

Descendants of John Grier Hibben and Jenny Davidson

Generation No. 5.1

JOHN GRIER⁵ HIBBEN (*Samuel Entriken⁴, Samuel Entriken³, Thomas², John¹*) was born April 19, 1861, in Peoria, IL, and died May 16, 1933, in Woodbridge, NJ. He married **JENNY DAVIDSON** November 08, 1887, in Elizabeth, Union Co., NJ, daughter of **JOHN DAVIDSON** and **ADELIA WAITE**. She was born 1863, and died June 18, 1933, in New York City, NY.

Child of **JOHN HIBBEN** and **JENNY DAVIDSON** is:

- i. **ELIZABETH GRIER⁶ HIBBEN**, b. August 11, 1888, Chambersburg, Franklin Co., PA; d. July 4, 1970. She m. **ROBERT MAXWELL SCOON** November 23, 1915, Princeton, Mercer Co., NJ; b. September 21, 1886, NY; d. April 8, 1970, Princeton, Mercer Co., NJ.

JOHN GRIER HIBBEN 1861 - 1933
and
JENNY DAVIDSON 1863 - 1933

*Where there is no sense of responsibility for the day's work,
Where there is a shirking of one's evident duties,
Where there is an inveterate impulse to follow always the line of least resistance,
I must confess I see no basis upon which character can be built.¹*

John Grier Hibben

Education And Ordination

John Grier Hibben, the only child of Samuel Entriken Hibben, II and Elizabeth Grier, was born April 19, 1861 in Peoria, Illinois. After his father died, he was raised at the homes of both the Grier and Hibben families. In order to assure the welfare and education of his grandson, Samuel had himself appointed Guardian of John Grier Hibben, aged five, in July 1866.²

John Grier attended high school in Peoria and matriculated at the College of New Jersey (Princeton University) in the fall of 1878. He distinguished himself in mathematics and was valedictorian of his graduating class in 1882. He then spent a year studying philosophy at the University of Berlin before enrolling in the Princeton Theological Seminary.³ On May 15, 1886 the *Hillsboro Gazette* reported: "Rev. Greer [Grier] last Sunday occupied the pulpit at the Presbyterian Church. He has certainly made full use of the rare educational advantages given him in a collegiate course at Princeton, a subsequent term at the great University of Berlin, and the theological training at Princeton again."⁴ John Grier was ordained as a Presbyterian minister by the Carlisle Presbytery in Pennsylvania on May 19, 1887. A few months later he married Jenny Davidson and for the following four years he was pastor at the Falling Spring Presbyterian Church in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

Elected President Of Princeton University

John Grier then returned to Princeton as an instructor and Ph.D. candidate. He received his doctorate in 1893 for his dissertation on "The Relation of Ethics to Jurisprudence." He was then made an assistant professor in 1894, full professor in 1907 and elected the fourteenth president of Princeton in 1912.⁵ (Plate 14) The *Princeton Alumni Weekly* reported the events of that day.

If it took a long time to decide on just the President Princeton wanted, it took a very short time to make him President. In less than an hour after the ballot was taken in the Board of Trustees the new President had taken the oath of office and was presiding over the Trustee's meeting. As soon as the ballot was completed President pro tempore Stewart appointed M. Taylor Pyne '77, Dr. George B. Stewart '76 and Dr. J. M. T. Finney '84 a Committee of Notification. This committee proceeded at once to find the new President. When they learned that he was not at his home on Cleveland Lane, they went to McCosh Hall and found him lecturing to his sophomore class in logic. Mr. Pyne briefly announced to the class that their professor had just been elected President of the University (tumultuous cheers) and hoped that they would excuse him from completing the

THE SAMUEL HIBBEN LINE

*recitation. Those sophomores will always remember that recitation. The committee, accompanied by Dr. Hibben, then hurried back to the Trustee's room, where without further ado President Stewart requested Ex-Chancellor William J. Magie '52 of the Board to administer the oath of office.*⁶

That night the student body marched to Dr. Hibben's home, where he appeared on the front porch and made a brief address:

I take the Presidency of Princeton at this time with hope, and with courage, and I may say with confidence; not however a confidence in myself, but with confidence in the great body of Princeton men. You men stand not for yourselves alone in my mind, but for all the undergraduates with whom I have come in contact in the years past; and I say that I look forward to the future with confidence, as I know what spirit you Princeton men are of. It is the spirit of youth, which is essentially a spirit of sincerity, free from cynicism and free from pessimism.

*And it is not only the spirit of youth. It is the Princeton spirit. It is the spirit, my friends, of honor, it is the spirit of fair dealing, man to man, and above all things it is the spirit of democracy. That spirit will continue to the end. It will be my supreme effort to maintain and foster that spirit of democracy.*⁷

The same issue of the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* printed a brief biographical sketch of the new President. The paper knew of Elizabeth Grier Hibben's DAR certification of her great grandfather, Rev. Robert Cooper, as a participant in the Revolution. Evidently, it was not aware that John Grier Hibben's 2nd great-grandfather, Thomas Hibben, on his paternal side, also was a participant.⁸

*President John Grier Hibben '82 comes of sturdy Princeton stock. His great-great grandfather was graduated under President John Witherspoon and though a clergyman he was Captain of a company of Pennsylvania Volunteers during the Revolution,—the Rev. Robert Cooper, D.D., of the Class of 1763.*⁹

John Grier Hibben challenged the Class of 1913, the first to graduate under his tenure, with this message.

You, enlightened, self-sufficient, self-governed, endowed with gifts above your fellows, the world expects you to produce as well as to consume, to add to and not to subtract from its store of good, to build up and not tear down, to ennoble and not degrade. It commands you to take your place and to fight your fight in the name of honor and of chivalry, against the powers of organized evil and of commercialized vice, against the poverty, disease, and death which follow fast in the wake of sin and ignorance, against all the innumerable forces which are working to destroy the image of God in man, and unleash the passions of the beast. There comes to you from many quarters, from many voices, the call of your kind. It is the human cry of spirits in bondage, of souls in despair, of lives debased and doomed. It is the call of man to his brother ... such is your vocation; follow the voice that calls you in the name of God and of man. The time is short, the opportunity is great; therefore, crowd the hours with the best that is in you.

The Presidential Record

As much has been written about the presidency of John Grier at Princeton from January 1912 to June 21, 1932, just a few references will be cited here. He assumed the office with deep divisions existing among the faculty, trustees and alumni of Princeton.

The search for a successor to Woodrow Wilson had lasted for fifteen months. Hibben's nomination and election came at the hands of those trustees who had most resisted Wilson's reforms, and this posed a special problem for the new president, whose warm friendship with Wilson had rapidly cooled after Hibben had joined forces with Wilson's principal opponents in the Graduate School controversy, Moses Taylor Pyne and Dean Andrew F. West. The University had become sharply divided during the controversy, and Hibben felt that his most urgent task was to bring the factions together. At his first public appearance after the election, he set the tone for his entire administration. "If I am to prove myself worthy in some small way of the confidence reposed in me," he told the alumni of Orange, New Jersey, "my administration must make for peace. I wish to say to the alumni that which I said to the board of trustees on the day of election to this high office, and later to the faculty, that I represent no group or set of men, no party, no faction, no past allegiance or affiliation—but one united Princeton!"¹⁰

Several biographical articles have been published which agree that his skill as a mediator and innovative leader did unite Princeton. Excerpts from a few of them mention some of his beliefs and honors.

He defended the ideas that underlie the traditional "liberal education," pleaded for the humanities, and, while he recognized the role of "pure" science, his own interest was in the transmission of old truth rather than in the discovery of new. To conserve the racial inheritance of the past and to vitalize it by fresh interpretation and adaptation seemed to him the chief function of the scholar.¹¹

John Grier Hibben was a member and former president of the American Philosophical Society, and a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. He was an officer of the Legion of Honor, a commander of the Belgian Order of the Crown, and a grand officer of the Serbian Order of St. Sava.¹²

*Hibben's interest in the life of the nation was keen. In the little volume *The Higher Patriotism* (1915—translated into Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish) may be discerned the deeper reasons for his ardent advocacy of the allies in the First World War. . . . From 1914 to 1917 he stirred large audiences with his appeals for national preparedness, and during the war dedicated his own and the university's resources to the service of the country. When peace came he joined the League of Nations non-partisan organization, and was one of the first signers of a petition advocating the canceling of all war debts. . . . His association and friendship with Col. Lindbergh, with whom he was in daily contact after the tragic kidnapping at Hopewell, N. J., intensified his interest in the suppression of crime.¹³*

Princeton Was A Family Affair

Hibben had a happy family life. His wife, the former Jenny Davidson, loved and respected him very much. She was a very strong-willed, energetic woman who

THE SAMUEL HIBBEN LINE

kept a close watch on the social affairs of the Princeton community. She took a personal interest in the affairs of the infirmary and, like her husband, made an effort to visit those undergraduates who were being treated there. Hibben often discussed University affairs with his wife, frequently reading his speeches to her for her criticism or consulting with her on various matters. Naturally enough, their son-in-law, Robert Maxwell Scoon, a Princeton professor who had married their only child, Beth, was also involved in the administrative problems of Princeton. The Hibbens and Scoon were saluted in a verse of the senior song of the mid-1920s, which ran,

*Here's to Hibben, Jennie's John,
And Robert Scoon, in-law their son.
We toast the whole damn family,
They run this university!*¹⁴

Retirement And Accidental Death

John Grier retired on June 21, 1932, the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation from Princeton. The trustees presented him with a new automobile. He had never owned one as the University had always provided transportation. So, he was a relatively inexperienced driver. *“On a rainy spring day in May 1933, driving the car the trustees had given him as a retirement gift, he was killed in an automobile accident.”*¹⁵ He was 72 years old.

“Princeton was Dr. Hibben's entire life,” said one of his colleagues in the Princetonian the morning after his death last week. The phrase accurately describes not only his physical relationship to the community, but also his lifelong devotion to the University—its campus, its students, its faculty, and its alumni. From the time when he entered as a freshman in the fall of 1877 he was a resident of Princeton almost continually until the day of his death.

*Dr. Hibben would prefer men to judge him by judging Princeton. Where Princeton failed he believed he had failed himself. Where Princeton succeeded, he felt he had succeeded, although he was generous in giving praise to his colleagues.*¹⁶

Jenny Hibben was severely injured in the accident, and died just a month later on June 18, 1933. *“MRS. JENNY HIBBEN IS AUTO ACCIDENT VICTIM, Former Resident of Hillsboro Dies in New York City Hospital.”*¹⁷ Both Jenny and John Grier were buried next to one another in Presidents' row in Princeton Cemetery.

Additional Information About Descendants of John Grier Hibben

Jenny and John Grier were survived by a daughter, Elizabeth Grier Hibben (a.k.a. Beth), and a grandson, John Grier Hibben Scoon. Beth, who was born in 1888, became the wife of Professor Robert Maxwell Scoon of Princeton University on November 23, 1915. Their son, John Grier Hibben Scoon was born October 13, 1916. He graduated with honors from Princeton in 1938. He had two careers, one as an editor for university presses, and another as a cultural attaché to the U. S. Information Agency.¹⁸ He served in Germany, Thailand and Burma. John married Annabelle Rouse in 1943 and they had two sons and two daughters. John Scoon died April 4, 1995.¹⁹

Postscript

Historians and family members have found very few of John Grier Hibben's personal or official documents remaining in the archives at Princeton University. Therefore, historical assessment of his personal thoughts or opinions of events and persons has not been possible. At the end of his term as President, he intentionally and systematically destroyed his files.

As the Hibben administration drew to a close, one of his office employees, Margaret Regan, began to discover an extremely puzzling sight each morning as she opened up the president's office in Nassau Hall. Scattered about the office would be piles of folders, the contents of which had been removed. Miss Regan encountered this phenomenon every day for quite a period of time. . . . Apparently, according to Miss Regan, Hibben and his wife came to the office each night, cleared the folders of all papers, and took the papers to the fireplace in "Prospect" [the presidential residence] to burn them.²⁰

Generation 5.1 End Notes:

- ¹ John Grier Hibben, "Report of the President, 1925," Princeton, New Jersey, (Princeton University), page 12. A favorite bit of advice to students.
- ² David N. McBride & Jane N. McBride, *Wills, Administrations, Guardianships and Adoptions of Highland County, Ohio, 1805-1880*, 1957, page 247.
- ³ Harris E. Starr, editor, *Dictionary of American Biography*, 1960, New York, (Charles Scribner & Sons), volume XI—Supplement one, pages 398-401; Rossiter Johnson, editor, *The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans*, 1904, Boston, Massachusetts, (The Biographical Society), volume V; *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 1947, New York, (James T. White & Company), volume XXXIII, page 4.
- ⁴ Newspaper, (unknown), Hillsboro, Highland County, Ohio, historical events column, "39 YEARS AGO," May 15, 1925.
- ⁵ Starr, *Dictionary of American Biography*, [Note 3], pages 398-401; *Who was Who in America, 1897-1942*, 1996, Fifth Printing, (Marquis-Who's Who, Incorporated), Volume I, page 559.
- ⁶ *The Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Princeton, New Jersey, January 17, 1912, volume XII, No. 15, page 231.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, page 232.
- ⁸ See Chapter II, Generation 2.1.
- ⁹ *The Princeton Alumni Weekly*, [Note 6], page 235.
- ¹⁰ Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, 1978, (Princeton University Press).
- ¹¹ Starr, *Dictionary of American Biography*, [Note 3], pages 399-400.
- ¹² *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, New York, (New York Genealogical and Biographic Society), volume 65, #2, April 1934, page 143.
- ¹³ Starr, *Dictionary of American Biography*, [Note 3], page 400.
- ¹⁴ Steven L. Buenning, *John Grier Hibben: A Biographical Study, 1919-1932*, 1971, Senior thesis submitted to the History Department, Princeton University, page 22.
- ¹⁵ J. A. Garraty and M. C. Carnes, editors, *American National Bibliography*, 1999, New York, (Oxford University Press), Volume 10, page 731.
- ¹⁶ *The Princeton Alumni Weekly*, [Note 1], May 26, 1933, Volume XXXIII, No. 33.
- ¹⁷ Newspaper, (unknown), Hillsboro, Highland County, Ohio, June 22, 1933.
- ¹⁸ *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Class of 1938 memorials.
- ¹⁹ Scoon family records.
- ²⁰ Buenning, *John Grier Hibben: A Biographical Study, 1919-1932*, [Note 14], page 81.