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4.4 SWEENEY'S and THE HARP OF ERIN HOTELS GREYMOUTH 1866

While John Hamilton was establishing the hotel at Cobden the two other major players in the Gilmer Brothers partnership, Hamilton and Sam Gilmer were establishing an early foothold in two hotels in the emerging town of Greymouth across the Grey River. These hotels were the Sweeney's Hotel and the Harp of Erin owned by Patrick Flannery. Both of these hotels were on Mawhera Quay.

In the early stages it is likely that there was a sharing the initial efforts between the partners but as the ventures progressed it became clear that Hamilton Gilmer was leading the efforts at Sweeney's and Sam Gilmer at the Harp of Erin. It should be noted that at this time both were still relatively young. Hamilton was turning 28 years of age in April 1866 while Sam turned 25 in that year. Both would have been assisted by their brothers Henry, John and Robert, (if they were all there), but we have only identified Henry working with Hamilton at Sweeney's.

Sweeney's Hotel

As shown in the advertisement below Sweeney was still at his hotel in January 1866. There are no newspapers for Greymouth available between January and May 1866 and by mid May there had been a change in the advertising for the hotel. There is a distinct style difference and the later issue refers to "*the proprietors*" inferring there was more than one. We have concluded that the change occurred in this period. There is also a reference to the hotel being enlarged.

S W E E N E Y ' S H O T E L ,
MAWHERA QUAY,
Corner of Tainui street.

These extensive premises are under the direct supervision of the proprietor, and he can therefore assure his friends that no effort shall be wanting on his part to make them comfortable when they call upon him.

The Bar is supplied with the very best liquors procurable; and the Restaurant will be under the direct supervision of that well known caterer for the public palate Mr. J. Harris, formerly of Chiltern and the Lachlan.

The Stables are under the superintendence of Mr DE LACY, formerly of Riverton, and of the Commercial Stables, Hokitika; and his name is also a warrant for efficiency, while the stables themselves are beyond all doubt the very best situated upon the Grey.

Grey River Argus 6 January 1866

S W E E N E Y ' S H O T E L ,
MAWHERA QUAY,
Greymouth,
Enlarged and now made the most commodious in the town,
Lofty and well-ventilated Rooms.
A first-class Billiard Table.

The Restaurant is under the management of the Proprietors, and will be found adequate to all requirements made.

Grey River Argus 19 May 1866

On 8 January 1867 an advertisement requested a settlement of accounts. This implies that Gilmer Brothers were operating the hotel under a sub lease from the owner Sweeney and that Sweeney's lease was coming to an end.

N O T I C E.
ALL ACCOUNTS against GILMER and
CO, of Sweeney's Hotel, to be sent in not
later than 3 p.m. on Monday, 14th January,
or they will not be recognised.

Grey River Argus 8 January 1867

To support this conclusion, there was a further advertisement placed in the Grey River Argus on 10 January by agents Maclean & Fisher, for the sale of a first class hotel on Mawhera Quay by private contract. The advertisement does not identify if Sweeney was the seller, but we do know that despite going through a business settlement process, Gilmer Brothers remained as operators of the hotel indicating that they had purchased the lease from Sweeney.

There are several newspaper references to Hamilton Gilmer that indicate that he was at a hotel in the first half of 1867.

NUISANCE.—Joseph Kilgour was charged with having a pig-stye, which is a common nuisance, on his premises; was convicted, but only mulcted in the costs of the court, 6s 6d.—J. C. Moore, manager of the Grey-mouth and Saltwater Tramway, was charged with depositing rubbish in a public thoroughfare, and ordered to pay the costs of the court, 6s 6d.—Henry Rowe, for having pigs and manure on his premises, was fined 1l and costs, 6s 6d.—Hamilton Gilmore, James Johnstone, Ed. Ashton, and Alex. Constantine, for similar offences, were fined 1l and costs.—A similar charge against William Thompson was dismissed with a caution.

Grey River Argus 9 March 1867

WEDNESDAY, May 2.
(Before W. H. Russell, Esq., R.M.)

CIVIL CASE.

The following cases were dismissed, there being no appearance of either party:—Affleck v. Heslop, Wagschell v. Dillard, Same v. Lorenz, Same v. Jacobson, Glenhill v. Montgomery.

Judgment by default was given in Strike and Son v. Miscampbell, for a balance of account of L14; George Marks v. O'Brien, a claim for L5 8s 6d, being the balance of five weeks' wages for boating at 30s a week, on which L2 2s had been received; Frederick Miller v. Gilmer Bros., for twenty dozen of eggs at 2s 9d—the defendant not having put in an appearance in either case.

Grey River Argus 4 May 1867

The significance of the May case is that it is the first reference to the business name of Gilmer Brothers. A formal entity had been established and we know from later events that it was a partnership between four of the Gilmer brothers (excluding Henry) and John Hamilton. (At this early stage it is possible that Henry was also a partner. He would have left the partnership when he decided to move to farm the land they held at Totara Flat.)

We can therefore assume that the spate of activities they were carrying out on a range of fronts were planned, coordinated, resourced and financed on a cooperative basis although this is not

to say that one did not contribute more than the other. The common ingredient was the family relationship.

The location of Sweeney's on the corner of Tainui St and Mawhera Quay, had the key requirement of a good location. It was on a corner, in a central position in the town and close to the steamer wharf where it would be able to attract commercial travelers and other visitors to the town. As we have seen with John Hamilton, advertising played a large part in his business strategy. This was also the case with the Gilmer Brother's businesses. It was common for hotels to take the name of their owner almost immediately they had bought the business although in the case of Sweeney's Hotel, Gilmer Brothers were very slow to relinquish the Sweeney's name in favour of their own business name. This was very sensible given the goodwill that would have been associated with the Sweeney name and the early stage of their own development as a business.

The May 1866 advertisement continued unchanged through to April 1867 when it was no longer published. There appears to have been a break in April and May but newspapers are not available for June and July. A new advertisement appeared in August 1867, highlighting improvements made, its central location, private apartments for families and the restaurant.

OLD TRACES RECOGNISED HERE NOW CHIEFLY IN THE

S W E E N E Y ' S H O T E L ,
Mawhera Quay.

The recent improvements have materially improved the accommodation of this well-known Hotel ; its central situation rendering it also the most convenient in town for visitors.

Lofty and well Ventilated Bedrooms.
Private Apartments for Families
First-class Billiard Tables

The Wines, Spirits, &c., are the best that can be procured.

The Restaurant, being under the immediate supervision of the Proprietors, will be found adequate to all requirements.

G I L M E R B R O T H E R S

Grey River Argus 22 August 1867

This advertisement ran until the end of March 1868 when there was a break through to the end of end of September 1868. On 3 October 1868 a new advertisement appeared which was significant for the first use of "*Gilmer Bros, Proprietors*" clearly indicating they were owners of the business. This was at least 16 months after taking over Sweeney's but they continued to retain the Sweeney's Hotel name. This was also confirmed in the Greymouth Directory of 10 November 1868¹

¹ Grey River Argus 10 November 1868

S W E E N E Y ' S H O T E L .

This Hotel has been so long established and so favorably known that little comment is necessary on its ample accommodation, and the Proprietors while simply wishing to mention that the recent alterations have added much to the comfort and number of the Bedrooms, may state that

The Dining-room has also been enlarged, and the table is under the immediate charge of the Proprietors.

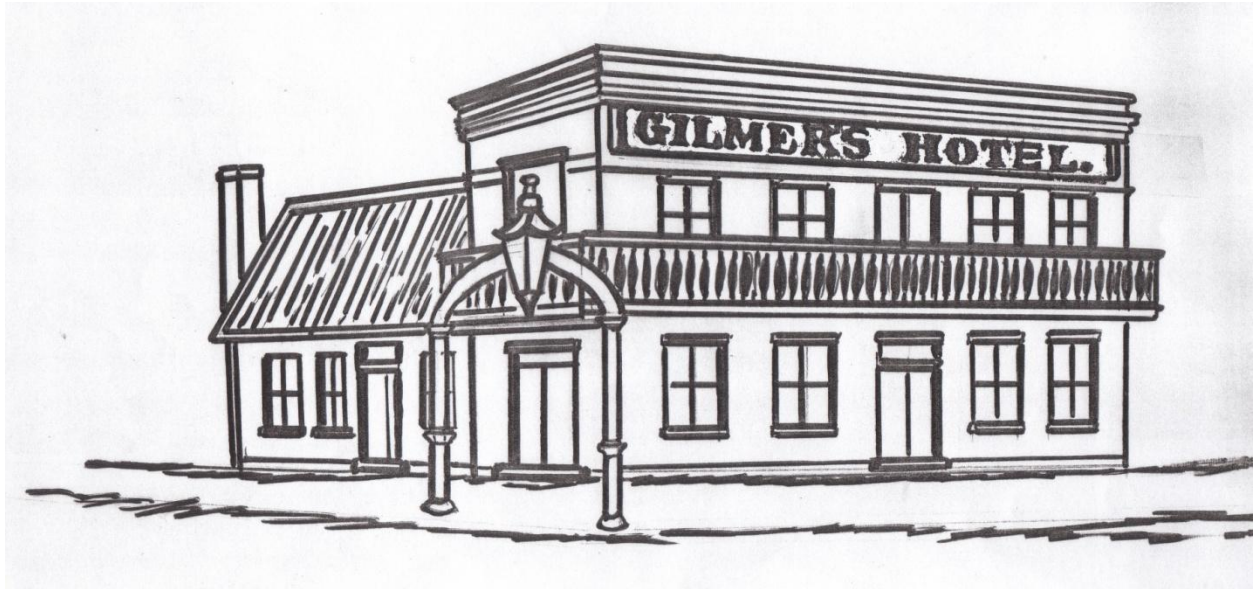
With Comfort, light and ventilation have been especially looked to in the fittings of the Billiard-room, which contains two most Superior Tables.

There are rooms also expressly adapted for Sample Rooms.

GILMER BROS,
Proprietors.

Grey River Argus 3 October 1868

It is interesting to speculate on the nature of the improvements made. Early sketches we have of the hotel show that it was rather small but from the advertisements we have the impression it had already been enlarged.



Sketch of original Gilmer Brothers Greymouth Hotel

The October 1868 advertisement also reveals another characteristic of their business approach, that is, to continue to improve the quality of the establishment and its accommodation.

In September 1868, 6 cases of Billiard tables were delivered from Westport² and despite the advertisement referring to recent alterations, in November tenders were requested for *"additions and alterations to Sweeney's Hotel for Mr. H Gilmer."* This was signed by W. H. Armson, the Hokitika architect who had been used for the new hotel at Westport. Later that year on 28 December 1868 a new large hall was opened. The event was seen as significant and the newspaper carried a detailed report:

Playing as soldiers.

The large two-storey building which Mr H. Gilmer recently added to his hotel, at a cost of over £1000, on the site of the old theatre in Tainui street, will be opened on Monday evening, when the gift auction, on behalf of the funds of the English Church School and Parsonage, will be held in the hall. This room is large and commodious, and is, we believe, the finest in Westland. It measures 56 feet long, by 27 feet broad, and 16 feet high, with two anti-rooms attached, each 14ft. by 14ft. The hall is excellently adapted for the purpose for which it is intended—a lodge-room—as the walls of the three rooms are thoroughly deafened, and the flooring is made of 1½ inch red pine boards. This hall will be consecrated as a Masonic Lodge-room, by the members of the Greymouth Lodge, on St. John's Day, 30th inst., and a banquet will be held there the same evening. Underneath this hall are four offices or shops fronting on to Tainui street, all of which are built in the most substantial manner, and are well adapted for the purposes for which they are intended. Altogether the building is a very handsome addition to the hotel, and will be a great convenience for many public purposes.

Grey River Argus 26 December 1868

² Grey River Argus 17 September 1868

CONSECRATION OF THE NEW MASONIC HALL IN GREYMOUTH.

On Wednesday last, one of those ceremonies which are always of deep interest to the Masonic Brotherhood was celebrated in Greymouth, in a manner which reflected the highest credit upon each and all concerned, and was to the full satisfaction of the brethren assembled. We refer to the opening and consecration of the magnificent new Masonic Hall recently erected by Mr. Gilmer, of Sweeney's Hotel. It is now some seven months since the first Lodge of Freemasons was constituted in Greymouth, and at that time, although the new Lodge was formed under very encouraging auspices, it was expected that the Lodge-room constructed by Messrs Tonks and Hughes, at the time they extended their premises, would afford sufficient accommodation for a considerable time to come. But the remarkable rate of progression the Lodge made in the accessions to its numbers, made it evident that the room then in use was not extensive enough, and Mr Gilmer offered to build a suitable hall, capable of giving the required accommodation. This offer was accepted, and Mr Gilmer, in the most spirited manner, set to work to fulfil his promise, to enable the Fraternity in Greymouth to celebrate the Festival of St. John in becoming manner, in a noble hall. In spite of many unforeseen obstacles to the completion of the building, owing to the very unfavorable weather, Mr Gilmer was able to finish the hall and its appropriate decorations within the specified time.

At High Noon on Wednesday, the Brethren mustered strongly in the old Lodge-room, at the Albion Hotel, where the Lodge was opened, and seven new members were initiated. After the initiations were concluded, Brother Tonks (one of the former proprietors of the Albion Hotel) was presented with a handsome Master Mason's Jewel, in recognition of his many and valuable services to the Lodge since its formation. This interesting and pleasing ceremony over, the Lodge adjourned until 3 p.m., when the Brethren, to the number of about seventy, assembled, and, forming in procession, marched to the new Lodge-room. The procession was under the able management of Brother D. Maclean, who marched the body in true Masonic style to the new hall.

This was followed on 28 December, St John's Day, with a Consecration ceremony by the Greymouth Masonic Lodge. It was reported that *"Mr. Gilmer offered to build a suitable hall, capable of giving the required accommodation. This offer was accepted and Mr. Gilmer, in the most spirited manner, set to work to fulfill his promise to enable the Fraternity in Greymouth to celebrate the Festival of St John in becoming manner, in a noble hall."*³

³ Grey River Argus 1 January 1869

The consecration ceremony started at the previous location of the lodge, the Albion Hotel, where seven new members were initiated and the seventy present then marched in a procession to the new Lodge-room. In the evening a banquet was provided in the new hall "by Host Gilmer".

This large new hall enhanced the competitive position of hotel and enabled it to permanently host the Greymouth Freemasons Lodge. The Lodge was previously based at the Albion Hotel but *'because of increasing numbers it was found to be insufficient for their requirements. Arrangements were then entered into with Mr. G. Gilmer, of Sweeney's Hotel and that gentleman undertook to build a large room for the use of the Lodge, and he has erected a hall that is perhaps the best and most suitable for the purpose for which it is intended in New Zealand. Certainly we have seen no Lodge-room on the Coast, so far as convenience and adaptability is concerned to equal it; the building itself being an ornament to Greymouth. The furniture and jewels of the Lodge are complete and magnificent and the general paraphernalia connected with the Lodge and the beautiful mottoes that decorated the walls had a very imposing effect.'*⁴

The hall commenced the holding of both public and private meetings and, for example, a meeting of "influential residents" was held at Gilmer's Hotel on 13 January 1869 regarding the St Patrick's Day races.⁵ The advertising for the hotel was also enhanced to reflect the new hall and a new ad appeared on 9 February 1869 under the heading "Excelsior" and pointing out that the hotel had been improved again by the addition of the new room.

S W E E N E Y ' S H O T E L .

EXCELSIOR.

Once again has this Hotel been improved by the erection of a Room which, for size and elegance of decoration, has been pronounced unequalled in New Zealand. It is admirably adapted for Public Meetings, while its convenient ante-rooms make it a favorite Lodge-Room for the various Orders.

All the other well-known arrangements of this Old Established Hotel, comprising the well supplied table- the comfortably furnished and well ventilated Bedrooms—are most carefully attended to.

The Billiard-room contains Two Most Superior Tables, and there are Sample-rooms for Commercial Travellers.

GILMER BROS.

Grey River Argus 9 February 1869

Further, on 18 February there was a report of a supper and ball in Gilmer's Hotel which proved to be a great success. *"The large new hall is nicely adapted for such reunions and contributes greatly to the comfort and convenience of the guests. The tables arranged both across and the*

⁴ Grey River Argus 27 May 1869

⁵ Grey River Argus 14 January 1869

full length of the hall, were quite filled by a gay assemblage, while the supper spread upon them was everything that could be desired.”⁶

The room made the hotel the only place to hold public meetings, company and shareholder meetings and functions of status and it put the hotel in the paramount position of the hotels in Greymouth.

Despite the efforts in completing the new hall, Hamilton Gilmer was clearly interested in ensuring he had the best facility in town and that it met all the requirements of the organizations that chose to meet there. So in a little over six months Gilmer Brothers were calling for tenders for the *“making of a new floor and sundry alterations to the Masonic Hall”⁷*

Major change to Advertising

On 13 May 1869⁸ there was major change to the hotel advertising. For the first time in Greymouth their advertisement refers to all four of the Gilmer Brothers hotels. The advertisement gave a view of the rapidly expanding scale of their hotel business and the scope of their operations on the West Coast covering the key towns providing access to the goldfields.

It gave them a differentiating factor from other hotels and enabled them to offer a similar level of service in each place which would add comfort to many. It would have been quite intimidating to their competition. There were no other hotels with a similar scale of operations.

While the advertisement was a first for Greymouth the chain style advertisement had previously been used at Westport and also at Charleston. We believe it was first used there on 21 November 1868 some six or more months before Greymouth. This leads us to the view that the instigator may have been Sam or John Gilmer who were at Westport and Charleston at the time. In later years when John Gilmer returned to Greymouth he appears to have revived the advertising of multiple hotels in the same newspaper even though by that time the Gilmer Brothers partnership had long been dissolved.

⁶ Grey River Argus 18 February 1869

⁷ Grey River Argus 10 July 1869

⁸ Grey River Argus 13 May 1869

POST-OFFICE HOTEL, TO WHOLE
 WESTPORT,
 (Nearest to all Public Buildings.)
 MELBOURNE HOTEL,
 Charleston. Office of Cobb & Co.
 HAMILTON'S HOTEL, COBDEN.
 Livery Stables and Horses for Hire.
 SWEENEY'S HOTEL,
 Greymouth, adjacent to the Wharf.
 The Proprietors beg to draw the at-
 tention of Travellers and others to the
 unequalled accommodation at each of
 the above four spacious and comfort-
 able hotels, and to assure them that no
 exertions will be spared by them to
 maintain the high character they have
 hitherto enjoyed.
 ALCOCK'S BEST BILLIARD TABLES.
 GILMER BROTHERS,
 Proprietors.
 VICTORIA HOTEL.

Westport Times & Charleston Argus
21 November 1868

SWEENEY'S HOTEL,
 GREYMOUTH,
 Adjacent to the Wharf.
 HAMILTON'S HOTEL,
 COBDEN.
 Livery Stables and Horses for Hire.
 POST-OFFICE HOTEL,
 WESTPORT,
 (Nearest to all Public Buildings.)
 MELBOURNE HOTEL,
 CHARLESTON.
 Office of Cobb and Co.
 The Proprietors beg to draw the attention
 of Travellers and others to the unequalled
 accommodation at each of the above four
 spacious and comfortable hotels, and to
 assure them that no exertions will be spared
 by them to maintain the high character they
 have hitherto enjoyed.
 " ALCOCK'S BEST BILLIARD TABLES.
 GILMER BROTHERS,
 Proprietors.

Grey River Argus 13 May 1869

A further change was made to the hotel advertisement in December 1869. This brought a distinct degree of sophistication to their advertising by dropping the name of Sweeney's and using Hamilton Gilmer's own name for the Greymouth Hotel. This made absolute sense as by this time Hamilton had made great progress in building his name and reputation. He was well known in the business community and more generally.

The other significant change was in naming the Post Office Hotel at Westport as Gilmer's Post Office Hotel and a similar change at Charleston to Gilmer's Melbourne Hotel. This provided a greater consistency in the usage of their brand name. The only exception was Hamilton's Hotel Cobden which seems to have been clearly associated with John Hamilton. However, this was not always the case.

It is noted that the advertisement shown below does not mention "Gilmer Brothers" and could be said to have been to create the impression that the business was run by one (Hamilton Gilmer) and not a partnership.

HAMILTON GILMER'S HOTEL,
MAWHERA QUAY,
GREYMOUTH.

Commercial men and visitors to Greymouth will find this most centrally-situated and commodious hotel to be the best suited for transaction of business of any in the town of Greymouth. It is by far the largest, and possesses not only a most complete suite of Bedrooms, but also two of Alcock's best finished Billiard Tables, which are unsurpassed in New Zealand, and are always attended to by attentive and experienced markers.

The ample accommodation, and view from the balconies, fully warrant its appellation of a first-class family hotel and home.

For public lectures or entertainments the large hall is without an equal on the Coast, if, indeed, surpassed in the Colony.

Visitors during the Christmas week will meet with every attention to their wants, &c.

A night watchman at all times in attendance.

A thoroughly experienced cook, with watchful and attentive assistants to look after the dining-room.

HAMILTON GILMER'S HOTEL
Mawhera Quay, Greymouth.
HAMILTON'S HOTEL,
Cobden.
GILMER'S MELBOURNE HOTEL,
Charleston.
GILMER'S POST OFFICE HOTEL,
Westport.

Grey River Argus 9 December 1869

Harp of Erin Hotel

Samuel Gilmer was on the List of Claims to Vote on the Westland Register dated 2 April 1866. His property qualification was "*leasehold, Part Lot 2 Mawhera Quay*". This property was the Harp of Erin Hotel owned by Patrick Flannery and the entry indicates that Sam and he were in partnership. This view is supported by business directory entries, for example the 1867/68 NZ

Directory lists Gilmer and Flannery, Harp of Erin Hotel.⁹ Sam is also shown at this address on later Electoral Rolls.

A couple of months later on 25 July 1866, John Hamilton was a passenger on a steamer from Greymouth to Westport. We speculate that this was an exploratory business trip to assess whether there were any opportunities there and we know that John was involved in establishing Hamilton's Post Office Hotel there in 1867.

A little later in the year, on 7 November 1866, tenders were requested for the erection of a hotel at the Buller, for Mr. Samuel Gilmore (sic) by W.B. Armson Architect¹⁰. Armson was a Hokitika architect but he also had a Greymouth Office and was later used by Hamilton Gilmer for the additions and alterations at Sweeney's Hotel. It seems fairly clear that this tender was specifically for the building of the Post Office Hotel at Westport the following year and also that Sam had carriage of the project.

TENDERS will be received tili 4 p.m.
on Saturday, 10th inst., for the Erec-
tion of a Hotel at the Buller, Nelson
Province, for Mr Samuel Gilmore.
Plans and specification may be seen at
my office.
W. B. ARMSON,
Architect.
Hokitika, 6th Nov., 1866. 5209

West Coast Times 7 November 1866

On 21 August 1869, a notice appeared in the Grey River Argus, which referred to a partnership existing between Patrick Flannery, Henry Gilmer and Samuel Gilmer in the Post Office Hotel, Westport and Harp of Erin Hotel, Greymouth.

This notice is significant in explaining Sam Gilmer's activities with the Harp of Erin from as early as 1866. He had, with Gilmer Brothers, in fact been a part owner of the Harp of Erin and when the Post Office was established in 1867 Flannery was in partnership there. The partnership implies that there would have been a sharing of profits between Flannery and the Gilmer Brothers business for each hotel.

Interestingly, the notice dated 4 August 1869 was signed by Hamilton Gilmer, ("per Hamilton Gilmer"). This indicates that the relationship was in fact a Gilmer Brothers venture rather than being one that only involved Sam and Henry. It also tends to indicate that at this early stage Henry was also a Gilmer Brothers partnership member even though he was not involved when that partnership dissolved in 1882.

⁹ Source John Hewstone, Nelson, New Zealand

¹⁰ West Coast Times 7 November 1866

DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP.	
The partnership hitherto existing between the undersigned in the Post Office Hotel, Westport, and Harp of Erin Hotel, Greymouth, is this day dissolved by mutual consent.	
All debts against the Post Office Hotel, Westport, will be paid by Samuel Gilmer; and those against the late Harp of Erin Hotel, Greymouth, by P. Flannery.	
(Signed)	{ P. FLANNERY, HENRY GILMER, SAMUEL GILMER, Per Hamilton Gilmer.
Witness—JAMES PAYNE.	
Greymouth, August 11, 1869.	

Grey River Argus 21 August 1869

The remaining issue is why the partnership was dissolved and the answer seems to lie in the fire that burned a number of buildings along Mawhera Quay in June 1869.

GREYMOUTH FIRE AND DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY 1869

On 12 June 1869 the newspaper¹¹ reported under the headline "*Fire and Great destruction of Property*" a fire which destroyed a number of hotels, banks and other properties on Mawhera Quay. Fire in that period was a very real every day threat. Most buildings were made of timber and any heating and cooking would have been fuelled by fire. Considerable care and vigilance was necessary to ensure that any risks of fire were minimized. It was not unusual for hotels to burn down and our research has also revealed that in many places valuable historical records have also been destroyed by fires. This has happened at Greymouth, Westport, Nelson and Wellington. Once a fire had taken hold the facilities of the day were generally quite inadequate to cope.

The fire started in the Melbourne Hotel of Mr. James Johnston, which was a large two storey building on the corner of Werita st and Mawhera Quay at 3 am. Johnston said later that when he left the hotel at 1am there were no lights on or signs of any fire and he did not know how it started. Flames were seen coming from the rear.

The newspaper reported:

"The alarm was given and assistance speedily rendered by the boarders and neighbours, but too late, for the fire appeared to have obtained a firm hold and very soon was bursting through the windows of the billiard room, which was recently attached to the hotel, and which fronts on Werita St. The members of the Volunteer Fire Brigade turned out with great promptitude on the ringing of the bell but before the engine reached the hotel the flames had ample mastery over the building and it was evident that nothing could save it A stiff gorge wind was blowing at the

¹¹ Grey River Argus 12 June 1869

time and fanned the flame into an immense blaze which very speedily leapt over Werita St and seized hold of the new building of the Bank of Australasia which stood at the opposite corner.

The engine was run on to the landing stage in the vicinity, the hose attached and work commenced, but immediately it was found that the suction –hose had slipped off, having been badly fixed, and disappeared into the river. This was a misfortune at a time when every second was precious, and enough to daunt anyone. But several members of the Brigaded determined to recover the hose thought they should dive for it and this two of them prepared to do.they were lucky enough to fasten on with a boat hook and drag it up with great difficulty and risk.

....Meantime the fire was assuming fearful proportions, spreading rapidly east and west bearing down on everything in its progress, and it seemed as if nothing could save the whole town from destruction..... East of Werita St nothing but hand buckets could be used to stop the flames and we are sorry to record that the spectators, as a rule, were very reluctant to lend a hand. Many men passed the spot with their hands in their pockets while women were passing the buckets. Next to Johnston's Hotel, Flannery's Harp Of Erin Hotel was consumed speedily, followed by the large free store of Hamilton and Nichol, containing goods to the value of many thousands of pounds, very little was saved. Next to it stood the shipping office and store of Messrs N Edwards & Co., containing a very large and valuable stock that was also consumed, very little being saved. Adjoining this the well stocked shop of Mr. Hunter, tobacconist, the front and side of which were torn and burned out and much of the stock destroyed. Here the fire was stayed on the east..... Meantime, the terrific flames were advancing before the smart gorse wind down Mawhera Quay and the Bank of Australasia, the shop of Mr. Badger, painter, the shop of Messrs Broadbent and King, watch makers and jewelers and the Union Bank were utterly destroyed and the flames rapidly enveloped the large and closely packed store of Mr. M Levy, ironmonger.....It was evident that the entire block as far as Tainui St must go if a break could not be made in the closely built street and Captain Whall, who is also the fire inspector gave orders for the Bank of New South Wales to be pulled down.

When it was feared that the entire block to Tainui St would go, orders were given, but not by the Fire Brigade, to tear down the Bank Hotel at the corner of Tainui St and Mawhera Quay, in order to prevent the fire from crossing the street. The work of destruction was commenced with axes and rope. Hundreds of men "tailed on" to the ropes, and by piecemeal tore out the side of the building, and the roof came in, but by this time it was apparent that the fire had been mastered and the work was given up..... On the opposite side of Tainui St the large new hall and hotel of Gilmer Brothers was covered with blankets and was for a time in danger, as well as the large store of Kennedy Brothers and much damage was done in the removal of goods and furniture from the various stores, hotels, and shops in the vicinity.

It can be seen that of the two hotels on Mawhera Quay in which Gilmer Brothers had an interest, Flannery's Harp of Erin Hotel was destroyed and Sweeney's which had only just been remodeled and expanded had a very narrow escape. Damage for Flannery's was put at 1000 Pounds for the building stock and equipment. Patrick Flannery was not insured. For Sweeney's and Kilgour's Union Hotel the damage "caused in the removal of stock" was over 200 pounds."

Subsequently, on 15 June 1869, all of the businesses impacted by the fire placed ads thanking the community for their assistance. Patrick Flannery's ad read:

"Though the alarm was so sudden that little could be saved, P Flannery, Harp of Erin Hotel' sincerely thanks everyone who came so promptly to his assistance."

For Sweeney's Hotel the ad read:

"SWEENEY'S HOTEL - Gilmer Brothers most sincerely thank all who rendered such timely service, not only in removing his stock, but enabling them to check the progress of the fire."

Aftermath of Fire - Harp of Erin Hotel

Following the fire on Mawhera Quay in 1869 in which the Harp of Erin was destroyed, Patrick Flannery was accommodated at Gilmer's Hotel in Greymouth probably because at that time they were still in partnership and were on good terms. Flannery's (perhaps in consultation with Gilmer Brothers) initial response following the fire was to offer the leasehold of the land and the unfinished building on it for auction on 22 July 1869 if it were not previously sold privately.¹² This indicated that Flannery (and/or Gilmer Brothers) wanted to be finished with the hotel rather than rebuild. It may have also indicated that this was what the Gilmer Brothers business wanted to do. The Gilmer Brothers business had been expanding their activities rapidly, and it would be logical for them not to want to be further involved in a rebuild of Flannery's or its ongoing operation.

However, it appears that the hotel did not sell either at auction or privately in July and on 3 August 1869¹³ Flannery called for tenders for rebuilding of the Harp of Erin Hotel. Plans and specifications could be seen at Gilmer's Hotel. It was while this activity was proceeding that on 11 August 1869¹⁴ the formal dissolution of the partnership took place and it appears that the Gilmer Brothers and Flannery had agreed to separate leaving Flannery to go forward with the rebuilding by himself.

By 23 September 1869, the new hotel had been completed on the old site and was open for business. The advertisement appeared under the name Flannery's Hotel (Old Harp of Erin).¹⁵ However, Flannery did not remain in business very long and on 28 November 1871 announced that he had sold the hotel to Joseph Booth.¹⁶

Flannery did not have a long retirement. He died *"after a long and lingering illness"*¹⁷ on 14 January 1872 with the Grey River Argus¹⁸ reporting his funeral:

"The funeral of the late Mr. Patrick Flannery took place yesterday afternoon from Booth's (late Flannery's) Hotel. Over two hundred of the residents followed the remains to their last resting place. The procession was headed by the Town Band, playing the Dead March in Saul, the members of the A.O.F. (of which deceased was a member) in regalia followed the hearse, and the private residents on foot and horseback brought up the rear. It was one of the largest funerals that ever took place in Greymouth, and while it passed through the town every place of business was closed"

¹² Grey River Argus 10 July 1869

¹³ Grey river Argus 3 August 1869

¹⁴ Grey River Argus 21 August 1869

¹⁵ Grey River Argus 23 September 1869.

¹⁶ Grey River Argus 28 November 1871

¹⁷ Grey River Argus 15 January 1872

¹⁸ Grey River Argus 17 January 1872

Flooding of the Grey River and Greymouth

Fire was not the only potential disaster that threatened the newly established town of Greymouth. Of perhaps greater significance was the threat of a flood from the Grey River. In 1867 Greymouth was a town still in its infancy. John Hamilton and the Gilmers had been there since 1865 and that was the year in which a Post Office was established and the town named.

The population increased rapidly and even in 1867 a large number of settlers would have had no experience with a flood of the magnitude that occurred in that year. The early settlers soon realized the risks and established Improvement Committees to protect the town. In July 1866 the first improvement works were carried out to build a levy at Boundary Street. Deputations were also made to the Secretary of Public Works to get assistance to make further improvements.

The early hotels of John Hamilton at Cobden, Sweeney's and also the Harp of Erin at Mawhera Quay, Greymouth had frontages to the Grey River. They were all exposed. However, of these hotels the Cobden Hotel was built on relatively high ground and had a lower level of risk.

On the other hand the exposure of Mawhera Quay was different. The location offered a commercial advantage, because of its proximity to the passengers arriving in Greymouth from the visiting steamers and ships. It also offered pleasant water views from the rooms. However, the hotels (and all of their neighbours along the quay) were at the front line when a flood event occurred. In the early years this was a fairly frequent occurrence.

The photograph below shows the damage that was caused on the quay which we believe was in 1866 as the hotel had not yet been named as Gilmer's and it was before a balcony was put across the frontage to the quay.



Mawhera Quay After a Flood c1866 Sweeney's Hotel later named Gilmer's on left

There was a significant flood in 1867 and it took these events to spur the community and local government to action. The newspapers always carried significant comment such as the following:

The late flood has undoubtedly proved the necessity of much greater means of protection against such visitations than the town has hitherto possessed. The piled embankment recently completed, although it has unquestionably been the means of staying the encroachment of the river at a most critical period, has nevertheless shown itself to have been quite inadequate for the purpose for which it was intended. Had the flood continued a few hours longer at the rate it ran when the embankment works first gave way, it is more than probable that the greater part of the Lower Township, and even the buildings on the upper side of Boundary street, would have been swept away. The utter unexpectedness of the flood shows how insecurely the town is situated, and urges the absolute necessity of embanking the south side of the river at any cost to make it secure. The quantity of rain that fell, although voluminous enough, did not exceed, to all appearances, previous downpours which had only occasioned an ordinary fresh in the river. The flood came down suddenly and without warning, and had the proximate cause — whether rain or melted snow — continued, Heaven only knows what the result would have been.

Although it may be fairly admitted that the embankment, frail as it has proved to be, did an amount of service that is probably worth its whole cost, it cannot be doubted that it was altogether unfitted for its purpose, and that the calculations of the engineer had been utterly at fault. This is the more blameable, seeing that the last flood was not so unprecedented as we and others had imagined. It seems that no longer than five years ago a flood even higher than the last occurred during the time that the brother of the present District Engineer was here, and this circumstance must therefore have been known to the officer who planned the present embankment. At that time we understand the only patch of dry ground on the present site of the town was a knoll at the back of where the Masonic Hotel now stands, so that the flood must have been several feet higher than it was the other day. Although there is always an amount of uncertainty in regulating the movements of erratic streams like the Grey River, still it is possible to reduce the risk of failure. In the case of the late flood, there was nothing unusual but the simple overflow of the river. There was no aid to the power of the river, such as landslips, or a rush of water from the land side. It was

Despite these comments actions that followed never matched the basic requirements and subsequent history was to record a succession of major flood events of increasing scale. While these were devastating for the people of the time the one feature that it has provided today's researchers and historians is the series of photographs of Greymouth's Mawhera Quay and the Gilmer Hotel. It is a shame that such a small peripheral benefit came with such a high personal cost.

The photograph below shows the Gilmer Hotel prior to the upgrading work carried out in September 1868. The photograph below has been taken from the one above and attempts to show a close up of the original hotel. It also highlights the damage on the quay.



Mawhera Quay c1867. Gilmer Hotel three quarter way on right.