

WHY A SCHOOL OF COOPERATIVE INDIVIDUALISM

By Edward Dodson, Cherry Hill, NJ

I recall some years ago I was working outside in front of my home when I was approached by two evangelical Christians. They engaged me in conversation, marketing their accepted religious beliefs as they were charged. Of course, I took the opportunity to convey to them that I derived my values from a source independent of any belief in a conscious creator, that I embraced "Georgism." One of the group asked: "Is that a Catholic sect?" I explained a bit more that what I sought was more of the supposed qualities of heaven in the here and now. They moved on and I continued my work.

The term "Georgism" has never been very satisfying to me. Henry George never referred to himself as a "Georgist," and only reluctantly as a "Single Taxer." So, what term best described the moral principles embraced by Henry George? I found the answer during the presentation by the historian Paul Gaston at the 1994 conference of the Council of Georgist Organizations, held in Fairhope, Alabama. Professor Gaston (grandson of Fairhope founder Ernest B. Gaston) explained to conference attendees that the guiding principles of the Fairhope founders was "cooperative individualism." Almost immediately I embraced this term to describe my own principles and decided to establish a project on the internet to introduce these principles to as broad an audience as possible. It took awhile to acquire the basic knowledge of website design, but in 1997 the first version of the School of Cooperative Individualism went live.

The highest priority for the School's online presence was to make the writings of Henry George available. Soon the online library was expanded to include the writings of every major and minor author who has contributed something of value to the volume of literature on Henry George, on the movement George initiated and, as time went on, to the social sciences as an interdisciplinary pursuit.

I also thought it might be useful to identify and provide links to pertinent material found on other websites. This resulted in the design of an Encyclopedia on Political Economy, organized by subject.

One of the major differences between my approach to the organization of these materials and, for example, Wikipedia, is that visitors are able to browse through lists of articles and papers, then click on a link to view and read articles listed.

At some point, I decided it would be constructive (and potentially useful for historians and other researchers) if I could create a record of individual involvement in the struggle for cooperative individualism. The result is the Biographical History of the Georgist Movement section of the School's website. In addition to recording whatever biographical details I could gather from Georgist periodicals and other sources, I decided to scan the printed writings of each person and provide links to this material, listed chronologically. Within the Biographical History individuals are listed by country of residence. Organization histories are also included.

Beginning during the early 2000s I took on the task of organizing all of the material stored at the Henry George

birthplace building in Philadelphia. I was still working full-time, so the work proceeded slowly. On the one hand, the movement's history was well-preserved because nothing had been discarded from storage at the birthplace for decades and decades. On the other hand, there were boxes and boxes of papers to go through, decide what had value and organize it for further use. By about 2010 I completed the organizational part of the work and increased the pace of scanning and adding new material to the School of Cooperative Individual website.

In 2014 the Henry George birthplace was formally designated as the movement's archive center, and all of the material housed at the school's headquarters in New York City was digitized. The hard copy material was then boxed and sent to Philadelphia for storage and future organization. Historian Alex Lough was engaged to begin building online collections of Georgist material on the birthplace section of the Henry George School's website. This work has been ongoing and has significantly enhanced public access to materials not formerly available online.

My work with the archives continues as well, with a focus on the resurrection of individual papers and articles. During 2016 I focused on articles appearing in such movement organs as *The Single Tax Review*, *Land and Freedom*, *Land & Liberty*, *Progress*, the *Georgist Journal* and *Henry George News*. Given the volume of material that remains to be put online, I am hopeful resources will be allocated to support this work as a long-term initiative.

Over the years, a number of our colleagues have entrusted their own collections of materials to me. What astounds me is that whenever I begin to feel like I have a grasp of the scope of work yet to be done, more material, more detail, comes to light. How strange it is to me that so few people alive today have any knowledge of Henry George or that people continue to devote lives to the promotion of George's ideals of cooperative individualism. We stand on the shoulders of so many who wrote and lectured and taught and campaigned for the cause. My hope is that resurrecting the history of this effort will find a growing number of new activist supporters.