In Arden Town
Bird and Bush Life Sacred
Single Tax in Practice

Florence A. Burleigh contributed to that staidest of American journals, the Springfield Republican, a most interesting article on the Town of Arden, which is in Delaware. In May, 1900, Frank Stephens and Will Price, artists, who had long dreamed of a village colony where love and justice should take the place of strife and injustice, found a piece of land near Wilmington, Delaware, which they immediately secured and started what is now a busy little village of 120 leaseholders, about 60 dwellings and 250 residents, 80 of whom remain all winter.

These two men had for many years believed that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living," and with Henry George that the only way to secure this was for landholders to pay to the community annually the value of the land they held. They also believed that art, music, and the drama were a very important -- indeed, the most important -- part of life and they agreed with William Morris in his "News from Nowhere" when he said, "We like these pieces of wild Nature and can afford them, so we have them. . . Go and have a look -- and tell me if you think we waste the land by not covering it with factories for making things that nobody wants, which was the chief business of the 19th century." So they set apart a green in the centre of the 160 acres -- a part of which was for sports and an outdoor theatre -- and much of the woodland.

For a few years Arden remained scarcely more than a dream; but one by one little picturesque bungalows appeared and soon an inn or "guest-house" was found necessary in order that visitors might find an over-night shelter and a simple meal. Next came a club house, planned and made by the Ardenites out of an old but substantial barn standing on the place.

Various industries -- carpet weaving, leaded glass, cabinet-making, etc. -- are carried on and many of the leaseholders have little gardens. There are at present a craftsmen's guild, having in charge the village industries, a folk guild, having in charge matters concerning hospitality and entertainment; players' guild, having charge of the dramatics; gardeners' guild, "including tillers of the soil and those who tell others how to"; a housewives' guild, scholars' guild, educational work, and several other guilds.

The woods are kept free from underbrush but otherwise are left untouched and no one
is allowed "to hunt or fish on any of the lands of Arden, or cut timber or fence in woodland or keep the land in such disorder as shall in the opinion of the majority of the residents of the community be injurious to the rights of others."

A clearing the form of an amphitheatere with evidence of numerous fires in the centre of it is the place where, every Sunday evening throughout the warm season, the Ardenfolk and their guests go with lanterns and rugs to watch the big fire which is built by some of the young men and boys, and sing from the Arden song book or listen to readings from Uncle Remus or other books for an hour. As the fire dies down, the ghostly folk file slowly back with their lanterns through the dark wood and soon there is no sound but the crickets or an occasional owl.

Saturday night is devoted to the open-air theatre, which is in the centre of the green and has a grassy stage about 20ft long, with a large rock at the back, and exits made by openings in the shrubbery. At each end of the state, which is footlighted by large oil lamps with reflectors, is a white column which gives dignity to the place. The seats are built in a semi-circle -- or, more strictly speaking, the long bench, for everything is quite primitive -- and the "front row" is cut out of the earth and grass-covered. The players file to the theatre and across the stage, already costumed, and the play begins. "Julius Caesar," "The Merchant of Venice," and "Romeo and Juliet" are the favorites; and if this might seem ambitious, the reply would be that the object is not so much the entertainment of the audience as the education of the actors. When the play is over -- and as it begins early it ends early -- those who care to adjourn to the clubhouse to dance. The plays, the sports, the pageants, and the campfire -- all are as much a part of Arden as the industries, and "the spirit of Arden pervades everything."

One of the dreams which has not yet been realized but which is surely going to be is a church on a sunny slope which shall be open at all times for anyone, no matter what his creed, who cares to enter in. The design is already chosen, square-towered and of stone, early English.

ONLY LAND IS COMMON.

But there must be a business side to every such undertaking and Arden is no exception. It is not a community in the sense in which the word is often used, for nothing is held in common except the land, and one of the strongest beliefs is that of individual freedom so far as it is consistent with the equal freedom of everyone else. Even one's time is his own, for it is an unwritten law that no one shall interrupt another in his own domain when the warning white flag is at the door.
One enters Arden from the country road, by means of steps over a stone wall under a rustic arch upon which is cut in graceful letters, "You are welcome hither." The path winds under large oak and chestnut trees past blackberry bushes and, in the fall, goldenrod and asters. The visitor usually arrives in Arden later than the resident, because he has been obliged to stop on the way to pick flowers or admire the beautiful surrounding country.

The visitor passes one or two little cottages right up to the shop, which often is called "the red house," and he has his first view of Arden. He sees the green with the wood at the rear, but otherwise surrounded by "the Admiral Benbow," "the lodge," "the monastery," the picturesque rough-plastered inn, "the Homestead," and other cottages of varying size and architecture.

THE LAND LAWS

Land cannot be bought in Arden, but all lots are assessed to "equal as nearly as possible the full rental value of the land, excluding improvements, and the rentals so collected shall be expended in the payment of all taxes, so far as said rentals will suffice, so that the leaseholders shall be exempt and free of all direct taxation to that extent, and thereafter for such communal purposes as are properly public in that they cannot be left to individuals without giving them an advantage over others."

Although Arden is a single tax colony in the sense that no one pays any direct tax except that on land values, among the residents are Socialists as well as Single Taxers, and people of no definite economic belief who go there to enjoy the freedom from conventionality. All the sites are taken for 1914, the rents amounting to £400. Besides the little homes, the inn and the guild-house, are a laundry, a summer school, and the craftsmen's show, which has a dozen rooms for bakery, store, studios, and for rug and furniture making.

EDUCATION SYSTEM

The "organic school" is unique in that no desks were used, only tables and chairs, and that the children have to be sent home instead of being sent to school. Occupations take the place of lessons, on the principle that the conscious reasoning into which the children are plunged upon entering school retards the development of the reasoning power for some years. If occupations were substituted for 'lessons' the reasoning power would develop unconsciously and naturally, thus insuring a stronger fine mentality. Children should not consciously strive to know any more than they consciously strive to grow. Singing, dramatisation, stories of literature and history, field geography, and Nature study in the form of walks -- observation and
investigation, gardening, creative handwork, art work, and fundamental conceptions of numbers, may occupy the children from six to nine years of age, without the use of books, excepting where the child really desires to learn to read. At nine or ten the child may come into the use of books, not by having 'lessons' assigned, but for the pleasure of finding out what the books can tell with the assistance of the teacher.

The affairs of the town are managed by three men, one of whom is chairman.

The Evening Post was founded by Henry Blundell and began publication as a daily in Wellington on 8 February 1865. Blundell was born in Dublin in 1813 and worked for nearly 30 years at the Dublin Evening Mail. In 1860 he migrated with his family to Melbourne. Blundell moved to New Zealand in 1863 and worked on the Otago Daily Times.