

**REPORT OF THE IMPROVEMENTS
PROPOSED BY THE ESSEX
PUBLIC ROAD BOARD, IN ESSEX
COUNTY, NEW JERSEY; PP. 5-59**

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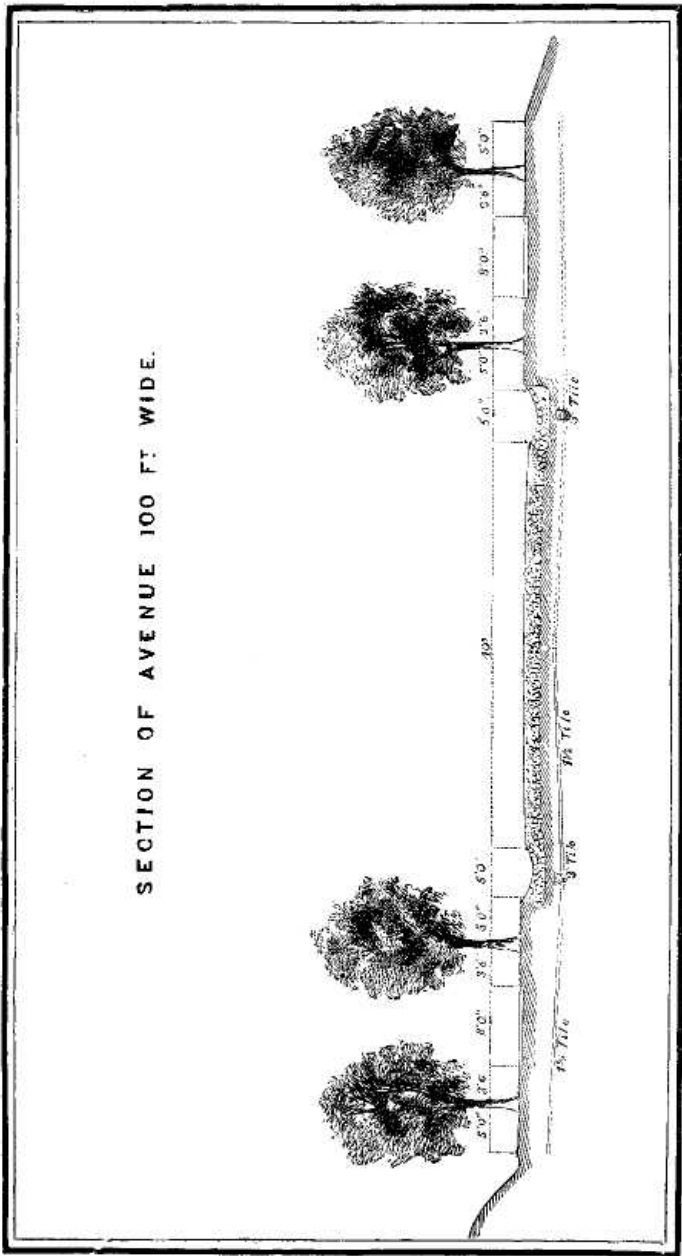
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VARIOUS

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SECTION OF AVENUE 100 FT. WIDE.



Report of Commissioners.

To the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Essex County, New Jersey :

GENTLEMEN :—The law of 1868, creating the Essex Public Road Board, contemplated the improvement of the roads of Essex county, beyond the limits of the cities of Newark and Orange.

While the law conferred all the requisite powers, it indicated no mode of exercising them; consequently, the Board was compelled to proceed with great caution, until its defects might be remedied by further legislation, as an opposite course would have involved the county in endless litigation.

The Board was also met at the outset by the following resolutions of your honorable body :

Resolved, That the Essex Public Road Board be respectfully requested, by the Board of Chosen Freeholders, to suspend their proposed improvements till next year. And further :

Resolved, That the County Collector be instructed to pay the warrants of the Essex County Road Board out of moneys raised for that purpose only. And

That the sum of \$10,000 be raised by tax for the use of the Road Board.

Upon careful inquiry, it will be discovered that nine-tenths of the population of the county is congregated into cities and towns, of which Newark is the largest; and that, generally speaking, almost the entire travel is between Newark and the towns surrounding it, and, through them, to the more remote parts of the county.

We find Newark, occupying the extreme eastern portion of the county, on the west bank of the Passaic river, already a city of about 125,000 inhabitants, and doing a large business, both of which are augmenting rapidly. It is only six miles distant from

the business portion of New York city, and intimately connected with it by two steam railroads, and two more projected, which must tend still further to increase the pressure from New York, and accelerate its growth in the immediate future. It is surrounded by the thriving towns of Woodside, Belleville, Franklin, Bloomfield, Montclair, Caldwell, Orange, East, West and South Orange, and Livingston on the north and west, Irvington and Millburn on the south-west, and Elizabeth city on the south, only four miles distant.

These being the points to, and from, which the travel of the county alternates, the question naturally suggested was, what are the present facilities of communication between them? Are the existing roads properly located, of the requisite width, well constructed, in good condition, and sufficiently numerous? In other words, are they adequate to the present or future wants of the county?

The Board found about 250 miles of these roads, exclusive of those of Newark and Orange. Their condition is fairly proclaimed, by the bills of indictment brought against six of the townships of the county last year. Without alluding to the inferior character of nearly all our local roads, the Board found the leading thoroughfares, in the main, indirect, unwisely located, of irregular widths, of indifferent grades, and imperfectly constructed. These defects result in a great measure from the fact that they were originally built to meet the wants of sparsely inhabited districts, without system, and hence are not adapted to the present populous state of the county.

It was evident, upon examination, that, even if these roads were put in the best possible order, they would prove utterly inadequate to meet the present requirements of the county; the very rapid increase of population within the last few years, demanding greatly increased facilities of communication. To illustrate this, the city of Orange has but one thoroughfare to Newark, and that contains a horse railroad track. The city of Elizabeth has but two

roads to Newark, and, to say nothing of their construction and condition, one of these is crooked and indirect, whether you take the upper or lower branch; and the other, South Broad street, is rendered useless for common travel, by the New Jersey Railroad. The problem, therefore, that presented itself to the Board for solution was, to provide the most easy, direct and ample road-facilities between Newark and the surrounding towns, and thence to the more remote sections of the county.

Any comprehensive system of roads, such as would meet the present or future requirements of the county, would necessitate the co-operation of the authorities of Newark and Orange to perfect it. We are happy to state, that the Common Council of Newark appointed a committee of its Street Commissioners to co-operate with the Board, who met us in a very liberal spirit. We presume the authorities of both cities would look favorably upon the contemplated improvements.

The Board selected Broad street, in Newark, as the basis of their entire system of improvements. This is by far the most important thoroughfare in the county, and ranks as one of the noblest avenues in the world. It is the great central avenue of both city and county about which population and business cluster. It was authorized about two centuries ago, to be two chains (132 feet) wide. As a fitting testimonial to its ample proportions, imposing public buildings, fine blocks of stores and elegant residences,—beautiful parks and grand old elms line its sides for miles, and it has become the great business mart of a large and rapidly growing city. Who would consent to have its width curtailed by a single foot? The only regret must be, that it was not continued, of similar dimensions, to the city or even the county limits.

From this grand avenue, as a centre, the Board has therefore projected six avenues, making them all one hundred feet wide, to accommodate the future travel on them, (as Broad street does that of to-day,) which, with Central avenue, will provide seven avenues of that width, raying, fan-like, from Broad street to the surround-

ing country. It is evident, that, when completed, these would immensely increase the facilities for travel, which would necessarily render intercourse more frequent and intimate, and greatly quicken the activities of business.

It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of these wide avenues, straight, of easy grades, and well built, whether we look to the comfort, the convenience, the increased value of real estate, the opening of very desirable tracts of new country, and the beautifying of our region; or seek, upon a higher plane, for the elevating influence they would exert upon the people, and upon the character of the improvements which would be immediately erected along them, of which those on Broad street furnish a good example. They would be main thoroughfares through the densely populated districts, and would form a skeleton, on which the future city and county would be able to develop themselves harmoniously. They would also form permanent land marks to regulate the location of new roads.

Many other new local roads also need to be constructed and old ones reconstructed, to accommodate the rapidly increasing demand for them. Several such have already been surveyed by the Board.

In projecting such a system of thoroughfares and roads, it was necessary, first, to go over the ground and locate them, and then to survey, map and correct them, (if necessary,) before their construction could be begun. The magnitude of this work, in its varied details, rendered it essential to employ a corps of engineers; but, under the circumstances, the Board contented itself with securing the services of Mr. James Owen, only, as engineer, through the courtesy of Mr. F. L. Olmstead, Landscape Architect of Prospect Park, in Brooklyn.

FRELINGHUYSEN AVENUE.

With Broad street in Newark as the focus of the projected system of improvements, the Board proposes, first, a more direct thoroughfare from it to Broad street in Elizabeth, by the extension

of Frelinghuysen avenue, in a direct line to Newark avenue in Elizabeth. This would be sufficiently distant from the railroad not to frighten horses. It is within a few minutes of being perfectly straight, and would be nearly level. It would necessarily take all the travel, and would probably need to be paved; and, if paved with Nicholson or other wooden pavement, it would become a grand pleasure drive. It should be widened in Newark to at least one hundred feet, and extended in a direct line to Clinton avenue. It is understood that the City Council of Elizabeth has already passed an ordinance for widening Newark avenue to one hundred feet, and prolonging it to Broad street, as recommended by the Road Board. Should the city of Newark do likewise, this important improvement, four miles in length, would give a great impulse to the intercourse of the two cities, which could not fail to result greatly to the advantage of both.

SPRINGFIELD AVENUE.

The second thoroughfare the Board proposes to improve is Springfield avenue, which already exists, nearly straight, so that there would be little to do, on the main part, save to move a few inferior buildings, make it one hundred feet wide, improve the grades, drain, macadamize and extend it to Millburn. The obstacles in the way of the part in Newark are serious, as it is built upon for a long distance, and, to widen it, would be attended with a heavy expense. But there is no doubt that it would well repay the city, and it can never be done at less expense than now. It passes through a beautiful, rolling country, well adapted for building purposes, and would become a popular place of residence for city people.

FIFTEENTH AVENUE.

The third thoroughfare proposed, one hundred feet wide, is Fifteenth avenue, or the continuation of Court street, Newark, from Broad street to South Orange, in a perfectly straight line. This