

duty at 1.47 a.m. The outbreak was confined to two small rooms, which were completely gutted, the roof and walls being burned away. A smaller outbreak had previously occurred in the same office, earlier in the year.

A fire occurred in the General Post Office block, Wellington, on the night of the 22nd May, 1908, resulting in three old wooden buildings being destroyed. The premises containing the parcel-post office and the dead-letter office were partly burnt. Very little damage was done to the General Post Office building, which undoubtedly was saved from destruction by the fire-proof doors in use. A few parcels were burnt, but no letters or telegrams were lost. There was no interruption to the post and telegraph business. The staff rendered excellent service in saving the records, and the members of the Post and Telegraph Rifle Corps, who took charge of the departmental fire appliances, displayed much bravery in preventing the fire entering the General Post Office.

The mails on board the s.s. "Muritai," wrecked on the Hen and Chickens rocks on the 27th May, 1908, were recovered.

For accidents to mail-coaches, see "Inland Mails."

POSTAGE-STAMPS, ETC.

The postage-stamps at 3d. and 1s. have since June and December, 1907, respectively been printed in sheets of 240 stamps instead of 120. Two steel plates for the 3d. denomination and one for the 1s., to print 240 stamps each, were obtained for the purpose from London.

One hundred sheets of New Zealand postage-stamps at 1d. were overprinted on the 19th December, 1907, for King Edward VII Land Post-office, which was established for the convenience of the British Antarctic Expedition that left New Zealand on the 1st January, 1908.

A letter-card at 1d., of a new design, was issued in December, 1907.

2,500,000 half-penny post-cards, bearing the King's effigy, were printed from a die obtained from Messrs. Perkins, Bacon, and Company (Limited), London. The card was sold to the public from the 16th December, 1907, on which date the postage on inland post-cards was reduced to a half-penny.

For persons so desiring, half-penny current post-cards were exchanged against one-penny post-cards, which are now only used for places beyond the Dominion.

Ten thousand inland reply post-cards, showing $\frac{1}{2}$ d. as the postage for each part, and bearing impressions of the King's head, were printed and brought into use on the 16th December, 1907.

A supply of the international reply coupon was received and brought into use in this Dominion in October, 1907. These coupons enable the sender of a letter addressed to a place abroad to prepay the reply on payment of a fee of 3d. A coupon may be exchanged for a postage-stamp of the value of $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. in any country which has adopted the scheme.

AUTOMATIC POSTAGE-RECORDING MACHINES.

"The Post Office Act Amendment Act, 1907," came into operation on the 19th November, 1907. By the provisions of the Act, the Postmaster-General may permit to be issued recording-machines for impressing upon postal packets and other documents the sign of postage or stamp values, and recording the amount of such values. Such impressions are valid for the prepayment of postage and of charges on telegrams. The amount of postage and stamp values are to form part of the postal revenue. The Minister of Stamp Duties may pay commission on amounts so collected, and may make refunds of amounts represented by impressions made and recorded in error and not used. A receipt, as defined in section 121 of the Stamp Act, may be duly stamped by an impression of the machine. Every person commits an offence, and is liable to a fine not exceeding £100, or to imprisonment for any period not exceeding one year, who impresses or causes to be impressed upon any postal packet, telegram, receipt, or other document any impression with intent that it shall be mistaken by any person for an impression duly made by a recording-machine issued under the authority of this Act.

The Automatic Stamping Company has been given permission to instal machines in any number up to two hundred at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

POST-MARKING MACHINES.

The introduction of post-marking machines is being gradually extended. Recent improvements in the machines have not only simplified the mechanism, but greatly increased the speed of working. The principle of the electric-power machines has been successfully applied to foot-power and hand-power, which will enable post-marking by machinery to be done in many of the second and third grade offices. The foot-power machines have a working-speed at the rate of from 600 to 700 letters per minute, as compared with 900 to 1,200 recorded by the power machines, and the hand-power machines 250 to 350.

There are now nine motor-power, two foot-power, and five hand-power post-marking machines in use in the Dominion, and it is estimated that their use saves the Department the cost of from seven-teen to twenty officers who would otherwise be employed in hand stamping.

All the machines in use were made in the Dominion.

BUILDINGS.

Owing to the demolition of the old buildings of the Levin Block, Wellington, to make way for the extension of the General Post Office building (for which plans have been prepared and tenders are about to be called by the Public Works Department), fresh arrangements for the accommodation of the branches housed in these buildings were necessary. The parcel branch, and the Inspector of Post-offices' branch, together with the bag-making section of the stores branch, now occupy the second