FRANCIS LEVI VICKERY sworn and examined. (No. 8.)

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] What are you?—A builder, and secretary of the Builders' Association. I may say that I am in favour of the duty being reduced on heavy Oregon on account of the utility of the timber for use here. It was mentioned before the Commission that Oregon timber would not stand more than four years. Well, I lived in America, and worked amongst timber for two or three years, and also worked amongst Oregon timber, and I never heard of it only lasting that short time. It has always been considered to be a lasting timber. There is a class of timber grown in Canada and North America, a sort of sugar-pine, which would only last perhaps four or five years. I might say that I have a straight-edge made of Oregon: I have had it in use for twelve years, and it is in good condition now, and has been lying about in the grass at various places. Then, in regard to the cost of building, I quite agree that the cost of building is about 40 per cent. more, at least, than it was fifteen years ago. I have a list of prices here that I paid for timber in 1887, obtained from Mr. Massey, delivered at West Plains. Ordinary red-pine, 4s. 4d.; 8 in. by ½ in., 3s. 3d.; rimu, 4s. 4d. delivered on the job, and totara, 9s. 6d.

2. What distance had it to be carried?—He had a mill at Makarimu, and he delivered it on the job four or five miles distant at that price. The price of timber, all lines, was 6s. 3d.; 10 in. by ½ in., 5s. 9d.; 3½ in. T. and G. without the tongue, 6s. 3d.; 6 in. by 1 in. T. and G., 5s. 9d.; 6 in. architraves, lineal measure, 8s. 6d.; and 3 in. ogee milling, 5s. 9d. Then I have the later prices (1895) of the Excelsior Timber Company—rough stuff delivered in a town, 5s. They have a very small forest now about cut out. Then the Excelsior Timber Company was in partnership with a man named Dawson. The prices were, for that year—rough timber (rimu), 5s. per 100 ft.; dressed weatherboards, 7s. 3d.; 7 and 8, 6 in., 7s. 6d.; ditto, 4 in., 8s.; black-pine, 10s.; T. and G., 3½ in. by ⅝ in., 7s. 9d. That is subject to only the usual 2½ per cent. discount; but I have some quotations here that were subject to 12½ per cent. McCallum's rough stuff in 1900 was 6s. 9d.; 4 in. by 2 in. ordinary rimu—first-class, 6s. 9d.; second-class, 5s. 3d.; dressed stuff, 6 in. by 1 in., 10s. 3d.; 12 in. by 1 in., 10s. 9d.; and there are various other things in proportion. This was subject to 12½ per cent. discount, and 2½ per cent. extra on payment of the account—making 15 per cent. altogether. But timber went up shortly after that. A combination was formed, and the price went up to 8s., I think. The cost of building must be more now, as the price of timber grew higher.

3. *Mr. Clarke.*] There is one question I wish to put to you with reference to the formation of the Sawmillers' Association. A statement was made in evidence the other day which had some bearing on the Sawmillers' Association of Invercargill. It was stated that the association was formed for certain purposes, and I want to know if you agree with the witness when he said that it was formed in self-defence, because a builder would come to the office and ask for a quotation. He would be told it was 6s. per hundred feet: he would then go to another sawmiller and ask what was the price, and would probably be told the same thing. The contractor would then say, "I have just left So-and-so, and he has offered the timber at 5s. 6d." Consequently they were bound to have some understanding amongst themselves. Do you agree that that was the moral tone of the builders of Invercargill and Southland at that time?—No; but I admit that the sawmillers used to cut against one another: they gave different quotations, but the builders are not in the habit of explaining their tenders to another man.

4. *Mr. Field.*] That is in Mr. Massey's sworn evidence?—It may be, I do not know.

5. *Mr. Clarke.*] With regard to the increased cost of timber, it is not very long since the increase went up from 6s. 9d., less 12½ per cent., in 1900, to its present price, and the main bulk of the increase has been within the last nine years to 10s. 6d., minus 5 per cent.?—About 4s. per hundred, roughly speaking.

6. That in itself would largely account for the increased cost of building within the last nine years?—It would account for 33 or 40 per cent.

7. Not only with regard to sawn timber, but do you not think that there has been a great proportion of the increase in the cost of manufacturing milled stuff—timber run into mouldings? Has not that increased at a greater rate than the ordinary sawn timber?—I think so. Take 1½ in. nosing, which used to be sold at 2s. 6d. per hundred, and now I believe it is 9s. 9d.

8. Do you not consider that is good evidence of the increased cost of building-material?—It is very much used. And cavetto is also high. I think the sawmillers might come down on these lines.

9. You think it would not be fair for them to say they are only making a reasonable profit when they are selling stuff at £1 10s. per hundred which they are making for 10s. 6d.?—I do not know much about their cost, but it stands to reason that their profit is great on small mouldings.

10. If it has been admitted that it costs them 10s. 6d. for the timber, and 9d. extra to run the stuff into mouldings, would you not consider £1 10s. rather high for stuff that has cost them about 11s. 3d.?—Taking the cost of production into account, it does seem rather high, I admit. The buildings that are being erected now, especially residences, do not have as much timber in them as they used to have. Therefore they do not get quite so permanent a job. They may have a more finished job, but the permanency of the job has suffered. There are lighter timbers used now, and the rafters are further apart. For instance, they used to be 18 in., now they are almost 2 ft. centres; and sarking I used to put on 1¼ in. thick, and now the timber used is lighter and second class, mostly 8 in. by ¾ in.

11. With regard to the difficulty of conserving your timbers, do you not think it would be advantageous to restrict the use of red-pine as far as possible to inside work and to joinery, and not use it for rough work any more than is possible, so that we could have a greater supply to go upon for finished work?—It think it would be. Red-pine is certainly a very good timber and