

SHIPPING SERVICES OF THE COOK ISLANDS DEPARTMENT, WELLINGTON.

NIUE ISLAND.

Inadequate and unreliable sea communication with Niue Island for many years prior to 1925 caused considerable anxiety to the Government, and very seriously hampered development and trade with that island. The following extracts from the annual report of the Department are eloquent of the serious state of affairs that existed prior to the entry of a steamer into this service :—

“ 1921.—The subsidized schooner service proved a failure last year, despite the fact that she was an auxiliary schooner. To begin with, she did not arrive here on her first trip till the beginning of the second week in May (five months). Then it took over two months for her to return to Niue on her second trip. Unfortunately, on her third trip she disappeared, and has not been heard of since. This is the second subsidized schooner lost within two years. Never has there been felt greater need for a regular and more frequent service. On four occasions relief in the shape of foodstuffs had to be brought to the inhabitants of the island. Much-needed provisions, that in the ordinary run of even an erratic subsidized service should have reached us last November, have not yet put in an appearance, and probably will not do so for some time yet. The crying need of this isolated outlier of the Empire is regular and dependable communication spread over the whole year. The conditions which obtain now very materially hinder the progress of the island. Until such time as a regular service can be instituted, trade and agriculture will languish, for it is impossible to get the Natives to go in for extensive planting without being able to assure them a regular means of getting their produce away.”

“ 1922.—The following vessels visited the island during the year: ‘Ysabel,’ four times; ‘Ajax,’ once.

“ 1923.—The hurricane season has been a very long one—probably five months by the time the first vessel of the new year arrives.

“ 1924.—The ill-fated ‘Kaeo’ was wrecked here on her first trip. In this case Captain MacDonald was fortunate enough to make Apia in the ship’s lifeboat without mishap, but it is unfair to ask or permit men to run risks of that nature. The Resident Commissioner has twice been faced with this situation during his term here. The fact that the steamer service did not materialize was a heavy blow to the island. A fruit trade is the only road to progress here. A number of Natives planted bananas extensively in view of a proposed service.”

In 1924 the Chatham Islands Shipping Co. was induced to place the “Rama” in the Niue service under Government subsidy, but after making three trips to Niue the vessel was wrecked at the Chatham Islands.

Every effort was made by the Department to induce private enterprise to cater for the trade, but without success. The Union Steamship Co., Ltd., at the Department’s urging, diverted the “Tofua” from her usual monthly run between Tonga and Samoa to Niue, but this assistance was limited to discharging some passengers and emergency foodstuffs. Arrangements could not be made for this company to carry cargoes. A further emergency trip was necessary before the end of the year, and this was made by the Marine Department withdrawing the “Tutanekai” from her lighthouse work for a trip to Niue with supplies to carry over the hurricane season. Eventually the Department were forced to take over and recondition the “Hinemoa,” which had at that time been lying for some years in Wellington Harbour, and to place her in the Niue trade. The “Hinemoa” ran between Niue and Auckland from 1925 until 1928, when she was replaced by the “Maui Pomare.”

The following is an extract from the report of the Resident Commissioner, Niue, which followed the advent of a steamer service :—

“For the first time in the history of the island the shipping includes no sailing-vessels. The advent of a steamer service, which made possible a trade with New Zealand in bananas and other fruit, was hailed with delight by the Natives.”

NORFOLK ISLAND.

With the entry of the “Hinemoa” into the Niue service, and as the latter service in itself was insufficient to keep a steamer in full-time employment, it was necessary, in order to avoid economic loss in tying the vessel up periodically, to endeavour to find other employment for the ship. Norfolk Island being conveniently situated for this purpose, and several of the Auckland fruit-merchants being willing to charter the freight at a figure that would guarantee the cost of the trip, an experimental voyage to Norfolk was made in 1925. This trade proved promising, and developed rapidly, as is indicated by the following tables :—

					Cargo outward. Tons.	Cargo inward. Cases.	Passengers.
1925-26	..	..	..	..	32	2,196	91
1926-27	..	..	..	..	141	2,528	551
1927-28	..	..	..	..	608	3,186	531
1928-29	..	..	..	..	981	4,504	606

Comparative Statement of Imports and Exports for Six Years ended 30th June, 1928.

			£				£
1922-23	..	..	19,215	1925-26	..	..	25,038*
1923-24	..	..	25,193	1926-27	..	..	41,427*
1924-25	..	..	21,151	1927-28	..	..	62,010*

LEPER SERVICES.

In addition to the Niue and Norfolk Island services, the “Hinemoa” was utilized by the Department in making three extensive trips into the Cook Group and removing all of the lepers of that territory—ninety-two in number—to the Leper Asylum at Makogai, Fiji. Several trips were

* Steamer connection with Auckland commenced 1925-26.