

The earthquake of the 3rd February caused extensive damage to post-office buildings in the Hawke's Bay District. The new chief post-office building at Napier, which was completed and opened for business as recently as the 28th July, 1930, withstood the shock remarkably well, but was gutted by the fire which followed, the destruction of the town's supply of water preventing any attempt at saving the building. The post-office building at Port Ahuriri was badly damaged by the earthquake, and then completely destroyed by fire. At Hastings the clock-tower collapsed, and the old portion of the post-office building which carried the tower was so seriously damaged that it had to be demolished. In the case of the Wairoa Post-office building, the clock-tower collapsed and the building itself suffered extensively. Other departmental buildings in the district, notably the Waipukurau Post-office building, suffered more or less severely from the earthquake.

Pending the replacement of the building at Port Ahuriri and the reconditioning and re-erection, respectively, of the buildings at Napier and Hastings, the Department's business at those places is being conducted in temporary premises. Except at Hastings, the arrangements which have been made meet present requirements fairly well. In the case of Hastings the volume of business is practically as great as it was before the earthquake, and it is necessary that proper accommodation be provided as early as possible. Steps are accordingly being taken to this end.

In recent years the policy has been to exclude clock-towers from new post-office buildings, owing principally to the additional expenditure which is involved in strengthening a building sufficiently to carry a clock-tower; also, because it has been found that, owing to the nature of the structural work which is required to support a clock-tower, the space on each floor below the tower cannot be utilized to advantage; that the existence of the heavy structural work creates a difficulty in the event of alterations or additions to a building being required; and that the reverberations from the chiming and striking of the clock cause considerable annoyance to persons working in and around the building, and, especially at night, to officers and their families who are required to reside on the premises. In addition, it was considered that a clock-tower on a building constituted a menace in the event of an earthquake; and this has, unhappily, been confirmed by the Department's experience in the Hawke's Bay and West Coast disturbances. It has been established that, in the case of the post-office buildings at Hastings, Wairoa, and Westport, the presence of clock-towers contributed largely to the damage caused to the buildings, and proved a grave menace to the safety of officers and of members of the public. In the light of this experience, action is being taken with a view to either strengthening or dismantling the clock-towers on a number of post-office buildings, and so to remove any possible danger of collapse in time of earthquake.

It is anticipated that the erection of the new building at Wellington, which is to replace the Courtenay Place Post-office building, will be sufficiently advanced by September next to permit of the post-office being transferred to the new premises.

Since the end of the financial year the erection of new post-office buildings at Palmerston (Otago), Ruatoria (also residence), Urenui, and Waitara, has been completed. Satisfactory progress is being made with the erection of new buildings at High Street (Christchurch), and Upper Symonds Street (Auckland).

Work has been commenced on the erection of a new building at Westport in replacement of the chief post-office building which was destroyed by the earthquake of June, 1929. It is anticipated that the work will be completed about the end of 1931.

The foundations for the proposed new chief post-office building at Dunedin have been completed. Plans and specifications for the building itself, have also been completed, and tenders are soon to be invited for the erection of the building.

MAIL-SERVICES.

Inland mail-services have been maintained with but little interference, except that the Hawke's Bay earthquake resulted in an interruption for several weeks of the Napier-Wairoa section of the Napier-Gisborne service. In order to provide an outlet for Gisborne and Wairoa it was necessary for a period to despatch mails via Rotorua and the Motu Gorge.