

In March, 1914, it was decided to abolish the agency at Masterton, and presumably thereafter Chennells ceased to act in any way for the Public Trust Office.

On the 12th April, 1913, Rangi was Europeanized under the Native Land Act, the effect of this being that his land was released from all restrictions and became capable of being disposed of as freely as European land. He states that he was advised to do this by Chennells, who told him that he would obtain certain privileges. Chennells gave him the usual papers to sign. The necessary recommendation was made by Judge Gilfedder in these terms:—

In the Native Land Court of New Zealand, Wellington District.—In the matter of section 17 of the Native Land Amendment Act, 1912, and in the matter of an application of Rangi Kerehoma to be declared a European.

To the Under-Secretary, Native Department, Wellington.

At a sitting of the Native Land Court held at Wellington on the 19th day of February, 1913, the merits of the above application were inquired into. I am satisfied that the applicant Rangi Kerehoma, who is a Native man, twenty-five years of age, has a competent knowledge of the English language, and is possessed of educational qualifications at least equal to the Fourth Standard as prescribed by the Education Act, 1908. He is possessed of real and personal property worth at least £60,000. Of this there is in the hands of the Public Trustee a sum of £25,000, the applicant being entitled during his life to the income arising therefrom.

I recommend that an Order in Council be issued declaring the said Rangi Kerehoma to be a European.

Dated at Hastings, this 10th day of March, 1910.

M. GILFEDDER, Judge.

Following this recommendation an Order in Council was issued on the 12th April, 1913, declaring Rangi a European.

Very shortly after this Chennells and a solicitor named Beard, who had conducted the proceedings in the Native Land Court at which the Europeanization recommendation was obtained, appear to have taken steps to obtain an interest in the land owned by Kerehoma, and each of them did obtain it in the names of certain members of their respective families. With the details of these transactions this Commission is not concerned.

Certain proceedings have been taken in the Courts arising out of these dealings, and some restitution has been made and a settlement arrived at.

There is not the slightest doubt that Chennells used his position as Agent for the Public Trust Office, and was enabled by such position to further his designs on Kerehoma's property, and it was because of his connection and standing with the Office that he was finally enabled to carry out what can only be described—look at it how you will—as a very gross fraud. As, however, has been pointed out by counsel, I am not empowered to try Chennells on any criminal charge, and beyond stating the facts in connection with his position as Agent for the Public Trust Office I have nothing further to do with him.

So far as the declaring of Rangi to be a European was concerned, it is quite clear that it was part of the scheme to enable Chennells and others to more easily carry out their designs on Rangi's property.

I have absolutely no doubt whatever that Rangi should never have been Europeanized. It was the first application of the kind to come before the Native Land Court, and the seriousness of the step does not appear to have been fully appreciated by the Court, which seems to have been impressed very largely by the solicitor, Beard, who appeared in support of the application and who was himself a subsequent party to the fraudulent dealings with Kerehoma's land. Kerehoma himself admits that he should not have been Europeanized, and that he did not understand the effect of the order. The Court was misled throughout the proceedings, and the true facts of the position deliberately concealed. A very few minutes' conversation with Kerehoma would have convinced the Court beyond any shadow of doubt that Kerehoma's case was not one in which such an extraordinary power should have been exercised. And it is passing strange to me that, with the knowledge that was generally possessed of Kerehoma's habits and qualities, the application was not blocked by the officials of the Native Office, as could undoubtedly have been done.