

WILLIAM YOUNG, Jun., sworn.

280. *Mr. Oliphant.*] You are part proprietor of this plantation?—Yes, I own a part, but not any of the part affected by the fire.

281. How many acres do the claimants own—Messrs. Fairlie and Patterson?—1,200 acres; and Blackley and Glassen claim to own about 300.

282. Altogether, about 1,500 acres?—Yes.

283. You have been pretty constantly in the district for—how many years?—It is sixteen years since I began to plant the place, but I was absent for a number of years.

284. You were the first to commence planting here?—Yes, I introduced wattle-planting into the North Island of New Zealand.

285. When you planted a large area here there was no Government plantation, was there?—No.

286. What can you say about these fires that happen frequently? We have evidence of a fire in 1890. Do you remember that?—No, I remember my father sending me a report about it. I was in Auckland at the time.

287. What did you do?—I was in England at the time of the fire. My father dealt with it.

288. There was another fire in 1893. Were you here then?—No.

289. Then there was the big fire of 1896. You were in Auckland at that time?—Yes.

290. Was a report sent to you?—Yes, at once, both on the 15th and 16th.

291. What did you do?—I got a report on the 15th that a fire had sprung from the railway and crossed to the plantation. I sent a report to Mr. Macdonald.

292. I have two replies here that you got from Mr. Ronayne, the General Manager of Railways. I will read them. The first letter is:—

SIR,—

9th February, 1897.

With reference to your letter of the 3rd instant, in regard to damage to your wattle plantation near Wairangi by fire alleged to have been caused by railway-engine on the 15th December last, I have the honour, by direction of the Minister for Railways, to whom the matter has been submitted, to inform you that he cannot admit any liability in the matter.

I am instructed to add that, from the inquiries which have been made, it appears that there is no direct proof that the fire was caused by the locomotive.

This is the second letter:—

SIR,—

1st March, 1897.

With reference to your letter of the 22nd ultimo, in regard to damage to your wattle plantation near Wairangi by fire alleged to have been caused by railway-engine on the 15th December last, I have the honour to inform you that this department cannot admit any liability in the matter.

Did you receive those two letters?—Yes, I did.

293. Now, we want some evidence as to value. How many acres were destroyed by the big fire?—Roughly speaking, we say 500 by measuring the plan to the best of our ability.

294. How old was the forest then?—Ten or eleven years.

295. In fact, it was in its full prime?—Yes, it was ready to strip.

296. At what do you value it per acre?—The cost of the planting came to about £2 an acre, but that does not include management during the ten years, or interest on the capital.

297. *Mr. Poynton.*] Can you give the market price of the bark and the cost of stripping per acre?—I took about 100 tons off my 100 acres last year—a ton to the acre.

298. In 1896 what would be the value of a ton of bark?—The average price of bark has been from £7 to £8. It was about £7 a ton, I think. The previous year it was £8.

299. That is when stripped and bound together?—Yes.

300. How much would you deduct for the labour of preparation?—It costs us nearly £2 an acre to strip and prepare for market, and to cart and yield it.

301. The net value would be about £5 an acre, then?—That is rather much. There is other expense, such as the railway freight to Auckland. You would have to deduct another £1 a ton. I think £4 a ton would be fair.

302. That is, £4 an acre?—Yes.

303. And, roughly speaking, there were about 500 acres destroyed?—Yes; but I do not think it would be all bearing at that rate.

304. We have evidence that 320 acres of the 500 acres held first-class trees?—Yes.

305. That would be worth £4 an acre?—Yes.

306. But the other 180 acres might be inferior?—Yes.

307. How much inferior? Would it be worth half?—I think half would be fair.

308. About £2 an acre?—Yes. Of course, these estimates are not exact.

309. How many reports have you sent in altogether about fires?—I think I have sent in four reports.

310. These reports were generally recognised by the department writing back denying their liability in the matter?—They did not acknowledge them all, but they have not admitted liability.

311. They did not dispute the fact that the engines might have caused the fires?—They never said that was not the case.

312. You are well acquainted with the east side of the line from this station to the big swamp?—Yes.

313. Have you ever seen gum-digging on the east side?—Not except at the station; and I have seen gum-digging in the big swamp for about half a mile down.

314. But not where this serious fire started?—No, not in the sixteen years. I have not known of a man being in the swamp.

315. Are these fires common?—They are so common that I have not brought evidence on the point, but if there is any question about it I could get any number of witnesses. I have a letter I