

Ross had been offered a piece for £3,500?—Yes; but I was told that that was four or five years ago.

1091. Did you ascertain if that was correct?—Not beyond asking Mr. Stark, and he said it was not true.

1092. Did it not strike you that Mr. Ross would have been the better man to ask?—I believe that Mr. Ross was away from Auckland at the time. I think I inquired, and was told that he was away. If I had this case to take into a Compensation Court, I should have been in a position to make a great many more inquiries, but the thing was done so hurriedly that I could not go into it sufficiently fully. When I have to take a case into a Compensation Court I have three weeks' notice in which to prepare my evidence. In this case I had no notice.

1093. You were informed that Professor Thomas paid £600 per acre for his land. Is Mr. Stark's as valuable as that?—I should think so. I do not think that the other has any special value beyond Mr. Stark's.

1094. Mr. Stark told you that he had been offered £16,000 for his property. Did you make any inquiries about that offer?—I did not. He did not tell me who had offered it to him. I fully expected that the case would go into a Compensation Court, in which case I should have had ample time to make all these inquiries.

1095. If, in your opinion, it would have been advisable to send the case to arbitration, why did you not advise that that should be done?—It was a mistake that the property was not settled for before the Government took possession of it.

1096. Do you think that it would have been advisable for the Government to have bought the property through the Court?—It would have been better in many respects, but I think that Mr. Stark would have got the same amount in the Court that he has now. Some people say that the value is not a correct one, but in my opinion it is.

1097. *Mr. Cowan.*] When you applied at Mr. Seaman's office, did it not strike you to inquire what was the previous valuation of this property?—No, I simply called there; and, as I said before, I thought I should have had ample time to go into the matter. I never anticipated settling the compensation at all. I had made up my mind that it was a case for a Compensation Court.

1098. Had you been in possession of the fact that in 1882 forty-two acres of this property were valued at £7,000, and that in 1885 twenty-eight acres of the same were valued at £15,600; would that have aroused your suspicion?—It would have made me more determined to take the case into a Compensation Court.

1099. It would have made you more anxious to put it through the Court?—Yes. I never had any other property so large but that I sent it into the Compensation Court. It was too big a thing for me, and I never dreamt of settling it, as I considered it too great a responsibility.

1101. You are aware of the fact that between the valuations of 1882 and 1885 the most valuable ten acres of this property were offered by Mr. Stark to several individuals for £3,500, and you have told us that that was three or four years previous?—That was what I was told.

1102. We have evidence of two distinct offers by Mr. Stark for that amount—one of them in March, 1884?—I cannot understand it, nor can I understand why the offer was not accepted.

1103. Were you in possession of this information when you made your report?—Certainly not.

1104. Had you been in possession of it what course would you have taken?—I should have kept it as evidence for the Compensation Court. I may say that I did not go to Mr. Mays to make inquiries about properties, but in connection with another question of a road, and this subject cropped up in course of conversation.

1105. Mr. Mays states that he informed you on that occasion that the property-tax valuation of 1885 was ridiculous, and that he informed you that a certain portion of it was offered at the figures mentioned: is his statement correct?—I do not quite remember what happened, but I should be prepared to take his word.

1106. Then, will you tell the Committee how you reconcile your subsequent action with this knowledge?—I do not think I had any conversation with Mr. Mays about the property-tax assessment at all, but simply about the alleged offer to Mr. Ross.

1107. Mr. Mays has made the statement. Do you contradict it?—I do not remember it.

1108. When Mr. Stark told you that he had been offered this price, did you not consider that it was your duty to ascertain by whom the offer was made?—I did not; I took his word for it. He seemed a straightforward man, and I had no reason to doubt him. I did not think it was necessary to make further inquiries. Had the case been taken into Court, of course I should have done so; but I had no chance of doing it, as I was too hurried over it.

1109. Do you know Mr. Allison?—No; I never met him till I saw him on board the "Hawea," coming down.

1110. Did his name not crop up in any of your conversations about the property?—No; I never remember hearing his name.

1111. Did it not strike you as a part of your duty to ascertain, in addition to Mr. Seaman's valuation, the value of the property as assessed for local purposes?—No, not at the time. If I had had more time I should have obtained more evidence.

1112. Had you at that time discovered that this property for local rating purposes was assessed at £3,000, would it have aroused your suspicions?—Of course it would; but I do not think much of local valuations because they change so much.

1113. But did you not inquire into them?—No.

1114. You still adhere to your opinion that the property has been cheaply acquired by the Government?—I think so; if it had gone into a Compensation Court they would not have got it for any less.

1115. Is this your opinion, even with the knowledge of these offers?—Yes; because a Compensation Court would take what it was worth at the present time, and not what it was worth in the past. A few years makes a wonderful difference. I have bought a section for £27 and sold it within five years for £500.