

held by one person. The discontinuance of the purchase of houses led to a considerable increase in the number of applications received from soldiers to assist them in the building of new houses.

During the year the Land Board considered, under all headings, 2,224 applications from soldiers for financial assistance. Of this number 1,820 were recommended, 282 being for farms, 474 for purchase of dwellings, 361 for the erection of dwellings, and 704 for the purchase of stock, implements, &c., and advances for improvements, the total amount authorized being £1,430,175. Of this sum £248,118 represented advances for stock, implements, manures, improvements, &c.

Many applications by soldiers to transfer their house properties to other soldiers have been received. The Board does everything possible to discourage the soldier from selling his home, but in most cases there are some special circumstances which make the sale necessary.

Every care is taken to ensure that the building of the new houses is well carried out. In the first place, with every application handed in proper plans and specifications are received. These are submitted to a competent builder for examination, and, if necessary, amendments are made. In the event of an advance being authorized the work of erection is carried out under the direction of our own builder, who makes inspections prior to each progress-payment. Generally, four or five inspections are made during the course of erection, the result being that a satisfactory job is generally obtained and the soldier receives good value for the money expended, and the Government security is rendered safe.

With the large amount of advances made in this district under section 2 it has become necessary that there should be frequent inspection and supervision of securities, and it is proposed during the year to strengthen the staff in this respect.

The Birdwood Estate.

The Birdwood Estate, formerly a kauri-gum reserve, containing 1,100 acres of hilly and undulating gum land, is situated about two miles and a half from Swanson, a small railway-station on the Helensville line, seventeen miles from Auckland City. The area was in past years a famous gumfield, and a first resort for men stranded in Auckland without money or employment. Since the early "eighties" the field has been dug over and redug, and as a consequence the land was intensely potholed. It became practically exhausted as a gumfield ten years ago, and the kauri-gum reservation was removed from the land. It was then decided to have the land prepared for settlement. Surveys were made, and the formation of the necessary internal roads was taken in hand and successfully carried through.

In May, 1919, a start was made with the breaking-in of the area. About 900 acres of the block was then covered with a dense, tangled growth of manuka and hakea, with occasional *Pinus insignis* interspersed over the area. The thick growth of scrub and the abundance of deep gum-holes on the land made the work preparatory to ploughing slow and costly. Up to the end of the year 865 acres was cleared, 250 acres ploughed and harrowed, a cottage built for the caretaker, and also stables and fencing erected, and a horse-paddock of about 20 acres laid down in grass. Most of the ploughing was done with a tractor, but owing to the broken nature of the ground, the generally rough surface, and the prevalence of deep potholes, which have been filled, the best results from the use of the tractor were not obtained. However, where the surface was at all smooth, good progress was made, and the ground turned over to a great depth in a satisfactory manner.

Wherever possible the development-work has been let by contract, with the exception of the ploughing, which was done by men specially employed for the work. The whole of the clearing was let by contract, the work being performed by returned soldiers. Works now in hand are being carried out by contract, more labour being available. Reasonable and satisfactory contracts have been entered into for carting, ploughing, cross-ploughing, and harrowing, fencing, and putting-in of crops.

The expenditure in development-work up to the end of the year amounted to £2,792. This year the ploughed area is being fenced, a portion of it cropped, and by the end of the year it will be ready for disposal in areas of from 25 to 50 acres as suburban farms suitable for fruit, poultry, pigs, and a few cows. The land which has been broken in looks in first-class condition. As soon as the sections are open for settlement they will be readily taken up, and the whole of the expenditure on the block in development-work will be recouped.

AUCKLAND.

(H. M. SKEET, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Lands opened for Selection.

The aggregate area opened for selection during the year under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act was 82,815 acres. Included in these are eight new settlements of land purchased under the Land for Settlements Act. These are—

(1.) Hereford Park Settlement (opened 12th April, 1920), situated near Te Puke, in the Bay of Plenty, and consisting of 1,409 acres of mixed grazing and dairying land, in four sections. All of these have been taken up, but two of the settlers who were not sufficiently qualified to handle the land are giving up their sections. The others are making progress, and the settlement should develop into a success for the right men.

(2.) Rangitaiki Settlement (opened 24th May, 1920), is situated on the banks of the Rangitaiki River, in the Bay of Plenty, the land forming part of an area acquired to facilitate the carrying-out of operations by the Drainage Branch. The area available for occupation was 150 acres, in six sections, the land being of excellent quality, and the locality suitable for small holdings, the