

George Brown,  
the cobbler anarchist of Philadelphia  
By Robert P. Helms

Robert P. Helms traces the life of an anarchist shoemaker from freethinking Northamptonshire to Philadelphia's burgeoning anarchist movement of the 1890s. Never famous, and only occasionally infamous, Brown was typical of many of the militants who made the movement what it was, and his story sheds a fascinating light on the microcosm of a social movement.

'The closer we examine this particular anarchist, the more he is his own unique self, the more fiercely determined he remains. He was somewhat wily, could be a bit pig-headed, but never for a selfish reason, never in a way that indicated even the slightest corruption. As yet another traveling anarchist noted in 1900, George's "whole soul is in the cause. He is a most genial companion, with a warm, human heart, but rigidly uncompromising in his devotion to anarchist principles."\*

\*James F. Morton Jr. "Across the Continent III" Free Society, April 8, 1900

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What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a political theory which opposes the State and capitalism. It says that people with economic power (capitalists) and those with political power (politicians of all stripes left, right or centre) use that power for their own benefit, and not (like they claim) for the benefit of society. Anarchism says that neither exploitation nor government is natural or necessary, and that a society based on freedom, mutual aid and equal shares of the good things in life would work better than this one.

Anarchism is also a political movement. Anarchists take part in day-to-day struggles (against poverty, oppression of any kind, war etc) and also promote the idea of comprehensive social change. Based on bitter experience, they warn that new 'revolutionary' bosses are no improvement: 'ends' and 'means' (what you want and how you get it) are closely connected.

## *Part One: The Long Road to Philadelphia*<sup>1</sup>

The life of George Brown (1858-1915) has escaped the scrutiny of historians of the anarchist movement, save as a passing mention in books on topics that touch upon his life.<sup>2</sup> It is fair to say that this is due to the fact that this remarkably eloquent man applied himself only sparingly to writing. On the local level, however, Brown stands among the most respected and persistent standard-bearers of anarchism during one of its most famous periods. He kept the fire burning, for the 28 years from 1887 until his death, mostly by addressing English-speaking, public meetings at Philadelphia. But there was a great deal more to his life than happened in that city, as we shall see. This article describes as much of his biographical puzzle as I have been able to bring together. Many pieces are still missing. Examining George's early life has been especially difficult, in part because his name is so common.<sup>3</sup>

Born April 16, 1858 at Raunds, Northamptonshire, in England, George was the son of a shoemaker named Edward

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<sup>1</sup>Alison M. Lewis has assisted my research on this subject with helpful suggestions, proofreading, and endless help in locating source material. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Mark Taylor, Curator of the Arden Archive, for much valuable advice and source information. Paul Avrich, in addition to his published work, was generous in sharing his knowledge of many personalities mentioned here. Important clippings are at the Delaware Historical Society and at Temple University's Urban Archive. The newspaper quotes were, in most cases, acquired from the microforms departments of the Free Library of Philadelphia and the University of Delaware at Newark.

<sup>2</sup>See Paul Avrich's books *The Haymarket Tragedy* (1984), *Anarchist Voices* (1995), *The Modern School Movement* (1980), and especially *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (1978).

<sup>3</sup>One problem has been the factual errors in the obituary for Brown, by his friend and fellow freethinker James B. Elliott (1849-1931), in *Mother Earth*, March 1915. His misstatements seem to be best guesses, made from memory. However, it serves as a good general outline of the shoemaker's life. The two men had a common link to Voltairine de Cleyre, and their sons, born 2 years apart, socialized as they grew up. I find no evidence that the two men were very close friends.

Brown, and he was one of seventeen children,<sup>4</sup> but nothing is known about his mother or his siblings. Northamptonshire was the capital of both the British Empire's boot and shoe industry and that of its Free Thought or secular movement. Raunds, like the rest of the county, grew up around shoemaking, which was starting to shift from a cottage industry to a mechanized, factory-based affair just as George was growing up and learning the trade from his father.<sup>5</sup> Free Thought historian David Tribe quotes contemporary sources, relating that "shoemakers were ever philosophers and thinkers... They lived a full life, based on their own resources, and so built up a sturdy independence on the social and intellectual side, as well as in industry... There has always been a curious kind of affinity between shoemaking and free-thinking." The damages to the human condition that were caused by the industrial revolution arrived late to shoemaking. By the time the trade was fully mechanized, the labor movement and some social conscience were already strong throughout England.<sup>6</sup> It was because of the strength and liberalism of the boot and shoe trade unions, in fact, that the great atheist leader Charles Bradlaugh chose Northampton as his constituency when he ran in the parliamentary election of 1880.

George received only a few weeks' schooling in each of his early years, but got his real education by attending the debates in the National Secular Society and his participation in the shoemakers' union. His early experience as a public speaker

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4"Brown Gone, Leaving Jail Without Bald Headed Man," *Evening Journal* (Wilmington, DE), July 29, 1911, p. 1.

5The obituary by Elliott (see above) gives the birthplace as "Raans, a small village in Yorkshire," but no such place has ever existed, anywhere in England. Raunds, however, rhymes with Elliott's mistake, and it also coincides with the other known pieces of Brown's youth (the shoe industry; the career of Bradlaugh). Also, George was described by a reporter as a native of Northamptonshire, and had apparently just gotten this from George himself. See "Arden's Anarchist quits jail..." *North American*, July 30, 1911.

6David Tribe, *Charles Bradlaugh, M. P.* (London 1971), pp. 104-105.

came as he helped get Bradlaugh elected to Parliament. It was that great iconoclast whose speeches converted the young shoemaker to atheism.<sup>7</sup>

Around 1881, just after the controversial election was won (it took years before the atheist politician was allowed to take his rightful seat in the house of commons because of a dispute over the oath of office), George Brown, now in his early twenties, was recruited by the Cooper Allen Boot Company to establish a factory at Cawnpore, India. This was the first boot factory in India, supplying the British Army.<sup>8</sup> George's job was to hire and train Indian workers. Joseph J. Cohen, an anarchist comrade who knew George in Philadelphia after 1903, remembered the shoemaker say that, "...although [the workers of India] were very poor, they had no desire to become industrial slaves. They didn't want such a civilization and they saw no necessity for it. They went hungry very often, but working day after day in a factory was not an attraction for them. The English tried to create a desire in the Hindu people for material things – clothing, jewelry, furniture – by offering easy credit. They thought that buying these things would make them take jobs in order to pay for their possessions. But this didn't help. They didn't follow the rules of this civilization. They would come to the factory and insist they get paid each day for each day's work. As soon as the worker made enough money to buy a sack of rice, he would disappear and not return to the job for a few weeks. They refused to work for unnecessary luxuries.

"This made a deep impression on the young man. Brown began to think deeply about the capitalist civilization which enslaved most of the young population with a desire for unnecessary do-dads. He began to study the subject. He read all the books that came to hand. He gave up his good job and came to

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<sup>7</sup>See obit by Elliott, (note 2); also *Conservator*, Nov. 1899-Jan. 1900.

<sup>8</sup>Zoe Yalland, *Boxwallahs: The British in Cawnpore 1857-1901* (Norwich England, 1994), pp. 216-226.

America. He took an ordinary job in a shoe factory so that he would have more time to study and to work for our movement.”<sup>9</sup>

Twenty-four years before Brown’s experience there, Cawnpore had been the center of the famous “sepooy mutiny,” a native rebellion that briefly threatened British colonial rule. The job in India lasted five years, and after it the young shoemaker made a short visit home to England.

George finally traveled to the United States, settling in Chicago during the first weeks of 1886.<sup>10</sup> Once there, he resumed his trade and became involved in the radical debating clubs. He had been in the city about five months when, on the evening of Tuesday, May 4, he was walking from the public library, westward along Randolph Street, toward his rented room. George later recalled that when he reached the Haymarket, he recognized Albert Parsons, who he had heard at Knights of Labor meetings and knew slightly, speaking to a crowd from the top of a wagon. After Parsons, Samuel Fielden spoke, and as he did, the sky threatened rain. The speakers had been talking about adjourning to a nearby hall when a squad of policemen rushed through the crowd with revolvers drawn, and its captain ordered the meeting to disperse. There was some kind of an incident in another part of the crowd, away from George, and the police captain shouted “arrest that man.” Upon this command, the police began to fire into the crowd of civilians. The shoemaker described the rest of this famous scene as follows:

“I thought they were firing blank cartridges, as I have seen the soldiers do in English riots, but a man who stood near me was struck in the side by a policeman’s bullet. I helped him get

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<sup>9</sup>Joseph J. Cohen, *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in the United States: A Historical Review and Personal Reminiscences* (in Yiddish; Philadelphia 1945). I quote the unpublished 1980 translation by Esther Dolgoff.

<sup>10</sup>“Memorial Address” *Free Society*, Nov. 23, 1900.

down into the cellarway, so he might escape further injury, and then I tried to get into the saloon which was at the corner. The door was being forced also by those on the inside, and so I turned to go back past the wagon, because the firing seemed heaviest ahead. When I had just passed the wagon and reached the mouth of the little alley, something went quite high over my head which looked like a lighted cigar: this was the bomb. It exploded in the midst of the police. I raised myself up as well as I could in the dense pack of the crowd, and looking past the wagon I saw a confused, writhing, squirming mass of policemen on the ground. Thinking that there were perhaps other bombs to follow, I made my way to Randolph Street again, walking East, past policemen who were firing from doorways at the fleeing citizens. I went by Canal Street to Van Buren, and then on to my room. I put on my slippers, lighted a pipe, and walked along DesPlaines Street, meeting the patrol wagons carrying quite other victims than those they had been harnessed up for hours for the purposes of carrying.”<sup>11</sup>

George remembered most distinctly, a quarter-century later, that the shout “arrest that man” was a pre-arranged signal for the police to commence firing; that they were firing for at least three minutes before the bomb exploded; and “above all, the dramatic precision with which the bomb was thrown and the exact poetic justice it wrought.”<sup>12</sup>

Brown’s testimony differs in one important respect with the prevailing labor-side documentation of the Haymarket bombing scene: he states that the police began shooting into the crowd before the explosion, while others have the salvo commencing immediately after it. Also, Brown’s recollection of the police order “arrest that man” has no second.<sup>13</sup>

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11George Brown, “November Memories,” *Mother Earth*, Nov. 1912.

12*ibid.*

13Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (1984), pp. 206-07; Henry David, *The Haymarket Affair* (1936, 1958) p. 204.

Brown's address to the 15th anniversary memorial meeting for the Haymarket martyrs, delivered at Chicago's North Side Turner Hall, gives us a complete document in which he describes his anarchist and pacifist ideas. Elsewhere we find only fragments and reports of him defending the philosophy in public speeches. He saw the Haymarket affair as the "moment of identification" which "made plain that the character and the method of government is the same the world over." He went on to say that,

"Whether it be called a despotism, a monarchy, or a republic, is of little importance: the underlying principle is the same. Many people believed that a democratic government might be so organized and administered that it would be in no danger from the freest criticism. The founders of this republic believed it, honestly believed it; and so in the constitution they provided that there should be no interference with the rights of free speech and assemblage. This belief that an organized government is compatible with freedom of speech and action was the iridescent bubble that the people of this country had blown out of their ease and ignorance, and which was so rudely burst on that fateful night on the Haymarket. Now, we may denounce as we will the action of the authorities in connection with this affair, but we are bound to acknowledge that they did what conditions compelled them to do. If we have at any time implied by our criticism that the government could have done other than it did, then we have failed to see the real meaning of government. [...] Let us be logical, and admit that the government acted in its true character when it took our comrades and strangled them. [...] A government is organized force, and must maintain itself by force. To expect it to do other than this is stupid and illogical. [...] Violence is the method of the government, and this one of the strongest reasons for my opposition to government. [...] But, to be honest, so soon as an act of violence is done as a protest against tyranny, I find myself seeking



for an explanation, and if I find it in the social conditions, then the act itself is scientifically justified and philosophy approves.”<sup>14</sup>

In the same speech, George quoted Robert Browning’s well-known poem *Paracelsus* to drive home a point, saying that “there is no more morally heroic figure than that of

*The youth who stands  
Silent and very calm among the throng  
His right hand ever hid behind his robe  
Until the tyrant pass.”*

The *Chicago Tribune* used the opportunity to claim that Brown was praising Leon Czolgosz (who had killed President McKinley just a year earlier), in his own words, omitting to mention Robert Browning.<sup>15</sup>

It was his eyewitness experience at the Haymarket, and his involvement in the futile efforts in support of the anarchists who were charged with the bomb plot that convinced Brown permanently of anarchism. It is not clear how strongly he had embraced the philosophy earlier, but in 1902 he wrote that he had come to Chicago “with ideas, opinions, and sentiments” like the anarchism he had just presented. Indeed, the hanging of four anarchists at Chicago on November 11, 1887 had the opposite of its intended effect. Instead of discouraging newcomers to the movement, the obvious bankruptcy of the state’s position and the worldwide publicity the case received brought in thousands upon thousands of recruits.

Another new convert to anarchism was a woman of about twenty-one years named Voltairine de Cleyre, who George first met at the Chicago’s Madison Street Theater, at a Freethought congress shortly after the Haymarket tragedy. There and at other similar meetings in the Midwest over the following few

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14“Memorial Address” *Free Society*, Nov. 23, 1900.

15“Revere the Dead ‘Reds’ and Decry Government,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1902.

years, de Cleyre impressed Brown both as a unique and promising intellectual as well as a formidable public speaker.

At the American Secular Union's 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress at Portsmouth Ohio (Oct. 31-Nov 2, 1890), George Brown not only encountered de Cleyre again, but also several others who would later share the radical club life with him in Philadelphia. Voltairine read a poem "that would have been considered incendiary in any other than poetic form," and she closed the conference with a speech on the moral standards of atheist men and women that was "mainly metaphysical," and impressed her listeners greatly.<sup>16</sup> Thus began an acquaintance that became a friendship lasting over twenty years and having a major effect on the lives of both these anarchist leaders.

Representing Philadelphia's group were Richard Brodhead Westbrook (1820-1899), a former Presbyterian minister who became an atheist lawyer and authored several scholarly, anti-clerical books, including one that attacked the trustees of Girard College for violating the school's secular charter. Also at Portsmouth was his wife, Henrietta Payne Westbrook (1835-1909), a physician who lectured on health and heredity topics. The Westbrooks were great defenders of marriage; Henrietta was debating with de Cleyre on the topic as late as 1907.<sup>17</sup>

Ida C. Craddock (1857-1902), the spiritualist and sex radical, was there as well. From a middle-class Quaker background, Ida was in 1882 the first woman to be accepted for study at the University of Pennsylvania, only to be turned away by the Board of Trustees. After several years as the Secular Union's secretary she turned her learned mind to her own brand of mystical sex radicalism, changing her title to "Mrs.," writing

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<sup>16</sup>The American Secular Union's Report appears in *Truth Seeker*, Nov. 8, 1890; George Brown, "Voltairine de Cleyre, *Mother Earth*, July 1912, p. 148.

<sup>17</sup>Richard B. Westbrook, *Girard's Will and Girard College Theology* (Philadelphia 1888); Henrietta Payne Westbrook, *The West-Brook Drives* (New York 1902), ch. 15: "Is Marriage a Failure?" pp. 175-186. "Dr. R. B. Westbrook Dead at Pascoag" *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), Aug. 22, 1899.

and lecturing that she regularly had intercourse with her “celestial bridegroom.” Ida was stalked by “the monsters of creation,” as a friend called the government anti-vice authorities who jailed her, and hounded by her mother, who had her committed and exposed her as an unmarried woman who could have no legitimate knowledge of sex. Ida killed herself to avoid a five-year jail term. Her case brought heavy public condemnation to Anthony Comstock, the famous suppressor of vice who had earlier boasted of how many “sinners” he had driven to suicide.<sup>18</sup>

These were some of the faces that George Brown would know well in the radical intellectual scene of Philadelphia. Of these at the 1890 secular congress, only de Cleyre was an anarchist, but they give a typical example of the rich variety in the intellectual life that George and the city’s anarchists led during the period.

George left Chicago because he was blacklisted out of the local shoe business for his support of the Haymarket defendants. From there he went to Cincinnati, where he is said to have formed a debating society and also to have become interested in the teachings of Moncure D. Conway, the famous abolitionist and Agnostic-Unitarian. However, I have been unable to document anything Brown did during his four to five years of residence in Ohio. One obituary states that Brown moved from Cincinnati to Philadelphia because of “a labor strike” in the former, without further details. But the shoemakers’ disastrous lockouts in both Philadelphia and Cincinnati between Novem-

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<sup>18</sup>Letter, Catherine S. Wood to Theodore Schroeder, March 30, 1903 (Cradock Papers, USI Carbondale); *Minutes of the Trustees*, Oct 1882-June 1884 (Univ. of PA Archives); Ida’s suicide note was printed in several journals, including *Free Society* and *Truth Seeker*; it and more on the case will be found in Taylor Stoehr, *Free Love in America: A Documentary History* (New York, 1979). On how the monsters of creation fared in Philadelphia, see Nicola Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton 1997) pp. 128-157;

ber 1887 and March 1888 were key parts of the general ruin of the Knights of Labor, and Brown was a Knight. Any shoemaker with such politics was likely to be blacklisted after such a debacle.<sup>19</sup> He had settled in Philadelphia by 1892 or very early in 1893.

### *Part Two: Love and Struggle in the City*

After his arrival in the ‘City of Brotherly Love,’ the first thing that we know George did was to accidentally meet, then fall in love with a girl sixteen years younger than himself. This was Mary Hansen, who became his partner. Brown recalled their meeting in an open-air lecture at City Hall, as a way of illustrating the idea of Free Love. The lecture was described in the memoirs of Chaim Weinberg some decades later:

“When I am not working, I like to go to a park and seeing as the law allows me to choose which park I want, I usually choose the second most beautiful park in America, which is located in Philadelphia: Fairmount Park. And of course I always have with me a companion in the park, a book. Sitting thus one time on a bench in the park, reading a book, a girl comes by and looks at me. But how do I, a poor worker, come to think about meeting a girl? Sitting until evening, I take myself home. The next time I come and I want to sit down in my usual place near the hill. I look around and I notice right away the same girl who walked past me yesterday: she sits under the same tree where I always sit down. I glance at the girl: she sits engrossed in a book. I become curious to know what she is reading. I ask her where she gets her books to read. She answers me: in the library. That an American girl should be read-

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<sup>19</sup>Judith Lazarus Goldberg, *Strikes, Organizing, and Change: The Knights of Labor in Philadelphia 1869-1890* (NY University, PhD Diss, 1985), pp. 262-267; James M. Morris, “The Cincinnati Shoemakers’ Lockout of 1888,” *Labor History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 1972), pp. 505-519.

ing the same books as I really surprised me. Thus I became acquainted with this girl.

“One time the girl speaks up: ‘why do you always have to escort me home? Let me escort you.’ That struck me like thunder. I lived at the time in a little room right in the tenderloin (seedy) neighborhood. So how could one permit her to come and find out where I live? But having no choice, I consent. At the house, I invite her to come up and drink a glass of tea and our acquaintance becomes more intimate. According to everyone, whether it is called God or Nature, whoever created in us the desire to reproduce, because it gives us joy, the girl and I sinned. The law did not have the least connection with our becoming acquainted. And therefore, it would be senseless to go and get from the law a paper to permit us to live in one room and love each other. Poor as we both were, living from our own work, we did the best we could, we ate together, lived together, and the result was two children. We don’t hate each other: we have differences of opinion. Our families are unhappy with our way of living, principally that we haven’t gone through the ceremony of getting permission for it from the city and the church. What is most important for us is that the children should grow up in such a spirit that religion and law should remain for them a dead, unknown letter.

“This, my friends, is the terrible Free Love in which we anarchists believe. What will happen if we grow tired of each other? We’ll part. We will, however, bear full responsibility for the children we brought into the world.

“And another thing – I want to confide a secret to you – the girl about whom I just told you, is among you, the audience. You see her every Sunday selling literature



and giving out handbills in connection with our work. This is Mary Hansen.”<sup>20</sup>

Mary Hansen, *North American*, (Philadelphia) 20 December 1902 Mary Hansen Brown (1874-1952) was the love of George’s life, the mother of his two children (George Jr., born in 1893 and Heloise, born Feb. 26, 1904), as well as his comrade in the cause of anarchism. Very little is known about her life prior to her meeting Brown and de Cleyre: all we have are a few unclear facts coming from Mary’s friends, and another very common surname to make research more difficult. She came to the United States as a girl from Denmark,<sup>21</sup> and “worked as a servant girl in a rich house.”<sup>22</sup> It is probable, but not certain, that she made the crossing with members of her family, but the passage quoted above is the only reference we have to contact with Mary’s (or with George’s) relatives as an adult. At various points in her life, we find her earning a living as a house cleaner or as a teacher of young children, and also there are signs that she may have worked as a dressmaker. She was a respected poet who refused to allow any editing of her

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<sup>20</sup>Chaim Leib Weinberg, *Forty Years in the Struggle for Social Revolution* (Philadelphia & Los Angeles 1952, in Yiddish), pp. 75-76; translated by Naomi Cohen, edited by Robert P. Helms. Publication by Wooden Shoe Books and [www.deadanarchists.org](http://www.deadanarchists.org) forthcoming. “Tenderloin” was the late 19<sup>th</sup> century reference for the area just north of Chinatown.

<sup>21</sup>Emma Cohen Gilbert, a close friend of Mary’s daughter, said that Mary was born in Sweden. Alexis Ferm, Mary’s associate after George’s death, said Denmark. Her death record (New Jersey, March 24, 1952, file #11704) gives her birthplace as England. I find Ferm to be the least likely of the three sources to be mistaken on this point, as he was himself from Sweden and close to Mary in age, and thus unlikely to get the countries confused. Also, Hansen is a specifically Danish name. George Jr., the informant for the death record, was mentally disabled by the time of her death. Mary is not remembered as having a foreign accent.

<sup>22</sup>Avrich, *Anarchist Voices* (1995), page 225 (Emma Gilbert’s testimony).

work. It is partly for this reason that only fifteen of her poems have survived.<sup>23</sup>

Mary's personality is documented by many personal letters, memoirs, and oral testimonies, and these reports all agree that she was a person of striking integrity, who worked selflessly throughout her long life on the grass-roots level of the movement (but seldom as a public speaker), and who was absolutely loyal and devoted to her friends.<sup>24</sup> A quiet intellectual, she is also remembered for her general kindness and the warmth of her smile. Alexis Ferm, a single-taxer and anarchist who knew her for the last 35 years of her life, described her just after her death as "quite a natural poet" who "had no mean qualities, no jealousies and... no hatreds."<sup>25</sup>

The greatest expression of her love was directed at the little ones. Once, when little "Georgie" was about seven years old, she reflected that "They – children – seem to need so much care and it is but a small return to make to them. Children are the best of us, they live and love and do not complain of the tyranny exercised in shoving them forward, into the darkness where we ourselves grope all too uncertain, and more often sink than climb."<sup>26</sup>

When George settled in Philadelphia, Voltairine de Cleyre had already been living in the city for a few years. George met her at radical meetings and also visited her at home several times, and they became close friends. He persuaded de Cleyre

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23Letter, Alexis Ferm to Gladys Hourwich, March 31, 1952 (Modern School Collection, Rutgers University). We find Mary's poems in *Free Society*, *Winn's Firebrand*, *The Modern School*, *Arden Club Talk*, and *Arden Leaves*, between 1898 and 1924. Two undated poems are in the Ishill Papers, Harvard University.

24Avrich, *Anarchist Voices* (1995); Joseph J. Cohen, *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in the United States* (Philadelphia 1945 transl. Esther Dolgoff); Chaim L. Weinberg, *Forty Years in the Struggle* (1952, transl. Naomi Cohen).

25Ferm to Hourwich, March 31, 1952 (see above)

26Letter, Mary Hansen to Horace Traubel, January 3, [1899], filed under "Miscellaneous, H," Horace Logo Traubel Papers, Library of Congress.

to take her evening meals at his home, with his family, in order to relieve her poverty a little. Some twenty years later he remembered these as “the happiest meals I have ever shared.”

They would read aloud from English and American poetry, and then have long discussions of each selection, often disagreeing on the faults and qualities of particular authors. It was at about this time that the other anarchists of the city started using Brown’s home as a gathering place, which facilitated a closer friendship among them.<sup>27</sup> The Browns always were, as George put it, “gloriously and independently poor.” He and Mary had at least five different addresses in Philadelphia between 1899 and 1915, and their digs at Arden, Delaware, where they spent the warmer months between 1908 and 1912, were merely a tent and a very small “rough-board cabin.”

The radical debating clubs of Philadelphia were at full swing in the early 1890’s – one could say in their golden age – and the anarchists were very much a part of that scene. There had been anarchist groups in the city by 1883, these being mostly composed of Germans, then in 1889-90 Yiddish and English-speaking groups appeared. Soon after George arrived, he joined the Ladies’ Liberal League, which had just recently (February 1892) split off from the Friendship Liberal League in order to air more controversial questions than was possible in the parent group. Men were welcome as members and speakers but only women served as officers. All the anarchist members apparently migrated to the new group, but we find non-anarchist freethinkers involved.<sup>28</sup> The new club met on Tuesday even-

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<sup>27</sup>*Mother Earth*, July 1912, p. 149.

<sup>28</sup>German anarchist groups existed in Philadelphia by 1883, and there were five branches of the International Workingmen’s Association in the city advertised in *Die Zukunft* on May 10, 1884. The (Jewish) Turgeniev Debating Club was founded October 1887; the (Jewish) Knights of Liberty in 1889; for details see Weinberg, *Forty Years in the Struggle*, ch. 3 (forthcoming). An English-language discussion group met in North Philadelphia in 1890; see Voltairine de Cleyre, “A Glance at Communism,” *Twentieth Century*, September 1, 1892, pp.



ings at 8 o'clock, first in the home of Perle McLeod at 218 South 8<sup>th</sup> Street. A better venue was found on the NE corner, Ridge & Green Streets in the Northern Liberties section, starting with the meeting of October 19, 1893. Lecture titles for that season included "Frontier Life," "The Immorality of Waste," "The Philosophy of Socrates," "The Religion of the Hindoos," "Misplaced Charity," "Effects of Education on Character," and "Unitarianism, its History and Principles." The guest speakers were often the leading professionals in their fields, and the finale in December was a debate between the famous paleontologist Edward Drinker Cope and Voltairine de Cleyre on the relations of the sexes.<sup>29</sup>

Another activity carried on by George Brown and his new comrades was the Radical Library of Philadelphia, which was a free reading room for working people, open 8-10 p.m. every night and offering an assortment of radical literature. The reading material itself was taken over from another group that was folding, and was located at McLeod's place on 8<sup>th</sup> Street until November, but then it moved to the NE corner, 15<sup>th</sup> & Spring Garden Streets, with more limited services. This library remained in existence, in various forms and locations but always in anarchist hands, until 1952.

The 34-year old cobbler made many friendships among the English and Yiddish speaking radicals of the town, and by the late 1890's he was one of the best-known and respected of the city's lasting anarchist leaders, alongside Natasha Notkin, Margaret Perle McLeod, Chaim Weinberg, Voltairine de Cleyre, and Mary Hansen.

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10-11. For the present reference, de Cleyre, "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," *The Rebel* (Boston) Oct. 20 & Nov. 20, 1895; and her "What Women are Doing in Philadelphia," *Lucifer*, Aug. 31, 1894.

<sup>29</sup>See weekly announcements, Aug. 10 through Dec. 21, 1893 in *Twentieth Century*. Professor Cope spoke on December 19, 1893, and de Cleyre responded on the 26<sup>th</sup>. For the actual texts, see (Cope) *The Monist*, October 1890 and (de Cleyre) *Lucifer the Light Bearer*, April 13, 20, 27, and May 11, 1894.

Aside from his fellow anarchists, George knew many radicals of other tendencies who lived in and around Philadelphia. He knew Christopher Columbus Jones, who recruited a small contingent of “Coxey’s Army” in 1894 and led it out along Market Street and then Woodland Avenue, and he mended the shoes of some of the marchers, including 14-year old Phillip Finkler, who then started a long anarchist career.<sup>30</sup> He had a very long friendship with Horace Traubel, leader of the Whitman Fellowship and editor of the socialist literary paper *The Conservator*.<sup>31</sup> He knew Thomas Phillips of the Knights of Labor, who had led the city’s cooperative movement during the 1870’s and ‘80’s, and who, like Brown, was an English-born shoemaker.<sup>32</sup>

By the end of the decade, George had become one of the best known public anarchist speakers in the city, with only Voltairine having similar name-recognition. His lecture topics included the mystical writings of the English atheist Richard Jefferies, and the poems of Thomas Hood, such as “The Song of the Shirt,” a vivid, gruesome description of a woman being worked to death at a sewing machine in 19th Century England. He also recited work by the Scottish writer Charles Mackay, whose poems would appear in anarchist newspapers of the day. We have a specimen of Brown’s own poetry, intended for an audience that was already familiar with the English poem *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, still famous today, which was

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30 See “Cobbler anarchist killed by splinter,” *Public Ledger*, Feb. 16, 1915; “Philip Finkler (1882-1934)” *Man!* (San Francisco), June-July 1934.

31 Horace L. Traubel’s obituary for Brown appeared in *The Conservator*, June 1915.

32 Thomas Phillips (1833-1916) remained an active public speaker long after his days in the KOL. On Oct. 19, 1902, his lecture to the (anarchist) Social Science Club on English cooperatives was cancelled by the Philadelphia Police. See biographical sketch, Thomas Phillips Papers, Historical Society of Wisconsin; *Public Ledger*, Oct. 20, 1902.

very loosely based on the *Quatrains* of a Persian poet and mathematician who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

On The Rubaiyat

Old Omar spake untrue. The Rose of long  
Ago in Naishapur he loved when young  
Is fresh today, and shall forever bloom,  
Fed on the scented Dew of his dear Song.

Old Omar speaks untrue. "I've sold," he says,  
"My Reputation for a Song." But Praise  
He buys with that same song, and Love and Wine,  
And life and Youth thru everlasting Days.

Old Omar spake untrue. The gracious Wine  
Still fills his Glass, and beaded Rubies shine  
About his Lips. And Love and Time for aye  
Shall wreath his brimming Cup with Rose and Vine.<sup>33</sup>

The important Jewish anarchist leader Joseph J. Cohen, who pressed the cause in Philadelphia from 1903-1913, remembered George as "a very important and active member... a highly educated man and a powerful speaker on the platform, like an erudite professor with a fine sense of humor... His imposing appearance made a very fine impression on the audience."<sup>34</sup>

This fond recollection of a friend is an interesting reference to George Brown, since he was almost entirely self-educated. According to the obituary already quoted, his school days were "limited to but a few weeks a year,"<sup>35</sup> Chaim Weinberg quoted Brown himself on this point. After a lecture one day around

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<sup>33</sup>This poem by Brown appeared in *Free Society*, August 4, 1903. Edward J. Fitzgerald's popular version of Khayyam's work was first published in 1859.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph J. Cohen, *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in the United States*

<sup>35</sup>Obituary by James B. Elliott, *Mother Earth*, April 1915.

1908, “the questions began, and one question was addressed to Comrade Dr. Brown (in full seriousness). Our Comrade Brown answered with his smile, ‘You call me by the title *Doctor*, when the truth is that I have studied for years and years to become what I am today, a shoemaker.’”<sup>36</sup> This reading of Brown as a highly-educated man occurs only in self-educated and working-class sources, like Cohen, Chaim Weinberg, Horace Traubel, and the respected Detroit anarchist Joseph Labadie. The cobbler-anarchist was extremely well-spoken by all reports, but he was better prepared in some areas than in others.

Alexis Ferm put another twist in George’s work as a speaker as well. “He was so clever,” he wrote, “so full of unanswerable talk or argument that many people liked him in spite of himself. The trouble was that, tho he was quite *smart*, he was more destructive than constructive...”<sup>37</sup> During the years when he and Brown moved in the same general circles, Alexis Ferm was a Single-Taxer and individualist Anarchist of New York with strong interests in the Ethical Culture movement and Theosophy. He was of working class origins but gravitated to management positions before starting his distinguished career as a libertarian educator.<sup>38</sup> Thus the two men were of two very different personality types, and we find no evidence that they ever even met.

George had a respectful difference of opinion for many years with the radical money-theorist and machine manufacturer Hugo Bilgram (1847-1932), a singularly brilliant Bavarian immigrant whose five-story factory building still stands at 1217-35 Spring Garden Street. This self-made millionaire inventor of special gears, whose curiosity extended to the micro-

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<sup>36</sup>Chaim Weinberg, *Forty Years in the Struggle* (1952); upcoming in English (transl. Naomi Cohen).

<sup>37</sup>Ferm to Hourwich, March 31, 1952 (see above).

<sup>38</sup>Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 260-63.

scopic study of slime-molds as well, had a long and prolific career as a management-side theorist of labor economics and finance, beginning with his 1887 article “The Iron Law of Wages.” Bilgram’s opinions became familiar to readers of radical papers including *Liberty* (individualist-anarchist), *Justice* (Single Tax), and *Twentieth Century*, which examined both these philosophies. Bilgram argued in Philadelphia’s clubs, going head-to-head with radical economists like William A. Whittick and Arthur Kitson, who both lived in the city in the 1890’s.<sup>39</sup>

The pages of *The Conservator*, a socialist literary journal, carried George Brown and Bilgram in a rather beautiful debate on labor unions in the final months of the century.<sup>40</sup> Bilgram’s theories called for an industrial system “free of involuntary idleness” that would “provide employment for all those willing to work.” He offered no criticisms of the “intended object” of the unions, but focused instead on their methods, which he said consisted “of force, of compulsion, of coercion.”

Bilgram held that “equity ceases when strikers in any way interfere with other men who are engaged to take their places, and their acts become clearly criminal when they resort to violence.”

“Their most effective weapon is ostracism,” he wrote, “which they apply to those who have the courage of their convictions in remaining free men. These nonunion men are denounced by trade unionists as enemies, as *scabs*.” He contended that union leaders were not sincere when they publicly re-

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<sup>39</sup>Reprinted from *The Age of Steel* (St. Louis), this 8-page pamphlet is in the Historical Society of Wisconsin. Bilgram’s articles in *Twentieth Century* run between 1889 and 1894; in *Liberty* during 1894 and ’95; in *Conservator* from 1896. He authored six books, and his machine patents begin in 1872, just three years after he arrived in the U.S..

<sup>40</sup> See *Conservator*, Nov. 1899 through Jan. 1900.

puddate violence against strike-breakers. “They attribute it to sympathizers, not to the strikers themselves, and they express an emphatic regret.” Unionists were insincere, Bilgram felt, when they denounced the use of force against strikers by government, and they should have “every reason to welcome, and even to assist, the police and the soldier.”

Brown’s response gives the impression that Hugo Bilgram was not personally disliked by anyone, but rather that he looked at the world through the rose-colored glasses created by his own theories. “He confounds the scab with the nonunion man,” George wrote. “The scab is a union man who... sells himself to the enemy,” and who must take his place “in the unlovely company of the spy, the traitor, the detective, and the informer.” The nonunion man, on the other hand, “may be the man of honor,” but often is simply “ignorant of the purposes of the union.” Brown described unions as well-organized, democratic bodies “that are the models of orderly business procedure.”

Brown closed by painting a picture of the rank-and-file unionist and places himself beside him. “Surely there is something indisputably noble in the man who with one hand fends off from wife and child the gray wolf of hunger, and with the other strikes valiantly for his right to work and live. For me the labor unions stand for this and more than this. In them I first learned the meaning of such dear words as fraternity, equality, and solidarity, and for the substance of these labor unions, I defiantly protest.”

In a letter to the editor of *Conservator*, written around this time, the artist Mary Elwell, active at the time with the anarchists and a few other societies, wrote that “I’d work Brown a little more for copy if I were you. If somebody doesn’t make better use of him than he makes of himself, he’ll go down to

his grave ‘unhonored and unsung.’”<sup>41</sup> Elwell’s comment reflected George’s very real “writer’s block,” which he really overcame only for about four years of his life (1899-1903).

George’s unionism had become a bit more militant by the time of Pennsylvania’s anthracite coal strike of 1902, when his comments appeared in Philadelphia’s mainstream paper *Public Ledger*, speaking as a member of the United Labor League. This is a tantalizing glimpse into what may have been George’s most interesting period in labor, possibly including more written work. It torments the researcher because the most important sources of this organization for several years around the turn of the century have somehow disappeared from the archive where they had been preserved. Until they turn up again or forever, we have only remarks from historians who looked at the organization’s meeting minutes and its newspaper *New Era* (1901-1903).<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately, those historians were not examining George Brown, who wrote of the coal strike that:

“The State is under imperative obligation to protect these men in possession of their property, or it would cease to exist. For this reason the trust has a right to call on the State for effective protection, and if this should necessitate the shooting to death of every miner in the state, it would have to be done, and neither policeman nor soldier would be legally culpable. If the property rights of the trust are not maintained inviolate, then is no property safe. Neither is the trust under any obligation to arbitrate: why should it submit to arbitration what has already

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<sup>41</sup>Mary Elwell to Horace L. Traubel, n.d., Traubel Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>42</sup>The Urban Archives Center at Temple University once had and microfilmed the early records of the AFL-CIO Philadelphia Council. The United Labor League’s meeting minutes and (as best one can determine) short-lived labor newspapers including *New Era*, were in that collection. Some years of the minutes and all the newspapers are now missing, and seem no longer to exist on the earth.

been settled in its favor? To import moral considerations into the matter is to make confusion...

“These unions have never been legal. At first they were under the direct ban of the law, and were prosecuted as conspiracies, which they undoubtedly were. They grew in numbers and power, however, until they were, and are able to defy persecution, and so they have secured toleration. But they are not, even now, legal, and are not suppressed only because they cannot be...

“And so we find this miners’ union making this great fight for a decent living, not only without help from the State but with all the force of law and courts, as well as police and soldiery against them. For the union is an attack on property rights. It is a claim that human life is more sacred than property; that those who work have rights as deeply rooted as those who only manipulate them.”<sup>43</sup>

George and other anarchists participated in a movement when workers within one of the city’s major industries held a general strike to improve their conditions. A traveling comrade observed that “...nowhere are the relations among the anarchists of all nationalities more harmonious and fraternal than here. Their whole ambition seems to be to diffuse anarchist ideas, combined with the desire to acquire knowledge... In the way of regular meetings they have not been able to do much, owing to police persecution, but thousands of leaflets and pamphlets are being distributed, and comrades George Brown and James Myers – the two champion speakers – avail themselves of street meetings, and they have done considerable propaganda work during the strike of the textile workers. They are the terror of Socialist and Single Tax politicians.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>George Brown of the U[nited] L[abor] L[eague], “A Union Man on the Strike,” *Free Society*, Oct. 19, 1902 (reprinted from *Philadelphia Public Ledger*).

<sup>44</sup>Abe Isaak, “A Little Journey” part III, *Free Society*, Sept. 20, 1903.



On June 1, 1903, about 125,000 textile workers struck all over Philadelphia for a reduction of work hours from 60 to 55 per week. At the start, 645 out of 700 mills were closed. Within a few weeks, the plight of child factory workers (some as young as seven, receiving about one-sixth of the adult wage) became another major issue. Mary “Mother” Jones, by invitation of the strike committee, led a series of rallies and marches drawing national media attention to the “factory children.”

But the anarchists were involved in the Germantown section before the strike began, and their input was resented by others who wished to provide leadership. George Brown, Myers, de Cleyre, Mary Hansen, and Julie (Julia) Mechanic (a transplant from Chicago, where she had been arrested after President McKinley’s assassination) addressed open-air meetings at Germantown and Cheltenham Avenues at least every Saturday evening in May. The police broke up the one held on the 16th, and a mainstream paper referred to “a number of persons whose purpose was to create a disturbance and break up the gathering,” and who were “bitterly denounced” as “outsiders” by “movement leaders.” The difference was explained later in the strike by Myers, writing in *Free Society*: “Be it said to the credit of these innocent textile wage slaves that only the methods of freedom were employed. Nobody was forced to quit work. The few organized workers went around, stating the need of a shorter work week to their unorganized fellows, and on June 1 every organized and unorganized man, woman, and child volunteered to stay away from the mills until the 55 hours had been granted. We had no ‘leaders;’ we had no Gompers or John Mitchells, and we didn’t need any.” Myers also described an anarchistic reply the workers made to factory owners’ excuses: “if the manufacturers could not run their mills profitably at 55 hours a week, [they should] hand the mills over to the workers, and see if they couldn’t.”

The Germantown strike's main activist was the Francophone revolutionary syndicalist Louis Dujardin, an immigrant textile worker who had organized the Franco-Belgian "Textile Workers of Germantown" along with socialist Auguste Mahieu during the preceding winter. Dujardin had been in Philadelphia from at least 1898, and he had shared the podium with Brown, de Cleyre, and Myers at the city's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Paris Commune two years earlier. On May 28, *L'Union des Travailleurs*, quoted an unnamed Germantown correspondent (either Mahieu or Dujardin), "Our socialistic school is now numbering around twenty. We've been agitating a lot for the reduction of work hours. The police again prevented us last Saturday from holding an open-air meeting, but we will be at it again this Saturday." Thus the more militant French labor activists of the city were speaking alongside the city's anarchists on those weekend rallies (May 16 & 23) in 1903, without the blessings of established union officers. James Myers reported that the rally of the 23<sup>rd</sup> was "a marked success."<sup>45</sup>

George Brown was not a man without faults, but his steadfast loyalty to his cause and to his friends was striking. To cite two examples around the turn of the century, he was the first anarchist to publicly speak on anarchism after the killing of President McKinley in 1901 by an anarchist, lecturing to high school and college students on anarchism only two months after the event, when public anger against anarchists was quite strong.<sup>46</sup> The following year, a week before Christmas in 1902, Voltairine de Cleyre was shot three times by a crazed former

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<sup>45</sup>Michel Cordillot, *La Sociale en Amerique: Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement social francophone aux Etats-Unis 1848-1922* (Paris, 2002), pp. 172-73, 285-86; *Free Society*, weekly ads preceding Commune event of March 24, 1901; reports of strike, May 31 and Oct. 11, 1903; "Textile Workers' Troubles" *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), May 17, 1903. *L'Union des Travailleurs*, (Charleoi, PA) May 28, 1903.

<sup>46</sup>"From Philadelphia," *Free Society*, Nov. 24, 1901. The lecture took place on Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>.

pupil on a street corner, and one of the key reasons she lived through that day was the instant action of George Brown, who along with Mary appeared at her side at the hospital, refused the doctors' opinion that she was doomed, and spread the word through the city and throughout the anarchist movement for help. The story of her close call with death is a wonder that involved many people, but George's role was vital at every step.<sup>47</sup> The closer we examine this particular anarchist, the more he is his own unique self, the more fiercely determined he remains. He was somewhat wily, could be a bit pig-headed, but never for a selfish reason, never in a way that indicated even the slightest corruption. As yet another traveling anarchist noted in 1900, George's "whole soul is in the cause. He is a most genial companion, with a warm, human heart, but rigidly uncompromising in his devotion to anarchist principles."<sup>48</sup>

Voltaireine, Brown's close friend and comrade all through the years, once wrote, "And there is George Brown preaching peaceable expropriation through the federated unions of the workers; and this is good. It is his best place; he is at home there; he can accomplish most in his own chosen field."<sup>49</sup> This was careful praise, given in a published essay, but in a private letter written in 1911, she gives the other side of it, replying to the idea of George becoming a teacher at Philadelphia's anarchist-run Sunday School.

"I smiled a little coldly amused smile at your 'having interested Brown,' and having interested the children. The trouble is, he 'knows a great many things that ain't so,' and will tell the children, as facts, a great many things which he only guesses

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47For the basic story of the shooting see Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist* (1978) pp. 171-180; also Robert Helms, "Anarchists in Medicine and Pharmacy: Philadelphia, 1889-1930" *Clamor Magazine*, Dec. 2000/Jan. 2001; For contemporary coverage, the *Philadelphia North American*, Dec. 20-25, 1902.

48James F. Morton Jr. "Across the Continent III" *Free Society*, April 8, 1900.

49From the essay "Anarchism." See de Cleyre, *Selected Works* (1914), page 116.

at, and guesses wrongly. This is what he always does; and if one is ignorant, and unsuspecting, he is always taken in by Brown's cock-sureness. I wouldn't care to have him teach any children, or grown people either. He's a very entertaining mis-representor of facts."<sup>50</sup>

When discussing labor issues or the literature of work, George was clearly in command. In areas relating to women and sexual morality, he was known to start arguments that he could not finish. In the fall of 1899, George Brown wrote in the anarchist-atheist *Lucifer* that woman "does not possess in equal measure [with men] the qualities ... intelligence, strength and moral force." He was attempting to argue that women could live their lives in the best way possible only if all competition in human society were eliminated. His local comrade Susan A. Patton responded by saying the George "argues like a capitalist when it comes to the sex question – women must be gentle and yielding, and then man will grant concessions – yes! As the traction company does. Give up your whole judgment into their hands, then they will tell you [that] you have neither intelligence, strength, nor moral courage, and point like the capitalist theologians to the facts of history." She added that members of Ladies' Liberal League knew "this litany of Brown's almost by heart." Her reference to the traction company was quite harsh, bringing to mind some brutal scenes of class war in Philadelphia's recent streetcar strikes. However, Patton took care to mention that George had "done much to free the minds of wage slaves from their masters."<sup>51</sup> Susan had been active with the Philadelphia anarchists since around 1892. Her curiosity for anarchism had come about when William M. Salter, leading the

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<sup>50</sup>Voltairine de Cleyre to Joseph J. Cohen, Feb. 7, 1911. Cohen Papers, Bund Archive, YIVO, New York City.

<sup>51</sup>Brown, "From the Communistic Point of View," *Lucifer the Light-Bearer*, Sept. 30, 1899; Letter from Susan A. Patton, *Lucifer*, Oct. 14, 1899. Patton died of Pneumonia on March 25, 1901 in Philadelphia at age 35. Her death record states that she was single.

local Ethical Culture Society, had “excommunicated the anarchists from their immaculate society,” as she put it.<sup>52</sup>

George might have done well by leaving that whole area of discussion alone forever, but he took up gender and morality issues again, and from May through December of 1903, the pages of *Lucifer* carried the spectacle of George Brown’s very unpopular opinions about women, and his being roasted in hell-fire by three anarchist women, the first being his own partner. We suppose that a fourth woman would have ripped his head off, but unfortunately Susan Patton had died in the meantime.

In an essay entitled “Prostitution,” Brown begins with “There is not in all the wide realm of nature an instance of prostitution outside the human family. Woman is the only prostitute. Why is this so, and how did it come to be so?” From there, it keeps getting worse. “Her instincts are weaker than in other animals; she is a poorer mother and more readily abandons her young... “Woman has only rudimentary moral sense and knows little about principles. To her justice is nothing; she would be quite willing to disturb the order of the universe for a mere whim. Of shame, she only learns from some man she has grown to love.”

George illustrated his opinions with remarks on the novels *Trilby* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, then finally concluded the essay with the following gem: “To the poor prostitute, pity without end. To the chaste woman, ‘the justified mother of men,’ respect, honor, and love.”<sup>53</sup>

Brown had an essay on heredity in the same paper two weeks later that was not at all bad, and which drew no criticisms. But about one month after his piece on prostitution appeared, the cannons of female wisdom began to roar. George’s partner Mary Hansen began on June 17, addressing him as “Mr. Brown.” We do not know whether or why this may be of in-

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<sup>52</sup>Susan Patton, “Conversion,” *Free Society*, December 3, 1900.

<sup>53</sup>George Brown, “Prostitution,” *Lucifer*, May 21, 1903.

terest, but it so happens that Mary gave birth to her second child, Heloise Hansen-Brown, on February 26, 1904, which was nine months, almost to the day, after Brown's preposterous essay appeared in *Lucifer*. Their only other child, George Jr., was eleven when Heloise was born, and so the arrival of the new baby was not a part of the usual family routine.

Mary did not require any special genius to counter George in her responding essay, but she accomplished the task calmly, precisely, and effectively. She demonstrated not only a complete command of the literature George had referred to, but gave countering examples of characters in other novels that would trump the points he had tried to make with *Tess* and *Trilby*. Mary's discussion of the subject was masterful, destroying each of her opponent's points one by one.

"The minds of the average man and woman are alike," Hansen wrote, "and the lower in the scale of civilization the more ready are both to use the club and the law to right their marital differences, while license allowed the male before marriage is both degenerating and debauching. Except for this, their lives are spent in much the same manner; their tastes, when healthy, are alike; so it must be from this slime and debauchery (from which he pretends to want to save women) that he gained his added social sense. Nor is it settled that there is no instance of prostitution in others than women; some well-informed writers have even said that there were and are male prostitutes..."

"And Mr. Brown's 'pity without end' will not help matters," she continued, "Men – drunken men, sober men, preachers, teachers, and fools – have slobbered pity over her through all time, and they still keep on doing their level best to make more prostitutes."<sup>54</sup>

The next retort in the pages of *Lucifer* came from a writer for whom we have no biographical information. Lena Belfort

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54Mary Hansen, "Man's Attitude Toward Prostitutes," *Lucifer*, June 17, 1903.

may or may not be a pseudonym (possibly of Voltairine de Cleyre), but she wrote other articles in radical papers of the period. Lena gives no indication that she knew or had ever met George Brown, and there certainly is no mercy in the way she carves him up personally and leaves his every word broken and ruined.

Belfort makes it perfectly clear in her essay “Moral Imbecility: Tess, or George Brown,” that she knew the novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* so well that she was the wrong person to use it on as a handy example of one’s male prejudices. She used each scene and character to pound her opponent into the ground like a stake. “Whose is the ‘imbecility,’ hers [Tess’s] or George Brown’s, who speaks of the ease with which she returns to ‘her betrayer?’ ... *Ease*, do you say, George Brown? Have you *read* the book? Had you ever a mother? Have you any human sympathy?”

Belfort closes by describing how Brown’s essay had “made my blood boil,” but that her anger is aimed at “our immoral morality.” Though she had shed tears over the sufferings of Tess, “bitter indeed are the tears in my soul as I remember there are those who can read her story and not *see*, can speak of it lightly, carelessly, and not *see* and *feel* and *cry out* and *revolt* against this fearful Moloch to which we sacrifice our purity and the best of our young womanhood – this monstrous chastity.”<sup>55</sup>

George Brown wrote another essay, not naming anyone, but clearly in his own defense, the following month. His basic statement was that neither his belief in Free Love (intercourse between men and women without interference by State, Church, or Society) nor his experiences in life, nor his readings had moved him from his belief that “the highest ideal of sex life is the exclusive and life-long union of one man with one woman.” He felt that “ill-matched, loose characters” or “moral

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<sup>55</sup>Lena Belfort, “Moral Imbecility: Tess, or George Brown,” *Lucifer*, June 25, 1903.

invertebrates,” were just as likely to fail in a marriage as in a Free Love union. George wrote that some Free Love advocates had “seen clearly the awful sufferings of the victims of mistaken marriages, and this has unbalanced them to such an extent that they are unable to distinguish between the purpose and the methods used to achieve it... They offensively and aggressively exalt that there is no freedom except what they euphemistically call varietism.”

George was already quite far onto the conservative side of Free Love, but then he laid on the rhetoric: “Varietism looks to me like a kind of ‘scab’ prostitution, and I object to the assertion that a woman cannot be at the same time free and chaste... Liberty does not spell obscenity. A free woman is under no obligation to be a varietist, nor to do any of the things proper to the scarlet lady.”<sup>56</sup>

Lena Belfort returned to the pages of *Lucifer* and crushed Brown again. She ventilated less anger, but hers was still not a tone of comradely respect. She was simply shooting fish in a barrel. “A free woman can may be a virgin, she may be a monogamist, she may be a bigamist, a polygamist, a polyandrist, a varietist – she may be, she *must* be, whatever her own nature demands and her own mind approves... I object to the inference that variety is perversion.”

“There is many a *chaste woman*,” Lena stated, “whose wifely office is not one whit above the office of a certain sanitary convenience, to mention which is impolite. And to this, *marriage has nothing to say!*”<sup>57</sup>

The final blow to George and his ill-fated essays on prostitution and chastity came from a comrade of his who had moved away from Philadelphia only a few years prior to this debate. Laura H. Earle was a Pianist and music teacher from a wealthy family that included many radicals, including some famous ab-

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<sup>56</sup>George Brown, “Dualism,” *Lucifer*, July 23, 1903.

<sup>57</sup>Lena Belfort, “The Chaste Woman,” *Lucifer*, August 13, 1903.



olitionist lawyers, a leading antivivisectionist, and one cousin who had been an anarchist for several years. Laura contributed many gentle, introspective love-poems to *Lucifer* and the *Conservator*. She was single, now 45 years old, exactly George Brown's age.

Laura was in agreement with, and warmly praised Lena Belfort's criticisms, but she added, "If I did not know George Brown to be a good fellow and a lovable one, I should let his utterances pass as nothing more than the stock chatter of the every-day trolley-car philistine, and forget them. As it is, I become indignant again, for the -th time, at this glib talk of 'prostitutes' and the 'chaste woman.' It seems to me that if I were a man, feeling as men do, as I have heard George Brown say he thinks, that the prostitute is necessary to men; if I used her myself; if this were the case, it seems to me that bare decency would forbid my speaking ill of this creature of my need."<sup>58</sup>

No one, male or female, came to Brown's defense in the pages of *Lucifer*. George thus never lost the respect of his contemporaries as a labor activist, nor as a decent person. As a radical thinker on women's affairs, he was ruined and publicly humiliated by this debate.

### *Part Three: The Hornet of Arden*

As we have seen, the anarchist movement has overflowed, throughout its history, with strong personalities; people quick to argue, or to use their quick wits to drive home a point. George Brown was such a person. During the summer of 1911, he stepped briefly into the national news by disturbing the tranquil social life of the still-young Single Tax colony at Arden, Delaware. The tale in a nutshell goes like this: tensions arose between Brown's faction and the more affluent residents, and he was arrested for disrupting some club meetings. Viewing it as an attack on his right to free speech, George turned things

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<sup>58</sup>Laura H. Earle, "Tess and Other Women," *Lucifer*, December 17, 1903.

around by having ten of his neighbors arrested for playing ball on Sunday. As we shall see, the details make the story both interesting and more than a little funny.

Along with so many other radicals, Brown knew the sculptor, portrait artist, and Single-Tax leader George Frank Stephens quite well. Born in 1859 at Rahway, New Jersey, Stephens began his career as a student of the painter Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. After graduating he taught there as well, and also at the Drexel Academy and the Spring Garden Institute. Along the way he was a member of the Philadelphia Sketch Club and the Art Club of Philadelphia.

In 1884 Stephens married Caroline (Caddie) Eakins, the sister of his distinguished teacher. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the couple turned against Thomas Eakins, and in a move that would be echoed later in his life, Frank instigated a campaign to oust him from his position at the Academy. One reason given was that Eakins' anatomy classes, making use of nude models, were immoral; the other was that he had taken liberties with female students.

Stephens' career in Philadelphia included many commissions for public sculpture, including pieces on the exterior of City Hall. It was at Arden, however, that Stephens made his permanent mark, both as an artist and as a social reformer.

Caddie Stephens died of typhoid in 1889, just as Frank's design company was starting to turn a profit. The young artist turned his mind away from this tragedy, toward the Single Tax land-reform movement and a new life. He traveled to New York and met the leader Henry George, becoming a trusted lieutenant.

Frank's great adventure as a young activist was the effort by the Philadelphia Single Tax Society to run candidates in the state elections of 1896 in Delaware. That summer, Stephens was one of twelve able speakers who walked across the border

wearing brown uniforms that were emblazoned with a symbol of the Earth. They carried old Union Army knapsacks filled with movement literature and made public speeches, for which they were promptly arrested. Stephens was the second one nabbed, and spent a month with the “Dover Jail Single Tax Club,” where he movement lyrics to old folk songs and sent drawings of the jail to be published in *Justice*, their Philadelphia weekly paper.

Stephens was an activist of no mean achievement. He opposed the Spanish-American War in 1898, and he helped organize the Anti-Imperialist League to oppose US aggression in the Philippines (1899-1902). In 1917 he walked into the White House to hand-deliver a letter stating his refusal of any part in the war. It read, in part, “I will neither kill nor help kill,” and offered himself up for punishment, which he viewed as a service to his country. Before the war ended, Stephens was indicted, but narrowly avoided prison, for preaching against the purchase of “Liberty Bonds” and against conscription.<sup>59</sup> He was a vegetarian as well as an officer of the Anti-Vivisection Society for thirty years, and he lobbied and lectured for that cause. This movement had its beginnings in Philadelphia and some of the city’s anarchists stood in its ranks.<sup>60</sup>

The Single Tax, Frank’s major cause, was based on the teachings of Henry George (1838-1897), which held that there was a common right to land (with its resources), and that all taxation and rent should be abolished save for a single tax on

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<sup>59</sup>See essays by Harry Weinberger, Robert R. Logan, and Scott Nearing in the memorial volume of Stephens’ poetry, *Some Songs* (Arden Press, 1935), pp. 11, 73, 131.

<sup>60</sup>Caroline Earle White (1833-1916), of a prominent abolitionist family, was the founder of the SPCA and the first humane animal shelter in the US, and the mother of one and the aunt of another local anarchist (Thomas Earle White (1856-1916) and Laura H. Earle (1858-1911), respectively). Voltairine de Cleyre was a passionate anti-vivisectionist (see “Facts and Theories,” *Free Society*, March 8, 1903).

land value. His movement drew hundreds of thousands of followers, mostly in Britain and the United States, and mostly from economic classes that were better off than ordinary wage-earners. The movement's tenets were clearly distinguished from both Socialism and Anarchism, and Single Taxers lost no opportunities to point out the differences. However, Henry George's writings had an influence beyond the single tax clubs, since no other movement was more focused on the wrongs of "landlordism." He wrote several books, the best-known being *Progress and Poverty* (1879), which provided the groundwork for a worldwide movement. When Henry George ran for Mayor of New York in 1886, he rode by each polling place in an open carriage with Terrence Powderly, Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor and still the leading labor leader in the U.S., and Edward McGlynn, the renegade Vatican-trained Catholic priest who would soon be excommunicated for taking bold public stands for land reform. George surprised the nation by missing his prize by about 24,000 votes.<sup>61</sup>

At Philadelphia and then Wilmington, the Single-Tax newspaper *Justice* was published weekly from 1888-1902. Its pages outlined the philosophy as follows: "Advocating The Single Tax, real free trade, proportional representation, direct legislation, equal suffrage, governmental control of highways for all purposes: in short, the greatest freedom for each one consistent with like freedom for others. Therefore, opposed to monopoly, militarism, Imperialism, tariffs, and trusts,"<sup>62</sup> But for all their passion and hard work, a keynote speaker remarked in 1910

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<sup>61</sup>Arthur Power Dudden, *Joseph Fels and the Single Tax Movement*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press (1971), pp. 30-31, 138; Mark Taylor, "Arts and Crafts and the Single Tax: The Utopian Experiment at Arden, Delaware," *Style 1900* Summer/Fall 1997, pp. 46-51; Henry Wiencek, "Laying Out the Idyllic life in a Latter-Day Arden" *Smithsonian*, May 1992, pp. 124-142; "Hewitt Wins," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Nov. 3, 1886, p. 1; "Rev. Dr. McGlynn Dead," *Brooklyn Eagle*, Jan. 8, 1900, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup>*Justice*, Dec. 7, 1901.

that “most Philadelphians regard the George men with amused tolerance.”<sup>63</sup>

The friendly relationship between the anarchists of Philadelphia and the Single-Tax advocates of the region can be seen from as early as 1889 when *Justice* carried a long poem by de Cleyre, and this was to continue after Frank Stephens published pacifist poetry in *Mother Earth* during WWI. Throughout the 90’s there was a continuous exchange of speakers between the clubs of the two movements, and their heated debates were described in the periodicals of both. While Frank Stephens became an activist in the Single Tax movement well before 1895, the earliest debate we find posted between him and George Brown took place on December 9, 1900<sup>64</sup>

In 1892 the Philadelphia Ethical Society underwent a split when its leader, William Mackintire Salter, headed a campaign against what he considered immoral ideas being examined by the society. Anarchists and the Single Taxers withdrew, along with devotees of Walt Whitman’s writings – especially his erotic, sometimes homoerotic poetry. The two new groups that were created in response (Fellowship for Ethical Research and Whitman Fellowship) and the literary journal *The Conservator* became important public venues for Brown, Stephens, and others of their respective creeds, for many years thereafter. Along the way, anarchists of these circles would include the great ethnologist Daniel Garrison Brinton, the musician and poet Laura Earle, and Susan Patton, the local feminist and freethinker. A key Single Tax proponent involved was Joseph Fels, of the Fels-Naptha Soap Company, who later financed the purchase of the land for Arden, Delaware.<sup>65</sup> Another split occurred the same

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63The speaker was a lawyer named Haines D. Albright, quoted in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, “Arden Celebrates Founder’s Birth,” Sept. 5, 1910.

64 See the poems “Nameless” in *Justice*, Jan. 27, 1889, “A.D. 1914” in *Mother Earth*, Oct. 1914; Notice for Social Science Club, *Justice* Dec. 1, 1900.

65Dudden, *Joseph Fels and the Single Tax Movement*, 32-34; note from Susan Patton (1866-1901), *Free Society*, Dec. 3, 1900; note from Laura H. Earle, *Lu-*

year, when young anarchist women decided that Friendship Liberal League, the city's Freethought club (established c.1873) was too conservative in its choice of guest speakers. As we have noted, the new group was the Ladies Liberal League.

The quality of this friendship between the two radical cultures was demonstrated on many occasions. When anarchist meetings were disrupted or their speakers were arrested by city police, the Georgeists (as the Single-Taxers were called) would stand up for their rights, if not for their beliefs. When Charles W. Mowbray, a visiting English anarchist, was arrested for expounding his philosophy in 1894, both the Philadelphia and Germantown sections made resolutions that expressed condemnation of Mowbray's ideas, but at the same time denounced his arrest as "a dangerous invasion of the inalienable right of free speech." The jailed speaker had addressed their clubs more than once during the preceding month, and they scoffed at the statements by police that he had incited his listeners (at an anarchist club) to riot.<sup>66</sup>

Frank Stephens was the Single Taxer who stepped up to the plate for Free Speech in April 1901, within a few days of the meeting of the (anarchist) Social Science Club that was forcibly prevented by police from hearing Emma Goldman speak. He went to the office of Abraham English, the Director of Public Safety, and stated that against the Director's peremptory orders, the Single Tax Society would publicly discuss the principles of Anarchy that very evening. In response, the Director threatened Stephens with arrest. The episode gave birth to a sustained and long-term Free Speech campaign, and this first episode was successful. First the Single Taxers, with George Brown sharing the podium, discussed anarchism, and then Emma herself spoke unhindered by the authorities.

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*cifer*, Feb. 26, 1903; "Brinton Memorial Meeting," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Jan. 16, 1900;

<sup>66</sup> For the Mowbray case, see *Justice*, January 5 and 12, 1895.

The Single Taxers maintained their clear commitment to Free Speech and avoided making reactionary statements in the difficult time following the killing of President McKinley by the young anarchist Czolgosz in September 1901 at Buffalo. This was a time when the movement came under very heavy fire throughout the country. Within the month Russell Conwell, the Baptist minister and President of Philadelphia's Temple University, declared from his pulpit that "a man who does not believe in our government, is a tyrant to be destroyed by assassination, and has no right to be here... the very fact that he believes it is his duty to murder is sufficient evidence of his being a human tiger who has no right to live."<sup>67</sup> But Henry George Jr., writing the Single-Tax perspective, called for calm consideration in the Philadelphia *North American*, a daily which had changed hands a few years earlier, was now bitterly at odds with the city authorities, and had left-leaning contributors. He pointed out that there were philosophical anarchists, of which he gave "that humane man and distinguished scientist, Prince Kropotkin" as an example, and then there were revolutionary anarchists, represented by "blood-smearred Leon Czolgosz."<sup>68</sup>

The next round in the Free Speech fight – for Philadelphia, at least – came when Goldman returned in April 1904, and was again blocked from speaking. Police arrived long before her arrival to close the hall, and four men, including Frank Stevens, were arrested for breach of the peace (actually for handing out leaflets for the event and for asking why they were being arres-

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67 *Temple Review*, September 20, 1901, page 422;

68 See "All Parties find an Enemy in Czolgosz," in *North American*, Sept. 9, 1901; Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist intellectual who had renounced his title much earlier, had made a very favorable impression in the Media in his two U.S. lecture tours (Fall 1897 & Spring 1901). However, Kropotkin specifically denied the notion that Capitalism could be abolished by entirely peaceful means. For a Philadelphia reference, see his letter to Mary Fels, March 1914 (Joseph Fels Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania); see also Robert L. Bloom, *The Philadelphia North American: A History, 1839-1925*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1952.

ted). Again, but with greater support this time, a defense meeting was held (with Brown presiding), resolutions passed, and a finally a crowd of 1,400 listened to Goldman talking on the anti-climactic subject “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation.” The fall of 1909 brought another, even more intense battle for Free Speech in the city, and again Frank Stephens and the Single Taxers stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the anarchists. That round too began because Emma Goldman had returned.

Frank Stephens and Will Price, a noted architect, founded the Arden Colony in Delaware in May 1900. The 162-acre abandoned farm, just above Wilmington and 25 miles from Philadelphia, was bought from the Derrickson family for \$9,000, of which the founders put down \$2,500. An existing barn became the Guild Hall. The remainder of the purchase price was taken as a mortgage, which was later assumed by the millionaire soap manufacturer and Single-Tax leader Joseph Fels. The original population was very small, with most residents living in tents, but the number started to rise sharply in 1905. By the summer of 1909 there were 150 Ardenites, living on 115 little plots, and fifty were year-round residents. Fels made a gift of \$5,000 to the colony the same year, making the construction of many houses possible. When the feud took place in 1910-11, residents included some very brilliant personalities, such as Scott Nearing, the Quaker and leading Socialist who taught economics at the University of Pennsylvania and who would, a few years later, be fired because of his views on child labor. At Arden, Nearing espoused going barefoot as a hygienic, economic, and time-saving innovation.<sup>69</sup>

The vision they sought to make real was not limited to land and Social reform. It incorporated the Crafts Movement, which

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<sup>69</sup>See Henry Wiencek, “Laying Out the Idyllic Life in a Latter-Day Arden” *Smithsonian*, May 1992, p. 130; Scott Nearing, *The Making of a Radical: A Political Autobiography*; (New York, 1972); also “Barefoot Cult at Arden,” *Public Ledger*, Sept. 6, 1910.



was “the making, using, and enjoying of beautiful things” as an essential part of everyday life. At Arden the most ordinary object, such as a door handle or a chair, will just happen to be an impressive work of art. The establishment of the Arden Club in 1908 and the construction of the Craft Shop in 1912 were milestones in the development of this creative culture. The Arden Forge was established and managed by Frank Stephens from around 1912 until his death. These gave organizational structure and permanent facilities in which countless Ardenites and other artisans would make small wonders for generations to come.<sup>70</sup>

Upton Sinclair, at the peak of his fame as a radical novelist, lived there as well. His 1906 book *The Jungle*, about poor sanitation and labor abuses in Chicago’s meat-packing plants, created such a scandal that major federal laws were passed in its wake to ensure safe food and drugs. Sinclair had tried, in late 1907, to establish the Helicon Home Colony at Englewood NJ, but the experiment failed after four months, because of a disastrous fire. He installed himself at Arden in 1910 and lived through the first winter in tents, and then hired Frank Stephens to build him a two-story bungalow (called “the jungalow” by his affectionate neighbors). In the following Spring, living with him were his wife Meta, their son David, a secretary, and Mary Kimbrough, who would become the second Mrs. Sinclair.<sup>71</sup>

During the summer of 1911, the poet Harry Kemp (1883-1960) stayed as a guest at the Sinclair home, and he wrote a half-fictional account of it in his “autobiographical narrative” *Tramping on Life* in 1922. His reports of the dispute surrounding Brown were clearly unreliable, but there are useful pas-

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<sup>70</sup>See the essay by Frank’s son Don Stephens, *Some Songs* (1935) p. 101. Mark Taylor, “Arts and Crafts and the Single Tax...” *Style* 1900 Summer/Fall 1997, pp. 49-51

<sup>71</sup>Morris Schonbach, *Radicals and Visionaries: A History of Dissent in New Jersey*. Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964, pp. 46-49; Henry Wienczek, “Laying Out the Idyllic Life...” *Smithsonian*, May 1992, p. 133.

sages that illustrate key personalities. Kemp's real focus was his naughty frolicking in the woods and fields with Meta Sinclair. Before summer's end Upton and Meta divorced.

Another significant Ardenite, now forgotten, was Herman V. Hetzel (b. 1847), President of the Philadelphia Esperanto Society, who not only taught that utopian language at Arden, but also led choruses in singing "La Espero," the international Esperanto hymn. Hetzel, an optician, had lectured to anarchist meetings on the Single Tax in the early nineties and was treasurer of the Single Tax Club for many years. His fellows in the movement called him the "Philadelphia cyclone" for his skills on the podium.<sup>72</sup>

The Brown family settled at Arden in 1908, taking out a 99-year lease on a small plot tucked between Millers Road and Naamans Creek. George's name occurred that fall in the colony paper *Arden Club Talk*, offering his services with the single word "Cobbling."<sup>73</sup> A pair of adjoining plots, in the names of Mary Hansen Brown and George Jr., were leased in the following two years, a short walk from the first. A photograph, dated October 1911, shows Mary's tent there, along Sherwood Road. It had been standing since June, and was pitched in order for Mary to feel "relieved" – apparently needing some personal space after being with George for almost 20 years.<sup>74</sup>

George's hovel by the creek was described by several news reporters in 1911, and all emphasized its humble qualities. "You walk through Arden, past pretty bungalows nestling among the trees..." one wrote, "the guide halts before a dense

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<sup>72</sup>*North American* (Philadelphia), Sept. 4, 1911; Voltairine de Cleyre, "The Past and Future of the Ladies' Liberal League," *The Rebel* (Boston) Oct. 20 & Nov. 20, 1895. *La Espero* means "the hope;" *Esperanto* "the language of hope." Bio-sketch of Hetzel in *Justice*, April 11, 1896.

<sup>73</sup>See "Arden Industries," *Arden Club Talk*, Oct. 23, 1908.

<sup>74</sup> Records of land leases; photo and poem, "The Elf Man of Sherwood Forest," both at Arden Archives. Also letter, Voltairine de Cleyre to Mary Hansen, June 3, 1911, Labadie Collection.

thicket.” They announce themselves, George invites them in, and they proceed. “Along the narrow pathway, bordered by wild flowers, we go until there appears the plainest little bungalow imaginable, and upon the 3 by 6 foot porch sits a bald-headed, smooth-faced man, clad in undershirt, trousers and sandals. It is Brown, the awful anarchist, the hornet of Arden, who in spite of his enemies declares that he is going to live there until his lease expires, and his lease still has ninety-six years to run.”<sup>75</sup> Another visitor described Brown’s digs as “a shack built practically in its entirety of old dry goods boxes; a two-room affair with a sort of enlarged dog-kennel adjunct that stood out nearer the road – [Brown’s] workshop.”<sup>76</sup>

With the increase in the colony’s population, the rental rates were increased as well, in order to install public services like water pipes and to create a firefighting system. The only source of income for its common use was the rent assessed for the developed parcels of land. In the fall of 1908, the water problem had become acute during a drought when most of the settlement’s wells went dry.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Arden’s culture is its annual fair, which continues to this day. On Monday, September 5, 1910, the colony held the first of these celebrations, having planned it for that Saturday but put off two days because of rain. Sunday was marked by a well-attended meeting in the open-air Field Theater to celebrate the birthday of Henry George, who had died 13 years earlier. In spite of the postponement and being held on a weekday, the fair, entitled the “Pageant Day,” was a grand success. The program called for all of the Ardenites to dress in picturesque costumes from the history and fables of “Merrie England,” then walk in an im-

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75 “Anarchist Offers Jobs At Stone Pile To Arden Colonists.” *North American*, July 31, 1911, page 1.

76 Harry Kemp, *Tramping on Life: An Autobiographical Narrative* Garden City, NY, 1922, p. 357. Kemp gave fictitious surnames for many people he remembers, including “Jones” in place of Brown.

pressive procession through the colony for spectators to appreciate. Many of the outfits were used in the evening performance of scenes from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, depicting roles like the Page and Oberon. There were falconers, squires, lords and ladies, foresters, varlets, troubadours and cooks. Will Price was a knight on horseback. Frank Stephens' costume was variously called "Lord of the Manor" and "The Little Father of Arden;" Upton Sinclair's was "The Man of Letters." Mary Hansen Brown dressed as "Poetry," and one of her neighbors as "The Arts." One news account remarked that the costumes were "exceedingly picturesque and artistic, but much was to be desired in the fitting."<sup>77</sup>

Two unexpected actors, one of whom drew more than his share of attention, were Arden's cobbler-anarchist, and in one report, someone named "assistant beggar Smith." Behind the long train of happy revelers, Brown came whining miserably in his authentic English accent: the unshaven, barefoot paupers wore burlap sacks, waved wooden bowls, and Brown used a long stick to walk with in a bent posture. "At the end of the procession," wrote one reporter, "as history tells that all famous processions were followed, came the beggar asking alms, this time portrayed by George Brown... His was one of the best characters in the line." Another wrote that "one of the best and most realistic figures in the entire pageant was George Brown, who has the reputation for being a 'red' anarchist, but bore wonderfully well the whining character of a roadside mendicant." Wilmington's daily, the *Evening Journal*, reported that Brown "easily took first honors in costume and acting," and that "the women fled from him in horror, and the men gave him car-tickets, but one little girl... gravely handed him a bunch of goldenrod." A photograph of him in this role accompanied his obituary in a Philadelphia daily less than four years later.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>*North American, Public Ledger, and Inquirer*, Sept. 5 & 6, 1910.

This defection from the prepared script of the influential Ardenites marked the beginning of the great feud. The trustees had wanted to portray only the beauties of old times, and they reacted with clear displeasure when Brown brought the spectators' attention to the unpleasant subject of poverty.<sup>79</sup>

While the beggar is the only acting role that we can now attribute to him, Don Stephens recalled that George Brown, although "quite an able actor," was told "we just can't have you" by Frank because he kept appearing drunk for rehearsals before the feud began.<sup>80</sup> This explains why George would make the surprise performance, and it is a critical piece of our shoemaker's puzzle. Throughout the reports of Brown's activities in the second half of his life, there are consistent mentions of drinking. Alexis Ferm, of uncertain acquaintance, wrote that Brown "did not believe in remaining sober long." On the other hand Joseph J. Cohen, a close friend of Brown, wrote that he "never saw him drunk." Apparently the alcoholic scenes at Arden's theater stayed in Brown's reputation, and that Ferm and Cohen, both writing about the question over thirty years later, were referring to what Don Stephens actually witnessed.<sup>81</sup>

Later in the fall of 1910, other differences would emerge in regards to what George and his supporters said was the *clique* of powerful men who controlled all the public affairs of Arden, with Frank Stephens as the despot. It all came out in the Phil-

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78"Ardenites in Feudal Pageant," *Evening Journal*, Sept. 6, 1911, p. 5; "Unique Pageant by Arden Colonists," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 6, 1910; "Arden's Single Tax Colony Holds Beautiful Pageant," *North American*, Sept. 6, 1910; "Cobbler Anarchist Killed by Splinter," *Public Ledger*, Feb. 16, 1915. 79"Arden's Anarchist Quits Jail Pleased With His Experience," *North American*, July 30, 1911.

80"Early Arden" (Interview with Don Stephens by Robert Foote, Nov. 7, 1966), Arden Archive.

81Joseph J. Cohen, *The Jewish Anarchist Movement in the United States* (in Yiddish; Philadelphia 1945), unpublished Translation by Esther Dolgoff; Letter, Alexis Ferm to Gladys Hourwich, March 31, 1952, Modern School Collection, Rutgers University.

adelphia newspapers the following summer, when the resident “cobbler anarchist” was breaking rocks in the workhouse.

“What started the trouble? Well, I don’t know...” recalled ‘Uppy’ Sinclair to the *North American*, “except what I have heard. Scott Nearing, who presided, had talked on ‘race suicide,’ and I believe that George was –er, a little –um, well, rather plain spoken. His views were not exactly wrong, but he expressed them rather roughly, and some of the women, I believe, were offended.

“That was the beginning of the trouble...” he continued, “George has just been insisting upon making speeches all the time since, and the club objected, and ruled that he should not speak. He hadn’t paid his dues for a year anyway, so I believe that he was dropped from the rolls. Oh, yes, I think he can go back by paying up, unless the club passes a rule to bar him out.”

“Wouldn’t that upset the whole scheme of Arden?” the reporter wondered.

“Yes,” Sinclair replied, “it probably would, and that’s the danger. I hope this little thing will be smoothed out, but I don’t want to hear George Brown talk every time I go to the club. I go there for pleasure. I am here because it is quiet and pleasant and I can write without annoyance.” Finally, the novelist repeated that he had not been present to hear any of Brown’s supposedly objectionable language.<sup>82</sup>

But only two days before Sinclair gave this second-hand account of the disrupted meetings, the *Record* stated that “while those who brought the charges against Brown claim that he has used language at the meetings which was not proper in the presence of women, a number who were seen today said they had attended practically all the public meetings and never heard Mr. Brown say anything that was improper.”

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82“Anarchist Offers Jobs...” *North American* July 31, 1911.

The same reporter brought out a lifestyle issue that had long stood between Free Love advocates (such as George and Mary) and other Ardenites. “Several members state that, while they do not approve of Mr. Brown’s home life and his ideas on that subject, his public life, as far as they knew, was perfectly clean. Mr. Brown does not believe in marriage and does not hesitate to say so.”<sup>83</sup>

The lifestyle question might be dismissed as an aside, were it not for Frank Stephens’ track record for prudery – that is, at least, relative to the typical radical of his day. Voltairine de Cleyre, Brown’s anarchist comrade, sheds light on this in a letter written the same week: “...Brown did what he meant to do, showed up Arden as a little petty tyrannous association of faddists. I have never had any use for Arden, as a place to live in, since George [Frank] Stephens asked Mary to ask me *not to pay them a simple house visit* a few years ago, for fear that the surrounding inhabitants *would burn the town*, because they said (some of the good women of Arden) that I was ‘a public whore.’” Voltairine had ignored Stephens’ fears and paid him a visit anyway. She stayed on good terms afterward, considering him “a good fellow for all,” but she never forgot the incident.<sup>84</sup>

In one interview, George Brown described the hard-boiled political tactics used by Stephens: “Why, at the last town meeting,” he told the *North American*, “when the rents for this year were to be fixed, he was so frightened of the opposition that though it was nearly midnight, he had all the women routed out of bed to hurry down and vote. Do women vote in Arden? Certainly. Everybody votes here – men, women, and children. I even voted an 8-month old baby. It was Andrews’ baby, and when I demanded that its vote be recorded, the chairman asked

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<sup>83</sup>“Red’ May Disrupt Socialist Utopia” *Record*, July 29, 1911.

<sup>84</sup>De Cleyre to Joseph J. Cohen, August 7, 1911; Joseph J. Cohen papers, Bund Archive, YIVO, New York City.

if it could talk. I gave it a poke in the ribs and it grunted. So I said it voted 'aye,' and the vote was recorded.<sup>85</sup>

George went further to describe the Arden Club, which had been meeting in the "Red House" on the commons, at the center of the colony, since the club's founding in July 1908. "It's the club that Stephens is using to control Arden. The club is incorporated. It controls the social life of the village. Now it is split into guilds. There's the dramatic guild, the playgrounds guild, the baseball guild, etc. Stephens has a follower of his own as the master of each of them. Stephens will rule or ruin. If he finds anyone against him, he pushes them down and out..."<sup>86</sup>

Another move by the anarchist that offended the founders was a poem he wrote in late 1910 called "In Arden Town," which they took as "a slap." This is one of two poems from the feud of which we have not located a copy. The other was "Ten Little Ardenites," written by a reporter and recalled by Don Stephens<sup>87</sup>

Things came to a head on the evening of July 20, as the veteran Single Taxer William L. Ross gave a lecture on that very subject at the Economic Club's regular meeting. Brown, though barred from the club, was so persistent in asking questions of the speaker that he was "jeered and subjected to catcalls," and the meeting was adjourned. The club members then went into Wilmington and swore out a warrant for Brown's arrest at the office of James W. Robertson, the Justice of the Peace. He in

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85The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, giving women the right to vote, was not passed till nine years after these events (1920).

86"Anarchist Offers Jobs..." *North American*, July 31, 1911, page 8. Musicians, gardeners', church, housewives,' folk, scholars', athletes' were other names given for the guilds in unidentified [Wilmington] news clipping, "Delaware's Arden as Picturesque as Shakespeare's," in Delaware Historical Society

87"Brown Gone, Leaving Jail..." *Evening Journal*, July 29, 1911 p.1; "Early Arden" (Interview with Don Stephens by Robert Foote, Nov. 7, 1966), Arden Archives.



turn assigned the warrant to Charles Green, the Constable. Green's job was to serve someone with the warrant and then either to escort them to the Justice for a hearing or tell them when they should appear. It was at Brown's hearing on the evening of July 25 that the affair began drawing the attention of journalists.

"Pretty nearly all the male residents" of Arden were present, according to news reports. The charge was "disorderly conduct," and Brown pleaded Not Guilty and served as his own counsel, with Worthington speaking against him. One unnamed witness stated that Brown had, at some earlier meetings, "said things in the presence of women that reflected on the American home." Ardenite Edward Moore said that on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Brown had "threatened" Frank Stephens by calling him a coward. Charles Shandrew testified that the anarchist had once referred to a "well-known woman of the colony" as "an irreproachable woman," but in a tone that gave the reverse of the literal meaning, similar to the Shakespeare line, "Yet Brutus is an honorable man." Brown responded, "well you can't convict me on what I meant." Fred Steinlein testified that Brown had insulted Stephens and had called others "puppets and tools." Louis Kramer and Emmanuel Gerstine spoke in Brown's defense. They both said that at the Economics Club meeting, Brown had been calm and collected, and his accusers had started the trouble.

Although George presented a spirited defense, still he lost, and the Justice pronounced him guilty. The fine of \$2 was laid to the defendant, but the accusers had covered the costs, for a total of \$6.20. Brown said "I have no money," and refused to let his friends pay, because "his belief in the principle of Free Speech" prevented it. The Magistrate gave him the alternative, which was to serve five days in the county workhouse at Greenbank. The Philadelphia papers mistakenly gave the sentence as 10 days. After the hearing, Kramer remarked that "this

is the very thing, free Speech, for which the Single Taxers went to Dover Jail,” and that now they were “sending Brown to jail for the same thing.” On the way home, the friends of the convicted man were already talking about schemes of revenge, including to invoke the Blue Laws.<sup>88</sup>

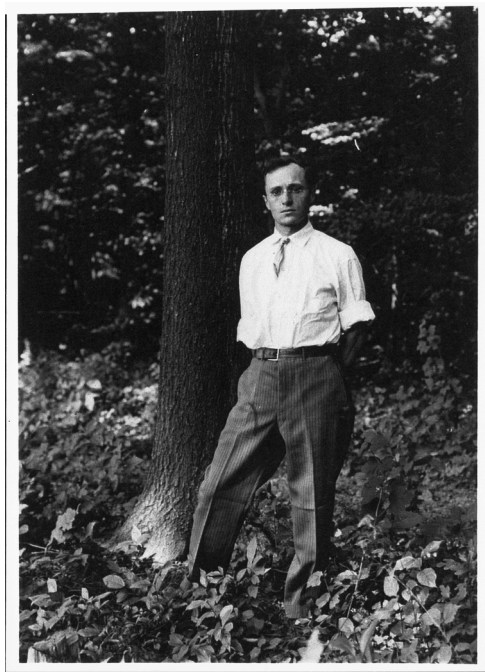
Frank Stephens was not in Arden at the time. He was occupied in the founding of a new colony in Westbrook, Maine, but was kept abreast of all the fuss by his friends. National publicity about embarrassing internal quarrels at Arden could not have been welcome to Frank Stephens when the news reached him there. Arden was, in fact, being used as the model for the Westbrook colony, and its main financier, a millionaire paper manufacturer named Fiske Warren, had been converted to the Single Tax idea starting from a visit to Arden. Frank Stephens and Will Price, already trustees of Arden, were becoming trustees of Westbrook, along with their convert Mr. Warren. The new colony of 120 scenic acres on the banks of the Presumpscot River were not only to be based on the economic management system of Arden, but it was actively promoted as a new settlement where the idyllic tranquility of Arden’s social life would be replicated. A long article in the *Portland Sunday Press* in March had devoted two thirds of its space to the peaceful and picturesque life of the Delaware model, along with a photograph of a few dozen children swinging from tree branches and sitting on a huge fallen trunk. When the March article appeared, the land had already been bought, surveyors were dividing up plots, and lease documents were being prepared. It can be presumed that by the time George Brown’s name and unfavorable opinions of Arden began appearing in papers all over the country in late July, Westbrook’s trustees

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88“Brown Gone, Leaving Jail...,” *Evening Journal*, July 29, 1911 p.1; “10 Days in Workhouse for Anarchist Brown,” *North American*, July 26, 1911; unidentified [Wilmington] news clipping, “Arden Finds Brief Period of Peace,” Delaware Historical Society, Wilmington.

must have been already recruiting and settling families, building infrastructure, and the like.<sup>89</sup>

Emmanuel Gerstine at Arden, undated photo, Arden archives  
The conflict continued to escalate during George's stint on the rock pile. "His partisans became more active than ever," the *Record* stated. They came near turning the July 28 meeting of the Economic Club "a repeat of the Brown Affair." Ross, the same speaker, spoke on the same subject, and again an Arden anarchist, this time Emmanuel Gerstine, brought up the unfairness of Brown's imprisonment when the question period began. Some audience members started to leave as he repeated himself and



scoffed at threats of arrest. The original meeting was adjourned and a "public" meeting was immediately called to order. Gerstine reviewed Brown's case and denounced the colony's "dictators," declaring that he would fight for the right of free speech even if he were driven out as a result. George Brown, Jr., eighteen at the time, also spoke in his father's defense. Don Stephens, Frank's son, blamed the arrest on the elder Brown's style of speech rather than what he had said, and Ross reminded the audience that Single Taxers had defended Emma Goldman's during her Free Speech fights in Philadelphia.

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<sup>89</sup>"Ideal Colony," *Portland Sunday Press* (Portland, Maine), March 12, 1911; clipping at Delaware Historical Society.

Emmanuel Gerstine was a 31-year old Jewish anarchist whose family had moved from Hazelton, Pennsylvania to Philadelphia around the turn of the century. He and his siblings (all younger), Mollie, Bessie, and Benjamin were anarchists, and the family counted Voltairine de Cleyre among its intimate friends. In 1908, he was living with his Russian-born wife Laura, their 3-year old son Carl, and his mother. “Mannie,” as he was sometimes called, was a storekeeper in Philadelphia. His son Milton, who still lives in Arden, recalled his dad saying that he’d walk with George Brown through the woods to the Philadelphia Pike, where they would stop in at a pub. A photograph of Leon Czolgosz, the young anarchist who killed President McKinley in 1901, was displayed in the Gerstine home along with those of relatives, but Milton was always told, “that’s your Uncle, Frank Dudeen, who died before you were born.” At age 79, Milton was quite surprised to learn the real story behind the old photograph.<sup>90</sup>

On George’s second day on the stone pile, an editorial in the *Wilmington Evening Journal* mocked the colony, both for hypocrisy on the Free Speech issue and saying that their “motley array of single taxers, socialists, and a few anarchists” could never live peacefully with one another. The piece ended with the unflattering question, “what would the world be if such reformers were in control?”<sup>91</sup>

Prior to George’s return from the workhouse, it emerged that Montgomery Beane, a builder who lived in Arden with his wife Elsie, told a reporter that George would be given a reception

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<sup>90</sup>In 1911 Emmanuel may have been at the colony only for the warmer months, or else just recently arrived, since the 1910 census has the couple at Philadelphia, living with Laura’s sister Hannah and her husband Jacob L. Joffe, the anarchist drug store owner.

Interview by the author with Milton Gerstine (with Mark Taylor, see note 1) at Arden, July 21, 1999; Letter, Voltairine de Cleyre to Mary Hansen, June 3, 1911 (Ishill Collection, Harvard University)

<sup>91</sup>“The Arden Matter,” *Evening Journal*, July 27, 1911 p.4

when he arrived. He also told of the trouble he was having with the trustees of Arden. Three weeks earlier, the Beanes had been notified that after five years in the colony they were being evicted from one of the lots they had leased. While inclined to fight the case in court, Beane said the he and others in Arden were “ready and anxious to sell and get out.” The grounds were that they had been late with the rental payments, and they were to vacate within 60 days. Another item fueled the idea of using the Blue Laws. “It is understood that the farmers of that section complain of the games,” stated one report, “claiming that they attract their boys from Sunday school and church.”<sup>92</sup>

The trustees of the colony were Frank Stephens, Will Price, and Charles P. Shandrew, who was appointed by Price and Stephens when the third original trustee, Fred Martin, had left the colony. The three original officers were approved by a court, but Shandrew was not, and according to Monty Beane, this brought the validity of the eviction into question. He also pointed out that a partial payment had been accepted. This dispute would develop further, as we shall see.

George emerged on Saturday morning, July 29<sup>th</sup>, after three and a half days in the workhouse. He stopped to buy clothing in Wilmington and began the next round. “The sentence was too short,” he quipped to one reporter, “as I would like to have heard the Sunday services.” Wearing sandals and lavender socks, he promised two things: a poem entitled “The Feeding of the Monster,” about the stone-crushing machine at the workhouse quarry, and that he would insist upon speaking again at the Arden Economic Club. The poem has not survived, if indeed it was written. To *The Evening Journal*, he was full of jokes, describing the fun he’d been having behind bars. “I was the only bald-headed man in the outfit composed of over 300

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92 “No Peace Yet for Ardenites,” *Evening Journal*, July 27, 1911 p. 1; “‘Red’ May Disrupt Utopia,” *Philadelphia Record*, July 29, 1911 (Bulletin Clipping File, Temple U.)

men in the prison,” he said. He went on to describe his bath upon entering the jail: “They put me under a shower bath and turned on the lukewarm water, and then it became hotter and hotter. Then I had a good scrubbing. Then the cold water was turned on and I tell you, it felt good on my bald head.” He took it further by asking for a comb, to which a “Negro in an adjoining cell” replied, “man, you don’t need a comb. You should ask the warden for some fly paper.” George also said that he had been kept aware of developments in Arden through the prison grapevine.<sup>93</sup>

It was on Sunday July 30<sup>th</sup> that the “Cobbler Anarchist” made an announcement that drew national attention. Busy all day receiving friends, it was reported that all of the colony’s eighty socialists, in addition to its anarchists, were soundly in Brown’s corner. We know of only two clearly anarchist families (the Browns and the Gerstines), so this brings us to perhaps ninety people in the faction. If the numbers are correct, it accounted for about half the colony. On the other side were all the Single Taxers. This was not the impression given to the poet Harry Kemp, who was staying at Sinclair’s place in the Summer of 1911. Kemp recalled “the community was divided into two parties: the more conservative, rooted element whom success was making more and more conservative, – and the genuinely radical crowd. The anarchist, [Brown], led the latter group, a very small one.”<sup>94</sup> While the news reporters’ collective estimates seem more reliable, Stephens’ camp was obviously the better organized of the two.

“Do you know who is the sorest man in this whole business?” Brown quipped to a reporter, “The Constable who arrested me. You see, when a fine is paid he gets a commission. I re-

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93“Brown Gone, Leaving Jail...” and “Brown Gets Warrant for Eleven Ardenites,” *Evening Journal*, July 29 & 31, both p. 1; “Arden’s Anarchist Quits Jail Pleased with his Experience,” July 30, 1911.

94Harry Kemp, *Tramping on Life*, Garden City, NY, 1922, p. 357.

fused to pay my fine, and he had to take me to New Castle. He was mad clear through... I was sorry for him, and promised that I would make it right by letting him serve all my warrants tomorrow, and I guess they'll pay their fines –though I'd like to see them tackle that stone pile... Yes, I am going to have them all arrested. I'll give them a dose of their own medicine. I don't approve of law, and it should have no place in Arden. They have invoked it, so just to prove how foolish it is, I will do the same.

“That is true anarchy, too,” he continued, “As a true anarchist, I have the right to demonstrate my principles as I like, and I choose the law I oppose to do it now. I have the names of all the baseball and tennis players who have been fracturing these wonderful blue laws today, and the man who sells ice cream, and the one who sells groceries and the rest of the lawbreakers, and the whole list goes to Wilmington tomorrow unless they restore to me my right to free speech by 10 o'clock. And I've got 'Uppy' Sinclair among them. He played tennis today.

“I'll show the people of Arden how the law hurts. They won't like it when they are arrested and fined for doing such wholly innocent things... I believe in having everything open and free on Sunday in Arden, and speech must be free. If I can't have free speech, then everything else must be shut off, too.”

Mary Hansen Brown disagreed with her bald headed partner, and did not favor the arrests. “Victory is best achieved,” she told the *Evening Journal*, “if personal feelings be left out of the combat.” It was her only known remark about the feud.

The reporter went from Brown's shack to Sinclair's bungalow and told him what the anarchist had said. “What –really?” the novelist asked, “I did not know. You see I've been reading poetry all day. We've found a new poet, you know. And then I played tennis, and I am to be arrested for that? –*the idea!*”<sup>95</sup>

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95*North American*, July 31, 1911.

By now the colony was crawling with reporters, and the Monday evening papers of Philadelphia raised the ante another notch. George shared with the *Evening Bulletin* and the *Evening Times* a letter he had just received from his famous comrade, Emma Goldman. She was encouraging him to write an article on Arden's affairs for *Mother Earth*, the monthly paper she co-edited with Alexander Berkman in New York. This gave George the public blessing straight from his movement's best-known leader, known in the mainstream Press as "the high priestess of Anarchy."

"My Dear George Brown," Goldman wrote, "I meant to write you ever since we got your letter, but I have been busy every minute since my return from the West. The article in the New York papers of your arrest made me so hot, I could not postpone my letter any longer. And so that is what Single Taxers have come to? Frank Stephens, the modern Lloyd Garrison, the non-resistant Tolstoyan – what a farce!"

She was referring to the great abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and the Christian-anarchist idea "non-resistance" that he preached before the Civil War (without calling it anarchism). To be a *non-resistant* was to take the Christian admonition to "turn the other cheek" to the conclusion that any form of domination between mortals was a rebellion against the government of God. When the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy became anarchist in his later life, he adopted this idea and developed it further.<sup>96</sup>

"When you suggested an article about Arden," Emma continued in the note, "I thought I would rather not begin with it. But I will now. Send it along as soon as you can, my boy. I am glad I can be instrumental in showing up this reformer. I could hug you for not paying the fine. Will have to make it up when I

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<sup>96</sup>Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Anti-slavery Thought*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973; chapter 3, pp. 55-91. This Lloyd Garrison should not be confused with his son of the same name, who was lecturing on social questions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.



see you again. Fraternally, Emma Goldman. – P.S. Love to Mary.”<sup>97</sup>

Emma let her views be known to Brown’s main opponent as well. In a letter dated July 27, she closes as follows: “PS Think of the contemptibleness of Frank Stephens and the Single Tax. SOB, to send Brown to jail. A reformer is always rotten. I wrote Stephens and gave him Hell.”<sup>98</sup>

And in the *Evening Telegraph*, Brown brought up the actors’ feud once again, in advance of the second annual pageant, set for the following month: “I will represent the Sheriff of Nottingham, and will have a posse. We will march on the field and arrest Robin Hood, who will most likely be Will Price, a noted Philadelphia architect.” The report noted that this was especially interesting since “Price is a large man.”<sup>99</sup>

For the next three days, newspapers across the United States carried reports of Brown’s swearing of the warrants at Wilmington and the “big show” back at Robertson’s office on Tuesday evening, the first of August. The affair would be covered continuously in Philadelphia’s papers until August sixth.

George threw in another juicy tidbit for readers of the *Evening Times*: he let it be known that “before he is through he will swear out a warrant for the arrest of his own son.” George Jr. had been selling newspapers that day, and he would not “make flesh out of one and fish out of the other.” He didn’t follow through on this, however.

Eleven warrants were issued, of which ten were actually served. Upton Sinclair was at the village water pump with his son when the constable charged him with playing tennis. When the warrant was read to him, he remarked that tennis “was not a

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<sup>97</sup>Goldman’s letter was included in front-page reports of the *Evening Journal*, *Evening Bulletin*, and *Evening Times* on July 31, 1911.

<sup>98</sup>Emma Goldman to Ben Reitman, July 27, 1911 (Reitman Papers, Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago)

<sup>99</sup>See *Evening Bulletin*, “Warrants are Out for Arden Leaders,” and *Evening Times*, “Brown Asks Arrest of Eleven Arden Men,” both page 1, July 31, 1911.

worldly game, but a heavenly one.” Frederick J. Steinlein was charged with selling ice cream. Frank Leitch escaped the whole mess, as he was away when the constable arrived. The other nine were charged with having played baseball. They were Don Stephens, Frank’s 24-year old son, who was intensely involved in the community’s affairs; Frederick Windle, a Philadelphia Lawyer; Professor Joseph H. Garrod, of Northeast Manual Training School, also in Philadelphia; the builder Chester Lightbown; Berkley Toby, and the brothers Harold M. and Hamilton D. Ware. Some of these were building a dam in the woods when Green arrived, accompanied by a few reporters and a troop of amused Arden children. One groaned as he heard the charge, “For the love of Mike, Brown must be crazy. . . . [He] ought to be boiled in oil for calling that a baseball game. It is an insult to the national pastime. Why, Chester Lightbown had three errors.” Thomas C. Ross, a lawyer, showed Green the courtesy of escorting him around, and suggested that because the charges were due to malice, they might be thrown out. The publicity was so widespread and entertaining that Brown was recommended as “an expert press agent of more than ordinary ability” by Wilmington’s *Evening Journal*.

That evening, Brown and Mrs. Sinclair happened to both disembark from the same train from Philadelphia, where the famous author was waiting.

“Hey Uppie, did you get arrested?” he shouted.

“Yes, thank you,” Sinclair replied, “Pleased, I’m sure.”

“Oh, don’t mention it,” Brown said.<sup>100</sup>

Another person who Brown had arrested was Alexander Dubin, 19-year old son of Dr. Simon M. Dubin of Philadelphia. The elder Dubin was Brown’s own comrade who, in 1899, had established the Mt. Sinai Dispensary with four other anarchist physicians to treat the poor Jewish immigrants of the Jewish

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100“Ardenites Here Tonight,” and “At Arden,” *Evening Journal*, Aug. 1, 1911 pp. 1 & 4.

Quarter.<sup>101</sup> Alexander was one year older than the younger George Brown, and it seems very likely that the two were friends. The elder Brown checked with Dubin before including him in the warrants.

Delaware's Blue Law stated that on Sunday, no one was permitted to drive goods for sale over the roads, nor expose goods for sale, nor hunt, nor conduct cock fighting, nor race horses. It went further to state that no one may go fowling, nor fish, nor "assemble to game, play, or dance on the Sabbath day." The law was passed 120 years earlier, in 1791.

In the late afternoon of Monday July 31, Constable Green returned to Arden with his warrants. He served them on the ten offenders he could find, releasing them on their own recognizance till a hearing the following night at the magistrate's office. As Green crisscrossed through Arden, the local boys made a joke of it, forming behind him and giving "an exhibition of the convict lockstep," according to the *Evening Times* reporter who seems to have been tagging along as well.

The very same reporter provided the readers of the *North American* with a selection of Brown's verse, in context of his teaching activities during the cooler months at the Philadelphia Modern School. The name was taken from the network of elementary schools *La Escuela Moderna*, founded by the Spanish anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer y Guardia (1859-1909). Ferrer's belief was in rational education, conducted independently of any governmental or religious agency, – which during Ferrer's life meant the Catholic Church. In The Modern Schools, there was to be freedom from the authority of the teacher as well. The function of the teacher was to encourage self-learning; to help them learn *how to think*, rather than what to think or believe. In 1909 Ferrer was accused of organizing

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<sup>101</sup>US Federal Population Census, 1900 for 327 Pine Street, Philadelphia (entry made July 1); "Facts and Theories," *Free Society*, March 8, 1903; *The Record*, March 6, 1905; Robert Helms, "Anarchists in Medicine and Pharmacy: Philadelphia 1889-1930," *Clamor Magazine*, Dec. 2000/Jan. 2001.

an uprising against the Spanish Government, and after what the overwhelming majority of observers, most importantly William Archer, found to be a mock trial, which made the court an international laughing-stock, he was executed on October 13, 1909 by firing squad in Barcelona. A world-wide movement for libertarian education quickly spread throughout the world. George Brown taught at the Philadelphia Ferrer School (which met only on Sundays), at 424 Pine Street from its founding in 1910 through some time prior to February 1914. The following was presented as “Anarchist Brown’s creed,” and was an example of his pedagogy at the school on Pine Street.

I believe that all men are of one blood.

I believe in the brotherhood of man and the solidarity of the race.

I believe that all should have enough of food, clothing, and shelter.

I believe that all are entitled to these things,

not because they are tall or short or fair or gentle or simple,  
but just because they are human.

I believe that it is my duty to do my share of useful work cheerfully,

lest others should have to do more than their share sadly.

I believe that useful work makes for health and happiness,  
and is one of the means by which we live.

I believe that play is just as much a right and duty as work,  
and that some day work and play will be one.

I believe that love is the best and highest thing in the world.

The love of men and women for each other, and for their children;

the love of children for each other and for their parents;  
and the dear love of comrades and friends.

I believe that sympathy is next to love and that to share the joys  
and sorrows of others is a great and beautiful thing.

I believe that where I cannot love, and do not feel sympathy,  
then it is my duty to myself to be just and kind.  
I believe that smiles are good and tears are good,  
but it is best when tears are dried in sunny smiles.  
And I pledge myself to do each day some kindly deed, that  
these things may be.”<sup>102</sup>

The *North American* of Wednesday, August 2 gave a precise narration of the hearing at Wilmington, which convened at eight the previous evening and brought the affair to its climax. “All of Arden turned out to escort the ten ‘criminals’ to Harvey Station, and see them off to Wilmington,” the page-one report stated alongside photographs of the colony and its best-known residents, “and more than fifty accompanied them.” Magistrate Robertson’s small office was “packed to suffocation,” the paper continued, and about 200, including many reporters and local residents, stood outside as the proceedings were underway. The magistrate read off the eleven names, and all but Frank Leitch responded. The absent one was said to have “had another engagement, and sent regrets,” but here are no further details of how his case was disposed. “You are charged with violating the Sabbath day by playing a game, all except Steinlein, who is accused of violating the laws of Delaware by selling ice cream on Sunday. Are you guilty or not guilty?”

“I speak for all of us,” said Upton Sinclair. “We admit that we played baseball and tennis, and that one of us disposed of ice cream on Sunday, but we deny that what we did conflicted with the law.” He explained that, according to the advice of three lawyers, the word *games* used in the ancient law actually referred to *gambling*, which they had not done. Robertson cut him short, saying that the law was plain. “As you refuse to

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<sup>102</sup>“Anarchist Offers Jobs...” *North American*, July 31, 1911, page 1; William Archer, *The Life, Trial, and Martyrdom of Francisco Ferrer*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1911; Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States*, Princeton University Press, 1980.

plead, I will enter a plea of 'not guilty' for you then. George Brown, take the stand."

George did not answer, and after a quick search found him on the outskirts of the crowd outside, he entered wearing sandals and lavender socks. As the hearing continued, he acted as though he were a lawyer, asking questions of witnesses, while Sinclair and Fred Windle spoke likewise, in defense of themselves and the other accused men.

"Last Sunday," Brown began, "I took a stroll about Arden. I passed the common and heard a great deal of noise, for there was a baseball game in progress, and I took a list of the players." As his opponents questioned him, there were roars of laughter from the crowd as George was caught on a few embarrassing points: that he had not charged the umpires or the visiting team because he "didn't want to appear spiteful;" that he'd offered immunity to Dubin, but the young fellow had looked forward to being arrested; and that he'd left his own son (who was selling newspapers) off the list, but would "punish him severely if he ever did such an awful thing again.

"They played very badly," George told the crowded court, "but they played." He was asked to describe what he saw particular men doing on the common, and he said they were "playing bum ball," all driving at the ball with bats but not hitting, although he, being an Englishman, didn't know the rules of the game.

George was asked to explain his motive for bringing the charges. "At the present time," he said solemnly, "there is a serious infraction of the laws of the state. I want the Sabbath day to be one of peace: it is a day when the workman needs his rest, and he should have peace and quiet. This boisterousness annoys me, and the slang used on the ball fields shocks me. Such horrible expressions as '*slide, you dub, slide!*' are most offensive to me.

“Two weeks ago I was brought into this court for exercising my right of free speech, and for five days I was compelled to work on a stone pile in the county workhouse. While there I had an opportunity to think: I came to see a great light; that the law is supreme and must be obeyed; and I saw that it would be a good and chastening thing for you boys to try the stone pile too.”

By offering these remarks, in a serious tone and in a court of law, the cobbler-anarchist had turned the affair into a comic theatrical performance. This was the same George Brown who for over twenty years had forcefully declared, from podium and soapbox, that he did not believe in religion or law. This was the well-known public spokesman of Philadelphia’s anarchists. But for any well-traveled, 53-year old factory worker and labor activist to claim he was shocked by ball field language may have been hard to do with a straight face. George was the only person in the courtroom who was stepping into a role and saying things that he did not actually believe. His opponents had resorted to law, believing it would raise the ante beyond what Brown would be willing to pay, and he had raised the stakes again. Brown was smiling calmly at the hearing and his opponents were sneering and scowling back, according to the news accounts. The colony was under the very close scrutiny of an amused public as the result of the situation. Everyone in the region, and plenty more around the country were laughing and poking fun. Arden residents recalled the affair for the rest of their lives and passed it into their family folklore, usually with a crisp resentment toward George Brown.

Elena “Lady” Darling, known for making finely-crafted leaded windows, was called as a witness by Brown, as was the trustee Charles F. Shandrew, but they merely confirmed that the games took place regularly, and yet they had never heard any offensive expressions on the ball fields, nor any complaint about the playing.

Finally Magistrate Robertson gave his ruling: “You have all admitted having played the games and having sold the ice cream. A trip to the workhouse will do you good. This state is too small to admit of quibbling and you are all guilty.”

Sinclair said, on behalf of the whole group, that they respectfully declined to pay their fines. The sentence was given as twenty-four hours in the workhouse, but after a few moments of negotiating, Robertson cut it to eighteen hours and the hearing ended just before 9 o’clock. Constable Green then escorted the convicts to the trolley, putting them “on their honor” not to jump off the car during the five-mile ride to the jail.

“No fear,” said Uppie Sinclair, “we will even pay our own car fares.” – and they did.<sup>103</sup> Before getting on the car, however, the merry crew treated the constable to a plate at Kyle’s Ice Cream Parlor, 6<sup>th</sup> & Orange Streets. Getting to the trolley involved being ushered through a crowd of hundreds by a policeman, and after getting on, they sang “Farewell My Arden.”<sup>104</sup>

But before getting on the trolley, Sinclair told reporters something very much like what Brown had been saying all week: “I will now proceed to organize an anti-blue law association, and will fight these fool laws until they are repealed. This association will procure funds for the crusade and hire detectives, and every man, woman, and child who violates these laws in the future will be prosecuted. I will, if necessary, arrest the judges and lawyers and public officials who play golf on Sunday, as has been their custom... I am in this fight to the finish, if I send half the state to jail.”<sup>105</sup>

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103The scene at the magistrate’s office is taken from “R-R-Revenge! Brown Sends Arden Foes to the Stone Pile,” in *North American*, Aug. 2, 1911, p. 1, unless otherwise noted.

104“Sinclair Finds Fresh Jungle at Prison Quarry,” *Evening Journal*, Aug. 2, 1911 p. 1; “Early Arden” (Interview with Don Stephens by Robert Foote, Nov. 7, 1966), Arden Archives.

105Sinclair’s announcement and scenes at the workhouse are taken from “Ardenites Worked That Stone Pile,” *Evening Bulletin*, August 2, 1911, p. 1.



The irony was not lost on the United Press Wire, appearing in the *Camden Post-Telegram*, some thirty miles to the North. “Considered a joke by all the participants, the matter became serious when it was remembered that an avowed Anarchist, who under oath testified that he believed in the law, secured a judicial opinion that the Delaware blue laws are legal. The result is likely to be that the laws will be enforced in every section of the state from now on, and all that will be left for the native to do will be to go to church or for a walk. Street railway systems in the cities, the steam railways throughout the state, the telephone and telegraphic instruments, in fact every kind of industry is illegal and can be stopped wherever the laws are enforced.”<sup>106</sup>

“Blue laws,” retaining religious monopoly for Sabbath days, had been a bone of contention between working people and powerful Protestant employers since the early nineteenth century, but these quarrels intensified in Philadelphia starting in the 1870’s. The laws were enforced only against small business owners and wage-earners, with the clear purpose of abolishing the time and space in which labor organizations could flourish. Far from being motivated by religious beliefs, the “Sabbatarian” societies rarely criticized employers who demanded Sunday labor of their workers. Some of the city’s most strident anti-union figures, such as John Wanamaker, were also leading Sabbatarians.<sup>107</sup> In one dispute of this nature, anarchists and other atheists within the Jewish community organized public, all-night dancing and drinking parties on Yom Kippur in order to give working people something to do besides praying on that solemn holiday, when every business closed its doors. The “Yom Kippur Ball” was held in Philadelphia in 1889, but was

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106“Sinclair to Fight Blue Laws; Anarchist Brown Turned the Trick,” *Camden Post-Telegram*, Aug. 2, 1911.

107Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia 1865-1915* (Philadelphia 1989), pp. 46-52.

suppressed by police in 1891, when four participants served 8-month jail terms on riot charges. Single taxers raised bail for the defendants, one writing that the arrests were “wholly unlawful and an outrage on the rights of citizens.” They also attended the hearings, countered the vicious mainstream editorials that maligned the accused, and raised money to relieve one of the imprisoned men’s wife and children.<sup>108</sup>

Back in Delaware, the sentences began at nine for the Ardenites, and they entered the jail at eleven that night, but being so late they were spared the trouble of bathing, as was normally required of incoming prisoners. In spite of their expressed wish to stay up playing cards, the guards placed them in five cells. They rose at six the next morning and went to the dining hall dressed in prison stripes. Upton Sinclair and one other, being vegetarians, refrained from eating. From there they “walked lock-step” through a tunnel, through the stockyards, and into the quarry. There they were given 3- and 4-pound sledgehammers, with which they broke stones into two-inch pieces. The stones were being prepared for a machine that crushed and separated the rubble. As they worked, two guards stood at a short distance with Winchester rifles. The Ardenites worked fast, making light of the experience, and the regular prisoners asked them to “slow down! ...Don’t raise the standard of work... We’re not going to work like that,” and so they slowed down.<sup>109</sup> Work stopped again at noon, when the men returned to the dining hall for lunch. They returned to the stone pile at 1:45 and worked till their sentence ran out at 3 p.m..

Uppy Sinclair and his witty friends were by no means treated the same way as the ordinary inmates. Upon their arrival, the entourage apologized for disturbing Warden Leonard

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108*Justice*, Nov. 21 & Dec. 12, 1891, March 26 & May 7, 1892; *Jewish Exponent*, Oct. 11 & 18, 1889; *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *North American*, Oct. 12 & 13, 1891; Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 179-202.

109“Early Arden” (Interview with Don Stephens by Robert Foote, Nov. 7, 1966), courtesy Arden Archives.

Crawford at such a late hour, and the warden quipped that he regretted having to put them two in a cell. He said that even the best hotels were sometimes overcrowded. More of this light humor followed, and the warden “gave them [striped convict] suits that had never been worn before.” The warden then whispered to them, “Don’t loaf too much, or these other fellows will get sore. But don’t kill yourselves. Just take things easy.”<sup>110</sup>

About an hour before the release, Alexander Erwin, described as the “Mayor of Arden,” arrived at the workhouse, as did a “corps of newspaper reporters and photographers,” of which Sinclair later counted twenty-three. They were threatened by the armed guards and warned by the warden to remain at a distance. They swarmed around the merry band as they walked through the gates, and Dubin and Garrod indicated that they didn’t mind the work and confinement.

Upton Sinclair, however, began shaming the conscience of Delaware with his first breath of free air. “It seems that Brown’s experience has turned him into a devout Christian,” he said with a smile, “mine has almost turned me into a rabid anarchist.” But he kept on the point, telling the journalists “I would like to make my 18-hour experience a required course of every college student in America, so that they might know something about the true causes of human degradation.”<sup>111</sup>

The freed prisoners and the crowd that was waiting for them took a trolley to Wilmington to eat their fill of whatever they desired. The *Inquirer* followed the “ten terrible convicts” back to the colony, taking remarks from all the key players. Sinclair, or “prisoner 16,321,” promptly “asked the way to the nearest ice cream parlor,” being a “confirmed reprobate as far as the

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110“Uppy Sinclair Sings in Verse of Jail and He is Not So Worse;” *North American*, Aug. 3, 1911 p.1.

111“Ardenites, Back From Pile, to Air troubles,” *Evening Journal*, Aug. 3, 1911, p.1

ice cream habit is concerned.” Since the food provided at the workhouse seemed unsafe to him, the already-small Uppy had fasted away three pounds, according to the *New York Daily Tribune*.

Again upon being released, Sinclair repeated his vow to fight the blue laws to the bitter end. But now another social issue was tied in with the Arden affair and would receive its own share of press coverage. This was the appalling conditions endured by inmates in Delaware’s jails. Alongside the battle between George Brown and the Arden elite, from here on there was an actual political question under examination.

Uppie Sinclair “took to rhyme and crime” during his short confinement, and he cleverly turned his poetry into another media moment outside the gates of the jail. “I memorized the poem in the night,” he said with a smile, “With those noises sleep is impossible, and in the morning, realizing I was a criminal, I resorted to theft in order that my lines might become immortal. I stole a sheet of paper and a pencil... wrote my poem.” Sinclair had lay on his own coat, on the stone floor, while his cell mate Berkeley Tobey occupied the only cot. “The Menagerie,” was penciled on the back of prisoner intake forms. It was printed the following day in dozens of newspapers:

#### THE MENAGERIE

Oh come, ye lords and ladies of the realm,  
Come from your couches soft, your perfumed halls,  
Come watch with me throughout the weary hours,  
Here are there sounds to thrill your jaded nerves,  
Such as the cave men, your forefathers, heard,  
Crouching in forests in primeval night.  
The beasts ye breed and hunt throughout the world.  
Hark to the snore – some beast that slumbers deep.  
Hark to that roar – some beast that dreams of blood.  
Hark to that moan – some beast that wakes and weeps.

And there in sudden stillness marks the sound  
– some beast that rasps his vermin-haunted hide.  
Oh come, ye lords and ladies of the realm  
– come keep the watch with me – this show is yours.  
Behold the source of all your joy and pride.  
These beasts ye harness fast and set to draw the chariots of  
your pageantry and pomp.  
It is their blood ye shed to make your feasts;  
It is their treadmill that moves all your world.  
Oh come, ye lords and ladies, keep the watch,  
Come sit and think of how it will be  
When God shall send his flaming angel down,  
And break these bars – so hath he done of yore.  
So doeth he to lords and ladies grand,  
Who feed upon the blood of other men  
– and loose these beasts to raven in your streets.

Harry Kemp, who grew up in poverty in the prairie states, considered this “a very bad poem.” He also recalled that “when they came back they were full of the deprivations of jail-life, and the degradations suffered by the prisoners there. To me, their attitude was rather tender-foot and callow. It was something that would have been accepted off-handedly by me. I had been in jail often, not for a cause... but *be-cause*. I did not accord hero-worship to [Upton] when he returned, as the women of the household did.”<sup>112</sup>

Alongside Sinclair’s poem, there was passing mention in a few papers of a gallows at the workhouse, which had been “used for the hanging of a Negro last week.” Sinclair himself made mention of the whipping post, but not the gallows, as far as we know. It turns out that the execution of Reese Roberts on a double murder charge, on the morning of July 14, was in itself intriguing for at least two reasons. During his trial, Roberts

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112Harry Kemp, *Tramping on Life*, Garden City, NY 1922, p. 370

was represented by Frank J. Ball: this was the same former judge who, as a trustee of the jail, was about to receive Sinclair's letter on prison conditions. Even more striking was the speech made by the condemned man on the scaffold. "This day has come and this little hour has come. The time was appointed by God and not by Man... May God have mercy on my soul and upon my false prosecutors... I am not only innocent, but know absolutely nothing about the crime." The *Evening Journal* described his death in heroic terms. "The remarkable nerve of Roberts stood out like the supernatural. Never once did he falter... knowing that the next instant he would be plunged into eternity, he seemed the coolest of all the persons present. He mounted the scaffold as if he were [there] to get his breakfast."<sup>113</sup>

The details of the ten jailbirds wandered from horror to comedy. A few papers noted that on their way to and from the stone-pile, the Ardenites observed torture devices, such as the dismantled gallows and the pillory. At the opposite extreme, the *New York Times* that Don Stephens, who caught a fast train to the big city as soon as he was freed, had excused himself from delivering his planned speech to the Esperanto Association because he was so tired from breaking stones. He then enjoyed a delicious dinner featuring "Stufita Kapono."<sup>114</sup>

Upton Sinclair's organized attacks on the state's Blue Laws came to little, but his critiques on the conditions at the workhouse drew press coverage and serious consideration immediately. On the evening of his release, The Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* ran an editorial backing his new cause full-bore. "One cannot deny that the prophet of Arden has found a righteous

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113Asserting Innocence, Reese Roberts Smiles as He Goes to His Death," *Evening Journal*, July 14, 1911, p.1; the hanging was mentioned in *Public Ledger* and *Evening Telegraph* on Aug. 2.

114"Esperantists Dine on Stufita Kapono," *New York Times*, Aug. 3, 1911. The particular menu entry is: "Stufita Kapono Kun Kresoj" – Stuffed Capon (with some kind of dressing or sauce).

cause, nor fail to hope that his pen may be endowed with power. The jails of that State have long been a cause of disgrace and scandal. More or less frequent complaints have been made, but with little effect, and if Sinclair and his fellow-prisoners can make sufficient noise to accomplish some reform in these institutions, the battle of Arden may yet be written down as a beginning of things.” Even the Wilmington *Evening Journal*, in response, admitted that there was room for improvement. The editors suggested that prisoners be used in chain gangs to repair the roads and get all the fresh air they needed, rather than work in a sweatshop.<sup>115</sup>

On August 4, a meeting was held at Arden during which both sides made their current positions plain. Brown repeated his grievances against the trustees and the lack of democratic process in the colony’s affairs, but he announced a ceasefire as well.

“I think all possible humor and dramatic fervor in our little play have been exhausted,” he said. “I have ordered the lime-light switched off and the curtain wrung down. I will now return to my bushes, and I won’t bother you for a while, but when I feel like it, I will come out of the bushes, take the center of the stage, and give you another shock, for which you will thank *the beggar of Arden*.” This first meeting broke up with Sinclair and other colonists extending Brown the hand of friendship, and George himself left the meeting and retired to his shack in the bushes as he’d said he would. But another, smaller meeting was convened, in which Miss Barrows (Up-*pie’s* secretary) read a statement by Will Price on behalf of the trustees of Arden. First, the town went on record that its residents would go right on playing tennis and baseball on Sunday. The Trustees’ second announcement was a shade more personal.

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115“Delaware’s Jails,” *Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 3, 1911; “Prison Reform,” *Evening Journal*, Aug. 7, 1911 p. 4.

“George Brown wants notoriety. He expects to provoke a fight. Arden folk feel that to let him severely alone, and take no notice whatever of his silly action, we will take the wind out of his sails, and leave him nonplussed. We want to go on record as a town that is above private grudge and spite work.” The threat of ostracism had now been formally pronounced.

During the following two days (August 5 & 6), the *Evening Telegraph*, the *Evening Bulletin*, and then the *North American* published Sinclair’s full-length letter to Frank J. Ball, Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Newcastle County Workhouse. It is a shrewdly crafted document, representing the opinions of all the Ardenites who had been briefly incarcerated with the famous author. Sinclair begins by saying that he’d found neither fault nor cruelty on the part of the jail’s officials, and that their workhouse compared well with the jail at Chester, PA or Philadelphia’s Moyamensing Prison.

Having established that this was not a personal attack, Sinclair stated that only the short-term prisoners were allowed to see the open sky and breath the fresh air. Long-term inmates were kept at work in the prison sweatshop, whose product was made for a New York clothing firm. When an inmate became sick in the sweatshop, he was allowed to work on the stone pile, but this did little good because, as a guard had explained, “they are generally too far gone from tuberculosis.” Sinclair advised the trustees of their responsibility to provide fresh air to all inmates, especially because of the danger of this disease, which in those years was “still the most dreaded disease of civilization,” in the words of the anarchist surgeon Max Staller who had, the previous year, inaugurated the Jewish Consumptive Institute in a 3-story building in South Philadelphia to treat and research the disease locally, in part of a world-wide effort against the “white plague.”<sup>116</sup> Sinclair emphasized that

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116“Jewish Consumptive Institute Dedicates New Headquarters,” *North American*, Sept. 12, 1910; Max Staller, M.D., “Report of Experimental Work in the



the need for fresh air and exercise had already become a widely-known axiom of hygiene.

Next, Sinclair attacked the “Silence System” that was enforced upon the inmates of the Newcastle Workhouse. “It took me the balance of my eighteen hours to realize the full horror of these words. ...there were twenty-two men serving life terms in the prison, and a great number of men serving ten, twenty, and thirty-year sentences. These men arise in the morning, go to their meals, go to their work, and go back to their cells with the eyes of keepers watching them every moment, and with heavy penalties hanging over them for uttering a word to any of their fellow convicts. ...there can be nothing in his soul, nothing but a blind and ferocious hatred of the powers of society which have inflicted such a horror upon him.”

Sinclair then addressed the food question. “I saw many men who were suffering from serious skin and blood diseases, and one man whose arm was rendered completely useless by boils.” He then gave expert recommendations on a balanced diet with fresh fruits, uncooked salad greens, and whole wheat bread.

The letter concluded in a respectful but forceful appeal, “personally and individually in the name of a common humanity,” reminding the trustees that he was not alone in his opinions, as was evident in the current editorials of three Philadelphia newspapers.

The trustees of the workhouse convened on August 22<sup>nd</sup> and published their position. They denied everything, they explained the criticisms to “an ordinary desire for notoriety and self-advertisement,” and they accused the newspapers of sensationalism. Upton Sinclair responded from New York, where he had begun a divorce suit against his wife, a month later. In his letter he expressed some disgust with the attitude of the trustees, comparing their criticism of the Press with the “silent sys-

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Production of an Anti-Tuberculous Serum,” *New York Medical Journal*, Dec. 17, 1917, p. 1166.

tem” of the workhouse. He wrote that if the trustees were concerned the harm done to society by offences like riding freight cars or playing ball on Sunday, “the man who comes out of Greenbank infected with tuberculosis does far more harm done to society than by committing either of the other offences.”<sup>117</sup>

On the evening of Saturday August 5<sup>th</sup>, the Arden colony “celebrated the advent of peace with a society circus,” which was reported in the *New York Sun* the following day. “Brown occupied a seat in the front row and applauded every act. Sinclair also was in the audience, was not allowed to remain long, when a clown attired in a policeman’s uniform seized him and marched him from the tent.” Some members of Sinclair’s group had tried to purchase their prison stripes upon their release, but they were refused. The uniforms were to be used as costumes in the theatrical performance planned for the circus. Plenty else contributed to the evening’s festivities: a “steam caliope” that amounted to a piano inside a wagon, with smoke coming out through a section of stovepipe in the rear; bareback riders, a snake charmer, and Elsie Beane in the role of Annie Oakley. Miss A. Server told fortunes. “Altogether it was a big night for Arden,” the *Sun* concluded.

On the following day, Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup>, the residents of Arden broke the blue laws in defiance of the state authorities, as usual getting press coverage. The whole town turned out and played baseball, played tennis, sold ice cream, and young George Brown Jr. sold newspapers. They even made a special point of yelling “*slide, you dub, slide!*” Seven of the previous week’s jailbirds were playing again, and Frank Leitch, who had been in the nearby town of Chester when the constable served the warrants, was on the field as well. George Brown had made a promise not to invoke the law any further, although he had not finished asserting his right to speak as he pleased. There was a

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117“Upton Sinclair Again Scores ‘Silent System’...” *Evening Journal*, Sept. 18, 1911 p.8

peace treaty in effect between the cobbler and his opponents, and for the Sunday games on the village green, George kept to his little shack behind his bushes along Naaman's Creek. The *North American* gave the odd report that "a minister has discovered that George has a soul, and he is going after it; he also has discovered that Arden is the place where the devil resides on Sunday, and that George is the White man's hope."<sup>118</sup>

The festivities continued into Monday, and the public message in regards to the state Blue Laws was made, loud and clear. The residents of Arden would continue to play and go about their business as they always had on Sundays. The authorities never gave any indication that they wished to pursue the matter any further.

At the end of August, a letter from Upton Sinclair (dated Aug. 17) appeared in the September issue of *Mother Earth*, the leading U.S. anarchist journal of the day, whose editor Emma Goldman had written letters in support of Brown's position less than a month earlier. In the letter, Sinclair stated that Brown had brought the whole affair upon himself by bringing up sex questions and repeatedly breaking up private meetings. He further indicated that Brown had told him personally that "his reason for having me [Sinclair] arrested was simply in order to contribute notoriety to the affair." The effect of this letter on the anarchist reader was not a good thing for Brown. There was no countering letter, nor any mitigating comment from the editor.

There were differing interpretations of the Arden affair among leading anarchists of the time. Brown's Philadelphia comrade Joseph J. Cohen had written an unfavorable report to Voltairine de Cleyre, who was by this time revered throughout the movement. We do not have Cohen's letter, but Voltairine's

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118"Arden Again Breaks Blue Laws; Brown Sticks To Bushes," *North American*, Aug. 7, 1911.

reply to him on August 7 clearly appreciates the actions of her longtime friend and comrade, George Brown.

“I suppose really if I were there I should likely have got excited about it too; but from this distance the thing looks infamously comical,” Voltairine wrote. “I don’t see why you worried about his arresting those fellows. The idea of its being done ‘in revenge’ is foolish; the purpose was to show *them* how very *foolish it is* to put a man in prison, since they themselves can be put in prison for such a piece of nonsense as playing tennis on Sunday. If he had tried to punish them for some real *crime* or offense, or got them in jail for two or three months, it would have been mean and wrong. But to get them in for 18 hours, or a few days, on such a charge is simply to show them how very ludicrous is the idea of ‘punishing men according to law.’ [...] I hope they have either come out decidedly, either for or against free speech.”<sup>119</sup>

A few weeks later, it was time for the second annual Arden Fair. Mary Hansen Brown, George’s partner, participated in the procession on the first day of the festivities, in costume like the others. Throughout the entire feud, Mary kept a low profile and kept her normal role in Arden’s affairs. She earned her living by cleaning the homes of the more affluent Ardenites, including Upton Sinclair’s. Mary maintained ties in Arden at least as late as 1924, long after George’s death.<sup>120</sup>

At the close of the Henry George meeting of Sunday Sept. 3, George Brown spoke up in a way that was perceived as an attempt to re-open the feud. “I move that Billy Worthington, the bum, and Mr. Shandrew, the gentleman, be appointed a committee to send people to jail like they sent me.” Frank Stevens cut him off: “This meeting’s adjourned!” And “meet-

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119Letter, Voltairine de Cleyre to Joseph J. Cohen, (from Chicago), Aug. 7, 1911; Bund Archive, YIVO, New York City.

120Harry Kemp, *Tramping on Life*, Garden City, NY 1922, p. 354. Mary’s poetry appeared in the April, August, and December 1924 issues of *Arden Leaves*.

ing a glare from every eye, the anarchist hiked back to his bushes and solitude, while all of Arden said things about him.”<sup>121</sup> As best we can date it, thus began the period when George Brown’s ostracism at Arden was put into action.

Four months passed before more trouble hit the papers. On January 12, 1912, just a few miles from Arden, a farm at Silverside was announced in area papers as where Socialist and Anarchist residents of snow-bound Arden would seek to establish a new colony, where “co-operation will be the law,” and there will be “a good socialist life,” free from the “triumvirate that ruled their present community much like a monarchy.” Leaders were named at the meeting in Wilmington, including Upton Sinclair and George Brown. Nothing ever came of it.

The following month, Ardenite Arthur E. Andrews (whose child had voted in an Arden meeting) wrote a scathing letter in the *Wilmington Evening Journal* stating that Arden was no longer organized in accordance with the philosophy of Henry George. He noted that improvements on plots were taxed at Arden, and the very essence of the single tax idea is the exemption thereof. He said there had been scores of instances when the basic idea of democracy had been violated, and that the weapon of social ostracism was being wielded against those who opposed the autocratic methods of the trustees.

True to Arden style, Andrews closed his letter with a quote from Homer’s *Iliad*: “Hateful to me as are the gates of Hell, is he who, hiding one thing in his heart, utters another.”<sup>122</sup>

Summer came again, and things got even worse. On June 26, Mrs. Elsie Beane, the wife of Montgomery Beane, was sitting on her porch with her two small children at her sides, and a

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121 “And they Squelched the Arden Anarchist, They Did!” *North American*, Sept. 4, 1911.

122 “Secession Threatened in Single Tax Colony,” *North American*, Jan. 12, 1912; “Utopians Leave Arden to Found New Paradise,” *Wilmington Evening Journal*, Jan. 12, 1912; “Discord Again Rents Arden Colony,” *Wilmington Evening Journal*, February 11, 1912.

Springfield rifle in her hands. This same lady had played the role of Annie Oakley in Arden's fairs and circuses, using the very same gun, and we assume that she was popular in the role because she was quite the markswoman. Mrs. Beane had returned from Florida, where she'd spent the colder months, only to discover that her bungalow had been sold at a constable's sale. Without Beane having been notified, the 1912 assessments had been declared. A lumber dealer and a grocer had placed attachments on her home. During May, the place was sold for \$150.00 to a Philadelphia sculptor named Robert Rautenberg. A hearing was scheduled to sort the matter out, and the trustees asked that these affairs be kept out of the papers.<sup>123</sup>

Some 200 Arden residents were present on July 1 for the monthly town meeting in the open-air theater, which was called the most disorderly ever held at the colony. "At its conclusion," a reporter wrote, "friends of several of the residents had trouble in preventing blows from being struck."

George Brown was a prominent voice at the meeting. He had promised in a previous meeting to appeal the assessments or rentals that the trustees had established, but he instead opened by declaring that "the eviction of Mrs. Elsie Beane from her home in the colony was the most *atrocious* happening that has befallen the colony." His opponents shouted "Out of order," but Brown persisted. A committee was convened to investigate the circumstances of the Beane family's dispute, with Brown interjecting that the trustees' attitude toward that dispute should be investigated as well. D. Haines Albright moved that the trustees be commended for their self-sacrifice and dedication to the community, and for their attitude in not desiring publicity into Arden's doings. Many shouted him down, and the motion was countered by one from Lewis Kramer, who

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123 "Takes Home and Guards With Rifle," *Wilmington Evening Journal*, June 26, 1912

called out, "I amend by voting that monuments be erected on Arden's commons in memory of the trustees." As to the question of outside press coverage, Brown's faction shouted, "If you won't hear us here, we will appeal to the world outside!" Emmanuel Gerstine, Brown's anarchist neighbor, moved that it become mandatory the trustees accept the will of the people on the question of rentals. His motion was lost, and the meeting disintegrated into small groups in separate discussions, and "cooler heads" having their hands full preventing fist fights between the residents.<sup>124</sup>

Mrs. Beane and her children were evicted at some date during the following three weeks. In response, the *Hornet* of Arden certainly did appeal to the world outside. For the rest of the summer, George Brown roasted the Arden trustees repeatedly in the newspapers, with the Beane eviction as his main talking point and illustrating Frank Stephens as "the Arden Boss" who misgoverns the colony and without whose favor a resident is shunned.

"Mr. Brown declared that Mr. Beane, who prospered in the first years of his residence in Arden, was driven to the wall by the deliberate persecution of residents of Arden." Brown continued, saying, "Then Beane was compelled to go elsewhere and Mrs. Beane and the children were left in Arden."<sup>125</sup>

A reporter from the *Evening Bulletin* stopped in at George's little shack on July 29, 1912 – a year after the scenes at the county workhouse – to hear the cobbler's plans for a book, actually a collection of stories about Arden, with Frank Stevens, dubbed by George "The King of Arden," to be cast as Mephistopheles. Brown also "swore a real swear" when Uppy Sinclair's name was mentioned. George was under the full weight

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124"Ardenites Near Blows Over Rentals," *Wilmington Evening Journal*, July 2, 1912

125"Anarchist Brown Again Stirs Arden," *Evening Bulletin* July 26, 1912 (in *Bulletin Clipping File*, Temple University).

of his ostracism by this time, but he seemed to be surviving it reasonably well.

“They won’t associate with George Brown down Arden way, because they say he is such a pestiferous cuss, always butting in and kicking up a row of some sort.

“In his little bungalow, back in the bushes, George was found yesterday putting artistic finishing touches to some grub which he had cooked himself in real woodland fashion by a fire outside. Several books were scattered about, for George is a reader.”

“Now the game is to drive out of Arden all the residents except those who can afford to build fine cottages,” George continued. “The poor man has no show. I fought for a principle, and they sent me to jail, then they boycotted me.. I am under a boycott and I have been for a year, and it’s getting worse.” George remarked that he approved of the boycott as a weapon (probably based on his background in labor unions) ...but they didn’t start it fair with me.”

Brown noted that at the previous week’s town meeting, a vote was taken to approve the eviction of Mrs. Beane, and the count was 74 to 3. The holdouts of the Brown faction were down to Emmanuel Gerstine, Arthur Andrews, and Brown himself.

“They have been trying to evict me for a long time... There is a clause in the lease that says that says it can be cancelled if the place is made objectionable to a majority of the community. But, though they may not like the appearance of my little house, it can’t be objectionable, because nobody can see it unless they come right into the bushes here, on my property.

“As I have no redress, I am just nagging them and pestering them whenever I get the chance. That Monty Beane affair was an instance. I denounced them for turning Mrs. Beane out of her home. Between me and you, it was perfectly legal: but it gave me a chance to annoy them, and I did it.”



Brown declared that four prominent men of the colony approached him recently and asked if things could not be fixed up, the boycott removed, and Brown restored to favor but Brown declared that “it could not be done that way. ...my book will tell all the world how Arden, once a democracy, has grown to be nothing but a boss-ridden community... I used to like Frank Stevens, but I don’t anymore.”

Stephens and his allies reportedly said that Brown was an unmitigated nuisance, and he can write as many darn books as he pleases, but he can’t get them printed, and if he does, nobody will read them anyway.<sup>126</sup>

While the feud was long remembered at Arden, the little community went on with its life, with Frank Stephens as active and respected there as always. George Brown’s life seems to have gone downhill, and he stopped living at the colony around the end of August 1912. When the annual circus was held that month, a news report mentioned that neither he nor Mrs. Beane (as Annie Oakley) would participate, but that Brown’s friends had prepared him a “send-off,” complete with song lyrics composed for the occasion: “*He’s the guy that had the ball team arrested/ To the workhouse sent them down/ Did you ever stop and ponder/ who was Arden’s greatest wonder/ There’s the guy – Georgie Brown.*”<sup>127</sup> Though he participated in a town meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup>, there are no later indications of his residence at Arden, although Mary and the children stayed on.<sup>128</sup>

The last time we find George Brown denouncing Frank Stephens and the trustees, he was speaking at the City Hall Plaza in Philadelphia, “where a special meeting had been prepared for him,” on September 22, 1912. Apparently he had

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126“Brown threatens to Write Book Exposing the Colony at Arden” *Evening Bulletin* July 29, 1912 (in *Bulletin* Clipping File)

127“Brown, The Guy, ...Everybody Sing!” *Evening Journal* Aug. 7, 1912 p.1.

128“Brown Says ‘Frame Up’ to the Ardenites,” *Evening Journal* Aug. 13, 1912 p.1.

packed up and left his little shack in Delaware, since there are no later indications of his residence at Arden (although there are for Mary and the children).

“He told of Arden’s past: how men, women, and children lived in a colony governed by pure democracy, and where child and sage alike cast his votes each Monday night at the real town meetings.

“He described vividly the spirit in which it was conceived four years ago [when the Browns settled at Arden]. ... Then,” he said, “the life was worth living. There were new attractions for every day in the week and especially interesting features for each evening. Dancing, and ball playing, and free and open discussion on all subjects formed an important part of the life of Arden.”

But then the “shoemaker philosopher,” as he was called in this particular report, gave a sour assessment of the colony’s present state and “ended with a gloomy prophecy for its future.”

“The majority of the inhabitants of Arden have neither ideas nor ideals. They are there because it has become a fad... Arden’s glory is gone,” he exclaimed. “Her charm, which attracted men and women from the whole earth, has been lost and Arden turned into a cheap pleasure place.

“Cheap sports reside there now. They come because it is the cheapest resort where they can show off and make people think they are fashionable. The *really rich* do not come to Arden: they go to more expensive summer resorts.

“It is a painful prophecy,” the exiled anarchist concluded, “but it is a sure one nevertheless. In the future Arden will be the summer resort of the cheap sports, and I hope ere long, everyone will know it.”<sup>129</sup>

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129“Arden Denounced by George Brown,” *Evening Bulletin* Sept. 23, 1912 (in *Bulletin Clipping File*)

This, as far as we know, ended the feud between Brown and the Arden trustees. George was ostracized and effectively banished from the colony. In all the news clips we have mentioning George during the few years before his death, the Arden feud was recalled so as to remind the reader that it was *that* George Brown who was being described. In his personal life, there is what we read as a distancing, or a separation, between George and Mary. George remained publicly active however. He was giving anarchist lectures at the Radical Library as late as January 1913, and still later he was active in the Socialist Literary Society of Philadelphia.

G. Frank Stephens retained all his influence and prestige at Arden, where he died in 1935. In a touching posthumous collection of his poems and song lyrics, full of eulogies written by friends and admirers, one wrote, “The sort of man to whom no one could remain indifferent. Either one liked him wholeheartedly... or disliked him vehemently... sometimes both at one and the same time. There was no half-way with him, nor for him. That was Frank Stephens.”<sup>130</sup>

Upton Sinclair outlived everyone else in this tale, dying in 1968, long after running for Governor of California (losing, but giving it a good fight) and having written over ninety books. After the Feud at Arden he married Mary Kimbrough, with whom he remained for the rest of his days.

Emmanuel Gerstine left Arden and spent time in Stelton, New Jersey (a Ferrer Modern School colony), then he moved again to Ardmore, PA, and in 1924, he returned to Arden where he died some years later. He is interred in the colony’s cemetery, just behind Guild Hall, not far from the grave of Frank Stephens.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>The comment is by Grace Isabel Colbron in Frank Stephens, *Some Songs*, Arden Press, 1935, p. 5

<sup>131</sup>Interview by the author with Milton Gerstine (with Mark Taylor) at Arden, July 21, 1999.

George Brown died at age 56 after suffering from blood poisoning. The infection developed from a wooden splinter, which penetrated his right hand three months earlier as he helped to build a bungalow at Arden. The salty shoemaker gouged it out with a pocket knife and then paid it no mind. Weeks later, news reports discussed his possible death and the amputation of his arm. He died at Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia after three months of suffering, with Mary, George Jr., and Heloise at his bedside, at quarter to midnight, February 14, 1915.<sup>132</sup>

Brown was eulogized with respect in radical newspapers and two mainstream dailies. Some insight into his personality come to light in the obituary by Horace Logo Traubel, the Socialist poet and editor who was “intimately associated in agitation of one complexion or another over the years” with Brown.

“He said the most tasteless things. Yet they were tonic. He had no politeness. Nor had he any apology. He was neither graceful nor graceless. He was himself. Even at Arden they seemed to regard him as a disturber of the peace. But what better business can a man be about in the world as it is? To be a disturber of the peace is to be an abettor of Justice... George had theatrical moments. And his pugnacity frequently got the better of his good will. But he lived mostly on the level. And he was mostly genial in controversy. He’d hate like a lamb and love like a lion.”<sup>133</sup>

George Brown’s death was one of a series of hammer-blows that weakened Philadelphia’s anarchist movement, beginning in 1910. By this time many of the intensely active comrades of the 1890’s had relocated, had died, or had become immersed in professional careers that left little time for activism. Voltair-

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132“Anarchist Germ Law Victim” *Record*, Nov. 28, 1914; “Arden Anarchist Dies in Hospital” *Evening Journal*, Feb. 16, 1915; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Certificate of Death #18549, Feb. 14, 1915; “George Brown” (obituary), *Conservator*, June, 1915.

133Horace Traubel, “George Brown” *The Conservator*, June, 1915.

ine's departure from the city in the fall of 1910 preceded her death by two years, and another key figure, Joseph J. Cohen, moved away in 1913. Chaim Weinberg, though based in Philadelphia, went wherever the Jewish labor movement needed him, or to attempts at farming cooperatives in other places. George Brown's sickness and death coincided with that of Margaret Perle McLeod (Falkenstein) from cancer on March 27, 1915. Perle had moved to New York at the turn of the century but was still remembered as one of the builders of the Philadelphia's movement. Mary Hansen left the city immediately after George's Funeral, never to live there again, and in 1917 another major local legend, Natasha Notkin, sold her pharmacy in Kensington and vanished from our radar, passing away some time during the late 1920's.

Within a few months of George's death, the Brown Family removed to the Modern School at Stelton, New Jersey, where Mary taught and Heloise studied and occasionally worked. George Brown Jr. somehow became a soldier and served in WWI, returning a "shell-shocked" and alcoholic veteran, living with his mother at Stelton, and lingering there after her death (1952) and outliving her by about a dozen years. Heloise, always remembered as an intelligent and lively child, married and divorced twice during her life and finally died in Hollywood CA in 1975 of lung disease, with the surname Petit. All three, Mary and her two children, lived in poverty at the times of their deaths.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Death record of Mary A. Brown, [the only occurrence we have of this middle initial] (New Jersey, March 24, 1952; #11704); Death record of Heloise Petit (California, Jan. 28, 1975, #0190-005059); Interviews with several members of Friends of the Ferrer Modern School by the author during reunions between 1997 & 2000. Attempts to locate Roger S. Tobey, who paid for Heloise's cremation (possibly her son), have been unsuccessful.

[www.deadanarchists.org](http://www.deadanarchists.org)

Welcome to the World of Dead Anarchists

From the editor...

The dead anarchists website has been launched in order to supply that extra measure of anarchist history to those who are hopelessly addicted to learning about the men and women who have struggled for centuries, searching for ways to eliminate governments from the Earth. This editor is such an addict, and derives pleasure by seeing others succumb to this delicious illness.

Finding an anarchist in a life situation similar to one's own can give moral strength to living anarchists. Often a young person will be told again and again that anarchist ideas are nonsense, by people who have an endless parade of generals and heads of state to use as examples for argument and role models for themselves. A similar pattern emerges as a teenager begins to form his or her own opinions about religion in a home that is dominated by clergy.

History is often ruled by tales about a handful of superstars, and with anarchism, the same thing happens, but with more likeable stars than usual. Voltairine de Cleyre once remarked that the whole movement seemed to operate out of Emma Goldman's suitcase. I held that same suitcase in my hand once, and that was fun. Anyway, when Emma or Voltairine, or Peter Kropotkin, or some other respected anarchist writer of the time arrived to give a lecture, they were not alone on a street talking to strangers. They slept at someone's house, ate dinner with someone, were introduced by a comrade, and fielded questions from many like-minded people. When a squad of policemen lumbered onto the scene, scores of people would feel the truncheon crash down on their heads. It's these smaller, local anarchist figures that make the fabric of the story, whereas the star characters make for wonderful embroidery.

As we slowly build up this garden of bygone faces, we will share lost texts by anarchists, descriptions of anarchists' grave sites, their landmarks, homes, and events in their lives. These little pieces have been gathered over the course of some fifteen years of research, mostly focusing on local research in my longtime home – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. But my walking tours of old anarchist neighborhoods, though successful, do not seduce enough newcomers to the idea to satisfy my ruthless agenda, and so I have turned to the ether. We begin small, but the flow will not stop until this editor joins his friends in the graveyard. Please let us hear what you think of all this, and above all enjoy the reading!

Robert P. Helms, editor

June 5, 2006