

General.—It will be seen from the figures quoted that the business transacted in the Wellington Branch has assumed very considerable proportions. By the hearty co-operation of the staff it has been transacted with general satisfaction to clients, as is evidenced by the expressions of appreciation which reach the Office from time to time. Genuine complaints have been few in number and have been of a very minor nature.

Accommodation.—The matter of increased accommodation, more especially in regard to space for interviewing clients, will shortly have to be taken seriously in hand.

19. WHANGAREI.

District Area.—This is defined as the whole of the area north of a line from the Mangawai Inlet on the east along the southern boundary of the Otamatea County district to the Kaipara Harbour on the west. This area contains the following seven counties: Otamatea, Hobson, Whangarei, Hokianga, Bay of Islands, Whangaroa, and Mongonui.

The District Office is situated in Whangarei, which is the main town in the north, and there are Agencies established at Dargaville, Kohukohu, and Kaitaia under the direct control of the branch.

Increase of Business.—There has been a large increase of business of a solid nature at this branch during the last twelve months. New estates accepted during the year total sixty-four, while administration was closed in forty-four estates having a distributable value of £25,772. The total number of estates under administration is 255, having an approximate value of £312,887.

Wills for Deposit.—A total of 107 wills, having a value of £400,610, were prepared at the branch during the year. This approximates to an average of £3,744 per will. The total wills on deposit at the branch now exceed six hundred. A gratifying feature of the wills deposited at the branch is the class of person imposing this trust in the Public Trust Office.

Realizations.—The value of the properties realized during the year slightly exceeds £20,000.

Staff.—Several changes in the staff have occurred during the year, and the total number of officers has been increased by two, making a total of ten.

Financial Stringency.—Although this district appears to have suffered less than many other districts during the financial crisis, the period of stress is by no means past, and farmers in general are finding it very difficult to pay their way. This chiefly concerns the operation of the Office in the matter of realizing assets and collecting income. It is difficult to effect sales, especially of farm properties, and there appears to be no real basis of values.

Personal Supervision.—As in previous years, direct personal supervision is aimed at in every estate, and long trips and long hours are undertaken to carry out this object. Three Agencies under control of the branch are visited at intervals, eight inspections having been made during the year.

The summer in the north has been an exceptionally wet one, and bad roads have considerably added to the arduous duties of inspecting and reporting officers.

Office Accommodation.—As forecasted in my last annual report, owing to the increase of business the original premises proved too small, and further temporary office accommodation had to be provided at the back of the present office.

New Premises.—The new Public Trust Office Building for the branch is rapidly becoming an accomplished fact. Although the building is in a very unfinished state at present, it is sufficiently far advanced to convey the impression that a handsome, adequate, and businesslike structure and one which will be a great acquisition to the town will be the result.

Industry and Development.—The advent of the railway to Auckland City and the general awakening in the north is evidencing itself in the increase of business activity throughout the district, and particularly in the Town of Whangarei. Many large buildings are in process of erection in the town, and the surrounding districts show promise in the amount of business development. The farming community is badly affected by the financial stringency, but this industry is nevertheless developing rapidly throughout the district. A gratifying feature is the activity of the local bodies throughout the district. The difficulties to be surmounted are many, but there is a steady improvement in the matter of roads and bridges in every direction, thus year by year enabling the district to be more readily controlled from the central branch office at Whangarei.

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