

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, County Superintendent.

In obedience to law I have the honor to present the following report:

This county is, in several respects, favorably situated, as regards the establishment and conduct of public schools. Newark, the largest city in the State, and the thirteenth in the Union, has for many years been under the direction of an able and experienced Superintendent; and its board of education has very uniformly consisted of men earnestly devoted to their work. The schools of Newark, consequently, have steadily grown in character, and in the estimation of its citizens. Fine buildings have been erected; well qualified men engaged as principals; and the standard of attainments for the position of assistant, regularly raised.

The influence of this example is felt throughout the county; not equally, but in proportion to the distance of a district from the city; the law being, "inversely as the square of the distance." Indeed, some of the districts near Newark rival her in the size, beauty and furnishing of their buildings, and in the character and qualifications of principals and teachers. In others on the outskirts of the county, the friends of good free schools have found it difficult to make much headway against the old notions of economy in such matters. Yet there is not a district in Essex county, in which progress has not been made.

When we consider of how slow growth is public sentiment, in favor of improvement in any matter, there is cause for surprise as well as congratulation that so much has been done for education, in this county, during the last three years. Our attention has been given principally to one thing at a time. The first was to build good school houses. Other matters have not been neglected, but this has occupied the attention of the people through the whole county, so that some improvement has been made in school buildings, in every district. You will notice in my statistical report, that there is not a single school house marked "very poor." Two years ago there were 4 "very poor," and 11 "poor;" this year, none "very poor," and 9 "poor;" and that, too, with the standard raised. In East Orange during the past year, two very handsome and convenient buildings have been erected, valued, with ground, at \$40,000 each. At their dedication the enthusiasm of the citizens, who with their wives and children thronged the buildings, augured a new era in the schools of that township. Bloomfield is building a house which, with the ground, is valued at \$35,000; in beauty and accommodation it will not yield to any in the county. In the weaker districts two new houses have been built, one begun, but not finished, and three enlarged and refurnished; the total expense is about \$5,000. In other districts various sums have been voted for the purpose of repairing, without enlarging or refurnishing.

The value of school property in the county, including cities, this year, is \$839,600, against \$709,658 last year, a gain of nearly \$130,000.

Believing that, at the present stage of our school history, more good would be done by laboring with the people than in the schools, I have spent much time in visiting districts; holding interviews with the officers and citizens, addressing them at their regular meetings, or at meetings called for the purpose, writing letters, issuing circulars, and working in various other ways to gain the attention and awaken the interest of *the people*.

Good houses being now quite generally assured, the next step is to occupy them with good schools. There is a growing sentiment in our richer districts that the public schools should, and must, afford even better advantages than private ones for a common school education. Private schools outside the cities are rapidly decreasing (I do not know how it is in the cities themselves); many of those who formerly patronized them now send their children to the public school. This will be the almost universal habit, when good teachers can be easily obtained. There is no want of applicants for positions, but the number of those who by careful study, and earnest, faithful application to the work, have qualified themselves for success in their calling, is still small. Such teachers are still wanted here. That I may not be misunderstood, let me say that, as I reported last year a large number of excellent teachers in the county, so this year I can report a decided gain even on what we then so prided ourselves. The salaries, have been raised, from an average of \$76 for male teachers in 1869, and \$86 in 1870, to \$99 in 1871. For female teachers they are still low, being respectively for the same years, \$35, \$36 and \$38. This is due partly to the fact that female teachers hold subordinate positions; that there are more candidates than positions; and that the poorer districts can pay but small salaries, which only females will accept.

The work to be done in this county during the coming year, is *in the schools*; the standard of scholarship must be raised; more thoroughness in the fundamental branches secured; and at the same time these results more quickly obtained. In addition to this some means should be taken to educate those who now *attend no school*. Of these there are over 11,000, almost one-third of the whole number. Will not our free school system be a failure, if its benefits are shared by only two-thirds of those to whom they are offered? Our last Legislature made ample provision for the education of all; will not our next one devise the means by which all shall accept these provisions?

As the statistical table gives full information about financial matters, I will not here refer to them, except to mention one matter not there reported. The dog tax of 1870 was, by an act of Legislature, appropriated to the schools. In this county the amount was \$3,435, which amount was apportioned to the districts, and should be added to the total amount expended for school purposes.

There are several vacancies in the Agricultural College, to be filled from this county. I wish our young men would take more interest in agricultural affairs.