

the properties had anticipated. I may add that in dealing with the land I treated the acquisition of a portion of the valley by the Government as a practical certainty. Mr. Russell did not come into the matter until my offer for the property had been declined. I shall doubtless have occasion to criticize Mr. Russell on other subjects, but I know of no one else in Canterbury in a position to set out the facts here stated, and therefore I feel it incumbent on me to defend even an old opponent for an unfair attack.—I am, &c., J. McCOMBS."

*The Chairman:* Are you prepared to answer any questions?

*Mr. Russell:* No. Without any discourtesy to the Committee, I wish to say that I do not appear here as a witness. If any formal charge is brought against me in the House I shall be prepared to come here as a witness and submit myself to any cross-examination the Committee may choose to put me to. I came here to make a statement, and I have done so; and I thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for your courtesy in allowing me to do so.

*The Chairman:* On behalf of the Committee, I thank you, Mr. Russell, for your statement, which has no doubt received great consideration, and the Committee will deal with it when we come to deliberate.

WILLIAM CHARLES KENSINGTON, I.S.O., examined. (No. 10.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You were until recently, Mr. Kensington, Under-Secretary for Lands?—Yes.

2. Will you kindly make a statement to the Committee concerning the roading and purchase of part of Runanga No. 1A Block by the Government?—Yes. The whole transaction was carried through while I was Under-Secretary for Lands, and I will, in explaining the position, follow along the lines of the *précis* which has been supplied to members of the Committee. I will for the time being explain the matter as if I was Under-Secretary for Lands, and I think it would be more satisfactory if I first explained the whole position of the Pohokura Block. The Pohokura Block was purchased by the Crown in 1899—that is, the final award to the Crown was in 1899. The property that the Crown managed to purchase consisted of nearly 41,000 acres, included in twelve different conveyances to the Crown, and the price paid was 3s. per acre. Now, the Pohokura Block is situated on the borders of Hawke's Bay, but just within the Auckland Land District. Therefore any movement in the direction of disposing of these lands had to come from the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Auckland and the Auckland Land Board. There had been a number of inquiries from Hawke's Bay as to the reason why such a large block of land should not be open for selection. I brought the matter under the notice of the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Auckland, and his answer to me in every case was, "We are so pressed with the work we have to do that we have not a single surveyor we can send to that far-away portion of the district to cut the land up." I am now only accounting for the apparent delay in opening the land. Now you come to the dates shown in the *précis* which has been supplied to members of the Committee. The end of it was that I found it was quite hopeless to expect the Crown Land Board at Auckland to take this matter up *con amore*. On the 7th August, 1909, after talking the matter over with the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Auckland, who happened to be in Wellington, it was decided that we should ask the Commissioner of Crown Lands and the Chief Surveyor at Napier to take the matter in hand. Mr. Brodrick, who was afterwards Chief Surveyor in Canterbury, and now in Wellington, said he thought he could find a young surveyor to start the work early in the new year. On the 7th August, 1909, I wrote to the Chief Surveyor, Napier, to have the Pohokura survey put in hand during the year, to start about December. The reason why I said it should start about December, 1909, practically almost 1910, was that the land being so high an altitude a surveyor could not make the surveys in the winter-time, because it is too cold. On the 9th March, 1910, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, after having corresponded with the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Napier—this was many months afterwards—forwarded me the proposed scheme of subdivision. Then there comes something which has been added since to the *précis* of correspondence—namely, that I was so intensely anxious to get the very best means of access to this land—*i.e.*, Pohokura—that I went to Napier myself on the 10th March, and personally interviewed Mr. Brodrick on the whole subject. I thought perhaps we could have got a road up the Matakuhia Valley, as I did not want to take the road up the Waipunga Valley and out of the Runanga Block, because I knew we had no power to do so, the time having expired. Every one of these Native blocks passed through my own hands, and therefore I am speaking with a personal knowledge of the facts connected therewith. I was intensely anxious to get the best road in, and I did not want to have to take it under the Public Works Act through the Runanga No. 1A Block, so I told the Commissioner and the Chief Surveyor that I thought the best thing was for me to go to Tarawera and meet Mr. Walshe on the land, and see if we could get the road in any other way. On the 14th March I was at Tarawera, and I discussed the matter with Mr. Walshe at the hotel that night. I had had a look at the country going through, and he assured me—and I knew for certain it was so—that we could not get any road to open up this land—*i.e.*, Pohokura—except by going through the Waipunga Valley. The Pohokura Block was bounded by the Runanga No. 1A Block, and it was all fenced along the boundary. It was proposed to subdivide it into small grazing-runs, but none of those grazing-runs on the Waipunga side would have had any flat land, and a man starting on a small grazing-run wants some flat land for his homestead, &c., and the greater part of the Pohokura Block is all forest. Therefore it was absolutely essential for the welfare of the settlers—not to the Department—that the Government should be able to give them a small piece of flat land extending to the proposed road. If the Crown did not do that, and did not purchase the land, the settlers would have had no road-access in to their holdings, in addition to taking the main road up the valley. The surveyor provided for 77 chains of access-