

Timaru Herald. 4 March 1930

ACTIVE CAREER CLOSES.
DEATH OF MR WILLIAM EVANS.
A HARDY PIONEER.

The death occurred, at his residence, North Street, at an early hour yesterday morning, of Mr William Evans, at the age of 92 years. The death of Mr Evans leaves another gap in the ranks of the fast diminishing band of pioneers, men and women, who, in the face of difficulties, successfully built up a town which was destined to become one of the most progressive in the Dominion. Full recognition has from time to time been made of the work which the early settlers of this town and district accomplished, but the late Mr Evans will be known to posterity for the part he played in helping to provide the district with an outlet for the products of its fertile soil. But for his foresight and determination, Timaru to-day might not be enjoying the commercial status it does. Possessed of great faith in the possibilities of the town and district, and possessed also of a keen business mind, he caused to be established a business, which, to-day enjoys Dominion-wide repute.

Like many another, the late Mr Evans, in his early days, was of a roving disposition, and he spent many years on the goldfields of the South Island, and also in Australia. Born at Cahir, Tipperary, Ireland, on February 8, 1838, the late Mr Evans arrived in Melbourne with his parents in 1841. Deceased remained in that city for a period of approximately 20 years. He left school at the age of 13, and went to work in the country. The late Mr Evans arrived in New Zealand in 1861, but he remained for a few weeks only, returning to Australia with goods and horses to set himself up as a storekeeper on the goldfields in Victoria. After a period of four years, deceased returned once more to New Zealand, making for the Otago goldfields. Here again he set up in business as a storekeeper, but he soon tired of life in the south, chiefly because of an intense dislike of the cold climate. He left Dunedin in 1865, in the "City of Dunedin," and it was on his trip north to Lyttelton, en route to the West Coast, that the late Mr Evans caught his first glimpse of Timaru. Arriving on the Coast, he established a general merchant's business, and this he carried on for approximately nine years, enjoying a fair measure of success. During this period he made one visit to Timaru, this being in the s.s. "Maori." in 1868. On this occasion deceased had in his possession a letter of introduction from the late Mr John Reid, Corner Bush, who was a sleeping partner in the store doing business under the name of Reid and Monroe, situated where the Empire Hotel now stands. Mr Evans again visited Timaru in 1874, when the crops of wheat and oats were looking their best, and on this occasion he decided to throw in his lot with friends and settle here. That decision formed the nucleus of a career which will always occupy a prominent page in the official history of South Canterbury. Mr Evans established himself in an old foundry next to the then King's stables, in Stafford Street, and at once made arrangements for the necessary alterations to make the premises suitable for a grain store. He then returned to Christchurch with the object of bringing his family to Timaru. Mr Evans leased a four-roomed cottage in Le Cren's Terrace (until a house was built for the family in Theodocia Street) where they lived for many years.

From what he saw of the country in 1875, Mr Evans decided that South Canterbury would later be one of the best wheat-growing districts in New Zealand. Up to that time very little wheat had been grown in, or exported from, the district, but deceased lost no time in commencing business, and had the foundry altered within a few days into a grain store, and he also secured adjoining premises. The property soon blossomed out into a timber and coal yard, so that in the first week in January, 1875, he started in business as a grain, timber and coal merchant combined.

The greatest trouble confronting pioneers at that time was the want of proper shipping facilities, as the mode of loading and discharging vessels was per medium of surf boats from a landing

service erected on the open beach. The growing necessities of the place became much ahead of the shipping accommodation, and the vessels were detained through bad weather and lack of surf boats for a period of six weeks at a time. Mr Evans realised that such a state of affairs could not last, as they were proving a severe handicap to business men generally, and he determined to use his best endeavours to assist in making a safe port for shipping. About this time, Mr Evans made several trips to Australia, and he made it a rule to take particular notice of what was going on there in the way of breakwater construction, and came to the conclusion that rough rubble stones of a large size would suit the requirements of Timaru for a breakwater mole much better than concrete blocks, besides being not nearly so costly. This was especially the case, as he knew there were splendid quarries of the best quality blue stone, where blocks of any size could be procured within a short distance of the contemplated breakwater. He strongly advocated rough rubble accordingly, but the marine engineers of that day ridiculed the idea of rubble stone for the breakwater mole. Nothing would do but 25-ton blocks of concrete, as they insisted that the rubble stones would not resist the storms which were sometimes experienced. As a matter of course, Mr Evan's opinion had no effect, as the other members of the Board of Works sided with the then engineers.

The trips which Mr Evans made to Australia were all associated with his business, he having worked up a fairly extensive export trade in wheat and flour. Some idea of his activeness may be had from the fact that on one occasion he had business to transact with three merchants in Brisbane. Mr Evans was in Melbourne at the time, and his vessel was to sail for New Zealand in two days' time. He took train to Sydney, and caught a coastal steamer to Brisbane, arriving there at 7 o'clock in the morning. He had previously advised the merchants that he was coming, and he contracted with them for 1400 tons of flour, and within an hour was on his way back to Melbourne.

The information gained by the late Mr Evans on these visits across the Tasman proved of immense value to him when he was elected to a seat on the first Harbour Board, in the interests of the Chamber of Commerce in 1877. One of the first actions of the Board was to engage the services of Sir John Coode to report on the proposed work. Sir John was at that time considered to be the leading engineer of the British Empire. The Board of Works had previously been in communication with him, and he had, some two or three years before, sent out his representative (Mr Balfour) to report on the practicability or otherwise of constructing a breakwater works at Timaru, but whilst making a survey, Mr Balfour was unfortunately drowned. Sir John, after a searching investigation, handed a report to the Board. This report the late Mr Evans heartily endorsed, as it coincided with his own views regarding the most suitable breakwater for Timaru. Other plans were brought forward, and eventually that of the late Mr John Goodall was adopted, and work was commenced. The travelling shingle began to bank up very quickly, and sand also commenced to fill up the harbour. Various engineering schemes were put forward, but the Board refrained from taking action, as it feared going to the ratepayers for a loan to put the work in hand. The late Mr Evans had all along kept urging the Board to extend the mole with rubble stone, and he placed his opinions before the ratepayers through the newspapers. At last the Board sent a deputation to him asking him to accept the chairmanship. After discussing the position for some time, he agreed to accept the chairmanship on one condition, that the Board should be unanimous in supporting him in the action he intended to take to try and carry out the work of the extension. An assurance of support being forthcoming, Mr Evans was elected chairman. He first obtained the support of the then Premier (The Rt. Hon. Richard Seddon), and through him, the Government. The Board were obliged to obtain the support of the ratepayers to a loan of £100,000 to carry out the work of erecting a new breakwater, and after a good deal of opposition in Parliament, the loan was approved. The work was commenced, and the consummation of efforts in which Mr Evans played a prominent part, is the Eastern Extension

which for many years has withstood the elements, and has been instrumental in establishing Timaru as an important shipping centre.

The late Mr Evans's public activities were confined practically to the Harbour Board. He was, however, a member of the directorate of the Timaru Gas Company, being chairman from 1903 to 1913.

As a business man, the late Mr Evans had a long and active career. When he commenced operations as a storekeeper on the goldfields, he had had little experience to assist him, but few of the ventures to which he turned his hand failed to succeed. After his arrival in Timaru in 1875, he established a business of grain, coal and timber merchant, and carried on in this connection for thirteen years, when steps were taken to form the company which is in existence at the present time. The first meeting of shareholders was held on February 8, 1888, and it was at this meeting that the late Mr Evans was appointed chairman of directors. It was not until January 7 of the following year, however, that the Atlas mill commenced operations. Some idea of the extent of the company's operations during the 42 years of its existence may be had from the fact that during this period the amount paid in salaries and wages totals £205,428, and that paid in shipping and railage charges, £99,038. From the date of the commencement of operations up to January 31 last, the output of the mill was 236,796 tons of flour, 50,104 tons of bran, and 49,238 tons of pollard. The quantity of wheat used in milling during the same period was 12,251,348 bushels.

The late Mr Evans occupied the position of managing-director for 42 years, retiring from office only a short time ago.

The late Mr Evans was married to Miss Annie Jacks, of Melbourne, and they are survived by Misses F. M., E. A., and E. L. Evans.

Mr Evans's second wife was Miss E. B. Morton, of Dunedin. The deceased leaves two sons and two daughters by his second marriage, Mr W. T. Evans (Fairlie), Dr. G. M. Evans, who is at present in the Old Country, Mrs E. K. Caws, of London, and Miss Alice Evans, of Timaru. Flags were flown on many of the business houses in Timaru yesterday, as a mark of respect to the late Mr Evans, who is to be buried this afternoon.

Reference to the death of the late Mr Evans was made at the weekly luncheon of the Timaru Rotary Club yesterday. Mr B. L. Blodorn (vice-president), in the absence of the president (Mr P. B. Foote) said that members would regret to hear of the death of their old and esteemed member, Rotarian W. Evans. The late Mr Evans was probably one of the oldest Rotarians in the world, having reached the age of 92 years. He felt sure Rotarians would join with him in expressing sincere sympathy with the bereaved relatives. Out of respect for their late member, Rotarians stood in silence for a few moments.