

The erection of the Public Trust Office at Dunedin on the new site in Moray Place proceeded steadily during the year, and the building has been opened for business since the 31st March last. The unsatisfactory conditions under which the business was being carried out in Dunedin and the lack of proper accommodation for the staff were such as to make the construction of a modern building a matter of urgent necessity. Before the building was given over to business it was thrown open to the public for inspection, and aroused great interest in the thousands of people who took advantage of the opportunity of viewing a fine modern office with adequate equipment.

The continued expansion of the Office business has rendered necessary additional accommodation for the staff at certain branches, and during the year it has been found necessary to extend the accommodation at Wanganui, Hawera, Invercargill, Nelson, and Palmerston North.

SAFE-DEPOSIT LOCKERS.

31. At the Head Office and in the principal Branches of the Department there has been installed a system of safe-deposit lockers to afford economical storage of valuables in repositories specially designed to guard against theft or fire. The rental for these lockers is moderate, and access to them may be obtained by lessees at any time during ordinary business hours. By means of the lockers the Office provides at reasonable cost safe keeping for negotiable securities and other valuables, and so affords those who avail themselves of its service relief from the anxiety inseparable from the keeping of valuables in homes or offices, where there is the risk of loss through fire or by theft. The Office safe-deposit system has proved very popular, and from time to time additional installations have had to be provided. This demand for lockers has been specially marked in Christchurch, where it has been necessary to extend the accommodation on several occasions. There is no doubt that, with the growth of population, as the service becomes more widely known increasing numbers of people will avail themselves of it.

STAFF.

32. The work of the Office is of a peculiarly distinctive character, involving many difficulties and technical intricacies. Thus, in addition to a familiarity with general business and commercial principles, there is required on the part of the staff knowledge of a special nature, such as accountancy and law in relation to the administration of wills and trusts estates, intestacies, mental patients' estates, &c. In the conduct of the Office business, too, the personal equation is essentially a very important factor. Moreover, the public naturally expects, and I think is entitled to receive, from a public Department the best possible advice and assistance that can be rendered. It has also to be remembered that one of the incidental advantages accruing to the clients of the Public Trustee is the guarantee of the Consolidated Fund to make good all breaches of trust. The security thus afforded to estates and the liability imposed on public funds make it essential that the proceedings of the Public Trust Office should be conducted with scrupulous care and with the most competent assistance. Considerations such as these render the staffing of the Department a very important matter. It is clear that without a competent staff the most thoroughly organized system will fail to achieve its purpose, and therefore the greatest care has been bestowed upon the selection and distribution of the Office staff.

Included in the Office personnel are experts capable of carrying out its difficult and technical work, and, on those occasions when outside agencies have necessarily to be employed, capable of criticizing and, if required, of supervising the work done by them. The organization is self-contained, and the staff is equipped to undertake all the numerous administrative and technical duties involved in conducting the administration of the estates under the Office control. Included on the permanent establishment are specialists in the various branches of legal, accounting, administration, and investment work: there are on the staff 106 officers who have