

Henry George Newsletter

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THE HENRY GEORGE BIRTHPLACE: Philadelphia's Newest Restored Museum



413 South 10th Street, Philadelphia, is a modest Center City rowhouse in which, 150 years ago, Henry George was born. Since its restoration this past summer, more and more people are taking notice of the "poorman's house" listed in the National Register of Historic Places. For example, an article on *Land Value Taxation* by Ann L. Rappoport in the October 18th issue of *Focus* begins with the Birthplace and then goes on to discuss the continuing significance of George's ideas. The Birthplace was also recently nominated by Preservation Techniques for the John McArthur Award for Superior Historic Restoration. Preservation Techniques is an organization devoted to improve craftsmanship and historic preservation. The Birthplace's nomination is in the "institutional" and "skilled" categories.

The Birthplace serves two functions. It is a Museum, complete with 19th century decor and objects such as the bed in which George was born, small items of his personal property, as well as a library and archives of old and rare works by George and others in the Single Tax movement. And it also houses the office and classrooms of the Henry George School.

Before-and-after photographs of the Birthplace were included in a recent exhibit held in Philadelphia in October, sponsored by the American Institute of Architects. Coming up in February will be a tour of 413 South 10th Street as part of a symposium of members of The National Trust for Historic Preservation. Richard Tyler, head of the Philadelphia Historic Commission has referred to the Birthplace as the city's newest museum. The Birthplace Museum is open to the public from 1 to 4 PM daily.



The Parlor, with a bust of George, inside the Birthplace.

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THE PRESS TAKES INCREASING NOTICE OF HENRY GEORGE

It is always an occasion for rejoicing when the public press mentions Henry George and his ideas. Recently this has been happening with surprising frequency; perhaps the economic dislocations George predicted are becoming evident enough for even conventionally trained economists to spot.

In September, *The Wall Street Journal* commemorated George's birthday with pithy quotations from *Protection or Free Trade*, which had in turn been collected by C. Lowell Harriss and published in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. The piece's headline was "A Banana Into a Cage of Monkeys", which of course is what Henry George said a tariff bill, introduced into congress, is like. In October, an essay by *New Republic* editor Michael Kinsley appeared in the *New York Post*, entitled "As in Henry George's day, soaring land values are distorting the economy." A revised version of the essay then appeared as the lead editorial in the 75th anniversary edition of *The New Republic*. In November, no less languaged an author than William F. Buckley tipped his thinking cap to George in the *New York Daily News*, in a piece on why it was not so bad for Japanese investors to buy Rockefeller Center.

Michael Kinsley's article was especially interesting because it argues very convincingly that a hidden "landowner's tax" exists and is detrimental to both justice and economic health. He cites Federal Reserve statistics that show that land value's share of America's national wealth has grown from one fifth in 1946 to one quarter in 1988 (that's \$155 out of 786 billion to \$3.53 out of 14.6 trillion). And Kinsley begins his article by exploding (as Henry George undoubtedly would) the fallacy that Japan has recently become "richer" than the United States because of the explosion in Japanese land prices. In fact, he cites statistics (from a book by Bill Emmott) showing that "the increase in [Japanese] real estate values over two recent years was equal to almost one-and-a-half times the nation's GNP." In other words, the prosperous Japanese economy merely enables Japanese non-landowners to barely keep up with their skyrocketing rents.

Kinsley has been reminding his readers about Henry George for some time. In a poll published in *American Heritage* magazine in May 1988, Kinsley cited Henry George as the most under-rated figure in American history.

Longtime Georgists will not be surprised, however, by the fact that mainstream writers still seem to be compelled, as if by a clause in some set of by-laws, to get in some digs at Georgist ideas even while praising George. Buckley states (impeccably) George's insight that land and capital are intrinsically different — and then appears to miss an obvious implication of that insight: that the rent owed to Japanese owners of American land will indeed leave the country — in exchange for nothing — if it is not taxed away. The *Wall Street Journal* notes by way of introduction that George is most famous for advocating "a social reform that attracted a cult following a century ago." Kinsley, whose writing shows a thorough familiarity with George, nevertheless calls the 100% tax on land values "impracticable" and states (erroneously) that no satisfactory answer has been made to the problem of compensation for landowners.

Although publicity and dialogue are always worthwhile, one cannot help but wonder why mainstream commentators who agree with Henry George's *diagnosis* of economic ills are unwilling to endorse his cure. Is there no way to clearly comprehend the full justice of George's reform other than in the classroom?

—Lindy Davies

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CARRIES ON

We are happy to report that all School associates were unharmed by the recent massive earthquake that hit the San Francisco Bay Area. One tragic highway collapse, and one near-collapse on the Bay Bridge, brings home—in an all too painful way—the need for adequate public funding of urban infrastructure. The deterioration of urban infrastructure is becoming an increasing problem in US cities from San Francisco to New York as we enter the last decade of the 20th century—reminding us that much of this infrastructure is now close to a century old!

Mother Nature, however, was still not too kind to the School. The Sacramento extension, reports Evelyn Friend, held a yard sale at the home of Gayle Voeller on September 16th—only to be rained-out! Much more successful, however, was the one-day workshop sponsored by the School at the Unitarian Universalist Society on Sierra Boulevard in Sacramento on September 23rd, cosponsored by the Church's Social Responsibility Committee. *Economic Justice and Land Rights* was the theme of the seminar, which was facilitated by Alanna Hartzok. The program consisted of presentations, video tapes, slides and discussion. Subjects covered included poverty and the maldistribution of wealth, homelessness and the housing crisis, and the land rights struggle in both the Third World and our own.

THE ILLINOIS GEORGIST

Volume 2, Number 2 of *The Illinois Georgist* has recently been published. This is the Newsletter of the Chicago HGS, and each issue contains articles and information of both local and Georgist interest. Included in this Fall '89 issue is an article by Robert Jene on a current property owner protest over increased assessments on the northwest side of Chicago. "Untaxing property," he writes, "leaves only that much more value to fuel ever increasing market values that price housing out of the reach of more and more people. This value is chiefly in the land which tends to inflate in price at least twice as fast as ordinary costs of living. People do have a right to complain about paying a tax based on inflated values. Getting rid of the tax, however, is not the answer to the problem." Other articles include an open letter by James Frederiksen to *Habitat World* on rising land costs and homelessness; an article on a new Census Bureau report on vacant land (18% of all assessed parcels in the US!) by Charles Metalitz; reports on the '89 Conference by Robert Jene and Adam Monroe, Jr.; and lots more. To receive a copy of *The Illinois Georgist*, contact the Chicago HGS.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE COMMUNIST WORLD

Norman J.M. Horing is a Professor of Physics and Engineering at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey. A student at HGS many years ago, he has recently seen George's analysis as increasingly relevant to the modern scene. Recent events in eastern Europe have prompted him to write and send *An Open Letter to the Communist World*. In his letter, he comments on the move toward capitalist practices, founded on the fact that "Human nature requires reward for the investment of its capital resources as well as its labor. This is a very personal requirement and cannot be controlled by government domination." But he also cautions that great care must be taken in turning toward capitalism, and points to inflation in China. Of course, it is Henry George's philosophy that is featured as holding out a way to adopt the best features of capitalism while avoiding its worst; and, given that communist societies have collective ownership of land, it may be easier for them than for the West to move toward George's Single Tax on land values. But this does not relieve the West of the responsibility to create more fairness and decency at home: "Surely America should expunge problems like homelessness and poverty before becoming comfortable with the notion that our system works better for all constituents than that of the collapsing communist world."

VI PETERSON

We report with sadness the death of Violetta G. Graham, known to many of us as Vi Peterson, on November 21st this year at age 87. Mrs. Graham was employed in 1936 by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, the publisher of the works of Henry George and a sponsor of *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. She served untiringly for 40 years as its Executive Secretary, and continued after her retirement as a member of its Board of Directors. Her published works include two essays, *Pathways to Land Reform* and *Land Reform in Hawaii*. A citizen of the United Kingdom, Mrs. Graham retired from New York in 1976 to Acton, Massachusetts, then to Boca Raton, Florida where she spent her last year. She will be sorely missed.

PHILADELPHIA CONTINUES OUTREACH EFFORTS

Economics for a Peaceful Planet was the theme of a presentation given by Director Mike Curtis, and arranged and introduced by Don Hurford at the Main Line Unitarian Fellowship to a group of 60. A second presentation, given by Mike and arranged by Don at the Thomas Paine Unitarian Fellowship, addressed 31 people on *Solving the Economic Problem*. And a third one, on this same theme, attracted 62 people at the West Chester Unitarian Fellowship. Questions from the audience were intelligent and specific — on farmers' development rights, eminent domain, etc. These presentations were part of HGS Philadelphia's Speakers Bureau. Five talks were also given by Mike to Wilmington High School classes on *The Georgist Idea*.

Over 100 pounds of Georgist literature was handed out to interested passers-by from the Henry George booth at Philadelphia's annual block party, Super Sunday, October 8th. The booth was staffed by Lu Cipoloni, George Kunz, Ken Ford, Don Hurford and Mike Curtis. Mike and Lu were also interviewed by Ann L. Rappoport for *Focus* magazine (see front page).

NEW YORK TO BEGIN EXPANDED WINTER PROGRAM

The New York School begins its winter term of classes on January 23rd. Our basic course, *Fundamental Economics* (Part I of *Principles of Political Economy*) will be taught on Tuesdays (5:30-7:30) by Lindy Davies, on Wednesdays (6:00-8:00) by George Collins, and Thursdays (6:30-8:30) by Nan Braman. This course will also be taught in Spanish on Wednesdays (5:30-6:30) by Manuel Felix, under the title *Progreso y Miseria*. Mark Sullivan will teach *Classical Analysis I* on Thursdays (6:30-8:30). We will have two afternoon classes this semester: Dr. Oscar B. Johannsen will return with his popular course on *Money & Banking* on Thursdays (1:00-3:00), and Lindy Davies will teach *Understanding Economics* on Wednesdays (12:30-1:30). Advanced classes scheduled for this semester are *Applied Economics* (Part II of *Principles of Political Economy*) with George Collins on Tuesdays (6:00-8:00), *Classical Analysis II*, new this semester, with Mark Sullivan also on Tuesdays (6:30-8:30), *Great Decisions '90* with Fryda Ossias on Wednesdays (5:30-7:30), and *Third World Issues* (the Spanish version of *Applied Economics*) with Manuel Felix on Saturdays (12:00-2:00).

Two Saturday seminars will also be held. On February 10, Lindy Davies will conduct *The Real Monopoly Game*, a new economic simulation exercise. *Housing and the Homeless*, on March 10, will examine the crisis of homelessness in the broader context of the chronic lack of affordable housing in our society. The panel will include Lewis B. Atlas, of the New York Office of Family Service, Walter Rybeck of the Center for Public Dialogue, and Rev. George Kuhn of St. Brigid's Church in New York.

New for this term are a series of Friday evening presentations on a wide range of subjects. The School's Friday events are open to the public without registration. On January 26, Frederick Kahn, C.P.A., will present *The Income Tax and You*. On February 23, Albert Hartheimer will present his firsthand impressions of economic and political changes in Russia and Hungary. And on March 23, Stan Rubenstein will discuss the reform period in American history, introducing his talk with the School's new 22-minute video, *Muckrakers and Reformers*.

***The Director and Staff of the Henry George School wish you
A JOYFUL HOLIDAY SEASON & A HAPPY NEW YEAR!***

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