

THE GEORGIST MOVEMENT

The Henry George Institute and the Henry George School of New York co-sponsored a mini-series of talks on aspects of the history of the Georgist movement, as follows:

- Nov. 4, 1987: "The Delaware Story," Michael K. Curtis.
- Dec. 2, 1987: "New York Starts the Ball Rolling," Robert Clancy.
- Feb. 3, 1988: "Unorthodox Georgists," Mark A. Sullivan.
- Mar. 10, 1988: "What Happened in Pennsylvania," Steven Cord.

Part of the first talk is presented below:

THE DELAWARE CAMPAIGN OF 1895

By NANCY T. WOLFE and MICHAEL K. CURTIS

This campaign was waged by the Philadelphia Single Tax Society. They chose the State of Delaware for several reasons: it was close, it was small, and there was general unrest on the subject of taxation. The state got a lot of revenue from banking, stock and railroad bonds, and railroad taxes. As revenue increased, the poll tax was put with the property tax for the counties. In 1893, because of dissatisfaction with taxes, the legislature appointed a commission to study the system. The conclusion was that there was a lack of uniformity in assessments, and that all property of equal value should be equally liable. No doubt the Georgists thought this presented a good opportunity. They figured that if they could get the Single Tax passed, Delaware would become so prosperous that other states would follow suit.

In preparation for their assault, they formed a Shakespeare Club to improve their voice and presence. They debated the finer points of the analysis and philosophy; they anticipated the results of taxing land, even to the extent of its effect on personal relations between men and women.

On June 15, 1895, the Single Tax Army (platoon would be more like it) invaded Delaware. Dressed in Union Army uniforms, armed with literature and an arm band reading "Single Tax," they started in a little town about six miles west of Wilmington.

Their message had two basic tenets: The land was provided by God for the use of all men equally; and a tax based on the value of the land alone was the only equitable tax. They had a newspaper, Justice, which they distributed wherever they spoke. It asserted that all taxes should be abolished except a tax on the value of land. It should be collected at the local level, a portion to be paid to the state.

Justice was distributed extensively, newspapers were contacted and a petition was prepared for the legislature. Money came in from private donations and other Single Tax Clubs. Once things got under way, headquarters were moved to the center of Wilmington. Over \$25,000 was spent on the campaign. Speakers were brought in from near and far, including Henry George, Lawson Purdy, Judge Maguire, Father McGlynn, Thomas G. Shearman and William Lloyd Garrison, Jr.

The press was mostly hostile, but two were won over: Watson Sterry of the Morning News and Frank Saylor of the Labor Herald. The Sunday Star invited fuller explanations which were provided. Judging from letters to the editor, the point which Delawarrians found hardest to comprehend was the necessity for the removal of the tax on improvements. Patiently, the Single Taxers explained that each man was entitled to the full profit of his labor, whereas the rent of land belongs to the whole community. The idea of community rights in land was a thorny question. And who was to decide the value of any particular piece of land? The answer was, of course, the market. The farmers feared that any tax based on land would raise their burdens.

Single Tax speakers were arrested for "noisy assemblage" and "impeding the thoroughfare." The jail in Dover played host to many Single Taxers; when released, they formed the Dover Jail Single Tax Club.

As Election Day, November 3, 1896, approached, the question of whether the Single Taxers should support sympathetic Democratic and Republican candidates or nominate their own slate caused a serious internal struggle. Not until September was the issue decided and the Single Tax Party of Delaware was formed. They endorsed William Jennings Bryan for President; in some cases they endorsed candidates of the two leading parties, in other cases they made their own nominations.

The Delaware campaign was a failure. The Single Tax vote of nearly two thousand represented only a little over three per cent of the thirty-eight thousand votes. But defeat did not daunt the Single Taxers. They persevered through 1897 in an effort to win Delaware. This new campaign was beginning to awaken greater interest, but the legislature put an effective stop to these efforts with a constitutional amendment which stated "Any tax, the object of which is the confiscation of land, shall be unconstitutional"; and "all classes of property shall be taxed equally."

The value of the campaign was much debated. Some considered it a victory, others thought it was a waste and had done more harm than good. But one thing is sure: The campaign inspired Frank Stephens to start the Single Tax colony of Arden, which lasts to this day. The story of the founding and development of this colony is another story worth the telling.