

home to their own country. They are of no benefit to New Zealand, but simply help to impoverish it. I have spoken to one of them about this, and he confessed that his object was to get £300 together, and then go Home, where he could live upon it as well as a man with £3,000 could live in New Zealand. I think they should be licensed to dig on gumfields only after they have lived two years in the country. The presence of the Austrians, as far as I know, is accounted for by a few of their countrymen doing well on the gumfields, and recommending others to come to New Zealand. This has been spreading for years, and now it appears that there are about fifteen hundred in the country.

*Alexander McCullough*: I am a gum-digger of ten years' standing. I am the holder of a lease in perpetuity (No. 7, Waipoua Survey District) containing 300 acres. I am a married man, with two children. I have been two years on the section. I hope to improve my section by my earnings on the gumfields. I have heard the evidence given by Mr. W. Reynolds, the previous witness, and I generally agree with the opinions expressed therein. Gum-lands should not be disposed of for gum-digging purposes; but cultivable gum-lands might be granted to intending settlers if there is reasonable ground for believing that the land is no longer sufficiently rich for gum-digging. In the grant or lease of gum-lands a provision should be made that any gum-digger has the right to dig thereon for gum if the lessee himself is obtaining gum therefrom, except in the ordinary course of clearing and cultivation.

*Bold Btomeh*: I come from Pellissa, in Dalmatia, Austria. I have been five years in the colony, and am twenty-three years of age. My father is a farmer. I am the occupier of an occupation-with-right-of-purchase section—No. 30, Block I., Maungaru Survey District. A number of my countrymen were in New Zealand before me, and from them I heard about it, and so decided to come myself. Some of them get money from their brothers and relations in the colony, and some paid their own passage to New Zealand. I sent for my own brother three years ago, and he is still about the Wairoa gum-digging. Some of my countrymen do not make money at gum-digging, and so go Home; and others make £2 a week.

Witness, who was supposed to act as interpreter for his countrymen, has, on examination, been proved to be so little conversant with the English language as to make it necessary to abandon the idea of examining any witnesses through his interpretation. Examination therefore postponed until suitable interpreter can be found.

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DARGAVILLE, 21ST JANUARY, 1898.

*Horace Hammond*: I am Clerk and Engineer of the Hobson County Council. In 1894 we sold 142 licenses, at 5s. each. In 1895 we only sold thirty-four; and in 1896 we only sold thirty. Total, 206 licenses in three years. We appointed a Ranger, and gave him 1s. 6d. commission for every license he sold. Our first Ranger was Mr. J. B. Pullham, and then we had John Perry about the middle of 1895, and he has had it ever since, and he does his best to collect the license. There are one or two camps of Austrians, and they declined to take out licenses, and they refused to give their names. The local policeman was away at the time, and we could do nothing. The constable is to come down and see about it. There is a great difficulty in collecting the license-fees. We give our Ranger 1s. 6d. commission out of each license, and he only collected thirty license-fees. These thirty bear no proportion to the number working on the field. I do not know how many diggers there are in this district. My idea is the time has gone by to worry much about collecting the license on the gumfields; it would have been different ten or fifteen years ago. The gumfields should have been put on the same footing as the goldfields. The diggers are getting four times as much now in price as they were getting twenty years ago, and that is the reason why the industry keeps up. There are fewer diggers at work now in this district. The main reason is that they are working at other industries, mainly the timber. We have often great difficulty in getting able-bodied men for roadwork. Two of our surfacemen, getting £2 5s. a week in regular work, left us at different times. One has come back. Times are very prosperous here just now, and so there are not so many gum-diggers; but if the timber industry failed they would have to go back to digging. I do not know much about the Austrians. The storekeepers are satisfied with them. If a man will take up a piece of Crown land, even if only poor gum-land, and settle upon it, it is far better to let him have it to live on than leave it open for the roving population. It would not lead to a monopoly if the area was not too large. If the conditions of improvements were enforced by the Board it would not pay them to throw up the section. In our district we have a number of settlers who have taken up land, and if it had not been for the gum they could not have existed. There are isolated cases where men throw up their sections, but 90 per cent. stop on them. Cases have arisen where gum-lands were taken ostensibly for settlement, and were afterwards worked for gum. These cases are rare, and the remedy appears to me to be not to allow any applicant to take up more than 200 acres on gumfields. Our county has always advocated the selling of the gum-lands.

*William Fitzpatrick*: I am a gum-digger. [The evidence given by him at previous Commission was read over, and the witness was asked if he wanted to amend anything in it.] He said,—I do not wish it to be understood that I give full approval to the system holding on Harding's Lease, as it is not free trade. If you sold on the field you had to sell to a storekeeper, who paid Mr. Harding for right to purchase gum on the lease. The diggers' desire is free trade—that is, to buy and sell in the best markets. Messrs. Brown and Campbell and Mr. Mariner, both paid a royalty or fee to Mr. Harding for the right of dealing on the field exclusively. I am not aware that the Government have taken any steps in the matter of issuing licenses. The diggers considered when they paid a license-fee to the local bodies that they should have a vote in county elections. I do not think there would be any difficulty in arranging for either the transfer of votes or voting in the districts where licenses were obtained. I think the reason why the diggers have