

Plans were then prepared by the Government Architect, Mr. J. Campbell, and in 1906 tenders were invited, and that of Messrs. J. and A. Wilson, of Wellington, for the sum of £40,780, was accepted for the structure. The date for completion of the contract was fixed for the 3rd August, 1908. Owing to difficulty in procuring stone, the work was necessarily slow, and it was not until the 9th June, 1909, that the building was officially opened.

The opening of these commodious and up-to-date premises, which were to be the permanent home of the Head Office of the institution, was an important event in the history of its career, being the commencement of a policy which provided permanent accommodation for the Office and its branches in the principal towns of the Dominion. Furthermore, it impressed upon the public that the Public Trust Office was a large and important institution carrying on a very special work, and entering largely into the life of the community.

At the official opening many important and prominent citizens of the Dominion were present. Amongst these was the Hon. E. C. J. Stevens, M.L.C., who, in a large measure, was responsible for the founding of the Office.

The Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, referring to the importance of the institution in the Dominion, said that it was a cause for pride to the founders when its marvellous growth and development were considered. He pointed out that within two years of its establishment the Department was practically self-supporting, and from that time onwards all salaries and expenses in connection with it had been paid out of its profits.

When the new premises in Lambton Quay were opened it was imagined that they would provide sufficient accommodation for probably the next fifty years. From the year 1909 onwards, however, the growth and extension of the business were phenomenally rapid. At first the Office occupied only two floors of its new building, the remainder being let to various tenants. In a few years, however, the whole of the building was required by the Office for its own purposes, and by the year 1918 it became necessary to provide further accommodation for the Head Office. In that year Cabinet approved of the purchase of the adjoining premises at the corner of Stout and Ballance Streets, formerly occupied by the Civil Service Club. This was renovated and connected with the main building, and there were housed the Wellington District Office and the Records Division. At the same time the whole of the interior of the office was remodelled on modern lines, so that the work could be carried out not only under more economical and efficient supervision, but also with greater comfort both to the public and the staff.

Accommodation at Branches.

In the early stages of the career of the Office the branches were extremely small, and rented accommodation was quite satisfactory. As the business increased and the branches grew in importance in every respect, economically and otherwise, it was found to be advantageous to the Office to have its own premises. Consequently in the course of time the policy of gradually establishing such premises in all of the important centres was conceived.

Christchurch.—This policy of acquiring permanent premises was first put into force in connection with the Christchurch Branch. It was first accommodated in the Post-office Buildings, but later on, however, owing to the insufficiency of the accommodation provided, it was transferred to Mr. Charles Clark's premises in Cathedral Square, in the buildings now occupied by the Government Life Insurance Department and others. The business in Christchurch increased very rapidly, and the Office soon became firmly established in the Canterbury District. The consequential increase in the volume of business rendered these premises quite inadequate. More commodious permanent premises were ultimately acquired in Gloucester Street at a cost of £3,750. The progress still continued, and it was not many years before even these premises were found to provide insufficient accommodation for the efficient and expeditious carrying-out of the work. In 1920 a suitable site was acquired in the centre of the city, in Oxford Terrace, next to the Clarendon Hotel. The site is admirably situated, and has a beautiful outlook over the River Avon and its pleasant surroundings. Cabinet has authorized the erection of an up-to-date building suitable for the transaction of such a large and important volume of business as is transacted at this branch. The contract has been let for a four-storied building with basement of reinforced concrete on up-to-date lines at a cost of £39,385, and a commencement has been made with the building operations.

Auckland.—For many years the work of the Department in Auckland was conducted from offices situated in the Palmerston Buildings in Queen Street, above the office of the Union Steamship Company. This accommodation soon became inadequate, and a lease was taken for three years of the second flat of a small building in Swanson Street. The business in Auckland, however, was a growing one, and before the term of the foregoing lease expired had quite outgrown the accommodation. The position was represented to the Government in 1910, when the Public Trustee was authorized to enter into negotiations for the acquisition of a suitable site, and on the recommendation of the Public Trustee, Dr. Fitchett purchased a section in Albert Street, about 40 ft. from the junction of that street and Wellesley Street. This land was acquired at a cost of £3,816, and the plans prepared by Mr. Prouse, architect, of Wellington, for a building in concrete with a steel frame were finally approved, and the tender of Messrs. Campbell and Burke, of £16,473, was accepted for the erecting of the structure, which was opened on the 9th May, 1913. The business of the Department has been conducted since that date from the Albert Street premises.

Dunedin.—The Public Trust Office in Dunedin until 1899 was housed in the A.M.P. Building in Princes Street, when a move was made to the Standard Insurance Buildings in Lower High Street, and later to more convenient and commodious premises in the New Zealand Insurance Company's building in Crawford Street. The work of the Department, however, had grown to such an extent