

In December, 1920, a supply of stamps, coiled by a machine imported from the United Kingdom for the purpose, was received by the Department for use in its stamp-vending machines. After an extended trial the machine-made coils were found to be quite satisfactory, and were brought into general use. Previously the stamps had been coiled by hand.

OCEAN MAIL-SERVICES.

Services outward.

During the year the "Moana" and the "Tofua" were replaced on the San Francisco service by the "Marama" and the "Tahiti," and these two vessels are maintaining a satisfactory service.

Except for some months during which the "Tahiti" replaced the "Makura," the Vancouver service has been performed by the "Niagara" and the "Makura," and a reasonably good service is being maintained.

The contracts for both services have been further extended, and now expire about July, 1922.

During the year a shipping strike in Australia seriously affected the two services, and made it necessary for the Panama route to be availed of for the despatch to America and the United Kingdom of three mails. Mails are despatched by the Panama route when it affords a quicker despatch. The matter of despatching mails via Suez has also been watched, but so far no opportunity for a quick despatch has presented itself. Correspondence specially addressed for despatch by any particular vessel or route continues to be so despatched.

At the request of the United States Post Office, commencing in December, 1920, specially addressed selected-letter mails for certain places in the United States of America were made up at the Auckland and Wellington offices for despatch by steamers sailing for Victoria, B.C., for despatch from there by seaplane service to Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. The United States Administration explained that the object was to test the seaplane service, and show its advantage in the transportation of mails quickly over a large body of water. The service is to terminate on the 30th June, 1921. This Administration has asked to be furnished with the result of the trial.

Services inward.

The British Post Office has had difficulty for some time past in determining the best route for the despatch of mails to New Zealand. Of late the Suez route has been largely availed of, for the reason that close connections with Pacific steamers have been rendered difficult by the fact that these steamers have been unable to maintain a regular time-table. The Panama route has also been used where it was thought that it would provide a quicker despatch.

It is anticipated, however, that the Vancouver and San Francisco steamers will shortly be in a position to adhere strictly to time-table, and the British Post Office should then be able to take advantage of Atlantic steamers, which, together with railways of the Continent of America, will provide close connections with the Pacific steamers. The matter of selecting the quickest route is one that has been given much consideration by the London Post Office.

INLAND MAIL-SERVICES.

Aerial Services.

The Department during the year continued to utilize aircraft for the carriage of mails.

Between April and July, 1920, mails were carried by seaplane between Auckland, Raglan, and Kawhia; Auckland, Russell, Whangaroa, Mangonui, and Awanui; Auckland and Whangarei; and between Auckland, Dargaville, Rawene, Kohukohu, and Whangape.

In June, 1920, an aeroplane carried mails from Gisborne to Tokomaru Bay and from Gisborne to Napier.

On the 19th October, 1920, Captain Russell (who has since lost his life in an aeroplane crash) took mails by aeroplane from Wanganui to Napier and Hastings.

In December, 1920, Government approved of the recommendation of the Air Board that aerial mail-services between Auckland and Whangarei, and between Christchurch and Timaru via Ashburton, be established by way of trial. The Christchurch-Timaru service, a daily one, was inaugurated on the 31st January, 1921, to run for a period not exceeding three months. For the flight from Christchurch to Ashburton forty minutes was allowed, and for the flight from Ashburton to Timaru the same time. The service was not used for mail-matter to any appreciable extent, but the objects of the Air Board were attained.

The seaplane service between Auckland and Whangarei has not yet been established, but arrangements for its commencement are now well advanced. It is not expected to be a success from a postal point of view, as the mail-services between the places mentioned are already adequate. An aerial mail-service between two distant places such as Auckland and Dunedin may possibly prove remunerative, but the high cost of fuel at present operates against success. While the public are anxious to have quick services for the carriage of their correspondence, the imposition of even the small aerial fee of 6d. per letter apparently deterred many from using the facilities offered.

Land and Sea Services.

Tenders were invited for the performance of all inland mail-services the contracts for which expired on the 31st December, 1920. No great difficulty was experienced in connection with the reletting, and the new subsidies were, generally speaking, the same as those previously paid.