

Assessments on Parade

CALIFORNIANS are hungry for tax reform, says Clayton C. Bauer, a frequent contributor to California Homeowner magazine. He thinks the assessor's office is the key spot in the tax reform field, and believes "an honest, hard-hitting reform assessor might well win the war for us. Assessors have so much leeway they can, if they want, do great harm or great good."

Irene Hickman had a personal stake in her campaigning—she couldn't get redress for certain tax grievances so she became a candidate for county assessor and won. John Nagy, President of Statewide Homeowners, lost on his first try but that was just for experience. "Doc" Ben Yellen (Dec. '65 HGN) ran for assessor-collector in Imperial County and polled 2000 votes against 6000 for each of two opponents.

W. E. Pereira of Los Angeles, another busy volunteer on the tax reform front, clarifies local issues in articles and letters. He very courteously wrote to a newspaper editor to thank the writer of an article in the Los Angeles Times who reported on San Leandro's annual tax reduction. How is a tax reduction possible? Property assessments have gone up and a favorable tax climate has attracted more than 500 new business firms, or one every ten days. They pay more than a third of the municipal costs and 45 percent of property taxes. Furthermore San Leandro is considering how to reduce taxes on improvements instead of increasing them. The Mayor said, "the people of this city do not want us running to Washington every time we need something. We go it alone, pay as we go, and try to pay for one improvement before starting another." The city is practically free of debt.

From Ventura comes a protest about the higher land assessments. Farmers say they can't pay their taxes and can't sell their land at a profit. The protestors

are not blaming the county assessor, they take the view that land speculators buy property near farm land at inflated prices and drive up assessed values all around them.

An equal assessment bill, ACA 80, was passed by the State Assembly but was bottled up in a committee. Senators argued that only five counties were implicated in assessor scandals, but newspapers report on twenty or more assessors involved in paring corporation taxes for a price. A Statewide Homeowners' survey handed the legislation a long list of grossly unequal assessments which Senators may ignore at peril to their political careers.

Lawrence T. Harniss of Seattle has gathered numerous newspaper accounts which prove that public interest is beginning to stir dramatically in the West against assessment leniencies and bribes by corporations. "Out West: A Property Tax Scandal" was the headline on one article in San Francisco which could have been suggested by material from the California Homeowner.

The items clipped by Mr. Harniss include mention of a taxing agency in Alameda County which took action to recover \$1 million in 1965 taxes from under-assessed business firms.

In Butte County, California, the assessor, an assistant, and a corporation president, were indicted in a tax scandal. The assessor was directed by the Grand Jury to restore to tax rolls \$55 million in property that had not been assessed since 1960.

Washington and two other western states are investigating leads provided by California, but the Chief Deputy Attorney General says they can't follow all leads at once because of a shortage of manpower.

Robert Scrofani of San Francisco reported on an inquiry into tax practices in Martinez after officials charged that the county's industries are under-

assessed and homeowners who make up the difference are hoping for a tax drop. The assessor denied any favoritism.

In Orange County, near Los Angeles, the assessor was re-elected by a wide margin. He instituted a 7-point reform program of equalization which aroused large landholders. Although they supported the opponent, the votes of homeowners multiplied—they are beginning to understand.

And who is the one person most responsible for arousing the public awareness? Surely none other than Sidney Evans of San Diego. For years he was the director of the Henry George School extension in San Diego. He gathered students who are now mold-

ing public opinion — John Nagy, to name only one—has had a wide influence with his talks and articles on taxation.

Mr. Evans saw that proper assessment was an issue which concerned the owners of homes especially: So in a modest beginning a few years ago he asked homeowners to band together to study this inequity. A magazine, California Homeowner, followed, and as a result of this emphasis Dr. Irene Hickman of Sacramento was inspired to wage the protest which got her the county assessor's job.

So the tax ferment in California is well on its way, and when it is recorded for history there is one name that can never be erased—that of Sidney Evans.

Rebel — blonde and blue-eyed

Dr. Irene Hickman is surely out to win the Georgist popularity poll. But she may be called by other names before she finishes the job she has promised to do. The San Francisco Chronicle refers to her as a Rebel Assessor, after her surprise win over the incumbent in Sacramento County. She is a doctor, a restaurateur, housewife and mother, and she didn't want the new job but says she's going to do it. She had little newspaper support in her campaign but she had proof of

unfair assessment, and this was something the public could understand.

When the news leaks out that she has taught Henry George classes for 15 years she is sometimes equated with socialism by the uninformed, but her reply to this is a terse: "Socialism doesn't work, and if it doesn't work I'm not for it." She spoke at a luncheon in San Francisco at which Robert Scrofani was chairman, and at the commencement in Los Angeles Henry George School on July 9th.

CAPTAIN JESSE B. GAY

Capt. Jesse B. Gay of the U. S. Navy, retired, died on his country's Memorial Day, July 4th in San Diego, after a long life of distinguished, patriotic service. He held the Navy Cross and medals from the Spanish, Cuban and Asiatic Pacific campaigns. During his retirement years he was active in the Democratic party and local committees such as the county Red Cross and the Musical Merit Foundation.

The name Jesse B. Gay was known to Georgists from coast to coast and especially by those who were privileged to visit San Diego and meet him personally. He was an instructor in the school for thirty years and his influence was tremendous. He served until 1963 on the board of directors.

Bessie Truehart, a former director of that extension, now living in Loma Linda, wrote "in deep sincerity and sorrow for our loss of a truly great man and Georgist."