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SAM GILMER'S GOLD MINING INTERESTS

In 1873, Sam moved to Ahaura from Westport and this brought him close to the gold mining activity in the Grey Valley. The Gilmer Brothers partnership had been involved as shareholders in many new companies floated during the late 1860's and early 1870's. In some cases they were Directors. Their main activities included Moonlight Quartz Mining Co.; Murray Creek GMC and the Inglewood Mines. (See Gold Mining Activities Story). These activities ultimately led the partnership to Reefton and the taking over of the Dawson Hotel there in mid 1877. This was managed initially by Robert and later by Sam. Sam's location at Reefton was probably strategic as it allowed him to be close to the centre of the Grey Valley gold mining activity and also to the Gilmer Brothers interests nearby, especially the Inglewood mine.

With the move to Wellington, Sam Gilmer soon found that gold was to be found there as well as the West Coast. This was to the west of the city in the Terawhiti goldfields.

It is stated on apparently good authority that several parties of men are now at work in the neighborhood of Terawhiti, some 12 or 14 miles from Wellington, gold digging, and are making wages of 5s or 6s per day, although without the proper sluicing appliances. We are informed that nearly all the Terawhiti country has shown signs of being auriferous, and that if the mining appliances used elsewhere were available employment would be afforded for a considerable number of men. It is alleged that they could earn fair wages at any rate, and perhaps more. In the present depressed state of the labor market it is very desirable that this opening should be developed so far as possible.

Evening Post 16 August 1880

As it did on the West Coast, the discovery of gold quickly led to the establishment of gold mining companies to raise money to explore claims and to hopefully "strike it rich". As it happened some of those promoting these companies had previous experience on the West Coast and at Reefton such as Louis Davies and Richard Reeves. The Gilmer Brothers partnership always had an interest in gold and even in the 1880's the members still held a number of land leases in the Grey Valley for the potential they may have had for the land to contain alluvial gold.

Although Sam would not have needed much encouragement to invest, the newspapers fuelled the interest in the Wellington mining activities by publishing stories of discoveries and also details of new companies being formed to participate. A number of companies were floated and calls were made by those whose capital was being used on exploiting claims:

The first company that we have identified in which Sam was a shareholder was the **Lady Gordon Gold Mining Company**.¹ Sam and T. G. Macarthy both had 250 shares and the majority were held by the manager Louis Davies who Sam would have known from Reefton. He had 8750 and Murray Byrne a mining speculator from Reefton held 6750 shares. These two held 77.5% of the company.

This was followed soon after by the registering of the **Golden Crown Gold Mining Company** on 20 October 1881 in which Sam was the largest shareholder with 3000 shares costing him initially 150 Pounds (assuming one shilling per share.) He had 16% of the shares and the first annual meeting was held at the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel on 30 June 1882. By 13 September there had been six calls of one penny or another 75 Pounds for Sam to pay. However the shares were selling at 8 shillings so Sam would have done very well selling at that price. By October 1883 the company had made 18 calls. The shares were quoted at 18 to 19 shillings which was good news for Sam. His holding was valued at 2,700 Pounds but he may have been tempted to take some profits.

Sam further invested in the **Merope Gold Mining Company** which was registered on 24 January 1882. He had 1700 of the 15,000 shares. T. G Macarthy, also with a West Coast history from Charleston, had 500 shares. The company made three calls each of one penny in March, April and August and auctioned 3400 forfeited shares in July 1882.² In October the company called a Special Meeting at the Royal Oak Hotel to elect a new manager to replace the one who had resigned. He was replaced by Louis Davies.³ The company through 1883 continued with calls reaching the sixth in October. Many others also made calls and it is clear they were all undercapitalized.

The **Kohinoor Gold Mining Company** was registered on 28 June 1883⁴ and Sam was a shareholder but on this occasion with a mere 500 of 24,000 shares. It appears he was starting to see what was happening. Rather than being an investment with the opportunity of a return, these companies were in fact a real gamble. This company was "late" being registered and there were no newspaper reports about it after January 1884.

There was a significant meeting of the directors of a number the Terawhiti goldfield companies, including some of those mentioned above, to consider the best means of developing the field at the least cost to shareholders. A number of resolutions were produced based on merging and amalgamation of claims and companies and employing a well paid expert to guide and manage the exploration and development. However, the primary resolution of the nine proposed was defeated and the others were withdrawn. The meeting closed without anything being achieved.

Anatori Gold Mining Company

The Anatori Gold Mining Company was registered on 12 December 1883. Sam had 750 shares, T G Macarthy 1000 and Robert Gilmer 250 and John Knox Hamilton 500 shares. Sam and TG

¹ Evening Post 23 September 1881

² Evening Post 17 July 1882

³ Evening Post 2 November 1882

⁴ Evening Post 13 July 1883

Macarthy were directors and the company operated at West Wanganui, Province of Nelson. The company made no impact and there were no newspaper reports about it after 13 January 1885.

Later in 1895 Sam in association with his Nelson solicitor C.Y. Fell also showed interest in the Collingwood district in the north of the South Island.

Mr Charles Y. Fell (Solicitor, Nelson), and Mr Samuel Gilmer (Hotel-keeper,) also applied each for 50 acres of ground for gold sluicing at the Quartz Ranges, where it is proposed in each case to invest a capital of £20,000. Their applications for both the special claims and necessary water rights were successful. But there is one singular feature about all these applications, viz; that they show that the applicants—Messrs Ziman, Fell, and Gilmer,—alike intend to conduct business under one and the same style, as follows, “Quartz Ranges Hydraulic Sluicing and Mining Company Limited. No matter what name, however, so long as there is tangible substance in the thing signified!

Nelson Evening Mail 4 October 1895

This claim was always going to be very expensive to work and it appears that they sold it to the Collingwood Goldfields Company, probably in exchange for shares. After a number of years it seems that the company was not particularly successful spending most of its capital and with only relatively small amounts of gold recovered.

Despite these experiences Sam was not deterred from investing in gold mining companies and his major success was to come later and to some extent this appears to have been entirely by accident.

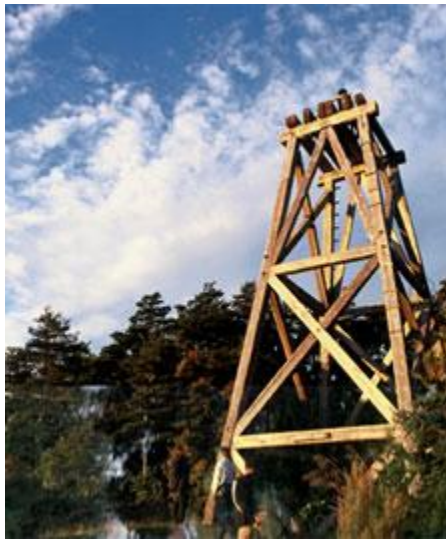
New Big River Mine

The New Big River Quartz Mining Co. was registered on 19 August 1907. The company was to operate the Big River Mine 30 kilometres south of Reefton. Sam would have been very familiar with it from his earlier time there.

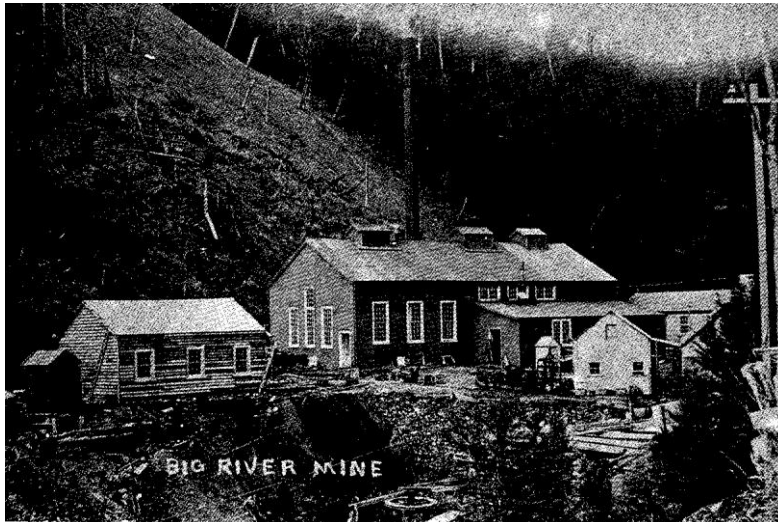
Gilmer ended up holding half the shares in Big River, although whether that was intentional remains in doubt. Frank Marshall had one version of how it happened:

“He had a fancy for Big River shares - he liked speculation occasionally, as most West Coasters do - and he instructed his sharebroker to buy Big River shares at the time when it was re-formed. Sam Gilmer forgot to put a limit on his buying, so the sharebroker went on buying and buying until he had a nice accumulation of Big River shares, and these shares bought by Sam Gilmer enabled him to have a very good life and probably to complete the purchase of the Royal Oak Hotel.”

New Big River Mine 1907 to 1931⁵



Big River Mine Poppet Head c1895



⁵ Wright, Les. (1993) *Big River, 1882-1942: A Worthwhile Speculation* (Friends of Waiuta and Department of Conservation).

In February 1914 each New Big River share, having returned £3.8s for an outlay of 6d, was worth £4.17s.6d on the market. Even at that price Sam Gilmer was still buying, increasing his holding to 7,175 in February and 7,763 by June. Butler believed his aim was to have half the company, or 12,000 shares. The firm of McMahon & Lee held 550.

New Big River Mine 1907 to 1931⁶

Between 1908 and 1918 the company produced gold to the value of 265,479 Pounds and paid dividends totaling 99,600 pounds or 4/3/- per 6 penny share.

Sam Gilmer, who made a fortune in the early days and spent a large proportion of it on over-priced shares later on, would have been a key figure in getting operations started again, being the biggest shareholder. His death, and a lack of interest among those who handled his estate, ended any hope of a revival of the New Big River company. Bill Wildermoth remembered Gilmer and his enthusiasm for the mine:

“About once a year he used to bring a load out. All the shareholders from Greymouth - Artie Beban and all the lawyers and all the dentists and all the doctors - they used to come with him when he came out and they'd have a look around the mine. He had a Rolls-Royce. I had a ride in it. I was 15, or I might have been 16 then. He got well paid, but he was a gentleman old Sam - put a lot of money back into the mine when she slipped. But Mr Laurie, I'm afraid, when poor old Sam passed away, didn't do the same. He wasn't interested in mining very much.”

A final bid to revive the company came in December 1930, at a shareholders' meeting in Gilmer's Royal Oak Hotel, Wellington. The response was disappointing and it was clear that if any of the untouched three-fifths (three shillings per share) of the capital was called up there would be many defaulters among the 69 shareholders.

New Big River Mine 1907 to 1931⁷

We find it hard to believe that Sam had a Rolls Royce because it was not in his nature to be ostentatious and he had nothing to prove to his Greymouth friends and colleagues. However, there was an eyewitness!!

⁶ Wright, Les. (1993) *Big River, 1882-1942: A Worthwhile Speculation* (Friends of Waiuta and Department of Conservation). Page 25

⁷ Wright, Les. (1993) *Big River, 1882-1942: A Worthwhile Speculation* (Friends of Waiuta and Department of Conservation). Pages 30 & 31



Sam Gilmer with Billy Rhoden(centre) at Big River Mine