

We Keep On Rolling Along

By HENRY L. TIDEMAN

THERE IS a bit of embarrassment in the task of making myself a feature, but here goes! I was born on September 11, 1883 in Rockford, Illinois. My parents were Sven and Hannah Elizabeth. Mother's natal name was Edholm. They were immigrants from Sweden. Father came in 1882 and mother about a year later.

Very early after father's arrival he became aware of a book which treated of the land question, a subject to which his attention was attracted by his life in Sweden. He got a copy of *Progress and Poverty*, and as I gathered the details, he and mother practically learned their English from that book. Though neither of them ever quite abandoned the, to me, delightful Swedish accent, both spoke the language rather well.

A few years later, when I was about four, we were living in Grand Rapids, and I used to go to the store with mother to buy a copy of *The Standard*, published by Henry George. Everything would stop until the paper had been read. It was during this period that I remember becoming acquainted with the phrase "single tax." Mother had Swedish and Finnish friends who had to be proselytized and consequently that phrase fastened itself into my consciousness.

In some way I got the notion that the lower case letter *b* meant *single tax*, and I tried to confirm it. One day mother was reading *The Standard* and I climbed into her lap. Looking over the page I found an *b* and putting my finger on it I asked, "is that single tax?"

Mother patted me gently, put me on the floor saying "yes" and thus got rid of the little pest. That was the source of my first public humiliation.

Years later when I was in school the teacher was drilling the newcomers with the alphabet by means of charts on the wall. I watched jubilantly. I knew I would be called upon, and when she put the pointer on the lower case *b* I became wildly excited. Here was something I knew. When she called on me to name it I said loudly "single tax."

Of course the teacher laughed with the whole class joining in, and I can still remember feeling hot and uncomfortable.

After we got settled in Chicago it was not long until my folks discovered that the Single Tax Club was holding meetings on Sunday afternoons. Thereafter we had "single tax" for breakfast, lunch and supper. I think I was twelve when my mother first took me to one of those meetings. I did not go often because carfare, then five cents, was real money, and we were poor.

But there was one meeting when I was about fourteen which stands out to this day as one about which I remember nearly everything. John Z. White was there. The speakers included a Roman Catholic Priest named Father Cox, also John S. Crosby and Louis F. Post. I remember Father Cox speaking very emphatically against restriction of immigration, and two stories told by John S. Crosby have influenced my thinking ever since.

Those were interesting years, but there would

be no point in bringing forth the details of my adventures as a newsboy, factory operative, office boy and my gradual induction into engineering. When I was twenty-five I married Ella Persson who was then just twenty. There followed thirty years of happiness during which we raised two sons and three daughters. Now all are married and I am twelve times a grandfather. Ella died in 1938 but I still live in the old house where most of the joy of my life was lived. [Daughter Marion is married to John Lawrence Montene, director of the Henry George School in Chicago, and young son Robert is its Publicity Director. There are no non-Georgists in the Tideman family.]

During the first decade of the twentieth century a rift developed in the Chicago Single Tax Club over political action. That quarrel would make interesting history, but I shall pass over it. The club dwindled and for several years was without force.

One Friday evening, I think in January 1911, I happened to be downtown and had the thought to go up and see what the Single Tax Club was doing since I had heard that they met on Fridays. There was a small room with about a dozen or fifteen men sitting in a smoke-filled atmosphere, conversing each other. In my eyes some of these were really great men, and I still hold the memory of many in high esteem. I was asked to join and having filled out an application blank and paid a quarter, I was accepted.

There was ferment in the air about that time and some other young men joined the club. We ganged up on the older members and in two years we "took over." From then until 1917, when the war interfered, we raised funds and held public meetings. During that period the club acquired some fame and had some influence. The disillusionment following the peace of 1918 made it impractical to continue, however, and the club was disbanded in 1923. The records were "turned over to Henry Tideman for custody until it should again be practical to resume activity."

Some years later, I think in 1929, I called a meeting and the club was reorganized and it had some usefulness until about 1938, when again it dissolved.

It was about September 1934 when Leonard Recker* came to Chicago to attend a Henry George Foundation meeting, that the next interesting episode occurred—that is, interesting to others than myself. He looked me up, asked me to lunch, and that over, almost without preliminaries, he said, "What I want to see you about is this: We want to start a Henry George School of Social Science in Chicago."

I felt a bit alarmed, and asked, "Do you expect me to get up on a pedestal and tell the neighbors to observe what a handsome and wise guy I am and come to me for lessons? I just can't do it."

"Well," said he, "if we got you a class, would you teach it?"

I said I'd be glad to do that.

* Now treasurer of the Henry George School of Social Science, New York.



"That's settled then," he said. "Next Monday at six o'clock you appear in our office. I'll see that you have a manual and a stack of books and there will be a class waiting for you."

He handed me a card with the address, and at the appointed time I was there. When the group assembled there were 25 of them including three who came on my invitation. There was an air of curiosity about it, but some were a little sullen. You must remember it was 1934—that was a depression year and anybody who had a job nursed it carefully and was alert to possible disaster.

But I did what I had been asked to do—I made a speech, and *what* a speech! I sold everyone a copy of *Progress and Poverty* and I tried to get some commitment out of the group on various questions. It was a sweaty evening for me. The two hours finally passed however, and when I returned the next week I found that practically everybody had done some reading, and had developed an interest. Anyway I went home inspired.

The Fundamental Course then consisted of only seven lessons. During the fifth session, one of the men interrupted the proceedings and said something to this effect: several of us have agreed that there is something in this proposition—what can we do about it?

I asked if he was thinking of political action. "Yes," he answered, "or anything."

Then I saw my chance. I told them that politics was of no use—there were not enough people with a thorough understanding of the proposal. But, said I, "if you will get some friends to join another class and if we can make the movement grow, there might come a day when constructive action toward the adoption of this proposal might develop."

They formed an organization which crowded to capacity the office of one of my friends, and a few weeks later we were operating three classes; then there were seven classes followed by a term with thirteen classes. So we were off—and we have been operating a growing school ever since.

Whole chapters might be written of trial and error, of working at cross-purposes, and of momentary discouragement—but we keep the faith. Like Old Man River we just keep rolling along!