

181. You say that all the owners of these blocks have signed the agreements?—Not all. In the Waiteti they have. I do not think there is any one outside of that.

182. You have verified that yourself?—We have not got all the block. There is land outside. As far as I know, all the owners of the bush part have signed our agreement. In the Okoheriki Block that is not so. There are some owners in that that have not signed.

183. How do you proceed in getting these agreements signed; do you employ any one to get the signatures?—No, I got the signatures myself. I have a licensed interpreter, and he and I go and get the signatures wherever we can. We call a meeting generally, and get them there.

184. How much does it cost you to get the signatures for your agreements?—It does not cost a great deal to get the signatures, but in most cases we have made advances which were from out of the royalty.

185. As a rule you pay the money before they sign?—No; after they sign.

186. Will you say that you made advances before they were entitled to receive anything?—Yes; before the timber is cut.

187. Do they demand these advances, or do you hold them out as an inducement?—They demand them.

188. You have to give them something before the Natives will sign?—No; they are perfectly satisfied. Of course, there are many expenses outside of that.

189. You have got the signatures of the owners of the block of land you are working?—Yes.

190. You only started last month: you started getting signatures in August last?—About the 15th August.

191. And before your mill started last week you had to advance money?—Yes.

192. You could not say roughly what it cost you per signature in expenses, counting your own expense?—I have no idea.

193. You have to get an interpreter, a Justice of the Peace, and probably an adult witness?—No; only a Justice of the Peace and an interpreter.

194. What system do they work on? For instance, how do you assure yourself that the money is paid to each owner? How do you pay them?—I agree upon the advance I will give to the Natives, and they form themselves into a committee. The committee is called together, and the money is divided by it.

195. You trust the committee to disburse the money amongst the owners?—Yes.

196. And your responsibility ceases when you hand over the money to the committee?—Yes.

197. And from what you can understand, the committee works satisfactorily?—They have to a point, but for the future it has been decided that I am to keep a separate account for each individual and to pay him his royalty.

198. Then, instead of paying over the money to the committee, you will keep it in hand?—Yes.

199. But the committee was practically the body that worked up the interest in your agreement to its culmination: the committee formed themselves into a body?—After they had signed the deed the Natives formed themselves into a committee, and then the advance is made and paid.

200. Previous to this did you go to each individual Native, and afterwards did they all meet?—We had a number of meetings, and thoroughly threshed the matter out.

201. Did they resolve themselves into a committee which undertook to complete the contract?—No; the contract was completed, but there was so much money to be paid as an advance. It was notified that the money would be paid on a certain day, and that they were to meet and to make their own division of it. The money was paid in an open room.

202. You said something about the Government purchases of Native land: have you any personal knowledge of lands purchased by the Government?—No; only hearsay knowledge from the Natives.

203. Perhaps you have heard that the land along the line of railway at Mamaku was purchased years ago in connection with the building of the railway?—I have heard there were purchases that were made.

204. And lands for which the Natives were paid compensation?—I have heard that.

205. That would be a few years ago?—It would be.

206. You have no personal knowledge of any land purchased there?—No.

207. Talking about the purchase of land with standing bush on it: according to your own showing, if the bush were put up at auction, say, last August, it would not have fetched the same royalty that you are giving now?—No.

208. And, say, five or ten years ago, when the land was purchased by the Crown—fifteen years ago in some instances—was there any activity in the timber-market at all?—Not the activity in that class of timber. It was worked very little.

209. Was there any effort by private individuals to establish sawmills?—The Mamaku mills were established.

210. But when the Government made these purchases?—I have no knowledge when the Government purchases were made.

211. In fact, the price of timber has gone up with quite a jump within the last twelve months?—It has advanced within the last eighteen months.

212. A good deal of attention is given now to the acquisition of bush lands for milling purposes?—I suppose there is.

213. Well, what impelled you to go in for it?—I had nothing in view of any extra thing in timber.

214. Why did you not go in for it years ago?—I had not gone into the district; but when I got into the district I conceived the idea of going into the timber business.

215. But you had been in the timber business before?—Yes.

216. And no one in the district had attempted to acquire the timber before you went?—No.