

him. This close representation results in speedier administration, and ensures that, no matter where the assets of an estate may be situated, there is an Office representative near at hand to deal with and to protect them.

Coupled with this extensive representation there is another factor in the organization which has played an important part in speeding up and economizing the transaction of the Office business—namely, the scheme of decentralization which was inaugurated by the passing of the 1912 Amendment Act, and to which I have referred at some length in previous reports. Prior to 1912 objections had from time to time been made to the administration of estates spread over the whole Dominion by an official located in Wellington. The old system contemplated everything being done by the Public Trustee, and the result was that with the enormous expansion of business the burden of work in the Head Office had become well-nigh unbearable.

It was only to be expected that such a system would cause dissatisfaction, and that it entailed both in the Head Office and the branches an enormous amount of correspondence and a heavy traffic in documents to and fro. Obviously, had it been allowed to continue, such a system must have broken down under its own weight. Even before 1912 the difficulty had to a certain extent been overcome by the appointment of District Managers and Agents in various parts of the country, but the limited powers possessed by these officers still necessitated frequent references to the Public Trustee, and did not afford sufficient relief either to the Head Office or the branches. A simple and effective remedy has, however, been found in the establishment of District Public Trustees in the principal centres, exercising such functions of the Public Trustee as are delegated to them. As I have stated, this was accomplished by a slight amendment of the Office Act in 1912. The details have been worked out departmentally and have been improved upon and developed in the intervening years, and now decentralization is working smoothly and effectively. Under this scheme the work of the administration of estates and numerous other duties are, subject to certain control by the Head Office, carried out at the various branch offices. The estate accounts are kept at the offices conducting the administration, and payments to beneficiaries, creditors, and others are arranged by these offices. When need arises, the various branches throughout the Dominion perform any necessary work on behalf of estates administered by other branches. Thus the whole of the detail work in estates is now carried on in the district offices in close proximity to the beneficiaries and other interested persons. The process of decentralization has been gradual, and each successive step has conclusively shown that the system was a proper one to adopt. The departmental officers and clients generally bear unanimous testimony that the change has been beneficial to the Office and those who transact business with it.

Another of the Office problems demanding its close attention has been the simplification and standardization of procedure and methods in order to cope with the demands placed upon the Department. The application of modern methods and the use of up-to-date machinery have materially assisted in this direction. The fund of experience which the Office has accumulated during the fifty-five years of its existence is constantly suggesting to its officers new ideas of more simplified methods and improvements in the systems employed. The object aimed at by those responsible for the running of the Department has been to secure improved management, co-ordination between officers and between the various divisions and branches, prevention of duplication and overlapping in work and systems, and the scrapping of wasteful and out-of-date methods. I think it may be fairly claimed that this has in no small measure been achieved, for, in comparison with the year ended 31st March, 1921, when the estates and funds under administration were £21,791,229 less in value, the year now under review has shown an increase of only £3,852 in working-expenses and of only seven in the number of staff employed. A study of modern business and commercial methods is made, and periodical conferences of senior officers are arranged, when Office methods and organization are discussed. The staff is encouraged to make suggestions for the improvement of the organization and working of the Department.

With estates and funds under administration totalling £44,155,548 and investments of £28,465,963, a rigid system of internal check and safeguard is imperative, and the system devised forms an important part of the Office management. Strict