

year. I think the goldfields are responsible for a certain decrease both in area of selections and improvements, as such a large number of young men have been attracted to them to the detriment of the settlement of the land. The area of bush felled in the whole district for the past year is estimated at 15,000 acres, but the burns generally have been very poor, and will necessitate a great increase of labour to properly clear and grass the areas so felled.

*The Forests.*—A careful surveillance has been kept over both the State and general forest-lands in the north, by Rangers Wilson and Maxwell, and also over those in the Hauraki Mining District by Ranger D. H. Lusk. A large quantity of dead and scorched timber has been disposed of in the State forests, the amount received being £3,734 5s. 6d., whilst for green and scorched timber on Crown lands and other leases £7,208 5s. was received, and from endowment lands for leases and timber £4,711 16s. 7d. has also been received. The actual amount of timber sold and partially paid for amounts to 45,300,503 superficial feet. The severe drought in the early part of the spring and summer made me very apprehensive that a still further destruction of the Crown forests would take place, particularly as some portion of the Puhipuhi Forest was again swept by fire, but the rains of February made them safe for this summer. Ranger H. S. Wilson and his assistant, Mr. McKay, are now branding and estimating the remaining dead and scorched timber in this forest, which will have to be sold to prevent further deterioration.

*Expenditure of "Thirds" and "Fourth."*—Sixty-six separate schedules of proposed expenditure of the amounts that were standing to the credit of various local bodies were received and checked, representing a total amount of £3,649 0s. 9d.

*Lands acquired under the Land for Settlements Acts.*—Two estates have been acquired in this district under these Acts—the Opouriao Estate, at Whakatane, Bay of Plenty, and the Okauia, near Matamata. Of the first named, sixty lots, of a total area of 6,524 acres 3 roods 9 perches, were leased last year, with an annual rental of £1,268 10s. 4d. This year ten additional lots have been leased, of a total area of 716 acres and 11 perches, and an annual rental of £143 15s. 10d.; making a total area leased of 7,240 acres 3 roods 20 perches, in seventy lots, with a total annual rental of £1,412 6s. 2d. Against this there have been two forfeitures for non-fulfilment of conditions, of a total area of 560 acres 2 roods, and annual rental of £9 16s. 4d., thus leaving a balance of 6,680 acres 1 rood 20 perches held at present date, paying an annual rental of £1,402 9s. 10d.

For the five lots in the Opouriao Estate which were opened for application on the 24th March there were no less than ninety-two applicants, but, at a special meeting of the Land Board held for the purpose, the number of those who were eligible for the ballot was found to be eighty-four. I think that, under the present regulations which govern the mode of selection, Government are far more likely to obtain a suitable class of settler.

I am unable to furnish a report upon the improvements and general carrying-out of the conditions by the Opouriao settlers, because the Ranger is only just at present making his first visit for the purpose. I believe, however, that all the conditions are being fulfilled. The settlers have had an anxious time of it for their first year, as the excessively dry spring season reaching to the end of January rendered it probable that the crops would be a failure, and this would have meant ruin to a good number. However, the timely rains of February and March effectually dispelled their fears, and I hear the crops are now promising good returns.

The second estate, lately purchased, called Okauia, of 6,528 acres, just across the Waihou River from Matamata, is now being subdivided for settlement into suitable sections, and I hope to report next year that it is all occupied by settlers.

*Office Work.*—The staff of both Lands and Survey have had their hands very full, more particularly the book-keepers' branch, as the mining vouchers checked and recorded amount to 1,742, covering payments amounting to £39,319 14s. 7d., whilst the vouchers for ordinary expenditure—roads, &c.—amount to 2,033, representing payments of £50,194 4s. 10d. From the messengers' books which are posted up I find that 16,928 letters have been received, and 22,359 letters despatched; 2,029 telegrams received, and 1,803 telegrams despatched; 3,365 parcels received, and 4,106 parcels sent out. Every sitting of the Land Board has been occupied with a very heavy amount of business, and the transfers granted amount to eighty-eight, whilst the applications for timber-flottage licenses, both for new licenses and renewals, amount to twenty-two. These have all to be very carefully gone into, involving much time and anxiety.

*Lands available for Settlement.*—The area at present open for selection scattered all over the land district is 496,705 acres. An additional 37,000 is now being subdivided for settlement in the Mangakahia district, Whangarei, and in what was originally the Tokatoka Swamp, in the Otamatea County (these rich lands have been scheduled for opening, and are well worth the attention of selectors); also a portion of the Opuatia Block, in the Raglan County, and other districts. Hokianga County has over 100,000 acres of heavy-forest lands of good quality, but which want roading to make them available for settlement. In the Kawhia County, from Pirongia southwards, there are 56,000 acres of Crown land of good quality, already under the control of the Land Board, but which it is not advisable to open until the purchase of the adjoining lands has been completed, and even then very extensive roading must be undertaken to make them at all useful or fit for settlement.

GERHARD MUELLER,  
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

#### HAWKE'S BAY.

The total area of land opened for sale or selection during the twelve months was 76,862 acres, classified as follows: Under the optional system, 13,026 acres; cash by auction, 19 acres; lease by auction or application, 46 acres; village lands, 34 acres; pastoral runs, 47,327 acres; small grazing-runs, 16,410 acres.