

No Place Like Home: The Settling of Jersey Homesteads, New Jersey

SORA H. FRIEDMAN

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Experimental communities became, except for their odd designs, ordinary communities __ Even Arthurdale and Hightstown, once so controversial, were remembered only because of the controversy. But a few people remembered, remembered well. They were the homesteaders, the living clay in the great exhibit. To them Cahaba and Dyess and Arthurdale represented not only an experiment but their homes. To them the story of the New Deal communities was really a story of one community, their community. Thus, beyond ideas, policies, administrators, bureaus, the story of the New Deal communities was really many varying stories - one for each individual community.

Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Programs*

Roosevelt, New Jersey, located midway between Philadelphia and New York City, was founded in 1936 as Jersey Homesteads. Changing its name in 1945 to memorialize President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the town was the product of its times, combining political maneuvers, dreams, and risk-taking to produce a history and character unlike that of any other community. Roosevelt carries its own personality and mythos, born at its founding and influenced by the interactions of both residents and visitors over the years as well as by geography and politics. But what is it exactly that sets Roosevelt apart from other towns? How was its "sense of place" created, and what makes it an anomaly?

If not already aware of Roosevelt's existence, only serendipity would bring it to one's attention today. The approach to the town begins at the New Jersey Turnpike junction near Hightstown. Located only four miles east of

Hightstown, Roosevelt is worlds away in terms of character, history, and layout. This shift in ambiance is noticeable as one departs from the Turnpike, a modern-day transportation artery, and enters Route 571, a journey to a past, simpler life. After passing through a small commercial hub, the two-lane country road winds past orchards, corn fields, homes, and a lake. Eventually, a small sign indicates arrival in the town: "Jersey Homesteads Historic District Est. 1937 [sic] Borough of Roosevelt."

Jersey Homesteads was the first triple cooperative community in the United States, combining agricultural, industrial, and retail cooperatives into a single New Deal endeavor. It was conceived by Benjamin Brown, a Jewish entrepreneur who envisioned a Utopian colony that would serve as a model for the country; a cooperative community built out of the hard work and collaboration of its residents, self-sustaining after a minimal amount of initial government support. Jersey Homesteads was the only one of more than ninety New Deal New Towns that specifically targeted a homogenous group with a strong religious identity—in this case urban Jewish garment workers. It was also a town that would maintain its reputation over the next sixty years as a special community, different somehow from those around it, attracting the offspring of its original settlers, a plethora of artists, and families in search of a tight-knit community. While the Jersey Homestead cooperatives failed within the first three years of the project, and the town has been influenced by the forces of change that occur over any given time period, Roosevelt has maintained an identity tied to its unique founding sixty years ago.

As part of a larger government aid program in the 1930s, Jersey Homesteads was the subject of intense federal debate. Democrats asserted that such programs were crucial for assisting the urban poor and held up the project as a model Utopian village in which, with some support from the government, people would learn to take care of themselves and each other. Republicans countered that such programs were glorified experiments in Communism serving only as bottomless pits for federal moneys (see Figure 1). Locally, settlers were the target of discriminatory practices and name-calling by residents of near-by towns.

As a planned community, Jersey Homesteads was based on the English "Garden City," which eventually was incorporated into the Resettlement Administration's plans for "New Towns"—small, self-sustaining, suburban, environment-friendly communities surrounded by woods or farm land. Roosevelt today is still considered an important model of architectural design and urban planning, combining the goals of the Garden City and New Town movements with a particular architecture—a combination of United States International with German Bauhaus. The town also continued the tradition of the Jewish-American agricultural movement that had taken root at the turn of the century.

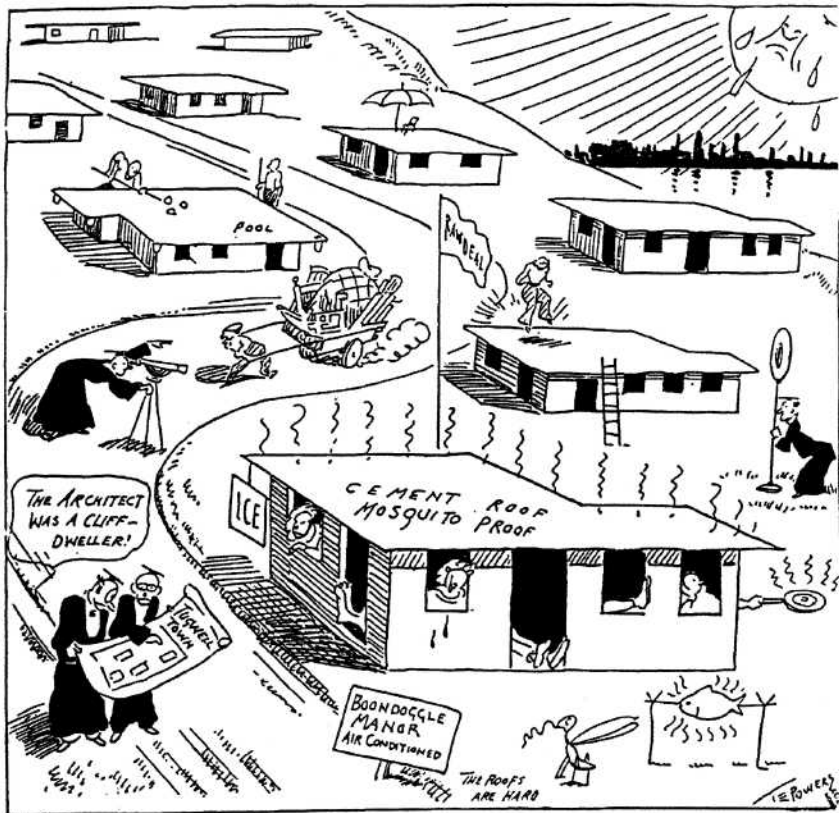
Figure 1. *Evening Journal* cartoon "Tugwellville, N.J."

EVENING JOURNAL

Tugwellville, N. J.

 Resettlement Project—
Taxpayer Will Settle Later

By T.E. Powers


 Copyright, 1936. New
York
Evening Journal, Inc.
Registered C. S. Patent
Office.

Jersey Homesteads drew much attention because of its target population. Ninety percent of the original settlers had immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe, the majority from Russia and Poland. Yiddish was their first language, although their children were native speakers of English. On average, the adult settlers had been in the United States twenty-three years; approximately ninety-five percent of them lived in New York City and the remainder in Philadelphia, Trenton, or Newark. They were between thirty and

fifty years of age, and had young children. Those from New York had worked in the garment factories of Manhattan.

During its early years, Jersey Homesteads received intense media coverage and often played host to hoards of weekend visitors curious to judge for

themselves the success or failure of the new colony. However, from the start, residents spoke of a sense of community that they had not experienced in larger cities. Although the economic rationale for the town's origination was soon inoperative, some scholars consider the project's byproduct—that of developing a social community—a success, based on the perpetuation of the town's unique character and the sense of nostalgia and belonging that remains.

This article explores the factors that contributed to the evolution of Roosevelt's unique character. It focuses primarily on the social agenda at the time of the town's founding as well as the experiences of the original settlers. It also considers the historical context within which the town of Roosevelt developed, analyzing both the New Deal and Jewish agricultural movements; the political controversy that surrounded the project from its start; the failure of the cooperatives; and the aesthetic qualities which distinguish it from other communities.

Historical Context

Roosevelt owes its existence to the confluence of three socio-political currents that were prevalent during the early 1930s: President Roosevelt's attempts to solve the country's economic woes through New Deal legislation, the efforts of one individual to establish a successful Jewish cooperative community in the United States, and the desire of a group of Jewish needle workers to seek a better existence outside of the tenements where they lived and worked. Without any one of these three factors, it is doubtful that the project would have been implemented. This section will review the first two legs of this tripod; latter sections will introduce the town and the settlers themselves.

The idea of a Jewish cooperative colony in central New Jersey was first conceived by Benjamin Brown, a Jewish entrepreneur who had long dreamed of establishing such an enterprise in the United States. Upon learning of the government's decision to fund the Homesteads project, he presented his idea to federal officials, who included it in a larger New Deal effort to address the economic hardships experienced during the Depression. After receiving government approval in 1933, Brown worked with the government to integrate his concept of the triple cooperative with federal specifications and to recruit Jewish garment workers from urban areas who, looking to better their lives, were willing to leave the cities to participate in the project. As described by community manager Max Blitzer,

This project is principally to demonstrate the possibility of decentralizing an industry. We hope to prove that the benefits of a semi-rural life carried out on the cooperative community basis will materially raise the standards of living of garment workers. Jersey Homesteads will mean a new life for hundreds of people who heretofore have been forced to work and live in the confined tenement sections of cities. '

Authorized by the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of 1933, the Jersey Homesteads project was originally part of the United States Department of the Interior's Subsistence Homesteads Division. Between the passage of the authorizing legislation and the town's founding in 1936, the project was shifted among agencies as programs were revised and additional legislation passed by Congress. Because of delays in its initiation (discussed below), the program was still in its infancy when it was moved in the spring of 1935 to the jurisdiction of the Resettlement Administration (RA), then under the leadership of Rexford G. Tugwell, a close advisor of President Roosevelt.

Four programs were administered under the Resettlement Administration to provide for economic development and a better quality of life for poor residents of rural and suburban areas. The Suburban Resettlement Program supported the development of environment-friendly towns on the outskirts of larger, urban areas. Rural Rehabilitation provided financial and technical assistance for residents of rural areas, while Land Utilization programs coordinated the federal purchase of poor-quality farm land for non-agricultural uses such as public parks. The fourth program was Rural Resettlement, which subsumed the Division of Subsistence Homesteads (DSH)² and served as custodian of the Jersey Homesteads project.

The Resettlement Administration oversaw the completion of thirty-four of the Subsistence Homesteads Division's sixty-five planned communities at a total cost of \$30 million. It also managed the twenty-eight community projects of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration as well as thirty-seven of its own. Altogether, ninety-nine communities were completed at a total cost of \$108.1 billion.³ Although some communities were designed as cooperatives, the program was diverse in terms of target population, economic base, geographic location, and the degree of community support offered by residents. Fifty-five were farm communities or villages, twenty-six were industrial, and others were considered resettlement and garden communities. Some of the anomalies were Aberdeen Gardens in Newport News, Virginia, a "garden city for Negroes;" and Terrebonne in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, a "cooperative plantation." Whereas many of the ninety-nine projects were self-sustaining cooperatives or greenbelt towns, Jersey Homesteads was alone in its conception as both a triple cooperative and an attempt to assist a homogeneous group with strong religious ties.

Controversy followed the New Deal housing programs as they shifted between government agencies. For example, the greenbelt towns "were cited as proof that the administration harbored socialist or collectivist plans and wished to undermine individualism" by imposing government responsibility and oversight.⁴ Even while the Jersey Homesteads project was under the oversight of the Resettlement Administration, its management continued to be shifted among divisions, including the Suburban and Construction Divisions.⁵ These numerous changes in management contributed to the project's

controversial reputation, and some contend, to the eventual collapse of the cooperatives as well.

Parallel to the New Deal's efforts in community development were those of the Jewish agrarian movement, which was especially active in central New Jersey. It advocated a back-to-the-land effort for urban Jews who were targets of anti-Semitism in the city and whose dreams of a better life in the New World were slow in coming. One faction, known as "agrarian idealism" and seen in New Jersey as early as 1882, thought that by moving to rural areas, Jews could "lead a natural life in which manual labor would be respected." Its supporters believed that such colonies "would disprove the image of the Jew as an unproductive middleman" and support the Americanization of immigrants by "diluting the Jewish population of the major cities." The movement remained active through the turn of the century, establishing several colonies, but decreased in popularity slowly as the children of its original supporters grew up and sought their fortunes in the "big cities" of Philadelphia and New York City. As a result, when the Depression hit, several of the colonies began to combine agricultural with industrial initiatives as a way to recruit new members. For example, the Baron de Hirsch Fund, which had resettled urban Jewish families in rural New Jersey, combined vocational and agricultural education in Woodbine, a community it established in 1891.⁶ Another group located just a few miles from the future Jersey Homesteads was the Hechalutz Farm School, which trained would-be settlers for a migration to Palestine.⁷ The Jewish Agricultural Society, an outgrowth of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, eventually lent its support to the Jersey Homesteads project, as it supported the back-to-the-land efforts of Jewish groups in the region.⁸

The Jersey Homesteads project was the brainchild of Benjamin Brown, a wealthy Ukrainian immigrant who made his fortune in poultry farming. Brown, who emigrated to the United States in 1901 at age sixteen, worked his way through college and became an organizer of rural cooperatives, starting with the Central Utah Poultry Exchange in 1919. In 1928, he traveled to the Siberian town of Biro-Bidjian to consult on the development of a distribution system for the Jewish cooperative in that area. It was there that he met M.L. Wilson, an official with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration consulting on the project who would become the director of the Subsistence Homesteads Division in 1933.⁹

Brown had long dreamed of developing an agricultural industrial cooperative for Jewish settlers in America. In his book *Roosevelt, New Jersey: Big Dreams in a Small Town and What Time Did to Them*, [author and] Roosevelt resident Edwin Rosskam wondered if Brown's motivation was not due to the prohibitions on land ownership that Jews faced in Eastern Europe. "I can well imagine that land and the working of it must have assumed for him—as it had for other American Jews before him—an almost mystical significance."¹⁰ Brown was active in the Jewish-American agrarian movement, and was elected chair-

man of the Provisional Commission for Jewish Farm Settlements. This organization was formed at a joint meeting of three Jewish labor groups (the United Hebrew Trades, National Jewish Workers' Alliance, and Workmen's Circle), that Brown had convinced to study his proposal for a Jewish cooperative. Upon learning of the government's intentions to establish a group of cooperative colonies in December 1933, the Commission applied for and received a loan for \$500,000. Under the government's direction, "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."¹¹ It also received government approval to coordinate the secret purchase of eight contiguous farms near Hightstown, New Jersey, located three miles from Brown's own home and farm. The 1,200-acre tract was purchased in several secret installments for a total of \$96,000 by several individuals hired by Brown to act as farmers interested in moving to the area. Brown feared that if the owners learned of the government's intent to establish a settlement of Jewish garment workers, they would refuse to sell.¹²

Although he never moved to the town, Brown devoted the remainder of his life to the Jersey Homesteads project. Early on, however, he was blamed for much of the town's continuous troubles. For example, homes could not be constructed within the \$3,000 per unit budget and plans to import inexpensive cattle for the agricultural cooperative were thwarted by the New Jersey state government.¹³ As a result of these problems, the project was removed from Brown's management in 1934 and placed under the care of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. In the fall of that year, the DSH authorized an additional \$327,000 as well as the start of site construction and participant selection. However, the project continued to falter, due both to continually rising costs and the frequent changes in management discussed above.¹⁴

Compounding these problems were public disagreements between Brown and International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union president David Dubinsky throughout late 1934 and early 1935. Although Dubinsky agreed with the principles of cooperative enterprise, he did not initially support the Jersey Homesteads project. Dubinsky did not like the fact that early plans called for private ownership of the new factory until residents could organize themselves. He feared that "it would result only in sweat-shop conditions, hindering rather than helping the workers."¹⁵ Dubinsky's and Brown's public disagreements, carried out in speeches and letters published in newspapers, threatened to derail the entire project. When private supporters reneged due to Dubinsky's lack of support, construction came to a halt even though 120 families had already been selected for participation. In May 1935, however, Rexford Tugwell assumed control of the Resettlement Administration and work was continued.¹⁶

The project was challenged again in November 1935, when the Comptroller General ruled that the non-agricultural factory was prohibited under

the authorizing legislation, resulting in another work stoppage. Later that month, the Resettlement Administration, with support from the proposed settlers (discussed below), was able to reinstate the project once more, deciding that the factory would be cooperatively run from the start. Dubinsky himself had ultimately agreed to support the project [ironic, since his lack of support had initially delayed negotiations]. Dubinsky also eventually encouraged the support of groups such as the International Workers' Order and Workers' Alliance.¹⁷

When the RA reinstated the project in November 1935, the agency did specifically prohibit Benjamin Brown from participating in its management. The homesteaders were furious at this challenge to their preferred and popular leader. In response they organized the Workers' Aim Cooperative Association. Although he was never formally reinstated to a position of leadership in the Jersey Homesteads project, Benjamin Brown was eventually allowed to return to work on behalf of the settlers. Work on the project itself accelerated in January, 1936, and in July of that year, the first group of settlers—seven families—moved in.¹⁸ Others came as their homes were completed.

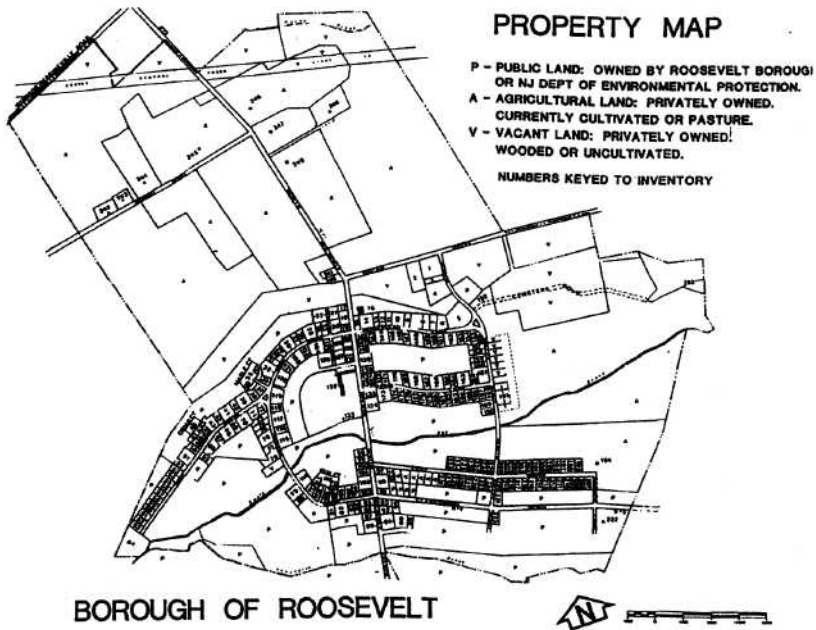
Although a controversial figure, especially among government officials, Benjamin Brown was considered the "father" of the town by the settlers, several of whom even referred to him as a messiah. Much of his popularity resulted from his ability to convince the federal government to provide continued financial support for the project, even as it faltered repeatedly over the years. For many of the settlers, it was the first time they had experienced someone who was willing to risk his own resources and reputation for their well-being. Brown died several years after the town was officially established. He is buried at the top of a hill at the town cemetery, and is still honored as Roosevelt's "founding father."

The Town

At the time of its ideological conception, Jersey Homesteads had been given the name "Assifa," Hebrew for *assembly* or *gathering*. In an undated document entitled "Questions & Answers," Brown explained that Assifa was also an acronym for "Association, self-sustaining industrial farm."¹⁹ However, for reasons not mentioned in the literature, the community was officially called "Jersey Homesteads" during the actual development of the project.

The original plan for the town, designed by Brown, government officials, and architects before settlers were selected and could have input, was estimated to cost a total of \$600,000 (\$3,000 per each of 200 units). It incorporated three elements: a residential core with community buildings and a cooperative-run garment factory; an inner commons with park land; and surrounding land for subsistence crops and woods that would protect the village from the encroachment of urban development (see Figure 2).²⁰

Government funds would provide \$500,000 for the construction of the
 Figure 2. Borough of Roosevelt Property Map



homes as well as a factory, school, municipal building, and support facility for plumbing, electricity, etc., while each of the two hundred families would contribute \$500 for a total of \$100,000 to make up the balance. By the conclusion of the construction, however, the total cost for the project was \$3,402,383.27 (\$16,516 per unit), more than five times the original estimate.²¹

The physical layout of Jersey Homesteads derived from both the English Garden City, popular during the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the American New Town. As described in the National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, "the English Garden Cities were well-known among New Deal planners and intellectuals, chiefly Rexford G. Tugwell. . . who believed in many of Ebenezer Howard's [credited with the founding of the Garden City movement] basic theories . . ." It held that land use should incorporate natural features such as streams, hills, wooded areas, and fields as key elements in the development of the project. From the New Town movement, Jersey Homesteads appropriated the idea to create a community that would be self-supporting, containing homes, school, employment, recreation, and commerce. The Inventory-Nomination Form explained:

The plan also exhibits 'American' qualities in its amplitude of scale (particularly the half-acre lots), the long Olmstedian strips of green space, and the invocation of

the single or semi-detached house as an ideal. The attention to pre-existing natural features (such as creeks and topography), the curvilinear street layout, and the careful siting of buildings in relation to one another and to the total plan are also elements of advanced community planning found in Roosevelt.²²

While Tugwell and his staff influenced the physical form of Jersey Homesteads, its overall planning design is attributed to architect-planner Alfred Kastner.

Kastner brought in as an assistant, architect Louis Kahn, who is credited with designing the distinctive Bauhaus-influenced structures.²³ (Kahn eventually became a leading architect of his generation.) Each house is located on a half-acre of land, so that families could supplement crops grown on the cooperative farm with vegetables grown in their own gardens. The majority of homes are single-story, with some two-story dwellings as well. They are box-like, with flat roofs and large windows in the front rooms, and range from two to four bedrooms. While many have been renovated or enlarged, the original design features remain.

The layout of Jersey Homesteads "left much of the existing agricultural landscape intact, incorporating it into a wide green belt of farm land and conservation areas," balanced by the inner commons and park land designed as the "inner greens." The open space and landscaping of the community plan were spatially and visually prominent. Unlike the prototypical planned industrial town focused on the centrally-located factory, here the factory and public works were located on distant corners of the property. The school's 15.5 acre site, occupying the most central location, served as a de facto town green. With plantings, a playground, ball fields, and its expansive lawn, it filled an aesthetic function as well as ceremonial and recreational purposes. The original municipal building now a residence, was also centrally located, as was the site then reserved for a future town hall.²⁵

Several pieces of material culture complement the town's layout and today still serve as symbols of Roosevelt's identity. These include a small outdoor amphitheater in the town center with a large bust of President Roosevelt (#133), a plaque honoring the sixty-four residents who served in World War II located directly in front of the school, and a mural painted by Ben Shahn in 1937 while he worked for the Resettlement Administration as a painter and photographer. The mural is located in the school lobby. Depicting the passage of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to the sweatshops of New York City to the fields of Jersey Homesteads, the mural came to serve as a community symbol. Shahn, who moved to the town in 1938 and remained there until his death (his wife is still an active resident), described its significance: "My first big job was the Jersey Homesteads school, and in one way, it's still the most successful. People really look at it. They know it by heart. To them it's like the building, a part of the community."²⁶

Other town landmarks include the synagogue;²⁷ streets which were named to honor residents who died during World War II (Tamara Drasin, for example, was a USO performer who died during a plane crash — Oscar Nisnevitz died while a prisoner of war in the Philippines); and Roosevelt's cemetery, located on the perimeter of the town (and presently reserved for individuals who can demonstrate a familial relationship with an original settler). Each of these artifacts [broadly defined] is still the site or object of community activity and attention, and is frequently invoked as a symbol of the community by residents during holidays, festivals, and ceremonies.²⁸

The Settlers

Although the story of Jersey Homesteads is intertwined with those of the New Deal and Benjamin Brown's quest for a Jewish cooperative in the United States, the third leg of the tripod, the homesteaders themselves, presents an interesting study of Utopian hope for prosperity and achievement of "the American dream." While the project had the support of the federal government and the leadership of a dedicated individual, the risks undertaken by this group of people should not be underestimated. Why would parents elect to uproot their families from the familiar life of New York City or Philadelphia? What would convince them to invest \$500 of their savings in a risky experiment? This section will introduce the settlers and examine their motivations for participating in the project.

Although Benjamin Brown's original hope was to create a colony for Jewish homesteaders, the Resettlement Administration's intent was to assist poor families, not necessarily Jewish families. Samuel Finkler, senior selection officer for the project, explained that he "obtained from the Cloakmakers Union, a list of one hundred and fifty Gentile families eligible for the colony. But none of these families would join."²⁹ A government worker concurred, "All families at the colony are Jewish because most of the needle trades workers in the New York area are of that faith. Gentile families were included in the list originally invited to join, but none accepted."³⁰ In the case of Jersey Homesteads, the plan resulted in a group homogeneous in religion, socio-economic level, and political leaning.

Original plans for the town called for eighty-five percent of the heads-of-household to be men who were skilled workers and who would work in the garment factory. The remainder would be farmers hired to work on the cooperative farm as well as others to work in support services ranging from carpentry to store clerkship to town management.

In order to understand the settlers' motivations for moving to Jersey Homesteads, it is helpful to understand what their lives had been like beforehand. While it is not within the scope of this article to conduct a thorough review of the immigrants' lives prior to moving to New Jersey, following are some brief personal accounts that illustrate their living conditions at the time.

For example, in an interview with the *New York World-Telegram*, Mrs. Notterman talked about her crowded four-room apartment in Brooklyn. "All my life I am unhappy here—twenty-two years it is when I come from Poland and always I worry."³¹ In an interview conducted more than forty years later, her daughter Sara (Notterman) Adler recalled:

Most of us came from Brooklyn and the Bronx, and it wasn't anything like this. . . Each year made the city more congested, more dirty and more polluted . . . Economics of the time were not too good. And I think this was not just a problem with the Nottermans; it must have been a problem with all members of the Union. . . There were many strikes in the trade before we came here. The money wasn't very good. I think we had to borrow money to move out.³²

Augusta (Gus) Chasan, the only original adult settler still living in 1997 (at age ninety-four), told how factories in New York City were closing, limiting the jobs that were available to needle workers and making it "very difficult for people to make a living."³³ Further evidence of the difficult lives of this group was presented in a government report produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Richard Danhof explains,

Before 1933, the economic outlook of these workers had become increasingly insecure. Along with the mechanization of the industry and increased competition between the hundreds of small shops in the industry there has been a tendency for women and youthful labor to replace skilled well-paid family heads. Even before the economic collapse in 1929 it was clear that Jewish garment workers would have to take drastic steps to meet their problems.³⁴

In addition, factories were ill-lighted, poorly ventilated, and filthy. Although workers received union wages—in fact some of the highest in the area—it was not unusual for garment workers to be employed only two months of the year, thus significantly reducing their earnings.

For years, many of the settlers had talked about the possibility of a "second migration" to the countryside. They were tired of the constant competition experienced in both the garment industry and in New York City itself, and believed they could supplement their industrial earnings with part-time farming. In addition, many were anxious to escape the anti-Semitism that was prevalent. Danhof continued, "By 1933, many Jewish needle workers had also developed a strong wish for a way of living that would not be characterized by the extreme seasonality of their occupation and that would offset the disadvantage of the highly urban setting in which they had to rear their families."³⁵ Several of the settlers later commented that they considered themselves partners in the program, not "as recipients of special Government aid, but as specially selected individuals ready to invest most of their savings . . . in a social experiment that was to serve as a guide for other groups of workers."³⁶

Settlers moved into Jersey Homesteads knowing that their rent would eventually be applied toward a down payment on their houses. In their essay

"Home is Where the Heart Is," Gordon Kirk Jr. and Carolyn Tyirin Kirk discuss the significance of home ownership for immigrants to the United States. They explain,

... by owning their own homes, immigrants gained some marginal control over their social and economic environment. Ownership provided independence from the dictates of landlords regarding the number of people in the household. Possession of one's home further offered some security and stability by providing a hedge against rising rents, a means of forced savings and increased equity, supplemental income, and security in retirement.³⁷

For most of the settlers, the thought of owning a home was unimaginable until they had joined the Homesteads project. As one person told Edwin Roskam, "... you never thought of owning a home. That couldn't enter your mind in your wildest dreams. That was something the people did in another part of town. We didn't think about the other part of town."³⁸ Mrs. Notterman continued, "Now I will have my own potato patch. My children will have good air. I am going to settle down in that lovely new house the government is giving us a chance to get—with no charity, either .."³⁹

Upon its founding in 1936, the town was planned to accommodate 1,000 people in 200 families. To recruit applicants for the project, advertisements were placed in Yiddish newspapers announcing a series of informational meetings for both perspective applicants and supporters. Once David Dubinsky, the influential union leader, was in agreement, project organizers also garnered the support of other labor leaders so that they could make use of union bulletins and newsletters for recruitment and publicity, and because they hoped the new factory would be unionized.

Over 800 applications were submitted as were several hundred additional expressions of interest [see discussion below]. From those applications, Benjamin Brown and Samuel Finkler (who served as senior selection officer for the project) selected 120 families. Men who would work in the garment factory had to demonstrate their membership in good standing in a labor union and proven skills in the garment industry. In addition, all settlers were required to pass a rigorous health exam and to demonstrate evidence of a responsible and well-managed home life. Applicants had to show an understanding of the cooperative movement, a willingness to participate in the endeavor, and the ability to contribute \$500 to cover start-up costs for the factory.⁴⁰ Government officials believed that the fee would discourage families not dedicated to the project and incapable of economic success.

It is no surprise that it was this last requirement that was the most challenging to the applicants, as explained by Yetta Ostrow, a child when her family moved to Jersey Homesteads. "And they said to my parents they would have to pay five hundred dollars. And five hundred dollars, don't ask, was a fortune of money. At that time, in the Depression, who had five hundred dollars? In New York two people had to work to pay fifty dollars a month rent.

So you can imagine where they would get five hundred dollars, with eight kids."⁴¹ Families cashed in their life insurance policies and soldier's benefits from World War I, borrowed from extended family and friends, and used any savings they had to pay the fee.

Although the majority of the applications apparently have been destroyed, the Archives Department of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Studies in New York has eighty-nine original applications in its collection "Jersey Homesteads/Roosevelt, New Jersey." Each one-page form was apparently completed by a staff person interviewing the applicant as much of the handwriting throughout the collection appears to be identical. The applications are mostly in English; some have Yiddish annotations clarifying or translating questions and answers. They appear to be mostly, if not completely, from individuals who were denied entree to the project, as the names are different from those of the original settlers and many are not needle workers nor union members.⁴²

While the application forms on file at YIVO may not shed light on the settlers themselves, most likely the families they represent did not have significantly different lifestyles than those selected for the project. Thus, they may provide insight into how members of the target group saw themselves and what their lives were like at the time of application when they were living in urban areas. Following is a demographic profile of this group of applicants, interviewed between January and August, 1935.

Of the eighty-nine applicants, five were female, seventy were male, and fourteen were impossible to determine based on the information provided. Nine were single, one was a widow, and seventy-nine were married. All but thirteen had children, from ages one to seven. The applicants ranged in age from twenty to sixty-one, with the average applicant aged forty-two. All but three of the applicants listed their nationality as Jewish; the others were American, Negro, and Jewish American. All but five were born in Eastern Europe; the others listed their places of birth as Philadelphia (three), South Carolina (one), and USA (one). Those born outside the United States had been in the country an average of twenty-two-and-a-half years. Twenty-four were professionally involved in the garment industry, ranging from tailors (ten) to cutters, sewing machine operators, and weavers. Twenty were working part-time (twelve in jobs different from their stated profession, for example, a carpenter working as a cake salesman, a weaver working as a store clerk, a knitter working as a window cleaner, and an upholsterer working in a laundry) while, at the time of completing the application, seventeen had been unemployed for periods ranging from two weeks to five years, with an average of two years. In only eleven families were both spouses working. Thirty-five of the applicants were union members, but only one family had two spouses who were union members. Seventy-five applicants identified themselves as members of the International Workers' Order, a left-wing fraternal organization that coordinated educational, social, and political activities, while three others noted

their memberships in other fraternal organizations. When asked if they currently carried insurance, twenty-three responded that they had lost their coverage, thirty that they did not currently have insurance, and thirty-one that they did possess insurance. Two did not reply.

Perhaps the most telling questions are those that inquire about purchases in 1934 and 1935, and about the applicants' outlook for the future. When asked if they had bought any new furniture, clothing or other articles for their home, themselves, or their families in 1934, thirty-nine replied "no" or "nothing at all." Forty-one had purchased clothes or something "minor." One person had purchased a "Plymouth automobile on installment," another, "some furniture," and a third, a "frigidaire on installment." In 1935, thirty-seven had not made any purchases. Those that did bought clothing (thirty-four), "minor things" (four), a frigidaire on installment (two), and a bed and gas range, radio, and oil cloth (one each). One individual explained that the shoes and clothing purchased for his children came to a total of twelve dollars for the year. Four additional applicants responded in the affirmative without providing details.

When asked, "What are the prospects for your immediate future?" eleven did not know. Other responses included, "worse than till now," "no expectations for advancement," "to be thrown out of work," "hard work and struggle against bad conditions," "to walk the streets," "don't expect any improvement," and "not making a living." Only five of the responses can be considered positive in any way, looking toward the future: One individual anticipated selling insurance; four responded that they would work in support of the "revolution" in America; and one hoped to search for a job "in the Soviet Union if possible."⁴³

These applications demonstrate that while not all of the members of this cohort were destitute, for the majority life was difficult. Full-time employment in one's trained profession was not a given, nor was a steady income. Purchases beyond the bare minimum were rarities for an extended period of several years, and people were often forced to liquidate whatever savings they had previously accumulated. Their outlooks for the future were grim.

Perhaps it was the change in outlook experienced by many homesteaders upon their move (discussed below) that contributed to an unexpected consequence. While the promotion of positive social relations within the selected group of settlers (not to be confused with cooperation in production) was only a secondary goal of the project, from the moment the selection process began, a positive group dynamic began to develop. While they were still living in New York, the selected families often came together to get to know each other better, attend classes on cooperative management and farming, and learn about the status of the project.

It was during this time between 1933 and 1936 that the settlers bonded as a group and worked together toward the completion of the project. Part of

their bonding was due to their frustrations at numerous delays in construction, slow communications with project staff, and the possibility of the project's cancellation when Benjamin Brown and union leader, David Dubinsky could not come to agreement over ownership of the cooperative. As a result, the settlers formed the Workers' Aim Cooperative Association to represent their interests to officials managing the project. Brown even composed a theme song to promote the colony's unity and identity:

Midst field and stream

Our Jersey homes we found,
To the hum of sewing machine
And the tractors sound
We sing, we work
Hand in hand
And to workers everywhere
A welcome hand extend.
Here we live,
We hoe, we sow,
We build, we plant,
Here we live,
We hoe, we sow,
We build we plant;
Come brothers, celebrate,
Everybody co-operate,
With our workers' aim,
Our nation of workers free,
Shall always be
Our aim, our only aim.
Production, Co-operation,
Freedom for every nation,
Here, there, everywhere,
Workers' aim, workers' aim.
This our claim.⁴⁴

During the controversies mentioned above, Association president Boris Drasin sent memos to the assistant administrator of the Resettlement Administration and to the State of New Jersey. The memos described the contributions and sacrifices the settlers had made to participate in the project, requested assistance in the form of the establishment of a local housing authority, and expressed the willingness of the settlers to continue their efforts. Exemplifying the settlers' dedication to the project, the memo to the RA closed, with the following statement: "We definitely propose to solve the garment work problem for the Hightstown Project ourselves."⁴⁵

Life During the First Year, 1936-1937

The Jersey Homesteads agricultural cooperative turned a \$17,000 profit (returned directly to the cooperative) during the first two years of its existence. Its produce included vegetables, especially potatoes, as well as dairy and poultry. Milk from the dairy was used to make ice cream which was sold in the cooperative Tea Room.

In newspaper articles, transcripts of interviews, and interviews conducted by the author, it is clear that, in spite of the challenges of living in an unsettled rural area, homesteaders continued to trust in the promise of the new town. Goldie Rosenzweig explained, "We came in 1936. The houses weren't finished. The school wasn't finished. The roads weren't finished. Nothing. Only two cars in the whole town. We walked so many times the four miles to Hightstown. We had to go shop." When her twelve-year-old daughter cried in sadness because of moving away from New York, Goldie explained, "Look, you will get older, you'll grow up and get married. But for papa and me this is the place. Because you know, when papa gets older, they'll throw him out of the factory. But not this one. Here the factory belongs to all of us. We'll surely have it for a lifetime."⁴⁶

One original resident was a Mr. Goldberg who had recently moved to the town from Brooklyn. Here he talks about feeling safer than in the city, in terms of both his new home and job:

In New Yoik," said Mr. Goldberg, "I was ridink always on that subway to voik. Vhat vas I getink but headaches? In 39th Street I never ate once a foist-class lunch, always stending, always hurrying. Lookit me here, where I go home every noon, valking all the vay.... Here I valk four blocks, no more, and always t'rough trees. I ain't got sidevarks, I ain't got treffic lights, I gotta path. Trees all around me," he whispered darkly. Then he brightened up. "I'm not lookink every direction vhat's going to hit me, I'm not vondering vhat's going to run over my kids, I'm not guessink is some feller holdink up Mrs. Goldberg wit' a gun.... I'm not vorryink.

... you know vhat's the bast thing ve got here? ... It's our vill to voik. Before ve never vanted to voik; now ve vant nothing but voik, voik, voik... In every leetle factory, up New Yoik vay, the boss is tryink to chisel. More profits for himself, nisch? So always he's lookink where else can he chisel. ... in a stage whisper he said, But when ve voikers are chisellink, ve are chisellink only ourselves.

Mr. Goldberg stepped back; the secret was out. He drew himself up, peered the full length of the factory as though he hoped there were others to hear him, and in a loud declamatory voice, astonishing in so small a man, Mr. Goldberg demanded: "So-o, VHY CHISEL?"⁴⁷

The town experienced a vibrant civic life from the start. Meetings were held, some say every night, for groups with interests ranging from Jewish culture to cooperative management to gardening to the arts. In addition, there

were Board of Education meetings, town council meetings, and Civic Association meetings. Groups were open to both men and women, and were conducted in a mix of Yiddish and English. People joked that when three or more people were walking in the street, they knew a meeting was in progress.⁴⁸

In addition to a full civic life, the town sported an active social calendar for both children and adults. Parents knew that if their children did not come home for dinner in the evening, they did not need to worry, assured that a neighbor had invited the children in to eat. Parties were held on a weekly basis to welcome newcomers. Gus Chasan reminisced about neighbors coming over at night, flashlights in hand, for tea and potato pancakes (potatoes were the main crop grown on the farm). "We would each introduce ourselves and talk about what we wanted to do. On some evenings, we would go to Ben Shahn's house where he would allow us to sit and watch him painting."⁴⁹

Seymour Slovik was approximately eighteen years old when his family moved to Jersey Homesteads in May 1939. In an interview for the Roosevelt Oral History Project conducted in the early 1980s, Seymour recounted how upon arriving at his family's new home, a group of young people approached him while he was unloading furniture from the moving truck. "They said, 'How would you like to go to a campfire?' . . . and before the furniture was unloaded, I was around a campfire with a bunch of people and I had a bunch of friends — I thought at the time that this was the friendliest town. In no time at all I had lots of friends."⁵⁰

Later interviews confirm the strong sense of nostalgia for the start of the project expressed by Mr. Slovik. For example, Lottie (Sackowitz) Eisner, fifteen when she moved to Jersey Homesteads in 1936, lit up when questioned about moving day. She described her first impressions: "We were in the second group to come, it was August 6, 1936, a Friday? Hightstown looked like a western movie to me. Farmers were going to the bank in overalls and straw hats; it was hot and dusty, strictly rural. The moving company was the Mayflower Moving Company. We kibitzed [joked] about coming on the Mayflower!"⁵¹

Some of the town's early cohesiveness likely resulted from the prejudice and discrimination that were part of life from the start, made manifest in the form of anti-Semitism and charges of communism. Goldie Rosenzweig explained:

Some stores wouldn't let you in. In one of them I went to buy something that year.

So the man said:

From where you come?

I said: From Jersey Homesteads.

He said: I'm not going to sell you.

I said: Why?

He said: Because it's communist there I won't sell you.⁵²

Gus Chasan shared her memories. "Hightstown was a real old-time vil-

lage [in 1936]. The people in Hightstown didn't like us and called us Jewish communists. They didn't want to sell to us and treated us terribly."⁵³ However, the vendors' prejudicial statements and practices were not new to this group, and in fact, seemed to contribute to the development of the sense of community as settlers banded together in the face of outside pressures.

As was common among New York's Jewish population, the majority of the settlers came to Jersey Homesteads with well-established leftist tendencies. In addition to the most obvious display of this political leaning (the cooperative nature of the town itself), it was also visible through some of the residents' actions outside the town. For example, "In the early years children were taken to the movies in Hightstown, where they sat in the section set aside for black immigrant workers . . ."⁵⁴ Two residents (one current, one previous) of the town independently confirmed that this was due, not to prejudice directed at the settlers themselves, but to their desire to illustrate their disapproval of racial segregation policies practiced at the time. As a result, many of the town's young people were the recipients of derogatory comments when they went to Hightstown.⁵⁵

As might be expected, not all of the original settlers were happy. The garment factory and commercial cooperatives did not turn a profit, and were the focus of sustained disagreements between the government and the townspeople. Many of the Workers' Aim Association meetings that first year consisted of debates between residents on how best to proceed. In interviews about the early days, many of the settlers talked about the incessant mud, as roads were not paved for several months; about the difficulties of getting to Hightstown for shopping, since few of the original families owned cars; and about the changes in moving from the city to the country. Stella Rosenzweig talked about her first days in the new town, when she was twelve years old:

I don't know whether you can imagine the impact of an open space on people who had been born in the crowded parts of a city. I was acutely uncomfortable in the country. I might have been put on the moon in terms of its visual and feeling impact. I was used to the security of all those packed bodies around me. And so much space, all of a sudden, is just as frightening as sleeping in a room by yourself when you never have. The quiet, the lack of light, the sense that there is nobody packed around you... I felt this the first evening I was here.⁵⁶

Nathan Green was one of those who chose to leave the project when it fell below his expectations. He didn't earn as much at the factory as he did in New York and was dismayed that workers hired to make coats were actually pants makers, necessitating extra training. In addition, he talked about what he perceived as a "crowd mentality." He explained in a newspaper article published several months after his departure, "They all seemed afraid of something. But I wasn't afraid. I dared to criticize. And when I stood up in meetings and started to say what I thought was wrong, they all booed me."⁵⁷

Despite the few unhappy settlers and the challenges faced by all, the

majority of that early group seemed content with their decisions to leave the city for Jersey Homesteads. Perhaps the spirit of the settlers during that first year was best summarized in a 1936 holiday message to President Roosevelt. In their card, the settlers wrote,

Once we faced these holidays with heavy hearts. Ahead there seemed nothing but a continuance of the lives of gloom and privation which we had always known. And then, suddenly, came new prospects. The promise of economic opportunity for ourselves, of sunshine and fresh air for our children, of a more healthful and cheerful environment for all of us.⁵⁸

The Later Years, 1937-present

In spite of the continuous financial difficulties faced by the cooperatives, the town's development and the settlers' civic spirit continued over the years. For example, in a 1938 dedication of the newly-opened school for grades kindergarten through eight, Mayor Philip Goldstein commented:

We feel for the first time in America that we are citizens. We lived in a city of which we were only a tiny part. We used the city's facilities, but never felt they were ours.

Today we open a school which is our own____Historically we know that the fate of the Jew and the fate of Democracy are closely allied. We feel that in helping to organize a community such as this one, based on the ideals of the American Constitution we help not only ourselves but our country and our civilization.⁵⁹

That same year, recognizing the active participation of residents in managing town affairs, it was decided to build a town hall, and elect a mayor and town council. As Gus Chasan said, "it was time to do something about becoming somebody!"⁶⁰

Neither the industrial nor the commercial cooperatives, however, ever turned a profit, even though after the industrial cooperative's loss its first year loss, Benjamin Brown had invested an additional \$50,000 in the project.⁶¹ Because of the troubles experienced by the cooperatives, recruitment for the final eighty families was never completed. In order to fill remaining homes, the government decided to rent the dwellings to non-participants in the cooperatives, exempting them from the \$500 fee as well as from other original criteria for selection. Edwin Roskam described the rift that separated the original settlers and the "renters," as they were called:

The homesteaders, with their unforgotten and unforgiven five hundred dollars as a club, turned on the newcomers. How dare they speak up at meetings? They hadn't paid the price of admission. They hadn't lived through the hard times before the streets were paved, when it was worth your life to cross from corner to corner in the mud. The five hundred dollars and the mud: these were the symbols of hardship endured, of merit acquired. And here, suddenly, were two classes in this tiny town where nobody had any one to speak of: on one side the homesteaders, the Plymouth Rock people, the Mayflower people; on the other side the renters, the tenants.⁶²

In 1938, it became impossible to ignore the financial losses consistently

sustained by the cooperatives. By the time construction on all the dwellings was completed, final costs for the project had exceeded original estimates by more than \$10,000 per unit, including the overages of the community buildings which were averaged across each of the 200 individual units. The project was officially declared a failure in 1939, and the Farm Security Administration, which was managing the project at that point, began to liquidate its assets. The farm and factory machinery were sold at auction to private bidders, the stores were closed, and the factory building, first empty for a year, was rented to a millinery company and subsequently sold to a private manufacturer. Today it is home to both a light production facility and to artists' studios.

Determination as to why the cooperatives failed has never been definitively agreed upon by residents, government officials, and scholars. One possible reason was the eventual unwillingness of the settlers to put the interests of the cooperatives ahead of their own interests. Edwin Rosskam elaborated, ... the idealist co-operators turned out to be few. A sizable portion had no intention (or capacity) to reconcile old habits with the new and very different outlook imposed by new and very different conditions of work and living. Every one of them knew how to run things better, in the town or in the factory or the store; and they weren't shy about letting everybody else know it.⁶³

Other possible reasons mentioned in the literature include the frequent changes in federal government management and miscalculations by Benjamin Brown regarding the cost of both start-up and maintenance expenses. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to identify the exact causes of the cooperatives' failures, more than likely it was due to some combination of all three, weaknesses in each leg of the project's original tripod.

With the closing of the cooperatives, settlers were forced to seek work elsewhere. Half accepted positions in the millinery that occupied the old garment factory building. Others returned to former jobs in New York City or found work in nearby Trenton or Camden. In 1946, when the final liquidation was completed, residents were offered the opportunity to buy their homes from the government. While several families opted to leave, the majority decided to stay.

Over the decades, Roosevelt has continued to adapt to circumstance (although growth has been successfully limited, perhaps due to the greenbelt surrounding the town). Today, more than ten percent of the town's residents are second generation homesteaders, and there are several third generation families as well. While the town has seen many changes, including religious diversity, new employment opportunities, and the construction of several new homes in outlying areas, there are elements which remain static—limitations on commercial development, a close sense of community support, a sense of nostalgia for a special history. Roosevelt has clearly changed throughout the years and adapted to prevailing forces, both of the 1930s and of each

decade thereafter. However, while the experiment in cooperative management failed, the residents who remained experienced substantial economic growth, and the cooperative spirit of the town remained for decades to come.

Closing

This article is not an exhaustive study of Roosevelt's history or character. Many stories have not been told (for example, the "psycho-geographical" study which attempted to assign houses based on personality). Many "angles" have not been fully explored (for example, the community's architectural significance, the educational system, the town's history between 1940 and the present, the role that religion played in the community in its later years, and the development of an artist's colony within the town, to name but a few). Other items, which are unclear in the literature and thus not fully explored here, include the relationship between settlers based on their cities of origin in the United States and the frequency with which settlers returned to their home neighborhoods to visit. It would also be interesting to know whether or not that small group of homesteaders who were not from New York City experienced a sense of alienation from the majority culture. Also, with what frequency did settlers return home at the start of the project? Did this change over time?

It is also important to note one area in which Jersey Homesteads/Roosevelt was not an anomaly, that is, the search for Utopian community and home life. Well-known examples today include the various communal movements of the 1960s as well as the New Towns of Columbia, Maryland, and Reston, Virginia. Both of the latter towns were developed by James Rouse, a successful real estate mogul who, in the 1970s, experimented with his own vision of Utopian communities—racially, socially, and economically diverse populations living in "villages" with a commercial core surrounded by common areas of woods and parks.

Perhaps the most recent example of a Utopian community is that of Celebration, Florida, a new town developed by Walt Disney Co. ten minutes south of Orlando. The town differs from Roosevelt in many ways, including scale (20,000 residents are expected in 8,000 units by the project's projected completion in 2010), motivation of the funders (one can only assume that, as Celebration is funded by a private corporation, the primary goal of its shareholders is that of earning a profit), and technology (homes are being constructed with full electronic links, including automatic hook-up to the World Wide Web and the town's own electronic network). However, many of its goals are reminiscent of Roosevelt's. A recent article describes the town's mission as "the creation of a sociable and civic-minded community that would be one of the safest, healthiest, and best-educated in the country."⁶⁴ While there is no discernible link, outside of the broad philosophy, between Jersey Homesteads and today's New Towns, they all demonstrate that people con-

tinue to search for a better life in communities where they hope to find a sense of belonging, safety, and shared values.

This article has explored Roosevelt's unique history, the relationship between the homesteaders and the town's development, and those characteristics that set it apart from other towns in the United States—in short, its "sense of place." While scholars may judge the town based on economic considerations, political success, or community presence, perhaps ultimately it is only the residents who can say if the venture was successful or not. In the words of Jersey Homesteads settler Sol Axelrod:

The Factory Failed
The Clothing Store Failed
The Poultry Farm Failed
The Dairy Farm Failed
The Grocery Store Failed
The Farm Failed
The Tea Room Failed⁶⁵

Yet the Jersey Homesteads was a gigantic success. I do believe we as the offspring of the true pioneers, our Fathers and Mothers, will pass on this experience to our children and they will to theirs. If this is not success then what is?

ENDNOTES

1. "Homesteads Plan Started in New Jersey," *New York Times*, 6 August 1935, 19. The position of community manager was funded by the federal government. This paper does not address the government's motivation for establishing a colony specifically for a religiously homogeneous group.
2. Bernard Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1964), 265.
3. *Ibid.*, 275.
4. Basil Rauch, *The History of the New Deal, 1933-1938* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1944, 1963), 166-7.
5. Joseph L. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-1954* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 40.
6. Barbara Cunningham, ed., "Jews," *New Jersey Ethnic Experience*, (no date or place of publication), 300.
7. George Weller, "The Promised Land," in *New Letters in America*, ed. Horace Gregory (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1937), 210-19.
8. Paul K. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, NY: American Historical Association and Cornell University Press, 1959), 261.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Edwin Roskam, *Roosevelt, New Jersey: Big Dreams in a Small Town and What Time Did to Them* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1972), 17.
11. Paul K. Conkin, 262. Brown served as the head of the Board of Directors,

which also included Rabbi Stephen Wise; Isador Lubin, Chief of the Bureau of Labor Statistics; and later, Albert Einstein and representatives of the labor movement.

12. Ibid.

13. Paul K. Conkin, 263. No mention is made in the literature as to whether or not this was the only reason for Brown's ouster.

14. Ibid.

15. Sidney R. Gushen, "A Survey of Jersey Homesteads," *The Bulletin of Economics* VII, no. 1 (March 1937): 11. Original designs called for homes to be constructed from prefabricated concrete slabs to be assembled on site. However, the design was quickly recalled when the first homes constructed collapsed onto themselves. The slabs were eventually used as roofs for the new home design.

16. Paul K. Conkin, 264.

17. "Milk and Honey: Jewish Needle Workers From New York Move into New Promised Land," *Literary Digest*, (June 20, 1936), 33.

18. Paul K Conkin, 265.

19. Benjamin Brown, "Questions & Answers," list of questions and answers about the colony, apparently for a press release for information brochure, "Jersey Homesteads/Roosevelt, New Jersey" Collection, Archives Department, YIVO Institute for Jewish Studies, New York, NY, 1. This is the only reference to this name encountered in the literature.

20. U.S. Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, National Register of Historic Places, "Inventory-Nomination Form," Application to place Roosevelt/Jersey Homesteads on National Register of Historic Places filed February 1983 by Gail Hunton, Monmouth County Park System, Item 8,5-6. The application for listing on the National Register of Historic Places was filed on the occasion of the town's fiftieth anniversary in 1986. It was approved.

21. Paul K. Conkin, 332-7.

22. "Inventory-Nomination Form," Item 8, 5.

23. "Inventory-Nomination Form," Item 8, 5-6.

24. Homes were assigned to settlers by lottery as they were completed in groups of six to eight. One settler, eighteen when his family moved to the town in 1936, retells the story of his family's lottery: "My father was working in Jersey Homesteads but staying with another family as our home was not yet ready. One day, he was told to appear at 2:00 p.m. for the lottery for the next group of homes. Who should be holding the hat that contained the numbers but Albert Einstein! You know he was on the Board of Directors! My father considered it a highlight of his life to the day he died." Marcy Friedman, interview by author, tape recording, Baltimore, Maryland, 7 September 1996.

25. "Inventory-Nomination Form," Item 7, 3-4.

26. John D. Morse, ed., *Ben Shahn* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 62, quoted in "Inventory-Nomination Form," Item 8, 7. Items of special interest within the mural include the portrait of Albert Einstein, the depiction of the Triangle Factory fire, and the blueprints for the town's layout.

27. At the time of the town's founding, the entire population was Jewish, although many residents were not observant on a regular basis. Services at that time were held in the basement of one of the original farmhouses. Although the number of Jews in the town declined over the years, the congregation continued to grow, and completed its synagogue in 1956.

28. For a study of the town's architecture, see Jason H. Cohen, "From Utopia to Suburbia: The Architecture and Urban Planning of Roosevelt, New Jersey," undergraduate thesis, Rutgers College (April, 1994).

29. Sidney Gushen, 10.

30. E.B. Berlinrut, "Jersey Homesteaders Giving Thanks," undated, 14. Although not stated explicitly in the literature, it seems that once they learned that some of the target population were Jewish garment workers, non-Jews declined participation in the project.

31. "(illegible) Garment Worker's Family," *New York World-Telegram* (June 30, 1936), page number is not given.; the first word of the title is also is not provided.

32. Sara (Notterman) Adler, interview by B. and F. Leefer, for the Roosevelt Oral History Project, undated, Special Collections and University Archives, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Box 16, Folder 1, 1-2, 6.

33. Augusta Chasan, interview by author, tape recording, Roosevelt, New Jersey, 3 November 1996. Gus is also a national figure as she was the first female firefighter in the United States when she joined the Jersey Homesteads Volunteer Fire Association in 1936. She continues to tell both the history of the town, and her personal story of crossing gender boundaries, to students at Roosevelt Public School each year.

34. Richard H. Danhof, "Jersey Homesteads," in *A Place on Earth: A Critical Appraisal of Subsistence Homesteads*, eds. Russell Lord and Paul H. Johnstone (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture), 136.

35. Ibid, 136-7.

36. Richard Danhof, 146.

37. Gordon W. Kirk, Jr., and Carolyn Tyirin Kirk, "Home is Where the Heart Is: Immigrant Mobility and Home Ownership," in *Immigrant America: European Ethnicity in the United States*, ed. Timothy Walch (New York: Garland, 1994), 69.

38. Edwin Rosskam, 6.

39. "(illegible) Garment Worker's Family," *New York World-Telegram*, page unknown.

40. "Inventory-Nomination Form," Item 8, 7; "Jersey Homesteads," in *Federal Writers Publications: Stories of New Jersey* (New York: M. Barrows, 1938), 210-11. To date, I have not found an explanation in the literature of how each applicant's "responsible and well-managed home life" was measured.

41. Edwin Rosskam, 18.

42. To my knowledge, these are the only applications still in existence. See complete tabulation in appendix.

43. Applications, "Jersey Homesteads/Roosevelt, New Jersey" Collection, Archives Department, YIVO Institute for Yiddish Studies, New York, NY.

44. "Jersey Homesteads Launched as 2,000 Cheer Cooperative Pioneers," Elizabeth (New Jersey) *Jewish Record*, 8 August 1936, p. 1.

45. Philip Goldstein, Mayor, et. al., Memorandum to the New Jersey Division of (illegible), "A Brief Historic Review and Present Status of Jersey Homesteads," 15 January 1938; Boris Drasin, chairman, Memorandum Handed to Mr. Alexander, Assistant Administrator Resettlement Administration at Washington, DC, 17 January 1936.

46. Edwin Rosskam, 2.

47. George Weller, "The Promised Land," in *New Letters in America*, ed. Horace Gregory (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1937), 218-9. No first name is provided.

48. Harriet Friedman, interview by author, 3 November 1996, Baltimore, Maryland. For more information on the town's civic culture, see "Voluntary Associations and Education in a Homestead Community," by Sandra Streeter, Ph.D. Diss., Rutgers University, May 1988.

49. Augusta Chasan, interview by author.

50. Norman Slovik and Seymour Slovik, joint interview by E. Datz and F. Leefer for the Roosevelt Oral History Project, 20 July 1981, Special Collections and University Archives, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Box 17, Folder 14, 1. One of the group described was the author's father, Roosevelt resident Marcy Friedman.

51. Lottie (Sackowitz) Eisner, interview by author, Roosevelt, New Jersey, 3 November 1996.

52. Edwin Rosskam, 1-2.

53. Augusta Chasan, interview by author.

54. Lisa Belkin, "Reunion: Commune is Recalled," *The New York Times*, 4 June 1984, B2.

55. Lottie Eisner, interview by author; Harriet Friedman, interview by author.

56. Edwin Rosskam, 3.

57. "Garment Maker Prefers Cash on 7th Av. to Nature in Jersey," *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 June 1937.

58. "Homesteaders Send Greetings to the President," (name of newspaper and date unknown).

59. "Dedication Ceremony for Homesteads School," *Hightstown Gazette*, 20 January 1938, page unknown. High school students attended Hightstown High School.

60. Augusta Chasan, interview by author.

61. Although Brown claimed to have borrowed the money, homesteaders speculated that it came from his private coffers as no documentation was ever found to support his claim.

62. Edwin Rosskam, 33.

63. Edwin Rosskam, 24.

64. Caroline E. Mayer, "The Mickey House Club," *Washington Post*, 15 November 1996, 1.

65. Sol Axelrod, Sol Axelrod Collection, Borough of Roosevelt Historical Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, Box 8, Folder 14.