

BUILDINGS.

But few offices have been erected or put in hand during the year.

The new building at Timaru is well advanced, and is expected to be completed by the end of July.

The post office and telegraph building at Wanganui is being altered and enlarged. The alterations are expected to be completed in about two months. In the meantime the business of the two departments is carried on in temporary offices.

Competitive designs have been received for commodious post office and telegraph buildings for Wellington, and premiums awarded the authors of the two best designs. No decision, however, has been arrived at with respect to adopting either design; and until parliamentary authority has been obtained for the necessary expenditure the erection of the new offices will not be undertaken. In the meantime the business of the Post Office is seriously impeded from the want of convenient accommodation.

The increase of business at Auckland has made it absolutely necessary to enlarge the chief post office; and the needed alterations will be carried out immediately.

New offices have been erected during the year at Ohaupo, Pahi, Port Albert, Patea, Waitara, Woodville, Duvauchelle, Catlin's River, Gore, Waitahuna, and Wyndham.

The offices at Hawera, Waipawa, Waipukurau, and Foxton, have been altered and enlarged.

New offices are in progress at Dargaville and Greatford; and the offices at Lower Hutt, Kawakawa, and Akaroa are being enlarged.

It is proposed to build new offices at Collingwood, Takaka, Sydenham, and Balclutha.

INLAND MAIL SERVICES.

The inland services were, on the whole, performed satisfactorily, remembering the very difficult nature of the country over which many of these services travel, coupled with the unusual severity of the weather and floods which had to be contended against. The usual delays to the Hokitika and Malvern service occurred, and interruptions to mail communication from floods were very general on the west coast of the Middle Island. Indeed, over the greater part of the colony exceptionally severe floods were experienced, and not only were the ordinary services interrupted, but communication by railway was occasionally suspended. Temporary arrangements, where practicable, were made in every case by the department to maintain communication.

The contracts for the majority of the inland services expired on the 31st December, 1878, and the services were re-tendered for, but with the result, in many cases, that the cost exceeded that of the former contracts, the difference being over £5,000. A proportion of this, however, must be set against new services and extensions or acceleration of existing ones. In 1878 the cost of inland services was £28,435, but the expenditure increased to £33,719 in 1879.

The service between Wanganui and New Plymouth was increased from thrice weekly to once a day. There is now daily communication throughout from Wellington to New Plymouth. A second daily service was established between Patea and Hawera.

A weekly service by coach between Auckland and Waiwera (Hot Springs) was established; but owing to the non-completion of the road the coach has been unable to proceed further from Auckland than the Orewa River.

The twice-weekly mail service between Palmerston North and Kopua was increased to thrice-weekly. Thrice-a-week communication between Wellington and Napier is now secured.

In connection with the Hokitika and Malvern service, a branch service has been established between Kumara and Goodfellows, admitting of the delivery and despatch of the Greymouth mails simultaneously with those to and from Hokitika.

A second daily delivery of mails has been established between the offices at Wanganui, Turakina, Marton, Greatford, Bull's, Feilding, Halcombe, Palmerston North, and Foxton.

The following statement shows the number and description of the inland services for the year together with the cost, compared with that of 1878:—

			1879.	1878.
Performed by coach and mail-cart	...	...	111	113
„ horseback	...	...	211	207
„ foot	...	...	61	52
„ water	...	...	43	45
„ railway	...	...	48	48
			<hr/> 474	<hr/> 465
Aggregate mileage	...	...	7,249	8,355
Total number of miles travelled	...	...	2,589,114	2,308,827
Cost to the department	...	...	£33,719 11s. 1d.	£28,435 10s. 8d.
Average cost per mile	...	...	3½d.	3d.

MAIL STEAM SERVICES.

The agreement under which the Imperial Government undertook to convey the colonial mails between London and San Francisco, Galle, or Singapore, and also to pay over to the several colonial post offices the outward postages, less the British inland rates (in the case of letters one penny per half-ounce), on the colonies undertaking to maintain mail services to the points named, expired on the 31st December, 1878. The position of the colonies at the beginning of last year with respect to this agreement may be gathered from the following extract from the last report:—