

Amendment Act, 1911, section 4, that upon the filing in any office of the Supreme Court of an application for administration of the estate of a deceased person it should be the duty of the Registrar of that office to transmit to the Public Trustee by telegram sufficient particulars in regard to the application to enable him to identify the deceased person in the event of his holding a will executed by that person. It will be readily understood that a very large number of notices in terms of this statutory provision are received each day from the Registrars of the various offices of the Supreme Court, and that a considerable amount of work is involved in dealing with these inquiries. Satisfactory arrangements have been made, however, to ensure that in every case the inquiries are disposed of with the utmost promptitude in order that the applications for administration may not be delayed on this account.

The system of an annual stock-taking of the whole of the wills on deposit with the Register of Wills, to which I have made reference in my previous reports, has been continued during the past year. With the large number of wills deposited the work involved is considerable, but it is considered that a very necessary purpose is served by this check. It is satisfactory to record that the thorough examination carried out, which is conducted with a proper regard to secrecy, has disclosed that all matters were in good order. With the most modern appliances ensuring the material safety of the wills, and in view of the other precautions strictly carried out, testators may rest assured that their wills and any other documents deposited with them are in secure custody and immune from any risk of improper disclosure of their contents. Safety is assured free of charge for the storage of wills in which the Public Trustee is named executor. The wills are kept in steel filing-cabinets in a special vault, and the method of filing facilitates the quick production of any will desired, and the expeditious filing away of them when they are completed.

LEGAL DIVISION.

63. In accordance with the principle of decentralization the legal staff is no longer concentrated at Head Office. District Solicitors have been stationed at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Gisborne, and Invercargill; and Legal Clerks, who are qualified solicitors, have been appointed at the Wanganui, Napier, New Plymouth, and Masterton branches.

The duties of the legal officers stationed at branches are mostly confined to the preparation of wills, conveyancing matters, and Magistrate's Court work. The duty of advising the Public Trustee is in the hands of the Solicitor to the Public Trust Office at Wellington. It has been found that the delegation of legal duties to legal officers at branches has made for a speeding up of work generally, with a consequent advantage to the Office and its clients.

64. Considering the fact that the Office represents and protects so many diverse interests it is inevitable that it should be drawn into litigation. Not only may the defence of the rights of beneficiaries compel or invoke consequential resort to the Courts, but the duty is frequently cast upon the Public Trustee of representing absentees, infants, or other persons under disability in proceedings to which the Public Trustee is not a party. It is recognized that the organization and resources of the Department peculiarly fits it to undertake the representation of persons whom it is impossible to make parties directly or who are unable by reason of disability to look after their own interests. Both the rules of Court and statutory measures make provision for the assistance of the Public Trustee being invoked in the cases last alluded to. The Office has discharged these special duties with entire satisfaction, and its services are being increasingly availed of in this direction.

In matters where the Public Trustee as representing particular beneficiaries is directly interested in the settlement of matters of doubt and difficulty all efforts are made to find a solution which safeguards the rights of beneficiaries without recourse to litigation with its attendant delays and expense.

From the nature of the case, however, or by reason of the uncompromising attitude of other parties, a settlement cannot in many cases be reached out of Court,