

## ONEHUNGA—NEW PLYMOUTH MAIL-SERVICE.

The Onehunga—New Plymouth mail and passenger steamer service, which had been in operation for about fifty years, ceased on the 2nd April. Until the Main Trunk Railway was opened between Auckland and Wellington in 1908, this service was the principal means of communication between Auckland and the South. Of recent years the increased use of motor transport has affected the service to such an extent that the steamship company decided early in the year to replace the passenger steamer by an auxiliary schooner carrying cargo only. It is not now advantageous to use the service for mails.

The Onehunga—New Plymouth service is the third mail and passenger steamer-service to be abandoned in the Auckland Province during recent years. The Auckland—Whangarei sea service was abolished in September, 1926, and the Auckland—Tauranga sea service in March, 1929. The opening of through railway-lines was principally responsible for the withdrawal of the sea services.

## OVERSEAS MAILS.

Except for the loss of the "Tahiti" on the 17th August, while on the voyage from Wellington to San Francisco, the ocean mail-services between Auckland and Vancouver and between Wellington and San Francisco have been performed regularly and without mishap. The Union Steamship Company, the mail contractors, were given authority to cancel the San Francisco—Wellington portion of the round trip that was to have been performed by the "Tahiti." For the following round trip the "Maunganui" replaced the "Tahiti," after which the "Monowai" (formerly the "Razmak" of the P. and O. Steamship Co.'s fleet) entered the service in permanent replacement of the "Tahiti" on the 2nd December from Wellington.

The average times of transmission of mails during the year by the contract services, which provide for regular fortnightly sailings, were as follow: Auckland to London (via Vancouver), 30-92 days; London to Auckland (via Vancouver), 30-38 days; Wellington to London (via San Francisco), 28-69 days; London to Wellington (via San Francisco), 31-5 days.

The contracts for the services expired on the 31st March, 1930, and were renewed for a further period of a year from the 1st April, 1930. The contracts are to be further renewed for twelve months from the 1st April, 1931.

The Panama route continues to be used for the despatch of specially addressed correspondence and of second-class mail matter and parcels for the United Kingdom and Europe. The advent of fast steamers on this route has led to the service becoming popular for specially addressed correspondence, and a considerable quantity of first-class matter is now despatched by the service. The United Kingdom Post Office uses this route almost wholly for the despatch of second-class mail-matter and parcels to New Zealand and to a considerable extent for letter mails.

The Suez route is used only for the despatch from New Zealand of specially addressed letters, but considerable use is still made of the route for forwarding correspondence to New Zealand.

The weekly Friday non-contract service maintained between Australia and New Zealand by steamers of the Union Steamship Co. and the Huddart Parker Co. was reduced for some months of the year. The service was, however, so rearranged that a steamer left either Auckland or Wellington every Friday for Sydney. Previously on every alternate Friday steamers left both Auckland and Wellington for Sydney. In addition to the regular weekly service, mails for Australia are despatched fortnightly on Tuesdays by the steamers engaged in the Vancouver and San Francisco services, and, when a good despatch is afforded, by cargo steamers engaged in the Melbourne, Sydney, and Newcastle—New Zealand services.

The Bluff—Melbourne mail service contract was not renewed or relet when it expired on the 28th January.

## LOSS OF MAIL-STEAMER "TAHITI."

The mail-steamer "Tahiti" was lost at sea on the 17th August (New Zealand time) some 400 miles south of Rarotonga on the outward voyage from Wellington to San Francisco. The sinking of the vessel was occasioned by a mishap to the starboard propeller shaft which occurred at 4.30 a.m. on the 15th August, when the ship was four days out from New Zealand. Water rapidly found its way into the after-holds and engine-room of the ship, and for some hours the position of the vessel was precarious. Although in a helpless condition, she remained afloat sufficiently long, however, to permit of the saving of the passengers and crew, and the great bulk of the first-class mail-matter.

Following the mishap steps were at once taken to have the letter mails brought to the deck. In this work the Mail Agent (Mr. J. C. Greig) and his assistant (Mr. S. Hanna) had every assistance from the crew. At a later stage the Mail Agents were able, with the help of passengers, to bring second-class mails also to the deck. At this time the crew were busily engaged in manning the pumps, and it was necessary for the Agent and his assistant to work in the hold at some risk to themselves in the event of the vessel foundering.

On the 16th August, the small Norwegian vessel "Penybryn" reached the scene, and stood by until on the following morning the s.s. "Ventura," a large American passenger vessel, arrived. The passengers and crew were transferred to the "Ventura." The boats of the "Tahiti," with the assistance of a boat from the "Penybryn," then engaged in the task of transferring the letter mails from the disabled steamer to the "Ventura." This was a most hazardous undertaking, as the mail-bags had to be dropped from the deck of the "Tahiti" to the boats rolling in the swell below. Some of the bags fell into the sea, but most of these were recovered. Of a total of 257 letter-bags on the ship only