

prior to January, 1848, are entitled to free grants of land, and that a memorial to both Houses of Legislature be prepared for presentation, embodying their views, praying that claims may be investigated and satisfied.' ” That public meeting was very crowded, and was well attended by *bond fide* early settlers of the colony. They had taken a vast interest in the movement for several years, but nothing had been done in the matter up to the present time, although a great deal had been said upon the subject. They had waited for one party and another to take the matter up, and he (witness), being one of the oldest settlers, had been deputed to bring the matter before Parliament. The result of that request and of the public meeting was the petition now before the Committee. The 22nd clause states, “That, inasmuch as the naval and military settlers have received from the Colonial Government, under the authority of the General Assembly, grants of land, and up to a recent period the Volunteers also, the pioneer settlers of New Zealand, who, in addition to the drawbacks and difficulties referred to above, had also, from time to time, to perform military duty in various parts of the North Island, and in the settlement of Nelson, believe they have an equal claim to the consideration of the Government.” With regard to the question what would be considered a fair thing for the settlers to claim, he suggested that the settlers who considered they had a claim should send in their claims to any one the Government might appoint to receive them. That could be done easily, and in an inexpensive way, by the issue of a form which the settlers should fill up, stating the date of their arrival, where they reside, the circumstances in which they are placed, and the nature of the claim they consider themselves entitled to. He knew there were many persons who had brought claims before the House upon several occasions, which had not been entered into; but if those of the petitioners were entertained, and some course such as that he had suggested were adopted, his opinion was that it would not be so formidable an affair as many persons were disposed to imagine. There was no expression of opinion on the part of the meeting as to the quantity of land that should be given to each early settler; but his opinion was that sixty acres would be a reasonable amount. That would be to each individual—man, woman, and child. The claimants had no idea what would be the number of individuals who would be entitled to or would be likely to claim. It was, however, stated at the meeting that at the end of 1848 it was estimated that 10,000 people had been introduced into the colony, but since then a great many had either died or left the country. Settlement upon the land should, he himself thought, be one of the conditions on which the claims, if entertained, should be granted. He thought they should have power to lease land granted, but not to alienate it. With regard to the limit of the period to 1848, he knew that a good many of the early settlers considered that the claims should be limited to the very earliest years of the colony—the first three or four years. There would be no objection to altering the limit, which was merely suggestive. At the public meeting there was an attempt made to make it a much later period than that named in the petition—namely, to extend it to 1853. The limitation was put at 1848 purposely to exclude the settlers of Canterbury and Otago, because they acquired peaceable possession of their lands for a small sum of money, while the settlers in the North Island have not acquired theirs in some cases up to the present time.

REPORT

Of PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE ON Petition of GEORGE CRAWFORD, as Chairman of a Meeting of Early settlers in New Zealand.

THE petitioners set forth the difficulties and dangers to which they were subjected as the pioneer settlers; and state that, as grants of land have from time to time been given to naval and military settlers, and also to Volunteers, they consider that they are equally entitled to the consideration of the Government, and pray that a full inquiry be made into their case.

I am directed to report that, while the Committee fully admit the difficulties and privations to which the pioneer settlers were subjected, and sympathize with them in the trials and hardships they endured in forming the nucleus of settlements through the colony, they cannot make any special recommendation to the House on their behalf.

T. KELLY,
Chairman, Public Petitions Committee.

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