

WILLS DEPOSITED.

53. During the year additional wills numbering 4,383 were deposited by testators with the Public Trustee for safe custody. The following table gives detailed figures for the year :—

Wills on hand on 31st March, 1922	31,839
Add new wills from 1st April, 1922, to 31st March, 1923	4,383
Deduct wills withdrawn from 1st April, 1922, to 31st March, 1923, through death of testator or otherwise	720
Net increase in number of wills on deposit	3,663

Total number of wills on deposit at 31st March, 1923	35,502
--	--------

The following is a return showing the yearly increase of wills deposited for the period commencing 31st March, 1914, and ending 31st March, 1923 :—

Number of wills on deposit at 31st March, 1914	6,427
Net increase for year ending—	
31st March, 1915	1,417
31st March, 1916	3,541
31st March, 1917	4,884
31st March, 1918	4,781
31st March, 1919	3,187
31st March, 1920	1,555
31st March, 1921	2,564
31st March, 1922	3,483
31st March, 1923	3,663

Number of wills on deposit at 31st March, 1923	35,502
--	--------

54. The foregoing figures reveal the fact that the number of wills received annually is gradually approaching the level reached during the war period, when the number was exceptionally increased by the large number of soldiers' wills which were deposited. Many of the testators are persons who have been brought into touch with the Office as beneficiaries in estates already under administration, or as tenants or mortgagors of the Office. The means adopted to make the business of the Public Trust Office more widely known has also contributed to the increase in the number of wills deposited.

The business which will ultimately come to the Public Trustee is not entirely measured by the number of wills held on deposit, since it is known that many wills in which the Public Trustee is nominated as executor are held by private solicitors and by banks and other financial institutions. It is becoming clear that a large amount of business is already assured to the Public Trustee for the future.

ACCOUNTS.

55. The position with regard to the accounts of estates and funds is most satisfactory. As a result of the transfer of accounts to the District Offices, and as a result of the policy of stabilization of the staff, accounting officers have been able to become fully conversant with the position of all local estates. In consequence the work involved in preparing and auditing statements of account of the Public Trustee's administration has been considerably diminished and the distribution of the proceeds of realization of estates has been expedited.

Immediately on acceptance by the Board of the administration of an estate, prompt steps are taken to obtain the full particulars required by the Stamp Duties Department with regard to all assets and liabilities, and every effort is made to file stamp accounts sufficiently early to permit of the assessment and payment of death duties before interest begins to accrue. That these efforts are successful is witnessed by the reports received from District Public Trustees throughout New Zealand.