

CHARLIE MAGUIRE

MUSICIAN SONGWRITER

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Mary Gibbs

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Mary Hannah Gibbs (1879-1984), the scrappy woman who risked her life for Itasca State Park (Head waters of the great Mississippi River) when she was 24 years old in 1903, could be a candidate for the earliest woman park ranger in history, as well as one of the earliest female environmentalists in the world. Her life before, during, and after her brief tenure as acting Commissioner in Minnesota's oldest park drove my search for answers which has now spanned 10 years and two countries, and has changed this song five times so far since I first wrote it in 1990. The song led in part, to the construction of the Mary Gibbs Headwaters Visitors Center at Itasca State Park. I sang this song when I dedicated that very building in 2005. I also wrote the first-ever article about her in 1992 for the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine.

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Lake Itasca 1903, Mary Gibbs is part of that history
She walked up to a gunman rifle in his hand
Guarding a sluiceway at a logging dam
Alone this woman took a stand

REFRAIN:

She let the waters out, she let the lake down low
Mary Gibbs let the Mississippi go
Down to the Gulf of Mexico
Mary Gibbs let the Mississippi go

ADDITIONAL VERSES:

The logging dam was deep and wide
Flooding out the land on every side
Acting Commissioner at 24
To protect the Head waters and enforce the law
Like her dying father had done before

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"I'll shoot anyone!" that gunman said
Pushing back the warrant before it was read
But Mary Gibbs she put out her hand
She placed on the lever that controlled the dam
"You'll not shoot it off!" she told that man
And "You'll not shoot me!" she told that man

Now old Judge Spooner he called her in
"An outlaw you'll be if you do that again!"
Against his orders she could not stand
The timber interests had tied her hands
She caught a train, for the Canadian land