

SITES, BUILDINGS, AND PREMISES.

62. During the year a new office-site was acquired at Timaru.

The Department's building programme, which had been seriously impeded as the result of the war, has now been resumed.

The need of buildings in the more important centres of the Dominion for the accommodation of the Office staff was an urgent one even before the war, and it has been greatly accentuated by the policy of delegating the administration of estates to the District Offices. The bulk of the work and the larger part of the staff are now located in the districts; and increased and improved accommodation has become essential for the proper conduct of the Office business.

During the year just closed new buildings have been erected at Invercargill, New Plymouth, and Palmerston North. The building at Napier is rapidly approaching completion, and new offices at Masterton and Timaru are well under way. A tender has been let for the erection of a building at Gisborne.

It will be necessary at an early date to provide accommodation at Whangarei, Blenheim, and Christchurch.

All these buildings are paid for out of the Office reserves, and form an investment of the reserves.

It has been the experience of the Department that the provision of suitable buildings not only results in more efficient work on the part of the staff, but serves a useful purpose in advancing the Office interests in the districts.

In all the buildings now being erected by the Office safe-deposit lockers are being installed. These lockers will be let to the public at reasonable rates for the deposit of valuables.

REDUCTION OF EXPENDITURE.

63. Throughout the year no effort has been spared to effect reductions in expenditure. In this connection District Officers have co-operated with the Head Office, and very satisfactory results have been achieved. Consequent upon the extension of the policy of decentralization, it has been found possible to dispense with the services of a number of the members of the staff, both at Head Office and also at the various District Offices. Every endeavour has been made to avoid the infliction of undue hardship in carrying out the rearrangement of staff, and as far as possible arrangements were made for the transfer of the officers concerned to other Departments.

It should be borne in mind that the full effect of the savings set forth have not yet in every case been fully realized, as some of the savings have operated over a portion of the year only. The benefit will, however, be fully experienced throughout the whole of the financial year which has now commenced.

64. The following is a summary of the total annual savings effected :—

	£
(a.) Reduction of 121 in number of staff	40,842
(b.) Closing of five branches where the volume of business did not warrant their being kept open, and the conversion of two branches from full-time to part-time offices	2,177
(c.) Reduction in the amount of overtime paid to officers ..	1,000
(d.) Reduction in travelling and removal expenses through transfers of officers (especially married men) being reduced to a minimum	1,600
(e.) The stabilizing of the staff, thus eliminating acting positions which involve the payment of allowances ..	300
(f.) Certain savings of a miscellaneous nature, such as discontinuance of telephone subscriptions, saving of cleaning, &c., alteration in system of keeping Assets and Claims Registers, saving in legal expenses, rates, business extension, and sundries ..	2,797
(g.) Saving on stationery	4,500