

Tomoana.—A settlement situated near Hastings and the Tomoana Freezing-works, originally part of the Frimley Estate. It contains 110 acres, and was opened for selection in March, 1898, being taken up by thirteen selectors, at an annual rental of £135 2s. Improvements have been effected to the value of £1,314 15s., as against £67 6s. required by the Act, which shows very satisfactory progress. Nine houses have been built, and eight selectors are already residing, there being thirty-four persons living on the block; 60 acres are down in maize, potatoes, barley, oats, and mangolds, the remainder being in gardens, orchards, and grass.

Mahora.—A settlement adjoining Raureka and Tomoana, being another portion of the Frimley Estate. The land was purchased from Mr. J. N. Williams, and opened for selection on the 22nd March, 1899. It contains 1,134 acres, which were subdivided into thirty-four sections from 6½ to 71 acres in extent. One hundred and sixty-two applications were received, and twenty-seven sections disposed of by the end of the month, with an area of 844 acres and an annual rental of £1,260 1s. 8d. Since the 31st March the remaining sections have all been taken up. From its proximity to Hastings, and having good soil suitable for grain- or fruit-growing, this settlement should make rapid progress.

Willows.—This settlement is situated near Gisborne, in Poverty Bay, and was purchased from the Bank of New Zealand. It contains 775 acres, and was opened for selection in March last. The settlement is divided into twenty-two sections, ranging in area from 20 to 71 acres, and fifty applications were received for them, sixteen allotments being selected, comprising 585 acres, with an annual rental of £573 10s. 4d., while since the 31st March all the remaining sections but one have been taken up. From its favourable position the settlement should flourish.

General.—Taking the settlements generally, they are making satisfactory progress, improvements to the value of £11,173 10s. having been made against £3,358 19s. 6d. required by the Act, this being an excess of £7,814 10s. 6d. over the requirements, showing that the settlers are pushing on with energy which should lead to success.

Revenue.—The total revenue this year is £23,291 3s. 11d., as against £18,507 12s. 6d. last year, showing a satisfactory increase of £4,783 11s. 5d., and being £4,750 over the estimate. The increase is partly accounted for by the large blocks of Crown land put into the market, and also by the large increase of perpetual leases made freehold, no less than £9,023 5s. 10d. being received from the latter source.

Arrears.—Fifteen selectors were in arrears to the amount of £161 2s. 2d., and considering the number of tenants now on our books—viz., 767—and the low price at present obtainable for wool and all farm produce, the amount is very small, and the prompt payment of rents is creditable to the Crown tenants.

Improvements.—We have had only one Ranger in the district this year, who is stationed at Poverty Bay, and have not therefore been able to have many inspections made in the Hawke's Bay portion of the district. Sixty inspections have been made, covering an area of 17,252 acres, principally in Poverty Bay. The total value of improvements effected is £12,972 5s. 6d., as against £5,765 2s. 8d. required by the Land Acts, thus showing that improvements to the value of £7,207 2s. 10d. have been made in excess of what was necessary. Eight selectors are behindhand in their improvements, but not to any extent. I have now, however, made arrangements for the Hawke's Bay portion of the district to be inspected, Mr. Mouat being detailed for this duty, and this next year will see a considerable increase in the number of holdings inspected and reported on.

Land available for Settlement.—We have some 400,000 acres available for settlement, a large portion of this being broken forest country difficult to road. We have, however, 225,023 acres now under survey, which will be thrown open for selection during the year. Of this area, 30,000 acres are in the Waipatu district, 120,000 acres the Crown portion of the Tahora No. 2 Block, 20,500 acres in the Nuhaka No. 2 Block, 20,000 acres being the balance of the Ngapaeruru and Waikopiro Blocks; and 35,023 acres of the Tauwharetoi Block at Hangaroa completes the list.

General.—The past year has been a very satisfactory one in this district, everything showing a steady progress. There is a good demand for suitable country, instanced by the rush we had on the Ngapaeruru sections. The portion offered for selection contained 13,730 acres of broken forest country with fair soil, subdivided into forty sections. For these we received no less than 2,342 applications, which constitutes a record for Hawke's Bay, and, I believe, for the colony. For one section we had 377 applications, and for others 263, 216, and so on, so that the balloting took a considerable time, and it was difficult to accommodate so many applicants, the Courthouse at which the ballot was held being too small to hold them. However, Mr. Jourdain and all the officers employed worked with great energy, and we were able to carry out everything to the satisfaction of the public.

There has been a steady increase in office-work in all branches, we having received and recorded 2,601 applications for land, had an addition to our books of 117 selectors holding 36,964 acres, while the land revenue received was £23,291 3s. 11d. The number of vouchers for expenditure was 2,064, representing a total amount of £53,279 17s. 11d., and in addition vouchers to the amount of £2,590 13s. 11d. were also passed through for payment of accrued revenue to local bodies. There were fifty-three transfers of leases and sixty reports furnished to the Government Advances to Settlers Department, while seventeen meetings of the Land Board were held. The number of letters and telegrams received was 8,833, and the number despatched was 9,325. It will be seen by this that Mr. Bull, the Receiver of Land Revenue, and Mr. Jourdain, the Land Clerk, together with other officers, have had a busy time, and it has been necessary to employ temporary assistance to enable us to get through the work.

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Commissioner of Crown Lands.