

Henry George News

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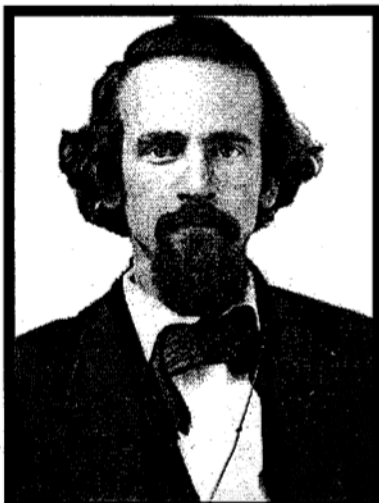
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JUSTICE AND PROSPERITY THROUGH ECONOMIC EDUCATION

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HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL 70th ANNIVERSARY!

David Domke

The Henry George School of Social Science was founded on January 1st, 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression by Oscar Geiger, a business man and scholar. On April 15 of that same year, the School was incorporated with a Board of Trustees and the famous American philosopher John Dewey was asked to be Honorary President, a post he accepted and held for twenty years, until his death.

Later in 1932, the School was granted a provisional charter by the Board of Regents of the State of New York. That charter was made absolute within five years, the normal waiting period, after the School had fulfilled all the expectations required of a chartered school.

By all accounts, Oscar Geiger was an extraordinary individual. An avid reader in his youth (he was born in 1873), Geiger devoured every book on philosophy and science he could get his hands on. One day, the Geiger family physician handed young Oscar a copy of *Progress and Poverty*. Oscar, who by that time was reading liberal and radical social reform literature, seeking, he later recounted, an answer to the problem of human suffering, was persuaded after the first reading. He became a Georgist. Shortly thereafter, in 1896, he sought out and met the author himself and worked on George's 1897 mayoral campaign. Though he

Happy Birthday HGS!

only knew George for one year, he later recalled that the year before George's death "was the happiest year of my life."

Once, after listening to Oscar expound a Georgist theory of interest, Henry George himself was heard to remark, "here is the future economist of our movement." It was also during that year that Oscar founded his first Georgist educational institution, the "Progress Club."

Oscar entered the fur business, at which he made a decent living until the onset of the Depression in 1930. Forced into unemployment, he and his family lived on his savings. He managed to pick up some money from lecturing on Henry George and social philosophy.

Former School Director Bob Clancy, in his biographical study of Oscar Geiger, *A Seed Was Sown*, recounts that while he was out of a job, Oscar's "thoughts turned to the problem of propagating the Georgist philosophy, and he was [already] devoting a considerable time to it."

Bob further wrote that the idea of a school of Georgist philosophy was one Oscar had since he participated in the Progress Club. "For years the idea of an educational institute

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where economic truth might be taught had haunted Geiger. He had always felt that the only

"He told the simple remedy that could restore to the people their birthright - namely taking the rent of land, the fund that society produces as an entity."

way the Georgist reform would make headway was through a thorough preparation by education. From time to time he attempted to found such an institution but without success... But now Geiger was out of a job. His thoughts turned to propagating the Georgist philosophy." On January 1st, 1932, the Henry George School of Social Science was founded, with Oscar Geiger as Director.

Its beginnings were modest indeed. Initially, the School consisted of Oscar as the main lecturer and after a year of lecturing, he offered the first official course — a 10-lesson course in what he called Fundamental Economics based on George's *Progress and Poverty*. He felt that *P&P* was still the best summation of George's ideas and he painstakingly went through the book and devised a 10-lesson workbook, a form of which the School uses to this day. This first course, as well as other School activities, was held in a rented room in the Pythian Temple. Soon, however, the need for a more permanent abode was recognized and one student, Leonard T. Recker, a vice-president of John S. Swift Co., a printing house, donated a year's rent and in July of 1933 the School moved into its first home, an undistinguished building at 211 W. 79th St. In the Fall of 1933 the first regular semester of courses began, with Oscar adding the courses Protection or Free Trade and the Science of Political Economy. Of 84 students who enrolled in September, 75 students completed the entire three-course study, graduating in the Spring of '34. Oscar taught all the classes, performed all the administrative work and was never entirely free of financial worries.

A Seed Was Sown picks up the story. "The School began its career unpretentiously. One would scarcely have observed that an institution was being founded. It was still no more than Oscar Geiger engaging in the same lecture work as before. Nevertheless, notices were sent out announcing the formal opening of the

School. It was a lecture and forum....to be held in January. Morris Van Veen wrote of this occasion "The night was bitter cold, but I went. I would have regretted all my life, after hearing what I did, to have absented myself. The master in a wonderful way told our story so simply, comparing past and present civilizations, showing their disintegration because of land monopoly; drew vivid pictures of conditions, and told the simple remedy that could restore to the



One of the School's first classrooms

people their birthright - namely taking the rent of land, the fund that society produces as an entity. Here we have a teacher who has the ability, the learning, the culture, the background, the power and the logic, truly, sincerely, convincingly, to tell the story."

As the School grew more popular, Oscar added classes in the mornings and afternoons. In addition, he began correspondence courses. All of these classes he conducted himself. The strain of the work soon began to take a toll on him, financially and physically. At the end of the 1934 Spring term a dinner was held for the graduating students. Many students arose, one after another, and offered their tribute to him. One student said,

"We can't afford to lose Oscar Geiger. We need him for this work." Oscar, in response, rose from his seat and declared:

"Oscar Geiger is now living and working for the cause, and he intends to continue doing so even if he dies in the attempt." This provoked great applause but proved, sadly, to be true. His friends and students begged him to take a well deserved vacation, now that classes were over. He had accepted an invitation to take his family to stay with a friend in Maine for the summer. But later that June Oscar's health took a turn for the worse. He died on June 29th of a heart attack.

Funeral services were held at the School; 150 students attended. At the ceremony one attendee, Charles O'Connor Hennessy, president of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, said, "I believe Oscar was happy in spite of the sacrifices and privations he endured for the faith that was in him. Because, caring very little for material rewards he hungered and thirsted after righteousness... he was true to his vision."

Although Oscar had left no formalized plans for the School to continue on after his death, continue it did, with friends and students banding together to carry on the work. Geiger's classroom notes were gathered and became the basis of Teacher's Manuals. Volunteer teachers were enlisted and prepared to teach classes in the Fall. The news got out, through word of mouth and the distribution of flyers, that the

School would go on. In September, the new school year opened with twice the enrollment of the previous year. Soon, followers of Henry George in other cities took note of the School's continuance and opened schools. The Chicago School opened that same year in the Fall, followed by Philadelphia. Within a few years, classes were

being held in cities and towns throughout the country. Soon the New York School outgrew its headquarters and a larger building was needed.



The School's charter, granted in 1937

In 1938, the School was moved to 29th St. A seed, indeed, had been sown.

The School continued to flourish, adding classes in different languages and expanding its correspondence courses. By 1944, the School once again needed more space and moved to 50 E. 69th St. By its twentieth anniversary in 1951, the School was graduating close to 750 students a year and had begun holding classes in local YMCAs, churches, libraries and public schools. The School had also inaugurated a speakers bureau, with volunteer lecturers fulfilling more than 45 speaking engagements in 1952 alone.

The social upheaval of the sixties saw continued growth for the School and its affiliates, as many people began to question the status quo

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and look for permanent solutions to social problems. In 1967, for instance, 700 students completed Fundamental Economics, in three languages. 700 students completed the correspondence courses, in five languages. In addition, the School by then had 23 extensions, 13 of which were outside the U.S.

By the 1980s the School added a High School program and newsletter, which now reaches over 1700 teachers throughout the country. The program has 3 lesson plans focusing on the land question throughout history, with one plan focusing on American history, another on World history and a third focusing on Economic studies. This entire program was made available, in the late 90s, free on the School's web site, www.henrygeorgeschool.org.

A calendar of events and a schedule of classes

is updated regularly at the site.

The year 2002 sees the School carrying on its 70 year tradition. A full load of basic classes in the afternoon has once again been added to the schedule. Recently, Mike Curtis the School's Director of Education said, "The School was started because the Single Tax political party, later the Commonwealth Land Party, was not able to win enough votes to create a just society.

"Geiger believed, as we at the School believe today, that the majority of people don't understand that land is a natural opportunity, or that its value is the result the actions of the community as a whole. And when they do, we believe the political process will deliver.

"For that reason our focus will remain, as it has for 70 years, the teaching of the basic principles of political economy. We will teach what is generally not taught at other institutions, but is necessary to create equal opportunity and a just distribution of wealth."

In summarizing this brief history of the Henry George School of Social Science, we could do no better than to quote from the Director's report of 1952, on the occasion of the School's 20th anniversary:

"The first score of years of the Henry George School of Social Science shows the following developments: The creative spark of genius that started the School. The emergence of its *modus vivendi*. The continuance and growth of the School after its Founder's death. The first wave of enthusiasm spreading over the country, resulting in voluntary School activities everywhere...the

School continually moving forward. And un-

derneath it all, the organic growth from the seed that had been sown in 1932.

"And, finally, must be mentioned the abiding faith, the unspoken dedication, and the persistent effort of the many friends and supporters and workers that have brought the great work of the School to the height it has attained and will bring it to still greater heights."

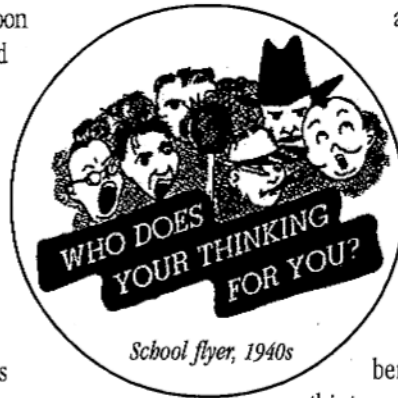
Recently, School Member Trustee Simon Winters had

this to say about both the School's history and its future mission: "In the 20th Century, the School was the primary educational voice of the philosophy of Henry George. Now in the 21st Century, it will redefine its educational mission and its institutional structure as a "school" by expanding its outreach via the new frontier of electronic media. This will give us the means by which we can reach millions of people representing different public interests... an all-inclusiveness that is at the heart of the teachings of Henry George."



In 1919, Oscar Geiger wrote the platform of the Single Tax Party. It read, in part: *In crude civilizations slavery and serfdom were encouraged to obtain the unpaid labor of men. Modern civilizations do not tolerate body slavery or serfdom, but, in their land laws, establish an unjust system that insidiously but effectively reduces many to economic dependence almost as helpless as chattle slavery and quite as intolerable; for a poorly paid and dependent class is inevitably created by obstructions to the use of land imposed by private ownership of land rent... The parent of all monopolies is the private appropriation of the rent of land. Other monopolies exist because this fundamental crime against human rights is permitted to endure.*

Information for this article culled from A Seed Was Sown, by Robert Clancy, printed by HGS in 1952; and other sources.



School's headquarters on 69th St.