

ROBERT MARSHALL, a resident in the district for about seven years, and digging gum the whole time.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had followed the evidence of the preceding witnesses. So far as the hilly land was concerned, the gum there was in it had been dug out, and there was no use in keeping it as a gum reserve. He had tried face-working in the swamps, but it had not always been payable.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] He was of opinion that firing should be prohibited for certain months in the year—say, December to April.

AHIPARA, TUESDAY, 7TH APRIL, 1914.

JOSEPH DRAGICEVICH, Farmer and Stock-dealer at Ahipara for eight years.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had about five hundred head of sheep (Romney-Merino) and eighty head of cattle, and was doing fairly well. He knew the south part of Rotoroa Reserve well, and considered the swamp part towards the Awanui River contained gum in places. At present digging was going on along the sides of the swamp, and also in the basins, but there was no digging in the main swamp, as there was too much water in it. The soil in the big swamp was good in parts, and there was not much timber in it. In its present state the swamp was not of use to the diggers, as there was too much water on it. His holdings comprised 1,375 acres, and 300 acres farther north, part of it being in grass, and about 300 acres were sand-drift. The sand had encroached on from 50 to 100 acres since he came into the district eight years ago. In regard to the wine-shops, witness had seen a great deal of drinking about, and believed it to be a great evil, more especially to the Maoris. He had been on the Epakauri Reserve, and knew diggers did well there some years ago.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] Epakauri was a winter field, and the ground could not be speared at this time of the year.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had cultivated 107 acres on his holding, growing melons, kumeras, potatoes, and cabbage. Cultivation repaid with manure.

*To Mr. Stewart.*] If the Government supplied plants for sand-binding purposes he would be glad to plant them.

AHIPARA, WEDNESDAY, 8TH APRIL, 1914.

THOMAS STEWART HOUSTON, J.P., a resident of Ahipara for twenty-three years, and engaged for the past fourteen years in the gum-buying business.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had a good general knowledge of the country and the various gum reserves, and especially the country between the locality known as "Sweetwater" and Ahipara. He was acquainted with Russell's holding, near Lake Ngatu, where some thirty or forty men were working in the swamp. In his opinion the south part of the Rotoroa Gum Reserve adjoining the Awanui River contained gum, but the field was unworkable in its present wet state. He had never known any one to dig there except around the hills, but "hooking" had been done in the swamp proper. From a farmer's point of view he knew that the swamp, if drained, would make first-class farms. In its present condition he would be willing to pay £3 per acre for the land, and if drained the land would be worth from £5 to £15 per acre, especially that part near the river. In his opinion the land should be drained and cut up for the benefit of the whole district. The difficulty in regard to the gum could be met by charging a royalty for it for the upkeep of the works. The best method of charging the royalty would be a levy of 5 per cent. on the value of the gum extracted, which would meet the case of all grades of gum. Another stipulation should be that when the gum was dug the land should be left in a fit state for cultivation. [Witness pointed out that already the kauri-gum reservation over this particular area and other areas in the Mangonui County had been lifted under the provisions of the Kaitaia District Drainage Act, 1913.] In regard to the Epakauri Reserve, he had known a large number of men to be digging there in former years, as many as a hundred at a time, but the field had been abandoned during the last two or three years.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] He regarded the land as still gum-bearing except on the beach portion, and considered the reserve should be retained for the diggers. About two-thirds of the Ahipara Reserve consisted of sand-drift, under which good gum had been found in parts. As it would never be fit for farming purposes, he considered the reserve should be retained for gum-digging. He had always regarded the sand-drift as a serious menace to the country, and in particular it would become a danger to the drainage operations about the Tongonge Reserve, and eventually spread through the Kaitaia Swamp unless checked.

*To Mr. Stewart.*] If supplied with plants settlers would readily plant the same for their own protection.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] In regard to firing on the gum reserves, he had seen a great deal of damage done by indiscriminate firing by diggers and others, and if persisted in it must destroy the future livelihood of diggers. In his opinion fires should be stopped altogether on the peaty swamps. Facing-work in the swamps was not practicable unless a body of men could be got to work together. Potholes, except the very deep ones, gradually fill up in time, but they were a danger to stock in many instances. He knew the field called "Sweetwater": the main swamp in it contained from 200 to 300 acres, and it had been worked to his knowledge for the last twenty years. The influx on the field was caused by the riddlings becoming of commercial value. Last year he handled about £4,000 worth of gum, partly won from his own field (about 800 acres)