

During 1921 tenders will be invited for the performance for three years from the 1st January, 1922, of the whole of the contract mail-services in the Dominion.

The provisions of section 8 of the Post and Telegraph Amendment Act, 1919, whereby the person in charge of a passenger-coach or other vehicle plying for hire may be required to carry mails in conjunction with his passenger service, have been availed of between Gisborne and Napier, thus increasing the frequency of the mail-service between the two places.

During the year heavy rains causing floods and landslips considerably interfered with mail-services.

During a heavy storm on the 23rd April, 1920, the launch belonging to Mr. H. Nilsen, the contractor for the mail-service Half-moon Bay—Paterson's Inlet (Stewart Island), was wrecked on Faith Island. The contractor was two days on the island before being found. The mail was not recovered until the 24th July, 1920.

In the Auckland District severe floods were experienced in the early part of June, 1920. On the 7th two miles of railway near Otorohanga were submerged, and the Main Trunk express trains were unable to get through on that date. Eight road services were disorganized at the same time, and in some cases it was a week before they were fully restored.

Whilst proceeding from Whakatane to Auckland on the 6th August the scow "Te Teko" was wrecked on Slipper Island, five miles off the coast of the Coromandel Peninsula, and became a total loss. The vessel was carrying a mail containing 300 letters and 35 parcels. The mail was lost.

When crossing the Mokau River on the 21st February, 1921, the motor-bus conveying mails between Awakino and Waitara ran backwards from the ferry into the river. One bag of mail for Urenui was lost.

The services throughout the greater part of the North Island were greatly disorganized during the year by a railway strike which lasted from midnight on the 27th April to midnight on the 2nd May, 1920. To meet the situation special motor mail-services were immediately inaugurated. The principal of these were as follows: Wellington to Wanganui and New Plymouth; Wellington to Napier, via Palmerston North; Wellington to Woodville, via the Wairarapa; Wanganui to Raetihi, via Marton; Auckland to Te Aroha, on the Thames line; Auckland to Putaruru, on the Rotorua line; Auckland to Te Kuiti, on the Main Trunk line; Auckland to Helensville and beyond. Besides, the Department received much assistance from private-car owners, who in many cases carried mails gratis to places on their routes of travel. The places to suffer most during the strike were those between Te Kuiti and Ohakune, and arrangements to serve these were complete when the strike terminated. The strike did not spread to the Whangarei district until midnight on the 29th April, so that land services there were not materially affected. Wherever possible, coastal steamers were used for the carriage of mails, Rotorua and district being served in this way via Tauranga. The steamer service between Auckland and New Plymouth provided the outlet for mails exchanged between Auckland and offices in the South Island and in the southern portion of the North Island. During the period of the strike letter-mails only were accepted for places served by such temporary services. Although the strike did not, happily, extend to the South Island, plans had been formulated for the carriage of mails there, and were ready for operation in case of emergency, and arrangements were being made for extra trips to be performed by the Onehunga—New Plymouth steamer.

BUILDINGS.

Owing to the difficulty experienced in procuring labour and material, and latterly to the financial stringency, which demanded that only urgent and essential work should be undertaken, the expenditure during the year was not very great. The result has been that several important works involving considerable expenditure have had to be deferred. This is particularly unfortunate, as during the period of the war many new post-office buildings and improvements in existing buildings could not be proceeded with, and at the termination of the war the Department, so far as its building programme was concerned, was practically several years in arrears. A big effort was made to catch up with the deferred work, but the Department was immediately faced with the problems of shortage of material and labour. Time after time no tenders were received for the erection of buildings required urgently; and, somewhat unexpectedly, when conditions regarding material and labour improved, a financial position arose which made it necessary to curtail the programme already planned. It is realized that when conditions improve a very active building programme will be necessary to bring the facilities of the Department up to the pre-war standard.

During the year post-office buildings were erected, or their erection completed, at Crookston, Glen Massey, Kelburn (for automatic telephone exchange), Ormondville, Owango, St. John's (Postmaster's residence), and Sutton; while important alterations were made to the post-office buildings at Auckland, Dunedin, Invercargill, Rangiora, Rawene, Ruatorea, Timaru, and Wairoa.

The acute shortage in housing during the year made it difficult for officers in some places to obtain accommodation, and rendered necessary the purchase by Government of residences for Postmasters and other officers at the following places: Balclutha, Blenheim (two), Coromandel, Darfield, Eltham, Frankton Junction Railway, Greymouth, Hamilton (four), Matamata, Ohura, Pahiatua, Palmerston North, Stratford, Te Araroa, Timaru (three), Tolaga Bay, Waitara, and Waverley (two).

MONEY-ORDERS.

The money-order business for the year shows an increase in both the number of transactions and the total of the amount remitted.

Twenty-nine money-order offices were opened and 13 closed, leaving 823 offices open at the close of the year.