



The death of Mr Theodore Russell, of Lake Wanaka, has been an event of sad importance. He was largely interested in, and almost the leader of, all kinds of progressive works at Wanaka lake. Saw mills, steamers, and large timber contracts had through his energy become the characteristics of that district, and his loss will be a severe blow to the locality. He leaves a wife and four children, fortunately, in good circumstances.

On 10 February 1877 the Otago Witness reported on the opening of a new sawmill at Lake Wanaka by Messrs Theodore Russell & Co.

In 1876 the Cromwell Argus reported that " the Westland Government having put a number of men to complete the Haast track from the West Coast inwards.....and last week the first mail was carried overland from the west Coast to Pembroke, whence it was brought down to Cromwell by Mr Theodore Russell.

In 1905 the Otago Witness reported on the death of Mrs Celia Russell of Lake Wanaka Hotel – there passed from us one of the most highly esteemed and widely-known residents of the county. Mrs Russell had been suffering for some time, and died on Sunday morning last. Deceased had kept the Wanaka Hotel for number of years – kept it so cheerful, comfortable and inviting that it justly had the name of being second to none outside the cities. Very deep regret prevails at her death. Four grown-up daughters and one son survive to mourn an irreparable loss.

An advertisement of the time talks of “ the Wanaka Hotel at the foot of Lake Wanaka, Pembroke, Proprietress Mrs T Russell, superior accommodation, every home comfort provided, boats at disposal of visitors, good stabling, loose boxes, and paddocks, billiards, wines, spirits and ales”

Theodore Russell was born circa 1843 in Hobart, Tasmania.

In the early 1860s he is involved in a venture rafting timber down the Clutha River to Cromwell with George M. Hassing and Charles Hedditch, and others.

In 1865 he married Celia Isabell Hedditch, Charles Hedditch’s sister and had six children by him.

In 1866 he was in partnership with Charles Hedditch and others in the Gin and Raspberry gold claim at Cardrona.

In 1868 Russell built the Wanaka Hotel and Store, with Hedditch and Russell as proprietors, on a site of some 14 acres.

In 1877 with J.B.Ewing he purchased a sawmill in the Matukituki Valley.

Theodore Russell was also involved with the land purchase and building of the Wanaka Town Hall (now demolished) opposite the hotel.

Theodore Russell died on November 14, 1877, and is buried in the Wanaka cemetery alongside his wife, and one son, Theodore Russell Jun. who died aged 3 years and 8 months.

Prepared by the Historic cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from information supplied by the Upper Clutha Records society Inc., the online website Papers past was also consulted for newspaper reports of the day.