

ways yearned to get in, especially after she had children. "I wanted them to experience the freedom and involvement of living in a community like this. They can be themselves here, and they also feel a real responsibility to the town. It's like an extended family."

With a population of about 500, Arden still operates under the single-tax system, which has an unusual effect on homeowners, an effect that is not to everyone's liking. Because Arden collects taxes based on land alone, regardless of what stands upon it, a small house on a half-acre is taxed at the same rate as a large house on a half-acre. As Henry George intended, the single-tax system rewards someone who gets maximum economic use from the smallest amount of land.

In a film history of Arden, Mike Curtis, an Arden resident who is the director of the Henry George School in Philadelphia, defends the peculiar results of the single-tax system: "What is a man getting from the community? He's getting . . . land. Well, he should pay the community for that. Through his own efforts he's built a big house. Why should he owe other people money for that? Why should

he pay a fine for his industry? To me, it makes all the sense in the world." (Single-tax fervor runs deep in Mike's family: at a raucous town meeting in 1954, his grandmother literally dropped dead arguing about someone trying to sell—sell!—land.)

Since 1967, when the village was incorporated, the controlling government body has been the Town Assembly, which meets four times a year. Budgets must be approved by a majority of eligible voters—age 18 or older—attending. The town's 1992 budget is about \$220,000, which Arden collects from its citizens through land rent. Of that amount, roughly \$150,000 will go to New Castle County for schools, police protection and property taxes (the town is *not* exempt from county property taxes). Arden pays for its own trash collection and road maintenance, and is covered by a nearby volunteer fire department.

The tax payment, or land rent, for a quarter-acre lot is about \$720, subject to adjustments according to the desirability of a lot's location. No bureaucracy exists; indeed, there are only two paid employees, both part-time: the secretary and the treasurer. Well-

organized committees staffed by volunteers do just about all of the work. In the words of one resident, "It's the purest democracy you can get."

With very little effort, Arden could have transformed itself into a tourist stop—a faux art colony with weekend studio tours and troubadours on the Green, or a Colonial Williamsburg of socialism and free love. But Ardenites have never aspired to make their community a living museum. Visitors who wander into it looking for entertainment will come away disappointed. It is quiet and picturesque, but there's no place to buy ice cream or HENRY GEORGE T-shirts. Nor is Arden an architectural theme park—mingling with the half-timbered cottages are ranch houses and split-levels. Despite the architectural impurities, Frank Stephens and Will Price would recognize much of their town if they stopped by today. They would also find the old spirit of Arden intact, a spirit described by a visitor in 1915: "Arden is the capital of the state of Uncritical Friendliness; it belongs to the federation of Mutual Helpfulness, under a constitution of Equal Opportunity. It is far removed from the world we know."

Busy Ardenites (from left): Rae Gerstine keeps Building & Loan solvent; Susan and Ed Rohrbach, with sons Alex (in cap) and Sian, are remodeling home; Amy Potter Cook holds a magazine cover she designed.

