

The licenses issued during the year consisted of 590 ordinary, 1,746 special, 215 gum-buyers', and 519 residence areas, a total of 3,070, yielding a sum of £1,857 9s. The new method of collection of license fees by the police has worked well.

The export of gum for the year was 8,354 tons, valued at £430,200, practically all from the north of Auckland.

FLAX.

The prospects of the flax-milling industry are good, but it is to be regretted that in many cases a large production in quantity, rather than a high standard of quality, appears to be aimed at. The dry spring and summer have been favourable to the industry, giving better fibre and greater facilities for bleaching and drying. The export for the year has been 21,567 tons, valued at £483,353.

CROWN LANDS FOR DISPOSAL DURING THE COMING YEAR.

Exclusive of the area of 242,089 acres already lying open for selection, I anticipate that an area of about 186,000 acres will be opened and selected during the ensuing year. This area will include about 101,000 acres under the optional-selection system, 5,000 acres near Tauranga under the Land for Settlements Act, 77,000 acres of national-endowment land to be offered on renewable lease, and 3,000 acres on the Hauraki Plains. The lands are well distributed over all parts of the district.

EDUCATION ENDOWMENTS.

The total area of reserves for the endowment of primary and secondary education which are now administered by the Land Board is 126,353 acres, out of which 75,850 acres are occupied by 637 tenants paying a rental of £4,789 per annum. Steps are being taken to offer for lease as many as possible of the unlet reserves, which are, however, widely scattered, and in many cases require survey before they can be offered. An area of 2,809 acres was offered during the year, principally in small sections, but only 724 acres found tenants.

GENERAL.

Twenty-six meetings of the Land Board have been held during the year, the amount of business dealt with at each being very considerable. The general work of the office has been heavy, and has kept the staff fully engaged. Some indication of the volume of business dealt with may be gathered from the fact that the incoming and outgoing correspondence totalled over 103,000 pieces of mail-matter, an increase of about 3,000 on the preceding year. I am pleased to say that the whole staff has worked faithfully and energetically.

H. M. SKEET,
Commissioner of Crown Lands

HAWKE'S BAY.

THE SETTLEMENT OF CROWN LANDS.

During the past year the principal areas opened for selection were the Manawaangi Block of 11,552 acres and Te Whitiara Block of 1,257 acres. These lands were purchased from the Natives and opened on the optional system. There was a great demand for the latter, with the exception of the homestead section, containing 61 acres, which, owing to the small area of the holding in comparison to the buildings thereon, has militated against its selection. The homestead section is generally the hardest to dispose of on most of the settlements for the above reason. The former block was not in great request, and three holdings, containing 1,525 acres, are not yet selected. Of those taken at the ballot, one has been forfeited (area, 677 acres), and three (area, 1,263 acres) are not yet occupied, and are evidently abandoned by the successful applicants.

The partial failure of the successful settlement of this block is apparently due to its distance from the nearest market at Waipukurau (thirty miles), and the bad state of the road (which has only recently been formed) from the main Waipukurau-Porangahau Road, a distance of five miles to the beginning of the block.

Several small scattered sections have also been offered, and have been readily selected.

The progress and prosperity of the older-established settlements have not been so satisfactory as usual, owing to the spring and early summer being wet and unsettled, followed by a very dry summer and early autumn. During the dry season grass-fires ran over thousands of acres, and farmers were very short of feed; also, the root crops have turned out badly, so that holders of stock are eagerly seeking temporary grazing-accommodation wherever available.

The above circumstances caused the price of stock to drop considerably, and the slaughtermen's strike also acted in the same direction.

The dairy farmer has suffered serious inconvenience and loss through the dry weather and grass-fires, not being able to keep up the usual supply of milk for the factory, and in many instances having to reduce his stock owing to the scarcity of feed. With rain and a little mild weather the feed is now beginning to improve, and there is still time for a prospect of fair winter feed. It has been a good season for fruit and grass-seed, and white crops have been fair and profitable.

Since taking charge in this district I have made myself well acquainted with all Crown lands still available for selection, and have personally visited most of the blocks. The surveyors are now busily engaged on the Crown lands available for settlement, most of which will be placed on the market during the coming year.