

ESSEX COUNTY.

Charles M. Davis, Superintendent.

To E. A. Apgar, State Superintendent:

In accordance with law, I have the honor to present the following report:

Essex is one of the smallest, but, at the same time, the most populous and the most compact of all the counties in the State. It forms one of the seven Congressional Districts, Hudson being the only other county that forms a district by itself.

The Passaic River, rising half way across the State, runs northeasterly as far as Paterson; then, bending to the south, it continues in that course till it reaches Newark Bay. The county formerly had this river for its boundary on the west, north and east, but a small triangular section has been taken from the north to help form the county of Passaic. That curious elevation of trap-rock, known as First and Second Mountains, running north-east and south-west, divides Essex into two nearly equal parts. Newark City, at the mouth of the river, and also extending along the bay, occupies a considerable part of the eastern section. This city, as regards population, is the thirteenth in the Union; as regards manufactures, it is ranked third. Orange, at the foot of the mountain, is a city of ten thousand inhabitants, and is rapidly increasing. The rest of this section is mostly covered with pleasant villages, the homes of thousands whose places of business are in the neighboring cities of New York and Newark. The narrow valley between the so-called mountains and the region beyond them are thinly settled. When the tunnel, now begun, and to be finished in two years, shall open communication between the opposite sides of these hills, the difference between these portions will gradually disappear, and the county will become more homogenous.

The state and progress of education in the county are influenced by these geographical facts. In the eastern portion are found the graded and high schools of the city and vicinity; in the west, the district school, with its many deficiencies and disadvantages. The schools of Newark, for many years under the able direction of Superintendent George B. Sears, have grown in number, size and efficiency. His report will speak for itself. Orange has also a superintendent, who reports for the schools of that city. The remainder of the county, consisting of ten townships, is under the charge of the County Superintendent, and it is of them that I beg to present this report.

During the year ending August 31, 1872, as during the previous one, there has been progress in everything pertaining to our public schools. This consists in new or improved buildings; a large increase in the value of school property; a larger number of children enrolled in the school register; a decrease of those who attend no school; an advance in the average salaries paid to teachers, and an improvement in the character and condition of the schools themselves. Two new houses have been built, one in Bloomfield (No. 7), at a cost of \$30,000, and one in North Caldwell (No. 14) for \$1,000. There were 912 more children on the register; 753 less in no school; the salaries of male teachers have increased \$12.79 per month; those of females, \$2.59. There are no "very poor" school houses in the county; the number of "poor" ones has decreased.

The people are becoming, quite generally, convinced of the fact that they must look to the public schools for the education of their children, and that these schools will be very much what the

people themselves make them. They consequently pay willingly for buildings, furniture, and salaries, provided they can thus secure good schools. Private schools are not increasing, nor is the number of children attending them, although two have been opened by the Roman Catholics, one in Millburn, and the other in South Orange, each of which has drawn away fifty children from the public schools. The best method of counteracting sectarian efforts is to make our free schools better than any others; parents will not long consent to deprive their children of superior advantages to gratify denominational pride or bigotry.

The financial condition of the districts is good. In Nos. 36 and 37 (East Orange), where expensive houses have been built and furnished, the money was raised by bonding the districts. In Bloomfield (No. 7), \$15,000 has been borrowed on bond and mortgage—the other half by taxation. In Belleville, an act of the Legislature has been obtained, authorizing the trustees to mortgage the school property in order to make repairs—an act of questionable wisdom. A district as rich as No. 3 should raise, by direct taxation, enough to make all necessary repairs, especially as it votes no other district tax. Most of the eastern districts raise large sums annually for the payment of teachers' salaries, and for other school expenses. Those in the country, however, particularly on the west of the hills, are so economical in spirit as to prevent the raising of enough money to keep good schools for nine months in the year. Still, to this there are noble exceptions, as will be seen by a reference to the statistical tables, and the spirit is extending. Before many years, there will be no difficulty in raising, in any district, all that is needed to have good schools in good buildings.

When first appointed superintendent, I gave my whole time, for a year and a half, to my official duties. I defined and described the boundaries of the districts; held meetings with trustees, and visited the schools. This was pleasant work, but the salary paid only one quarter of my family expenses, and I sought other employment, which prevents my visiting the schools as much as is desirable. During the past year I have made fifty-four visits; at some of the schools I have spent a day, at others an hour. There are ninety-one departments in the county; half a day spent in each would require two and a quarter months; if two visits were made, four and a half months. This, added to the other work, would occupy the school year. It is desirable that the county superintendent should give his whole time to his official duties. This can be done only when the salary will command his entire services.