

and on the west coast south of Kaipara Heads. The principal work done on the Waipu side is on the frontage of the Uretiti Kauri-gum Reserve, and a considerable area was planted in marram, lupin, and other suitable plants. Although the settlers in the Waipu Settlement have been agitating for years to have this work put in hand, they displayed little interest in the work after it was begun, and one of the greatest difficulties we had to contend with was in the trespass of the adjoining settlers' cattle and horses. It was not until we started impounding the stock that any attempt was made by the settlers to keep their stock on their own farms. The work on the west coast was commenced in the vicinity of Woodhill, a few miles south of Helensville, where the sand-drift is seriously encroaching. Several areas have been planted in marram, and plantations of lupins made. It is pleasing to report that the settlers in this locality have heartily co-operated in carrying out the work. One serious difficulty to be faced here is the rabbit pest. This work in both localities has been under the charge of Mr. Samuel Stafford, who has carried it out in a satisfactory manner.

Birdwood Estate.—This is a block of clay gum land situated about sixteen miles from Auckland on the Helensville line. The block has been roaded, and subdivided into areas from 25 acres upwards. The land was covered with tea-tree and other scrub; it had been very intensely dug over by the gum-diggers, and it was decided that the area should be brought into a state of cultivation before being disposed of. With this end in view this scrub was cut down by parties of returned soldiers, the work being let in small contracts. After the felling and clearing was completed a start was made with ploughing the land, the work being done with a tractor, and satisfactory progress has been made. The land is turning over well, and when the work of preparation is completed a successful small settlement should be established on this land, which has so long been lying in a wilderness condition. Situated so close to Auckland, the land is well adopted for fruit and poultry farms, and will be readily disposed of. The Birdwood Block contains 1,100 acres.

The past season on the whole has been a very fair one for stock, both sheep and cattle, all stock having done well. Although there was a slight falling-off in prices of store cattle, beef has held its price fairly well. The price of sheep has been well maintained throughout the year. The growth of feed during the past autumn has been exceptionally good, and the settlers are looking forward to a prosperous year. Present indications are for dairy stock being in great demand during the coming season, and the outlook for the dairy-former is encouraging.

AUCKLAND.

(H. M. SKEET, Commissioner of Crown Lands.)

Lands opened for Selection.—Apart from lands opened under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, the area offered for public selection was only 11,068 acres, of which 7,846 acres were opened under the optional system and 2,479 acres were education endowment areas for lease only. Practically the whole of these areas had been previously offered, and had either failed to find selectors or had been taken up and forfeited. In the last report it was pointed out that, so far as Crown lands were concerned, there was very little inducement to land-seekers either from the United Kingdom or other parts of the Empire to settle in this district, and thus the opportunity was being lost of attracting men possessed of some capital to take up unselected lands. The resumption of immigration from the Mother-country has emphasized this position, and new arrivals in the Dominion experience difficulty in securing suitable lands to settle on. There is thus a risk that experienced farmers and veterans of the war may be lost to the Dominion, and either of these types would prove excellent colonists.

Selections during the Year.—The area of Crown land selected during the year may be grouped under the following heads: Freehold for cash and on deferred payment, 95 selectors, 1,059 acres; selections by discharged soldiers, 226 selectors, 41,439 acres; selections by civilians (settlement tenures), 29 selectors, 13,368 acres; miscellaneous leases, 44 selectors, 8,435 acres: totals, 394 selectors, 64,301 acres.

The area comprised within the Auckland District is now 9,047,340 acres, and the number of tenants on the books at the close of the year was 4,669, occupying an area of 1,264,908 acres, and paying a rental of £97,728 per annum. The gross revenue of the district for the year was £208,844.

The Freehold Tenure.—During the year an area of 55,206 acres was acquired under freehold tenure by 292 selectors, principally lessees holding leases with right of freehold. In addition to these, 73 other selectors commenced to acquire the freehold of 11,539 acres by deferred payments, these also consisting principally of the exercise of freehold rights under existing leases. The latter figures represent a considerable reduction from those for the previous period, due to the expiration of the period for acquisition of freehold of settlement lands held under lease in perpetuity.

The acquisition of freeholds in the Native townships of Te Kuiti, Otorohanga, and Taumarunui, under the Native Townships Act, 1919, as well as the contemplated extension of freehold rights to lessees in the Rotorua and Te Aroha Townships, should lead to a considerable increase of transactions under this head for the coming year.

Conditions and Progress of Settlement.—The dry winter and spring experienced in 1919, although highly advantageous to reclaimed swamp lands such as those on the Hauraki Plains, were very trying to dairy-farmers in other parts of the district, particularly the Waikato and King-country. Excellent rains in February, however, relieved the situation, and conditions during the latter part of the season were favourable. The development of the outlying districts, which had been almost at a standstill during the war, has recommenced with the return of many of the men, although it is