

LEGAL DIVISION.

38. The activities of the Office involve a considerable amount of legal work, consisting principally of the preparation of wills, the preparation and perusal of documents, general legal advising, applications to the Court, and the representation of the Public Trustee in Court proceedings in which he is directly concerned or in which he is directed by the Court to represent any party.

During the year administration was obtained in 1,708 estates. Other Court applications for leave to take steps necessary in the administration of the estate, but not authorized by the will or by statute, numbered 98, while in 11 cases it was necessary to file a certificate under Part IV of the Administration Act electing to administer the estates concerned as insolvent. In addition, a number of exemplifications of probates granted abroad and of New Zealand grants were sealed to enable assets situated in the respective countries to be dealt with.

As in previous years, the Legal Division has investigated the possibility of claims for compensation under the Workers' Compensation Act in respect of estates administered by the Public Trustee, and obtained orders for the apportionment of compensation which has been awarded or paid.

The legislation providing for the relief of mortgagors and lessees has necessitated many appearances by members of the legal staff before various Courts and Adjustment Commissions.

OFFICE BUILDINGS.

39. Mention was made in last year's report that a new site had been purchased at Nelson to provide for the erection of a new building to replace the one previously occupied and disposed of because of its unsuitability for the needs of the Office. Plans and specifications of the proposed new building are now being prepared, and in the meantime the Office staff is located in temporary leased premises in which the work is being carried on under conditions of some inconvenience.

A vacant section of land adjoining the Office premises at Auckland has been acquired to provide for future requirements.

The expansion of the Office business at a number of centres has necessitated the provision of additional and improved accommodation for the staff and the public, and during the year it has been found necessary to extend the accommodation at Invercargill, Masterton, Whangarei, Hawera, Wanganui, and Palmerston North. In some cases minor alterations to existing premises have been made or are at present in progress. At Palmerston North the accommodation became totally inadequate and it was necessary to effect major alterations and additions to the Office building there.

At the time of their erection some of the buildings which have been extended were considered to be large enough to provide ample accommodation for future requirements, but the growth of business in these districts has so far exceeded expectations that extensive additions were essential. The improved accommodation has also added to the comfort and efficiency of the staff and the convenience of clients of the Office, an important factor when the confidential and personal nature of the Office business is considered.

Last year's report stated that it would shortly be necessary to provide improved and additional accommodation for the staffs at Head Office and Wellington District Office. The position has since become acute, and the unsatisfactory conditions under which business is being carried out in Wellington and the inadequacy of the accommodation for the staff are such as to make the construction of a larger and a modern building a matter of urgent necessity. The question is now receiving consideration.

RURAL INTERMEDIATE CREDIT.

40. The arrangement under which the Office acted as agent of the Rural Intermediate Credit Board in the administration of the rural intermediate credit scheme continued during the year, and proved mutually satisfactory to the Board and to the Office.