

DISTRICT OFFICES.

REPORTS BY DISTRICT PUBLIC TRUSTEES.

AUCKLAND.

THE period under review has been one of gradual recovery from the depression of the previous year. There was a marked improvement in the butter-market last season, and this has resulted in increased prosperity throughout the Auckland District.

The principal matters affecting the business of the Office are the investment of funds and the realization of properties. So far as Office mortgages are concerned, there have been practically no failures in this district. So far as estate investments are concerned, in many cases the estates on acceptance were more or less involved financially, but by careful management the majority of these have been placed on a satisfactory basis. Throughout the year properties have been realized freely, but in the majority of cases the terms had to be made easy, particularly in regard to rural properties, owing to the difficulty in financing. It is clear that capital has largely been withdrawn from this class of investment.

There has been rapid development over the whole district of farming lands and extension of public works. This is having a marked effect on the progress of the city, and it is extending in all directions more rapidly than at any time in its history. There is great activity in private building, and the City Council is also engaged on an ambitious scheme of development-works to keep pace with the growth of the city. It is already apparent how this development has affected the extension of the office business, and indications point to the fact that the next few years will show relatively greater progress in this direction.

There have been several visits by the Public Trustee and Chief Inspector during the year, and these have been of undoubted advantage to clients, besides enabling the local office to keep in close touch with the policy of the Board.

The volume of new business has been well maintained, and the number of new wills deposited shows a substantial increase over the previous year. One gratifying feature is the number of cases in which beneficiaries have expressed their satisfaction of the Public Trustee's administration by appointing him the executor of their own wills.

Those clients who feel they have cause for complaint are requested to submit the matter to the Public Trustee for investigation. It is pleasing to note that not one serious complaint has been received during the year. On the other hand, the number of expressions of appreciation affords considerable satisfaction.

Estates under Administration.—Year ended 31st March, 1921, 1,167 estates—value, £1,048,365; 1922, 1,153 estates—value, £1,314,064; 1923, 1,102 estates—value, £1,530,544. The new estates accepted during the year total 250, including 59 wills estates. There is a continual improvement in the class of business being received, and the average value of the estates is increasing annually.

During the year 290 estates were closed, the total value of these being £113,775.

The number of new wills deposited during the year was 475, as against 419 for the previous year.

There has been a considerable reduction in the other profit-and-loss expenditure. This has only been possible by observing rigid economy in all directions.

Staff.—The reduction in staff has been effected by continuing the reorganization of the office, and has also been assisted by the fact that the Administration and Accounts Clerks, as they gain in experience, are able to take a bigger proportion of the work.

The staff at the 31st March, 1921, numbered 81; total annual salaries, £19,004. At 31st March, 1922, the number was 58; total annual salaries, £15,977. At 31st March, 1923, the number was 47; total annual salaries, £11,274.

In spite of the considerable reduction of staff during the year the current work has been kept up to date. Special attention has been paid to the training of the juniors. A special class has been inaugurated, and lectures have been given regularly on various subjects of importance to them and to the office. There is no doubt that this will result ultimately in a higher standard of work being obtained. Practically all members of the staff in this office are studying either law or accountancy, and at present there are nine qualified solicitors and four accountants on the staff.

Sub-office at Pukekohe.—This office, which was opened on three days per week, was closed during the year.

Agencies.—Two agencies were established during the year at Pukekohe and Helensville. That at Pukekohe is controlled by Mr. D. R. Hamilton, who is very well known in the district, being the secretary of the Agricultural and Pastoral Association, which holds two shows during the year. Pukekohe is the centre of a large and flourishing farming district, and the prospects are good. The Helensville Agency is conducted by Mr. John Grey, who has already secured a number of new wills and has interested a great many people in the Office. I have arranged to supply each Agent with assistance from the District Office from time to time should it be required.

Decentralization.—The policy adopted by the Office in regard to decentralization has been amply justified. In a district such as this, as the business of the Office extends an ever-increasing number of matters will have to be decided finally in the local office. It may be safely said that the organization of the office as an efficient machine has now been completed. The success of the decentralization has no doubt been largely due to certain of the systems which have been inaugurated, and the provision for the review of estates by Inspectors. It is pleasing to note that as the staff becomes more experienced it has been found possible to modify various of the systems installed, and the reviews by the Inspector also show that the standard of the administration-work is continually improving.