

117. You were in Wellington?—I was over in Blenheim.

118. Do you not happen to know?—Yes, it is a fact.

119. And do you not know that the Government Railway Department and Levin and Co. were working together in the interests of the port as against the Manawatu Railway?—No, I did not know that.

120. You have spoken about the quantities of coal that have come into Foxton?—Yes.

121. Is it not a fact that most of the coal that came in was for the railway or Government purposes?—That is so.

122. Do you know the reason why the Government has ceased to import its coal in this way?—I do not know the reason they say, but I know for a fact that they could not get as much coal through here as they wanted to get before they changed the contracts.

123. Do you know whether it has suited them better to make other arrangements?—They would say it has suited them better. The fact of the matter is that the Department could not get as much coal as they wanted to when they had the contracts here.

124. Do you know where the Government railway gets its coal for Foxton?—I think it comes from Wellington or Wanganui.

125. Do you know that?—Yes. Of course, there is some coming through Foxton, but not much.

126. The Railway Department, I suppose, makes its arrangements with the shipowners. You would not have any knowledge of the arrangements it makes?—No.

127. Your company has only the one ship coming here?—No, two—the “Queen of the South” and the “Awahou.”

128. Did it not have other ships coming here, say, within half a dozen years?—Yes, we had the “Gertie” trading here.

129. Did your company ever have more than two at one time on this run?—I do not think so.

130. What is the tonnage of the “Queen of the South”?—She carries about 225 tons of general cargo.

131. And the “Awahou”?—She mostly comes here with coal. She can carry 340 tons, but she never comes here with more than 170.

132. How long has the “Awahou” been running here?—Three or four years, I should say.

133. And the “Queen of the South”?—About twenty years.

134. You have told us that the depth of the river in the channel is not as good as it used to be?—It fluctuates, but the general condition of the river is not as good as it used to be years ago.

135. Does that apply also to the depth at the wharf?—The depth at the wharf does change occasionally. We very often have vessels sitting on the mud at low water when discharging there. In fact, the part of the river between the Railway Wharf and our sheds was such that you could not bring a vessel down there at times.

136. Would you say that the general condition at the wharf has altered for the worse?—Yes; it is more shallow than when I came, but not a great deal. There is not enough water there to do the work properly. There is always a chance of the vessel sitting on the mud. The Department did some dredging there some years ago.

137. Was that dredging done since you came here?—Yes. It was about four years ago, I think. It was done with a grab dredge.

138. Would you expect if the river is deepened and the conditions improved that the quantity of goods shipped by the vessels would be increased?—It is a natural consequence, I should say. More vessels would be running.

139. And the quantity of goods carried by rail from Wellington decreased?—Naturally. That is the trouble, of course.

140. That, of course, would affect the revenue of the railways?—It would affect them to a certain extent, but whether it would affect them in their net profits I could not tell you. I do not think it would very greatly.

141. Does the Department employ many casual hands here in connection with the business on the wharf?—Yes, about twelve.

142. You say that the Railway Department receives about £750 per annum from hemp and tow?—And wool, yes. That is at 3d. per bale, but there has been an increase of 10 per cent. since last October.

143. And have the freights gone up too?—Yes. It is 9s. now, while before that it was 8s. 6d., and some years ago 7s. 6d. It was 7s. 6d. when I first came here.

144. I am told that in the days of the Manawatu Railway competition you used to run at 5s. per ton?—I could not say that. It was rather foolish if they did. I should like to say that you must not take me as a hostile witness to the Department. If the Department will do their duty to the port that is all we want. It is a question of whether they should be there (in the interests of the district) and do nothing, or whether the Board should be there and do something.

145. You are putting it purely from the interests of the district?—Yes.

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FRANK LAWTON sworn and examined. (No. 7.)

1. *Mr. Weston.*] You are Harbourmaster to the Foxton Harbour Board?—Yes.

2. How long have you been Harbourmaster?—Seven years.

3. During that time how has the general condition of the harbour and bar altered—for the better or worse?—For the worse.