

## SAM'S HOTEL INTERESTS at AHAURA, GREYMOUTH & NELSON

From 1878, the Gilmer Brothers partnership turned their attention to Wellington and purchased three hotels there. These were the Empire and The Duke of Edinburgh in 1878 and the Royal Oak in mid 1881. The Empire was sold very quickly for a large profit but the others were retained.

In 1882 the partnership was formally dissolved and the assets shared between the partners. Sam obtained the Royal Oak Hotel, the Ahaura Hotel and the Gilmer Hotel at Greymouth as well as the leasehold of the Masonic Hotel at Nelson. Hamilton obtained the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel and the Post Office Hotel at Westport. John Hamilton obtained the Cobden Hotel.

Sam advertised his hotels in the Wellington newspaper for a couple of months in September and October 1882.

<p><b>R</b> OYAL OAK HOTEL, Corner of CUBA AND MANNERS STREETS, WELLINGTON.</p> <p>SAMUEL GILMER begs to inform the public of Wellington and surrounding districts that the above centrally-situated hotel has been recently fitted out with all the comforts and conveniences of a well-appointed hostelry. The bedrooms and parlours are commodious and supplied with patent ventilators. Private parlours if desired. Excellent accommodation for travellers and families. The ales, wines and spirits, are of the best brands.</p> <p>SAMUEL GILMER, Proprietor.</p> <p><b>G</b> I L M E R ' S H O T E L, GREYMOUTH.</p> <p>The above establishment is the largest and best appointed hotel on the West Coast of the Middle Island, and possesses excellent accommodation for travellers and families. The rooms are commodious, while private parlours can be obtained if desired. The billiard-room is one of the largest in the colony, and contains three excellent tables, presided over by an experienced marker. The Mail Coaches all leave this hotel, and travellers need never fear missing either coach or steamer.</p> <p>GILMER'S HOTEL, AHAURA, SAMUEL GILMER, Proprietor.</p>
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Evening Post 16 September 1882

### Gilmer Hotel Ahaura

While Sam obtained the Ahaura Hotel he was not to be a long term owner. With the move to Wellington the Gilmer Brothers partnership in 1881 advertised the sale of some of their West Coast assets. One of these was the large area of land on Pike's Plains and the Ahaura Hotel was advertised for lease. It is clear they did not have a long term interest in the Grey Valley preferring to invest in Wellington where they saw their future.

<p><b>T</b>            <b>O</b>            <b>L</b>            <b>E</b>            <b>T</b> .</p> <p>That Large and Commodious HOTEL at  <b>AHAURA</b>, known as GILMER'S HOTEL,  with immediate possession.  Also - For Sale, 450 acres Freehold Land,  on Pike's Plains, - Apply,  <b>GILMER BROS.</b>,  <b>Greymouth.</b></p>
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**Grey River Argus 12 March 1881**

When Sam took over the Ahaura Hotel, the licensee of the hotel was John Overend, a long term employee of the Gilmer Brothers partnership and also a very good friend of Henry Gilmer who he had worked with in early days at John Hamilton's Hotel, Cobden.

John Overend renewed the license of Hamilton's Hotel, as it was called at the Licensing Committee, at the June 1882 licensing committee meeting at Ahaura<sup>1</sup> On 7 March 1883 the newspaper<sup>2</sup> reported the transfer of the license from John Overend to Edward Murphy. Sam Gilmer had sold the hotel and closed the chapter on his close involvement in the activities of the Grey Valley.

### Gilmer Hotel Greymouth

Sam's half brother William moved from Wellington to Greymouth in 1882 and ran the Gilmer hotel there. This was not formally recognized until mid 1883.

<p>TRANSFERS.</p> <p>The license of Gilmer's hotel was  transferred from Samuel Gilmer to  William Gilmer, no objection being  offered.</p>
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**Grey River Argus 9 June 1883**

William's license was renewed in 1884 and 1885 but his health was a problem and he returned to Ireland in the latter year. This left Sam with two major hotels in different parts of the country

<sup>1</sup> Grey River Argus 7 June 1882

<sup>2</sup> Grey River Argus 7 March 1883

posing a significant management problem. The local newspaper indicated that as a consequence the Greymouth Hotel was for sale.

Gilmer's Hotel, it is generally understood, is open for sale privately at present, and in default of terms being come to in that way will shortly be placed in the open market. Some little time ago Greymouth people will remember that Mr William Gilmer left here for a trip to the Home country, owing partly to ill-health, and partly to attend to some private business requiring his presence. This left Mr Samuel Gilmer with two large first-class hotels on his hands, with the peculiar disadvantage as regards personal supervision that each is in a different island with hundreds of miles between the houses. The result is that he feels constrained to part with one, and as the Empire City is the rage at present amongst business men, he has naturally decided to dispose of the Greymouth property. Those acquainted with such matters will readily estimate the value of the opening thus afforded for any one desirous of adventuring in this particular line.

**Grey River Argus 20 May 1885**

For whatever reason the hotel was not sold and it appears Sam turned to a previous long serving old employee in James Cornish to manage the hotel. The license was transferred to him at the next annual meeting on 5 June 1886. In September 1886 Sam started a large addition to the Royal Oak Hotel and it appears while this was being done the family moved to Greymouth. No doubt Sam had concerns about Cornish and his inexperience and felt the need to be there.

Cornish held the license for a further two years and transferred it to Richard Richardson on 2 June 1888. Richardson was at the hotel for three years and transferred the lease to W. D. Rivington on 7 June 1891. It is of interest that for a short period in 1892 Cornish was declared a bankrupt from which he was cleared two months later.

Rivington was at the Gilmer Hotel for five years relinquishing the license to John Gilmer at the June 1896 Licensing Committee Meeting. On 13 April 1896 an advertisement had appeared in the Grey River Argus that announced that The Gilmer Hotel is "*At present in charge of Mr. John Gilmer late of Charleston and Westport.*" The editor gave enthusiastic support:

*"The Gilmer Hotel still holds a leading place amongst the houses of the colony. The Greymouth hotel is at present in charge of Mr. John Gilmer, well known at Charleston and Westport, and under his care will no doubt continue to be one of the foremost hotels on the Coast. It is a*

*certified house of the Commercial Traveller's Association and has always been a favourite of tourists and others.*<sup>3</sup>

At this time the hotel was still owned by Sam Gilmer and John's appearance has the look of Sam helping him out. This is supported by the fact that the paper also had advertisements in the same column following the Gilmer Hotel for The Masonic at Nelson and for the Royal Oak at Wellington. These all appear to be one advertisement and it seems that both Sam and Robert were supporting John by giving the appearance of the continued existence of a Gilmer chain of hotels. Hamilton Gilmer had also been advertising the Empire Hotel in Wellington and this soon was associated with the advertisements in the same column although clearly not part of the same advertisement.

We have formed the view that in the early days it may have been John who had the original idea to advertise as a chain because this style of advertisement first appeared at Westport quite a few months prior to it being adopted in Greymouth in 1869. That it arises in Greymouth in 1896 so many years later may not be a coincidence.

**THE GILMER HOTEL,**  
GREY MOUTH,  
At present in charge of MR JOHN GILMER, late of Charleston and Westport. Besides the best of wines, spirits and beers, a special consignment of LAGER BEER is on hand.

**THE MASONIC HOTEL,**  
NELSON,  
In charge of ROBERT GILMER.

**THE ROYAL OAK HOTEL,**  
WELLINGTON.  
PROPRIETOR ... .. S GILMER.

The above houses are replete with every convenience for the travelling public, and the wines and spirits are of the best.

Grey River Argus 13 April 1896  
(Note misspelling of Wellington)

At present in charge of MR JOHN GILMER, late of Charleston and Westport. Besides the best of wines, spirits and beers, a special consignment of LAGER BEER is on hand.

**THE MASONIC HOTEL,**  
NELSON,  
In charge of ROBERT GILMER.

**THE ROYAL OAK HOTEL,**  
WELLINGTON.  
PROPRIETOR ... .. S GILMER.

The above houses are replete with every convenience for the travelling public, and the wines and spirits are of the best.

**EMPIRE HOTEL,**  
Willis Street, Wellington.  
HAMILTON GILMER, PROPRIETOR.

This old-established and favorite hotel is centrally situated, and within five minutes' walk of the Wharf, Post Office, and Public Buildings.

Excellent accommodation for tourists, commercial travellers and visitors to Wellington.

WEST COASTERS receive a hearty welcome.

The best brands of wines and spirit only kept.

Staple's beer on tap.

Large and convenient sample rooms.

**EMPIRE HOTEL,**  
Willis Street, Wellington.

Grey River Argus  
20 June 1896

**ISLAND BAY HOTEL,**  
ISLAND BAY.  
HAMILTON GILMER, PROPRIETOR.

This old-established and favorite hotel is situated about four miles from Wellington and is a favorite resort for families and visitors.

Excellent accommodation for tourists and visitors to Wellington.

WEST COASTERS receive a hearty welcome.

The best brands of wines and spirits only kept.

Coaches run to and from Island Bay daily.

Staple's beer on tap.

**ISLAND BAY HOTEL,**  
Island Bay, Wellington.

**THE GILMER HOTEL,**  
GREY MOUTH,  
At present in charge of MR JOHN GILMER, late of Charleston and Westport. Besides the best of wines, spirits and beers, a special consignment of LAGER BEER is on hand.

**THE MASONIC HOTEL,**  
NELSON,  
In charge of ROBERT GILMER.

Grey River Argus  
11 July 1897

<sup>3</sup> Grey River Argus 13 April 1896

In 1897 Hamilton Gilmer sold the Empire Hotel in Wellington but he continued to advertise the Island Bay Hotel in the Grey River Argus from 10 June 1897.

John did not stay at the Gilmer very long. In February 1897 he advertised that he would apply to transfer the license to James Cornish at the March meeting of the Licensing Committee.<sup>4</sup> The transfer was granted. It seems that once again Sam Gilmer had turned to Cornish as a manager he could trust. At this time Cornish was 70 years of age another indication that he was a "stand in" caused by John's unplanned and abrupt departure.

At the subsequent Licensing Meeting on 1 June 1898 Cornish transferred the license to Thomas Oxenham.

**L**ICENSING DISTRICT OF GREY.  
 —  
 NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR A  
 PUBLICAN'S LICENSE.

I, THOMAS OXENHAM, of Greymouth, do hereby give notice that I desire to obtain, and will at the next licensing meeting to be holden at Greymouth on the FIRST DAY of JUNE, 1898, APPL<sup>y</sup> for a certificate authorising the issue of a PUBLICAN'S LICENSE for a house situate at Mawhera Quay, Greymouth, and known as The "Gilmer" Hotel, containing 45 rooms, exclusive of those required for the family.

Dated the 3rd day of May, 1898.  
 Name of owner of premises, SAMUEL GILMER.

THOMAS OXENHAM.

Grey River Argus 6 May 1898

**THE GILMER  
 HOTEL,**

Mawhera Quay, Greymouth.

T. OXENHAM ... PROPRIETOR.

This Hotel being the leading one in Greymouth offers excellent accommodation for Tourists and Travellers combined, with all the requisites of a well appointed establishment.

Three Billiard Tables. Three Sample Rooms.

Night Porter kept.

T. OXENHAM ... Proprietor.

Twenty-five years English and Colonial experience.

Grey River Argus 25 November 1898

Thomas Oxenham advertised the hotel on an almost continuous basis in each edition of the newspaper as was done in earlier years by Gilmer Brothers. As well, Oxenham took a high profile in many community activities with membership of committees for the Jockey, Cricket and Athletic Clubs and as a director of the Greymouth Brewing Co. He also catered for relatively high profile functions at the hotel that were commented on in the press along the lines as occurred with Hamilton Gilmer in his early days. He also hosted other traditional meetings like the Hospital Committee.

In December 1905 it was reported that the Gilmer Hotel had been sold by Sam to John Giesekeing of the Albion Hotel:

<sup>4</sup> Grey River Argus 9 February 1897

For the last 35 years the Gilmer Hotel has been established at the corner of Tainui Street and Mawhera Quay, and under the ownership of Mr. S. Gilmer has been conducted as a first-class hotel. Time, however, has done its work, and the old three-storyed building has had its day. It has stood the test of the severe climatic influences of the Coast, and for the last few years has passed beyond repair. Mr. John Giesecking, proprietor of the Albion Hotel, a gentleman who has unbounded faith in the future of the town, and who is possessed of active and energetic business ability, approached the proprietor with the object of purchasing the old landmark. On Saturday afternoon the terms were arranged, Mr. Giesecking purchasing the lot for the sum of £3600. This

is considered by many a huge price; but those who have any knowledge of the business sites of the town are inclined to think that Mr. Giesecking has made an excellent bargain. It is the intention of the new proprietor to at once proceed to erect a large three-storyed brick building on the site, and fit it up as a first-class hotel to cater for the tourist and commercial trade. The building when erected will be an ornament to the town, and on such a site will command the attention of all. The Albion Hotel, which is now owned by Mr. Giesecking, will be turned into shops, and a better site for a business establishment it would be hard to find. Mr. Giesecking is to be congratulated on his pluck and enterprise, and it is to be sincerely hoped that his sanguine expectations of the future of the town will be realised.

Grey River Argus 18 December 1905

Giesecking paid the substantial price of 3600 Pounds and the newspaper commented that he planned to build a new first class hotel of three stories on the site. However, Giesecking was not interested in keeping the hotel operational and he was only interested in purchasing the name and the Gilmer Hotel License.

He had also purchased the Harbour Board land at the corner of Arney and Gresson Streets with the objective of building a new hotel there. In May, Thomas Oxenham gave notice of his application to have the license removed to the new hotel.

Mr Hannan in opening the case for the claimants, called Michael Joseph Fogarty, accountant on the firm of G. W. Moss and Co., who stated that his firm sold a section at the corner of Arney and Gresson streets to Mr J. Giesecking for £630. There were two old buildings of no value on the property.

To Mr Guinness—Mr Giesecking is a hotelkeeper and bought the Gilmer Hotel license. He did not know what Mr Giesecking wanted the site for. His firm sold everything out of the old Gilmer Hotel. He did not know Mr Giesecking wanted to erect a hotel on the site when the site was sold to Giesecking. His firm tried to purchase the adjoining property. He knew now that Mr Giesecking was erecting a hotel on the site.

Grey River Argus 15 March 1907

LICENSING DISTRICT OF GREY.

NOTICE OF APPLICATION TO REMOVE A LICENSE TO OTHER PREMISES.

I, THOMAS OXENHAM, of Greymouth, hotelkeeper, being the holder of a Publican's License in respect of the house and premises situate at Greymouth, known as the Gilmer Hotel, do hereby give notice that I desire to obtain and will at the next licensing meeting to be held at Greymouth, on the sixth day of June, 1906, apply for the removal of the license for the aforesaid house and premises to a house situate at the south-western corner of Arney and Gresson Streets, Greymouth.

Dated the 10th day of May, 1906.

THOMAS OXENHAM,

Signature of Applicant

Grey River Argus 18 May 1906

Thomas Oxenham was at the hotel until it moved in June 1906 when the license was transferred to John Gregory Harris. The notice indicated that the hotel had 25 rooms rather than 45 on previous transfers. In May Oxenham bought the first class Sumner Hotel at Sumner, Christchurch and moved his family there and he followed. However, he was to die of heart failure in April 1907.

The Police brought objections to the removal of the License and the hotel to the new site on the grounds that a hotel was not required there and also that the License had been abandoned because the old hotel had been pulled down. At the hearing the police withdrew the objections in view of the shortage of accommodation in Greymouth and on condition that a substantial hotel be built not just “a small drinking shop”. The Licensing Committee agreed to the removal of the License “on condition that a substantial house is built.”<sup>5</sup>

The Gilmer Hotel still exists in Greymouth today, well over hundred years later, at the same location offering backpacker accommodation under the name of Neptune Backpackers.



**New Gilmer Hotel 1924**

### **Floods at Greymouth**

During Sam Gilmer’s twenty three years of ownership of the Gilmer Hotel, the town of Greymouth experienced three major flood events. These were all very significant for the town and also for the hotel in view of its prime position on Mawhera Quay opposite the wharf. This location was very beneficial for obtaining customers from the steamer passengers but it was

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<sup>5</sup> Grey River Argus 7 June 1906

also very exposed to major floods. In fact all shops and hotels on Mawhera Quay could expect to be flooded to 2 or three feet in any of these events. Over the years these floods were to be one factor in the gradual deterioration of the hotel.

**TERRIBLE FLOOD.**  
 THE HIGHEST KNOWN  
 TWO FEET HIGHER THAN THAT  
 OF 1872.  
 HUNDREDS HAD TO LEAVE THEIR  
 HOMES.  
 GREAT DESTRUCTION OF PRO-  
 PERTY.  
 PRINCIPALLY GROCERIES AND  
 DRAPERY.

**Jubilee Flood**

Grey River Argus 10 July 1887

The newspaper named these floods for events in the life of Queen Victoria. 1887 was the Jubilee Year of her reign and in 1897 she established the record as the long serving British monarch.

**THE RECORD REIGN FLOOD.**  
 THE TOWN UNDER WATER.  
 MIRACULOUS ESCAPE FROM  
 DESTRUCTION.  
 WASHING OVER THE WHARF.  
 A CASE OF DROWNING.  
 LOSS OF COAL CREEK CATTLE.  
 GENERAL DAMAGE.  
 Greymouth has had a narrow escape  
 from a terrible calamity. A little more

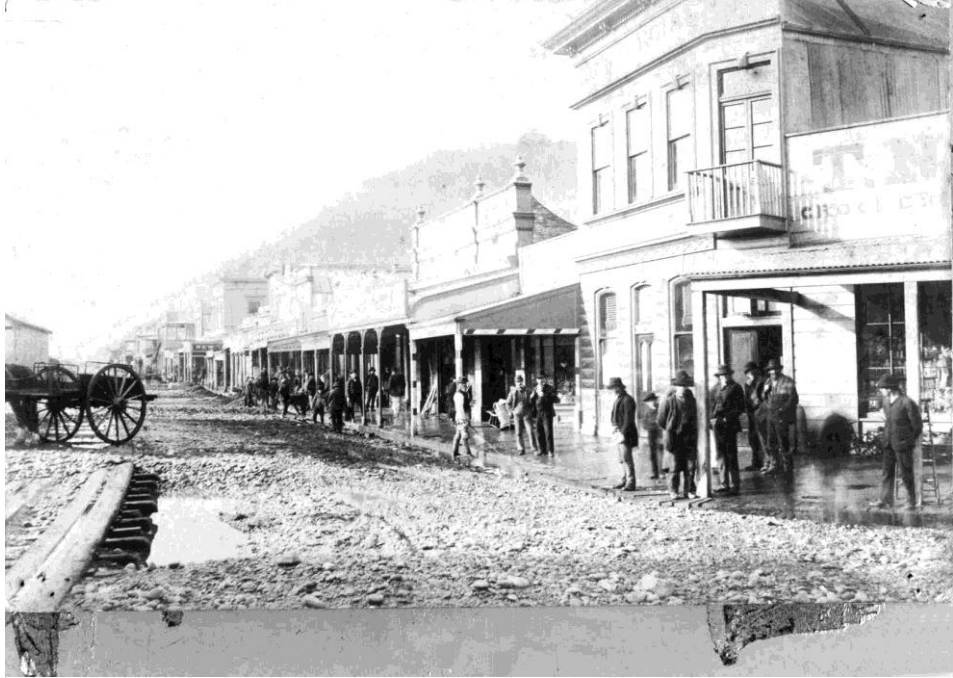
**Record Reign Flood**

Grey River Argus 10 March 1897

**The Premier Flood.**  
**Greymouth Under Water.**  
 Firebells Alarm the Citizens.  
 River Rose With Great Rapidity.  
 Overflowed and Tore up Streets and Roads.  
 Fire brigade render good service.  
 Early morning rescue and salvage work.  
 Heavy loss and damage in the country.  
 Coal Creek farmers almost ruined  
 Traffic Manager's suspended train services.

**Premier Flood**

Grey River Argus 26 June 1905



After the Jubilee Flood 1887<sup>6</sup>



1887 Flood Gilmer Hotel on Left<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> History House Greymouth  
<sup>7</sup> Turnbull Library Wellington



1905 Premier Flood Gilmer Hotel<sup>8</sup>

## LEASEHOLD OF THE MASONIC HOTEL NELSON

**N**OTICE is hereby given that the PARTNERSHIP hitherto existing between HAMILTON GILMER, SAMUEL GILMER, JOHN HAMILTON, JOHN GILMER, and ROBERT GILMER, carrying on the business of Hotel-keepers at Greymouth, Wellington, Cobden, Westport, Nelson, and elsewhere, under the style of "GILMER BROTHERS" has this day been DISSOLVED by mutual consent.

As witness our hands this Fourth day of February, 1882.

HAMILTON GILMER,  
SAMUEL GILMER,  
JOHN GILMER,  
ROBERT GILMER,  
JOHN HAMILTON.

Witness to the signatures of all parties,

WILLIAM PERKINS,  
Solicitor, Greymouth.

612-26

**T**HE Business of the MASONIC HOTEL in Nelson, will, for the future, be conducted by, and in the name of the undersigned.

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ROBERT GILMER.

Nelson Evening Mail 22 February 1882

<sup>8</sup> History House Greymouth

The above dissolution of partnership notice was published in the Nelson newspapers until the end of March. Robert's statement that he would continue at the Masonic did not mean that he now owned the hotel. In fact, all the indications are that Sam Gilmer continued to own the lease with Robert operating the hotel on Sam's behalf. It would be of interest to know the terms of such an arrangement.

In June 1886 additions were made to the hotel:

*"Extensive additions are being made to the Masonic Hotel are now near to completion. They consist of a billiard room, 20 ft x 26 ft, kitchen, pantry, offices on the ground floor and ten bedrooms and a bathroom in the upper storey. This will go far towards providing the additional accommodation which Mr. Gilmer so frequently finds that he requires, and will enable him now to provide sleeping accommodation for about forty lodgers. The late billiard room is converted into a dining room, for which purpose it is admirably suited. The new building which is of brick has been erected in a most substantial manner by Mr. Dear."*<sup>9</sup>

This was followed shortly by the announcement that a billiard tournament was to take place at the Masonic Hotel.

The question arises as to who paid for the upgrading of the hotel. It would not have been the building owner so it would have been either Robert or Sam Gilmer although it is more likely to have been Sam.

### **Purchase and sale of the Masonic Hotel Freehold**

On 2 November 1900 the Colonist reported that Sam Gilmer of Wellington *"has purchased the freehold of the Masonic Hotel of which he has been lessee for a number of years."* The transaction was finalized on 1 December 1900.

Shortly after Robert renewed his license for the Masonic in June 1901, the newspaper carried a brief comment that *"it is understood that negotiations are pending with a well known hotelkeeper in the Wellington district for the sale of Gilmer's Masonic Hotel."*<sup>10</sup> This was supported by numerous shipping movements of *"Gilmer"* to and from Wellington.

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<sup>9</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 15 June 1886

<sup>10</sup> Nelson Evening Mail 13 July 1901



Masonic Hotel 1902

Sam sold the hotel in January 1902<sup>11</sup> to Henry Baigent and he held a mortgage over it until 14 July 1910.<sup>12</sup>

**SALE OF MASONIC HOTEL.—** We learn that the well-known Masonic Hotel, at the corner of Hardy and Trafalgar streets has changed hands, Mr S. Gilmer having disposed of the property, £9,500 being mentioned as the purchase money. Mr Henry Baigent, of Collingwood-street, is the purchaser, and took possession yesterday afternoon.

Colonist 23 January 1902

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<sup>11</sup> Colonist 23 January 1902

<sup>12</sup> John Hewstone, Nelson