

There were in all sixty-one Boards of Review, and the total number of days on which they sat was about 200. In some instances the business transacted was little more than nominal, while other Boards had several days' heavy work in considering and determining important objections that were referred to them. While alluding to the Boards of Review, it is but fair to state that the members give their services—the office being an honorary one—but, of course, all travelling and other expenses incurred by a Reviewer in the performance of his duties are refunded. The office is an important and responsible one, and I have much pleasure in bearing testimony to the extreme care and attention bestowed by the Boards in the performance of their onerous and difficult duties.

The number of valuation-rolls supplied to local bodies is 944, and the cost of copying them amounted to £625, which does not include cost of checking, adding, paper, &c. All the copying is done by piece or contract, and this system is adopted in all extra work where practicable.

In August, 1891, several extra clerks were taken on to prepare for the assessment, and the number gradually increased until February, 1892, when there were 82 on the temporary staff. There are now 49.

From time to time I have given full consideration to the question of the advisability of the general assessment for local bodies being made by this department. I have come to the conclusion that it is not desirable to continue the present system. It is not necessary to immediately provide another in its place, and next year would be early enough to introduce a measure repealing "The Rating Act, 1882," as far as regards supplying rolls by the Commissioner. At present an immense quantity of work is done that is not required for a land-tax assessment, and this was the case, though to a less extent, under the property-tax assessment. The fact of our values being taken for local rating causes much hostility to the assessment, and consequently to any system of State taxation administered by this department. Heavy payments made for ordinary rates, special rates, drainage rates, and harbour rates, are all more or less attributed to this department, and this causes considerable irritation, while the dread of serious local taxes induces many to resist a valuation with which they would rest content if the State tax only were levied on our assessment.

At present so much time is taken up with the valuation of non-taxable properties that it is almost impossible to give sufficient consideration to the assessment of the larger and more important landed estates. If the valuation of the smaller properties were dispensed with, and rolls were not supplied to local bodies, the triennial assessment and its heavy cost might be abolished. Due care would have to be taken to insure an adjustment in the event of any general rise or fall in values in any extensive area of the country or in any boroughs. This would be done without anything approaching the work or cost of a triennial assessment, and its attendant trouble and annoyance to owners of land.

Much interesting information may be extracted from an examination of the results of a general land-valuation as to the colony as a whole and its various parts. The two natural divisions of New Zealand may be taken first, and the figures for two assessments are,—

		1888.	1891.	Increase.
North Island	...	£49,607,873	£57,441,115	£7,833,242
South Island	...	61,529,841	64,783,914	3,254,073
Totals	...	£111,137,714	£122,225,029	£11,087,315

Comparing the total valuation of 1888 with 1891, there is an increase of more than £11,000,000, a result that is highly satisfactory, and will no doubt be a surprise to many persons, even to those who take an interest in watching affairs having a more or less direct bearing on land-values and increased settlement. Of this large additional value, the North Island claims nearly £8,000,000, the increase in the counties being £6,500,000, and the boroughs, £1,300,000. In the South Island the increase is £3,000,000, and it may be said that the whole is in the counties, the boroughs showing an increase of £300,000 only. The value of the boroughs in each Island is about the same, being £18,184,297 in the North Island, and £18,222,565 in the South. The North Island counties reach a total of £39,256,818, and those in the South, £46,561,349. It appears probable that by November, 1894, the North Island will have reached a total land-value nearly equal to the South, for there is every indication that settlement will continue to proceed much more rapidly than in the South Island, and there is a great deal of land that is likely to be improved during the next two years, in addition to a large area that has been taken in hand since last November. As an instance of progress, Oroua County may be cited, for its value rose in three years from £1,397,753 in 1888, to £2,268,854 in 1891.

In considering the results of this assessment, it should be remembered that it has been made at a time when in no part of the colony did any excitement in land-dealing exist, and there was nothing like a boom, if one or two small local districts are excepted. In many parts of the colony there has been a great deal of improving done, and on the whole there has been in the districts which show the greatest increase a steady and *bona fide* demand for good to fair land. It will be seen that very few portions of the Auckland Provincial District show an increased value, but in several counties in the southern part of the North Island there has been a most marked increase in the total assessed value. It has been asserted—it is always so—that values have been placed at too high a figure by assessors; but this is not the case, and the higher total must be ascribed—firstly, to the increased extent of improved land, and to a generally firmer feeling in the land-market; and, secondly, to many larger properties having been raised to their fair market value.

In the North Island the counties rank thus as to total value: Hawke's Bay, £3,673,889; Oroua, £2,268,854; Waipawa, £2,179,812; Eden, £2,002,677; Cook, £1,885,856; Wairarapa South, £1,872,035; Patangata, £1,863,936; Wairarapa North, £1,831,209; Rangitikei, £1,475,473; Manukau, £1,385,330; Hawera, £1,247,436; Wanganui, £1,176,106; Wairoa, £1,101,072; and