

character which would assist the opening-up of the country as well as assisting local bodies in the prosecution of essential works.

Upon the appointment of the Public Trust Office Board in the latter part of 1917 a comprehensive scheme of reorganization of office methods and practices was decided upon.

The main lines of reorganization which were laid down included the extension of the principle of decentralization which had already been applied to a limited extent, the expansion of the organization of the Office throughout the Dominion, the introduction of modern methods of supervision, staff control, and office practice, and the provision of accommodation of an improved character to promote the comfort and convenience of the staff and members of the public.

The scheme of reorganization laid down may now be regarded as practically complete, the only further work in connection with it remaining to be done being the introduction of certain details complementary to the main schemes.

Full application of the principle of decentralizing the work has been made possible by legislative amendments to the Public Trust statutes, and at thirteen of the principal towns in the Dominion there now exist Local Deputy Public Trustees, with wide powers of independent action, under the general direction and control of the Public Trustee.

It has been the serious and constant aim of the Board to minimize those delays in administration which have been a source of dissatisfaction to beneficiaries and the public in times past, and, although in a business of such magnitude and complexity it is impossible to expect that delays will ever be finally eliminated, the Board is able to chronicle great progress in this matter.

The delegation of administration and accounts to local offices, the introduction of time-saving methods, the improvement in the record system, the introduction of a system of check on inward correspondence, and the periodical review of the administration of all estates have been factors which have resulted in a great speeding-up of the administration.

The offices at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin have also been provided with district solicitors for the transaction of certain classes of legal work, thus avoiding references to Head Office.

Permanent branches of the Department have been opened at Newmarket, Hamilton, Wairoa, Stratford, Taihape, Dannevirke, Palmerston North, Newtown, Blenheim, Sydenham, Ashburton, Timaru, Gore, and Otautau, and the opening of further offices at fifteen other towns only awaits the provision of the necessary trained staff.

The working-conditions of officers have been very greatly improved by the provision of new and modern office-accommodation wherever possible.

The work undertaken in connection with the administration of deceased soldiers' estates proved very onerous. Great concessions were made in the performance of this work, and the total value thereof cannot have been less than £50,000 or £60,000. The greater part of the soldiers' work has now been disposed of and the next year should see it practically completed.

The prospects for the future work of the Office are most encouraging. At new branches which have been recently opened there has been a steady flow of work showing a constant increase.

One specially satisfactory feature is the large number of wills of living persons which are being prepared and held in safe custody by the Office. Already the number held exceeds twenty-six thousand and the accretions each year number between three and four thousand. The accumulated wills represent a reserve of business which in the future should prove most valuable.

When the improvements now in course of introduction have been perfected, and the remaining towns throughout the Dominion have been provided with branches of the Office, it can confidently be anticipated that the work of the Office will show a further increase.