

# HGI JOURNAL

---

No. 5

March 1973

---

## CENTENARY OF OSCAR H. GEIGER

On February 24th the Henry George Institute held a luncheon at the Roger Smith Hotel in New York attended by members and friends from New York City, Long Island, New Jersey, Boston and Philadelphia. The occasion was the 100th birthday of Oscar H. Geiger, businessman, philosopher, teacher and founder of the Henry George School of Social Science. (This event also featured a program on Fairhope. See page 11.)

Robert Clancy, President of the Institute, who studied under Geiger, reviewed the life and accomplishments of the founder as related in his book A Seed Was Sown. Born in New York February 24th, 1873, Geiger died June 29th, 1934 at the age of 61. In 1932, while the Georgist movement was in decline and during the Great Depression, he founded the School, and though he died a little more than two years later, the work went on and grew, reviving the movement.

Oscar Geiger compared his work to sowing a seed. And as with plants that reach maturity other seeds are thrown off and propagate elsewhere, so it has been with the Henry George School. Geiger has given us a workable method for spreading the Georgist philosophy, said Mr. Clancy: Let us continue it and create anew a Georgist movement stronger than before.

(Contd. on p. 8)

GEIGER (contd. from p. 1)

Tributes to Oscar Geiger from absent friends were received, among them the following:

From GASTON HAXO, friend and collaborator of Oscar Geiger in many Georgist efforts: "Henry George founded the Single Tax movement by writing Progress and Poverty in 1879. For 17 years he gave every hour of his time and every ounce of his energy to fulfill his vow to abolish poverty. He made many converts all over the world and the future of his crusade for a free earth looked exceedingly bright. But he had given too much of himself to his cause and he died during his second campaign for Mayor of New York in 1897. He was only 58. His untimely passing caused the movement to lose vitality. It became scattered and started to decline until about 1930, when the torch he had lighted was on the point of going out.

"It was then that Oscar Geiger, ruined financially by the Great Depression, made his vow to use what time and money he had left to keep the torch of freedom from being extinguished, perhaps forever. He founded the Henry George School of Social Science, and like Henry George he gave all his time and energy to revive the Georgist movement. He succeeded but he died in the attempt two years later. He was 61, only three years older than Henry George.

"All we can do now to honor his memory is to dedicate ourselves to the task of making his dream come true."

From MILTON NORWALK, Secretary of the Round Table Club, a group of young friends of Oscar Geiger's son George: "In the early 1890's a young man hardly in his majority secured a copy of Progress and Poverty. He did not sleep that night until he had read it from cover to cover. With the light of the morning came a vision; a flame was kindled in him which lighted the whole course of his life and gave brilliance to his acts."

"As a youth he had been raised in the Jewish faith. Oscar Geiger had been a devout student of the Hebrew

scriptures and had trained himself for the rabbinate. But now all the fervor, the spiritual force, the religious faith of a lifetime channeled itself to another path. He embraced the Single Tax and all his life devoted himself to his self-imposed burden of propagating the faith so close to his heart.

"In season and out, to friends and acquaintances, at social gatherings, on soap boxes, to whomsoever would listen, he spoke the gospel.

"His one son George was named in honor of Henry George. George's young friends formed into a group that began with story telling and evolved into the Round Table Literary Club whose members were thoroughly conversant with Single Tax and which lasted for 20 years.

"When the Depression came, Geiger lost his fur business which he had spent his life in building, and he now devoted the rest of his life to building, alone and unaided, the Henry George School of Social Science.

"Oscar Geiger died as he had lived, active in the work he loved, Single Tax. Like Moses on Nebo, he gazed into the future and saw the fruition of his dreams in a promised land he could not tread - a world with justice for all and peace and freedom for the human race."

From WILL LISSNER, writer for The New York Times and editor of the American Journal for Economics and Sociology: "I first met Oscar Geiger around 1930 at the beginning of the Great Depression. I recall that he told me he was planning to open a school dedicated to teaching George's economics and social philosophy but until it was ready he was teaching students privately in his home. He offered to take me on and for several years I had the privilege of his tutoring.

"During our several hours together each week I learned to know and appreciate Geiger. He had been a rabbi assigned to an orphan asylum, but he left to make his living as a furrier. Attracted to the Henry George movement, he was active in it, and when the movement went into a decline, he vowed to spend the

rest of his life in building an educational movement that would revive it. The fact that there is a Henry George movement today we owe in large part to the work of Oscar Geiger.

"But Geiger's interest transcended economics, even philosophy. Another bond between us was that I had studied Swedenborg and was an admirer of Kant, Emerson and John Dewey. Bob Clancy produced a course on Geiger's philosophical outlook which shows how wide-ranging was his thought.

"I remember his passing in 1934 when the School was on 79th Street. More than a hundred people crowded into the small quarters to hear the eulogy by Lawson Purdy who said that the truth to which Oscar Geiger dedicated his life would live on, thanks to his efforts.

"Nearly forty years have passed - and that truth has indeed survived. We have yet to see it manifest in our economy and our society, for ignorance dies hard. But I am as certain as Geiger was that if I do not see it in operation, my descendants will. For that achievement we will owe much to an army of people. And prominently standing in their midst is Oscar H. Geiger."

Other messages included one from MARC BERK, an associate of Geiger's in the early days of the School, who wrote that "Oscar Geiger did not spare himself in attaining his goal of spreading the Georgist philosophy through education. He was a gentle, humble man. He inspired confidence and he succeeded in getting a great variety of people to work together for the common cause, before and even after his death."

Messages were also sent by younger people who had never met Oscar Geiger but were greatly influenced by studying his philosophy. Among them: GEORGE COLLINS, Director of the Philadelphia Henry George School, who said that Henry George's and Oscar Geiger's philosophy combined have become his own philosophy; and WILLIAM CAMARGO, a Director of the Henry George Institute, who had studied science and through Oscar Geiger came to a spiritual understanding of the teachings of science.