

HENRY GEORGE NEWSLETTER

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HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL: The First Sixty Years

The Henry George School of Social Science was founded by Oscar Geiger in 1932. Sixty years ago! During those years, the New York headquarters has had five locations and seven directors - and approximately 150,000 students have completed the basic HGS course over the years.

The numbers become especially impressive when we realize that the Henry George School has always relied on volunteers to do its teaching. Its staff has always been small, and its funding has always come from contributions. Through depression, world war, the McCarthy era, sixties social upheaval, seventies doldrums, and the greedy 80s, the school has managed, somehow, to keep going. It has managed to develop innovative new approaches and yet - for most of its history - to keep its core intact. That core is the school's course in *Fundamental Economics*. The syllabus, divided into ten weekly sessions and provided with supplemental readings, has been revised and updated, but its basic pedagogical approach is that of the *Progress & Poverty* course developed by Oscar Geiger. Like its classic text, the school's flagship course has stood the test of time.

Bob Clancy, who served as Director of the HGS through its most successful period in the 50s and 60s, wrote a series of articles for the *Henry George News* on the occasion of the school's 25th anniversary in 1957. In the first he spoke of Geiger's conviction that the movement needed an educational foundation on which to build:

For many years Geiger carried the school idea within him. He was an ardent follower of Henry George and watched the emergence of a movement under its leader's guidance, saw it flourish for a while, then decline and become all but extinct. [In 1932,] the world was bewildered and chastened by a long depression. And Geiger who had become jobless as a result of the depression was living on his savings. It was thus that in this time of Geogist, world and personal adversity, Oscar Geiger made his decision and brought the school into being.

In the summer of 1933 the school moved into its first home, at 211 West 79th Street. A year's rent was paid by a student, Leonard T. Recker, and early fund drives raised enough to establish a secure financial basis for the school's survival. Through the 30s the school built a strong program of classroom teaching, correspondence courses, and support for extensions in other cities.

The school's program was diminished - but not destroyed - by World War II. Bob Clancy in 1957:

As the European war waxed, Americans were divided on the issue, and so were Geogists. Feelings on both sides ran high in the school and the controversy reached the pro-

portions of a split, until that fateful day, December 7, 1941, took the matter out of the realm of discussion. [Teachers and students] were involved in the war effort, and so it was that 1942 to 1945 were ebb-tide years. But - and this is important - the work did go on. It was not like World War I, which crippled beyond repair the great Geogist political efforts that had been going strong prior to the war. This seems to me to indicate that Oscar Geiger was right in his diagnosis of the Geogist movement, and that the educational work was truly a solid foundation that would make continuous growth possible.

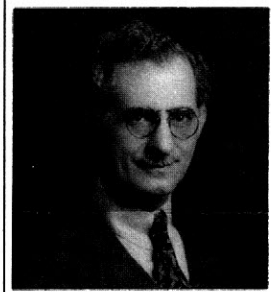
Ebb-tide or no, it was in 1944 that the school moved into its finest headquarters at 50 East 69th St.. Many oldtime Geogists remember this place with pride - its spacious auditorium and classrooms, commodious library, graceful winding staircase, student lounge, and restaurant on the premises.

Since it was sold in 1980, the school has made do with progressively less space.

The Henry George School's programs flourished in the 1960s. Perhaps the social ferment of the times led more people to question fundamental economic relationships, or perhaps years of plodding work were simply bearing fruit, but during those years the school's activities on many fronts reached their greatest height and breadth. A perusal of the 1967 annual report, for instance, shows: daily *Fundamental Economics* classes (over 700 graduates that year in three languages,) correspondence courses (over 700 graduates in five languages,) and reports from 23 extensions, 13 of which were outside the U.S.

The early 70s brought a sea change in the school's educational program. Arnold Weinstein, elected president of the Board of Trustees in 1968, felt along with other board members that the school had to achieve greater academic clout in order to fulfill its mission. Accordingly, a prestigious academic advisory council was named, and attempts were made to hire a tenured economics professor to direct educational programs. This was not achieved at the time. The school continued to explore the land question; various modernizations and extensions of the *Progress & Poverty* course were developed.

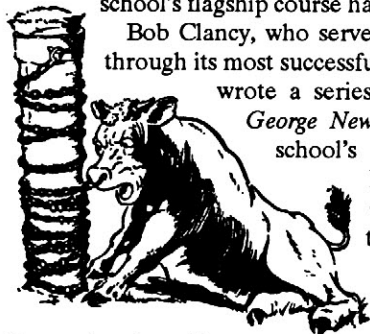
The school continued to supplement its basic teaching with new approaches in the 70s and 80s. Director Philip Finkelstein initiated the Center for Local Tax Research in 1977, to provide students and researchers with (continued on page 7)



Oscar Geiger

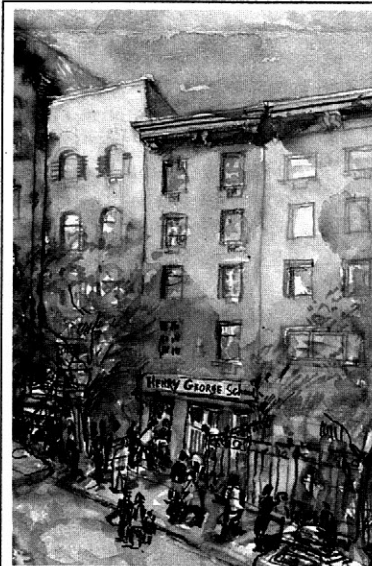


...asked a New York HGS flyer, mid '40s



"Are we Americans like this bull - IN A SPOT?" From the St. Louis HGS, 1950

For many years Geiger carried the school idea within him. He was an ardent follower of Henry



121 East 30th Street, New York. Watercolor by visiting Russian urban planner Prof. Yuri Bocharov, 1991

HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL

The First 60 Years (from first page)

relevant statistical analysis on the land question. Several years after Prof. Finkelstein's death in 1982, the Center's work was taken up by the Center for the Study of Economics, in Columbia, Md., under the direction of Prof. Steve Cord.

Under the direction of NY-HGS director Stan Rubenstein, and Northern California HGS Director Bob Scrofani, an ambitious high school program was begun. Twenty-three semi-annual high school urban workshops have been held, in cooperation with the NYC Council on Economic Education at Baruch College. Over 4000 teachers nationwide have used the school's *Land and Freedom* high school lesson materials and videos.

In 1989, an international conference celebrating the 150th anniversary of Henry George's birth was hosted by the Philadelphia HGS. This extension is housed at 413 South 10th St. - the birthplace of Henry George. At the 1989 conference, the birthplace was re-dedicated. Lovingly restored to its appearance and dimensions at the time of George's birth, the building has received a number of awards for excellence in restoration.

Now, in 1992, the Henry George School endeavors to keep juggling most of the plates it has successfully thrown in its 60-year history. Adult classes at the headquarters and extensions, returning to the tried-and-true HGS curriculum, are gathering momentum. The high school program continues to expand in

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Henry George School at Sixty

(from page 7)

both breadth and depth. Efforts to integrate the Georgist philosophy with professional economists are bearing fruit, e.g., this year's intensive seminar for a group of economists from Moscow. The school has survived depressions, doldrums, and divisiveness. Speaking to the 7th Henry George Congress on the founding of the school in 1932, Oscar Geiger said, "If truth were the goal of our Schools and Colleges, ...our task, as our master's, would have been done." That day has not come, but the HGS's longevity, and its current vitality, make it likely that the school will continue its work until that day arrives. - *Lindy Davies*

Henry George School Directors

Oscar Geiger 1932 - 34
Norman Fowles 1934 - 35
Otto Dorn 1935 - 36
Frank Chodorov 1936 - 42
Margaret Bateman 1942 - 46
Robert Clancy 1946 - 68
Arnold Weinstein 1969 - 74
Philip Finkelstein 1976 - 82
Stan Rubenstein 1975, '83 - 89
George Collins 1989 - present