

A small number of alienations of land in Native townships have taken place during the year, four lessees in Otorohanga and two lessees in Te Kuiti having acquired the freehold of their sections. In addition the Native Land Purchase Board, on behalf of the Crown, purchased the freehold of eighteen sections in the Taumarunui Native Township, and negotiations were in progress and have since been completed for the purchase on behalf of the Crown of the freehold of fifty-three sections in Taumarunui Township Extension No. 1, all of these sections being within the Borough of Taumarunui and comprising very valuable land.

As in past years, the transactions of the Boards have entailed a great deal of accountancy work, due to the large number of blocks dealt with and to the fact that the owners usually hold in varying shares. The turnover of the Boards for the year totals the sum of £919,528 0s. 8d., while the actual cash received by the Boards for the same period amounted to £443,094 3s. 4d., these figures disclosing the large increases of £336,492 6s. 9d. and £171,422 8s. 8d. respectively over those for the preceding period. The extensive additions can be accounted for partly by the fact that a number of transactions were dealt with by the Boards in previous years, but could not be completed as to payment of purchase-money owing to non-completion of surveys, and partly by the fact that the Boards generally now require purchase-moneys and rents to be paid over to the Boards for distribution to the Natives entitled.

The total funds held at credit by the various Boards on the 31st March last amounted to £329,469 0s. 10d. Of this total, the sum of £267,162 9s. 3d. was placed on deposit with the Public Trustee in separate accounts in the names of the respective Boards, the interest accruing thereon at the usual office rate being payable to the Natives entitled in terms of subsection (5) of section 35 of the Native Land Amendment Act, 1913. The balance of the funds, amounting to £62,333 11s. 7d., represents the sums at credit for current account of the respective Boards.

The revenue received through the Maori Land Boards by way of fees payable under section 38 of the Native Land Amendment Act, 1913, for the year ending 31st March last amounted to a total of £3,814 6s., the small decrease of £5 5s. on last year's figures indicating that there had been no drop in the volume of work done. To this total must be added the sum of £3,633 4s. 3d. received by way of commission and interest, making the total revenue received through the Boards during the year amount to £7,447 10s. 3d.

Table B herewith sets out in detail the operations of the various Boards, and there are also appended statements showing the receipts and disbursements of the Boards.

Native Land Purchase.

The Native Land Purchase Board held eleven meetings during the year, and dealt with a steadily increasing volume of work. During the year some seventy-three blocks, comprising 116,655 acres, were proclaimed Crown land. The actual purchases made during the year totalled an area of 154,006 acres, as compared with a total of 96,256 acres acquired during the previous period. In the West Coast Settlement reserves the area purchased from the beneficial owners on behalf of the Crown amounted to approximately 10,000 acres, while in the Urewera Reserve an area of 84,700 acres was secured, making the Crown purchases in the Urewera total 125,495 acres as at the 31st March last. Negotiations are in progress at present for the acquisition of some 793,306 acres of Native land, and a start is being made with the purchase of a number of fresh blocks in the Urewera country. The purchases made by the Board in the Taumarunui Township have already been referred to.

Approximately 205,799 acres of Native land have been subject during the year to prohibitions against private alienation. Of this area a large portion was acquired during the preceding period, and 23,778 acres of the balance were purchased during the year. The remainder of the land still under prohibition is at present being negotiated for.

During the six years which have elapsed since the coming into operation of the Native Land Act, 1909, the total sum expended upon the purchase of Native lands through the Native Land Purchase Board has amounted to £1,153,850 11s. 7d., out of which total the expenditure for the last three years has amounted to £714,491 1s. 8d. The total area of Native land alienated by way of sale during the six years is approximately 1,568,394 acres, and of this total an area of some 531,848 acres or more than one-third of the whole has been acquired on behalf of the Crown, indicating the extensive part which the Crown has played in securing Native land for *bona fide* settlement. The area of Native land purchased on behalf of the Crown during the last three years totals 331,881 acres.

Table C attached hereto sets out in detail the operations of the Native Land Purchase Board during the past year.

Native Interpreters.

Out of thirty-one applicants for licenses as Native interpreters, twenty-seven sat for the necessary examination, and of these eight passed the first-grade examination, while five passed the second grade, the remaining fourteen failing to reach the required standard of efficiency. Fees under this heading amounted to £70.

Departmental.

The departmental expenditure during the year was £26,849 12s. 3d., and of this total the sum of £1,972 6s. 5d. was on account of and charged to the Native Land Settlement vote. The total revenue received by way of Native Land Court, Maori Land Board, and Native Interpreter Board's fees amounted to the sum of £13,729 17s. 9d.

In concluding my report I would mention that quite one-fifth of the limited staff of the Department are away at present on active service, and I wish to express my appreciation of the assistance given by the remaining members of the staff in their efforts to keep the office-work up to date.

THOS. W. FISHER, Under-Secretary.