

304. *The Mayor.*] Is it not a fact that the great majority of passengers from there either ride or drive into the Ashburton?—Yes; a good many go by Methven and round by Rakaia to Ashburton.

305. *The Commissioner.*] How do you account for their going round by the Rakaia to the Ashburton, when they have the Anama Station close by?—Because it is nearer to the greater portion of the people at the north end, and they can go by Methven better than by Anama. They come down by the express to Ashburton, and they can go and come in one day.

306. Do you not think that the diversion of the traffic is to be accounted for by the fact that there is a daily train from Methven and a train only twice a week on the Anama line?—That might make some difference, although I do not think it would make much. People at that end of the bush took to using the Methven line from the time when it was first opened. I did not get one of the passengers from the day that line opened.

307. *The Mayor.*] If the proposed extension to Bowyer's Stream were opened do you think that, with a daily train, the passenger traffic would come that way instead of by Methven?—It might. It would certainly increase the population. You must bear in mind that I am judging from my coaching experience, and there is a great difference between coach traffic and railway traffic.

Mr. GEORGE ST. HILL, examined.

308. *The Commissioner.*] You are a builder in Ashburton?—Yes.

309. Have you had much experience with the Mount Somers building stones?—Yes.

310. They are limestones?—Yes.

311. Do these stones command a ready sale here?—They would if they could be got. The only stone available is the Anama stone, but that is very hard for working. As it is now, we send to Oamaru for stone; but if the Anama stone were supplied to the builder he would have to estimate the cost of working it, and we could supply the material from Oamaru and work it for the same cost that it would take to work the Anama stone. So we have to send seventy to a hundred miles for stone, instead of getting it close by.

312. Is the Alford Forest and Mount Somers stone easily worked?—Yes; and if this railway were made we could get the stone within some twenty-three miles, instead of sending for it to Oamaru.

313. What do you use it for?—Facings, and so on.

314. Do the people prefer it to brick?—It is almost prohibitive now; but if the railway were extended to Mount Somers it would reduce the cost of the material, and it would undoubtedly be used more generally than it is now.

315. In that case, do you think there would be a considerable consumption of it?—I should think so, if we could get it cheaper.

316. What do you use Oamaru stone for?—For quoins and arches.

317. For ornamental work only?—Yes; but it is useful as well as ornamental.

318. Do you approve of using Oamaru stone for house-building?—Yes, decidedly.

319. Do you not find it very porous and spongy?—No; it turns green at first, but it hardens afterwards, when it is exposed to the atmosphere.

320. Where is the stone situated at Mount Somers that you speak of as suitable for building?—I refer to Peache's quarry.

321. *The Mayor.*] Is it not a fact that there are several houses built of brick with stone facings in this township?—Yes; and I have no doubt that if it could be got easier it would be much more largely used, as the timber must get scarcer.

322. *The Commissioner.*] Then, you are of opinion that there would be a considerable traffic in stone?—Yes.

323. *The Mayor.*] Have you not found that the Mount Somers stone is much closer than the Oamaru stone, and not so spongy?—Yes.

324. *The Commissioner.*] Can you give me any information as to the lime produced there?—No, I cannot; but if the line were opened we could get lime from there instead of from Dunedin.

325. Do you get it from Dunedin?—Yes, I believe it comes from Dunedin.

326. Is there much lime used in this neighbourhood?—Mr. Tucker could answer that better than I can.

[Mr. TUCKER stated that about five tons a month was used, but the consumption had been as high as twenty tons. No lime had been used for manure.]

Mr. DONALD WILLIAMSON, re-examined.

327. *The Commissioner.*] You wish to make a further statement?—I should like to supplement the evidence of the last witness in regard to lime. I may state that in former days I was a stonemason by trade, and I have had considerable experience in working lime. A good many years ago I worked some of the Mount Somers lime at Alford Station in brick work. I afterwards worked lime in Timaru that came from Otago, and from Pleasant Point, and from Pareora, and I considered that the Mount Somers lime, which I used at the Alford Station, was superior to any of those limes.

328. The Dunedin lime which is imported into Christchurch is well thought of. Do you think the Mount Somers lime is equal to that?—I think it is better than that.

329. In fact, you think it would be much used in trade if it were procurable?—Yes. I may say that the method of estimating the value of lime is the quantity of sand which you can add to it and still make a good mortar, and that is a test that the Mount Somers lime will stand.

330. If the carriage were facilitated, do you think the lime could be produced up there as cheaply as elsewhere?—Yes, as there is bush there to burn it, and native coal also, which is one of the best materials for burning lime, as it retains the heat for so long.

331. Are the coal and the lime near together?—Quite close, as I understand. I may add, too, with regard to lime, that a great quantity of the land in this country would be much benefited by