

schools, &c. The area granted under Acts comprises titles for Native reserves near this town, and elsewhere.

Table W, Selectors on the Books.—After allowing for new selectors, there are eighty-seven less on the books of the department than last year; and, out of the total number of 1,454, only 1,001 are liable for payments during the year.

Improvements.—The reports of the Crown Lands Ranger show that 274 sections were inspected, comprising an area of 27,067 acres of first-class and 45,964 acres of second-class lands. The requirements of the Act were 3,657 acres under cultivation, and additional improvements to the value of £15,439 3s. The area actually cultivated was 19,505 acres, at a value of £38,669, and other improvements, such as fencing, buildings, gardens, &c., to the value of £15,836. Twenty-six selectors were in default. The area of bush felled on selections made during the year was 480 acres, by about thirty settlers. A number of special inspections were made, notably of the twenty-two sections in the Mangamingi Block, also of the University Reserves, Carlyle and Opaku, to be surrendered with a view of the lands being relet at reduced rentals.

Probable Future of Crown Lands.—The area of Crown lands at present available for settlement is, roughly, 544,000 acres. Of this area, 114,561 acres were purchased from Natives during the year. As in last year's report, I would again urge the adoption of energetic measures in obtaining the freehold of as many as possible of the Native blocks on each side of the Ohura Road north of Taumatamahoe. These lands are urgently wanted for settlement, and it appears to me folly to go on spending, as at present, large sums of money in clearing and forming the Ohura Road through these Native blocks without first obtaining the freehold thereof. It simply means doubling or trebling the price the Crown will ultimately have to pay for such improved lands.

The Ngaire Block of 7,500 acres, which lies about one mile and a half east of Eltham Railway-station, and on which a considerable amount of Government money has and still is being spent, in cutting drains, clearing and forming roads, &c., will shortly be ready for disposal, and will doubtless be keenly competed for, being of good quality and easy of access.

The Rawhitiroa Block of 35,000 acres, situated on the Waitotara River, some thirty-six miles by road north-east of Waitotara Railway-station, and of which the survey is nearly completed, will, during the coming season, be opened for selection as small grazing-runs in areas of from 1,800 to 5,000 acres.

In the Mokau-Mohakatio, Taumatamahoe, Egmont, and Rata-tomokia Blocks, surveys for settlement purposes of some 48,000 acres will be put in hand, pushed on as rapidly as possible, and opened for application as soon as available.

JOHN STRAUCHON,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

HAWKE'S BAY.

The selections this year have been seventy, embracing 20,141 acres, an average of 287 acres to each selector. The preference for lease in perpetuity is very pronounced, there having been exactly four times as many selectors under this tenure as on the alternative of occupation with right of purchase. It is interesting to note the average size of selections is lowering yearly. In 1892-93 it was 553 acres, in 1893-94 it was 329 acres, and this year 287 acres, as above stated.

Cash Sales.—The cash sales have been only four this year, all town sections, and show that the cash purchase of rural lands is not in favour here; but thirty-five perpetual-leaseholders have acquired the freehold of their lands to the extent of 13,190 acres, contributing £11,336 to this year's revenue.

Deferred Payment.—Sixteen licensees have made their holdings freehold, reducing the number of selectors to eighty-five. The permitted extension of licenses from ten to fourteen years has been taken advantage of by most of those remaining, so that it will be a few years more before this system of tenure is extinguished.

Perpetual Lease.—The perpetual leases are also fast decreasing, the total number now held being one-fifth less than at the commencement of the year: thirty-five have been made freehold, seven have been exchanged to lease in perpetuity, and three have been forfeited for non-fulfilment of conditions, leaving 209 leases at the present time, holding 95,416 acres.

Occupation with Right of Purchase.—Only four selections have been made during the year. The total area now held is 19,736 acres by twenty-nine licensees.

Lease in Perpetuity.—This tenure is evidently preferred to the last-mentioned one, as the lessees are considerably more than two to one, there now being sixty-seven holders with 45,860 acres. Seventeen leases, comprising 10,343 acres, have been taken up this year, and seven exchanged from perpetual lease. Forfeitures and surrenders have been four in number.

Village Settlements.—The selections during the year have been five for cash, five on occupation with right of purchase, and six on lease in perpetuity. There are now forty-eight on the books, holding 258 acres. As a rule, they are not a success so far as settlement is concerned, for the greater number are unoccupied, the holdings being found too small to make a living upon independent of outside labour, which is difficult to obtain in the particular localities these settlements were placed in. The consequence is that improvements are made sufficient to comply with the conditions so as to avoid forfeiture; but a large proportion of the selectors are absentees.

Village Homestead Special Settlements.—There has been no change under this tenure, neither new selections, forfeitures, nor surrenders. There are two settlements, one at Woodville, with twenty-seven holders, and the other at Puketitiri, with four holders. The total area held is 203 acres, and both settlements fulfil expectations. The total advances made are £876 15s. 9d., and the estimated value of improvements £5,632, £830 being for houses and the balance for bushfelling and other work.