CHARLES DANA GIBSON:
THE AMERICAN TRENDSETTER

Charles Dana Gibson (1867–1944) was an American illustrator best known for his creation of the Gibson girl. Gibson was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts and moved to Flushing, Queens as a young child and grew up on 149th street (originally named Jagger) and Sanford. Though the family's house no longer exists, however, the gate is still standing.

Coming from an old New England family, which included merchants, seamen, and artists, his artistic interest showed itself early in his life. Gibson's father often cut silhouette figures to amuse his son which influenced the young Gibson to create his own drawings. At fourteen years old, his skill with scissors had become a local legend. This led him to obtain an apprenticeship with Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907), the notable American sculptor of the Beaux-Arts generation. During this apprenticeship, Gibson did not show an aptitude for sculpture and prefered to work on paper, leading him to his experimentation with pen and pencil. In 1883, Gibson enrolled in the Art Students League, NY at sixteen years old.

Eventually he developed an extensive portfolio which made its way in the New York City offices of Life magazine, a young humor magazine which began in 1883. By 1904, a contract with Collier's weekly made him the highest paid illustrator in America, where collections of his drawings appeared periodically in a series of books that ran into many editions. Gibson studied in Paris briefly which contributed to the improvement of his drawings and inspiration to depict high society. By the 1890s, Gibson fashioned a new standard for romantic love, revival of chivalry, and beauty – the Gibson Girl. He became president of the Society of Illustrators during World War I, and served as the head of the Division of Pictorial Publicity under the Federal committee of Public Information.

Gibson apartment building on 149th street, Flushing Queens. James Driscoll, Flushing 1880–1948, Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2005: 123.

Curated by Daniela Addamo. Designed by Aliana Prior.
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THE GIBSON GIRL

The Gibson Girl was an iconic representation of the beautiful and independent American woman at the turn of the 20th century. She was based on characterizations of Gibson's wife Irene Langhorne Gibson (1873–1956) and her sister Nancy Astor (1879–1964), the first woman to serve in Britain's Parliament, and both of whom were featured in the American Book of Beauty in 1904.

The Gibson Girl corresponded to the burgeoning "new woman," depicting the fashionable upper-middle class society. Gibson Girl was pretty and feminine, illustrating some of the contradictions of modern womanhood at the turn of the twentieth century. She depicted the modern woman, known popularly as the "new woman," and had a large influence on fashion at the time. This "new woman" movement came out of the Aesthetic Movement's dress reform which rejected highly structured and heavily trimmed Victorian corsets. Dress reform began in England in the mid-nineteenth century by figures of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Arts and Crafts Movement. This new current which Gibson addressed also took place later in America around the 1870s. American women began to speak out against tight-laced corsets, hoop skirts and bustles and advocated for unrestrictive simplicity of design. An S-shaped figure became trendy, with a large bust and large hips which at the time was seen as masculine. The Gibson Girl hairstyle was soft and very poofy with a bun on top and ringlets and tendrils hanging down.

The Gibson Girl represented many types of girls. Each was imbued with an ideal refinement that most women identify and men admired. This new icon spread everywhere in popular culture; in popular songs, banners, pillowcases, silver spoons, stationary, cocktail napkins and decorative household items. Most notably, Gibson's drawings were carefully studied and copied for the latest hair styling and costume, and became the dominant fashion of the time period. The term Gibson Girl was referenced during the early twentieth-century and was synonymous with the latest fashions.

Gibson Girl 1909 Collier's Magazine Artists' Proof. No. 1 A Daughter of the South.

The Gibson Girl was an iconic symbol of poised, self assured American women, which remained popular from the post-Victorian era until after World War I.

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DANIEL CARTER BEARD & THE GIBSON MAN

The Gibson Man reflected the looks and manner of Gibson's friend Richard Harding Davis, debonaire, ruggedly handsome writer, war correspondent, and adventurer. Gibson also took inspiration from his close friend Daniel Carter Beard as another representation of the Gibson Man. In many scenes of the Gibson Girl, who embodies independence and assertiveness, the Gibson Man works to function as her direct counterpart. The relationship that Gibson constructed between the two introduced a new dynamic in gender relations, ultimately highlighting both a positive and progressive outlook on women as dominant figures within courtships and marriages.

Born in Cincinnati, Daniel Carter Beard (1850–1941), one of Gibson's influences and muses for the Gibson Man, was a prominent Progressive-era reformer, outdoorsman, illustrator, and author. In the early 1870's Beard moved to Flushing, Queens with his family and began to make a living as an illustrator following a short career working at the Sanborn Map and Publishing Company. He was called "Uncle Dan Beard" affectionately by his fellow Flushing residents. The young artist's drawings graced the cover of numerous newspapers and magazines, from the New York Herald to Harper's Weekly, and from St. Nicholas to Godey's Magazines. Beard's notoriety attracted the attention of author Mark Twain, who hired him to illustrate various publications.

Additionally, while touring tenements in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1878, Daniel Carter Beard became interested in the plight of urban youth. Upon reading a sign with the words "No dogs or children wanted," he proclaimed "I thought to myself that the fools have built an immense city without any place for the young at all." From this, Carter became dedicated to initiating programs throughout New York which embraced, supported, and sustained the city's youth and is thought to be the founder of the Boy Scouts of America. Boy Scouts originated its early beginning in Flushing where Beard considered the Gibson boys to be his first Boy Scouts – commending their proclivity for the outdoors, adventure, and exploration.

Early 20th century leader of the Scouting movement Dan Beard, assumed location Flushing. Bain News Service, 1937

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