931, US national unemployment jumped to 16.3%. Locally, high net worth Guilford County is impacted. Under the first two year of J.W.'s tenancy, county positions, hours county services are provided, and wages to staff are cut. Mr. Burke and his peers' efforts paid off. "The county succeeded in weathering the effects of the Depression without defaulting on its obligations, due in no small degree to the fact that, by 1933 and for the remainder of the decade, it had become the wealthiest county in the state." Mr. Burke was a County Commissioner for twelve years.

**The Palmer School / Charlotte Hawkins Brown:** For over thirty years, J.W. sat as a member of the Board of Trustees and treasurer of Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia. This African American school evolved from an agricultural and manual training facility (in 1901) to a fully accredited, nationally recognized preparatory school." The school closed in 1971. On a personal note, through his involvement with this civic institution, Mr. Burke became friends with Nat King Cole, "whom he entertained at his home on many occasions."

**August 10, 1961:** Death of J.W. Burke at age 82 due to viral pneumonia. His funeral was handled by Bartlett Funeral Home and he was buried at the Gibsonville City Cemetery.



## Etta “P. T.” Burke (1884 - 1968)

**December 19, 1884:** Birth of Etta Mendenhall to father William D. Mendenhall and Mary Blair. At the time, the Mendenhall's were an established Guilford County / Greensboro family.

**1904:** A seven room wood structure with an auditorium was built for a school use. Due to its color, it became known as the Green School. Miss Etta Mendenhall was one of the first two teachers at the Green School and relocated to Gibsonville for this employment. This school was located near 401 East Joyner Street where the historic Gibsonville School is today.

**January 11, 1906:** Marriage of J.W. Burke (age 27) and Etta Mendenhall (age 21).

**Between 1911 – 1918:** “A career that originated with teaching at Gibsonville’s former Green School... culminated in a lifetime devotion to the Parent Teacher Association. Hoping to model a Gibsonville PTA chapter after that of the Greensboro organization, Mrs. Burke initially enlisted support from the Green School’s principal [Mr. W. W. Davidson]. Mrs. Burke hosted many of the earliest events. Often these events were conducted around a stone fire place situated in the rear of the Burke House in Gibsonville [now Burke Manor Inn], an edifice that still stands today. Such dignitaries as Governor Kerr Scott were in attendance during some of these meetings.”

**1918:** Mrs. Burke “was instrumental in helping to organize the [P.T.A] program on a state level.” “The first State PTA office, which housed the office of the Treasurer, was located on the second floor of Burke’s Department Store. Mrs. J. W. Burke, better known as “P. T. Burke,” was the first State PTA Treasurer, and she served without compensation.” Additionally, this office space was furnished gratis by Mr. and Mrs. Burke.

**1920:** The Burke family had tremendous financial success. During this time and through her life, Mrs. Burke “kept the books” for her husband’s businesses and for statewide PTA efforts. Ironically, in this same year, women are allowed the right to vote by the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution.

**1926:** Mrs. Burke accepts a Board of Directors role with the North Carolina Congress of Parents and Teachers. She worked with this group and actively supported educational efforts statewide throughout her life.

**Early 1930’s:** The Burkes open a Ben Franklins in downtown Gibsonville. This was a five and dime store. Per local interviews in 2016, this store was owned and primarily managed by Mrs. Burke. The Burkes also operated a Ben Franklins in Reidsville.

**Merchant Associations:** In her lifetime, Mrs. Burke was a president of the Gibsonville Business and Professional Women’s Club.

**1958 - 1960:** After over 40 years, Mrs. Burke’s Gibsonville office closed around 1958. She had “the honor” of turning the first shovel full of dirt for the planned new construction offices at 3501 Glenwood Avenue, Raleigh. On April 27, 1960, she attended the dedication ceremony for the new State Office of NC Congress of Parents and Teachers. Mrs. Burke delivered an address and was honored by the dedication of a room in her name.

**August 1961:** Death of Mrs. Burke’s husband, J.W.

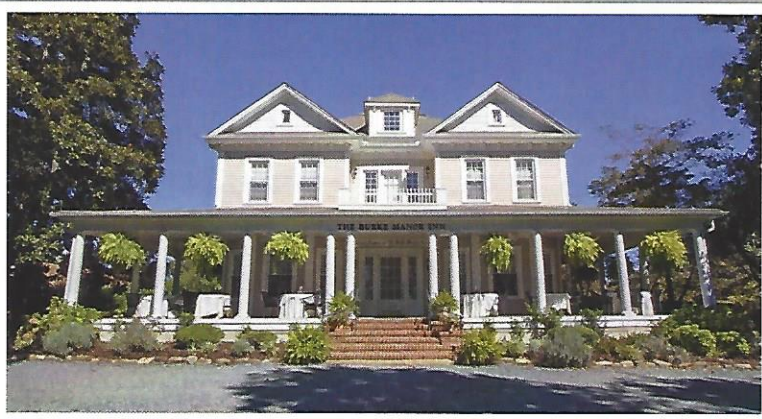
**November 28, 1968:** Death of Etta Burke at the age of 83. It was asked that, in lieu of flowers, contributions be made to the Etta Burke Student Fund of the NC PTA. She was survived by her two sons (Blair and Edward), one daughter (Ruth), two sisters (J. W. McLennan and Mrs. Charles Swam, both of Greensboro), five grandchildren, and three great grandchildren. She was buried at the Gibsonville City Cemetery with her husband J.W.

*For a list of sources, see the Detailed Histories tab (Under History) at [www.gmhsi.org](http://www.gmhsi.org).*

## Historic Spotlight: 303 Burke Street

**1906:** Construction of this late Queen Ann Colonial Revival period home. This residence was built to be a superintendent’s home for the nearby Minnoeola Mills plant. At time of construction only half the house (as it stands today) was in place.

**1911:** The home was sold to J. W. Burke. Four generations of the Burke family resided in the home.



**Date Unknown:** In honor of their contributions, the street their home is on is named after the Burke family.

**1999:** Property is sold to Vernon and Lynn Brady. The Brady’s improved the property and converted it into a bed and breakfast / event center called the Burke Manor Inn.

**2011:** Property is sold to Lil and Lori Lacassagne. They took this property to the next level and incorporated a 4 Diamond AAA rated French restaurant within the house. Prior to ownership of the Burke Manor, the Lacassagne family were the proprietors for ten years of the #1 rated French restaurant in Raleigh.  
Website: [www.Burkemanor.com](http://www.Burkemanor.com)



## Change of Museum Hours (2017): First Saturday

The Gibsonville Museum will change its schedule in 2017. The Museum will be open on the first Saturday of each month from 10 AM – 1 PM. It will also still be open during town events and for other special occasions. This revised schedule is being done in order to match the schedules of other downtown activities like first Saturday events / concerts, Family Market Days, the Gibsonville Garden Railroad (9 AM – Noon), among others. Local families who venture out on these First Saturdays will have the choice of abundant activities in our vibrant, beautiful downtown. For those of you who have yet to visit us, the Museum is located at 219 East Main Street in downtown Gibsonville. We look forward to seeing you.

### Membership Matters

*By Sandi Moulton*

This column appears to bring you up-to-date about issues that concern your membership. Recently, a question was raised about benefits for different levels of sponsorship. The board of directors appointed a subcommittee to study the issue and to propose revised guidelines for 2017. We'd like your input too! Contact us about what benefits you would suggest for each GMHSI sponsorship level (\$100, \$250, \$500, and larger). We can be reached at [info@gmhsi.org](mailto:info@gmhsi.org). Please title your email "Membership Benefits Suggestions". "Membership Matters" has a second meaning - it gives the board an opportunity to say thank you for providing the dollars that keep the museum doors open to you and the general public. In this edition, we give thanks to all of our members and also special recognition for sponsorships, honorariums and memorials in 2015 and 2016.

- **Bronze (\$100)** - Carl "Ricky" Clark, Onie Dennis, Jim & Joan Drummond, Deleno and Susan Flynn, Bob and Sandi Moulton, Jerry Nix, Dot Pourteau, Richard and Barbara Swank, and Carol Younger
- **Silver (\$250)** - J. Patrick Harman, Mike and Denise Ramos, and Dick and Barbara Swank (2015)
- **Gold (\$500)** - Jack and Nan Flynn
- **Larger (\$675)** - Sean Dowell

**Memorials** - Patsy and Josh Flynn, given by Deleno Flynn; Warren Hendricks, given by Bob & Sandi Moulton; David Hix, given by Bob and Sandi Moulton

**Honorariums** - Richard Kleeberg, given by Friends of Richard Kleeberg; Bob and Sandi Moulton, given by Dr. Patricia Moulton

**About the Gibsonville Museum & Historical Society, Inc:** The GMHSI is a member funded, non-profit organization created to promote public knowledge of local, state, and national history (with an emphasis on the history of Gibsonville). The GMHSI has regional related historical artifacts as well as revolving exhibits at the Gibsonville Museum. The Museum is located at 219 East Main Street in downtown Gibsonville and is open on the first Saturday of each month (as of January 2017) from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. For information on membership, the Museum, donations, or otherwise, please email [info@gmhsi.org](mailto:info@gmhsi.org), call us at 336-449-5678, or visit us at the Museum.

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**Gibsonville Museum and Historical Society Inc.**

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