

and it is anticipated that a considerable proportion will be taken up. Renewals have been arranged upon revaluation in a few cases where leases originally issued by the School Commissioners were about to expire.

KAURI-GUM.

The number of licenses issued during the year has been—To British diggers, 2,598; to alien diggers, mostly Austrians, 577; gum-buyers' licenses, 225. These figures show a considerable reduction on those for the previous year, especially among the Austrian diggers, this reduction being due to the low price of gum, the low wages resulting having driven many diggers to seek more lucrative employment in other directions.

Several applications have been made during the year for the removal of the reservation from kauri-gum reserves, with a view to the land being opened for settlement; but the provisions of the law which require a certificate that the land is no longer required for gum-digging render it difficult to remove the reservation from any considerable area, as all the reserves are being worked to some extent, and it is exceedingly difficult to say when a field is worked out. Should the price of gum again become high, many difficult places at present practically untouched will no doubt be searched, and may quite probably give payable results. Already gum has been found beneath the sandstone bottom underlying swamps, as well as in hard cement formations which require to be broken with a pick.

Numerous applications for leases of residence and business sites in terms of the regulations issued in December last have been received and dealt with, though the work has been delayed for want of survey assistance to mark out the areas applied for preparatory to issue of leases. The question of occupation of business-sites is a matter requiring special attention, and the area that is allowed for settlement is in many cases hardly large enough if a digger endeavours to make a farm.

LAND BOARD.

During the year twelve ordinary and fourteen special meetings of the Board were held. The special meetings were held at different centres within the district, ranging from Taumarunui in the south to Dargaville in the north, the members of the Board being thus enabled to meet Crown tenants in their own localities, and to make personal observation of the needs and capabilities of the different parts of the district. The result of these meetings justifies the Board in stating that the Crown tenants of the district are generally of an excellent stamp of settler, who are in many cases performing fine pioneer work under considerable difficulties and hardships, and deserve whatever sympathy and consideration can be justifiably given.

The biennial election of a Crown tenant's representative on the Board was held in February, and resulted in the re-election of the sitting member, Mr. J. Trounson, whose nomination was the only valid one received. Mr. M. W. Armstrong, whose term as a nominated member expired in March, did not seek reappointment, and the vacancy has been filled by Mr. J. Rountree.

OFFICE-WORK.

The continual increase in the number of Crown tenants in the district, the keen demand and numerous inquiries for all lands opened for selection, and the increasing number and complexity of the transactions passing under the control of the Department, have combined to make the year a busy one in all branches of work. Some indication of the volume of work passing through the office may be gathered from the fact that the number of letters, packets, and telegrams received during the year was 37,609, while the outgoing mail numbered 61,720 pieces of matter. The corresponding figures for the preceding year were 33,097 incoming and 46,810 outgoing.

I took charge of this district on the 1st December last, upon the retirement of the late Mr. E. C. Gold Smith, and wish to place on record my appreciation of the willing assistance that has been given me by the staff since I assumed control.

H. M. SKEET,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

HAWKE'S BAY.

THE SETTLEMENT OF CROWN LANDS.

The year just ended, generally speaking, was one of advance in settlement right throughout the district. The settlers in the old-established settlements are prosperous, and there is a great movement towards efficient farming, bringing into use land which before was considered of little value, by manuring and adopting other methods of progressive farming.

The new settlers in the back country are engaged in the work of bushfelling, burning, and grassing, having made great headway, and appear quite satisfied with their prospects.

Every opportunity has been taken during the year to survey and offer the remaining Crown lands for settlement, but the supply was not quite equal to the demand, as can be seen by there being only three sections, of a total area of 871 acres, still available for selection, comprising two which are village allotments. In view of the extraordinary demand, the Land Board has decided, when offering lands for selection, to give preference to landless unsuccessful applicants in previous ballots, and also applicants with families.