

The Arden Georgist Gild

Mike Curtis has been the Director of the Henry George School in Philadelphia for ten years — and a zealous volunteer educator for quite a few years before that. He tried many times to interest his fellow Ardenites to learn about Henry George's ideas, with responses varying from small to undetectable. But in 1992 he decided to try one more time, announcing in the Town Meeting that a class in Georgist economics would be offered. At long last, an enthusiastic group gathered — and stayed through all three classes — mainly due to the recruitment of Sadie Somerville, Mark Taylor and, especially, Rodney Jester, who somehow talked all his friends into coming. And so the Arden Georgist Gild was born in 1993.

Arden's Gild Hall (where our conference was held) is the home of the Arden Club, which sponsors interest groups named Gilds. These are outgrowths of the Arts-and-Crafts movement, the second major influence (after the Single Tax) on



Sadie Somerville

Arden's founders. Prominent Gilds today include Folk Dance, Shakespeare, Arden Singers (who perform an exclusively Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire), Garden, Library — and of course the Swim Gild, which maintains the lovely pool behind the Hall.

Today, the Arden Georgist Gild has some two dozen members, nearly all of whom were there, working, at the Arden conference. The Gild sponsors educational activities such as seminars and lecture series, and hosts an annual dinner with an invited (Georgist) guest speaker. They also offer some attractive merchandise, including t-shirts, mugs and bumper stickers.

Another substantial task that the Georgist Gild has undertaken has been the ongoing challenge of educating Arden residents about the principles under which their unique villages were founded — including the requirement, in the town's Deed of Trust, that the elected Board of Assessors determine the full rental value of each parcel of land in the town. Even though there is no requirement to **collect** the full value,



Rodney Jester

the rule has not been followed. Overall assessments have tended to be computed as equal to the revenue demands made by the surrounding city of Wilmington. Gild members have repeatedly shown that the full rental value of land can be accurately determined, and urged their towns to do it. Residents fear full-rental assessments, because they would show how much land rent they are actually pocketing, in this "single tax town"! Georgist Gild members are proud of their town, "and that's why," said Rodney Jester, "we keep yelling at them to do the right thing." GJ

The Experimental Village

The following is an excerpt from the paper "Henry George and the Single Tax" by Bob DeNigris, a Trustee of Ardentown. The paper is available online (see page 7).

Following the failure of the 1896 campaign in Delaware, some followers of George wanted to establish a single tax community at the village level. In 1900, sculptor Frank Stephens, architect Will Price and soap manufacturer Joseph Fels bought 162 acres of land in north Wilmington, Delaware, and created the Village of Arden. The village was designed to demonstrate George's theories in practice. It was named for the "Forest of Arden" in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. There was no private ownership of land. More than 50% of the land was held in common for general use, while on the remaining land, leaseholds for private use were set up with 99-year leases, which could be transferred as well as renewed. These land-use conditions in the village are little changed since its founding. In 1922, a second village, Ardentown, was created. And in 1950 the third, Ardencroft, came into being. All three villages are based on the single tax, but as communities offer much more to their residents. Each village is governed by a Deed of Trust – the original founding document, by the leasehold system, and by the Act of Incorporation. Three trustees are nominated and confirmed in each village. They are responsible for the administering the Deed of Trust, and collecting the taxes. A town assembly runs the day-to-day affairs of each village. Every resident over the age of 18 has a vote in the town assembly. There is a town chairman, town secretary, and town treasurer. In addition, many committees are mandated, to help in the operation of the village. They include: Advisory, Archives, Audit, Budget, Civic, Community Planning, Playground, Registration and Safety Committees, and the Assessors. Each has a unique role in civic affairs.

The founders of Arden also wanted to include cultural activities in the daily life of Ardenites. Organizations, such as the Arden Community Recreation Association and the Arden Club were started. The Arden Club is an association of gilds, each involved in some aspect of cultural life. In addition, other activities include arts and crafts, a major source of income; a (former) community public school, the Arden School; a monthly newspaper, *The Arden Page*; and the annual Arden Fair. Life in the three villages of this single tax community is one of activity, togetherness, and value.