

Levin Branch.—This branch has made good progress, there being twenty-two estates now under administration, as compared with sixteen the previous year. The number of new wills obtained during the year was fifty-one, of a total value of £216,000, showing that the office is becoming more appreciated in the district as the advantages in administration which are offered are becoming more generally known.

Contract and Repair Work.—The contract and repair work carried out has shown an increase, notwithstanding the fact that we now have only one Inspector, although the two rent-collectors attend to and report upon all minor repairs. The contracts and repairs carried out amounted, in 1922, to £4,401; in 1923, to £5,028. The charges for supervision of these contract repairs more than covered the Inspector's salary. These charges are now to be abolished.

Death Duties.—Death duties amounting to £20,921 were paid in ninety-nine estates.

Rents.—Of the £70,633 rents collected, £35,131 was collected by the rent-collectors, being £9,000 more than they collected the previous year.

WHANGAREI.

Area controlled.—A line commencing at the Mangawai Harbour and following the southern boundary of the Otamatea County until it meets the Kaipara Harbour defines the southern boundary of this district. The whole area from this boundary up to the North Cape is controlled by the Whangarei Branch of the Public Trust Office. The district comprises the following counties: Otamatea, Hobson, Whangarei, Hokianga, Bay of Islands, Whangaroa, Mangonui.

The District Office is situated at Whangarei, and there are agencies established at Dargaville, Kohukohu, and Kaitaia; the two former agencies were in existence before Whangarei was created a separate district, and the Kaitaia Agency has since been established.

New Premises.—Although it is only two years since the branch was established, it has already outgrown the present premises. Plans have been prepared and tenders called for the erection of a new office building. This building comprises four spacious floors, and will accommodate all the Government Departments.

Increase of Business.—The growth of business at the branch has been of a solid nature and is indicative of the increasing popularity of the Public Trust Office in the district. The new estates accepted during the year total seventy-nine, while administration was closed in thirty-eight estates, having a value of £15,144. The total number of estates under administration is 232, having an approximate value of £253,870.

Wills for Deposit.—This branch of the Department has been appreciated by the public, and eighty-nine new wills were deposited for safe custody.

Financial Stringency.—The district as a whole has so far weathered the financial crisis in a remarkable manner. This no doubt is due to the fact that the land boom had not properly reached the north before the depression came. Although a considerable amount of office funds is invested in the district there is not one bad security. The collection of rent and interest on estate assets has been very satisfactory. The money shortage has, however, manifested itself in the realization of assets. Sales are difficult to effect, and buyers will not approach a deal except at much lower prices than previously ruled, and only small deposits can be obtained in most cases.

Personal Supervision.—Although the district is a large one and in many parts sparsely populated, personal supervision is aimed at in every case, although long trips and long hours are necessary to do it. This policy undoubtedly inspires confidence in the office. The office motor-car is invaluable, and without it much of the personal supervision would be impossible.

Industries of the North.—The largest part of the North consists of farming-lands ranging from fertile flats, which are equal to anything in the Dominion, to rough grazing-lands. Then there are large areas of gum land which yield an annual wealth. Coal, timber, lime, cement, and flax are produced in great quantities, so that the district has varied resources and is not dependent solely on farming. At the close of the year the North was suffering from drought conditions which considerably reduced the output from farming operations, and also reduced the winter supply of feed.

Development of the North.—Development is noticeable everywhere in the North. During the year Whangarei and Auckland have been connected by rail, and the increased interest in the Town of Whangarei as a result of it has created a mild boom. Borough Councils, Town Boards, and County Councils are vigorously applying themselves to the roading question, and the quagmires of the past are rapidly giving way to passable roads. The office cannot be without pride in these local developments, as office funds have contributed largely towards it. The Public Trustee visited the district and travelled largely over it during the early part of the year. His visit was very beneficial to the branch, as it focussed considerable public interest on the office.

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