

of £5 per acre or they would not have spent more than £5 on improvements? Why did you put more than £5 in improvements on your land when you knew that you could only be compensated up to £5?—It would pay me to do it.

68. It would pay you to lose that 10s. an acre because you would make more out of the land meanwhile?—Yes.

69. *Mr. Kerr.*] Did you know or do you know under what conditions you could get a new lease in 1900?—No, I did not know.

70. *The Chairman.*] You said you knew nothing at all about the right to convert in the Act of 1892?—That is so, sir.

71. You did not know whether you had a right to convert or not?—Not anything after that.

72. *Mr. Kerr.*] Do you know now what conditions you would have been under if you had taken up a lease in 1900?—Yes, I know since I have been in town. I heard on Saturday last.

73. You did not know before that?—No.

74. *The Chairman.*] Seeing that you gentlemen took such an active interest in this matter—and rightly so—and held a meeting, do you think it possible that other lessees should know nothing at all about this? We have it in evidence that a certain lessee did not know anything at all about his right to convert?—Well, we did not travel about much.

75. Did all your people round your district know?—I think they all knew round, say, Normanby and Okaiawa.

76. Did you have the regulations before you?—Yes, I think the thing was generally discussed.

77. Would you discuss it without having the regulations and without having the Act?—I do not think we had any Act, but we would have the regulations.

78. You knew exactly all the conditions under which you had the right to come under the 1892 Act?—Yes.

79. And in plain English it would not have paid you to have come under?—Not at that time, sir.

80. *Mr. Bell.*] Who convened the meeting that was held?—I cannot say, but I think it was Mr. Heslop. He held a good bit of this land.

81. Was he in your district?—Yes, he was on the Hastings Road, but I am not quite sure it was him.

82. Was there a circular issued calling you to the meeting?—No, I think it was just casually mentioned from one to the other. He may have written to some.

83. Were there settlers there from other parts of the district?—Not at this meeting.

84. Only those living around about you?—Round about the locality. There was a good deal of Native land round Okaiawa and on the Mountain Road, and it was the lessees there that would meet.

85. *Mr. Welsh.*] It was a local meeting?—Yes.

86. Was the railway-line through in those days?—Yes, it was through from New Plymouth to Hawera.

87. *Mr. Kerr.*] You say you were one of the original lessees?—Yes.

88. How did you come to know that the compensation you would get for the improvements you might effect would be limited to £5?—I was supplied with a copy of the regulations. I was in the office several times. In the first place, I tendered for a section, and some one tendered above me, and then I came back to the office to see if any had not been applied for.

89. *The Chairman.*] You were anxious to get it?—Yes, I wanted to get a piece of land.

90. Do you mean to say you would not take it now at the same price?—Yes, I would take it now at the same price.

91. *Mr. Kerr.*] You were furnished by the office with a copy of the regulations?—Yes. Mr. Mackay and another man in the office gave me a lot of information. I had several conversations with them.

92. *The Chairman.*] May the Commission take it that you were fairly conversant with all the conditions existing at the time?—Yes.

HENRY PARKER BEST sworn and examined. (No. 3.)

1. *Mr. Welsh.*] You are a farmer, and live at Normanby?—Yes.

2. And you are a brother of the last witness?—Yes, that is so.

3. Do you also hold a lease under the Act of 1881?—Yes.

4. What is the number of your section?—Section 17, Block XIV, and Section 14, Block XIV, Ngaire—two separate leases.

5. Were you an original lessee?—No.

6. How long ago is it since you purchased?—Section No. 17 I have had about twenty-four years.

7. Who did you buy from?—From Mr. J. Smith.

8. And the other section you have held how long?—About twenty years.

9. When you purchased you were aware of the £5 limitation in regard to improvements?—At that time, yes.

10. Over what improvements did you think you were to be protected to the extent of £5?—Bushfelling, grassing, buildings, fencing, and general improvements.

11. What were the nature of the improvements on the land when you purchased it?—On Section 17 there were about 20 acres of bush felled and ring-fenced and a small whare.

12. And the other section?—That was all felled, grassed, and fenced.

13. Did you ever apply to convert?—Yes, in 1893.

14. And did you proceed to convert or not?—No.

15. Why not?—I considered the valuation was too high at that time compared with other valuations on the road.