

EARLY VENTURES IN BUSINESS

EIGHTY-TWO HOTELS IN
ONE STREET

TWO WIGMAKERS SET UP SHOP

[By W.W.]

In early Hokitika the business places and private residences were mostly in Beach street, Revell street, and Gibsons quay. In Beach street there were two hotels and 36 business places and residences. Amongst the familiar names were Tait and Renton, Cassins and Comiskey, Churches and Ching. Bealey street was built upon only between Gibsons quay and Weld street. In this locality some of the old cottages survive. The Pioneer Hotel of 1934 occupies the same site as the Pioneer Hotel of 1866. In Brittan street there were only two houses north from the quay. On Gibsons quay, there were 14 hotels facing the river, the top one being the Islay Hotel (John Shang).

There were six hotels on the quay between Tancred street and Sewell street. The Red Lion, originally kept by James Evans, is the only one that survives. Hampden street was built upon between Revell street and Fitzherbert street. Revell street, named after William Horton Revell, a magistrate and warden who arrived in 1864, extended in a crooked line along the sandhills from the river to opposite the cemetery, the last hotel in the town being the Montezuma, kept by W. Bastings, on the north side of Tudor street.

"Hotel Street"

There were 33 hotels on the east side of Revell street and 49 on the beach side. They were clustered thick and fast in the centre of the town. The Munster (D. Murphy), the Plough (Walter Harris), and the British Empire were side by side, and across the street the Lord Nelson, the Charley Napier, and the Tyrone Family Hotel adjoined each other. The names were many and various: Sundial, Horse and Groom, Auld Reekie, El Dorado, Nags Head, and many others. One man spread his net very wide: The Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle (kept by Solomon Michael Salomon).

First Land Transfer

Some of the old names still remain on the original business sites. Keller's Cafe National and Williams, Chemist and Druggist, but very few others. The first land transfer title volume 1, folio 1, Westland registry, was issued to Sophia Middleton, and the section is now held by J. F. W. Schroder. There was very little spare space in Revell street; between Weld street and Stafford street, on the east side, there were 32 business places, of which eight were hotels. One of them was the Gridiron, in which was held the first meeting to form the town into a borough.

The Empire Hotel (B. Osborne and Company), which stood opposite the Bank of New Zealand, was the principal hotel, where the Superintendent

of Canterbury and other important people stayed on their official visits. The proprietor used to run a sweep on the lines of Tattersall's.

Jews and Germans mustered in great force in those early days. They seem to have fallen out in later years. There were 13 bakers' shops, eight chemists and druggists, 12 hairdressers, 10 jewellers, eight surgeons, six tinsmiths, and two wigmakers. It is interesting to note how nationalities selected occupations, viz.—Tobaccoists: Boedinghaus, Colman, Falck, Fuerst, Marks, Mendelsson (2), Mender-shausen, Nashelski.

The old town was well catered for in the way of amusements. The Prince of Wales Opera House, built in Melbourne and re-erected in Hokitika, and afterwards called the Duke of Edinburgh, stood at the east side of Revell street, and the Theatre Royal on the west side, adjoining the Shakespearean Hotel (near where Preston's baker's shop now stands). The White House was opposite Keller's, and many hotels provided special amusements.

Dancing Girls

It was found necessary to put the following clause in the Licensing Act: "Whereas a practice exists in certain parts of the colony of hiring women and young girls to dance in rooms and places where liquors are sold, any contract by which any females shall be hired to dance in any such room or place shall be null and void. Any room or place in which females shall be so employed, or permitted whether by contract or by a share of the produce of the sale of tickets, or in any other way, shall be taken to be a disorderly house. Penalty: First offence £20, second £50, and forfeiture." Fortunately, at the very beginning of the so-called West Canterbury goldfields, the Canterbury Provincial Government, with the earlier example of Otago before them, had appointed good men to manage the district, and law and order was well maintained. There was only one gang of marauders, and they did not last long.

It was not until 1868 that the borough put in street lights. Before that the only illumination was the lamp in front of each hotel. On October 7, 1865, 13 vessels came over the bar, and on October 10 there were five vessels in the roadstead, seven on the beach, and 24 at the wharf. On February 28, 1866, nobblers were reduced to 6d each, although previously 6d hotelkeepers had signed an advertisement that good liquor could not be sold under 1s a glass.

Crime and Punishment

In those days people were liable to imprisonment for debt, and there were many complaints about the debtors being confined with criminals. Sentences were not light. A boy of 16, for altering a cheque on the Bank of New South Wales, was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment with hard labour. A coloured man for passing a £5 valueless cheque received nine months' imprisonment with hard labour. For stealing a horse, a man, aged 46, received eight years' penal servitude. Another prisoner who falsely represented that he was authorised to receive a carpet bag left in a storekeeper's charge received six months' imprisonment with hard labour.

During the sittings a lawyer said that the prosecutor was "three sheets in the wind." His Honour Mr Justice Gresson remarked that if scientific terms were used, then he must have someone to explain their meaning.

Business in the Town

The picture advertisements of the hotels show women in crinolines on the footpath. Susman Behrend and Company, of Weld street (four doors from the White Horse Hotel) sold "wax and other matches," and also "tumbler and nobbler glasses." Findlay and Haworth, Gibsons quay, advertised themselves as owning the first sawmills established on the West Coast. The Westland Loan Office, next to the Oddfellows' Hotel, advanced money from £1 and upwards on diamonds, guns, pistols, etc., and "discounted bills with the greatest secrecy." An estate agent stated that he had established agencies at Dunedin (Otago), Christchurch (East Canterbury), Waimea,

Rosstown, and Okarito. One advertisement read: "Roberts reportorium. William Roberts, L.A.C., M.L.R.L., Pharmacopoliist," Spicer and Murray, undertakers, drew attention to "their velvet palls and ostrich plumes."

The various churches were all firmly established—Anglican: the Venerable H. W. Harper, M.A., Archdeacon of Westland, and the Rev. George P. Beaumont, M.A. Churchwardens J. Winter and Dr. Beswick. Wesleyan Church, in Tancred street, built for £450, opened in December, 1865. Roman Catholic: A large wooden building seating 350. "Walls bedecked with the fourteen stations of the Cross, in oil colours. A bell costing £50 rings the Angelus at 6 a.m., 12 noon, and 6 p.m. Rev. Fathers W. J. Larkins and H. F. McDonough." Presbyterian: 60ft x 32ft, with bell tower 58 feet high. Rev. John Gow. Hokitika Hebrew Congregation: Tancred street. Rev. J. Zacariah.

HOKITIKA AT THE BEGINNING

Visualise a lone calico tent on the sandy beach, with hobbled pack horses nearby, beside a river mouth; behind, a backing of forest area mounting to the hills, and then losing its verdure as the timber is replaced by permanent snow on the mountain peaks, stretching as far as the eye can see north and south. The beginning of Hokitika is revealed. After a long tramp from Canterbury over the Plains to the mountains, then a stiff climb to the first saddle, to find a passage by a river bed to the distant West Coast, Messrs J. R. Hudson and J. Price, two venturesome pioneers, eventually pitched their tent, and elected to establish themselves as ferrymen and storekeepers at the Hokitika river mouth.

In those later days of 1864, migrating miners lured to the coast by reported discoveries of gold at Greenstone and elsewhere, moved up and down the district, trying to locate fresh deposits. Within a few days of the camp at Hokitika river being established, more prospectors moved south, to return in a fortnight's time reporting the discovery of gold at what was christened Donnelly's Creek, near where the town of Ross was soon to be born. The find galvanised the intensity of the search for more gold, and the arrivals spread about the district. In quick succession gold fields at Stafford, Kanieri, Woodstock, and other places were reported. For those localities, as with Ross, Hokitika became the natural centre, and to that point a wild rush of men soon set in. Hudson and Price arrived at the river mouth on October 1, 1864. By the next month the beach was dotted with miners' tents and calico places of business built by enterprising storekeepers and others. In the month of December the first steamer arrived, crowded with passengers on deck, and loaded with supplies below. By Christmas Day the town was definitely in being. Hokitika was in the domain of the Canterbury province. It was the "West"-land area across the moun-

tains, and officials were sent over to represent law and order, and to create authority to control a fast rising town.

Rapid Growth

Hokitika grew very rapidly indeed. Trading steamers and sailing craft found an entrance, bringing men and material for the making of a new district. A constant stream of men passed over the ranges from

Canterbury, and pack horses and bullock drays trailed along the sea beach with goods and chattels to be consumed in the rising town from which stories came of gold in plenty. The authenticated records of gold buyers and bankers of the day leave no doubt of the golden treasure won in the district, and purchased for export by the bank authorities. Every day was alike—a repetition of returning miners with body-belts

of gold and buyers ready to convert to notes for the miner to renew supplies, or to spend freely in pleasure. The scenes and incidents of every early gold field were repeated with faithful accuracy, if anything more intensely; as the weeks went by and more men went out in the goldfields, gold was won as a very ready harvest from the sea beaches and alluvial river deposits which could be worked easily by simple means.

The story of the rapid growth of Hokitika, the great influx of population; its creation as a borough, and settlement as an established town, has been told by many. There is no doubt the town had a rapid beginning, and was peopled by men of distinction. Its establishment was not reached without finance or difficulty, consequently the venturesome were of a type who already had made their way and had grown used to the roughing necessary to hew a town out of a forest in a place far remote from any centre for ready supplies. Many of the early arrivals at Hokitika came by boat from Melbourne direct. The largest steamers of those days arrived in the Hokitika roadstead with hundreds of passengers and full cargoes of goods and supplies. The steamers were tendered by small boats able to enter the river, and so arrived a people well equipped for the task before them. The first year saw wonderful progress in the town, for all the while the district round about and as far south as Okarito was yielding up its treasure in rich quantity. It was a notable beginning. As fresh discoveries were made, more people arrived, and the town grew and spread inland. There are many interesting old photographs which, compared with later pictures, show the speedy expansion of the town, its rapid roading, and the improved class of residences appearing. The substance of the advancement in a few short months showed the quality of the people pioneering the district, and the faith they had in its future.

Giants in Politics

That there were political giants in those days is shown by the interest the people took in their town. The machinery of local government was operating in far away Christchurch,

and the distance obscured the view of the authorities. The first agitation was for a municipality, and an appeal was made to the Superintendent of the province. Mr Bealey granted the request, and a municipal council composed of influential citizens was appointed. From the number Mr J. A. Bonar was elected the first Mayor. Soon afterwards, still not satisfied with the administration from the Canterbury Provincial Council, an agitation for separation came, and in the end a short-lived Westland Provincial Council was set up. Here again Mr J. A. Bonar came to the fore. He was the first and only Superintendent of the province, and took up his residence in "Government House." That first Provincial Council was a notable one, as two mem-

bers, the Hon. J. A. Bonar and the Hon. H. H. Lahman became life-members of the New Zealand Upper House; a third member, Sir Arthur Guinness, became Speaker of the Lower House, and a fourth member, the Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon, the great Premier and first Prime Minister of New Zealand.

It was natural that the goldfields should ebb and flow. Mining operations at first were on a primitive scale, and only the easily won gold was recovered. But later, in the rich basin of Ross, the deep levels were operated on a scale of which the present generation knows nothing. Great resource and enterprise were required, but again the people had the equipment for the occasion, and rich treasure was won. Those who have followed after owe a great deal to the work and memory of the pioneers who built for the future, and opened up a district which, as developed, becomes more and more an important producing centre of New Zealand.

To go back still, the country should realise what the discovery of gold has meant for New Zealand. From 1857 to 1932 it is recorded that 24,257,672 ounces of gold were exported, and the output is valued at £96,131,832. This was the magic magnet which at the outset drew population from the four quarters of the globe to people the country, consume local produce, and build up a Dominion in the remote antipodes. No other industry could have brought the early invading thousands across the seas and round the world to a distant, unknown island.

Bright Prospects

From Christmas, 1864, to Christmas, 1934, is the span of time Hokitika and its promising surrounding country has flourished. Now, after 70 years, the whole district may be said to be about to start another new year with brighter prospects ahead than ever. The search for gold at the present time is more intensive than it has been for a score of years, and better returns are being won. The district is better roaded than ever, and farming and settlement generally are flourishing under favourable district conditions of land values, facilities, taxation, and other overhead factors to foster better returns. The scenic glories of Westland are unexcelled for easy approach and noble grandeur. The timber lands are a vast asset, the largest remaining stands of timber in New Zealand. Westland is peopled by a loyal and contented people, who over the years, in spite of isolation and the slowness with which the authorities have moved to open up the far south, and practically the non-cultivation of the tourist features of the district, have continued to work out their own destiny, and have achieved a wonderful degree of success.

HOKITIKA HARBOUR.

A TROUBLED HISTORY.

The following article by Mr T. Fletcher, editor of the "New Zealand School Journal," gives some details of the history of the Hokitika harbour:—

At one period of its history Hokitika was the most important town and port on the West Coast, and, indeed, one of the largest towns in New Zealand. Shortly after the discovery of gold was made at Greenstone, another rich field was discovered near the Hokitika river. The gold was near the surface, and easily obtained. Thousands of folk rushed thither, and towns sprang up as if by magic all along the river.

The largest settlement was at the mouth of the river, where it is said that the sand was in places yellow with gold. Three miles from the mouth the town of Kanieri sprang up, and Woodstock on the opposite side. So rich were these diggings that the weekly earnings of the miners were often from £15 to £30, while at one beach a few miles north of Hokitika the men sometimes cradled as much as a hundred ounces of gold a week!

At first the dwellings were only tents, but timber was plentiful, and soon houses were built. Within two years of the first rush the greatest output of gold was obtained, and then the production began to decline, steadily at first, but more rapidly later. The towns dwindled, and now the old houses, mostly in ruins, are the only signs of the wonderful wealth in the "sixties" and "seventies" of last century. It has been estimated that more than five million ounces of gold, valued at over twenty million pounds, have been won from the goldfields of the West Coast.

Hokitika early became the trade centre of the district, and at one time contained as many as twenty thousand people. Vessels were continually coming and going. Those of lesser draught crossed the bar, entered the estuary, and berthed at the wharves, where at times they were lined up two deep. Those that could not cross the bar were anchored out in the roadstead, and their goods were brought ashore in boats. It is said that sometimes, after a severe storm had made the bar impassable for a few days, as many as a hundred ships could be seen in the roadstead, waiting for a chance to enter the river.

What a different scene there is today! Now, instead of vessels coming direct from Sydney to Melbourne, one small coastal vessel calls at the port. Hokitika contains just over two thousand people, and, though goldmining is still carried on, the main export is timber. There is no finer bush anywhere in New Zealand than those wonderful Westland forests. But the bushman's axe and the fire-fiend have, sad to say, wrought much havoc, and some of the finest beauty spots in the world have been ruined by the felling of the forest giants.

The Hokitika river and its main branches rise in the Southern Alps, and drain an area of 445 square miles. Over this district there is an annual rainfall of from one hundred to one hundred and twenty-five inches.