

George Samuel Hamilton

George Samuel Hamilton was born on 26 April 1879 in Milton. He attended Tokomairiro school from Jan 1885 to July 1894 ('Destination: Home'); he never married. George died of pneumonia on 7 July 1930, aged 51. Annie Osborne Hay née Hamilton wrote the following about George, her uncle, in 1988:

[George] suffered from epilepsy and he lived with Dad & Mum [i.e. his brother William and wife] until Essie was born [1898], then neither sister wanted him as they had young families, so he went to Seacliff [Lunatic Asylum] and was the head gardener there for many years. Dad went by train to see him sometimes, and he and I once met him at the Dunedin winter show, he was wandering around alone, and was so much like Dad I couldn't believe it.

Not all of this information is correct.

The Seacliff asylum records show that George was 'wandering at large' and presumably causing a nuisance in Outram, Otago, on 3 June 1908, and so was arrested and confined to a cell. Constable William Southgate listed the following as George's property at the time of his arrest:

- Rotherham silver watch no.117173 with metal chain attached;
- 2 sleeve links;
- tie clip;
- Bible;
- clothes brush;
- leather purse;
- 14 one penny stamps; and
- Sunday papers.

The next day George was brought before the magistrate in Dunedin and, on the advice of two medical practitioners, was committed to the Seacliff Mental Hospital where he came under the supervision of Dr Frederic Truby King. George was described by the doctors as a single, 29-year-old labourer, religion Salvation Army, previous place of abode Milton, and he was regarded as dangerous.

Dr Williams, one of the certifying doctors, records:

Geo. Samuel Hamilton has excitable manner.... Says that several people and a woman got into his cell at Outram while door was shut. He tried to hit them. Wm. Southgate, Const., states that G.S.H. was very violent in Outram cell & thought people were in the corners of his cell. Bruised knuckles hitting at walls to hit these people. Refuses food.

Dr Evans corroborated these details, adding 'No signs of drugs or alcohol'.

George (Reg.No.44120) was examined at Seacliff by Dr Truby King on 5 June 1908; his diagnosis is 'Epilepsy. Imbecility'. George's height is given as 5ft 7½in [171.5cm] and his weight 10st 10lb [68kg]. He is described as:

A well developed man of small stature, eyes grey..., teeth defective.... Bilateral enlargement of the thyroid.... Expression weak & childish. Manner quick. Hair brown. Has an old injury of the right elbow joint caused by falling out of a loft during childhood, flexion and pronation being limited, but the arm is fairly well developed and useful.

Mental state: Patient has a peculiar frowning and staring expression, and in manner he is very nervous and in conversation uses the right side of his mouth during articulation which gives him a very one-sided look. He gives the following account of himself: 'I get a sort of nervous feeling coming over...

mostly coming on at night when asleep. I roar out and think I am talking to people.... When I wake from one of these attacks I feel confused and shivering all over. I used to have fits when I was a boy, taking "funny turns" until I was seven years old when they left me and I was 21 when they came on again.... Sometimes at night I hear voices when I am asleep & think the person is right beside me. These voices talk to me about silly things & sometimes curse & swear at me, this makes me feel very angry and I feel as if I could pull their heads off. These attacks have come on me when I have been in the street. I have fallen down unconscious, bitten my tongue & always foam at the mouth & sometimes wet myself, after an attack I want to lie about as I feel lazy and tired. Often after fits I feel suspicious of people and think they have not been treating me well.'

Salient points: Epileptic insanity associated with attacks of maniacal excitement; aural and visual hallucinations; patient is to a certain extent congenitally defective, his manner being facile and childish; marked thyroid enlargement.

On 1 July 1908 Dr Truby King records: 'Patient has been keeping very well and is not troubled now with hallucinations. He is quiet and well-behaved and I am about to give him a trial as "help" with the Plumbers.' And on 5 September: 'Manner childish and simple, has occasional "nocturnal fits" of which he has no recollection when questioned; is somewhat hypochondriacal.... Is at present working well in the Plumbers Shop.' Also a treatment for his goitre had been tried but found to be ineffective so was discontinued.

On 15 June 1909 George was transferred to the Orokonui Home in Waitati, an adjunct of the Seacliff hospital. A report dated 27 April 1910 reads:

At Waitati patient has had fits occasionally, at times 2 or 3 in one night. Mentally he is generally quiet and well-behaved, though when interfered with in a trifling degree by other patients he has shown himself hot-tempered, either striking the interferer or... [*in one case*] turning a hose on him. Bodily health fairly good. His thyroid... not noticeably changed since coming to Waitati.

George was transferred back to Seacliff on 12 January 1914, the medical record stating: 'He is full of complaints. Fits rare but severe. Good kitchen worker.' A November 1916 entry includes the comment: 'He is considerably demented & weeps readily without adequate cause.... Most emotional; works fairly well in kitchen'.

In April 1920 George is said to still be 'a good worker in the kitchen', with the following qualification:

When the cook is away he [*i.e. George*] becomes very 'bossy' and resents anyone coming into the kitchen. Impulsive, and will hit out if he thinks he can get the better of it. Excitable and emotional. Generally has a complaint about other patients which he brings to the Doctor. Complaints are always about patients calling him names. Fits are irregular. May go two or three weeks without a fit & then has 3 or 4 on end.

Physical condition good. Goitre large. Tremendous eater. Sleeps well. Weight 11st 6lbs [*72.5kg*].

In December 1924 he is reported not to be keeping well and so had been shifted from the kitchen to outdoor work, which brought about an improvement in his physical condition. By January 1926 he was back in the kitchen. His fitting and behaviour continue as before. A note dated 17 August of that year reads:

Patient still takes severe and mild fits at intervals. His cerebration is somewhat slow and his memory is poor. He gets very irritable at times. Is

very religious. He is working on the farm [*Orokonui?*]. Conduct is fair and he is clean and tidy. Bodily health is satisfactory. He has a greatly enlarged thyroid but it shows no signs of becoming toxic.

Further entries in his record include the following:

6.11.27 Received a severe scalp wound due to a fit during the night. Five sutures inserted.

4.1.29 A demented feeble-minded epileptic who has periods of irritability.

4.1.30 A demented childish epileptic who has frequent fits. Fair health.

3.7.30 Confined to bed suffering from Broncho-pneumonia.

6.7.30 Condition much worse – had a fit at 11pm being noisy & restless afterwards.... 4pm Special att'ant in charge of patient during the night.

7.7.30 Condition much worse, sinking slowly. Died at 1:15pm in the presence of Att'ant A. McInnis. Cause of death: Broncho-pneumonia; Cardiac failure.

George died in the Orokonui Home, and is buried in an unmarked grave, Block 5 Plot 16, in the Waitati Cemetery.

The final hospital report form completed in respect of George Samuel Hamilton shows that the last visitor he had received was his eldest sister Elizabeth (Mrs J.B. McIntosh) who had come to see him on 23 January 1928, almost two and a half years before his death. His five siblings all out-lived him, the youngest of t