

# Stephens Centennial To Honor Arden Founder

By WILLIAM P. FRANK

An unusual birthday party was held on Sunday in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Stephens in the single tax village of Arden.

The "guest of honor" was there in spirit and memory only—the late Frank Stephens, sculptor, writer, economist, craftsman and most important, founder of the village.

Frank Stephens was born on Dec. 28, 1859.

And the "birthday party" was really the beginning of a community-wide plan for the Frank Stephens Centennial Year that will culminate on Dec. 28, 1959—the one hundredth anniversary of his birth. Mr. Stephens died on June 16, 1935, at the age of 75.

Philip Cohen, Wilmington attorney and one of the three trustees of the single tax village, was elected chairman of the Frank Stephens Centennial Celebration in the town.

Donald Stephens, son of the founder, was elected secretary and I. B. Finkelstein, another trustee of the town, was elected temporary treasurer.

Tentative plans were discussed for a Shakespearian festival to be held next summer in the old field open air field theatre that Frank Stephens built himself more than 50 years ago.

H. D. Ware, another trustee of the village, and an artist himself, was appointed to head up a portrait committee. His assignment is to have a portrait of Mr. Stephens painted and unveiled in the Gild Hall which is the hub of the village's communal social activities.

Other plans:

A series of publications, recounting the widespread contributions made by Mr. Ste-



**SINGLE TAX ADVOCATE—**  
Frank Stephens.

phens and the village he founded. tennial of the birthdate of Mr. Stephens, residents of neighboring single tax villages of Ardentown and Ardencroft will be invited to participate because their existence stems from the idea that Mr. Stephens planted in present day Arden when he and the late Will Price, a Philadelphia architect, laid out the town of Arden.

Mr. Stephens was born in Rahway, N. J., and at an early age, it soon became evident that he was not only a non-conformist but that he was going to lead the life of a non-conformist.

Becoming a disciple of Henry George, hailed as the father of the single tax theory, Mr. Stephens led a group of other disciples from Philadelphia into Delaware in 1896 in an effort to convert Delaware.

Mr. Stephens and some of his colleagues were thrown into the Dover jail—in the course of their tour of the state—but the net result of it all was that Mr. Stephens returned here in 1900 and through the help of the late Joseph Fels, Philadelphia philanthropist, obtained the land on which Arden was started.

(In brief, Single Taxers believe that only the economic rent for land should be paid to the state or community and that all improvements should be tax free. Single taxers do not believe in any kind of income tax or sales tax. They say that if people who control land would pay the true rental value of land, determined by true economic appraisals, there would be sufficient money to operate government.)

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Revival of the old community camp fires.

Revival of Sunday evening vespers during the summer months.

Planting of memorial trees, particularly on the village green and in the Memorial Garden of the town.

Discussions emphasizing the land rent system of Arden.

Revival of the plans, started by Frank Stephens in the 1920's, for the construction of a non-denominational chapel-by-the-side of the road, in the town.

As plans develop for the cen-

BACK in the late 1890s a young idealist who was also a sculptor, actor, and craftsman, came from Philadelphia to Delaware in a unique campaign to convince the people of our state that the best way to raise money for governmental purposes was through land rents. **Wilmington, Del.**

He preached the Henry George philosophy of the "single tax" on Wilmington street corners and when he and his fellow campaigners ventured into Dover, they were thrown into jail. This made them very proud of their mission. At last, they were martyrs.

The single tax campaign ended—but not for good. This same young man, George Frank Stephens, left Philadelphia, and with the help of a noted architect, Will Price, and with money made available by Joseph Fels, Philadelphia philanthropist, he founded the village of Arden on the principles of the Henry George philosophy.

Arden became more than just a suburb in Brandywine Hundred.

It became the home of Delaware's first real community theatre. It was the cradle

of community sponsored small crafts. It nurtured an interest in Shakespearean plays. It became the summer home of musicians, artists, and political scientists of all varieties.

In time there developed another suburban community called Ardentown, and now there is a third community, Ardencroft.

Frank Stephens was far ahead of his times in suburban planning and setting aside many acres for community recreation and pleasure. Had Arden been a community developed by land speculators or private investors, little or none of the Arden woods along Naaman's Creek would be in existence today. But under the land rent system of the village, the woods are intact.

Why this eulogy? Because he was born 100 years ago next Monday and the people of Arden and Ardentown and Ardencroft are gathering in the Arden Gild Hall Sunday night to honor his memory.

Frank Stephens died in the 1930s but the memory of him is still fresh and the villages still flourish. He was a dreamer whose dreams became practical ways of living. He developed a rich way of life for suburbanites—many of whom found easy access to land in a community that has a definite charm and character. He was a pioneer who, though he did not build on a large scale, built solidly and well.