

## JOSEPH FELS

Stetson Hats, Hires Rootbeer, Fels Naphtha Soap—these are a few of the Philadelphia products that became household words and made Philadelphia the "workshop of the world." But while other entrepreneurs accumulated great fortunes, few gained the international reputation of Joseph Fels.

The soap business brought Joseph Fels to Philadelphia in the early 1870s. By the 90s, his new naphtha soapmaking process led to considerable success. Fels-naphtha products and plants appeared around the world.

His wealth assured, Fels turned his attention to bettering the lot of mankind. He found many of his answers to social problems in schemes for rearranging patterns of land use and ownership. Influenced by the back-to-the-land movement of the time, Fels backed a project to farm Philadelphia's vacant lots. But the heart of Fels's philosophy was the Single Tax Movement of Henry George. George argued for taxes on the unearned increment in land value—on the profits — of speculators. These taxes would return the benefits of urban and industrial development to those who had made them possible. When Fels left his business at the turn of the century, he became the movement's primary backer, contributing \$100,000 a year to spread Single Tax ideas around the world.

Joseph Fels differed from other successful businessmen who turned to philanthropy. Through his support of the Single Tax movement, he questioned the very system that had produced his wealth.