

with the Seat of Government that they were constantly being excited by false reports, the truth of which they had no means of testing. It appeared on every account most desirable that effect should be given to the wishes of the memorialists, and accordingly a service was, without much difficulty, established, branching off from the Napier line at a place called Arowena, and passing by Tarawera, Maketu, to Tauranga. The number of letters transmitted for these places has hitherto not been considerable, but no doubt as soon as the facilities for communication become better known the amount of correspondence will increase.

Another branch to this Line, or more properly, a further extension of it, has been made by establishing a service from Napier to Poverty Bay.

As may be gathered from what has already been said, there are three Branch Lines in connection with the main line between Auckland and Napier.

1st. From Karkariki to Raglan and Kawhia.

2nd. From Arowena to Tarawera, Maketu, and Tauranga.

3rd. From Napier to Poverty Bay.

The principle upon which the cost of these has been apportioned, is to charge each Province with the maintenance of any Branch wholly within its boundaries, the expenses of the Trunk Lines being charged to the General Account of the Colony.

Thus the two Branches to Raglan and Kawhia, and to the Bay of Plenty respectively, inasmuch as they keep up a communication between portions of the Auckland Province only, are charged against that Province. On the other hand the Line between Napier and Poverty Bay, inasmuch as it traverses partly the Province of Hawke's Bay, and partly the Province of Auckland, has been treated partly as a Local Post of the former Province, and partly as a portion of the Napier Trunk Line. The one half, viz., as far as the Wairoa, being charged against the separate account of Hawke's Bay, and the remaining half against the General Account.

The cost of the Branch to Raglan is £52 per annum; to the Bay of Plenty, £65—both charged to Auckland. From Napier to Poverty Bay £208—one-half being charged against the Province of Hawke's Bay, and the rest (£104) against the General Account.

Local Posts.

As regards the Local Posts, the extension which has lately been given to this part of the service requires some attention.

The small amount of salary now paid to Local Postmasters, (the duties of the Office being in some cases performed gratuitously, in others the salaries being merely nominal) would prevent any very extensive changes in the present system, at least any that would be calculated to impose much additional work.

One improvement, however, on the present system might be made which would be calculated to introduce more method and exactitude into the mode of conducting the business of the Local Offices, but which would entail an expenditure not hitherto authorised.

The Local Offices have as yet been unprovided with date-stamps. The consequence of which is that it is almost impossible in cases where delay had occurred in forwarding any letter, to trace the fault to the right source.

As the number of Offices unprovided with date-stamps is now considerable, and as the expense of obtaining the required quantity would be therefore large, it is a matter of some importance to consider how this could be done most economically, and particularly how unnecessary expense can best be prevented.

The removal of a Country Post Office, a matter of no unfrequent occurrence, would, for instance, if the date-stamps for these Offices were prepared on the ordinary model, be a source of much useless expense.

The date-stamps, as is known, at present in use are distinguished by bearing the name of the particular locality cut upon them at which the Post Office is situated. It is evident, however, that in cases of removal the date-stamp of the original Office, specially adapted as it would be to one particular locality only, would become useless directly the Post Office was removed to a locality of another name, and therefore the expense incurred in providing it would be entirely thrown away, unless indeed the new Office were to retain the date-stamp of the original one, a plan which would lead to great confusion.

In order to avoid these inconveniences, it is proposed to provide a sufficient number of date-stamps and to designate the respective Post Offices not by the names of the places at which they are situated but by consecutive numbers. By this plan the removal of an Office would not involve the necessity of a new date-stamp, as the old one would be quite sufficient to identify the Office at which any letter may have been posted, or through which it may have passed.

Steam Postal Service.

Before entering upon the actual state of the Steam Postal Service, it will be desirable, in order to give as complete a view as possible of the matter to refer briefly to the progress made previous to the period comprised in this report.

The attention of the Legislature had, during its Session in 1856, been more especially directed to the best means of improving the steam communication between the different Provinces, leaving that between the Colony and Australia in connection with the line from the United Kingdom, to be provided for by the Imperial Government according to the Treasury Minute of November, 1855.