

## Albert Burnley Bibb

( - 23 Dec 1942)

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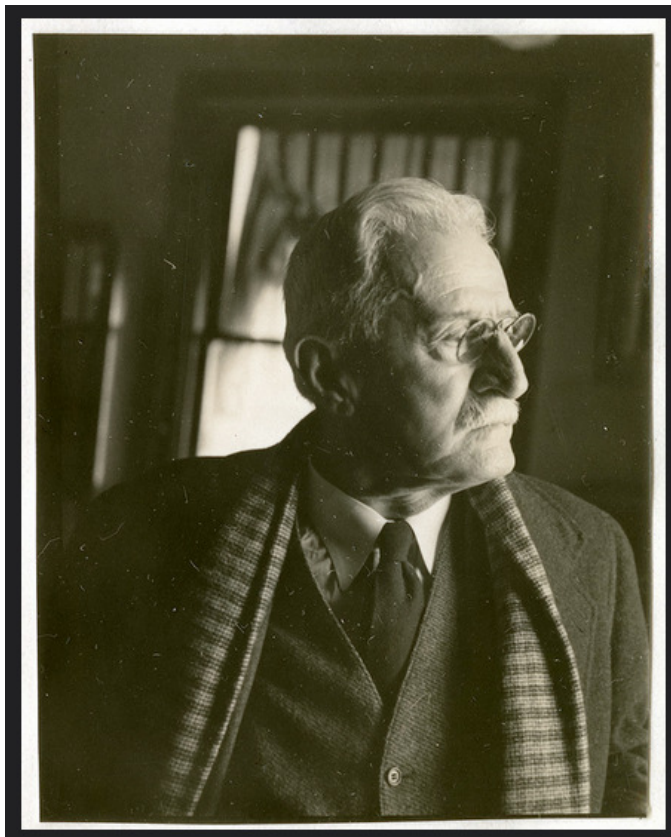
**Bibb, Albert Burnley.** On Wednesday, December 23, 1942, at Emergency Hospital, Albert Burnley Bibb, husband of Julia Hanson Bibb and father of Mary Hanson Bibb and Gertrude B. Merritt. Funeral services and interment private.

*The Washington Post, December 31, 1942, p. 8*

### The Post Impressionist

#### Albert Burnley Bibb

Somewhat more than a quarter of a century ago it was my privilege to meet and immediately to



surrender to the charm and learning of Professor Bibb. The friendship so casually begun in the Cosmos Club, before I was a resident of this city, developed and ripened as I was gradually permitted to know and to esteem the abiding quality of the man hidden behind the more or less austere habit of the professional teacher.

Of his boyhood and school days I frankly know nothing. My knowledge begins with a gangling young giant some 50 years ago in the employ of a mining company at its headquarters in San Francisco. From the office, young Bibb was soon sent to the mine as resident manager. Silver City in those days was a roaring camp in which Bret Harte would have found himself quite at home. Many a wild tale he told me of those days, with pistol play, murder, mass carousing, the stealing of vast amounts of precious metal, the racial feuds between Chinese miners and white men. He lived the stories Harte wrote. I lived them at countless breakfasts as the silver-haired, gentle professor recreated the life with gusto and pungency.

What followed the mining camp episode to fill the years before he opened an office as a practicing architect here in Washington, I never knew. But once, in conversation with Delos H. Smith, one of his former pupils and himself an architect of distinction, he indicated that he wished he had not given up the practice of his profession for teaching. Yet sometimes fate, while doing the individual a scurvy turn, serves the world well, for it was as a teacher and inspirer of strong young men in the arts that Professor Bibb accomplished so much. He told me himself that he gave up his office to go abroad because of the health of his family. There, after residence in England and both wanderings and residence in Italy and other parts of the continent, always keenly observant and studious, he settled at Meran in the Austrian Tyrol. In no time at all he had a host of friends, from Austrian archdukes to mountain guides and English

winter residents. Almost at once his professional qualities came to the fore, and more than one stately mansion on the snowy Tyrolean hillsides is the work of his brain and hands.

Back in the United States, he was soon the head of the department of architecture and fine arts of Columbian College, later to become George Washington University. There he built well, drawing about him a devoted and affectionate circle of students who since then have justified his teaching and inspiration. What few know is that when Columbian College went into a tailspin, as a prominent architect describes it, Professor Bibb went calmly on with his work, refusing any compensation but abating not one jot or tittle of the profound wisdom he gave his classes.

About 1927, when Frederick Murphy returned from Europe, he took charge of the department of architecture at Catholic University, and finding he needed an able coadjutor, invited Professor Bibb to join him. The invitation was accepted, and history speedily repeated itself. Faculty and students swiftly came under the warm spell of his personality and the university profited by the spirit as much as by the superb quality of the teaching and leadership in the department. Again and again its students went forth to honors. The coveted Prix de Rome came their way; inspired guidance was having its inevitable result. The Trinity College asked for the same sort of instruction for its eager young women and again Professor Bibb met the need.

Again and again I turned books over to him for review. In each case the result was not a prosaic review of content and worthiness to be published, but a brilliant essay discoursing upon many things, using the book as a peg upon which to hang a flashing string of profound, wise, invariably kindly estimates of life as well as art. But write an article he would not, any more than he would come to dinner or join a party. For him comradeship lay in the intimacies of dialogue, the informal atmosphere of the breakfast table or the casual meeting in Lafayette Square, while he fed the squirrels and made biting comment on the follies of the moment -- none of which the squirrels possessed.

If I may, I offer the following lines as humble tribute to one whose infallible taste and judgment will, I know, be tempered now as ever by love.

Quietly, as a hero goes  
To face the King and take the laurel wreath,  
He went. We whom he left who know  
All his deserts, know that he met  
Whatever lies in wait at life's far end  
Smiling and unafraid. I think he walks,  
Clenched in firm teeth a reeking briar,  
Probably quite cold. With head thrust forth,  
Back hunched, stick in his hand,  
Probing with quizzical humor through the skies,  
And eyes alert, he shakes his world aside  
For that great last adventure we must all,  
Willing or not, experience.  
And if he meet with God, he will not flinch  
At MAJESTY. He may but smile,  
Remove his pipe, and say, "Well, God,  
Here's Bibb. I'm glad to know at last  
You really Are . . ."

Oh, Friend! The oak uprooted leaves  
An emptiness no other tree can fill.

Arthur Stanley Riggs