

Free Acres, New Jersey

by M. B. THOMSON

FREE ACRES DIFFERS FROM THE DELAWARE AND ALABAMA enclaves in that the original site was donated to its founders, the Free Acres Association, whereas the southern enclaves' land had to be purchased from outside sources. The donor was Bolton Hall, a New York attorney, the author of several books on land use and an admirer of Henry George, whose doctrines he hoped would, to some degree, be demonstrated through this experiment.

The title, Free Acres, is no misnomer, since the Association received the land free from Bolton Hall and each original leasehold was obtained from the Association for nothing. Now that all acreage has been given out, a leasehold can be obtained only through the purchase of a house, at which time the lease is automatically transferred.

The colony is located in the center of New Jersey, straddling the corners of Union and Somerset counties. The post office address is Berkeley Heights.

The taxes are paid to the townships of New Providence and Watchung. Two blanket tax bills based on the usual assessments of land and buildings are sub-

mitted by these townships each year and are paid by the Free Acres Association out of the aggregate rentals received from the leaseholds. Leasehold rentals are not based on the townships' assessments but on an assessment made by the officials of the Association itself. They vary, of course, according to the size and location of the plot, and there is always a surplus above the tax bill which the colony uses to defray expenses for roads, the water system, swimming pool, meetinghouse, etc.

As can be seen, in some respects Mr. Hall's hopes have been realized, although in the ensuing years the colony has departed in matters of considerable detail from the original principle. For instance, when a leaseholder rents his house to someone else, he now must pay the Association 15 per cent of the total he receives in addition to his regular land rent. The question of whether this can be interpreted as a tax on improvements, inasmuch as the amount varies according to the size and quality of the house that is rented, is a matter of controversy in the colony today.

Free Acres covers 60 acres which have been divided into 90 leaseholds, although 150 to 200 might have been made, increasing the income and benefits to the Association without seriously affecting the privacy of any holding. The population of the colony is about 300, and there are no restrictions as to race or creed.

It is a colorful community. Colorful because of its lovely wooded hills and the interesting people who have lived there. It is colorful, too, for its community activities

—the folk dances that are given under stately trees, the performances in the open-air theatre, and its fiery monthly meetings at which matters concerning the running of the community are threshed out and every man's voice is heard.