

Remembering Neva Bianco

by Lindy Davies

The georgist movement suffered a grievous loss this January, with the passing of Neva Bianco. She was the very essence of, in Henry George's words, "One of those sweet and patient souls who in narrow circles live radiant lives".

Neva was a mainstay of the New York Georgist community long before becoming a founding member of the Henry George Institute in 1971. Along with her sister, Roma, who passed away in 1987, Neva studied, taught, volunteered, and generally enlivened events at the New York Henry George School all through the 1950s and 60s. She was a founding member of the Henry George Institute, and a prolific, much-loved teacher of the georgist philosophy.

I had known Neva for some years, but I began to work closely with her after the passing of Bob Clancy in 1995. Neva had been the HGI's Treasurer for years, and came in to the office once a week (a bit more than an hour each way from her home in Long Island) to help in the office. Bob's illness hit him sooner, and with more force, than he counted on, and he left us without much preparation, or even information on how he ran the operation. It fell to Neva and I to sort things out, and — with the help of the excellent Sonny Rivera — keep the Henry George Institute functioning. There was a great deal to do, and without Neva it probably could never have been accomplished. During that period I grew to respect and admire Neva very much, and I also got to see a bit of what made her tick.

She would come in to the office and fill every single spare moment with discourse on social justice, the georgist remedy and the issues of the day. She had been reading, and thinking, and teaching in silence, and it was as though she had a bodily need to express these thoughts to someone who "got" them. There really was no one in her community with whom she could discuss her georgism. She was involved with her local Unitarian-Universalist Church, and enjoyed its spiritual eclecticism and social-justice orientation. But she had tried, for years, at every (*continued on page 35*)



Neva celebrating at Henry George Day in Arden, Delaware in 1955 (thanks to Mike Curtis for photo)

truths of which we all are conscious.. and on which in everyday matters we constantly base our reasoning and our actions. And its processes, which consist mainly in analysis, require only care in distinguishing what is essential from what is merely accidental. — The Science of Political Economy (1897)

Kids in New York City have been missing school, the article went on to report, because they and their families, some 700 strong on recent nights, had spent the night in the hallway of the Bronx office responsible for the city-wide assignment of shelter beds to homeless families. Things like this are a tragedy in our “new economy” — but they are not a mystery.

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opportunity, to interest church members in George’s ideas, to no avail. It was a constant source of both frustration and bewilderment to her.

During that confusing time when we were sorting out the HGI’s day-to-day functions, Neva started grabbing dozens of new correspondence students. I may never know how many students she actually taught that year, but it was a lot (our database, which was begun in ’95, lists 82 students for Neva — but, of course, she had been teaching for many years before that). Her students nearly always continued past the first course, and universally praised her work.

This was also when Neva, in her inimitable “no big deal” style, contributed a sizeable mutual fund to the Henry George Institute. “It was my sister’s,” she said, “and I knew that was what she’d want me to do with it.”

Although she supported all endeavors to broaden the influence of the georgist remedy, Neva’s personal philosophy had an expansiveness of vision — in which Association in Equality, made real by georgist reform, could transform human society. She was an enthusiastic teacher of the HGI’s course in *Liberation Theology and Land Reform*, and was passionate about the spirituality and faith expressed in Henry George’s works.

Neva never married, and aside from her fondly-remembered sister, Roma, I know nothing of Neva’s family. I know how she felt about little children, though. One of my fondest memories is of Neva at the 1997 CGO conference in New Jersey. During the talk of one of the luncheon speakers, she asked to hold our son Eli, who was then five months old. She took Eli, and proceeded to become so rapt with burbling love for the child that she became transported. I went up, sheepishly, and tapped her on the shoulder, bringing her back to “reality”.

Neva was one of the most sensible people I have ever known. She never allowed ego to get in her way. Although she was competent at everything she did, and sure enough of herself on her own ground, I don’t doubt that she would be very surprised to know what a great many lives she touched.

The *Journal* would gratefully accept other remembrances of her. GJ