

LAKE COUNTY

Hon. W. N. Sheats, State Superintendent Public Instruction, Tallahassee, Fla.:

My Dear Sir--I have the pleasure to submit to you this general report of the condition and progress of the Public Schools of Lake county during the last two years.

Loss in Revenue.--The loss of our orange groves in the winter of 1894-95 reduced the assessed valuation of the property of Lake county from about \$4,000,000 to about \$2,500,000. This caused a direct loss to the school fund of \$7,500 per year. Our county school tax was already five mills and of course we could not increase it so as to make up the loss caused by the reduced valuation. Yet, notwithstanding this great adversity, we have kept the condition of our schools almost up to the standard which they had reached before that time.

Teachers Warrants Not Discounted.--During the school year of 1895 and 1896, as well as in former years, we had to contend with the late payment of taxes, just as other counties do. But we did not permit our teachers to bear the loss of discount on their school warrants. It is true that some warrants were discounted, but they were all discounted at one bank, and by a contract between the County School Board and that bank a definite record of such discount was kept by the bank, and instead of retaining this discount as compensation for cashing the warrants, the County School Board agreed to pay the bank a definite rate of interest for the use of its money. The discount was charged to the bank, and as soon as the County Treasurer had a sufficient amount of money on hand to pay all indebtedness, a settlement was made with the bank and with the teachers whose warrants had been discounted. If the discount which the bank had received amounted to less than the interest on their money for the actual time which it had been in use, the School Board paid to the bank the difference, but if the discount amounted to more than the interest, the bank paid to the School Board the difference. At this general settlement the County School Board returned to each teacher the full amount of the discount which he had paid to the bank. By this plan the teachers lost practically nothing and the bank received a reasonable rate, and only a reasonable rate, of interest on its money used in cashing the warrants. The plan has always been satisfactory to all parties concerned and is less expensive and much more satisfactory to the School Board than borrowing money would be.

Condition of Finances.--We opened our schools this year with about \$8,400 in the treasury--a larger amount than we had ever had on hand at that time of the year since the county was organized, and no part of the taxes of 1896 had at that time been collected. This amount, with the taxes of 1896, will be sufficient to sustain our schools six months and leave a surplus of eight or nine thousand dollars with which to open the schools next year. This condition of our school fund convinces us that notwithstanding our severe loss of two years ago our schools will not suffer to any serious extent.

Character of Teachers.--Our teachers are usually well qualified for their work. Some of them have taken special courses in training schools and nearly all of them have read a few good books on the subject of pedagogy and school management. They all have free access to a circulating library of about fifty well selected volumes upon the subject of teaching, and many of them have been much benefitted by its use. Some of them have excellent libraries of their own.