Five and Twenty School Years

by Robert Clancy

This is the second of a series of four articles on the history of the Henry George School, written on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. The first article told of the school's beginnings up to the death of the founder. Oscar H. Geiger, in June 1934.

II. Growth

When the founder died, what was left? Who would carry on?

Oscar Geiger had allowed few to help him because few came up to his high standards. He was a perfectionist —but perfectionism, he felt, had to go into the founding of the school. No one had been trained, no plans were made for carrying on the work.

Was this a mistake? Not according to Geiger's outlook on life. "All the planning has been done by Nature," he said. "If I am acting in accordance with Nature's plan, help will come. It is only for me to do my part. If I have done my part well, the rest is in other hands," and so it was!

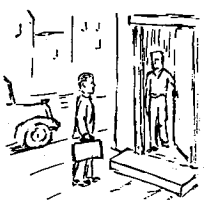
Not long after Geiger's death, his faithful student, Helen Denbigh, called a meeting of her fellow students. At this "Pentecost," the group expressed their determination to do their best in carrying on the work of the founder. They were not experts but laymen deeply moved by the Georgist philosopy and Geiger's teaching. A reasoned analysis plus a moral urge led them on.

The board of trustees appointed a new director, Norman C. B. Fowles, one of the "old-timers" of the movement. Geiger's notes for the course made the basis for a teacher's manual. Copies were made up by Leonard Recker's printing company.

In the fall of 1934 notices of classes were printed up and mailed out. Geiger had offered "alertness credits" to school teachers, and these were continued, but the mailing list became more diversified. Geiger had charged $10 for the 15-week course (including three textbooks and a free subscription to Land and Freedom), though he was liberal with "free scholarships." It was now decided to offer the course tuition-free, and to depend on contributions to keep going. New students did come and classes were taught by Mr. Fowles and others.

There was movement elsewhere, too. One of the Georgists of Chicago, Henry L. T. Tideman, formed an extension of the school in his city. Julian P. Hickok did likewise in Philadelphia. Georgists in other cities also started extensions—all on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Fowles was director for about a year, then Otto K. Dorn took over. modestly using the title of business manager. (Mr. Dorn later became, and still is, a trustee). Anna Gorge de Mille, daughter of Henry George, became president of the board of trustees.



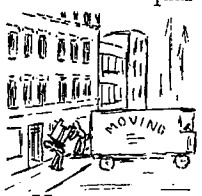
John Lawrence Monroe (son-in-law of Henry Tideman) came to New York from Chicago and was engaged as field director. Mr.

Monroe brought to this new task his experience with his late father's touring Henry George Lecture Association. This time, John Monroe toured the country on behalf of the Henry George School, encouraging Georgists to form extension classes. Between 1936 and 1939 no fewer than 200 cities and towns launched classes in *Progress and Poverty*. In 1939 Mr. Monroe returned to Chicago to become director of the Henry George School there, a post which he holds to this day.

In 1936, Frank Chodorov became director of the school in New York. Up to this time, modest contributions had enabled the school to carry on, and now a bequest from Charles O'Connor Hennessy, and contributions begun by John C. Lincoln, opened up possibilities of expansion.

A correspondence division was started in 1937. Gaston Haxo was engaged to conduct the course and the project grew rapidly. The year 1937 also saw the launching of The Freeman, a monthly edited by Mr. Chodorov. Classes were promoted in the suburbs of New York, a job vigorously pursued by Teresa McCarthy. (It was also in 1937 that the school received the absolute charter from the State of New York).

With these expanding activities the school soon outgrew its rented quarters at 211 West 79th Street. A building at 30 East 29th Street was purchased from the New York Telephone Company, and the Henry George School moved into its first own building in September 1938. A few months later the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation moved in.



It was a roomy five-story building with scope for the growth that was taking place. Up went the enrollments, the number of advanced courses, the classes around the city, and the extensions in other cities. A speakers' bureau was formed, with Dorothy Sara as volunteer chairman, and scarcely a day passed without a school speaker filling a lecture engagement before some other group. All speakers and teachers were volunteers—and still are.

Was some of this growth pushed a little too hard? Possibly. But during the depression of the 'thirties people were concerned about economic problems and they had the time and inclination to study and discuss them seriously.

The Henry George School was becoming known abroad, too. In 1936 there was an international conclave of Georgists in London. Anna George de Mille and Lancaster M. Greene (newly elected to the board of trustees) attended and encouraged Georgists from Denmark, Australia and England to form schools.

Another international conference (sponsored by the same group, the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade) was held in New York in 1939—the centenary of Henry George's birth. The conference opened at the Hotel Commodore with a welcome by Mayor LaGuardia, and climaxed with a meeting at the World's Fair addressed by Judge Samuel Seabury, on Henry George's birthday, September 2nd. On that very day World War II broke out.

(To be continued)

"Men congregate naturally. It is in the nature of things for them to do so. Our mission should be to use this tendency to induce men to gather to talk the philosophy of Henry George."

Oscar Geiger