

line, whereas I understood that the inquiry was into the question of the direction in which the Tinwald-Mount Somers line should be extended. A certain amount of money has been voted for that purpose, and it is impossible to use any of it for the Methven extension. In the first place, the Methven line belongs to a private company: it is not a Government undertaking in any way; and, even supposing that it was a Government undertaking, the sum of £15,000 has been allotted for the extension of the Tinwald-Mount Somers line, and I do not see how, without a great breach of faith, the balance could be used for the Methven line, or for any other line in the colony. Another point is that, if it were used for that purpose, the amount available would be utterly insufficient even to bring it to Gough's Crossing. I should venture to protest against the inquiry going beyond the question of the extension of the Tinwald-Mount Somers line.

FRIDAY, 25TH JANUARY, 1884.

MR. DONALD WILLIAMSON, Mayor of Ashburton, examined.

209. [*To the Commissioner.*] In opening these proceedings, I should like to state a few facts, and I shall endeavour to be concise, in order not to take up much of your time. The late Provincial Council decided that a branch railway should be made from Ashburton to Alford Forest and Mount Somers, through the Forks. The Council at the same time made reserves through all the unsold lands up the Forks of the Ashburton, with a view of providing a site for the railway. They also ordered ten thousand pounds' worth of rails from England for the work. These rails arrived in 1874. Before the rails arrived, however, the Provincial Government had ceased to exist. When the rails did arrive the Colonial Government used them for other works. The Ashburton County Council claimed a return of these rails, as county property. Then the route of the line was changed on the plea of economy. It was found that a bridge could be saved over the North Ashburton, and large landholders on the south side of the river offered to give the land required free of cost if the line were carried through their properties as they wished. The smaller settlers in the Forks did not see their way to do this, so the Ashburton-Alford Forest Railway became the Tinwald-Mount Somers Railway. About three years ago an effort was made to get the line continued as near as might be to what is known as the Triphook survey.

210. Was the line actually commenced at that time?—This was after the line was started and had been continued for some distance on the south side. A public meeting was held in Ashburton to support this view, and a deputation was appointed, consisting of the then Mayor of Ashburton, Mr. Hugo Friedlander, and Mr. Peache, of Mount Somers. The deputation went to Wellington to urge this matter upon the Government.

211. Before we go any further, can you indicate on this map what you call the Triphook survey?—I have a map here which shows it [map produced]. The blue line indicates Mr. Triphook's survey. The view urged by the deputation was not acceded to, but the line has been and is being gradually pushed on to a point where the district more immediately affected saw that, if the line was to be of much use to them, or pay any return on the outlay, it must cross the river in the direction of Alford Forest. The settlers of Alford Forest were quite willing to concede the point of bringing it to the township, in order that the whole district might be served. Remonstrances have been made accordingly, of which this Commission is the outcome. In my opinion, a very considerable traffic awaits the completion of the line to the districts of Alford Forest and Mount Somers, not only in goods and raw material, such as coal, timber, stone, and no doubt other minerals, but also in grain, wool, and other farm produce, besides a considerable passenger traffic. I believe the principal reason why the present length of railway is so poorly patronized is that people, instead of carting back or driving some six, eight, or ten miles to the railway, prefer to go straight to Ashburton by road; as the distance which they would have to cart or drive or ride, going back to the railway, would bring them a very considerable part of the way towards their destination. This would be very different if the railway were brought within a reasonable distance of the settlers, and I hope that the witnesses who are about to be examined will demonstrate this more fully. I may state that the reasons why Ashburton supports the diversion of the line—although, after all, it is only the original line—are these: First, we have a considerable trade with the districts affected, which will increase in proportion as the railway is made a paying affair, so that the interests of the town and of the colony are identical; second, we, in common with the colony at large, wish to see this line a financial success; and, third, we desire, above all things, to see that justice is done to the struggling settlers of Mount Somers and Alford Forest. Many of these people bought their land in the full faith that a railway would be made to their district, and I know for a certainty that they have been struggling on for years, the cost of cartage completely absorbing the profit they would otherwise have secured on any produce they were able to raise. I thought it was only fair to state the principal reasons which actuated the Borough Council and the burgesses of Ashburton—being so far distant from the districts directly affected—in taking an active part in the matter. The Borough Council and the inhabitants have always been at one upon this question. I have brought with me some of the principal resolutions which have been passed at the meetings of the Borough Council, which I wish to put in. I may state that these resolutions were always carried unanimously, as we have been at all times willing to assist a district which had been wronged, and which was being, as it were, deprived of its birthright. [Resolutions put in; see Appendix C.]

212. Have you any idea of the value of the traffic that would be developed by such an extension of the line—exclusive, I mean, of the present railway traffic?—I could not say with any certainty what the money value of the traffic would be. I am sure that the traffic must be increased a great many times over.

213. Have you any opinion as to the route, seeing that the line has been made as far as it is; this map [map exhibited] was supplied at the inquiry at Mount Somers?—A meeting was held of the Borough Councillors and a number of burgesses with the Mount Somers people, so that the districts and the Borough Council are satisfied with what was arranged. No doubt this was pointed