

The Queenstown Courier

The Official Publication of the
Queenstown & District Historical Society

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All correspondence and accounts should be addressed to the Society's
permanent address - P O Box 132, Queenstown

Glenpanel - Peter and
William Reid

Society Activities

Field Trips

Four successful trips have been held during the Summer-Autumn months.

- In November seventy-six members enjoyed the inspection of three homes in the Lake Hayes area which included the Stalkers (Glenpanel), Strains (Threepwood) and Grants (Lake Hayes).



Val and Trevor Stalker's home (Glenpanel) on 28 November 1993
(Society Field Trip).

This is the second house built on this property. It was built in 1909 for Peter and William Reid and purchased and restored by Val and Trevor in 1976. They continue to maintain the home in an immaculate condition. Construction is of Red Beech and Rimu from the head of the Lake.

- On 31 January forty people walked up Twelve Mile Creek to Sam Summer's Hut.

- Unfortunately the February trip was cancelled, with both the Thomson's Track and Macetown road being washed out with the earlier flooding.
- The March trip to Maori Point on a perfect day attracted thirty-one members.
- And finally in April sixty-one people travelled to Queensberry, Wanaka and Cardrona.

Plaque

A plaque to commemorate the Frankton Wharf site has recently been placed on a large morainic boulder near the end of the Queenstown-Frankton Walkway and can easily be seen from the Frankton Road. The plaque reads:

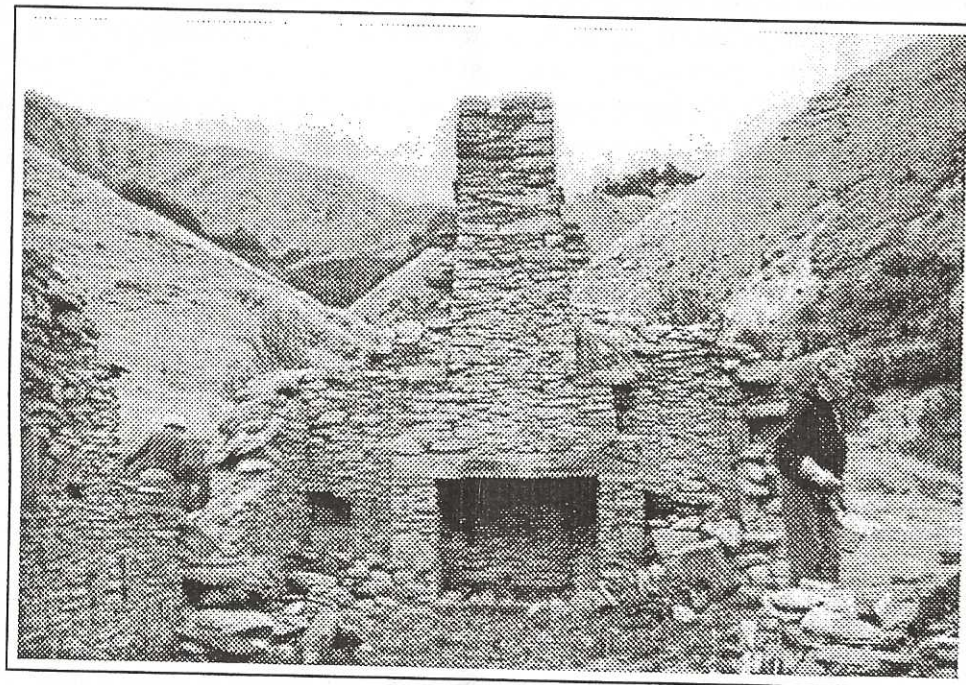
Frankton Wharf Site
This is the site of the
Frankton Wharf constructed
to serve the shipping system on
Lake Wakatipu and the wider district.
(circa 1863-1942)

Frankton Wharf site - plaque

Saw Pit Gully Stone Cottage

Sawpit Gully Stone Cottage

On 18 October 1993 about 20 members climbed the Sawpit Gully track and cleared the scrub and foliage from in and around the remains of a miner's old stone cottage. It is hoped that some day this cottage may be restored.



The remains of the stone cottage near the head of Sawpit Gully on 18 October 1993. (Society members working party)

The Reconstruction of the School at Skippers

By Raymond Clarkson

When the Hon. Denis Marshall unveiled the plaque commemorating the reconstruction of the Skippers School a great amount of thought and hard work came to fruition. It was no straightforward simple task, just as the building of the original school had been a considerable contribution in planning and effort by the gold-mining community in the Upper Shotover region when it was built in 1879.

There was agitation for the setting up of the school from the scattered groups which worked up the Shotover River gorges and the tributary valleys. Isolated from Queenstown and Arrowtown by rugged ranges and a thread of a road which was impassable for several months of the year, the construction and staffing of the nineteenth century school raised problems which tested the determination of the mining families.

When, in 1986, plans were laid for the reconstruction of the school which had had a chequered history since its closure in 1924 it was not realised that several years would pass before the building could be classed as finished. The work of clearing the site, removing the tack-ons from the woolshed days, the taking of innumerable photos to show the remaining details of the original structure, plus interviews with surviving pupils and teachers guaranteed a faithful reconstruction. The Department of Conservation in Queenstown is insistent that this is not a restoration as much as a reconstruction of the original school. Because of the great changes made in the walls and the consequent weakening and the subsidence of the foundations as a result of the weight of the stone walls pressing down on them, it was thought advisable to rebuild using the original material when possible and matching it when replacement was needed. As a future role was envisaged for the building - an educational one - then a degree of solidity and permanence was required.

When the school opened in 1879, of the anticipated 120 pupils, only 24 appeared. It was a basic fact of the school roll that calculations were rarely correct because of the transient nature of the population. This fluctuation was also reflected in the great number of changes in the teaching staff. Goldfields lifestyle was one of impermanence. The Education Act of 1877 which had made primary education compulsory had stipulated that all children must attend school regularly and this imposed difficulties where some lived too far from a school and also where there were not enough teachers to meet this sudden demand.

Pupil attendances in Skippers were fairly regular except when weather closed down communications which was not uncommon in winter months, especially 1895 when there was a five month break. One interesting departure occurred in May 1897 when school rolls at Skippers and Bullendale - further up the Shotover - fell and the schools shared a teacher who spent two days a week at Bullendale and three at Upper Shotover as Skippers was then called. Winter conditions and the difficult terrain in that area makes one feel for the problems of the teacher. The miserable examination results achieved by the pupils in this cost-cutting encouraged the school committees to demand that the Southland Education Board open both schools for the full week.

When the roll dipped again in 1919 the school was closed. However the Smith family with six children arrived and the school was reopened in 1921 with Mrs Smith as teacher. The roll had dropped to six by the end of 1925 and so at the beginning of 1927 Skippers Point School closed for good and the building was abandoned.

In 1941, Archie MacNicol, the local runholder on Mt Aurum Station who along with the rest of his family had attended the old school, decided to convert the building into a woolshed. Terri MacNicol writes "We spent much of our time until December 1941 on the conversion. Floors were lifted and gratings laid instead, doors were replaced by gates, wool bins and a table were built. A lean-to was added for the 'board'. Finally Archie built counting out pens and yards. It was rough and ready but efficient and was finished in time for our shearing." That old building with a few more alterations was still being used as a shearing shed when the Station ceased functioning. This was the building which the Department of Lands & Survey finally inherited and decided to do something about.

In the mid 1980s a tourism development initiative was announced. As a result funds for projects became available. The idea of doing something with the school building was first thought of in 1986 by Neill Simpson, Nelson Cross and Nick Clark, employees of the Department of Lands & Survey. An application was submitted and was granted on 8th December 1987. The tourist and Publicity Department grant of \$ 60,000 for reconstruction and \$20,000 for interpretation through the Community Assisted Projects scheme provided funding for the project and the stated purpose of this was to initiate an educational, social and learning experience for outdoor education and also give a focal point for visitors. At the time there were 30,000 people annually going into Skippers.

When it was built the Upper Shotover School cost £300, but fittings were needed to enable the school to open. It was a substantial stone and iron building comprising a school house and a master's residence. £160 of the initial price was contributed by the Southland Education Board. Little is known of the original contractors, but the stone was quarried locally and the other materials were carted in from Queenstown. When the school was built there were few trees near Burke's Terrace where it stands, so any wood in the frame, the floorboards and the windows would have had to be carried in too at considerable cost. In June 1878 the Board approved an allowance of £75 for fittings. In 1884 the resident teacher, a Mr Andrew Murray who had a large family, asked for the teacher's house to be built. This was declined, but it is recorded that £15 was spent on increased accommodation. No record survives of the nature of these additions, however they are probably the partitions which created two small bedrooms off the living room.

Surrounding the school grounds was a post and wire boundary fence. This was quite unsatisfactory - the wire had barbs, a danger to the pupils and it did not keep the cattle out anyway. A picket fence later replaced it.

One of the biggest threats to the school occurred in 1888 when application for a mining claim was made. This would have allowed mining the school grounds. In January 1889 the Board supported the Committee's action in objecting to this and the application failed.

When the Tourism Grant was obtained and before the actual site work could be started considerable research was done. Glenda Thompson, working for the Department of Conservation in Queenstown, prepared a comprehensive document which detailed the history of the school gleaned from old records and interviews with surviving teachers and pupils. Then followed much photographing of the remaining building and details of its construction. Working plans and drawings were found. Each wall foundation and ceiling was photographed for detail. There was enough of the structure remaining to judge what the original had been. Sections of the original window frames still existed.

Measurements were made of the complete structure and how the plan of reconstruction was to be undertaken; all the original remaining materials were inspected and stored; walls were measured for thickness, then dismantling took place. All unstable walls were removed. Approximately 60% was sound, but the outside walls, because of alterations and weakening when windows had been knocked out to put in doors, tended to be the most unstable. The

building was cleaned - no small task as over the years there was an accumulation of 800 mm of dags. The working prescription was drawn up and progress was on the way.

Site preparation continued with the cartage of materials - local stone came from Skippers Creek nearby which would have been the source of the original stone which it matched. About thirty truck and trailer loads were necessary to fill in the gaps. Mortar was mixed in various proportions but usually 7 sand: 1 cement: 1 lime. The sand came from the Shotover River.

In 1989 rebuilding started and as this was done the add-ons were removed - the garage and the front lean-to. Fortunately the Lakes District Council loader was in Skippers at the time and this was used to dig out and clear away the dirt which had slipped down and accumulated at the back wall of the building over a long period. One metre below ground level ashes from the time of use as a school were found.

The original foundations were just stacked stone laid on great rocks buried in the ground. These had held up reasonably well considering the age of the building and the weight of the walls, but they had subsided in places and there had been considerable movement in the soft ground. If they had been maintained they would have lasted.

Many old pictures had been borrowed from the Lakes District Museum at Arrowtown, from ex-pupils and residents, and from Duncan MacNicol came a very accurate verbal account of the layout and furnishings of the school-room. Apertures for the windows were obvious. What remained of the building was sufficient to enable an accurate reconstruction. In the first year the substantial concrete foundations were set and the walls stabilised. Two major walls which were ready to tumble were taken down to their foundations then rebuilt. The outside stonework took four months from October 1990.

In the planning guidelines local materials supplemented with cement to give longer life were to be used, the finished product to be as authentic as possible. During the construction no further damage was to be done to the structure. It was important to plan in stages so that if there was a danger of the money running out certain stages would be completed. There was constant assessing of progress.

No photos existed of the back of the building where there was major damage. Doors had been made where there had been windows and some parts had been completely destroyed. While it was often difficult to make the old parts look like the new replacements, there was much thought given to

marrying the two. It was a challenging and worthwhile task said those involved. There was no room for your own imagination, or for design improvements. Interior doors were created, then filled in because there was no evidence that they had once existed. It was essential to keep to the original. The construction material was 60% quartz rock combined with other stone. The exterior stone work was a monstrous job. The building would not have lasted much longer because of water damage but in the end the major parts of the walls were saved for the new structure.

The following year the roof was the main focus. To tie the whole building in a hidden reinforced beam was poured on top of the walls for stability and to strengthen them. On this beam was put a top plate. The roof which had been removed was now replaced. The original iron was useless and so from around the area, mainly demolition yards, old iron was bought. A profile of gutter was retrieved and this was matched by a local plumbing firm. Then the whole building was floored with concrete to make a thick, compacted, vermin proof slab. The concrete was mixed on site by hand and wheeled into the building. Then the roof went on.

Work on the interior joinery and plastering could proceed now. The double hung windows manufactured locally from salvaged examples were fitted as well as the doors. In the Skippers climate there were seasonal breaks. During the winters of 1991, and 1992 which was bitterly cold, when communications were cut-off, the ice was permanent and the sun non-existent, work ceased, but the building was weatherproof.

Spring of 1992 saw renewed enthusiasm and activity. Neil Milne's attempts to repair interior plaster in July had been defeated by the cold, but now there was some warmth. The work of the previous autumn done as a holiday task by his father and brother, both tradesmen who had just happened to be visiting Queenstown, could be completed. The extent of this plastering was major as the inside walls were very rough stone in contrast to the exterior which had a much better appearance. In places the plaster is 7 cm - 9 cm thick put on in layers to get a reasonably smooth finish. To the original lime and sand mix some cement was added as a kind of compromise designed to be stronger and more durable. It was also going to be painted. Most of the walls were out of plumb and the architraves and skirting showed up all the irregularities.

On the exterior it was difficult to match the mortar colour. The old, between the interlocking stones, had been a mixture of mud and water which set hard and was suitable if protected. If water got in and froze it blew out this

mortar. The new mixture was obvious and so the whole building was treated with a slurry which closely matched the original colour. Lois Galer of the N.Z. Historic Places Trust in Dunedin had been consulted on the exterior colour scheme which is white and colonial white with a red oxide roof.

The interior wooden floors were put down starting on the 16th November, using the generous help of Noel Tweedie of Christchurch who spent several weeks as a volunteer carpenter. By the 20th November 1992 the building was nearly complete, three years after the initial start on the stonework.

At the ceremony on the afternoon of the 20th November 1992 the largest crowd to assemble in Skippers since the opening of the bridge in 1902 gathered. Period costumes, vintage cars, old time musicians and dancing, school pupils and reminiscences of old identities made the occasion memorable. All the planning work by the Department of Conservation and the many volunteers and the hardship of working in the remote area were well rewarded as another stage in the life of Skippers Point School was entered.

I would like to acknowledge the help of Nick Clark, Stewart Hardie, Kim Logan and Neil Milne plus the research document of Glenda Thompson, in preparing this account.

Raymond Clarkson

François St Omer

By A J De La Mare

François St Omer was born in Marseilles, France, in 1827. Nothing is known of his early life and it appears even his own family were not given this information because no details of his father or mother appear on his death certificate. At an early age St Omer left France to follow the gold rushes, first in California, then to Victoria, Australia and finally to New Zealand.

Before he came to New Zealand St Omer commenced his trade as a baker at Albany, Western Australia. It was here too that he married Julia Casey. St Omer arrived at Queenstown in 1863 and soon after his arrival took over William Rees' dining tables. This presumably means the Queens Arms Dining Rooms but whether as manager or lessee is not known.

The first rate records in Queenstown show St Omer living in Beach Street in the back part of the present Opal Centre on the corner of Beach and Rees Streets. Immediately next door was Oswalds and Lamb's bakery which St Omer obtained an interest in and finally took over the business in 1867. Next door again was the Caledonian Hotel St Omer bought this property in 1869. Presumably he ran a restaurant in these premises until he bought another old hotel in 1890 which he converted into a restaurant. The hotel was the Victoria, purchased from M J Malaghan for £200, situated on the present site of the Rees Street Dairy.

In 1903 St Omer is recorded as operating a private hotel of 10 rooms with accommodation for 16 guests. The tariff was 1/-d for meals or board and 20/-d per week. Whether St Omer used the Old Caledonian or the equally old Victoria for this business is not known.

St Omer had an interest in other land in the borough. At the first sale of land in February 1864 he bought a section in Shotover Street about the present site of Queenstown Wines and Spirits and the section immediately behind fronting on to Main Street. He is also shown in 1866 as the owner of a section in Beach Street almost opposite the steamer wharf which was recorded as an auction mart.

St Omer conducted the business of baker and restaurateur up to his death, assisted for many years by two sons, Alfred and Frank. Julia St Omer died in August 1911 and two children of the marriage predeceased their father.

In J D Salmond's "Hearts of Gold" he records his mother's memory of St Omer. "Like the other children of the town I was very fond of Saintie's pies

and tarts. His currant buns were a source of wonder. In Scotland I had eaten currant buns only at Christmas time as a very special treat. Is it any wonder that the currant buns raised the thought in my child mind that in this wonderful new land Christmas was a daily occasion."

Besides running a popular and successful business St Omer took a prominent part in public affairs. He was first elected to the Queenstown Borough Council in 1878 and his obituary records he served as councillor for 11 years and as Mayor for 14 years. St Omer represented the Lake County on the Southland Hospital and Charitable Aid Board for 11 years. Attending meetings involved a visit to Invercargill which occupied three full days. St Omer took a prominent part in the Acclimatization and Caledonian Societies. He served on the Hospital Committee and two of the local Licensing Committees.

St Omer made a great contribution to the Queenstown Brass Band. When the band was formed to fill the gap left when Captain Eichardt dissolved the Queenstown Volunteer Brass Band St Omer was a foundation member and secretary. He was an active player and member for many years, his instrument being the cornet.

St Omer was a great tree planter and is usually credited with planting the weeping willows near the steamer wharf and many of the trees along the One Mile. It used to be part of the Queenstown folklore that the willows he planted were the lineal descendants of the trees which grew over the grave of Napoleon on the island of St Helena. St Omer is said to have been a cabin boy on the vessel which returned Napoleon's body to France hence the connection. Napoleon's body was returned to France in 1840 and St Omer did not reach Queenstown until 1863 which perhaps indicates the story is a myth.

There is another story concerning St Omer which is probably apocryphal. It is said that during the Franco-Prussian War St Omer would fly the tri-colour when news of a French victory was reported while Eichardt, a Prussian flew the German flag over his hotel to celebrate German victories. If the story is true St Omer's flag got few airings.

St Omer died on 18 April 1915, and is buried in the Queenstown cemetery. Neither of his surviving sons married. The family tradition of tree planting was carried on by Frank St Omer. When he died in 1950 he left his estate to the Queenstown Borough Council for the beautification of Queenstown. St Omer Park on the One Mile has been named in his memory.

Jonny Seffer and Moonlight mine. Ned Oxenbridge and Oxenbridge tunnel
Dr. Lindsay Stewart

Two Old Local Gold Mines

By Dr Lindsay R Stewart

Stimulated by the reminiscences of Pat Bleakley and Lel Luckie in the Courier, and Alan De La Mare's "Shotover River", I felt constrained to add a few notes of personal experiences, although there must be others who could contribute more.

Johnny Seffer and the Moonlight Mine

As young teenagers, Hilary and I frequently walked up to Moonlight in the early 1930s, a very popular tramp in those days. Johnny's hut was papered with pages from "The Auckland Weekly News" and "The Free Lance". He also brewed a very good elderberry wine (an added attraction!) He asked Hilary to go and live with him, but she declined the honour.

The mine was a typical alluvial "paddock" worked by high pressure sluicing, down to the bedrock well beneath. We used to pick out small nuggets from the crevices in the tail-race tunnel, and often brought home small bottles of gold.

Finally the mine closed, said to be due to visitors like us helping themselves to too much gold, but the truth was, it was worked out.

The Oxenbridges

After the failure of the Oxenbridge Tunnel, Ned Oxenbridge and his sons moved up the Shotover on the north bank close to the Moonlight junction. Hilary and I frequently walked up during school holidays. The track branched off the Moonlight track, crossed the Shotover on a flying fox, then up the other side for a short distance.

They had driven a shaft down beside the river, then across to beneath the centre of the river, then up to the bed. It was one of my more frightening experiences watching them pick-axing away at the roof of the tunnel, with water pouring down, expecting the river to burst through at any moment.

A force pump was used to empty the tunnel of water, but during the winter the pipe line above froze, halting the operations. The debris from the tunnel was carted up to a "paddock" beside the river and then sluiced through a sluice-box.

Their hut was on a small terrace above the river where we were always

welcome. Ned Oxenbridge was a marvellous spitter, and would sit in the hut, remove his pipe, and unleash a silent stream to put out a small flame in the fire.

I believe this venture was successful and when finally they had recovered all the gold they naturally sold out to a consortium for a reputed £10,000 as was the habit in those days!

They then shifted to the Twelve-mile Creek, where I occasionally visited them with Lindsay McCurdy. The sad death of Jock Angelo, their friend and fellow-miner, persuaded them to shift back to Australia and my contact with them was lost.

Skippers-Macetown

In December 1930 I joined the McCurdy brothers and walked up to Skippers via Moonlight and the Stony Creek Saddle. The bridge over Stony Creek was boarded up and had no planking but we managed to cross and stayed the night with the Smiths at Skippers. Next day we went up to the Branches and up Advance Peak joining the track down the Peak past the stamping batteries to Macetown. We slept in the old Macetown store, littered with interesting account books, and walked down to Arrowtown next morning.

With a Box Brownie, I took many photos of the Moonlight and Oxenbridge mines.

Henry Manders

By Alan De La Mare

There is some doubt whether Henry Manders or Issac Henry Manders or James Henry Manders as he was sometimes referred to was born in Dublin or London. He was born in 1829 and is said to descend from a wealthy Dublin family, his mother being of Spanish extraction. He went to school at Rugby and was a man of good education. Little is known of his early life but it is known he emigrated to Australia where he took an active part in politics at Avoca, Victoria.

Following the lure of gold, he crossed the Tasman arriving in Queenstown probably in 1863. He was a mining agent by profession probably having first gained experience in this field in Australia. A mining agent was an unqualified lawyer earning a living by advising miners on their mining and water rights and representing them in Court during applications and disputes. Manders also acted as a journalist for the Wakatip Mail.

Following his interest in politics Manders was appointed honorary secretary of the Queenstown Improvement Committee in February 1864. The Committee formed in October 1863 was a popularly elected unofficial local authority which was intended should perform some of the duties normally carried out by a Borough Council. Because it had no standing and relied on the goodwill of the residents it operated with mixed success until superceded by the Queenstown Borough Council in 1866.

In August 1866 Manders was appointed first Town Clerk of the new Borough at a salary of £100 per annum. It is not known how well Manders carried out his duties but what is known is that his position was advertised in August 1868 at a salary of £40 plus 10% of the rates and Manders being the only applicant was appointed. A week later Councillor Fraer having examined the books and found them carelessly kept moved that Manders' services be dispensed with. There was some support for this proposal but it was finally decided Manders be given 14 days to bring the accounts and books up-to-date and if not done he be dismissed. Manders retained his position for another year when a new council decided to advertise the job at a salary of £30 per annum plus 10% of the rates. H J Cope was appointed.

When the Lake County Council had its first meeting in January 1877 Manders, who had indicated an interest in the position of County Clerk, was offered the job until 30 June 1878 at a salary of £125. Manders said it was not

enough and he was finally appointed for six months at a salary of £150. At the end of his six months' contract a new County Clerk, P B Boulton was appointed. It is difficult to escape the opinion that Manders' performance as Town Clerk and later as County Clerk did not measure up.

Manders represented The Lakes in the Otago Provincial Council from April to June 1875 when the council was prorogued before being abolished in November 1876. In January 1876 Manders became the Member for Wakatipu in the House of Representatives, losing his seat to H J Finn in August 1879. It was an interesting election in that besides Finn and Manders, William Mason also stood. Mason a prominent architect was the first Mayor of Dunedin in 1865 who had retired to Queenstown in 1877. Finn made a determined bid for the seat and like politicians of recent times made promises that he had no prospect of honouring. He promised educational preference to the Catholics, a railway to Martins Bay and the benefits of a "million dollar loan". The bait was too much for the electors and Finn received 266 votes to Mason's 232 leaving Manders a poor third with 143.

One thing that probably affected Manders' chances was an incident in July 1877 when as Member of Parliament a dispute with his housekeeper, Margaret McKeene, made national headlines. Manders was about to board the vessel Wakatipu at Port Chalmers to attend a session of parliament at Wellington when he was stopped by McKeene on the wharf and prevented from leaving. She had taken a case against Manders for the return of certain articles which she claimed were hers and had been held by Manders. These included a feather bed, a quantity of linen and personal clothing and a "View of Queenstown" Manders defence was that he was the owner of all the items. The Magistrate ordered the return of the "View of Queenstown" and awarded £1 damages and costs. McKeene had been Manders' housekeeper for eight years and was probably angry at being replaced by a Miss Clark after such long service. McKeene took the opportunity of the case to blacken Manders' reputation.

Manders died at the age of 62 on 5 January 1891 and was buried in the Queenstown cemetery. Even in death Manders made headlines. The newspaper report said he suffered from chronic gout and rheumatism. A few days before his death he was visited by an old friend James Tower and they indulged rather freely. Some time after Manders complained of a pain and went to bed. His friend failed to call the doctor and Manders was found dead in bed next morning. An inquest was called for and the jury's verdict was Manders died of excessive drinking. Manders was like many who followed the lure of gold.

They arrived alone, were reticent about their past, had no kith or kin and died lonely deaths mourned only by a few friends.

The Courier
Acknowledgement

This issue has again been typed and printed by Mrs Susan Milligan at the Southland Education Centre in Invercargill. Her quality work is hereby acknowledged.