

Act there was the first attempt at individualising the ownership of Native lands, and the title under it was called a "memorial of ownership." We had never the misfortune in this district, as they had in Wairoa and Hawke's Bay, of practically handing over to trustees, who were nominally owners, the power to sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of the tribal lands as they thought fit. Under the Act of 1873 the whole of the owners had to execute a deed of sale or lease before the land could pass. During the "70's" there was a good deal of hesitation on the part of the Maoris to come to the Courts for the titles to their lands. This was the case more particularly with regard to the lands lying to the north of the Waiapu River. Those lands south of the Waiapu River were first dealt with, and, with the exception of a few small blocks, the titles were all ascertained by 1888.

During this period the first attempts were made by the Maoris to carry on sheep-farming on some of their lands. The attempts were crude, and necessary operations like dipping were neglected. The prevalence of scab brought down the Government Stock Inspector, who ordered the destruction of the Maori flocks. Thus ended the first attempt to follow in the ways of the Pakeha. This set-back, taken in conjunction with the fact that their titles were passing through the Native Land Court, and that Europeans and Government agents were scouring the country buying or leasing land, diverted the energies of the people for a time towards litigation, and the rapid conversion of their lands into money to be dissipated at the publichouses. But they were never so foolish as to part with the freehold of their lands near the coast. These were leased, but the back country was willingly parted with.

When the Waipiro Station, which consisted chiefly of Native lands leased to Mr. J. N. Williams, commenced operations, and the Maoris saw from 1883 down to 1888 what could be done by Europeans in farming land and managing the stock, they commenced to work on their lands in a small way what they had seen done on the European farms. Fortunately, most of the blocks by the coast were open lands under natural pasture, and the only question at first was how to obtain stock. One Maori station, which has since developed into one of the best-paying properties on the East Coast, began with the purchase of sheep for £70, the balance of money raised in connection with a meeting-house. In other cases the owners of a block took a bushfelling contract for Europeans and invested the proceeds in the purchase of sheep. There was no great amount of litigation to engage the attention of the people between 1888 and 1894. Down to 1898, although there were no extensive improvements, small beginnings were made on many different blocks, and the pastoral industry grew steadily if slowly. Financial difficulties stood in the way of rapid development. In 1898 and 1899 the system of management and control was reorganized somewhat on the lines laid down in the rules and regulations of incorporated blocks. Although not formally incorporated, the system rested broadly on the co-operation of the owners, who were willing to give the general direction of the improvements to the committee, who in turn delegated the detail-work to managers having some experience in sheep-work and who had the confidence of the Europeans of the district. This made it possible for arrangements to be made to secure advances on the farming-stock. The Williams family have during the last ten years provided the greater part of the capital for the Maori farms, and without their assistance the great progress made by the Maoris of the district of late would not have been possible. The Maoris have also received great assistance from the local storekeepers. In the last ten years the stock has been doubled, while the land brought under cultivation has more than doubled. The Maoris have been steadily acquiring experience in sheep-farming and stock-raising generally. A wonderful improvement has been made in the quality of the sheep, while their European neighbours have on every occasion given them sound advice in the management and handling of their flocks.

In 1892 the Native Land Purchase Act was passed for the purpose of purchasing Native lands for settlement under the provisions of "The Land Act, 1892." From 1891 to 1894 many blocks situate to the north of the Waiapu River were investigated by the Native Land Court, and almost as soon as any block passed the Court it was bought up by the Government. So long as the Government was buying the inland blocks the tribe as a whole raised no objection, though there were some who doubted the wisdom of parting so readily with these bush blocks at what now appear to be low prices. But when the Land Purchase officers began purchasing blocks under Maori occupation and where they were attempting to carry on farming, there was the greatest resentment felt. It seemed to be a departure from the policy of the Government, which was to acquire the waste lands of the Maoris, and not lands occupied by them. All papatupu lands which were before the Court in 1894 and awaiting hearing were withdrawn. They were kept out of the jurisdiction of the Court until 1902—until, in fact, there was a guarantee from the Seddon Government that no purchases would be carried on by the Crown in this part of the district. The area thus excluded from the jurisdiction of the Court by the concerted action of the people amounted to about 170,000 acres. After 1902 the titles to some of the blocks were investigated by Block Committees under "The Maori Lands Administration Act, 1902." The title to 22,000 acres has finally passed, while 87,000 acres investigated by the committees have, owing to a technical defect in the Board's confirming order, been referred to the Native Land Court. Although papatupu, a considerable area is under occupation, and improved, and carrying sheep and cattle.

Dealing with lands for which the Natives have obtained titles, which were reserved from sale or lease to Europeans or to the Government, details will no doubt be supplied to show how they are occupied. There is only a small area of land the title to which has been ascertained which will be found available for settlement, if the area of 24,868 acres already vested in the Tairāwhiti Maori Land Board for leasing to the general public is excepted. The bulk of the unoccupied lands is papatupu.

The main question for inquiry seems to me to be whether the Maori owners of the lands in this district, by their past action and present endeavours, have justified their claiming a large proportion of the balance of their lands for their own use and occupation. It depends on the view the Commission takes as to whether their settlement of their lands up to the present has been satisfactory or otherwise. I know that the younger members of the tribe and not a few of their elders are very anxious to get farms of their own.