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SAM GILMER'S ROYAL OAK HOTEL (Part 2)

Sam Gilmer and his family lost everything they had in the 1898 fire and they all would have been absolutely devastated. Sam and Mary as well as Edith, who had turned twenty, would have lost all their personal belongings, clothes, jewelry etc. There had been no time to take anything. Their focus was on getting out with their lives.

It says something about Sam's personality that he did not dwell on his or his family's loss but immediately set about replacing his hotel on a much grander scale. To an extent the fire had done him a favour. He had a clean slate to work with and instead of having his old building, a mix of two and three storeys, he could now go straight to what he saw his hotel ultimately looking like.

With the insurance settlement being reached very quickly, Sam moved immediately to rebuild the hotel. He employed a new architect in James O'Dea rather than W.C. Chatfield who Sam had used from earliest days over some twenty years. Sam must have been very disappointed with Chatfield and the main issues appear to be the speed with which the fire spread through the old building and perhaps the claims made about it being fire proof.

O'Dea did not disappoint Sam. He moved with great speed to produce plans for the new hotel. In January he called for tenders to remove the charred and damaged wood and corrugated iron from the site¹ and on 2 March 1899 advertised to builders to provide tenders giving them until 15 March 1899.² This was then extended to 20 March. Contracts for the building were let in two stages. The first contract was let on 24 March 1899 to James Trevor.

Mr. J. O'Dea (as architect for Mr. S. Gilmer) has accepted the tender of Mr. James Trevor for the re-erection of the Royal Oak Hotel. The amount of the tender, which covers that portion of the building to extend partly along Cuba-street, and the whole of the Dixon-street frontages, is £9980. Separate tenders are to be called for the Manners-street frontage of the hotel, which will run into figures almost as large as the tender already accepted. Mr. Trevor signed his contract this afternoon, and the work is to be proceeded with at once.

The restoration of the Royal Oak Hotel is proceeding apace. The second contract, relating to the block facing Manners-street, has been begun, and the internal equipment of the southern wing, which abuts on Taranaki-place, is now proceeding. It is worth mentioning that the floor and wall tiles alone have cost £350, and the kitchen appliances nearly £400, Mr. Geo. Winder having imported both.

Evening Post 24 March 1899

Evening Post 22 September 1899

The newspaper reported on the New Royal Oak in a rather lengthy descriptive article on 24 January 1900:

¹ Evening Post 31 January 1899

² Evening Post 2 March 1899

"Royal Oak, Wellington," has been the address-tab attached to the luggage of many Englishmen and Australians who have made sojourns in New Zealand's Empire City, and once noted Mr. Samuel Gilmer's hotel was never forgotten. Without its Royal Oak, Wellington, in the opinion of those who travelled, was not considered complete, but the fire which destroyed the original house may now be looked upon as a blessing in disguise, for, Phoenix-like, the new building has risen handsomer and larger than the old. Raised another story in stature, extended many feet along Dixon-street and Manners-street, the new hotel, with its massive appearance, and conspicuous and convenient site, has become a building in every way worthy of the capital city of the colony, and one which is all that is claimed for it—an establishment for the best classes of visitors to our colony.

The main entrance to the hotel is from the broad pavement at the foot of Cuba-street, a handsomely-designed wrought iron verandah covering the approach. Immediately upon crossing the threshold the visitor steps upon tiles, which, in elaborate designs, cover the floors of the outer and inner vestibules, and the stairway hall. The ceilings of the vestibules are covered with asbestos zinc, of artistic design, picked out in silver and gold. In many parts of the building the ceilings have been decorated and the walls toned in a manner reflecting credit upon Mr. G. H. Jackson, the painter and decorator. Further decorative effect has been gained by Mr. A. Lawson with embossed glass work, and Mr. R. Martin with coloured lead-lights. From the vestibules, to the right and at the foot of the stairway, entrance is had to one of the handsomest dining-rooms in the colonies. With a length of 75 feet by a breadth of 34 feet, and furnished in the best taste, with a series of small tables giving accommodation for 100 persons, the room strikes the visitor with a most pleasing effect. A great deal of decorative work has been bestowed upon the ceiling, the walls contain many mirrors casting myriad reflections, the floors are covered with specially imported Wilton-pile carpets, and the windows hung with red rep. curtains. All the pretty tableware

was made to order, and besides the clusters of electric lights hung from the ceiling, each table is having an electric lamp set up in its centre. Messrs. Cederholm and Tolley have this work in hand. Immediately off the dining-room are a wine-room and a dessert-room, and off the centre is a large pantry, equipped in the most convenient style. From the pantry access is gained to a lofty and commodious kitchen, all the walls and flooring of which are of concrete. Under the management of Chef Williams, recently imported from London, the kitchen has been furnished with Messrs. Carron's latest manufactures—a central range (10 feet by 5 feet) containing four ovens and two furnaces, four steam presses for meats, a coke-grill, and steam stock-pot; and there are also a gas-stove, a monster plate-warmer, and heated carving-bench, as well as a 5-h.p. boiler, which supplies all the steam for heating purposes throughout the building. The chef. also has a cellar for his larder, fitted with ice-chests and cooking-chambers.

In the matter of bar accommodation and furnishing, the American system has been adopted, which makes for an attractive appearance and general convenience, both for the general public as well as for the man of leisure. Of cosy corners the patron of the Royal Oak has a wide variety of choice. Immediately off the dining-room is a lounge, or sitting-room, handsomely furnished, and containing a piano; near at hand is the smoking-room, another very fine room; across from this is a small writing-room; and when the Manners-street wing is completed there will be on the ground floor a cafe, a reading-room, another writing-room, and a private billiard-room; whilst underneath this suite will run a cellar (75 feet by 25 feet). Near at hand are the lavatories and conveniences, the floors and walls of which are tiled. Off the public office, which is in charge of Mr. Clarke (head clerk) is Mr. Gilmer's private office, fitted with a telephone, which places him in instant communication with all parts of the house, every floor being connected with the office. Altogether, the architect (Mr. J. O'Dea) has achieved a triumph in the planning of his ground floor.

Ascending the main stairway, handsome bronze figures are noted as stands for the electric lights on the pillars of the staircase, which by day is lighted from the glazed roof. On the first floor, opposite the entrance to the stairs, is a lounge leading on to the balcony which overlooks Cuba-street. The floor contains twelve suites, five double-bed rooms, and thirty single-bed rooms (each room having a wardrobe), with writing and drawing-rooms for ladies, all the rooms being handsomely furnished, and hung with papers of the most artistic designs. The Dixon-street corridor has a straight run of 170 feet, and all the passage-ways lead to a place of easy exit, the fire-escapes upon this and the upper floor being conveniently placed, although every known preventive of fire has been adopted throughout the hotel. The lavatories and baths on both floors are of the latest designs, with tiled floors and walls, Mr. Snaddon being responsible for the plumbing. The third story is "the sleeping floor," and contains sixty-five bedrooms, with a bachelors' lounge and

other special rooms, baths, lavatories, luggage-elevator, telephone, escapes, etc. The lantern light over the stairway is 75 feet from the vestibule below.

In giving Wellington an up-to-date and modernly-equipped hotel, Mr Gilmer has spared neither money nor trouble. His purse has been drawn upon to the extent of some £35,000, a lifetime's experience has assisted in overcoming many difficulties, and success has been achieved. Adult visitors will find all their requirements anticipated in the Royal Oak, but no provision is made for the care of children in the way of nurseries. An immense amount of detail has been involved in the task of furnishing the hotel, upon the floors of which, for instance, there are 6000 yards of carpets, and nothing that would tend to the comfort and convenience of patrons has been omitted. The builder (Mr. James Trevor), the architect, and the owner are all to be heartily congratulated upon the success which has attended their joint labours.

Evening Post 24 January 1900 (Lower Portion)



New Royal Oak Hotel 1901

Once the new Royal Oak Hotel was opened and working well, Sam was able to turn his hand to lesser issues with the Wellington City Council which, while they were small issues, they obviously bothered Sam.

Sam had received a letter of sympathy from the Council following the 10 December 1898 fire³. This letter was promptly sent and was clearly well intentioned.

To Samuel Gilmer Esq.

13 December 1898

Dear Sir,

I am instructed by the City Council to express their regret at the destruction of your fine hotel by fire on Saturday, last, and their sympathy with you in the trying circumstances of the case. I assure you that I heartily concur in the expression of sympathy on the part of the Council.

Yours faithfully

Town Clerk

No doubt when Sam received this letter eighteen months earlier he would have been pleased to receive it. However, with the passage of time and with his substantial personal losses he had reached another view. That is, that perhaps it might be more fitting for the Council to show him a more tangible expression of sympathy by waiving his rent for the Council owned land on which the hotel was built. Sam had kept paying the Council for his lease while his hotel site was cleared and the hotel was rebuilt. This took a little over twelve months during which there was no income.

The newspaper closely followed Council affairs and reported the progress of Sam's request, perhaps because he had alerted them but then again Council meetings were open. Sam's request was referred to the Council Finance Committee.

Mr. S. Gilmer, of the Royal Oak Hotel, the site of which is on land leased from the Council at £583 10s per annum, wrote asking for such remission of rent as the Council might consider him entitled to. He pointed out that the hotel was destroyed by fire, that with all reasonable diligence he entered upon the work of rebuilding at an estimated expenditure of £25,000, but that for over a year from the date of the fire the hotel would not be open for business, and he was at the loss of the total rent. The lease contained no provision for abatement of rent in the event of fire, but Mr. Gilmer believed that the Council had in other cases granted a remission of rent during the rebuilding of premises destroyed by fire. The request was referred to the Finance Committee.

Evening Post 23 March 1900

³ The Hotel That Sam Built. Compiled by John Hewstone Ian Cameron and Peter Sydor

The Finance Sub-Committee recommended:—That an allowance of one half-year's rent be made to Mr. S. Gilmer on account of the fire at his premises (Royal Oak Hotel);

Councillor Luke moved that the Council should not adopt the recommendation as to the remission of part of Mr. S. Gilmer's rent. This was lost on division, and the committee's recommendation was adopted with the addition that the opinion of the City Solicitor should be taken as to the legality of the proposed payment.

that the City Solicitor having reported that it will not be legal to make the allowance recommended on account of Mr. Gilmer's rent, unless the Council first adopts clause 10 of the Public Bodies Powers Act, 1887, the committee does not see its way to recommend any further action in the matter,

Evening Post 1 June 1900

Evening Post 22 June 1900

Sam obviously had some support within the Council but there were also those who were prepared to ensure he did not receive any favoured treatment.

Not long after the rent issue was resolved Sam again wrote to the Council on 25 October 1900. The nature of the letter was also reported in the newspaper the very next day.

Mr. S. Gilmer wrote complaining that the cabstand in front of the Royal Oak Hotel affected the letting value of the offices in the building, and he asked that it should be removed. The matter was referred to the City Engineer for a report from the Inspector.

Evening Post 26 October 1900

Sam's concerns were that the Cabs, which were drawn by horses, stood at the Cabstand for lengthy periods in front of the four new shops. Their presence made access by others difficult and it clearly affected the letting value because the horses caused a nuisance making a mess with an offensive odour from their droppings.

The Council met on 1 November 1900 and two Councillors McGill and Townsend were asked to provide a report on the removal of the cabstand and also a similar request at the Royal Hotel.⁴ They provided their report three weeks later which essentially agreed but contained other details on the issue:

⁴ Evening Post 2 November 1900

Councillors Townsend and M'Gill presented the following report on the subject of cab stands:—(1) Royal Oak Hotel: That the present stand be abolished, and only one cab be allowed there between the two telephone posts; that two cabs be allowed to stand at Cuba-street extension in front of the express stand in the middle of the street; that a stand be appointed in the centre of Dixon-street, west of Cuba-street; that timber-blocking be laid down for the one cab at the Royal Oak Hotel, and that a new gutter be laid where the cabs now stand.

Evening Post 23 November 1900

At a Council meeting on 13 December 1900 the Cab Proprietor's Union requested to "*be heard*" before the cabstand was removed and the Council agreed to do this.⁵ At a further meeting in January it was evident that there was at least one Councillor against the proposal considering it a mistake.⁶ There was no rush by the Council to decide the issue and the Cab Proprietors' Union did not meet with Council until May 1901.

A deputation from the Cab Proprietors' Union waited on the Council to ask it to reconsider its decision as to the shifting of the Royal Oak cab-stand. The spokesman said that the cabs had been put back to a narrow portion of the street where it was very dangerous, as there was only ten feet between the cabs and the tramcars. He wished the stand to be returned to its old position. Another member of the deputation said that the cabs were as much a public convenience as Mr. Gilmer's hotel was. The Mayor assured the deputation that the Council would go carefully into the matter.

Evening Post 17 May 1901

The Cabstand was finally moved to a new location where it remained for a period of about eighty years.⁷ Sam had his way on this issue at least.

It is of interest that Sam's approach to the new Royal Oak Hotel did not make provision for children or families as had been the case with the improvements he made in earlier years. This

⁵ Evening Post 14 December 1900

⁶ Evening Post 18 January 1901

⁷ The Hotel that Sam Built. Compiled by John Hewstone, Ian Cameron and Peter Sydor

appears to be a very conscious design decision, taking account of the fact the hotel had to be continually expanded to meet the continually rising demand. There were always requests for accommodation that had to be denied. As a clear example “over 100 applications for accommodation had to be refused on Thursday and Friday last.”⁸ The hotel continued to be successful and had gained an excellent reputation. However, the simple fact is that adults spend money in hotels but children do not.

As well as not providing for children Sam Gilmer was not interested in “theatricals” staying in his hotel. This was despite (or perhaps because of) Sam’s major interest in the Wellington Opera House as a director and major shareholder over a period of some twenty years. (See story: John Knox Hamilton Business Activities at The Move to Wellington and Nelson 1878):

“John Knox Hamilton and Sam Gilmer were shareholders from the start of the second Opera House Company in 1885. They went through the difficult and most contentious period of building, liquidation, establishment of a further company and then fire destroying the building. They responded with their funds when called upon and contributed generously with their time for little or no reward for a lengthy period. Sam saw the good years and the new Opera House opening in 1914 but unfortunately John Knox was not so rewarded.”⁹

John Knox Hamilton died on 26 October 1902, a month short of his 53rd birthday.

Strangely, Sam is reputed to have rejected the great Dame Nellie Melba from entering his hotel. We have three newspaper articles that support this:

ous hotelkeeper “Sam” Gilmer, owner of the Royal Oak Hotel in Wellington. Mr Sam Gilmer is remarkable because he simply won’t have wandering musical or theatrical celebrities in his house. He has in fact intimated this prohibition policy to Madame Melba herself, and a similar intimation to Madame Clara Butt caused that lady to write about “that funny little place Wellington” and “stern Presbyterian hotelkeepers” or words to

Observer 4 April 1914

⁸ Evening Post 22 August 1904

⁹ John Knox Hamilton Business Activities

It has been generally understood that ever since the days of Melba's visit to Wellington, the Royal Oak has been practically closed to the theatrical profession. Madam put on so many hoity-toity airs and left off so many common graces that "Old Sam" tabooed actresses for ever more. There is one exception, Florence Young. Samuel has great respect for the popular prima donna, who, when visiting Wellington, has an open invitation to stay at the Oak as Mr. Gilmer's personal guest.

NZ Truth 20 March 1915

But a much less august personage bested Melba in a little-known incident during her tour of New Zealand.

She arrived at the Royal Oak Hotel at Wellington and was going up the wide staircase, her Pekinese under her arm, when a voice called out: "And who are you, may I ask?"

She looked haughtily at the man and said icily: "I am Melba, of course."

Melba's last appearance

"H'm, a theatrical," said the man. "And I'm Sam Gilmer, the owner of this hotel. And I don't have theatricals staying here."

He was as good as his word. The great Melba, her followers, her baggage, and her dog, were forced to go.

Melba Tour of New Zealand

Women's Day & Home 2 August 1954¹⁰

These three articles did not date the event but they do confirm it. We have identified that Madam Melba, as she was then, made two tours of New Zealand the first in 1903 during which she gave one concert in Wellington at the Opera House. Given his role there Sam and Mary must have been at the concert. The second tour was in 1909 when Melba put on three concerts at the Town Hall which could accommodate larger crowds than the Opera House.

Melba was born in 1861 and when she visited New Zealand she was an internationally recognized performer. She had left Australia for Europe in 1886 and had made an international name for herself spending most of her time performing at Covent Garden in London and in the opera houses of Europe and the United States. She demanded and received fees of up to 1000 Pounds a performance. She was a very wealthy woman but was very generous with significant contributions to charity. She was a "superstar" of her day and she knew it.

On her first trip to Wellington, Melba stayed at the Empire Hotel¹¹ which until 1 March 1897 had been owned by Hamilton Gilmer. In 1903 the Empire was owned by Joseph Mandel and he had rebuilt it after taking over from Hamilton. Perhaps Sam was miffed Melba had not stayed at his hotel? In 1909, Melba stayed at the Grand Hotel.¹² It seems that if the event was in either 1903 or 1909, Melba might have been just visiting the Royal Oak. Alternatively, after being rejected by Sam, she may have just gone to stay at the other hotel.

¹⁰ Located in Lil Hamilton's papers. Wife of Leo, Grandson of John Hamilton

¹¹ Evening Post 23 February 1903

¹² Evening Post 17 April 1909

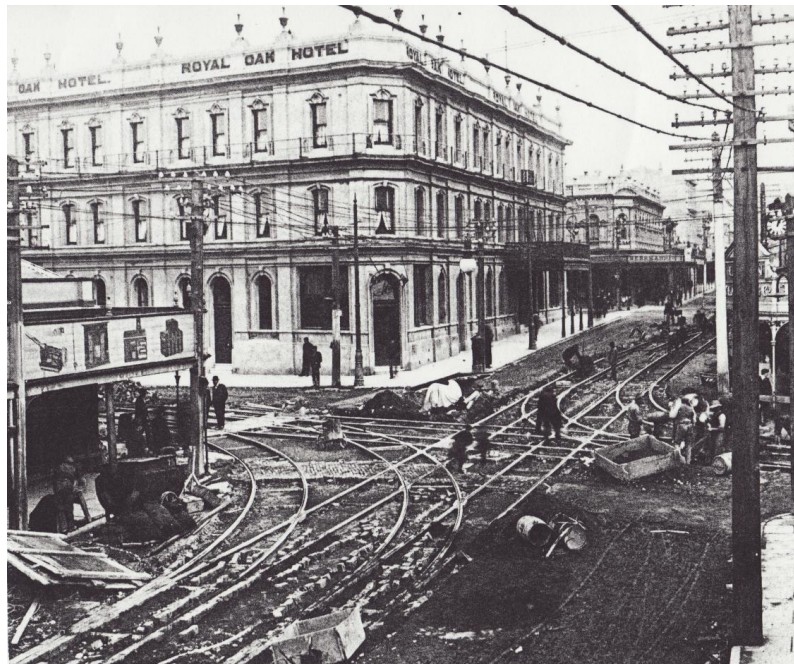


Melba 1890's



Melba 1904

Late in 1904 tramlines were laid in both Cuba Street and Manners Street. This would have brought about a major disruption to business at the Royal Oak over the several months it would have taken to do the work. Access to the hotel would have been seriously limited with the Main Entrance in Cuba Street hardly accessible at all. In addition to the disruption of access, the dirt, dust and noise that would have inconvenienced both hotel patrons and staff. However, once completed the new lines were to bring trams and make it more convenient for more people to reach the hotel. There is little doubt that there would be increased patronage at the hotel as a consequence



Laying Tramlines 1904

In August 1904 Sam bought a further parcel of land occupied by Messrs Luke and Sons Foundry on the eastern side of the hotel said to be “for a large sum.” This land ran from Manners Street to Dixon Street at the rear of the hotel with a 66 feet frontage to each. It was said his recent venture in rebuilding the hotel was so successful that he had to acquire additional land with the object of still further extending to meet the additional demand for accommodation.¹³

Extensive as is the accommodation at the Royal Oak Hotel it has already proved to be insufficient to cope with the demand, and the proprietor (Mr. S. Gilmer) has decided to carry out additions on an extensive scale. The extension, which will be four stories high, will have a frontage of 74ft to Manners-street, occupying the site now covered by the old foundry. The new portion of the hotel will be erected so as to form a continuation of and to be worked in connection with the present building, and will be provided with all the latest and most up-to-date conveniences, including an efficient system of fire escapes. When the extension has been completed, the Royal Oak Hotel will have a total frontage to Manners-street, Cuba-street, and Dixon-street of 556ft. The plans of the addition have been prepared by Mr. O’Dea.

Grey River Argus 22 August 1904



Royal Oak Hotel With Trams

¹³ Evening Post 22 August 1904



Cuba Street with Royal Oak Hotel on left

The Royal Oak continued to attract visitors to its bars, dining rooms and lounges. The newspapers recorded on a daily basis the names of visitors from other parts of New Zealand and also from other countries around the world. It gained the reputation as the place in which to stay when visiting Wellington.

The Royal Oak was also the place that local Wellington people went. Business people and people in government also drank in the bars and or had lunch or dinner there. There was many a wedding reception or other celebratory function held there. The following illustrates some of the visitors both from overseas and a local lunch involving the former Prime Minister Sir Joseph Ward. Sir Joseph used the hotel for a luncheon with important business connections. (One of those mentioned, Martin Kennedy, was a former Greymouth businessman well known to Sam and a partner of Hamilton Gilmer in Staples Brewery):

The following visitors to the colony are staying at the Royal Oak Hotel :—Messrs. A. G. Campbell, of England ; J. U. Richardson and S. Entwistle, of Ireland ; G. Norman Dixon, of Yorkshire ; A. G. Wilson, of San Francisco ; C. A. Davis, of Los Angeles, California ; J. Brown, of Newcastle, N.S.W. ; G. F. Todman, T. R. Allt, C. Weisbach, and Mr. and Mrs. Tickle, of Sydney.

Evening Post 28 February 1905

At the Royal Oak Hotel to-day Sir Joseph and Lady Ward entertained at luncheon the executive committee of the recent Presentation Committee. Amongst those present were the Hon. Chas. and Mrs. Luke, Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Donne, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Dyer, Hon. Dr. Collins, Dr. Martin, Hon. J. E. Jenkinson, Mr. Martin Kennedy, Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Windér, Mr. Wm. Field. and Mrs. Field, and others. Dr. Collins thanked

Evening Post 14 November 1912

However, the clientele of the Royal Oak was not always well credentialed, affluent and honest. As a hotelkeeper, Sam was from time to time the subject of small crimes committed by people staying at his hotel. One such crime was a fraudulent cheque on an Auckland bank passed to him in February 1914. The amount of the cheque was for 30 Pounds and when presented no payment was made. The police arrested the person who had a history of two previous convictions with the Victoria Police. He was tried, convicted and sentenced to two months imprisonment.¹⁴

Sam could have avoided issues like this by not accepting cheques drawn on "out of town" banks or cheques more generally. However, Sam was a hospitable person who wished to please his customers and took these chances. He also sought redress if he was wronged.

On the other hand there was an event recorded which also showed Sam as being prepared to use different means to make money. In this case, Sam bought whisky in bulk and put it in empty whisky bottles no doubt to sell at higher prices than he might otherwise have obtained.

Substantial compliance with the law is not sufficient in cases where heavy minimum penalties are fixed by the Legislature. This point was stressed in the Magistrate's Court yesterday by Mr. S. E. M'Carthy, S.M., when dealing with a charge against Samuel Gilmer, of the Royal Oak Hotel. The defendant was charged with having in his possession bottles with labels on and the making use of them without destroying the original label. The evidence showed that the defendant imported Bell's whisky in bulk, and used the empty whisky bottles from the bars, which were filled with draught whisky, the original labels being defaced with a

penknife. It was submitted by Mr. Gray, who, with Mr. Ward, appeared for the defendant, that if there had not been strict compliance with the law, there had been substantial compliance. There was no fraud, for the labels on the bottles were defaced, though not destroyed. The Magistrate agreed that there had been no attempt at fraud, but stated that he had no option but to impose the minimum penalty (£20) and costs. A similar decision was come to in respect of Philip Lucas Firth, for whom Mr. M. Myers (with Mr. Wylie) appeared. In each case it was intimated that a refund would be applied for.

Evening Post 13 October 1917

Sam also had an interest in a boarding house in Dixon Street opposite the Royal Oak Hotel. He owned the house but had it leased out. It had nine rooms. The place was called the Mawhera Boarding House which is the Maori name for the Grey River at Greymouth which leads us to think that Sam may well have established the place. The name certainly indicates Sam's continuing empathy with the West Coast.

Sam had the unfortunate experience of having the Royal Oak destroyed by fire and also had to face damage to the boarding house also by fire. This fire broke out in the back portion of the wooden building forcing the ten occupants mostly women and children, to escape using ladders because the stairs could not be used. There was no loss of life.¹⁵

¹⁴ Evening Post 11 March 1914

¹⁵ Evening Post 3 November 1915

The "Mawhera" boardinghouse, in Dixon-street, opposite the Royal Oak Hotel, which was damaged by fire early yesterday morning, is insured by the owner (Mr. Samuel Gilmer) in the Liverpool, London, and Globe office for £700. The contents of the building are the property of Mr. Henry Brady and are covered by a policy in the Phoenix Company for £125

Evening Post 4 November 1915

Market Reserve Land

When Sam Gilmer took over the Royal Oak Hotel in 1881, it occupied a very small portion of the Wellington City Council's Market Reserve measuring 28 by 50 feet or 1400 square feet. Sam progressively enlarged the hotel across the frontage Cuba Street (about 126 feet) and down both Dixon and Manners Streets

This land had been held in trust by the Council for a Public Market Reserve. With the land leased to Sam and with building he erected on it being planned for long term occupancy of the site rendered him vulnerable to the possibility that he would be exposed to changed levels of rent and lease terms with council membership changing over time after elections.

Newspaper reports reveal Sam's risk but also that he had moved to protect himself and the long term interests of the Royal Oak Hotel.

"That the necessary steps be taken to accept a surrender of the two leases held by Mr. S. Gilmer and both dated 27th day of October, 1892, and that a new lease for the remainder of the term be granted at an increased rental of 5 per cent., and upon the same terms and conditions as the present Te Aro reclamation leases, and that a special order be passed to give effect to the recommendation."

Evening Post 14 December 1906

The land described has on it the Royal Oak Hotel, among other buildings, and last Friday the City Council passed a special order, granting the proprietor of the hotel "a new lease or leases for the balance of the existing term with perpetual right of renewal on the terms already agreed to."

Evening Post 8 February 1907

With the perpetual right of renewal Sam's risk had been covered off. With this in place both Council and the community accepted that if Wellington was to have a public market place that it would have to be located somewhere else and not on the original land reserved for this purpose now well and truly occupied by the Royal Oak Hotel which was new and of substantial form. There continued to be pressure on the Council to establish a public market but efforts were made to locate a site elsewhere.

However, the Council continued to have an interest in the land adjoining the Royal Oak Hotel and with the addition of tramlines and trams there was a need to widen Manners Street. The

Market Reserve behind the Royal Oak Hotel was looked as potentially providing this. However the Council was also interested in creating open space and park behind the Royal Oak.

a public utility character. At the present time, however, the police station blocked the way of effecting an urgent widening of the roadway opposite to the Grand Opera House. In the block was an old foundry, the property of Mr. S. Gilmer, who would utilise it in the extension of the Royal Oak Hotel. However, in that foundry block was a strip of land near Dixon-street that could be exchanged for a strip in Manners-street, which would much assist in the widening of that thoroughfare. The Mayor thought the old foundry site should be acquired from the owner and thrown

into the proposed plantation, to take the place of the existing old buildings; "the more open space the better," he added. He was at present in communication with Mr. Gilmer respecting this matter. Assuming the council does not acquire the old foundry site, it will in any case be absolutely necessary to acquire the narrow strip referred to. As to the Turkish baths, it was absolutely necessary for the council as a matter of policy to determine what was to be done to fill their place, and, further, to consider the whole matter of the improvements from a financial point of view.

Evening Post 3 March 1915

However, the council moved very slowly, if it moved at all, and six years later nothing seemed to have changed. This also applied to Sam who by 1921 was in his late seventies. Newspaper articles through this period gave any little in information about Sam. However, the following article indicates that he still proposed to extend the hotel. We have not found any evidence that this occurred.

It has been decided that the Turkish baths building in Manners-street is to be destroyed. The alteration of the tramline has made it necessary, for the sake of safety and convenience, to set back the building line, and as the building is too old for alteration it will have to be demolished. The decision was left in the hands of the Finance Committee of the City Council, and was reached after an inspection of the property. Not only will the Turkish baths building disappear, but the old foundry now leased by Mr. S. Gilmer is to be pulled down. Mr. Gilmer proposes to build in its place an extension of the Royal Oak Hotel.

Evening Post 10 March 1921

In addition to the establishment of a park on the land at the rear of the Royal Oak Hotel another issue arose regarding use of the land. The Wellington Citizens War Memorial Committee had been established and in January 1923 it examined seven sites for a War Memorial to the 1700

Wellington men who died in the Great War. The Memorial was to cost 10,000 Pounds of which 2300 Pounds was already available.¹⁶

The committee made an assessment of seven sites and concluded that the Turkish Baths site in Manners Street at the back of the Royal Oak Hotel offered “*a very satisfactory solution.*” This conclusion brought strongly adverse comment in the newspapers despite the Wellington City Council donating the land to be used for the Memorial.

Over a period of time the committee changed its view and settled on another site. This was on the Parliamentary grounds on the triangular piece of land on the corner of Lambton Quay and Molesworth St. On 17 June 1924 it was reported that the government had agreed with the Committee to use this as the site.¹⁷

Six months later on 14 January 1925 Sam Gilmer died after some forty three years at the Royal Oak and fifteen years at his New Royal Oak. The hotel was to continue for a further fifty five years.

¹⁶ Evening Post 6 January 1923

¹⁷ Evening Post 17 June 1924