

JOHN HAMILTON IN THE 1870's

Introduction

In 1870 John was turning 47 years of age and Hamilton Gilmer, the eldest of the Gilmer boys, was turning 32. The Gilmer Brothers business had developed over the previous five years and was already very successful. Hamilton Gilmer had developed a very good reputation in Greymouth and was a business leader in that community. It was natural and logical that John would tend to take a back seat over the ensuing years as the younger partners, more energetic and ambitious, would take the lead on the future direction of the development of the business.

Given his age and decreased level of activity, the newspapers which are our primary source do not yield the same wealth of material as they provide for John's more aggressive and younger nephews. John was a key member of the Gilmer Brothers partnership and we know that his key colleagues Hamilton and Samuel Gilmer would have sought his counsel. However, it would be natural if they reached a point where they considered they did not need to consult with him, if only because of their own success and possibly their independent wealth.

Against this background, John had taken a leading role in the establishment of the hotel at Ahaura and also participated in life at Ahaura. His roles in the establishment of the Ahaura Hotel and in the Grey Valley Hospital at Ahaura have been separately documented. It remains to document what we know of John's time on the West Coast before he went to Wellington along with his nephews.

Activities at Ahaura

John was at Ahaura from late 1869, and for a year or so later, to establish the new Gilmer Brothers hotel business there. The evidence tends to indicate that his role at Cobden was carried out by Henry Gilmer. Despite this, throughout 1870 especially, there was significant activity in the Cobden horse hire business that would have required him to be "hands on" with decisions. After this time Henry would have been able to manage the day to day activity until April 1873 when the horse hire business moved to Chapel St Greymouth and was operated under the Gilmer Brothers brand. In September that year Henry married Martha Dent and as she was not prepared to live at a hotel they went to live at Totara Flat. Henry continued working in the hotels on a part time basis.

It is clear that John continued to be very active at Ahaura. In 1871 he was heavily involved as Treasurer of the Grey Valley Hospital Committee but he was also elected as a Steward and also Treasurer for the Grey Valley Race Meeting to be held on 16 and 17 February 1871¹. The arrangements for this race meeting were made at Gilmer's Hotel. Entries were sent there and also meetings were held there to declare weights. These were followed by a settling night on 20 January 1871. It was good for business to have a key role in the organization of the races.

While at Ahaura, John also continued his role as a collector for the Grey River Hospital (at Greymouth). Henry took over John's role as the collector for Cobden. These collections were

¹ Grey River Argus 28 January 1871

from "country subscribers" who through their subscription were guaranteed entry to the hospital if this was required.²

Grey Valley Agricultural Association

The Grey Valley Agricultural Association was formed at a meeting on 22 August 1870.³ John Hamilton and Hamilton Gilmer were both present and the latter was elected to the committee. John was subsequently added at a committee meeting on the same day.

A numerous-attended meeting of the farmers and others interested in agricultural pursuits in the Grey Valley was held at Lardi's Hotel, Totara Flat, on the evening of Monday, 22nd inst., for the purpose of forming an agricultural association and to arrange about the forthcoming ploughing match. Several gentlemen from the Ahaura, including Messrs E. Fraser, John Hamilton, James Byrne, &c., were present and took part in the proceedings.

The following gentlemen were then separately nominated, and approved of, by the meeting as members of the Committee—C. Whitefoord, Esq., R.M., Messrs David Donald, Robert Alcorn, Patrick M'Kinlay, and Michael Savage, of Totara Flat; Messrs John Reid, of Riverbank Station; Edward Fraser, Ahaura; George Muir, Camptown; Donald Maclean, and George H. Gilmer, Greymouth; James O'Malley, Little Grey Junction; S. M. Mackley, M.P.C., Waipuna Station,

A meeting of the members of the committee who were present was held shortly afterwards, and, by virtue of the power vested in them, they added the following gentlemen to their number—Messrs John Hamilton (Gilmer), Ahaura; Robert M'Neill and Michael Erskine, Totara Flat. Mr David Donald was elected Treasurer, and Mr Robert Alcorn consented to act as Hon. Secretary to the new Association.

Grey River Argus 25 August 1870

The question is why these two very busy hotelkeepers would be interested in such an association? John's neighbour at Cobden was the Warden of the Nelson South West Goldfields Caleb Whitefoord and he was the President of the association. However, we know that John already had a good relationship with him.

The purpose of the association was not clear and over subsequent years the focus was on the annual ploughing match and talk of the social benefits from agricultural people meeting together.

A ploughing match was held on 10 September 1870 and for the next three years. In 1870 the attendance was reported as between 300 and 400 people.

² Grey River Argus 16 August 1871

³ Grey River Argus 25 August 1870

We doubt that in 1870 Gilmer Brothers had acquired any land in the Grey Valley. They later purchased 200 acres in 1872, held in the name of Henry Gilmer, and ultimately they had 760 acres. Henry was to work most of this land.

In 1872 a newspaper article reviewed land being worked in the Valley. Mention was made of the names of many farmers but there was no mention of a Gilmer or Gilmer Brothers.⁴ On the other hand, a similar article in 1874⁵ mentioned the oats harvest on Henry Gilmer's land at Totara Flat and also the pasture on the 50 acres of Gilmer Brothers land opposite Ahaura Cemetery.

This association kept Gilmer Brothers in touch with the farmers in the Valley. In addition to the land the business was to buy, there were quite a number of leaseholds. While they undoubtedly saw a good future for the Valley it is more likely that the interest was for the potential of finding alluvial gold on the flats of the Grey River. With so many business activities occupying their time it must have been a strong interest to hold them in what appears to be a very peripheral activity.

John was elected to the Council of the Association on 30 January 1872⁶ and Hamilton Gilmer was elected to the General Committee in September 1873.⁷ However, in the next twelve months interest in the association generally seemed to wane to the extent that the annual ploughing match was cancelled. Over subsequent years there was little further reporting of its activities.

Horse Stables at Ahaura

On 25 May 1871 there was a case brought by "Hamilton and Gilmer" in the Ahaura Resident Magistrate's Court relating to payment for horse hire. From his early days of 1866 John Hamilton had stables and hired horses at Ahaura for the Grey Valley. Increasingly, this activity was later managed by Sam Gilmer who by January 1872 had also established Gilmer Brothers stables Reefton. Ahaura still remained as an important intermediate point and was soon to become a location where the mail coach service stopped to change horses.

**Hamilton and Gilmer v. Rheberg.—A
claim of L1 5s for horse hire. Judgment
for amount with costs.**

Grey River Argus 30 May 1871

In April 1872 there were additions to stables at Ahaura. These appear to be the original stables started by John Hamilton which were now run as part of Gilmer Brothers:

**works Flat. Messrs Hamilton and Gilmer
are extending their already commodious
stabling accommodation by the addition
of ten stalls, with a double storey front to
Clifton road, consisting of grooming
quarters, loose boxes, and hay loft. The**

Grey River Argus 17 April 1872

⁴ Grey River Argus 8 February 1872

⁵ Grey River Argus 26 February 1874

⁶ Grey River Argus 1 February 1872

⁷ Grey River Argus 10 September 1873

There was a further incident that confirmed John's management of the Gilmer Hotel at Ahaura throughout 1871 with a report on a court case at Ahaura:

bail for his appearance at Court. The witness said he particularly noticed the note produced among Kettle's money when it was returned to him. It was torn in one corner, and it had a peculiar signature. John Hamilton (Gilmer) proved that the prisoner changed the L1 note produced at the bar of his hotel on Wednesday evening. He gave the note to the Police. For the defence, Duntail Walnesley said he gave the prisoner a L1 note and 5s the day before the robbery. Mr Staite addressed the Court for the prisoner, who was sentenced to 21 days' imprisonment with hard labor.

The Court adjourned to September 21.

Grey River Argus 12 September 1871

It is of interest that in the early years John was so strongly associated with the hotel at Ahaura that it was often called Hamilton's Hotel. This was still the case almost two years later as shown below. Even though the hotel was advertised as Gilmer Brothers, with John's continued presence there it was often known as Hamilton's Hotel. The street corner was also known as "*Hamilton's Corner*"⁸

The adjourned race meeting was to be held at Hamilton and Gilmer's Hotel, Ahaura, yesterday (Monday) evening. Business: To appoint stewards for the ensuing races, and to fix the date of the meeting.

Grey River Argus 7 November 1871

A major issue for Ahaura and the Grey Valley was the state of the roads. Up to the end of 1871 the road from Ahaura to Reefton was little more than a track and in most cases only suitable for horses and not for carts and wagons. There was general dissatisfaction with the Nelson Government and the lack of funds for development of this basic infrastructure.

A meeting was held on 29 August 1871 at which the feelings of the Ahaura people towards the government were voiced. John Hamilton was to be a member of the committee to put the resolutions of the meeting into effect.⁹

⁸ Grey River Argus 7 October 1872

⁹ Grey River Argus 1 September 1871

To-day we publish a report of an important public meeting held on Tuesday evening last, at the Ahaura township, for the purpose of giving the residents in the Grey Valley districts an opportunity of protesting against the past and present mis-management of these Gold Fields by the Nelson Government. The large hall was crowded, and the meeting most enthusiastic. It was unanimously resolved to petition the General Government "to assume the control of the public expenditure in this district, in order that the money voted for roads and other public works be immediately expended." The petition is being signed by nearly every man in the district, and will be in the hands of the member for the Grey Valley before the date for which he has given notice of his intention to move his series of resolutions for the better government of these Gold Fields, and it cannot fail to aid him very materially.

Moved by Mr R. ALCORN, and seconded by Mr JOHN HAMILTON (Gilmer)—"That a committee, consisting of Messrs J. D. Pinkerton, A. White, J. M'Laughlin, J. Hamilton (Gilmer), James Hayes, W. J. Potts, M. H. Hayden, W. S. Staite, D. Donald, and the mover, be appointed to carry the foregoing resolutions into effect. Carried.

Grey River Argus 1 September 1871

Four months later little progress had been made and further meetings were held at Greymouth and Ahaura agitating for the construction of a main dray road to Reefton.

"That in the opinion of this meeting the time has now arrived for the residents of the districts lying between Greymouth and Inangahua, to take such steps as will compel the Provincial Government to construct a main dray road between the said districts, and in the event of the Superintendent not complying with the above request, that this meeting is of opinion that the Governor should be memorialised to withdraw his delegated powers from the Superintendent of Nelson, and cause the management of the said districts to be assumed by the General Government; and that this meeting cor-

Mr W. S. STAITE proposed and Mr E. FRASER seconded—"That the following gentlemen be appointed a Committee to carry out the object of the resolution and to co-operate with the Greymouth Committee: Messrs James Wilkie, M.P.C., S. M. Mackley, M.P.C., F. Guinness, J. D. Pinkerton, E. Fraser, A. White, John Hamilton (Gilmer), P. M'Inernay, A. Nicol, M. H. Hayden, D. Donald, R. M'Neill and the mover." Carried.

Greymouth Meeting

Grey River Argus 13 February 1872

Ahaura Meeting

Grey River Argus 13 February 1872

These meetings and subsequent actions appeared to have an effect and by September 1872 reports were appearing that indicated there had been improvements.¹⁰ These stated that instead of it taking all day to travel from Ahaura to Reefton "*with actual and positive risk to life*" the trip could now be done "*with ease comfort and safety*" in some five hours.

¹⁰ Grey River Argus 19 September 1872

In early 1872 John was also active at Ahaura on local road issues. In one particular case John and Warden Whitefoord raised funds from the community to put towards the development of the road into the town. This report indicates very clearly that the government was not interested in fully funding road development in the Grey Valley.

A memorial was forwarded some time ago from Ahaura to the Nelson Government, requesting that certain alterations in the gradients of the roads at the entrance of the town and at the hill near Pothan's hotel should be made. An answer came this week that the Government, true to its instincts, would join in a "shake in the hat" with the residents as to who would be at the expense of the improvements, or, in other words, if the aforesaid hat was sent round the district the Government would contribute a sum in proportion to the amount collected. As the work is one of absolute necessity to the progress and prosperity of the town, the residents had no help but to comply with the terms of the Government. On Tuesday Messrs Whitefoord and John Hamilton (Gilmer) canvassed the district, and succeeded in raising about £55, and this, with the Government subsidy, will be sufficient to perform the alterations, tenders for which will be called at once.

Grey River Argus 2 February 1872

John Hamilton's Agricultural Lease 1873

On 13 September 1873, John Hamilton applied for an Agricultural Lease of 50 Acres situated at North Beach about 2 miles from Cobden paying a deposit of Ten Pounds.

North Beach was a location where gold had been found and seeking an agricultural lease was a means of obtaining a position. The application demonstrates an interest but conditions applied to such leases.

John was not a farmer and would never have farmed the land so he obviously was interested in the land because of the potential for gold to be found at the location. The Warden as John's next door neighbour would have known John very well. As a consequence we do not believe John's application was successful. We have never found any evidence that John pursued any "hands on" activities in searching for gold.

Several years later the government reviewed the situation with these Agricultural leases. This confirmed that of 24 applications 14 were from *bona fide* miners and the evidence was that these found it very difficult to eke out a living. The remainder were from storekeepers residing in

the locality or by absentees for speculative purposes.¹¹ The enquiry recommended revised conditions for these leases.

PROVINCE OF NELSON.
APPLICATION FOR AGRICULTURAL
LEASE.

Cobden, 13th September, 1873.
To Warden Caleb Whitefoord.

I hereby apply for a Lease of Land for Agricultural Purposes, situate at North Beach, two miles from Cobden; and containing fifty acres or thereabouts, and I deposit herewith the Receiver's receipt for ten pounds, in accordance with the Agricultural Lease Regulations of the second day of May, 1873, made under the Gold Fields Act, 1866.

JOHN HAMILTON.

The above application will be heard before me, at Cobden, on MONDAY, the 29th day of SEPTEMBER.

(Signed) CALEB WHITEFOORD,
Warden.

Grey River Argus 18 September 1873

Other Gilmer Brothers' Activities

By and large John appears to have done progressively less after he finished at Ahaura, which we place towards the end of 1873 corresponding with Henry's marriage to Martha Dent and moving to the land at Totara Flat. (We have no evidence that this is a fact other than the absence of any newspaper references to his personal involvement.)

However, there were two particular events at Westport at which John and/or Hamilton Gilmer were present at in mid 1873. The first was the dismantling of the Clarendon Hotel in the face of the floods which occurred on 6 June 1873. The second was the removal of the Post Office Hotel and its reopening at the corner of Palmerston and Wakefield Streets.

We have identified three shipping records that are relevant. The first is on 13 June 1873¹² "*Gilmer from Westport*". This seems to be Hamilton Gilmer returning after the Clarendon Hotel was initially dismantled. The second was on 7 July 1873¹³ "*from Westport Gilmer, Hamilton*". This is John and Hamilton Gilmer returning one could expect they had been looking at progress on building the new Post Office Hotel."

The third record is for 16 August 1873¹⁴ "*from Nelson, Westport, Murray, Hamilton Gilmer*". This was Hamilton returning after an event at Westport which could have been the opening of the new Post Office Hotel. The photograph below shows the hotel and Hamilton Gilmer (3rd from left). The person 2nd from left may have been John Hamilton. He has the more portly

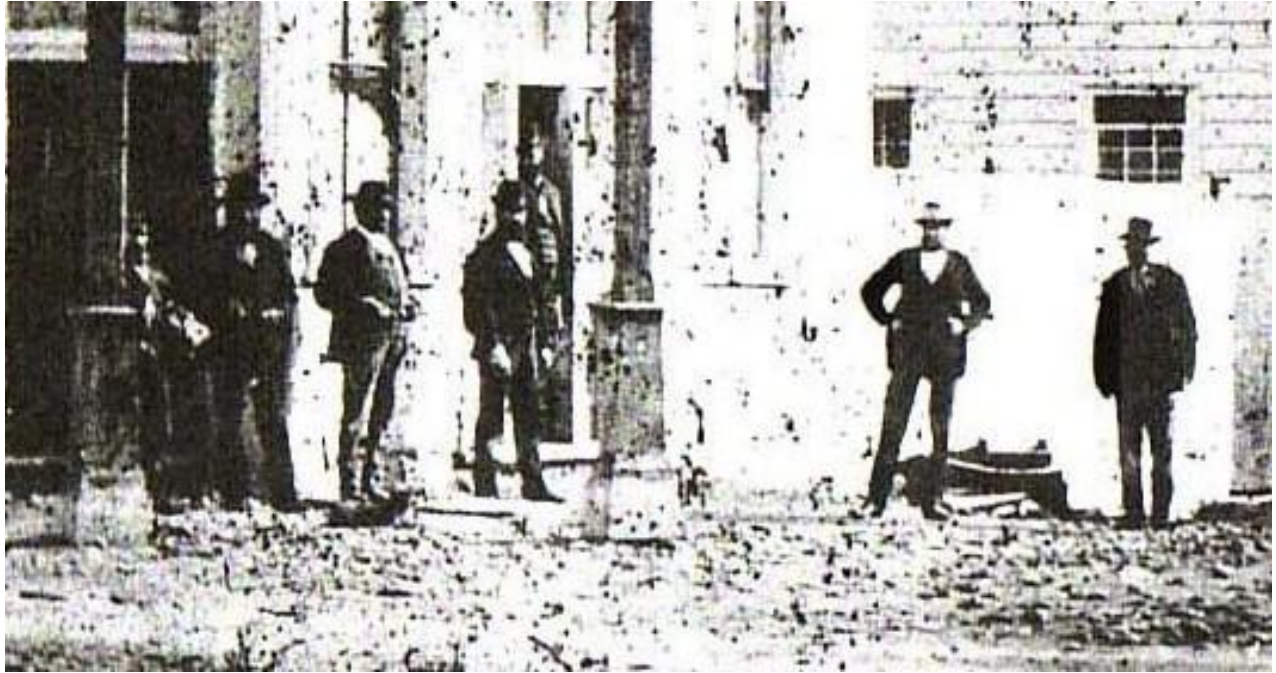
¹¹ Grey River Argus 5 February 1877

¹² Grey River Argus 13 June 1873

¹³ Grey River Argus 7 July 1873

¹⁴ Grey River Argus 16 August 1873

appearance of an older man and is wearing similar clothes to those we have seen in another earlier photographs in 1868. We cannot be sure of this conclusion.



1873 Outside Post Office Hotel Palmerston & Wakefield Sts

F & J HAMILTON

We have been very fortunate that other people had an interest in researching John Hamilton.¹⁵ In the early days of our research we obtained documentation produced by them. We were very grateful that they had taken the time and trouble to put it together.

In this work, the view has been put that the Gilmer's took over John Hamilton's Cobden Hotel when John decided to diversify his interests and went into partnership with the unrelated Francis Hamilton, a merchant in Greymouth. Francis Hamilton had previously traded as Hamilton and Nichol and he then opened business as F & J Hamilton. It was said he was in partnership with John from 1871 when John had semi retired from his hotel until 1881.¹⁶

It is easy to see how this conclusion could be drawn given the confusion of the same surnames and initials and added to this the fact that Hamilton's Hotel was advertised as part of the Gilmer Brothers chain of hotels. For a number of years May 1872 to the end of May 1874 it was advertised as Hamilton Gilmer's Hotel so it is easy to see how this conclusion might be formed.

¹⁵ John Hewstone Nelson and History House Greymouth

¹⁶ History House Greymouth

However, we now know that except for a short time at Ahaura John never left his hotel in the 1870's.

While John was widely recognized as an uncle of the Gilmers, it might not have been as widely known that he was a member of the Gilmer Brothers business partnership (The newspaper always mentioned him as John Hamilton (Gilmer) especially if the event was at Ahaura).

As we now know John Hamilton, Hamilton Gilmer and Sam Gilmer were in fact the three leading members of the partnership. It was logical that the Cobden Hotel would be included in the Gilmer Brothers advertising but this did not mean that John Hamilton did not continue as the licensee. Any association of the hotel with Gilmer Brothers ceased with the dissolution of the Gilmer Brothers partnership in 1882.

As well, we now know that John was deeply involved at Ahaura in 1869 to 1873 and at Reefton with the Dawson Hotel venture in 1877. There were also continuing activities at Westport and Charleston. It is difficult to see how he would have time for further "non-core" activities such as grocery, and importing of wines, spirits and other goods, at a time the Gilmer Brothers partnership was expanding at a very rapid rate.

With the availability of digitized newspapers in recent years, we now know the facts relating to the F & J Hamilton partnership. These are that Francis Hamilton entered into partnership with James Hamilton in October 1875. James Hamilton was previously a storekeeper at Marsden and had come to Greymouth where he traded a James Hamilton & Co. Francis had previously traded as Hamilton and Nichol from as early as February 1867. The business was situated on Mawhera Quay. In 1874 both Hamilton and Nichol and James Hamilton & Co. had wholesale liquor licenses and in September of that year Francis Hamilton's partner, G.W. Nichol, left Greymouth and the partnership.

In April 1875 it was announced that F & J Hamilton would be formed and advertisements were placed in the Grey River Argus. This partnership was later dissolved in January 1881.

PARTNERSHIP NOTICE.

F. HAMILTON, formerly trading as "Hamilton and Nichol," and JAMES HAMILTON, formerly of the firm of "James Hamilton and Co.," have THIS DAY ENTERED INTO PARTNERSHIP as Grocers, Importers of Wines, Spirits, Crockery, Glassware, &c., under the style or firm of "F. & J. HAMILTON."

Greymouth, April 13, 1875.

F. AND J. HAMILTON,
FAMILY GROCERS,

Importers of

WINES, SPIRITS, CROCKERY, GLASS-
WARE, &c.

BUSINESS PREMISES:

ADJOINING MELBOURNE HOTEL,
Mawhera Quay.

Grey River Argus 19 April 1875

DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP.

The Partnership hitherto existing between FRANCIS HAMILTON and JAMES HAMILTON, trading as "F. and J. Hamilton," merchants, Greymouth, has, this day, been DISSOLVED by mutual consent.

Dated this 19th January, 1881.

F. HAMILTON.
JAS. HAMILTON.

Witness to the signatures of Francis Hamilton and James Hamilton.

WILLIAM PERKINS, Solicitor, Greymouth.

Referring to the above Dissolution of Partnership, all CLAIMS against the late firm of F. and J. Hamilton must be PRESENTED forthwith for PAYMENT, at the office of Mr F. Hamilton, Mackay street; and all DEBTS DUE to F. and J. Hamilton MUST be PAID within thirty days from date, otherwise they will be placed in the hands of a Solicitor for COLLECTION.

F. HAMILTON:
JAS. HAMILTON.

Grey River Argus 28 January 1881

Messrs Girdwood, Lahman and Co. submitted to auction the whole of Messrs F. and J. Hamilton's properties, but failed to elicit a single bid,

Grey River Argus 27 October 1880

HAMILTON'S HOTEL COBDEN

After his return from Ahaura there is little coverage of John's activities in the newspaper but we believe that he remained at the hotel for the period until he moved to Wellington in 1882.

John's license had been renewed in his name in each year through the 1870's. In 1880 there was an attempt to renew the license in the name of Gilmer Brothers but ultimately it was renewed in John's name. The report indicates that the hotel was managed by a Mr. Maxwell implying that John was frequently away. At this time the major activities were in Wellington. The Duke of Edinburgh and Empire Hotels were bought in 1879 and the Royal Oak in mid 1881. No doubt other hotels were looked at in the interim.

TUESDAY, 1ST JUNE.

The annual Licensing Court sat yesterday at noon.

COBDEN.

(Before James Mackay, R.M. (Chairman),
G. W. Moss and W. S. Smith, Esqs.,
Commissioners.)

Charles Seaton.—Granted.

Henry Jones.—Granted.

Henry Gilmer.—Inspector Feast stated that Mr Gilmer did not reside on the premises. The house was well conducted by Mr Maxwell, who was in charge of the house.—Granted on condition that Mr Gilmer reside on the premises, or else transfer the license.

Grey River Argus 2 June 1880

COBDEN.

(Before J. Mackay, Esq. (Chairman),
W. S. Smith, and G. W. Moss, Esqs.,
Commissioners.)

An application was read from Gilmer Bros, relative to the license of Hamilton's Hotel, Cobden, and which stood over in order that either Mr Gilmer should reside on the premises or that the licence be transferred. The application stated that they had arranged that Mr John Hamilton should reside on the premises.

Inspector Feast thought that the license should be transferred to Mr Hamilton.

Mr Hamilton having stated that he was one of the firm of Gilmer Brothers, and that he was going to reside on the premises,

Grey River Argus 30 June 1880

Despite Cobden's reputation as a sleepy but cosy hollow, the hotel was always a place of continuing activity. As well as the regular patrons, there were special events such as Inquests and political meetings with sitting members or prospective politicians seeking support for their election. There were also special events recorded in the courts such as the following:

B. M'Guire was charged with using abusive and obscene language at Mr J. Hamilton's Hotel, Cobden. Mr Boase having proved that the defendant made use of certain language, an exception was raised by Mr Warner, that the defendant was accused of three different offences in one indictment. His Worship allowed the objection, but permitted Sergeant Moller to amend the indictment. Mr Warner also urged that the alleged offence was committed "after hours." His Worship adjourned the case, to allow of the attendance of Mr Hamilton, who was unable to attend through ill health.

Grey River Argus 27 October 1880

Bryan Maguire was brought up on remand charged with using abusive language on the premises of Mr John Hamilton, hotelkeeper, Cobden. His Worship said he would have to dismiss the case, as there was no evidence in support of Boase's statement. It might be that justice was thwarted by the illness of Mr Hamilton.

Grey River Argus 6 November 1880

There is no doubt that Wellington was firmly on the Gilmer Brothers agenda in mid 1881 especially with the purchase of the Royal Oak by that time. Sam was managing the Duke of Edinburgh and the license for the Royal Oak was transferred to his half brother William from W.G. Emeny. It is no surprise that the newspaper reported that Hamilton's Hotel and stables were to be let.

An advertisement in another column announces that the Hamilton Hotel, Cobden, is to let. Besides the hotel business, there is the stable accommodation to let. The hotel and stables together comprise a nice little business.

Grey River Argus 24 May 1881

HAMILTON'S HOTEL, CORDEN.

TO LET.

This fine commodious Hotel is to be let, with stables attached.

Apply for particulars on the premises ; or at Gilmer's Hotel, Greymouth.

Grey River Argus 27 & 30 May 1881

The advertisement ran for only four days indicating that there had been a change of mind. However, in about fifteen months (September 1882) he transferred the license to Mary Roche and had gone to Wellington.

JOHN HAMILTON'S LAND AT COBDEN

The Crown Grants Nominal Index shows John Hamilton purchased a number of properties in Cobden. The register shows them all with the same date of 10 September 1874. It is very likely that John was occupying all these parcels of land well before that time.

He had owned the hotel since at least 1865 and in conjunction with the hotel he operated a business hiring horse to diggers going to the gold fields and was known to have a sizable number of horses probably of the order of 150. He would have needed land to house or graze these horses. Some of these parcels were quite large and these were the ones most likely to be used to graze horses. Details of the land and their locations and purchase prices are:

Date of Grant	Section Number	Address	Price Pounds	Area
10 September 1874	117	Peel St Mid way block between Blackett & Sturge Sts	10/0/0	1 Rood
10 September 1874	124	90 Bright St	10/0/0	1 Rood
10 September 1874	247	Cnr Ward & Newcastle Sts Since subdivided	10/0/0	1 Rood
10 September 1874	248	Cnr Fox & Newcastle Sts	10/0/0	1 Rood
10 September 1874	249 to 258	Whole block bounded by Sturge St (West) Newcastle St (East) Ward St (North) Fox St (South) Now occupied by Cobden Public School	100/0/0	2 Acres & 2 Roods
10 September 1874	Suburban Section 141	Ward St (South) Richmond St (West) Sturge St(East) First 5 lots in Richmond & Sturge Sts	25/0/0	5 Acres

Each parcel of land was held by John until his death

Some of these parcels were relatively small blocks only suitable for single houses and were probably held as investments. We have identified one event that indicated that John actively considered development of some of the land. In November 1892, John Hamilton wrote to the Greymouth City Council requesting *“to have the bush fallen and a street formed on certain sections in the township. If the council did not he would commence to build at once”*. The council’s response was that *“Mr. Hamilton to be informed that it was impossible in the present state of their finance to comply with his request”*.¹⁷

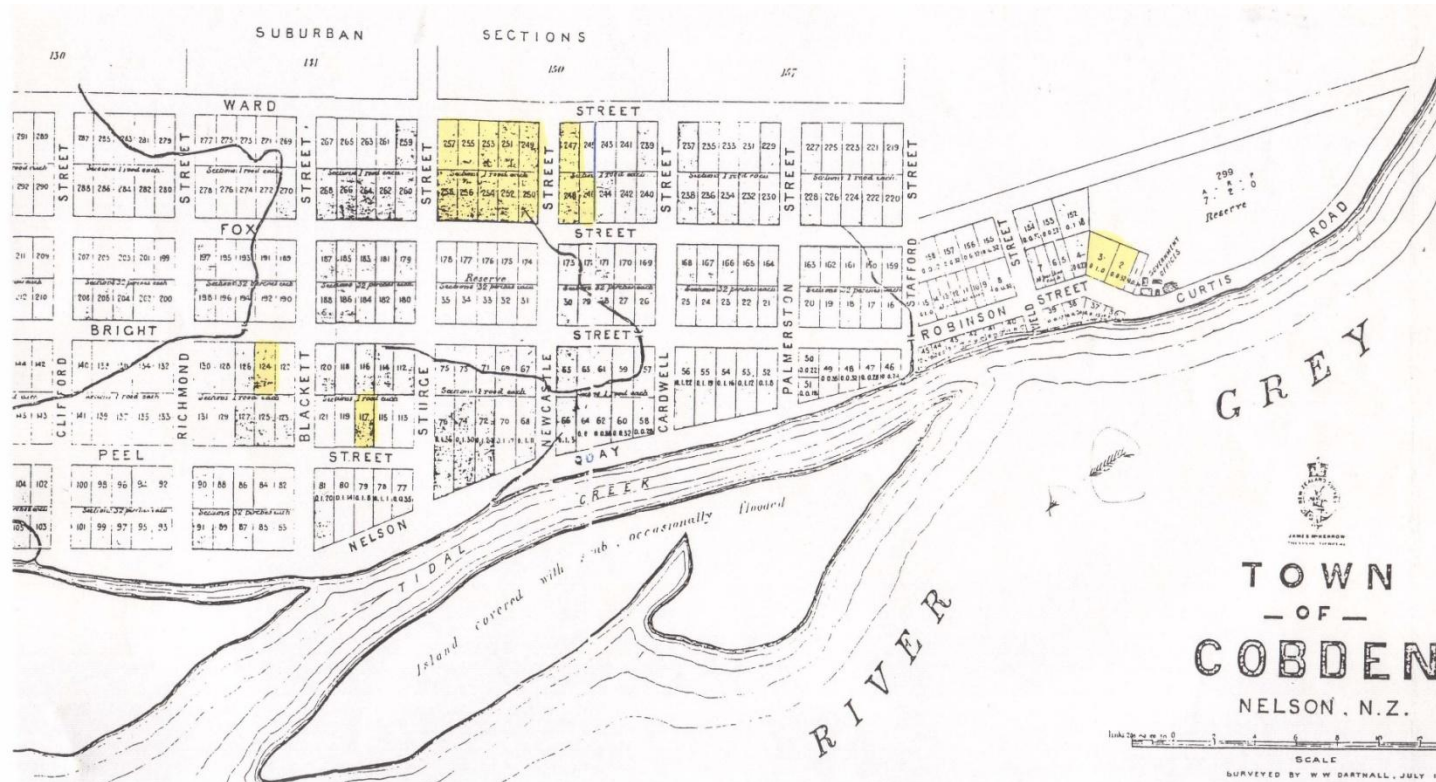
We are not aware of what John had in mind or what he was proposing to build. He had continued to own all of the land that he obtained by Crown Grant in 1874 but we have no way of knowing his plans for these Sections.

The Town Plan of Cobden below shows the location of John’s land. Not highlighted is Suburban Section 141 which he also owned. This contained 5 acres and was clearly a location that would have been used to keep horses.

¹⁷ Grey River Argus 24 November 1892

The interesting point is that John never sold any of this land even when it was clear that he had no use for it. His move to Wellington in 1882 was probably the time he could have been expected to sell and at this time and later he did try to sell his Cobden Hotel. However, he always retained the land.

Cobden was never a place that stood out as having a bright future. It was on the cold, wet and windy West Coast and on the wrong side of the Grey River. However, of all places it could well have reminded John of his homeland of Ireland and as well it was the place where he really first set down his roots in New Zealand and therefore must have had some form of sentimental attraction for him.



COBDEN TOWN PLAN July 1874¹⁸

¹⁸ John Hewstone