

PUBLIC CALL OFFICES

At the 31st March there were 1,413 public call office (coin-in-the-slot) telephones installed in New Zealand. The total collections amounted to £104,974. (See also Table No. 5 in Appendix.)

CARRIER TELEPHONE EQUIPMENT

A commencement has been made with the installation of twelve-channel carrier telephone systems (similar to that recently installed between Auckland and Wellington) for operation between Wellington-Christchurch, Auckland-Hamilton, and Wellington-Palmerston North. When these systems are cut into operation the waiting-time at present experienced by users of the toll service between the places mentioned will be considerably reduced.

SUBMARINE CABLES

In the report for last year, mention was made of the lifting from Cook Strait of a four-core submarine telephone cable and its projected use elsewhere. The recovered cable has since been reconditioned and laid across Foveaux Strait between Oreti Beach, Invercargill, and Lee Bay, Stewart Island. The new cable has provided the Department with one additional telegraph and three additional telephone channels. These facilities will fill a long-felt want.

THE CANTERBURY SNOWBREAK

On the 14th July, 1945, following an extremely heavy gale the previous afternoon, one of the heaviest snowstorms ever experienced in the Canterbury District caused the most extensive disruption to toll, telegraph, and telephone services in the Department's history. The area affected was roughly that situated between the foothills of the Southern Alps and the east coast and bounded on the north by Cheviot and on the south by the Waitaki River.

On the Christchurch-Dunedin main toll and telegraph route some fifty-six miles of pole-line carrying a large number of circuits were levelled to the ground, while in approximately another fifty miles of toll and telegraph line many spans of wire were broken, although generally the poles were standing. Notwithstanding that the area north of Christchurch escaped more lightly than the southern and western portions of the province, there was, nevertheless, extensive wire damage in the north. As a result of the damage to toll and telegraph services, many post-offices and telephone exchanges were isolated. Within the course of a day or two, however, temporary lines were provided, enabling the restoration of communication between a number of the more important offices and other parts of the Dominion. On account of the magnitude of the disruption and the widespread area involved, several days elapsed before reliable and full information was available, but immediate steps were taken to despatch technical officers, linesmen, materials, and plant to Christchurch. Altogether some one hundred workmen from all parts of New Zealand, some of whom were rushed to the scene by air, were made available.

Immediately the disruption occurred, departmental emergency radio services were brought into operation, and by this means urgent messages, including a large amount of press traffic, were disposed of without serious delay. All telegraph and toll services, on a slightly limited basis, were available within three weeks after the storm, while full services were restored on more or less temporary lines some six weeks later.

In addition to the damage to toll and telegraph plant, very serious disruption and damage was caused to telephone exchange subscribers' equipment in the numerous exchanges in the district. Altogether some ten thousand telephones were rendered inoperative and hundreds of miles of subscribers' lines were damaged to varying degrees. It is of interest to record that sixteen days after the storm approximately four thousand subscribers had been reconnected, while on the thirtieth day following the storm the number of subscribers reconnected totalled approximately eight thousand.