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COOPERATIVES: Back to Capitalism

As ill-starred a social project as ever drew howls from anti-New Deal columnists is Jersey Homesteads, a settlement of 200 flat-roofed, garage-like homes halfway between New York and Philadelphia and hard by the Revolutionary battlefield of Monmouth.*

Designed for Manhattan garment workers, 120 of whom paid in $500 each for participation in a cooperative garment factory on the grounds, Jersey Homesteads was thoroughly snarled in Government red tape. Some $4,000,000 went into purchase of the land (1,275 acres), building of a factory and homes, equipping a communal farm. Thousands of dollars went out the window when Resettlement Administration officials took to prefabricating concrete slabs for the houses, then couldn't find a way to join them. More was lost when they switched to casting cinder block, later found these could be bought for one-third the cost on the open market. Four years after the project was begun (1933) the first families finally moved in and the garment factory began to give work to about 60 needlemen.

But the garment factory was a dismal flop, found no market for its coats and suits. Government loans of $200,000 fell due, and the Department of Agriculture, which had fallen heir to R. A.'s white elephant, finally foreclosed, sold some of the plant machinery for $1,811. Jersey Homesteaders who could find jobs commuted to Manhattan or Philadelphia, still counted themselves lucky to be living in the country at monthly rent of $14 to $17.

Last week, Jersey Homesteads' dead cooperative economy was buried. Rented for five years was Jersey Homesteads' factory. The renter:

Manhattan's Kartiganer & Co., manufacturers of women's hats. Hopeful was many a member of Jersey Homesteads' 125 remaining families that private enterprise might provide jobs where their cooperative had failed.

* Where George Washington ordered General Charles Lee to advance, found him retreating, called him a "damned poltroon."

- http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,763902,00.html

some other interesting notes

Tomorrow A New World

http://www.archive.org/stream/tomorrownewworld00conkrich/tomorrownewworld00conkrich_djvu.txt

Jersey Homesteads A Triple Co-operative

IT is a long way from Scott's Run to the Jewish garment district of Manhattan, long not so much in terms of miles as of cultural differences. But in both areas the depression led to hardship and to concerted efforts at colonization upon the land, although the background of Jersey Homesteads was entirely different from that of Arthurdale. In contrast to the brief, depression-born subsistence homesteads movement in West Virginia, the all co-operative Jewish colony in New Jersey was the culmination of a long history of Jewish agricultural and industrial colonization in the United States that reached back beyond 1881. In the past efforts of Jewish immigrants to go onto the land and in the long and little-known efforts of Jewish leaders to develop a strong Jewish agricultural community are contained almost all the roots of Jersey Homesteads. In fact, almost the total program of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads and the Resettlement Administration had been anticipated by the work of Jewish organizations in colonization, part-time farming, decentralization of industry, rehabilitation, and social engineering.

Because of numerous restrictions on landownership and constant persecutions and migrations, the ancient Jew, a nomadic herder or a farmer, became, by 1800, almost exclusively a city dweller. Seven colonies of Jews in South Russia in 1804 represented the first modern

attempt of Jews to become farmers. In 1825 an ambitious Jewish refugee colony was planned for Grand Island in the Niagara River, but never proceeded beyond land purchase. Beginning in 1837, a small

Jewish colony of twelve families in Ulster County, New York, survived for five years. Other ambitious back-to-the-land schemes, but no real accomplishment, culminated in the formation of a Jewish Agricultural Society in 1856, which never went farther than elaborate planning for colonies. After the assassination of Alexander II of Russia in 1881, a series of pogroms and restrictive laws forced thousands of Jews to emigrate to the United States and other countries. Among the intelligentsia of these emigrants was an organized agrarian group, Am Olam, which, beginning in 1881, established several abortive and a few lasting farm colonies in the United States. A number of these featured collectivist plans; all were founded without previous farming experience, without adequate guidance, and without sufficient funds. The first settlement was at Sicily Island, Louisiana, with others following in Arkansas, Kansas, Colorado, South Dakota, and New Jersey. Only the New Jersey colonies survived. 1

Alliance, the first of the New Jersey colonies and the first permanent Jewish agricultural colony in the United States, was founded in 1882 by about twenty-five Jewish immigrants from Russia. Aided by a newly formed Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society, they purchased 1,100 acres of land, divided it into fifteen-acre plots, and established small factories. The Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society searched the West for farms for those other Jews determined to go onto the land, but, as the stream of immigration temporarily slowed, soon went out of existence, leaving a Jewish author, Michael Heilprin, as the father of several later colonies. In this first great spurt of Jewish colonization, lasting from 1881 to 1888, enduring colonies were started in South New Jersey at Norma, Brotmanville, Rosenhayn, Carmel, Garten Road, and Alliance. The Jewish people, with their distinct communal proclivities and without any real experience in agriculture, chose the colony or community method of agricultural settlement. They also, even in the first settlements, introduced factories into their farm villages. Mean-

Jewish Agricultural Society, Jews in American Agriculture: The History of Farming by Jews in the United States (New York, 1954), pp. 8, 16, 19, 23-26; Philip Reuben Goldstein, Social Aspects of the Jewish Colonies of South Jersey (New York, 1921), p. 12; Gabriel Davidson, Our Jewish Farmers and the Story of the Jewish Agricultural Society (New York, 1943), pp. 194-249.

while an overwhelming majority of the Jewish immigrants settled in the large cities and became needleworkers. 2

When the heavy Jewish migration resumed by 1890, a wealthy European industrialist and Jew, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, became so interested in the plight of the Russian Jews that he endowed a Jewish Colonization Society which, from its European headquarters, aided in the colonization of Jews in several countries. In 1891 Baron de Hirsch also contributed $2,400,000 to be used exclusively for the aid of Jewish emigrants to the United States. Of this sum, $240,000 was specifically designated for farm colonies, since Hirsch was a convinced agrarian. The executors of the Baron de Hirsch fund (American Jewish leaders) appointed an agricultural and industrial committee which early decided that any new colonies should be both agricultural and industrial. Meanwhile the South Jersey colonies were adopted and aided by the committee, which also made loans to individual Jews who wished to enter agriculture. For its first major endeavor the committee considered establishing either a suburban-type colony at Hightstown, New Jersey, or a predominantly agricultural colony in southern New Jersey. The latter plan was adopted, while a Jewish colony at Hightstown had to await the New Deal. 3

To develop their first farm colony the trustees of the Baron de Hirsch fund founded a colonization corporation which purchased 5,300 acres near Vineland, New Jersey, and, in 1892, began the development of what was to become the Woodbine colony. Sixty families were selected for the farms, with each being required to contribute some small sum as down payment. The land was divided into three parts a central town, an encircling area divided into fifteen-acre farmsteads, and, at the outskirts, a circle of pasture land. In the first year sixty-four farmhouses, valued at $600 each, were constructed by the corporation, and twenty-five town houses were constructed at a cost of from $850 to $1,300 each. The first factory, a cloak company, was opened during the first year, and, everything seeming well under way, all aid from the Baron de Hirsch fund ceased. This led to a strike on the

2 Goldstein, Social Aspects of the Jewish Colonies, pp. 13-17; Samuel Joseph, History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund The Americanization of the Jewish Immigrant (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 5, 8-9; William Kirsch, The Jew and the Land (American Association for Agricultural Legislation, Bulletin no. 7; Madison, Wis., 1920), p. 12.

3 Joseph, History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, pp. 11-22, 24, 32-34, 48-50.

part of the farmers, who found poor soil and who lacked experience in farming. They had received a house, a cow stable, money for cows and chickens, farm implements, seeds, and fruit trees. For three years they were obligated for an annual payment of only fifty dollars, but by the end of twelve years were to have paid the full cost of the farm, receiving fee simple ownership at an estimated cost of only $1,100. After the strike the leases were modified, and the colony entered a long period of supervision and direction from the trustees of the Baron de Hirsch fund, who suddenly discovered the magnitude of the undertaking at Woodbine. Woodbine, planned as a beginning of the reconstruction of Jewish life in America, was the last such colony attempted. The trustees of the fund spent years of effort in securing adequate, subsidized industry for Woodbine, presaging the efforts of the Resettlement Administration at Arthurdale and elsewhere. Although the first Jewish agricultural school was established at Woodbine, the colony became an industrial village with only a few farms surrounding it. By 1900 the population of Woodbine was 1,400. 4 The efforts of the trustees of the Baron de Hirsch fund to establish Woodbine, to aid the older Jewish colonies, and to establish individual farmers led to the formation of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (since renamed the Jewish Agricultural Society) in 1900 and to more experimentation. The original purposes of the society included the "removal of those working in crowded metropolitan sections to agricultural and industrial districts," the granting of loans to artisans seeking suburban homes, the decentralization of industry, and the encouragement of co-operatives. In the first few years the society devoted much of its efforts to unsuccessful attempts at decentralizing industry, especially in connection with several of the New Jersey colonies. It also attempted to found a few new colonies in the West, but failed each time. By 1909 the society became orientated toward a lasting policy of aiding individual Jewish farmers. It continued to direct the settlement of individual back-to-the-landers, but depended upon individual farms in community groups rather than on organized colonies. It published a farm magazine in Yiddish, initiated an itinerant supervisory program that predated the United States Extension Service, organized the first rural co-operative credit unions in

America, formed local Jewish farm federations which experimented in

4 Ibid., pp. 52-56, 89.

group purchasing, organized test farms, made short-term rehabilitation loans, carried out the first work in rural sanitation in the United States, and, in the New Jersey colonies, conducted evening schools, established libraries, built community halls, and supervised recreation. In fact, the Jewish Agricultural Society, directed by many of America's best-known Jewish leaders, became a miniature Resettlement Administration. From only 200 to 400 families in 1900, the Jewish farm population grew to approximately 5,000 families in 1910 and, by 1930, to approximately 16,000 families. The work of the Jewish Agricultural Society was intended to prove false the long-standing and bitterly resented allegation that Jews did not make good farmers. In this it succeeded. 5

By 1924 the Jewish Agricultural Society was seriously considering part-time farming as a transitory step for Jewish urbanites who eventually desired to be farmers. From this came plans for agro-industrial communities, one of the earlier precedents for subsistence homesteads. In 1926 an agro-industrial settlement was started at Bound Brook, New Jersey, by Jewish families who were advised and assisted by the Jewish Agricultural Society. By 1929 forty families were living on four- to fourteen-acre tracts and commuting to their city jobs. In 1929 the Jewish Agricultural Society decided to initiate a second such community. It purchased a tract near New Brunswick, New Jersey, where it intended eventually to settle about twenty-five families on five- to seven-acre plots. Cautiously beginning the experiment, it constructed nine four- and five-room houses which the settlers helped plan. The first homesteaders contributed about one-fourth the value of their homesteads as a down payment. Although further expansion was curtailed because of the depression, the society continued to believe that the idea was sound and welcomed the support given to a very similar idea by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1931 in his early advocacy of subsistence homesteads. 6

In the back-to-the-land movement of the depression the Jewish Agricultural Society was swamped with applications for aid in locating

5 Ibid., pp. 120-121, 129; Goldstein, Social Aspects of the Jewish Colonies, pp. 25-28; Davidson, Our Jewish Farmers, pp. 19, 24, 29, 36, 75; Jewish Agricultural Society, Jews in American Agriculture, pp. 35, 38-41.

6 Jewish Agricultural Society, Annual Report, 1929 (New York, [1930]), pp. 8-10; Annual Report, 1930 (New York, [1931]), pp. 10-12; Annual Report, 1931 (New York, [1932]), p. 10.

and buying farms, but was handicapped by a lack of funds. Yet its long work in directing farm settlement, in granting farm credit, and in part-time farming quickly became a part of the New Deal program. One of its members. Henry Morgenthau, Jr., became the first director of the Farm Credit Administration. In New York City the back-to-the-land idea captured the minds of many Jewish leaders and of many idle garmentworkers. Against the cautious advice of the Jewish Agricultural

Society, several ill-conceived farm colonies were attempted, including the short-lived Sunrise Community in Michigan. This movement also led to Jersey Homesteads, which, because of its collective features, was viewed hopefully but with some skepticism by the Jewish Agricultural Society, since many former such colonies had failed. If Jersey Homesteads had followed the pattern of the other, less-collectivized industrial homesteads, it would have been a direct extension of the two agro-industrial communities of the Jewish Agricultural Society.

Benjamin Brown, the immediate father of Jersey Homesteads, was a Jewish emigrant from the Ukraine. Coming to the United States in 1901 at the age of sixteen, he worked his way through college and became an enthusiastic organizer of rural co-operatives, beginning with the Central Utah Poultry Exchange in 1919. By 1925 he was managing a distribution organization in New York City which served several Western farm co-operatives and had an annual business of $12,000,000. As a complement to his enthusiasm for farm co-operatives, Brown had long desired to establish co-operative agricultural and industrial colonies for the Jewish needleworkers of New York City. In 1928 Brown was a member of a delegation of Americans which traveled to Russia to help in the organization of a distribution system in Biro-Bidjan, the all- Jewish colony in the Soviet Union. Also on the trip was M. L. Wilson, who sympathized with Brown's desire to remove the garment-workers to the country. 7

Many Jews saw the country as a means to escape the criticism so often leveled against the Jews because of their concentration in urban areas and because of their participation in highly competitive commercial and financial occupations. Thus, in June, 1933, leaders of three Jewish labor bodies, the Workmen's Circle, the United Hebrew Trades,

7 George Weller, "Land of Milk and Honey," Literary Digest, CXXIV (Aug. 14, 1937), 14; Ralph F. Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," Saturday Evening Post, CCX (Feb. 5, 1938), 7, 34.

and the National Jewish Workers' Alliance, were willing to meet in a conference in New York City to study Benjamin Brown's back-to-the-land proposals. The conference resulted in the formation of the Provisional Commission for Jewish Farm Settlements in the United States, with Brown as chairman. The commission, which in addition to support from labor organizations included among its members Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Isador Lubin, Chief of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and, later, Albert Einstein, planned to give form and direction to the back-to-the-land movement. Jersey Homesteads, which became its first effort, was planned as the first of a series of similar colonies, although no others were ever actually attempted. 8

With the announcement of the subsistence homesteads program, Benjamin Brown and his commission applied for a loan of $500,000 from M. L. Wilson and the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. The plan proposed by Brown was for a colony of 200 skilled Jewish needleworkers, who were to become self-sustaining through subsistence farming combined with seasonal employment in a co-operative garment factory. Small individual homestead plots were to be supplemented by a community truck garden, dairy, and poultry plant, all operated co-operatively. Completing the circle of co-operative activities was to be a community store to sell the community-produced products. The cost of such a colony, including the factory, was estimated at $600,000, with $100,000 to be provided by the 200 homesteaders, who

were to contribute $500 each. After investigation, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads approved Brown's plans and granted him the loan in December, 1933. Under the early policies, Brown and his commission became the Board of Directors of a Jersey Homesteads Corporation, which was authorized to develop the colony with a minimum of government supervision. Brown had already determined on a 1,200-acre tract of fertile land about five miles from Hightstown, New Jersey, and proceeded to buy it for $96,000 in December. In January, Max Blitzer, a former assistant to the president of William and Mary College, was appointed project manager by the local corporation. The first announcement of the project resulted in 800 ap-

8 New York Times, Jan. 7, 1934, sec. 9, p. 12; "Milk and Honey: Jewish Needle-Workers Move into Highstown Project," Literary Digest, CXXI (June 20, 1936), 32-33,

plicants for homesteads, despite the $500 down payment. Jersey Homesteads seemed well under way. 9

As soon as Benjamin Brown and Max Blitzer began to try to turn their plans for Jersey Homesteads into a reality, troubles multiplied. First of all, Brown failed to maintain the support of all the original sponsors, particularly those representing labor and charity groups. Brown was also foiled in his early plans to build homes for $2,000 or less, since National Recovery Administration codes had raised prices. Plans to import inexpensive cattle from drought areas were thwarted by New Jersey laws. Then, in May, the whole subsistence homesteads program was federalized, removing all actual control from Brown, even though Blitzer was retained as project manager. Shortly thereafter M. L. Wilson, Brown's friend, resigned from the Division of Subsistence Homesteads.

After the newly centralized Division of Subsistence Homesteads had reviewed the plans for Jersey Homesteads, another $327,000 was authorized for the project, and by the fall of 1934 construction operations were under way. Then a new obstacle intervened. Brown's original plan, from which he would never deviate, called for a private manufacturer to operate the garment factory until the homesteaders were settled and could organize their own co-operative. As a result Brown and Blitzer began negotiating with private concerns, only to face the determined hostility of powerful David Dubinsky, head of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Dubinsky opposed the subsidized removal of a factory and jobs from the already-harassed workers of New York City. Since Dubinsky remained adamant, despite attacks in the Jewish press and pleas from Einstein and others, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, with no guarantee of an adequate economic base and with no desire for another stranded community, decided to suspend all operations at Hightstown. Thus was the situation stalemated when the Resettlement Administration and Tugwell took over in May, 1935. 10

9 Russell Lord and Paul H. Johnstone, A Place on Earth: A Critical Appraisal of Subsistence Homesteads (Washington, 1942), pp. 137-140; Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," p. 34; Lawrence Lucey, "A Cooperative Town," Commonweal, XXV (Dec. 18, 1936), 210.

10 Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, pp. 140-142; Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," p. 34.

At the time the Resettlement Administration took over Jersey Homesteads, 120 families had already been tentatively selected as homesteaders, $170,000 had been spent, some land had been cleared, the cleared land was being cropped by the New Jersey Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, and one well had been dug. The 120 homesteaders were carefully screened individuals who, since they contributed $500 of their own money, never regarded themselves as recipients of special government aid. The families had been selected by the sponsors, with final approval by an official of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. Beyond the possession of $500, they had to be union members in good standing, to be sufficiently skilled in their needle trades to give assurance of economic success, to have some understanding of cooperative endeavor, and to have a family which showed evidence of good home management. The homesteaders, accustomed to organizing in unions or other groups to enforce their demands, desperately searching for security and a higher level of living, and blindly trusting in the leadership of Brown, were determined that the government complete the original plans for their colony. With the delays and the reluctance on the part of the government, the homesteaders, ably backed by their sponsors and numerous Jewish groups, began a long and perfectly united struggle to force the government to continue with the construction of Jersey Homesteads. With the delay in the spring of 1935, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads was besieged with letters, demands for action, and petitions from mass meetings. The homesteaders could cite the real sacrifices they had made to raise $500 and the jobs they had relinquished because of their prospective moves to new homes. 11

The Resettlement Administration early decided to continue Jersey Homesteads, although administration officials considered expanding it into a larger housing project of the greenbelt type. Construction work was resumed in August, 1935. Blitzer remained as project manager, while Brown continued the negotiations with Dubinsky. But once again the project was plagued with difficulties, since the arguments between Brown and Dubinsky became more bitter than ever, with little prospect for a compromise. A ruling in September by the Comptroller General seemed to outlaw any factory not connected with agricultural pro-

11 Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," p. 34; Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, pp. 146-147.

duction. In November the factory plan was temporarily dropped by the Resettlement Administration, and Blitzer was dismissed. It was rumored that the project would be discontinued or that it would not include the Jewish homesteaders. In any case all construction ceased. On November 26, 1935, the Resettlement Administration announced that Jersey Homesteads would be completed, but that all responsibility for the project, including the factory negotiations, would be assumed by the Resettlement Administration. 12 This left no assurance that the original plans would be followed. Brown was practically excluded from the project, and the homesteaders were indignant. Fortunately, the Resettlement Administration was able to secure Dubinsky's approval for a garment factory at Hightstown, provided it was operated co-operatively from the very beginning. With this plan in view, the homesteaders organized a Workers' Aim Association for the operation

of the factory, and the Resettlement Administration announced that it would go on with the original plans.

The first two years at Jersey Homesteads were years of controversy; the two years of construction were years of extravagance. Tugwell, interested in developing new, inexpensive methods of prefabricating houses, used Jersey Homesteads as an experiment. In the fall of 1935 approximately $200,000 was spent in erecting factories to manufacture concrete slabs for the sides and roofs of the homes. Yet when the first such construction was attempted, the walls collapsed. The whole process was abandoned. The concrete slabs were actually used for roofs, and the factory was used to manufacture concrete blocks until it was discovered that they cost about three times as much as those purchased from private manufacturers. This and other early mistakes led to an unpopular order to exclude all visitors from the construction area and to the posting of guards at the entrances.

In January, 1936, the Resettlement Administration began an accelerated construction program at Hightstown. Even though the construction was delayed by procedural snags and Works Progress Administration labor regulations, the factory was completed by May, and several homes were well under way. By July, 1936, the first seven of the flat-roofed bungalows were occupied. Most of the other 193 homes were completed by January, 1937. As finally completed, the town

12 New York Times, Aug. 1, 1935, p. 25, Aug. 4, 1935, p. 7, and Aug. 6, 1935, p. 19; Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, p. 145.

section of Jersey Homesteads contained 200 white, concrete-block homes of from five to seven rooms, located on small homestead plots of approximately one acre. The homes, although not beautiful from the outside, included modern baths, oil furnaces which air-conditioned the homes in summer, and electric refrigerators. Each homestead had a combination garage and workshop. The town contained the garment factory, a modern sewage disposal plant, a water tank and water lines, a town hall, which also contained a day nursery and library, a combination elementary school and community building, a co-operative store and butcher shop, a clothing store, a tearoom, and a medical clinic. 13

Jersey Homesteads was the only New Deal community to be settled by a completely homogeneous population with strong religious ties. From the beginning the homesteaders were a cohesive and enthusiastic group. Almost all of foreign extraction, inured to persecution in Russia or other foreign lands, they had practically been forced into the garment industry on arriving in America, since almost a third were illiterate, since they arrived with less funds than any other major immigrant group, and since, in most cases, they were skilled only in the needle trades because of occupational limitations imposed upon them in Russia. In the garment districts of New York City they had not always found the economic security for which they longed. The opportunity for a homestead in the country, with their own people as neighbors, seemed to be a second migration, away from an insecure, chaotic, and highly competitive world to a modern promised land. They were all as eager as children to get into their new homes. As early as May 17, 1936, the homesteaders and friends picnicked on the grounds of the uncompleted project, disappointed only because no important Resettlement Administration official attended. 14

The first moving day at Jersey Homesteads was on July 10, 1936, when seven families arrived after dark. Their fifty-mile trip from New York City was delayed by a bridge that was out and by the loss of three trucks in heavy traffic. Elaborate opening ceremonies had to be canceled, and the homesteaders unloaded in the face of a thunderstorm, delayed by a publicity director who insisted on recording the

13 Lucey, "A Cooperative Town," pp. 210-212; Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," p. 6; New York Times, June 14, 1936, sec. 12, pp. 1, 8.

14 New York Times, May 18, 1936, p. 6.

event on a newsreel. With the completion of the project, visitors were allowed, with approximately 5,000 inspecting the project on July 12. The first settlers were soon greeted by the "doers of good" or the "eager helpers and amiable zanies," depending on the point of view, that represented the Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration. There were lectures on preserving, co-operation, and drama and, to a group of frugal Jews, on the necessity for economy. On the day of moving an interior decorator came from Washington with a load of furniture and set up a model cottage, despite the fact that homesteaders were on the way from New York to move into every completed home. On her departure a van came to the house and unceremoniously removed the model furniture and placed it in storage. Soon after the first homesteads were occupied, a large surprise package arrived a huge modernistic statue depicting a woman at a sewing machine. 15

The central idea back of Jersey Homesteads was co-operation. M. L. Wilson stated that the "pattern of the community itself will be as co-operative as it is possible to make it," a sentiment that was in line with the ideas of Benjamin Brown. 16 Jersey Homesteads was planned as the first triple co-operative in the new world, with co-operative stores, farm, and factory. Except for homeownership and garden production, every aspect of Hightstown was to be co-operative. According to early plans, approximately 40 homesteaders were to work the farms and service the stores, while 160 were to work in the factory. Admittedly, the garment factory was the key to the economic success of the community. But with an aggressive and well-knit band of homesteaders, it appeared that Jersey Homesteads would surely be one community where co-operative or group activities would succeed.

As the first homesteads were completed in the summer of 1936, Benjamin Brown was under pressure from the homesteaders to get the factory under way, since many of the homesteaders had suffered hardship because of having to hold themselves in readiness for moving to a colony that seemed ever-longer delayed in construction. The factory building was dedicated in an elaborate ceremony on August 2, 1936. Nearly 2,000 people were present, observing the optimism of the home-

15 New York Times, July 11, 1936, p. 31, and July 13, 1936, p. 31; Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," pp. 38-39.

16 M. L. Wilson to Murray C. Lincoln, Dec. 31, 1936, R.G. 16, National Archives.

steaders, who marched into the factory to the music of "Stars and Stripes Forever." They received a congratulatory telegram from Tugwell and sang their co-operative association theme, composed by Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Brown:

Production, co-operation,
Freedom for every nation,
Here, there and everywhere,
This is our claim:
Workers' Aim, Workers' Aim.

The factory building was 100 feet by 220 feet, mostly all windows, air-conditioned, and declared to be the most modern in the East. Present at the dedication were union officials, sales organization executives, fashion models, and an orchestra. Large orders for coats were announced. Benjamin Brown, who presided at the dedication, defended Jersey Homesteads against charges of communism, declaring instead that it was "common sense-ism" and in line with the Constitution and the American way. The trade name of the factory product was to be "Tripod," standing for the triple co-operative foundation of the colony. Brown said: "On this tripod we will not only bring back craftmanship and pride of achievement, together with security, but we will bring back prosperity based on abundance and not on curtailment." 17

Despite the auspicious opening of the factory, it failed in its first year of operation, with Brown blaming the government and the government inclined to place the blame on the homesteaders. Brown became committed to a summer opening of the factory because of Resettlement Administration promises to have the homes finished by July. Yet, in August, only eight homesteads were completed, even as factory orders were being received. Plans to settle homesteaders in pup tents pending completion of their homes were rejected by the Resettlement Administration, which feared the adverse publicity. As a result many of the family heads came to Hightstown and found lodging in local homes, thus managing to keep the factory going. By December the $60,000 contributed by the 120 approved homesteaders was exhausted, and orders for coats had not been large enough for a profit.

"Washington Star, Sept. 8, 1936; New York Times, Aug. 2, 1936, pt. 2, p. 2; Lucey, "A Cooperative Town," p. 211.

Brown, who led a delegation of homesteaders to Washington, accused the government of a breach of faith in not having completed the house construction as scheduled, thus preventing the success of the factory. Although the Resettlement Administration felt that the failure of the factory was due to poor management, it was keenly embarrassed by the lags in construction. This was particularly true of the Family Selection Section, which had readied the homesteaders for moving without knowing of the delay by the Construction Division. Several homesteaders faced acute hardship as a result. Therefore the Resettlement Administration granted Brown a loan of $50,000 for the further operation of the factory. 18

The second factory season opened in January, 1937. Since the Resettlement Administration had completed the homes, any further losses could not be attributed to a lack of ready labor, although Brown could claim that the nonfulfillment of orders the first year had permanently ruined the market for the factory's products. The second

factory season ended by Easter, with no further operating funds. Brown's appeal for a new loan from the Resettlement Administration (now part of the Department of Agriculture) was rejected. Brown accused the government of bad faith and raised $50,000 himself, forming the Tripod Coat and Suit, Incorporated, to design, promote, and distribute the garments. The factory products were to be sold through farm co-operative outlets throughout the country. The Tripod products were distributed by seven trucks, each of which carried complete lines of coats, plus racks and mirrors. One truck reported sales of $1,000 in one day. But by May, 1938, Tripod suspended operations for lack of funds. Appealing to the Farm Security Administration, Brown finally received a loan of $150,000, with stipulations intended to prevent reckless expenditures or overproduction. Almost unbelievably, these funds were exhausted in less than a year. The Farm Security Administration had to admit the complete failure of the co-operative factory and adamantly refused to grant Brown any further aid. 19

Long before the final failure of the factory in April, 1939, the housing shortage at Jersey Homesteads had become a housing surplus. Even

18 Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," p. 38; J. O. Walker to E. E. Agger, Oct. 9, 1936, R.G. 96, National Archives.

19 Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, pp. 150151.

though the 200 homes were completed, the Resettlement Administration was unwilling to move more families into the colony than the economic opportunities warranted. In addition, no tenants could be found who were willing to contribute $500 to a factory that was an obvious failure. In February, 1938, ninety-six homes were vacant, with the Resettlement Administration threatening to lease them to nonparticipating tenants, and this it later did. Jersey Homesteads never contained more than 120 participating Jewish families. 20

The Jersey Homesteads agricultural asociation was organized in the summer of 1936, with ninety-seven homesteaders joining. The farm co-operative had $16,000 profit from the New Jersey Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, which had leased the farm land for the first year, and two loans from the Resettlement Administration totaling $133,692. The general farm of 412 acres was operated by seven experienced farmers who had been selected as homesteaders for that purpose. They received a regular salary of twenty-five dollars a week from the agricultural association. By raising truck crops for the market, the farm made a profit of $17,000 in 1936, only to lose money consistently in the following years. In the spring of 1937 a poultry unit was started, and a nearby dairy farm was purchased in the fall of 1937. Contrary to Brown's expectations, the three farm units never provided employment for more than thirteen people on the project, and these were the professional farmers. The factory workers, used to indoor work and union wages, were not willing to supplement their earnings by farm work, even in periods of unemployment. As a result transient Negro laborers were employed in busy seasons. Of the three units, only the poultry plant managed to make any profits. After lasting only a year and losing $15,000, the dairy farm was leased to an outside co-operative. 21

The third leg of the co-operative tripod, the consumer outlets, was slightly stronger than the factory and farms. The clothing store was

doomed with the factory, but the grocery and meat market had periods of limited prosperity, while the small tearoom managed to survive, albeit with inadequate stock and facilities. The three co-operatives at Jersey Homesteads were each controlled by a Board of Directors

20 New York Times, Feb. 7, 1938, p. 2; Sept. 24, 1938, p. 19. ^Weller, "Land of Milk and Honey," p. 13; Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, pp. 152-154.

elected by the members. Each of the co-operatives was represented in a community council, which approved all new members admitted to the community. Each member of the co-operatives had one vote and was to share equally in any dividends. The homesteaders entered into the co-operatives with great enthusiasm, making co-operation almost a religion. They even formed a co-operative political party, which elected their first mayor. Yet enthusiasm was not enough. 22

The co-operative factory lost money because of an inexperienced manager, because of production in excess of orders, because of an overly ambitious line of goods, and because of high labor costs and inefficient production. Even though many of the homesteaders felt that the failure was the fault of the government, they would have been more realistic if they had placed the blame on themselves and their own attitudes. Habituated to highly competitive endeavor, they were frankly seeking more wages and a better job for themselves rather than a new way of life. Co-operation meant benefits to the exclusion of sacrifices. Thus, in the case of the farm units, the homesteaders, except for the farmers, were primarily interested in what they could get from the farms. They wanted lowered prices for farm products but were unwilling to work for the lower farm wages. Eventually the nonfarmers in the agricultural association secured control of the Board of Directors and tried to run the farms for their own benefit. Even the homesteaders' cohesiveness sometimes hindered, for their attitude was one of "you protect me and I will protect you." Thus inefficient workers were retained. A clerk in the co-operative store, when dismissed, picketed the store the next day, and not a customer passed him. He was rehired, since all business had ceased. 23

Although a co-operative economy at Jersey Homesteads failed, a second objective of the original sponsors the successful decentralization of a seasonal industry was not necessarily proved impractical, since decentralized clothing factories were successful in nearby towns. Just after the failure of the co-operative factory in 1939, a private company leased the factory building from the co-operative association, but remained only a short time. The homesteaders, used to the

22 Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, pp. 152-154; Harold V. Knight, "Jersey Homesteads, Co-operative Outpost," Christian Century, LV (Feb. 2, 1938), 142; Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," p. 7.

23 Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, pp. 148, 152153, 155.

excellent positions and high wages they had given themselves, made such high wage demands that the private concern withdrew after a short period of bitter controversy. In October, 1939, the Farm Security

Administration forced the co-operative association to sell the factory at auction, since its loans were still unpaid. The government bid in the factory and most of the fixtures, netting only $1,811 on the items released. After remaining idle a year, the factory was rented for five years to Kartiganer and Company of Manhattan for the manufacturing of women's hats. By that time many of the homesteaders had secured jobs in nearby cities, although in 1941 about 100 homesteaders, from 40 families, were working in the hat factory, which proved moderately successful. 24

Another objective of Jersey Homesteads was subsistence agriculture on the small homestead plots. When first on their homesteads most of the settlers were enthusiastically interested in vegetable gardens. Experts from the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station gave lectures on gardening, and the farm co-operative offered to plow and sow each garden for ten dollars. Many of the homesteaders quickly lost their early interest. Eight families never made use of their garden plot at all, and thirty-eight families almost exclusively raised flowers. These families claimed that gardening did not pay when proper charges were made for their own labor, which, in spite of periods of unemployment, they felt should be amply rewarded. On the other hand, about sixty-five homesteaders took pride in their vegetable gardens, some as sources of food, many as hobbies. 25

One objective of Jersey Homesteads was fulfilled even beyond expectations. From the first occupancy, Jersey Homesteads was a true community, with a cohesive, socially active citizenry. The first moving into homes was a community affair. Through the long wait for the completion of the homesteads and during what the settlers believed was a long struggle to get the government to fulfill its obligations, the homesteaders had developed a close bond of kinship. In the community everyone knew everyone else, and house doors were never locked. Though quick to criticize the government and its policies, the homesteaders were proud of their new homes and very happy

24 Ibid., p. 156; New York Times, Oct. 28, 1939, p. 17, Oct. 31, 1939, p. 23, and Nov. 1, 1939, p. 26; "Back to Capitalism," Time, XXXV (April 22, 1940), 87-88.

25 Lord and Johnstone, A Place on Earth, pp. 157158.

about the opportunities offered by the community. Numerous social organizations were quickly organized; in fact, the community was almost overorganized, with some meeting occurring almost every night. In 1939 there were only three adult members of the original homesteaders who did not belong to one or another of the community organizations. There was a dramatic club, a junior league, a sewing circle, a baseball club, and a regular cultural evening. In spite of the lack of steady employment, none of the homesteaders wanted to return to New York City. When economic necessity forced homesteaders to move, they always mourned the loss of friends and the pleasant social life. Jersey Homesteads, as much as any other New Deal community, was a well-defined social organism, with a character and a soul all its own.

Although the homesteaders desired, more than anything else, to own their own homes, Jersey Homesteads remained under government leases until the final liquidation by the Public Housing Authority. The rentals were very low, averaging from about $12 to $16 per month. Although Jersey Homesteads had a community manager appointed

by the Resettlement Administration, it always exhibited more local control than most of the other communities. The influence of the original sponsors remained very important, with the homesteaders surrendering all authority to such leaders as Benjamin Brown. The group meetings of the homesteaders were dominated by those leaders, who often deliberately defied government officials. Unique among the subsistence homesteads projects, Jersey Homesteads was incorporated in 1937 as a borough, with its own town government. The first mayor, Philip Goldstein, practically became a permanent official, serving many years without a salary. 26

Jersey Homesteads, even as Arthurdale, was a focal point for anti-New Deal criticism. Its controversial career invited critics, while its co-operative pattern aroused conservatives to an attack upon the ideas back of the community. Much of the early controversy was heightened by the actions of the homesteads and their leaders, who were quick to accuse the government of bad faith and who never hesitated to publicize their complaints or their wishes. The fact that many of the homesteaders had emigrated from Russia, that 90 per

26 Ibid., pp. 158-159; Armstrong, "Four-Million Dollar Village," p. 7; New York Herald Tribune, June 8, 1937; New York Times, July 13, 1941, p. 28.

cent of them were foreign-born, that Brown himself was born in Russia and had co-operated with the Soviet Government in 1928, was ammunition for the most unethical critics. The Philadelphia Inquirer complained that "the American taxpayer is putting up $1,800,000 to erect a model of a Russian Soviet Commune half way between New York and Philadelphia." According to the same editorial, "200 carefully selected families, headed by a Russian-born little Stalin, will be running their 'co-operative.' " 27 To counteract criticism of this sort, the homesteaders had Fourth of July celebrations, sang patriotic songs, attended Americanization classes, and tried to point out the difference between co-operation and communism.

The most convincing attacks on Jersey Homesteads were directed at the high costs, the mistakes in construction, and the failure of the co-operatives. The homesteaders and sponsors aided part of this attack by constantly expressing their fears that the project cost was going to be so high that they could never repay the government. On July 4, 1936, as the costs and criticism mounted under the Resettlement Administration construction program, Rabbi Wise, a loyal sponsor, stated: "We will pay back the government every red cent that it has invested in this enterprise, even if it takes the rest of our lives and the lives of our children." 28 This very quickly became a manifest impossibility, and not by the fault of the homesteaders, who surely were not expected to pay for the inefficient relief labor or for the $200,000 concrete-slab factory. The failure of the concrete-slab method, the lockout of visitors at the construction site, the drab appearance that was so widely belived would mark the slab-type homes, the loss of local tax revenue, and the enormous cost, all influenced Senator Warren Barbour of New Jersey to introduce his Senate resolution requiring a full, and what was hoped would be an embarrassing, report from the Resettlement Administration.

Many of the New Deal communities were disliked, for one reason or another, by the older inhabitants in the surrounding areas. This local hostility was very marked at Jersey Homesteads. The type of architecture, the extravagance, and the character and nature of the ex-

pected homesteaders were all assailed by local or, at least, by New

27 Philadelphia Inquirer, May 7, 1936.

28 In Lucey, "A Cooperative Town," p. 210.

Jersey critics. It was the mistakes at Jersey Homesteads that influenced the citizens of Bound Brook to enter their successful injunction against the greenbelt city of Greenbrook and thereby almost block the whole Resettlement Administration program. In fact, a Hearst newspaper reporter circulated a petition in the town of Hightstown requesting a similar injunction against Jersey Homesteads. 29

It was the cost of Jersey Homesteads, more than that of any other project, that gave Senator Harry F. Byrd grounds for attacking the extravagance of the Farm Security Administration. Byrd's attack materially contributed to the final abolition of the Farm Security Administration. Using information allegedly secured from the General Accounting Office, Byrd placed the price of Jersey Homesteads at over $4,000,000. The final account by the Farm Security Administration listed the total cost as $3,402,382.27, or about $16,516 per unit if divided equally among each of the 206 homesteads (both in town and on the farms). 30 If it is considered that only 120 families ever shared in the numerous community facilities, the total unit cost for some of the participating homesteads was over $20,000. Of course much of the money was poured into the operation of the factory, into experiments in construction, and into the wages of highly inefficient relief laborers. But, in any case, there was no question in the mind of anyone, including the officials of the Resettlement Administration, that the total cost of Jersey Homesteads represented at least three times its actual value. In fact, as early as 1937, the Resettlement Administration estimated that Jersey Homesteads could be liquidated for only 27.9 per cent of cost. 31

In one sense the end of the Jersey Homesteads experiment began in September, 1938, when the Farm Security Administration, finally realizing that the economic opportunities at Jersey Homesteads were not sufficient to attract any more Jewish garmentworkers (at $500 a family), began renting seventy-five homes to nonparticipating families from the local area. In 1940 the farm, poultry plant, and crops were auctioned, with the government bidding in most of the property. After having lost money for four years, the farm co-operative was abolished.

29 Weller, "Land of Milk and Honey," p. 12.

30 Select Committee of the House Committee on Agriculture, Hearings on the Farm Security Administration, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., 1943-1944, p. 1118.

31 H. W. Truesdell to E. G. Arnold, May 28, 1937, R.G. 96, National Archives.

With the factory already in private hands, the co-operative community was at an end. 32

One thing could not be liquidated the community itself, for it involved more than economics. In July, 1941, the 102 remaining Jewish

homesteaders celebrated their fifth anniversary at Jersey Homesteads. Some were commuting to other cities for work; others were employed in their old factory; all were happy with their homes and homestead plots. Mayor Philip Goldstein, deploring the fact that the homesteaders still rented their homes, asked for a homestead association for Jersey Homesteads. Such an association had been tentatively approved by the Farm Security Administration as early as July 15, 1940, but in 1942, before it was ever put into effect, Jersey Homesteads was transferred to the Federal Public Housing Authority. 33 This agency and its successor, the Public Housing Administration, completed the liquidation of the government's investment in Jersey Homesteads by selling the homes to individuals after the end of World War II. After liquidation, the homesteaders decided to change the name of their community to Roosevelt, New Jersey. Jersey Homesteads, long associated with controversy and extravagance, disappeared from the map. Roosevelt, New Jersey, a name symbolic of a better future in its very newness, was also an indication of the homesteaders' gratefulness to a recently deceased hero.

32 New York Times, Sept. 24, 1938, p. 19; Oct. 31, 1939, p. 23; July 3, 1940, p. 19.

33 Ibid., July 13, 1941, p. 28; Memorandum for J. O. Walker, March 16, 1941, R.G. 96, National Archives.