

AUTOMATIC STAMP AND POST-CARD VENDING-MACHINES.

Automatic stamp and post-card vending-machines are in use throughout the Dominion, and have proved themselves efficient and economical. With the curtailment of hours during which post-offices are open for the sale of stamps, &c., they will be found a still greater convenience. The patent rights of the stamp-vending machines for New Zealand have recently been purchased by the Department.

POSTAGE-STAMPS.

The twopenny official stamp of the pictorial series was superseded by an overprinted King George stamp on the 20th April, 1917.

The sixpenny and twopenny stamps of the King George series were overprinted and issued for use at Samoa on the 5th May, 1917, and 14th February, 1918, respectively.

As the various stamps in use in the Island dependencies of Niue, Aitutaki, and Penrhyn Island comprised three distinct issues, several denominations being of the New Zealand pictorial series of 1898, it was decided to bring them up to date by overprinting King George stamps. It was also decided to discontinue indicating the values in the respective native languages. The following stamps have accordingly already been issued: Aitutaki, $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., 3d., 1s.; Niue, 1d., $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., 3d., and 2s. and 5s. (New Zealand fiscal); Penrhyn Island, $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., 6d., 1s.

Similar action is proposed with regard to the present issue of Cook Island stamps, which has now been in use since 1902. As soon as circumstances permit, arrangements will be made to replace the existing series with current stamps of the Dominion suitably overprinted. The denominations at 5d. and 10d., which do not exist in the King George series, will be omitted from the new set. The new series will consist of the denominations $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., 2d., $2\frac{1}{2}$ d., 3d., 4d., $4\frac{1}{2}$ d., 6d., $7\frac{1}{2}$ d., 9d., and 1s.

As the black colour of the $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. postage-stamp does not show the obliterating-mark satisfactorily, it has been arranged to print the stamp in cadmium-brown colour. The change dates from the 11th September, 1908.

REGISTERED-LETTER ENVELOPES.

As a consequence of war conditions the cost of manufacture of registered-letter envelopes has increased to such an extent that it was found necessary to increase the price at which the envelopes are retailed to the public.

The small-sized ($5\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $3\frac{1}{4}$ in.) registered-letter envelope was withdrawn from issue during the year, as the demand for it had ceased.

OCEAN MAIL-SERVICES.

Four bags of mails for the United Kingdom and two bags for Malta, despatched from Wellington on the 3rd and 10th May, 1917, were lost in the "Mongara," which was sunk at the entrance to Messina Harbour, in the Mediterranean Sea.

The P. and O. Company's "Mongolia," which was sunk off Bombay on the 23rd June, 1917, carried 925 bags of mail for New Zealand. These mails, all of which were lost, comprised letters awaiting despatch from London from the 16th to the 31st May, and printed papers awaiting despatch from the 16th to the 30th May.

The "Port Kembla," which left Melbourne on the 12th September, 1917, was sunk on the 19th idem by an explosion when near Cape Farewell. The mails on board included correspondence from Australia, India, Aden, South Africa, and a transport. None of the mails were recovered.

The s.s. "Wimmera" left Auckland for Sydney on the 25th June, 1918. An external explosion occurred at 5 a.m. on the following day, and the vessel sank in ten minutes. The eighty-five bags of mail on board were lost.

In accordance with the provisions of the additional war regulations made on the 9th January, 1917, the time of closing of oversea mails, and any particulars about the dates of sailing and the names of vessels carrying such mails, ceased to be published. Publication of the times of closing of mails only, without any reference to vessels, was resumed on the 7th February, 1918. On the 10th May, 1918, permission was given to advertise as freely as before the war the despatch of mails via Vancouver and San Francisco.

San Francisco Service.

This service has been carried out during the past year by the "Moana" and "Paloona," and until recently a fairly satisfactory time-table has been maintained.

Vancouver Service.

The Vancouver contract, which was due to expire in October, 1918, has been extended for a further twelve months. A satisfactory time-table has been observed by the "Niagara" and "Makura."

INLAND MAIL-SERVICES.

Inland mail-service contracts generally were due to expire on the 31st December, 1918. Owing to the abnormal conditions it was decided to renew them if satisfactory arrangements could be made; and in accordance with this decision the greater number have been extended for a further period of one year, or two or three years. In cases in which contractors were not willing to accept a renewal, or in which their demands for additional subsidy were considered to be exorbitant, and in other special cases tenders will be invited.

Many mail contractors have joined the Expeditionary Force, and in every case a suitable arrangement has been made for the continuance of the service.