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SAM'S FAMILY INTERESTS

Samuel Gilmer was the fourth of six sons of Hugh Gilmer and Margaret Dorothea Hamilton (Dolly). He was born in 1842 at Mullaghane, Broomfield, Co. Monaghan, Ireland.

Sam's eldest brother, James, was to inherit the farm and with four other brothers his prospects in Ireland were very limited. In the early 1860's, his brother (George) Hamilton left Ireland and went to Australia. He looked around the Victorian goldfields and observed that the peak of the discoveries had passed and so he went on to New Zealand and the Otago goldfields. His uncle, John Hamilton had made the same trip and it is believed they met up in Otago.

Sam followed his older brother and went to NZ. We cannot be precise about the dates but we believe that the brothers were all in New Zealand in 1863. We also know that they all came to the West Coast goldfields in 1865 and were in Greymouth in that year.

Sam was a very active member of the Gilmer Brothers partnership and its hotel activities. He was involved in early 1866 with Patrick Flannery in the Harp of Erin Hotel as a representative of the Gilmer Brothers partnership which at the time was a partner with Flannery. He also took the lead in the establishment of the Post Office Hotel at Westport. In February 1871 Sam returned to Greymouth to run the Gilmer Hotel because Hamilton had returned to Ireland to marry Elizabeth Hamilton. Sam undertook a number of Hamilton's other responsibilities and directorships. In 1873 he moved from Westport to the Grey Valley and the Ahaura Hotel and subsequently was at Dawson's Hotel at Reefton before going to Wellington in 1878.

Sam married **Mary Isabella Martin** in on 20 July 1877 at the residence of his brother Hamilton in Greymouth. Mary was from Newtownards, Co. Down in Ireland being born on 24 April 1844. Sam was 35 when he married and Mary was 33.

MARRIAGES IN THE DISTRICT OF *Grey River*

No.	WEDDING, AND WHERE.	NAMES AND SURNAMES	AGE	RANK OR PROFESSION.	CONDITION.	NAME OF OFFICIATING MINISTER (OR REGISTRAR).	WEDDING, AND WHERE.
132	<i>20 July 1877</i> <i>Westport</i>	<i>Samuel Gilmer</i> + <i>Mary Isabella Martin</i>	<i>35</i> <i>33</i>	<i>Hotel prop-</i> <i>rietor</i>	<i>Bachelors</i> <i>Spunster</i>	<i>G T N</i> <i>Watkins</i>	<i>20 July</i> <i>1877</i>

Married, after the delivery to me of the Certificate required by the Act of the General Assembly of New Zealand, intituled "The Marriage Act, 1854," by

G T N Watkins Officiating Minister (or Registrar).

This Marriage was solemnized between us,

Samuel Gilmer }
Mary Isabella Martin }

In the presence of us

Hamilton Gilmer Hotel proprietor
Elizabeth Gilmer

I CERTIFY that the above is a true Copy of the Entry in the Register Book of Marriages kept by

G T N Watkins Officiating Minister (or Registrar).

Reg. Gen., 12, s. 1197

Marriage Certificate Sam & Mary 1877

Sam and Mary had one child, **Edith Margaret Ann**, who was born at Reefton in 1878. It is clear that Sam was following Irish traditions because Edith was given the names of Sam's mother and also that of his father's second wife. We believe Edith was born relatively early in the year because by 5 March the license of Dawson's Hotel was transferred from Sam to John Dawson and Sam would have gone to Wellington to manage the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel.

Sam and Mary had no further children. They could be described as being relatively old when they married and Mary could well have had difficulties with Edith's birth. Also, Reefton was an isolated gold mining town which would not have had the hospital and medical facilities of Wellington and probably Greymouth.

Mary & Dorothea Hamilton

In her early days in Wellington Dorothea lived with Sam and Mary Gilmer in a cottage quite close to the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel. When she arrived, her father was living at the Masonic Hotel at Nelson with Robert Gilmer and later he returned to his own hotel at Cobden. Dorothea was obviously being supported by her father because she did not work for some six months.

Mary Gilmer would have been pleased to have her company. They spent time shopping together and Mary bought Dorothea new clothes. They also spent time looking around the countryside and Dorothea wrote to Ireland that she was looking forward to going on a train ride when the weather was better and also going to Greymouth in the summer.

Sam's relationships with his brothers and cousins and his Uncle John Hamilton.

Hamilton Gilmer

Hamilton and Sam together with Uncle John were the major drivers of the Gilmer Brothers partnership and they all worked together very well moving and supporting one another when and where needed. This appeared to be the case until 1882 when the partnership was dissolved.

We are not aware of the reasons for the dissolution or whether it was a sudden event or something a long time in the making. However, the catalyst appears to be the move to Wellington and the formation of different objectives by both Hamilton and Sam about what they wanted to personally achieve with the move. Sam was the first of them to take an active working interest in Wellington being there from 1878 and it appears he continued to have a primary focus on the running of hotels. He soon developed a single minded interest in the Royal Oak Hotel with which he was singularly identified over the rest of his life.

On the other hand, while Hamilton had run the Gilmer Hotel at Greymouth, it was a vehicle for building his close involvement and influence with the business community there. With the move

to Wellington he focused on broadening his portfolio of interests to include brewing as well as hotels. Strategically, Hamilton could see how this would provide entities which could purchase hotels which in turn could be leased to hotelkeepers with lease agreements tying them to the purchase of his brewery's beer. This established a basis for him to accumulate hotels and to profit through the production and sale of beer. This did not preclude him from operating his own hotel.

It is of interest that Sam seems to have had a more sentimental attachment to the West Coast and Nelson. He continued to be involved at Nelson until 1902 and with the Gilmer Hotel at Greymouth until December 1905. On the other hand, Hamilton appeared to sever his ties there immediately although this perhaps was because some of his major contacts and acquaintances such as Martin Kennedy had also moved to Wellington.

A rift developed between Hamilton and Sam. Jean Gilmer has written¹: *I do know Hamilton and his brother Sam parted company as business partners and, almost as brothers – this for several reasons both business and private. Although they both lived in Wellington and both were involved in the ownership of hotels they did not speak to each other for the remainder of their lives- and yet my father Knox was allowed and encouraged by both men to act as a go between.*

One cause of the rift has been said to be that Hamilton sought a loan from Sam when he was in need of funds which Sam refused to provide. We believe that any request would have been at a time was fully stretched with funding the Royal Oak Hotel and it was more likely he was unable to provide the loan.

Robert Gilmer

Robert and Sam in the days of the Gilmer Brothers partnership worked well together at a number of places. The closest and longest association they had was later when Sam took over the lease of the Masonic Hotel after the dissolution of the partnership. The major issue through this period was Robert's bankruptcy. The evidence shows that it was Hamilton rather than Sam who had assisted Robert to finally clear his debts.

John Gilmer

John took over the hotel at Westport from Sam and was there for many years until it was sold. He does not seem to have been the best of managers but he was a Gilmer and the broad good reputation of Gilmer Brothers carried through to all of the brothers.

However, it appears that John could not get work for a period after he left the Grand Hotel at Westport. In 1895, Sam helped him out by giving him job at the Gilmer Hotel Greymouth and there was some cooperative advertising giving the appearance that the Gilmer Brothers chain still existed. Our view is that John would have initiated this. John lasted only about twelve

¹ Dame Elizabeth Gilmer. My Mother's Story. Jean Lindsay Seddon Knox Gilmer. Alexander Turnbull Library NZ Pacific Collection.

months at the Gilmer Hotel. John in later years had a drinking problem which caused him to be refused a hotel license three times over three successive years from 1902 to 1904². This problem would have developed over a period of time and was probably evident in 1896 at Greymouth. Had it appeared to be an issue Sam would have dismissed him whether John was his brother or not.

John Knox Hamilton

Sam had a very good relationship with John Knox Hamilton and they worked very closely together on the board of the Wellington Opera House Company over many years until John's untimely death in 1902. John Knox was also involved with horses an interest Sam also shared.

Andrew Hamilton

We have not identified any evidence of a close relationship between Andrew and his cousin Sam Gilmer. Andrew was involved in brewing and later in hotel management. In both industries there is some evidence that he was involved with or had relationships with Hamilton Gilmer but none with Sam. We are not aware of any personal reasons for this.

John Hamilton

Sam remained very close to his Uncle John. John's Imperial Hotel was in Cuba Street and his cottage was around the corner in Marion Street a very short walk from the Sam's Royal Oak Hotel. In 1906, Sam used to call on John at his home every day and take him for a walk. By this time John was 83 years old and Sam 64.

An event occurred in 1906 which although it did not involve John, took place at John's house. The newspapers labeled it the "*Marion Street Sensation*"³

Sam Gilmer had taken the short walk from the Royal Oak to Marion Street to take John, for a walk but he had already gone out. As Sam was talking to the housekeeper, Mrs. Woodward, at the door a man came up the path, burst his way in, and assaulted Sam with a chisel. A struggle occurred and a neighbour came to Sam's aid. They wrestled the man to the ground and the police were called.

The man Francis Gordon Waddell, a ship's fireman, recently discharged from the SS Manoroa, was charged with assault. At the conclusion of the hearing Waddell was committed to trial in the Supreme Court on the charge of assault with intent. He was found guilty and sentenced to 19 months imprisonment with hard labour⁴.

² Wareatea North Licensing Committee Minute Book 1882 to 1915. Archives NZ Christchurch

³ Evening Post 19 March 1906

⁴ Evening Post 15 May 1906

EXCITING TIME IN MARION-STREET

ROUGH AND TUMBLE WITH A HOUSEBREAKER.

CAPTURE OF THE TRESPASSER.

An exciting incident, in which the principals were Mr. Samuel Gilmer and a fireman named Francis Waddell, occurred at the residence of Mr. John Hamilton, Marion-street, off Vivian-street, shortly after 11 o'clock this morning. Waddell is a man about 30 years of age, and it is alleged that he has some personal feelings against Mr. Gilmer.

The only person residing at Mr. Hamilton's place of abode is a lady named Mrs. Maggie Woodward, who keeps house for him. About a quarter past eleven this morning she saw some one approaching the house by the path that leads to the front door, and was surprised to hear the visitor opening the door. When she entered the corridor she was confronted by a man who brandished a chisel in his right hand and declared, "Now I've got you; now I'll do for you!" Mr. Hamilton was out at the moment, but Mr. Samuel Gilmer happened to have called for him a few moments before to go for a walk with him. Mr. Gilmer rushed out of the drawing-room and closed with the man. A great struggle ensued. Waddell fought furiously to get away, but Mr. Gilmer held fast and rolled over and over on

the floor. In the struggle Mr. Gilmer was badly injured about the face, and one of his hands was cut by the chisel. Waddell had armed himself with; but the trespasser or whatever he may be did not escape punishment. Mr. Gilmer used his fists to good purpose, and the severity of his blows was evident when the man was subsequently taken to the police station.

While the struggle was proceeding, Mrs. Woodward went out in search of a policeman. Constable O'Connor arrived in about fifteen minutes. Previous to his arrival, however, Mr. Andrew Walker, a tailor, residing in Marion-street, was attracted to the house by the noise, and helped to overpower the intruder. The man was quickly handcuffed and marched off to the Police Station. Inside the house confusion reigned supreme. The furniture was upset and vases, etc., were broken. Both Mr. Gilmer and Waddell were liberally bespattered with blood about the features. Mr. Gilmer's injuries, however, are not of a serious character.

Mrs. Woodward informed a Post reporter that Waddell has been hanging about Mr. Hamilton's house for some months. He evidently knew that Mr. Gilmer was a frequent visitor there. Only a couple of nights ago he called at the house and informed Mrs. Woodward that Mr. Hamilton had been seriously injured near the Royal Oak Hotel. This ruse did not culminate in the lady rushing off to make enquiries, however, and if Waddell contemplated burglary he failed in his purpose. He passed the house at an early hour this morning, and was afterwards seen lounging about Marion-street. He is a ship's fireman, and was recently discharged from the Mararoa.

Sergt. Hutton, who has the case in hand, states that Waddell will probably be charged with assault with intent to commit grievous bodily harm.

Evening Post 16 March 1906

Later in 1906 Sam's wife, Mary, died at the age of 62.

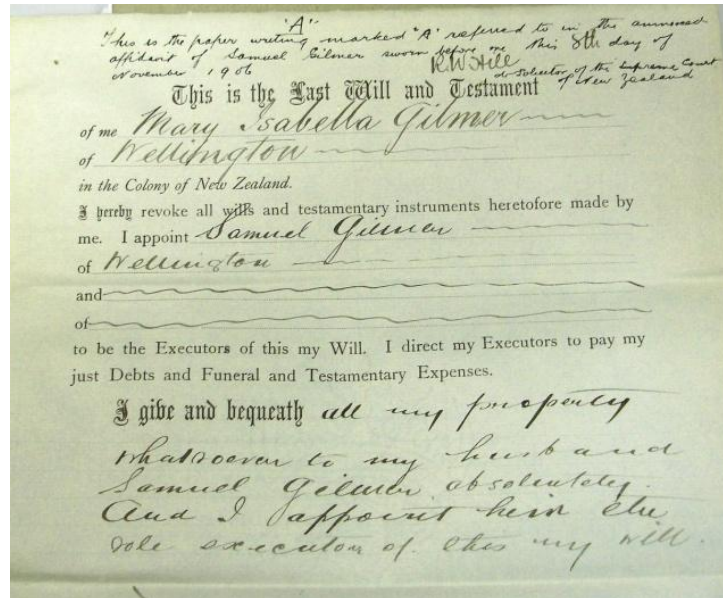
Mr Felix Campbell yesterday morning received a telegram stating that Mrs S. Gilmer, wife of Mr S. Gilmer, of the Royal Oak Hotel, Wellington, had passed away. Deceased was a resident of the Coast in the early days, and was highly esteemed and respected. The bereaved husband will have the sympathy of his West Coast friends in his sad loss.

Grey River Argus 23 Oct 1906

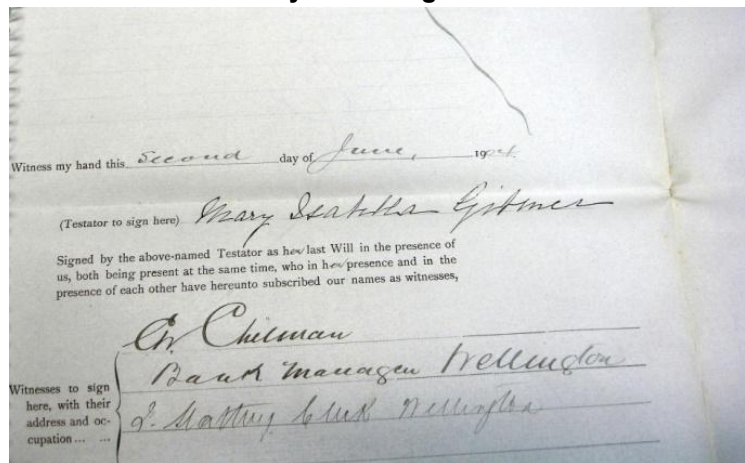
Mrs. Samuel Gilmer, wife of the proprietor of the Royal Oak Hotel, died this morning. The deceased lady had been in ill-health for a considerable time. She was married in Greymouth 32 years ago, and was much respected by a wide circle of acquaintances.

Evening Post 22 October 1906

Mary's Will was simple and she left all her property to her husband. However, it seems strange that she did not leave anything to her daughter such as more personal items.



Mary's Will Page 1



Mary's Will Page 2

Sam was now left alone at the Royal Oak Hotel because his daughter was away with her husband in Penang although Edith and Peter did return to live in Wellington about 1909. Sam continued to be very active with the hotel and also with the Opera House Company.

Mr. Samuel Gilmer, of the Royal Oak Hotel, who has been seriously ill, is improving in health, but is still confined to his bed.

Evening Post 10 April 1917

The many friends of Mr. Samuel Gilmer, of the Royal Oak Hotel, will be pleased to know he is about again after his recent illness.

Evening Post 28 June 1917



Sam with Hugh Gilmer (Right) early 1920's

MR. SAM GILMER

The death occurred this afternoon of Mr. Samuel Gilmer, proprietor of the Royal Oak Hotel, one of the best-known old identities in the Dominion. Mr. Gilmer, who had been in failing health for some years, had a sudden heart seizure this morning, and after a brief rally, he died several hours later.

Evening Post 14 January 1925

The funeral of the late Mr. Samuel Gilmer took place this afternoon. There was a very large attendance—representative of the mercantile community, and of the numerous friends Mr. Gilmer had made during his residence of over fifty years in the city. There were also present many former residents of the West Coast, now living in Wellington. Rev. H. Watson, vicar of St. Peter's Church, officiated at the graveside.

Evening Post 16 January 1925

The first announcement in "The Post" last evening of the sudden death of Mr. Samuel Gilmer, the well-known proprietor of the Royal Oak Hotel, and a resident of this city for about half a century, was received with much surprise and deep regret by his many friends in Wellington and the surrounding districts.

The late Mr. Gilmer, who was in his 83rd year at the time of his death, was a native of Castleblaney, County Monaghan, Ireland. He came to New Zealand as a young man in 1864, accompanied by his two brothers, and landed in Otago. From there he went to the gold rush on the West Coast. For some years he engaged in hotelkeeping at Greymouth, and came up to Wellington in the 'seventies, and continued in the same line of business in this city—his first venture being the Duke of Edinburgh Hotel. Subsequently he acquired the Royal Oak Hotel, for which he made a name as being one of the most comfortable and best-conducted hostelrys in the Dominion.

While on the West Coast, Mr. Gilmer married Miss Martin, of Melbourne, who predeceased him nearly twenty years ago. Mr. Gilmer was a life member of the Wellington Racing Club, and one of the promoters of the Wellington Opera House. He leaves one married daughter, Mrs. P. A. Lawrie, Hobson street, and a granddaughter.

The late Mr. Gilmer was a man of remarkable independence of character, and was distinguished for his shrewdness in business and for his indomitable perseverance. He was a man who would never accept defeat; was a keen observer, and was greatly interested in the welfare of the city. A pioneer in the goldmining industry on the West Coast, he was interested also in the development of the coal measures in that district. He was a man who never went back on his word—his word was his bond. The late Mr. Gilmer took no prominent part in party politics, and, indeed, had many friends on both sides. His very independence of character prevented his becoming an active partisan. Although he was strongly averse to any publicity in respect to assistance he might give in cases of need, it was known that no old West Coaster who had a deserving case appealed to him in vain. He ever remembered in a kindly way the West Coast and the friends of his young manhood. Many who have benefited by his ripe and solid judgment, and who were accustomed to consult him in respect to many matters, personal and public, will miss his kindly counsel. The funeral will leave the Royal Oak Hotel to-morrow afternoon at 2 o'clock for the Karori Cemetery.

Sam's Obituary Evening Post 15 January 1925

Sam's Will

Sam's Will was dated 8 June 1921 and his estate was valued at 163,518 Pounds 19 Shillings and 5 Pence. He appointed his daughter Edith, her husband Peter Stanley Lawrie, Charles Skerrett King's Counsel and Charles Chilman, a Wellington Banker, as his Executors.

Sam left all his clothing, watches jewellery and trinkets to his daughter Edith. The balance of the estate was left to his trustees to convert to money firstly to pay all debts, funeral and testamentary expenses including death duties. The balance was to be held by the trustees who were progressively liquidate the estate to the ultimate benefit Edith and her family.

Sam also left a number of Legacies and Annuities. The Legacies were:

- His brother Robert Gilmer 1000 Pounds and his nephew Hugh (Robert's son) also 1000 Pounds.
- His nephew Hamilton Andrew Hugh Gilmer was also left 1000 Pounds.
- His nephew Hugh son of his brother William 250 Pounds
- His niece in Ireland, Mary Dorothy Hamilton, daughter of Sam's eldest brother, James, was left 100 Pounds
- He left 250 Pounds to an employee Mrs Ahern, a barmaid at the Royal Oak, and also to her husband William and their daughter 50 Pounds each.

If the balance of the estate exceeded 100,000 Pounds (which it comfortably did) the following Legacies were also to be paid:

- 2500 Pounds each to the three sons of his brothers Henry, who had enlisted and served in World War 1 in Europe.
- 500 Pounds to Henry's son Hugh who stayed at home to run the family farm.

The following Annuities were to be paid

- To his brother Robert 500 Pounds per annum during his life. (Robert died in 1932 at the age of 89.)
- To Robert's son, Hugh, also 500 Pounds during his life. We have not identified when Hugh died. We believe he went to China and never returned.
- To Sam's niece Ruth Gilmer, daughter of Henry 250 Pounds per annum during her life. Ruth had a distinguished career as a nurse during World War 1 and later.
- To the three other daughters of Henry 100 Pounds per annum. They were:
 Margaret Ann who died in 1946 and who married David Baird.
 Eliza who died in 1949 and who married William Campbell.
 Mary who died in 1953 and who married Thomas Reid.
- To his four nieces the daughters of John Gilmer 50 Pounds each per annum during their lives.
 Cecile who married William Flynn
 Martha who married Arthur Grant
 Mary Anne who married Kenneth Skilton. (Sam's file at the NZ Archives contains a letter from Mary Ann Skilton dated 1955 requesting a copy of his Will.)

Ivy who married Herbert Thompsett.

- To Dora Martin, Sam's sister in law 250 Pounds per annum during her life.
- To James Martin of Woolhara, Sydney, Sam's brother in law 250 Pounds per annum.
- To his granddaughter Mary Lawrie 1000 Pounds per annum on attaining the age of 21 or when she married.

The Trustees were to pay the balance of the estate to Sam's daughter Edith and after her death to pay her husband Peter Lawrie 1000 Pounds per annum.

Sam and his wife are buried in Karori Cemetery some 50 metres from the grave of John Hamilton and his daughter Dorothea. As might be expected his grave is in a prominent position on a main path and is clearly recognizable by its black and white check top and its Celtic Cross.



Sam & Mary's Grave at Karori Cemetery