

own and the storekeepers' weighings. Three of them were married, and one single. Their families were at Home. If they had the money to bring their families out they would settle here. Peter and Nicolas Skakandich (brothers) have fourteen people dependent on them, counting their parents and sisters. It would take about £400 to bring them out. It is the custom in Dalmatia to divide the land equally between all the children on the death of the parents. Thus the land is cut up into very small sections. They were at present draining a swamp on Flax-mill Lease (Mitchelson's). The men added: we have each of us spent £20 of our own money, and are in debt to the storekeeper to the extent of about £10 each. This debt was incurred during the last six months, and if we find good gum we will be well paid for it, but if there is no gum in the swamp we have been doing all this work for nothing. Up to the present we have cut about three miles of drains, and found very little gum. If the swamp is a failure we will have to dig gum somewhere else to pay for the "tucker." We will pay off the storekeeper. During the last twelve months close on a hundred more Austrians have left than have arrived in the colony. Fifty of them went Home to Austria. A few of them could not make money enough to take them Home, and had to borrow money from their friends to enable them to do so. They do not know anything about the New Zealand land-laws, or how the land is taken up for settlement. There are nineteen of us working in the swamp.

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HARDING'S LEASE, DARGAVILLE, 22ND JANUARY, 1898.

*Antonio Falconetti*: I am an Austrian, and come from Istria. I was a sailor, and came here because my brother thought I would do better than remaining at sea. I paid my own passage. I have been at Parengarenga, digging on Yates's land and on Maori land. The conditions that obtain there are practically the same as those on Mitchelson's leasehold. The gum must be sold to him, and all provisions obtained from him. A fair price was given for the gum, but the stores were dear. There was no rent or royalty; the profit was made on the stores. I have never known them give short weight. I had my own scales. I left Parengarenga to join the party here to drain and work Harding's Swamp. Our agreement with Mr. Harding is to this effect: We pay him only half royalty—that is, 5s. per quarter per man instead of 10s., which the other gum-diggers pay who work on any other part of the lease; in return for this concession he will have his swamp drained. Mr. Harding does the carting at 1s. 3d. per hundredweight. We are free to deal with any storekeeper or butcher, but as a rule we get our meat from Mr. Harding. Under the agreement we have the right to dig gum in this swamp for ten years. The swamp is divided into five sections, and the sections must be worked in succession—that is, the first one within two years, the second within four years, the third within six years, the fourth within eight years, and the last before the expiration of the ten years. We are working the swamp on the co-operative principle. There are twelve married men and eight single men in our party. I have not completed my military service, as I went away as a boy to be a sailor. If I went back to Austria I should not receive any punishment for not having completed my military service, but I might have to serve my three years. Since I took to gum-digging I do not think I have averaged 10s. above my "tucker," but when steadily at work I may have made 15s. and over. None of us know anything about the land-laws of this country. Some of us would settle if we got good land and got a start from Government. We have no money, and so cannot buy land straight out. I consider that many of us would settle if the ordinary assistance given to other settlers was given to us—that is, paying us for bush-clearing, grass-seed, and making an allowance for the erection of a house, the cost of all of which may be added to the capital value. I think, under these conditions, many of my countrymen would settle. A great difficulty would be the bringing-out of our families; if assistance could be given many would be glad to settle in New Zealand. The translation of the land-laws into the Dalmatian language will do away with much misunderstanding, as it will be found that our people will settle as readily as others who have come to New Zealand.

*Stephen Gadastephano*: I come from Waldelena, north part of Italy. I am a labourer. I have been nine years in the colony, and came here through reports of my countrymen, who returned Home and told us about New Zealand. A countryman of my wife's (Swiss) had done very well here, and this was the main inducement for me to come out. I never heard of any labour being engaged by contract to work on the gumfields. I paid my own passage myself. For seven years I worked at Mitchelson's Lease. The price for "tucker" was very high, it being always the same price, but the price given for gum was low. Mitchelson's have the name of giving very much less than any other storekeepers for gum: £2 per hundredweight was the highest price I ever got for ordinary gum. I have heard grumbings amongst the men as to the weights and scales, but I had no means for testing, having only very small scales for that purpose.

*John Macoich*: I come from Morrana, Istria. I am a sailor. I heard in my own country from those who had been in New Zealand about the gum. I therefore came here twelve months ago. Between thirty and forty of us came together from Genoa direct to New Zealand in one of the steamers. We were met by some of our friends in Auckland, and they told us what camp in the Wairoa to go to. We first went to Tikinui and worked on Government grounds, and also on Maori land, and then on the Melbourne Lease, and then to Harding's Swamp. The conditions on Maori land are 2s. a week royalty, but then we could not make it pay.

*Marcus Didovitch*: I am a Dalmatian. I was a stonemason, earning 2s. 6d. a day and keep in my own country. I have been fourteen months in New Zealand. I heard from my countrymen that they were making better money here, and so I came out. Eleven others came with me, and they are scattered about the fields. I have only worked in this district.

*Arthur Negerrich*: I come from Istria. I am a labourer, doing navvy work on the railway and in stone quarries, and I could earn from 3s. to 4s. a day, finding myself. I have been here five years. I went first to Queensland, and was there six months. It was very bad times in Australia, and so I came to New Zealand. I came here with a party of seven.