

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER, 1904.

JOHN WALSH examined on oath. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation, Mr. Walsh?—Farmer.
2. Where do you reside?—In the Eltham district.
3. Will you state, briefly, how you took up the land, and just recite the facts that you gave us in your petition as briefly as possible?—Thank you. I took up the land about two years ago—I am not sure of the exact time—from the Hawera Borough Council. I paid a half-years' rent in advance and got the land.
4. Just mention how much land you got, will you?—About 112 acres.
5. It was a lease, was it not?—Yes, for twenty-one years, at 2s. an acre. At the end of the twenty-one years, if the land should not be leased to me again, I would have a right to compensation not exceeding £5 per acre.
6. *Mr. Buchanan.*] For improvements?—For improvements. Then I let a contract for the 112 acres, and I had three men working on this land, when I got word from the Commissioner of Crown Lands at New Plymouth that I had better cease felling bush on the land; that the Government were going to take it over, and that they would compel me to give it up. I said that I was not dealing with the Government; I was dealing with the Hawera Borough Council, and under any circumstances I could not give a decided answer until the Hawera Borough Council gave me word to that effect. The Commissioner at the time came to see me, and met me on the section adjoining. He said he had a letter from the Mayor of Hawera, to the effect that he had stated to me that it would be better for me to cease felling bush. That was to the Commissioner, not to me. "Well," I said, "if I get a letter from the Mayor to the same effect I will certainly knock off the men working, but until I get that I cannot do so." He was satisfied with that. He did not think I was in any way unreasonable, and the next question he asked me was what compensation I would take provided this land was taken from me. I said that I could not decide then; I would not like to say what it would be, but I said, "It will be no harder than that of the other men who have it," and mentioned one of them especially—Mr. O'Connor. He was one of those who had some of the leased land. The Commissioner took a note of this, and seemed to be satisfied with it. But where I lived was on his way home, and he called at the house to see if he could get any further information. I could give him nothing but what I had stated. I had not the power to do so until I had seen the Hawera Borough Council. He said to me, "Now, could you not come to a conclusion and put an estimate on what you want for compensation?" "No," I said, "I cannot." I said, "I would like to go down to Wellington some day next week, and I will then let you know further, or I will send word to my boy at home and he will deliver the message." The Commissioner said, "You will manage it all right there. I will give you a letter of introduction to a man at Wellington that will settle the case." I thanked him for that. I thought the letter of introduction would be a grand thing. So he gave me this letter to a man named Marchant, in another part of the town. I went to this Mr. Marchant, produced the letter, and he read it over. Then he laughed and said, "I have nothing at all to do with it. I am surprised at a man of the Commissioner's ability not knowing better than to send you here. Nevertheless, I will do what I can for you. I will send a messenger up to the Minister of Lands, and you will make it all right there." I went up to the Minister of Lands, and the most unreasonable man I met was the Minister of Lands. When I went into his room he said, "You are one of these lessees, are you not?" I said, "Yes." "Well," he said, "I am surprised—in fact, I put you down to be worse than those that let the land to you." Of course, I did not know what to say. I knew that I was in an awkward position. I think that any man will take a good thing when he gets the opportunity. So that was my position. If a man had come to me the day I paid my half-year's rent and said, "I will give you £800 for your goodwill there," I would not have sold it. The land was better to me than a man's offer to give £800.
7. *The Chairman.*] What we want to know is to whom you let the contract, and the terms of the contract?—I let the contract at £1 per acre, or at £1 ls. provided the bush was felled by a certain date, to my satisfaction.
8. What was to be done?—The whole lot was to be underscrubbed at first—as is usually the case with bushfelling.
9. All the bush was to be cleared off?—All the scrub was to be cleared first.
10. Was the contract in writing?—Yes. Mr. Major has the contract. I sent a copy of the contract—indeed, it is the real contract, stamped, and all—to Mr. Major.
11. Who signed the contract?—A man of the name of Williams. Then, there were two more in the contract.
12. Who were they?—A man of the name of Sherwood, and my own son.
13. The three were Williams, Sherwood, and your own boy?—Yes.
14. How long were they there?—They must have been fully three months there, but whether they were working all the time they were there or not I cannot say. They were fully three weeks before I could come to a settlement with them.
15. How long were they there altogether?—They would be there close upon four months, I expect. I could not tell you exactly what time they were there.
16. How much work did they do?—I could not tell you.
17. Did you look at the work afterwards to see if it had been done?—No. I had often been there when they were working, but not since they knocked off.