

135 acres were felled in 1896, and are now ready for grassing. Each settler has felled sufficient bush to enable him to build with safety when the time arrives. Four of them are married men, the number of children being eleven. At present the settlers are engaged in making the road to their lands.

Tawai (411 acres; nineteen selectors).—This settlement is in the Auckland District, Awakino Survey District, and is administered by this department at the request of the Commissioner of that land district. 69 acres were felled and grassed to 31st March, 1896; 213 acres now felled, and ready to be grassed. Five settlers have built houses, valued at £175, and are resident, the married men with their wives and seven children in all. There are thirteen single men here out of the nineteen selectors. About 50 chains of fencing has been erected, valued at £28. There are twenty-nine head of cattle and eighteen horses in the settlement. 202 chains of Manganui (service) Road has been felled, stumped, and cleared, and 8 chains formed.

Taken as a whole, these settlements may be considered to be fairly successful up to the present time. On the earlier settlements rent becomes due this year; this, together with introduction of part-time system of work, will no doubt test the *bona fides* of the settlers.

In addition to the foregoing, there is the Burfoot ("Mangapoua") Improved-farm Settlement, which has been surveyed but not yet balloted for.

JOHN STRAUCHON, Commissioner of Crown Lands.

WELLINGTON.

Since my return to this district I have inspected the whole of the improved-farm settlements. Of the four under Captain Turner's control and management, the Kawatau and Pemberton farms present a satisfactory state of improvement and progress, and should always afford the advantages of comfortable homes and at least part livelihood for settlers of energy and industrious habits. The other two settlements, Akitio and Mangatiti, comprise generally scattered sections in the eastern Puketoi country, rough, hilly, and remote from markets.

Captain Turner reports:—

A total area of 7,950 acres 1 rood 6 perches was allotted under this system during the year. The new improved-farm settlements which comprise this area are Horopito, Mangatiti, and the extension of Akitio. The Kawatau is the only settlement on which the improvements were completed so as to enable the sections to be finally registered on the books during the year. This settlement comprises twelve selectors, and an area of 999 acres 3 roods 36 perches. This makes the total number now registered on the books twenty-five selectors, holding an area of 2,246 acres 3 roods 36 perches. The number of selectors who hold sections but have not been registered is 174, holding an area of 15,782 acres 3 roods 8 perches. The arrears of payments on the registered holdings, not including the current half-yearly payment, amount to £4 19s. 10d., due by one selector. Two forfeitures took place during the year on account of non-payment of rentals. Four ballots were held, two of which were for forfeited sections, and two for forfeited sections in farm-homestead special settlement blocks, which had been subdivided and proclaimed under improved-farm regulations. The total number of allotments disposed of in these ballots was 162. As the number of sections held is 199, and the number of persons who have applied for land under this system is 820, it will be seen that 621 applicants have been unsuccessful owing to the available land suitable for settlement on these conditions being so limited.

It is quite evident that there is a considerable demand for holdings under this excellent system, and it would appear advisable to select the settlers rather than ballot for them, to insure that married men of good character and qualifications obtained preference. Our chief difficulty, however, is the want of good land in suitable positions to meet the requirements of applicants and afford them a reasonable prospect of establishing homes for themselves and families.

Akitio Improved-farm Settlement.—During the past year 503½ acres was felled, but owing to the unfavourable weather only 282 acres was burned, and some of this not well burned. 103 acres of grass was sown, 20 acres this season and 83 acres last autumn. There are at present on the farm forty-one settlers, representing seventy-six persons, occupying 4,271 acres. The stock on the settlement at present consists of three head of cattle, three horses, and 240 sheep.

Kawatau Improved-farm Settlement.—During the year 32 acres of bush has been felled and burnt, and grass-seed sown. The two sections which were forfeited last year have been taken up, and are now occupied. There are twelve settlers (nine married and three single), with sixty-five persons dependent on them, making a total of seventy-seven persons, on the settlement. A good amount of fencing has been done, and other improvements effected, by the settlers during the year. Two of the settlers have their sections fairly well stocked, but the majority who have no stock have let the right to graze sheep to outside settlers. The stock on the settlement comprises nineteen head of cattle, six horses, fourteen pigs, and ninety sheep.

Mangatiti Improved-farm Settlement.—169½ acres of bush has been felled on this settlement, which is occupied by ten settlers, with twenty-six persons dependent, who have taken up 1,030½ acres between them. The bushfelling on the farm has only been done recently.

Pemberton Improved-farm Settlement.—Only 10 acres of bush has been felled on the settlement during the past year, most of the land being already under grass. There are now thirteen settlers on the farm (nine married and four single), with forty-three persons dependent on them. The stock has increased slightly, and there are now 112 head of cattle, ten horses, nineteen pigs, and 654 sheep on the settlement. The settlers continue to make substantial improvements, and are apparently prospering. The schoolhouse mentioned in my last annual report has been sanctioned by the Government, and is now in course of erection.

Mr. Murray reports on the settlements under his charge as follows:—

There are now seven improved-farm settlements in the Wanganui district, the oldest of them having been only about two years and a half in existence, the others are really only starting.