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GREY RIVER HOSPITAL

In 1870 Hamilton Gilmer was re-elected to the Committee of the Grey River Hospital a position that he had held continuously since first being elected in 1868.

The election of members of the Committee of Management for the Grey River Hospital for the year took place at Gilmer's Hotel, on Saturday, before Messrs Fox and Hall, the appointed scrutineers. There were twenty-five gentlemen nominated, and from that number thirteen had to be elected. When the poll was declared in the evening, the following gentlemen were found to have been elected:—Messrs G. King, 45; J. Arnott, 42; G. W. Moss, 39; C. Winter, 37; D. Maclean, 36; H. Gilmer, 35; M. Kennedy, 35; E. Masters, 32; J. Greenwood, 31; W. F. Strike, 31; J. Kilgour, 30; H. Kenrick, 23; J. S. M. Thompson, 21. In addition to the above names, the Wardens on both sides of the river are *ex officio* members of the Committee. The newly-elected Committee will meet for the transaction of business at Gilmer's Hotel to-morrow evening, at eight o'clock.

1870 Election Results Grey River Argus 19 July 1870

As a consequence, Hamilton was a member of the committee in February 1871 when he left New Zealand to return to Ireland to marry Elizabeth Hamilton. He resigned from the committee and Sam Gilmer was elected in his absence.

Sam was re-elected to the Committee in July 1871 and continued on the committee. This gave him the same opportunity that Hamilton had of working directly with a dozen of the business leaders of the town. The difficulty that Sam had was that once Hamilton had returned from Ireland he had business responsibilities at Westport, Ahaura and Charleston that would keep him away from Greymouth.

Nevertheless, Sam participated in the committee's activities to a sufficient level to attain re-election in each of next three elections through to 1874.

The major issue that arose during Hamilton's absence from the committee concerned the removal of the Hospital to a new location.

In August 1874, The Borough Council held a special meeting to discuss the location of the Post & Telegraph Office. The conclusion was that because the office was not centrally or

conveniently located and it should be moved to a better location. The Hospital Reserve was suggested as a suitable place. The Council view was communicated to the Government and to the Hospital Committee. The initial response from the Government was that they would take over the site and provide “*valuation for improvements*” as consideration. The Hospital Committee responded that they had no desire to create any difficulties with the proposal but all they wished was “*buildings equal to the present on another site.*”

A committee of the general public was appointed to cooperate with the Hospital Committee in the negotiations to be conducted with the Government and if necessary guarantee to the Hospital Committee the extra cost required for the erection of new buildings.¹ This committee included many previous members of the Hospital Committee including Hamilton Gilmer. Because Hamilton was not involved on the committee any longer he became involved in the processes of the removal as a person with a long previous history on the committee and sympathetic to it.

In a meeting with Mr Bonar, the Westland Superintendent, it was proposed that he seek 1200 Pounds from the Government and 500 Pounds each from the Provinces of Westland and Nelson with a further 300 Pounds to be raised from public subscriptions. On 8 October 1874, Hamilton Gilmer and three other members of the Removal Committee met the Hospital Committee and advised the Government would provide 1000 Pounds and each Province 250 Pounds and proposed that the Hospital Committee contribute 100 to 150 Pounds of its funds. Also they sought access to the grounds by the Government. The Hospital Committee agreed to provide access to the grounds to allow immediate building providing the plans were acceptable to the committee and the Removal Committee guaranteed the building of a new hospital. The following was communicated to Mr Bonar:

¹ Grey River Argus 30 September 1874

and considered. A telegram from the Hon. J. A. Bonar urging the Committee to give an immediate answer to the offer made by the General Government for the present Hospital buildings and site was discussed; after which the following resolutions were unanimously carried, and the Chairman requested to forward them to the Superintendent:—

“1. That his Honor the Superintendent of Westland be requested, on behalf of the Greymouth Hospital Removal Committee, to accept the offer of L1000 from the General Government for the present Hospital Buildings.”

“2. That the General Government can obtain possession of the vacant ground of Hospital site at once, and the buildings immediately on the erection of a new Hospital, tenders for which will be called as soon as plans and specifications are prepared.”

“3. That his Honor be requested to obtain from the Government, on behalf of the Committee, certain out-houses, of little value to the Government.”

A sub-committee was appointed to enter into an agreement guaranteeing to the Grey River Hospital Committee a building in every respect as suitable as the present one. It was resolved

Grey River Argus 16 October 1874

By the end of October a new site for the hospital was chosen on a rectangular parcel in Marlborough St bounded by the Railway reserve and High St. By 3 November plans had been drawn up, the site was approved by 7 November and by 26 November the tender for the new hospital was let.

This case is an illustration of how rapid progress was made in the early days on the West Coast. The issue was very well handled and brought to a very quick conclusion in a very cooperative manner. It was a great credit to the people involved which included both Hamilton and Samuel Gilmer.

In 1875, Sam stood again for election. In that year there was a change in the voting system with the number of votes for each elector varying according to the level of subscription. He was not re-elected and for the first time 1867 there was no Gilmer representative on the committee.

In 1876 neither Hamilton nor Sam stood for election. In 1877 Hamilton again stood for election and there were 22 nominations for the available 13 positions. As usual it was a Who's Who of Greymouth business people standing. Hamilton was elected in 13th position. It is of interest that ten of those who nominated had been elected to the committee in 1870.

Nominations were then taken for the Committee for the ensuing year, and the following were proposed :—Messrs Gilbert King, E. Masters, F. Hamilton, H. Kenrick, G. Wickes, J. Arnott, W. E. Hickson, G. Glenn, W. S. Smith, J. G. Thomas, G. C. Bowman, W. H. Revell, F. W. Lahman, W. F. Strike, J. Greenwood, F. C. Dupre, D. Sheedy, Dr. Acheson, J. Petrie, G. Gilmer, Dr. P. Smith, R. Nancarrow, and J. Kilgour.

1877 Nominations for Hospital Committee

Hamilton Gilmer nominated and was re-elected in 1878 and 1879. In the latter year he attended 24 of the 25 meetings the highest number of any committee member. He was also re-elected in 1880 and his meeting attendances declined significantly attending only 18 of 28 meetings. By this time Gilmer Brothers were operating two hotels in Wellington as well as the Masonic Hotel in Nelson and the Post Office Hotel in Westport. These business interests occupied most of his time. We have identified three Gilmer arrivals and departures from Wellington in March, May and October. Each trip probably took about three weeks and this would account for missing about six to eight meetings.

Hamilton stood for election again in 1881 but he was not successful. His poor attendance in the previous year no doubt would have worked against him.

Even though he had continued to show interest in the hospital, by mid 1881 it was quite clear that Wellington was where his future was for Hamilton and his family.