

The policy of inviting competition for the stores business has been continued during the year, and concurrently with this the policy of giving preference to (a) stores produced or manufactured in New Zealand, and (b) stores produced or manufactured within the Empire has been kept in operation.

The work of reorganizing the Stores Branch was actively continued during the year. The new systems have now been firmly established throughout both Islands and are working well.

The accounting system as now designed and in operation is capable of being expanded as may be required in the future.

All main stores and sub-stores and a number of trust stores have been completely re-equipped with new racks of a standard design.

Practically the whole of the stores and material in the hands of other branches—particularly Locomotive Workshops and Way and Works—has been brought into the new system.

Up to the present the numbers of sub-stores and trust stores created or brought into working under the new system are as under: Sub-stores—Locomotive workshops, 5. Trust stores—Locomotive workshops, 10; maintenance works, 13; permanent-way, 31; locomotive, 15; Car and Wagon Inspectors, 6.

These will shortly be added to when the main signal-workshops stores are actually taken charge of and the locomotive running-sheds in the South Island more completely incorporated in the system.

During the year fifty complete lessons on stores work and practice have been prepared for the education of the staff, and examination-papers, questions and answers, have been prepared in connection therewith.

The costing of all railway motor services has been continued during the year by the Stores Branch.

This branch has continued to give service throughout the the system to the Stores Control Board, and has systematically dealt with the very numerous requisitions and stores requirements of other Departments of State.

#### NEW ZEALAND RAILWAYS MAGAZINE.

The monthly magazine which the Department commenced to issue last year has been very well received by those amongst whom it circulates.

It is regarded by the press of the Dominion as a source from which information respecting the intentions, operating developments, and general attitude of the Department towards the various phases of transportation activity may be obtained.

Many members of the public have also shown their interest in the publication by contributing informative articles for its pages.

#### REFRESHMENT BRANCH.

The number of refreshment-rooms controlled by this Branch remained at twenty-six during the year, but Paekakariki and Kaitoke rooms were taken over as from the 2nd April, 1927.

The staff of the Branch at the 31st March was 341, compared with 368 in 1926.

The volume of business for the year was £4,047 short of the previous year's record of £133,658, the gross earnings amounting to £129,611. This is regarded as satisfactory, as the previous year was an abnormal one on account of the Exhibition traffic.

During the year it was found necessary to make further improvements at some of the refreshment-rooms, and these included the following:—

Palmerston (S.I.) refreshment-rooms remodelled and brought up to date.

Ohakune counter room altered and improved.

New staff accommodation-house erected at Ohakune.

New refreshment-rooms erected at Helensville.

Facilities at the Mercer staff accommodation-house improved.

Addition to headquarters office, Wellington.

These works were all of an urgent nature, and their completion has resulted in considerable benefit.

In connection with the visit to New Zealand of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York this Branch undertook all the catering arrangements on the trains in both Islands and in the camp at Tokaanu, the staff being drawn from the refreshment-rooms and sleeping-car depots.

At the majority of the hotels where the Royal party was accommodated assistance was given the proprietors in the matter of staff, equipment, &c.

The menus at these hotels were approved by the Branch, and chefs provided for preparing same. The undertaking was one of considerable magnitude and importance, and it was satisfactory to learn that the results earned the approbation of Their Royal Highnesses and party.

The operations of the Branch in connection with the purchasing of foodstuffs and groceries for other Government Departments under the authority of the Stores Control Board have been maintained during the year.

The system of hiring of cushions to passengers on the Auckland-Wellington Main Trunk express trains, inaugurated in April, 1925, has increased in popularity, and the number hired during the year was 65,467, compared with 38,519 for the previous year.

#### SUGGESTIONS AND INVENTIONS.

The Department's Suggestions and Inventions Committee dealt with 1,245 suggestions during the year. Of these, 108 were recommended for adoption either wholly or partially; 276 were deferred for subsequent consideration, had been previously considered, or were already in operation; 628 were rejected; and 233 were under trial or investigation or had still to be dealt with at the 31st March.