



Henry Driver was born in Delaware, USA, the son of Joseph Edmonston and Mary Jemima Driver. As a young man he went to the Victorian goldfields, and became an employee of Lord & Co, importers of American merchandise, before becoming a partner in a sheep station on the Murray River.

In 1861 he established himself in Dunedin as a horse trader, and later as a merchant and stock agent in Driver, McLean & Co.

In 1862 he married Mary Frances Morton, and soon afterward secured a contract for a telegraph line from Dunedin to Port Chalmers – the second such line in New Zealand.

Becoming a public figure, he was a JP, Dunedin City Councillor 1865-68, member of Otago Provincial Council 1866-71, and a member of Parliament for Roslyn 1869-71.

His firm expanded rapidly with interests in several runs, but the Dunedin manager of the bank of New South Wales allowed its loans to exceed the limits set by his Australian superiors. The Melbourne manager described Henry Driver as a “swaggering, unprincipled Yankee who will some day clear off with some of our coin”. To prevent this Driver, McLean & Co were forced into bankruptcy. Driver had to resign his provincial Council and Parliamentary seats, and his warrant as a JP.

He was resilient however both in business and politics. With the dismissed manager of the bank he set up a new business partnership, Driver & Stewart. When this firm was merged with the New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Agency Co he became manager, and later of the Mutual Agency Co.

From 1872-6 he was again a member of the Provincial Council, Member of Parliament for Roslyn 1878-81 and Hokonui 1881-84.

His land speculations included the freeholding of runs at Conical Hills and Waimea Plains with Australian loan money. He also purchased the freehold of the Horseshoe Bush Estate at Clarendon. With other wealthy men such as William Larnach and G.M. Bell he was heavily involved in the ambitious schemes of the NZ Agricultural Co which collapsed in 1890.

A racing man and foundation member of the Dunedin Jockey Club, in 1877 Driver persuaded R.C. Bagot to travel from Melbourne with the plans for the Geelong racecourse, and arranged for the laying out of Forbury Park along similar lines. For several seasons Driver was a starter, later a judge, and President of the Jockey Club 1879-80.

Henry Driver died at his home in Maori Hill on 23 January 1893, survived by five sons and three daughters. He is remembered in the name of the main thoroughfare up to Maori Hill, Drivers Road.

Henry Driver is buried with his wife and two children in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery under a fine memorial.