

34. From how far south do you draw your supplies?—About three miles. Practically all our milk-supply comes from the west. To the place where we put a cart on this season on the eastern route there were only two suppliers. That is just outside of our immediate surroundings here.

35. Have you any rivals in the field?—No.

36. Where do the people who produce the supplies live?—There are none supplying dairy factories outside ours until you get into the Whangarei district.

37. Are there none south of Mangapai supplying cream?—The nearest settlers to the south of us going to the other factory are those eight miles away, and going to Maungaturoto.

38. Do you know where the Maungatapere Factory is?—Yes.

39. Do you know how far it is from this place?—No.

40. Would it surprise you to know they collect cream twenty-eight miles?—Not at all.

41. And with as good roads?—I am not aware what the roads are like there.

42. You say that the number of settlers has fallen off from your factory?—Yes.

43. How do you account for that?—One man has had a large contract to handle, but has announced his intention to come back next season; another has leased his large holding; while the third is going into another business.

44. What was the number at the start?—I do not know.

45. Do you not think the Taranaki land would have been taken up without the assistance of railways?—Yes.

46. And the land to the east and west of this part of the country in the same way?—Yes.

47. Do you not think that this piece of land here has been taken up and kept in its present condition because it is the best part of the district?—Yes, this piece here has been taken up because it is the best.

48. It is a piece of limestone formation?—Yes.

49. Is there any crystalline with the limestone in this district?—Yes; our roads are metalled with one of the finest samples of limestone.

50. Has there been any attempt on the part of the settlers here to utilize the valuable properties this limestone possesses?—If you refer to limestone suitable for agricultural purposes, I cannot say whether the limestone here is suitable or not.

51. Has there been any attempt made to use it?—Not that I know of.

52. What has the factory put through this season?—Over 32 tons, from twenty-four suppliers.

53. What age are you?—Thirty.

54. How long were you farming before you went dairying?—I have been farming since I was twelve years old. I was from twelve to eighteen years working on a farm.

55. In what district?—Taranaki.

56. *Mr. Evans.*] Would you be in favour of connecting Whangarei with McCarroll's Gap instead of going on with the western route?—Most decidedly not. It would be a great mistake, and a mad policy.

57. *The Chairman.*] How long has the local factory been in existence?—Since 1904-5.

58. For how far north are you acquainted with the land in this peninsula?—Just up to the Tangihuas. I have been round the mountains from here following the western route, and round Kirikopuni to Tangiteroria, then round to Maungakamea, and going down the eastern route.

59. You have not seen the Kaikohe land?—No.

HARRY HILFORD examined. (No. 55.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a storekeeper, residing at Waikiekie, where I have lived for forty-three years.

2. Would you make a statement to the Commission?—I know the country along both routes of the railway between McCarroll's Gap and the Tangihua Range, and I am in favour of the western route, with a connection from Whangarei connecting with the main line in the Waitira Valley between Mangonui and Tauraroa. I am in favour of the western route, as I consider it opens up good country which is not so easy to reach as the land on the eastern side. The distance from the Mangapai landing to the eastern route is about ten miles on the main Waikiekie-Mangapai Road, and to the western about sixteen miles to the same place on the same road. The cost of carting from Mangapai to Waikiekie is £1 to £1 10s. per ton—a distance of fourteen miles.

3. *Mr. Evans.*] Where is the largest population: on the eastern or the western route?—In this district the greatest population would be on the western route, but there is very little difference.

4. On the eastern side of the eastern route or the western side of the western route, which has the largest population?—The western side. The greatest population is in between.

5. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] How long have you been storekeeping?—Five or six years. Before that I was farming in this district.

6. How far do you travel west with your stores?—Five or six miles, sometimes seven, into the bush.

7. *Mr. Steadman.*] Do you not think that the lands to the east want railway assistance?—I think the lands to the east would get it if there was a connection made with Whangarei.

8. Would that effect the lands at Ruarangi?—Yes, I think so.

9. How far would they be from the junction?—I think there would probably be a station at Ruarangi.

10. Do you know if there is any road from Waipu along this way?—Yes, there is a road from Millbrook.

11. Do you know that the Waipu settlers have great trouble in getting away their produce?—Yes.