



Elizabeth Creilman Dreaver was a pioneer in Dunedin's fashion and drapery trades. Born in Glasgow in or about 1848, she was the daughter of Elizabeth McHoul, née Creelman [sic], and Hugh McHoul, a boat builder.¹ She worked as a domestic servant before migrating to Otago on the *Robert Henderson* in 1870.² She married James Dreaver at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Dunedin, on 6 March 1873.³

James had briefly been a partner in Robson and Dreaver, a tailoring firm established in 1864 and wound up after a disastrous fire the following year.⁴ Little is known of his activities over the next decade.⁵ In 1878 Elizabeth opened the Red Flag Drapery, although this name was soon dropped and the business became popularly known as 'Mrs Dreaver's'.⁶ James remained active in the background, and it was under his name that a new block of buildings

¹ Death registration 1934/10770.

² *Otago Gazette*, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ourstuff/RobertHenderson.htm>

³ Marriage register, St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/archives/marriageregisters/standrewsdnmarriages3.htm>

⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, 18 October 1864, 3 (advertisement); 16 March 1865, 4.

⁵ He may have run a toy shop for a time, see *Otago Daily Times*, 22 December 1874, 1 (advertisement).

⁶ *Otago Witness*, 10 August 1878, 21 (advertisement).

was built in George Street in 1879. Designed by William Grasby, they included three shops, milliners' rooms, and upstairs dwellings.⁷

Early advertisements offered costumes to fit at a few hours notice and described the firm as the cheapest house in the city.⁸ Stock included dresses, jackets, skirts, mackintoshes, children's wear, feather boas, and other goods expected of a large drapery. Dreaver's became well-known for a parcel post service (with money back guarantee) offered to country customers.⁹

Hats, especially for the races, were a specialty. Milliners who worked for the firm in its first years included Miss Graham, formerly head milliner to Mrs W.A. Jenkins, and another who had worked at Madame Louise's in London's Regent Street.¹⁰ In 1888, at a hat carnival at the Columbia Rink, Elizabeth Dreaver won first prize from about 100 entries for the most original hat, with a design representing a pair of roller skates. She also won the prize for the smallest hat.¹¹

In 1885 Elizabeth left Dunedin for Scotland, citing ill health.¹² Unable to sell her business, she returned after five months with a stock of purchases made in London and Paris.¹³ From this time she vigorously promoted the 'scientific' method of pattern cutting that was revolutionising sewing. She imported the pattern books of the Butterick Publishing Company, which then had over 1,000 agencies throughout the United States and Canada. She became Otago's sole agent for American Scientific System of Dresscutting, gave lessons at Otago Girls' High School, and offered board to out of town pupils.¹⁴ By 1893 she had taught the system to 700 people.¹⁵

James Dreaver died on New Years' Eve 1904, aged 63.¹⁶ In the first decades of the twentieth century Elizabeth continued to manage the business, which some advertisements described as the 'Shrine of Fashion'.¹⁷ Management was eventually taken over by other family members.

Elizabeth Creilman Dreaver died at her home in Clyde Street, Dunedin, on 30 November 1934, aged 86. She was survived by three sons and two daughters.¹⁸ Her remains, and those of her husband James, are buried in the Northern Cemetery.

⁷ *Otago Daily Times*, 15 January 1879, 1; 4 June 1879, 3.

⁸ *Otago Witness*, 31 July 1880, 2 (advertisement).

⁹ *Otago Witness* 20 February 1896, 10 (advertisement).

¹⁰ *Otago Witness*, 16 November 1878, 25 (advertisement); 29 May 1880, 2 (advertisement).

¹¹ *Otago Daily Times*, 26 June 1888, 3.

¹² *Otago Daily Times*, 29 December 1884, 3 (advertisement).

¹³ *Otago Daily Times*, 17 February 1885, 3 (advertisement).

¹⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, 26 March 1887, 3 (advertisement); *Otago Witness*, 29 April 1887, 9 (sole rights); *North Otago Times*, 3 May 1890, 4 (lessons at Otago Girls')

¹⁵ *Otago Witness*, 2 February 1893, 24 (advertisement)

¹⁶ *Otago Witness*, 4 January 1905, 47.

¹⁷ *Otago Witness*, 20 December 1905, 45 (advertisement).

¹⁸ Death registration 1934/10770.

Dreaver's continued to trade until about 1953, and the firm's buildings still stand.¹⁹
Decorative tiles displaying the Dreaver name can be seen at the entrance to the Hydro Surf shop in George Street, between Moray Place and St Andrew Street.

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[Last para is important as many people are curious about these tiles]

¹⁹ Date from last entry in *Stone's Otago and Southland Directory*; Archives New Zealand defunct company file DAAB/9055/D93/59/e/1924.