

A launch plying with twenty passengers on Lake Okataina was totally destroyed by fire during the year. Due to an unsuspected defect in the engine reversing-gear which caused its intense overheating, adjacent accumulations of petrol vapour and oil were ignited. Fire-extinguishers, which were applied to the fire, were sufficient to damp the fire long enough to permit the vessel to be beached and the passengers and crew safely landed. But for the presence of the fire-extinguishers and their efficient condition and application, it is probable that a serious loss of life would have arisen from this casualty. Fortunately, the gradual decline of the petrol-engine with its highly dangerous fuel is effecting a corresponding reduction of the total fire risk.

It is with satisfaction that the Department reports the year's additions to the Dominion's seagoing merchant fleet. Several notable vessels have been acquired by the Union Steam Ship Co. of New Zealand, Ltd., including the twin-screw motor-vessel "Kamo" of 1,450 gross tons. She is the former German ship "Gaarden," which was allotted to New Zealand as the Dominion's share of German shipping reparations. "Kamo" is technically interesting in that she was built as a German supply ship with twin rudders designed to give her, as a merchant ship, exceptional ability to take evasive action. She was extensively repaired in a United Kingdom shipyard, and is now engaged in the New Zealand coastwise cargo service.

"Wairata," a single-screw motor-vessel of 5,255 gross tons, is an addition to the Union Co.'s New Zealand trans-Pacific service. Built in 1943 in the United States and named "Cape Igvak," this vessel was transferred to the New Zealand register in 1947. To effect transfer of registry, "Wairata" was completely measured at Wellington for British tonnage by the Marine Department. This is so far the largest ship completely measured for tonnage in New Zealand. The crew's accommodation was improved at Wellington to conform to the latest requirements of the Department.

The latest addition to the Union Co.'s fleet is the steamer "Koromiko," which recalls an earlier "Koromiko" celebrated as the only "turret" type ship ever registered in New Zealand. The new "Koromiko" is a steamer about 3,900 tons gross and is a sister ship of and replaces the "Komata," which fell a victim in 1942 to enemy action in the Pacific Ocean and was sunk.

Two modern steam-tugs, "Tapuhi," ex "Empire Shirley," and "Taioma," ex "Empire Jane," recently arrived in New Zealand to take up duty in Wellington Harbour to succeed the Union Steam Ship Co.'s veteran tugs "Terawhiti" and "Natone." Both of the new tugs, built in Aberdeen, are of recent design and burn oil fuel. They provide an important addition to the ship-salvage and general towage facilities available to Wellington and the coast south of Wellington. The steam tug "Terawhiti" was surveyed by the Department for the last time for a voyage to Sydney, to which port she proceeded in December, 1947, there to enter a new period of usefulness. The future of the tug "Natone" has not yet been decided.

In addition to the normal duties of the Ship Survey Branch, the consultative staff attached to the office of the Chief Surveyor of Ships has been occupied with various design projects for the Marine Department and for other Government Departments. The work has included the design of a motor oyster-carrier for the Fisheries Branch to operate in the Auckland oyster area, a combined tug and oyster-tender for Kaipara Harbour, two modern passenger motor-vessels for the Tourist Department's lake services, an inter-Island passenger and cargo motor-vessel for the Island Territories Department converted from a Fairmile patrol vessel, and other various lifeboats, surf-boats, and small craft for the lighthouse tender "Matai" and the dredges and other ships operated by the Marine Department.

Special services have also been rendered by the Ship Survey staffs at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin on local Docking Committees, in the valuation of various craft on behalf of the Rehabilitation Department, and generally in affording advice and practical assistance to other Government Departments and to private industry concerned with shipping.