

the Henry George News

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The Day the *Henry George School* Was Founded

by ROBERT CLANCY



Oscar H. Geiger

IT was January 1, 1932. What kind of a day was it? Surely the most desolate of New Year's days. It was at the bottom of a deep depression that had lasted two years, with no end in sight.

New Year's Eve in New York had been celebrated without enthusiasm, without hope. And to the inhabitants of the "hoboes' jungle" on the West Side (which included a number of ex-bankers), January first was just another dreary day.

New York was demanding federal help for its 800,000 unemployed; and across the nation one out of four persons was unemployed. Businesses continued to fail and stock prices continued downward. Economists were calling for bold new programs to cope with the situation. Sumner Slichter

wanted economic planning, and Richard T. Ely, conservative foe of Henry George, called for a huge public works program. A move for higher tariffs was first on the agenda when Congress should reconvene in a few days. The Federal Reserve Board was being pressured to loosen credit as a way out of the depression.

While chaos and bewilderment reigned in the economic and political worlds, science continued to make progress. Einstein's theories had just been confirmed by new experiments in California, and progress was being made in exploring the atom and in overcoming disease.

The worlds of art and entertainment were not doing badly, in spite of everything. The New Year's movie

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offerings were Greta Garbo in "Mata Hari" and Frederic March in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Along Broadway, Noel Coward had a new play, "Hay Fever," Helen Hayes triumphed in "The Good Fairy," and a promising young dancer, Agnes de Mille, was preparing to open a new dance recital. Two new museums had been started—the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art. And the Metropolitan Museum of Art had just been bequeathed a collection of Renaissance masterpieces—total value (in depression dollars), \$500,000.

You could buy steak for 25¢ a pound, a good suit of clothes for \$25, and you could find a place to live for \$25 a month—if you had that much money.

The first New York baby of 1932 was born at 12:01 A.M. to Mrs. Hilda Brown of Brooklyn. Mr. and Mrs. Ely Culbertson were enjoying fresh triumphs as bridge champions. Southern California defeated Tulane in the New Year's Rose Bowl football game. And Father Cox was planning a march on Washington with an army of unemployed.

Overseas, Britain had been losing gold, resulting in a crisis. And France had been piling up gold, resulting in a crisis. In Germany hoodlums were parading in the streets led by a crank named Adolf Hitler. Russia was in the midst of a "five-year plan," and 77 persons had just been sentenced to ten years in prison for stealing bread. In India, Mahatma Gandhi was launching a campaign of civil disobedience. On New Year's Day, the City of Chinchow in Manchuria fell to the Japanese invaders, and the League of Nations was thinking of discussing the matter.

Despondency gripped the world.

Mental disturbance was great, not only because of the world-wide depression but because people had become convinced that such crises belonged to the past. There was a demand for great political changes—not that better results were expected, but because of resentment there was a desire for any change, for better or for worse.

* * *

In his apartment in upper Manhattan, Oscar H. Geiger sat figuring out a crucial matter.

He had been with the Henry George movement for 35 years, from the last days of George to the present. He had seen it as a great and vigorous movement to which large numbers of people had been attracted. And now—when George's message was needed more than ever—now, this great economic philosophy which held the key to the world's woes was almost unknown, and the movement built around it had dwindled to almost nothing. Why?

Geiger was convinced that a more basic method was needed than had as yet been applied in promoting the Georgist philosophy. There had been much oratory and soap-boxing, much pamphleteering and tract distribution, much politicking and propagandizing—and all had come to nought. At this moment, when leaders and laymen were all desperately looking for a way out, the Georgist movement had not the means or the manpower to make its influence felt, to make known its solution to depressions.

A good deal of Georgist effort had been concentrated on municipal tax reform. All to the good! But had Georgists themselves been taken off guard by the depression? Had they, too, believed that such crises belonged to the past? Here indeed was vindication that their leader knew whereof he spoke!

Geiger had long felt that the full

philosophy of Henry George needed to be taught in a systematic way. He had been too busy as a business man and family man to devote more than spare hours to the Georgist cause—much of which had been taken up by the organizations and programs already going.

But now he was one of the growing army of unemployed. Of the Georgist programs, not much remained. The Commonwealth Land party had folded up, along with an array of other organizations. James R. Brown, the leader of the Manhattan Single Tax Club, had recently died. A magazine, *Land and Freedom*, with a dwindling circulation, was being edited by an aging man, Joseph Dana Miller. A couple of bright spots were the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation which had published a 50th Anniversary edition of George's *Progress and Poverty* in 1929 after that book had long been out of print; and the annual congresses of the Henry George Foundation, which helped keep the spark alive. But still, a systematic program was needed to bring numbers of new people into the movement!

And so Geiger mapped it out. A school—a Henry George School—where people, especially young ones, could learn economic truth. Not just a school of "single tax"—though that would be of prime importance—but a school where all the ramifications would be taught, where it would be shown that natural law reigned in the economic world as in other fields. A school of social science—the Henry George School of Social Science—which would teach a fundamental approach to economics and the philosophy surrounding it—fundamental economics and social philosophy.

Oscar Geiger made his New Year's resolution: *"I mean to devote what is left of life to me here to establishing an institution that by the time I am called away will be so well established that others can and will continue it."*

Was Henry George looking over his shoulder? . . .

Thus it was that on January 1, 1932, Oscar H. Geiger founded the Henry George School of Social Science, which was to grow and exert an ever-increasing influence over the years.

The life and philosophy of Oscar H. Geiger is outlined in the book *A Seed Was Sown* by Robert Clancy. It is available at \$1 a copy from the Henry George School, 50 East 69th Street, New York 21, N. Y.

On January 4th, the Henry George School celebrates its 30th anniversary with a dinner to which members and faculty have been invited. The address of the guest speaker, Dr. Johnson Fairchild, Director of Adult Education at Cooper Union, New York, will be reported next month.

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