

Initial Upload 3 December 2010  
Last Update 10 July 2011

## JOHN GILMER 1845 TO 1919

John Gilmer was the sixth and youngest son of Hugh Gilmer and Margaret Dorothea Hamilton. He was born in 1845, the year in which his mother died. This could indicate that she died giving birth to John although we do not know whether this is correct.

We do not know when John migrated to New Zealand. His death certificate shows that he was 55 years in the country implying he came out in 1864. He would have been 19 years old at that time and therefore, we believe that he would have come with his two brothers Sam and Robert and possibly Henry. We know he was in New Zealand in the late 1860's as he was at Charleston. His name was on the 1869/70 Electoral Roll as being at the Camp Street Melbourne Hotel.

John moved from Charleston in 1873 when his brother Robert took his place and John went to Westport to take over the Post Office Hotel from Samuel who had returned to the Grey Valley. By that time the hotel had changed its location from the corner of Gladstone and Molesworth Streets to the south west corner of Palmerston and Wakefield Streets, a site now occupied by a New World supermarket. John stayed at Westport until 1893 spending 20 years of his working life at Gilmer's Grand Hotel Westport.

From at least 1878 John managed the Grand Hotel at Westport on behalf of the Gilmer Brothers partnership. After the dissolution in 1882 John continued to run the hotel. Clearly the ownership did not pass to him. As was the case at the Masonic Hotel at Nelson, which was owned by Sam Gilmer, so also might the Westport hotel been owned by Sam or Hamilton Gilmer. We are not aware of which.

John married Ellen Wooton in 1880.<sup>1</sup> They were married on 19 January 1880 at the "*Private residence of William Nahr, Westport.*" The minister was Rev. James Murdoch Fraser. John's age was given as 31 and Ellen's as 23.

There are a number of inconsistencies in the available records with respect to Ellen's name and the ages of them both:

- The marriage record shows her name as **Wooton** and her age as 23 years implying a birth year of 1857.
- Her death record shows her parents names as William and Sarah **Whitton** and her place of birth as Waimea West and age as 48 years implying a birth year of 1858.
- John's petition for divorce says their marriage date was 19 January 1879 and Ellen's name as **Witton**. It was odd for John to remember the day and not the correct year.
- There is a birth record for Ellen Witton in 1862 without parent names.
- There are no birth records between 1855 and 1865 for a female Whitton, Wooton or Witon. There is an unnamed female Wooton born in 1861 just north of Wellington. Her parents are shown as John and Martha Witton nee Jordan.
- The birth certificate of her eldest child shows her age as 22 years implying a birth year as 1858 and her place of birth as Nelson. It also shows Ellen's name as Whitton.

**To complicate the issue still further, John's death certificate (see later) records his wife's name as Ellen McKenzie. More recently the McKenzie name has come to light in the letter from Dorothea Hamilton to her sister Sarah Jane<sup>2</sup> that mentions that "*John***

<sup>1</sup> Births, Deaths & Marriages, New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> Letter 10 To Sarah Jane from Gladstone July 1880

***Gilmer is married to Miss McKenzie***". We are unsure of the reasons for this conflict but the weight appears to favour a variation of the Witton name rather than McKenzie.

We believe the 1862 birth was clearly Ellen but it means she was 18 years of age when she was married in 1880 not 23 as shown on the marriage record. She had increased her age just as John had reduced his from 35 to 31 to minimize the difference in their ages. The location of the wedding in a private residence is also indicative of the fact she was pregnant. This has been confirmed by the birth record of an unnamed female with John and Ellen as parents in 1880.

John and Ellen proceeded to have to have four children, all girls. They were:

**Cecile Maude**

Born 1880

Married 1901 to William Francis Flynn, died **1947**

Died 1942 aged 62

**Martha Ellen**

Born 1882

Married 1901 to Arthur Chatham Vaughan Grant at St Thomas' Wellington South. Her age was shown as 21 and her husband's as 26.

Martha Ellen's name appears among the birth records for their family and is also mentioned in John's petition for divorce. However, there is no marriage record in her name. There is a record for a Marguerite Cecilia who was married in 1901 to Arthur Chatham Vaughan Grant. As we know the married names of the three other girls it appears that Martha changed her name to Marguerite for the marriage to Arthur Grant.

It is also of interest that this marriage certificate shows her parents as John and Ellen. John's occupation is shown as Miner which is quite correct for 1901. However, Ellen's maiden name is recorded as Mc Kenzie which we believe is incorrect.

Arthur Grant was reported as dying on 9 April 1912 following an operation for appendicitis. He was 36 years of age. He had been the Stationmaster at Hokitika for four years.<sup>3</sup>

Martha married again as Martha Ellen Grant in 1916. Her new husband was a mining engineer named Robert Alison. He was the manager of the Brunner Coal Mine and had been in that position since 1897. He left there in 1920 to take a similar role at the new Dobson Mine.<sup>4</sup> He died in 1926 at the age of 57 years. We can find no death record for Martha Alison. Perhaps she married again?

**Mary Ann Martin**

Born 1884

Married 1904 to Skilton

Died 1958

Mary Ann Skilton wrote to the National Archives in September 1955 seeking a copy of Sam Gilmer's Will on the understanding she may have been a beneficiary. The letter is filed with the Will. At the time she was living at 43 Pah Road, Epsom, Auckland.

<sup>3</sup> Grey River Argus 10 April 1912.

<sup>4</sup> Grey river Argus 15 November 1920.

**Ivy Isabella**

Born 1886

Married 1910 to Herbert Henry Thompsett General Manager Te Aro Warehouse Wellington  
We have not located a death record.

**Ivy's Engagement and Wedding**

In 1909 the engagement of John's youngest daughter was announced. She was to marry Herbert Henry Thompsett. He was the Manager of the Te Aro Warehouse in Cuba Street Wellington. The engagement notice indicated John lived at Granity. The couple was married in March 1910 and at that time John was still living at Granity.

The lead up to the wedding had been the subject of continuing press. The engagement had been announced in the Greymouth paper and also in the social column "*Women in Print*" in Wellington's Evening Post. Reference was made to Ivy being a niece of the Hon. Hamilton Gilmer.<sup>5</sup> There was an article on the presentation of a wedding gift to Mr. Thompsett from the Te Aro Warehouse staff<sup>6</sup> and another about the couple being let the house of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Isaacs in Wellington.<sup>7</sup>

The wedding took place on 16 March 1910 at All Saints Church Hokitika. John Gilmer is not mentioned in the detailed newspaper report in the Evening Post of 22 March. The bride was given away by her brother in law Mr. A. C. Grant so we presume that John was not at the wedding. The report continued:

*The bride "wore Satin charmeuse directoire gown, with a bridal wreath & veil, and she carried a shower bouquet. The bridesmaids were Misses Meachen and L Gilmer. They wore blue charmeuse dresses and black picture hats and carried bouquets of pink begonias. Mrs Grant (sister of the bride) wore cream silk relieved with embroideries and feather hat and boa to match. Mrs. Skilton also a sister of the bride wore eau de nil silk, and plumed hat to match. Dr Rogers acted as best man and Dr Teichelmann and Mr. J E Wade as groomsmen. After the ceremony the guests were entertained at the residence of Mrs Grant, sister of the bride. Mr. & Mrs. Thompsett left later on by motor car en route for Franz Joseph Glacier The brides travelling dress being a blue costume with toque to match."*

John's absence from his youngest daughter's wedding while sad is probably not unusual. Ivy was about seven years old when he left in 1893. She would have been close to her mother in the years that followed and probably saw little of her father.

The report of the wedding also does not mention Ivy's eldest sister Cecil Maude. She had married William Francis Flynn in 1901 but there is no mention of her among the guests.

**John's relationship with his daughters**

It is of interest that shipping records show that a Gilmer visited Westport on 1 April 1898<sup>8</sup>. We believe this was John. There was also a report showing his return on 17 May 1898. On his return he was accompanied by a Miss Gilmer. It seems that at least one of his daughters was in Westport. The three eldest would have been about 18, 16 and 14 years old.

<sup>5</sup> Evening Post 23 November 1909

<sup>6</sup> Evening Post 15 March 1910

<sup>7</sup> Evening Post 21 February 1910

<sup>8</sup> Grey River Argus 2 April 1898

Apart from this reference we have no knowledge of any relationship. We can understand the situation regarding Ivy as the youngest. However the older three would have had a much different perspective.

Mary Gilmer was identified at Toi Toi Valley School in 1895. She left that school and went to Hardy Street school. A record shows she left the Hardy St school in February 1896 with the destination shown as Greymouth. She would have been 11 at the time. This seems a little early as Ellen had not yet given up the license at the Custom House Hotel and their divorce had not been heard.

John's four daughter's were each left an annuity by Samuel Gilmer of fifty Pounds a year

### **John's Horse Racing Activities 1894 to 1896??**

After John left Nelson in late 1893 there is a two year gap in which we have not been able to locate him. We initially thought that he went to Greymouth where for the next two years his major activity was in owning and racing racehorses. However, we have come to the view that the person involved was his cousin Johnny Gilmer from Left Hand Branch near Reefton. Johnny had played key roles in establishing racing around Reefton and is a much more likely person to have actively participated in horse racing.

This still leaves us with a lengthy period in which we are unaware of what John was doing.

### **Ellen's Death**

On 26 January 1906 Ellen Gilmer died of Asthenia a disease causing muscle weakness, She was buried in Greymouth Cemetery. James Cornish died in 1911 at the age of 84 years. His death was also noted in the Evening Post in Wellington<sup>9</sup>.

### **John's Prospecting and Final Years**

John had an interest in prospecting and in 1901 he was granted a license for a Residence Site by the Warden's Court. He was shown as being from Westport and a Settler that quaint term indicating an early settler had retired. The land was about 1 acre in area on the Westport Coal Company lease at Granity. The location was at Mine Creek Millerton. However John transferred all rights in the License on 27 July 1901.<sup>10</sup> Also in 1901 his eldest daughter Cecil Maude married.

In February 1902, John was mentioned as meeting a Grey River Argus correspondent with an ex Mayor of Westport and Constable McDonald.<sup>11</sup> In 1903 he took out a lease on Section 156 at Westport. This was located on the east side of Queen St midway between Brougham and Wakefield Streets.

In 1906 John was granted a Special Quartz Claim in April. This claim was over 100 acres in the Marina Survey District Section 19 Block 113. It was located on the banks on the Mokihinui River. He was at Granity at the time.. John held this claim for two years and the papers were endorsed "*Cancelled by Complaint Kelly v Gilmer.*"<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The Evening Post 3 January 1911

<sup>10</sup> Wardens Court Karamea Mining District Archives NZ Christchurch

<sup>11</sup> Grey River Argus 11 February 1902

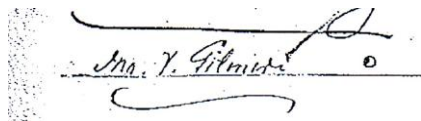
<sup>12</sup> Wardens Court Karamea Mining District 1414 Special Quartz Claim Archives NZ Christchurch

John continued his prospecting north of Westport in 1911. In January he took out an Ordinary Prospecting License. This was in partnership with a Peter Carsen. The license was for one year and covered 100 acres at Seatonville. The grant described them as from Mokihinui and as Miners.<sup>13</sup>

Later the same year, John was granted a License to construct a Water Race at Cascade Creek Maori Gully, near Seddonville. The distance was 12 chains and the time to build was given as 6 months at a cost of 50 Pounds. The purpose of the water race was for “*sluicing and battery*”. John gave his address as Granity and occupation as Speculator.<sup>14</sup> This work would have kept him busy until well into 1912 when would have been almost 67 years of age.

We have located John in Wise’s Post Office at Granity up to 1915. There is no other record of him until his death in 1919 at Nelson. There was some initial difficulty in locating his entries because the national Alphabetical Surnames list records a John Gilman at Granity for each year but no John Gilmer. However, when the Place names are searched there is John Gilmer at Granity but no Gilman. The search is also complicated because in 1911 a John Vernon Gilmer appears in the directory at Puponga. Because of the lag in publication this would mean he was probably there in 1910.

Given what we know of the location of John’s prospecting activities at Granity and places north of Westport we do not believe that John Vernon Gilmer and John Gilmer are the same person. In fact the Post Office directory showed John at Granity and John Vernon Gilmer at Puponga in each year from 1911 to 1915 indicating there were two different people. As a means of being more conclusive about this we have obtained the signature of John Vernon Gilmer from a land transfer for a property purchased in Nelson in 1912. This showed his occupation as Shipping Clerk. Later he became harbor master. We can compare the signature with that of John Gilmer. We believe that this supports the case that they were different people.



**John Vernon Gilmer 1912**



**John Gilmer 1881**

**Further the following item appeared in the newspaper in 1914:**

Mr J. V. Gilmer, who for fourteen years has held an important position with the Puponga Coal Company, was, prior to his leaving the district, presented by the residents of Puponga with a suit case and travelling rug. Mr Gilmer leaves Nelson shortly for Australia.

**The Colonist 5 August 1914**

**This makes it a lot easier to conclude that there are two different John Gilmers.**

<sup>13</sup> Warden’s Court Westport 24 January 1911 No 3117, Archives NZ, Christchurch

<sup>14</sup> Wardens Court Westport 30 September 1911 No.3437, Archive NZ, Christchurch.

John's brother Hamilton died on 25 July 1919 leaving John the sum of 30 shillings a week for life. He did not leave anything to his brother Robert. However, John, did not live very long to profit from this legacy. He died in Nelson at a nursing home in Collingwood Street on 24 October 1919. The cause of death was given as Senile Decay, Bronchitis and Heart Failure. He seems to have been estranged from his children and also his brothers. He is buried in an unmarked grave in Wakapuaka Cemetery, Nelson. His grave has spectacular views to the northwest over Nelson Harbour.

DEATHS IN THE DISTRICT OF *Nelson* DURING THE QUARTER ENDING THE *31<sup>st</sup> day* of *December*, 1919.

| DESCRIPTION OF DECEASED. |   | CAUSE OF DEATH.   |   | PARENTS.  |  | IF BURIAL REGISTERED.                                       |   | WHERE BORN.                                   |  | IF DECEASED WAS MARRIED.  |   | INFORMANT.   |      | REGISTRAR. |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|------|------------|
| No.                      | 1. When died.<br>2. Where died.   | 1. Name and Surname.<br>2. Rank, Profession, or Occupation. | 1. Sex (M or F).<br>2. Age.<br>3. Age before death. | 1. Duration of last illness.<br>2. Medical Attendant, whom notified.<br>3. When he last saw Deceased (i.e. before death). | 1. Name and Surname of Father.<br>2. Name and Surname of Mother.<br>3. Maiden Surname of Mother.<br>4. Rank or Profession of Father. | 1. When buried.<br>2. Where buried.                         | 1. Name of Minister (or Name of Witness).<br>2. Religion of Minister. | 1. Where born.<br>2. How long in New Zealand. | 1. Where married.<br>2. At what Age married.<br>3. To whom married.<br>4. Age of Widow, if living. | 1. If still living, etc. Age.<br>2. Age of Widow, if living.  | 1. Signature of the Informant.<br>2. His or her Description.<br>3. Residence.<br>4. If Entry a Correction of a former Entry, Signature of Witness attesting the same. | 1. Signature of the Registrar.<br>2. Date of Registration. |      |            |
| (1)                      | (2)   | (3)   | (4)   | (5)   | (6)  | (7)   | (8)   | (9)   | (10)   | (11)  | (12)  | (13)   | (14) |            |
| 113                      | (1) 1919.<br>(2) 24 <sup>th</sup> October.<br>(3) Collingwood Street, Nelson.<br>(4) Hotel. Keeper. | (1) John Gilmer   | (1) M.<br>(2) 41.<br>(3) 33 years.                  | (1) Senile decay.<br>(2) Bronchitis & Heart failure.<br>(3) 23 <sup>rd</sup> October 1919.                                | (1) Hugh Gilmer.<br>(2) Dorothy Gilmer.<br>(3) Hamilton.<br>(4) Elmer.   | (1) 24 <sup>th</sup> October 1919.<br>(2) Nelson, Cemetery. | (1) Rev. John Walker.<br>(2) Church of England.                       | (1) Westport.<br>(2) 30.<br>(3) 33 years.     | (1) Married.<br>(2) 30.<br>(3) Ellen McFongie.<br>(4) Deceased.                                    | (1) Alfred Stone.<br>(2) Undertaker.<br>(3) Collingwood Street, Nelson.<br>(4) 23 <sup>rd</sup> October 1919. | (1) B. G. Somers.<br>(2) Registrar.   |  |      |            |

**John's Death Certificate**



**John Gilmer's unmarked grave Wakapuaka Cemetery Nelson**