

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

(MR. LAURENSEN, CHAIRMAN.)

WEDNESDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 1901.

WILLIAM REEVE HASELDEN, Stipendiary Magistrate, examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] I will ask you to state in what direction you think the regulations under the Old-age Pensions Act can be improved, and after you have made a statement I suppose you will have no objection to answer any questions put to you by the Committee in reference to the regulations?—As far as my own work is concerned under the Old-age Pensions Act, I have not much fault to find with the regulations. I read them with a good deal of elasticity, and so far I have succeeded in avoiding complications either with the statutes or the regulations. I should like to make some suggestions with regard to work which certainly indirectly concerns me, but the operative part of which would rest primarily with the Registrar. I may say that there have been about 740 claims dealt with in Wellington alone since the commencement of the Act.

2. *Mr. Field.*] Seven hundred and forty claims in Wellington City?—Yes, in Wellington City. I have not investigated all those claims, because I have only been here since May, 1899. I investigated about four hundred claims in the Wairarapa during the two years and a quarter I was there. Some little time ago I had a list made—a nominal roll—of the 740 claims, and forwarded to the Inspector of Police, with a request that he would divide it up amongst his men, and have a report sent in to me touching the character of the pensioners, their mode of living, and any property which they might have, or which they might be supposed to have. I received this roll back about a fortnight ago, and in about eight cases it had been found that pensions have been obtained by persons who had property to an extent which would disentitle them in some instances to the whole of their pensions, and in some instances to part of their pensions. During my investigation of pension-claims every assistance has been given to me by police officers, Registrars of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, and the Immigration Department—which, although dead, has its records. The chief difficulty which Magistrates labour under is that the applications for pensions are made *ex parte*, and the Magistrates are really put in the position of inquisitors. It is very difficult to maintain a judicial attitude with stupid or reluctant witnesses, and in a few cases—a small percentage—the advisability of the Registrar of Pensions being represented does appear. In most cases the Magistrate can with kindly tact get out the facts, but in a small number of cases I think it is advisable that the Registrar should be represented.

3. *Mr. Arnold.*] Represented by counsel?—Either by legally admitted counsel or by some officer of the department.

4. Is he not there in person?—No; the Registrar is not represented at all, either personally or by counsel. The question of age is one of the chief difficulties. Applicants produce their marriage-certificates or immigration-papers, in which their age is stated at less than that which they now say is correct. The probabilities are that they are truthful now, and that they are really of the age they say; and that they misstated their age when getting married, or when they came out to New Zealand under the assisted-immigration scheme. I understand that in those days no one was assisted under the immigration regulations who was over forty years of age, and consequently they put their age down as under forty. If we take that statement as correct they are not sixty-five years of age now; but they say they are over sixty-five when claiming the pension. Through the means of the police investigations I have recently discovered several cases—about eight out of the 740 claims—where the applicants either had money in the Post-Office Savings-Bank to a considerable amount as compared with the maximum amount which a pensioner can have, or landed property. The excuse is that they do not understand the questions put to them, and I have sent notices to those pensioners. Most of them have come in and delivered up their certificates, and the matter will be arranged and adjusted in some way so that they shall not get more from the country than they are entitled to. I may instance one case where a man produced a marriage-certificate which he had palpably altered. In my opinion, in this case a prosecution ought to have taken place as an example to others, but I declined to act as prosecutor and judge in the same case, and the pension was simply refused. I think it is more than likely that some persons have been absent from the colony for a longer period than that allowed by law, and that we have been unable to find it out. That is a most difficult circumstance to discover; but, on the whole, I believe the percentage of fraudulent or improper claims is very small indeed, but without increased care I think the percentage is likely to increase now. I have here a number of claims which I have brought with me as illustrations. [Particulars in some of these claims discussed.] I have a form [produced] which is a form I devised myself, and which the Government printed and distributed. I think, if it is necessary to specify the forms, it might very conveniently be put into the new regulations. Regulation 8 says, “The pension-claim, with a minute of the Magistrate’s decision thereon, shall be filed in the Court.” Well, I found that the method of noting memoranda on the back of the pension-claims was inconvenient, and this really sets out what is proved and disproved, and after four years’ experience I find it a very good form. [See Appendix A.]

5. *The Chairman.*] You suggest that as a form for every Magistrate to give out?—Yes. There is a form of claim and a form of certificate. This is a form of minute. Under Rule 9 it is provided, “If a Magistrate’s decision is that the claim is rejected, such minute shall specify all the material points which he finds to be respectively proved, disproved, and not proved.” There is no form for that except that one I produce. It is not in the regulations.