

out to you at Mount Somers. The line agreed upon was as shown in green on the map, with the terminus at Bowyer's Stream.

214. This plan indicates the area which the Mount Somers people believe would be served by that extension. Do you think the district as marked a fair one?—That will be answered by one of the witnesses who will give evidence presently. I should think that quite the whole of the area shown by the red line would be served by the railway.

215. Have you any information to give on the subject of the other extension of the line, up the south side of the south branch of the Ashburton?—I have never been up farther than the limestone rock, but in passing through that country I must say that I was not favourably impressed with the quality of the land.

216. You know nothing of the land beyond?—Beyond that point there may be good land, but as far as the railway goes, and as far as we traversed, I saw no good land.

217. Do you think that the line would serve other people in the neighbourhood to the southward of the river?—There are no settlers there except one or two large landholders, and I believe that the principal products are sheep and wool, which the railway, up to the point to which it is now being made, would serve sufficiently for all the purposes of their traffic.

218. You have not been over this country to the south-west of the proposed extension up the south branch?—No; I have not been over it further than I have just stated.

219. Have you any further information to give?—I should like to say that I have been requested by Mr. Percy Cox, who is unable to be here, to state that he would be glad to give evidence before you in Christchurch. We set a good deal of value on his evidence, as he was a long time a resident at Mount Somers, and has a very good knowledge of the whole country. I think his evidence would be very valuable.

Mr. HUGO FRIEDLANDER, examined.

220. *The Commissioner.*] You are a member of the County Council?—Yes.

221. And you are familiar with this question?—I have been endeavouring to get up some statistics regarding the grain-producing qualities of the Mount Somers district, but before laying them before you I should like to make some remarks with regard to this branch line. I am an old resident, and I know the ins and outs of it from beginning to end. In 1873 a public meeting was called in the old Ashburton Library for the purpose of urging on the then Provincial Council to set aside a sum for the purpose of making a line of railway from Ashburton to Alford Forest and Mount Somers. In the year following, 1874, the Provincial Council granted the sum of £10,000, and expended part of that amount in the purchase of rails. In 1877, after the provinces were abolished, the General Government thought of appropriating this £10,000 by crediting it to the whole of the province. To this the Ashburton County Council objected, and they pointed out that it would be manifestly unfair to this district if the amount were credited to the old province, instead of the Ashburton County. The outcome of the agitation was that the General Government agreed to hand over the £10,000 to the County Council if they would make the railway from Ashburton to Mount Somers and Alford Forest. Some of the members of the County Council were, unfortunately for the interests of the Ashburton Township, very largely interested in the land on the south side of the river, and they were willing to give the land required for the railway *gratis*, which the settlers on the north side refused to do; and the result was that, instead of being taken towards the Ashburton Forks, the line started on the south side of the river and was taken up the south side of the South Branch. Whatever was the reason for deviating the line from the Forks, as originally proposed, it had nothing to do with the people at Mount Somers and Alford Forest. It was more a question of economy, but there was no intention at that time of taking the line towards the Rangitata, or the settlers would have been up in arms and have objected to it, and with good reason, too. In support of what I have said I wish to hand you some resolutions which have been passed by the Ashburton County Council, which will bear out what I have stated. [Copies of Minutes of Ashburton County Council put in; see Appendix D.] In 1881 a public meeting was held here and a deputation was appointed to go to Wellington and interview the Government in regard to the extension of the line, because the line had only been made as far as Anama, and it was urged by the public meeting that the deputation should interview the Government to see if the line could be extended to Mount Somers. I was one of the deputation, and when we interviewed the then Premier, Sir John Hall, he promised that the line would be extended. We understood this promise to mean an extension towards Mount Somers, because we never urged any other line than the one to Mount Somers.

222. What do you understand by "Mount Somers"?—The township. One of the deputation was a settler in the Alford Forest district, and he urged that the line should skirt the bush. At the end of 1882, when the question was raised about deviating the line, the County Council took the matter up, and a committee consisting of Messrs. Wright, Jackson, Lambie, Macfarlane, and Walker was appointed to consider and report on the subject. The report was as follows: [Copy of Report put in; see Appendix E.] This, you will find, supports what we are advocating; it also shows that there never was any intention of taking the line in any direction but Mount Somers. This report was adopted at a meeting held on the 10th January, 1883, a minute of which I now put in. [Copy of Minute put in; see Appendix F.] I now come to the matter of grain statistics, which I have endeavoured to collect. I beg to hand in a very complete statement of the area and the quality of the land within a certain radius from the point to which the committee wish the line to be extended, namely, the corner of Rural Section No. 26795. This statement gives the number of every section, also the area of each section, the quality of the land, and its producing capabilities. The summary of the statement is as follows: Of 28,969 acres, there are 1,455 acres the greater part of which, after sweetening, will produce very good wheat. It is at present heavy grass land, and swampy. Then there are 8,469 acres which will yield a fair crop of oats, if required, or can be utilized for turnips; but, even if we calculate that the producing capa-