

## **TREASURE ISLAND, NJ – A BOY SCOUT CAMP POST OFFICE**

**On the Occasion of BSA's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Compiled from several SOSSI articles**

**by Bennett D. Kitts, Don Ross, Lawrence Clay & Fred Bok**

Not long ago an article appeared in the Scouts on Stamps journal (SOSSI) which Gene Fricks brought to our attention – “Treasure Island Continued,” by Bennett D. Kitts.<sup>1</sup> It explored the history of this summer post office which existed on a Scout Reservation on Treasure Island, a New Jersey island in the Delaware River below Frenchtown, accessible only by boat. “Continued” implied earlier articles, and searches revealed that SOSSI had published three previous articles<sup>2</sup> related to Scouting postal history and the Treasure Island post office. We also have mentioned Treasure Island in three *NJPH* journals – in May 1996 in an article by Brad Arch,<sup>3</sup> in August 2005 in an article by Arne Englund on Summer post offices,<sup>4</sup> and again in Jim Walker's Postal History of Hunterdon County, under DPOs of Kingwood Township.<sup>5</sup> A lot of coverage for a post office on an island where no one lives!

As much of the first SOSSI article is repeated in the third by Don Ross & Lawrence Clay, we use that as our basis for this reprinting of that information, with additions from Bennett D. Kitts. Many thanks to Don and Bennett, and to SOSSI for permission to reprint.

### **HISTORY AND PHILATELY of the TREASURE ISLAND SCOUT CAMP**

By Don Ross with input from Lawrence Clay

Treasure Island Scout Camp occupies a fifty-seven acre island in the Delaware River between Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The camp is operated by the Cradle of Liberty Council (formerly the Philadelphia Council), Boy Scouts of America.

An article by Doug Uzakewicz and Don Ross about Treasure Island appeared in the November/December 1997 issue of the *SOSSI Journal*. For clarity, some of the information in that article is repeated here...

The island<sup>6</sup> was first used as a Scout camp in 1911 when Scoutmaster Oscar Worman brought Troop 46 here. It was a pioneer camp with no accommodations provided in advance. One meal per day was provided by the troop cook and the individual Scouts were responsible for their other meals as part of their woodcraft training. The island was used by Troop 46 again in 1912.

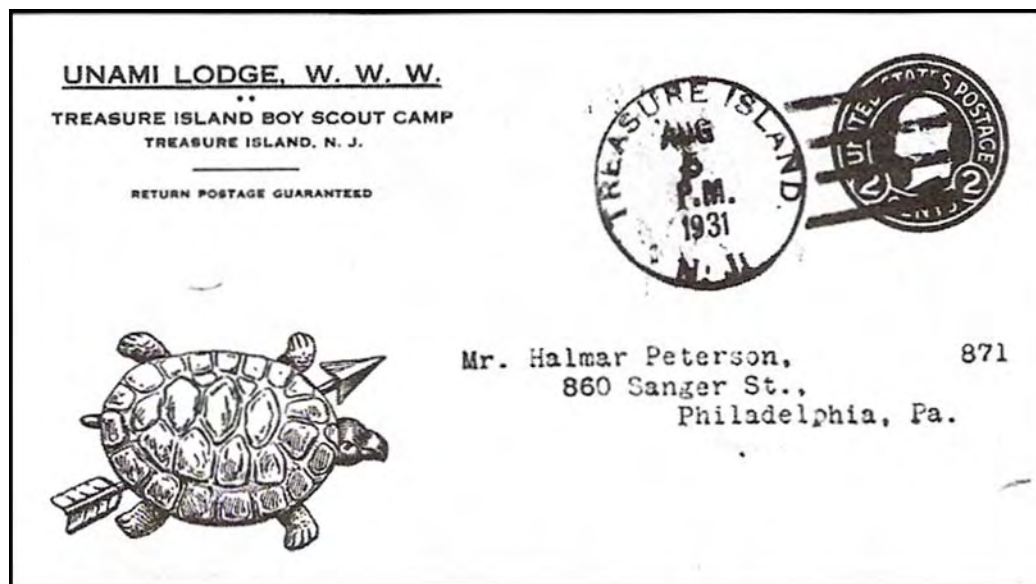
In January 1913, the primitive camp was leased for five years to the Philadelphia Council to become the successor to Camp Pequa (on the Susquehanna River below Columbia, PA). The name Treasure Island is derived from a casual remark from a camp inspection team member. Surveying the island, he remarked about “what a treasure” the island was. As “Treasure Island,” it became an organized summer camp. When the original 5-year lease expired, a donation from Edward Bok enabled the Philadelphia Council to purchase the property. Thousands of boys have received training and enjoyment there.

Other Scout camps also claim to be the oldest continuously operated Scout camp. The Owasippe Scout Camps in Michigan, in an article by Gary W. Hall, were discussed in the November/December 2004 issue of the *SOSSI Journal*. Camp Owasippe, first known as Camp Wichita, was purchased (40 acres) in 1910. A well was dug in 1911, and the first camp was held there in 1912. Camp Owasippe today contains 14,000 acres but one cannot stand on the original 40 acres of the camp as this acreage was sold.

At Treasure Island, one can stand on the exact spot on the ground where Scoutmaster Worman first camped in 1911. As stated before, this land was leased in 1913 and purchased in 1918 by the Philadelphia Council and has been in continuous use since.<sup>7</sup> Camp Tamaracouta is Canada's oldest Boy Scout Camp. This 1,000 acre site located near Montreal is owned by the Quebec Provincial Council of Scouts Canada. It started operation in 1912 and their website states that it is the longest continuously operated Boy Scout camp in the world.

If continuous use as a Scout camp is the criterion, Treasure Island is the oldest camp. If one uses the criterion of being operated as a Scout camp by a Scout council, then Camp Owasippe is the oldest Boy Scout camp in the United States and Camp Tamaracouta is the oldest one in Canada. So each has a legitimate claim to the oldest camp depending on what criteria are used.

During the summer camp season of 1915, E. Urner Goodman and Carroll A. Edson formed the Indian Society known as Wimachtendienk, better known today throughout Scouting as the Order of the Arrow, an honor camping society. The first known cover related to the Order of the Arrow, issued on August 3, 1931 by the Unami Lodge at Treasure Island, is shown in *Figure 1*.



*Fig. 1: Earliest known Order of the Arrow cover, August 3, 1931.*

According to Jay Rogers in the *Levy's Boy & Girl Scout Cachet Covers of the United States, Volume I & II, 1910 – 1960*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Treasure Island was one of four Scout camps in the United States to have seasonal post offices entirely within their boundaries. The others were Kanohwahke Lake, NY, Ten Mile River, NY and Owasippe, Michigan.<sup>8</sup>

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Prior to 1931, the Treasure Island Camp mail appears to have been cancelled in Pipersville, PA as shown on this 1930 post card (*Figure 2*).



*Fig. 2: This 1930 post card sent from Treasure Island Scout Camp, was cancelled at Pipersville, PA – where the mail was taken for mailing prior to the establishment of a post office on Treasure Island itself.*

According to the official records of the United States Postal Historian, Corporate Information, the first Treasure Island post office was established on July 1, 1931 as Treasure Island (Hunterdon County), New Jersey with Thomas G. Cairns as Postmaster.

[Adding from Bennett Kitts' article, he notes from a Fred Bok history on the establishment of this office:]

“During the depression of 1920’s, there was not money to go around. In 1930, it was suggested that the Council see if it could get a temporary 4<sup>th</sup> Class summer Post Office with a postmaster. The salary was about \$300.00 regardless of the mail volume. If a certain dollar level was reached, there was an additional bonus.

“The application was approved in 1931. Thomas Cairns was the sitting Council Chief Executive and was named as Post Master. The salary was used to pay the Camp Director. However, the actual work was done by the Camp Clerk or Assistant. This was a full service Post Office, selling stamps, insuring packages, handling registered mail, envelopes and postcards.

“Mail was cancelled in the morning. All the cancels were A.M. (If P.M. is used it would be interesting.) Mail was taken in the afternoon to the Pipersville, PA Post Office and camp mail [collected], to be picked up at the units boxes in ‘City Hall.’ Often this was done after evening colors.”

The post office was changed to Pipersville, Bucks County, PA on November 2, 1932, then changed back to Treasure Island, Hunterdon County, NJ on June 24, 1933.

[This interesting anomaly of a state change is explained in more detail by Bennett Kitts in his 2009 article:]

“There are conflicting opinions as where and when the change from PA to NJ and why. Politics were a factor in this. My limited understanding was that a postal historian was researching and located some old archives that indicated that middle of the river was the dividing line – some of the islands were on each side, some down the middle on either side. To even this up it was agreed to swap land. Treasure Island ended up in NJ.” He further quotes from one of Fred Bok’s pamphlets on the history of the camp:

### **Treasure Island**

“The historical background of Treasure Island has provided material for many camp-fire yarns for Scouts since this area was first acquired ... from the Indians on September 19, 1737.

“The Council leased Treasure Island from 1913 to 1918, when it was purchased with the help of Edward Bok. As the camp was being prepared to open one summer, we were informed by the Post Office Department in Washington that our Post Office should be marked Pennsylvania. Since the deed to our property is recorded in New Jersey, we decided to do some research. We discovered that a Philadelphia surveyor named Holmes had surveyed the entire river and had assigned the islands in the river to the state to which they were nearest. Later, a geological surveyor in Washington thought that the state line should be clearer and sketched in where he thought it should go and the Post Office Department discovered that Treasure Island placed in Pennsylvania rather than in New Jersey. Eventually, however, with authorization from the Pennsylvania Attorney General that Pennsylvania did not claim the island, everything was cleared up and the postmark was Treasure Island, New Jersey.

“The finding of Indian relics, Indian pottery and arrowheads and the stone house once occupied by Thomas Edward Marshall still standing on the mainland, all lend authenticity to the colorful history of Treasure Island.”

[Certainly any mail, if it exists, posted at Treasure Island between November 2, 1932, and June 24, 1933, with a Pennsylvania Treasure Island cancel, would be an extraordinary find. However, as this post office operated seasonally during periods when the camp was open, it is unlikely that any such postmark exists.]

Thomas Cairns served as postmaster until 1937, when the records show that George Henry Keller became Acting Postmaster on 29 June 1937 and Postmaster on 7 August 1937. Walter V. Rutherford was appointed Acting Postmaster on 15 June 1943 and Postmaster on 12 August 1943 and continued in that capacity until the post office was discontinued.

The post office remained there until June 15, 1953 when the postal responsibilities were assumed by the Pipersville, PA post office. No [New Jersey] postal business was conducted at Treasure Island in 1953.

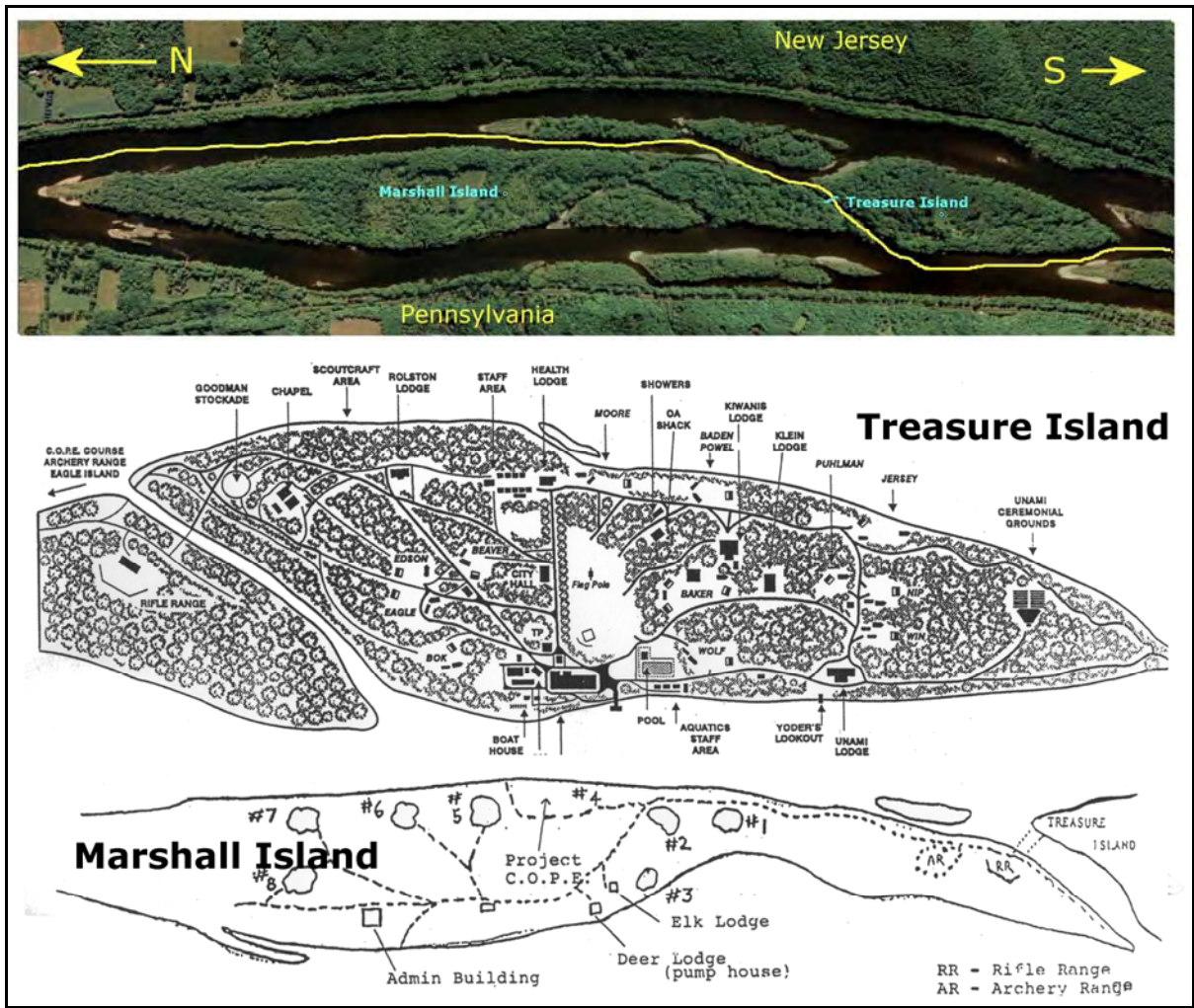


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The map at left indicates the location of Treasure Island in Hunterdon County.

The map below shows both the original Treasure Island campsite, and the addition, in 1959, of Marshall Island, with the NJ/PA border shown in yellow. Treasure Island was the more developed of the two islands, with the central camp buildings, including City Hall which housed the post office. Marshall Island was used for more wilderness camping. It also had the advantage of Pennsylvania's less stringent gun laws, so was used for the rifle range. A small suspension bridge between these two was thus an interstate bridge. There was no bridge to either the New Jersey or Pennsylvania mainland. The camp was reached by boat from the Pennsylvania side where the docks were located.



Marshall Island was actually the larger of the two islands. The small connecting bridge was located at the northern tip of Treasure Island.



*Fig. 3: Don Ross at the Treasure Island Post Office in “City Hall,” Treasure Island, New Jersey.*

The US Post Office was located in the central building of the camp known as City Hall. The original façade, including barred window, letter combination boxes, and post office sign are still located at City Hall. See *Figure 3* showing long-time SOSSI member and author Don Ross at City hall in front of the Treasure, Island, NJ Camp Post Office window.

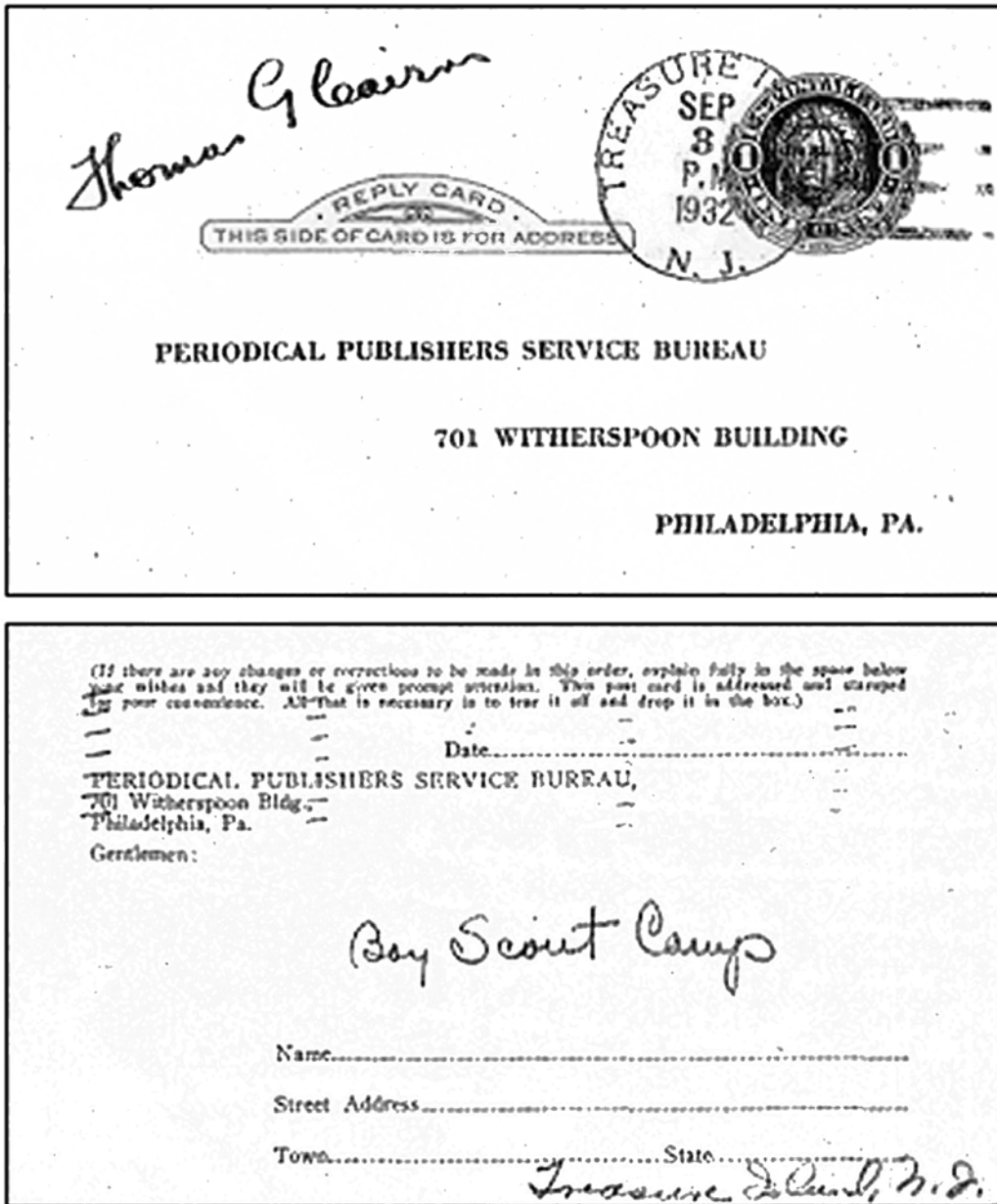
An example of the Treasure Island cancel in its first summer of use is shown below in *Figure 4*. The post office was established July 1, 1931.



*Fig. 4: The first cancel device was a 4-bar duplex hand canceller which was applied using black ink as seen on this post card cancelled on August 26, 1931.*

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Bennett Kitts shows a post card cancelled right after the camp closed in 1932. "It is signed by the first Postmaster and Chief Scout Executive of Philadelphia Council. It was sent to an audit bureau to deregister the Camp. Note the date is September 3, 1932. This is just before changed in November 1932 to Pennsylvania." (See *Figure 5* below.)



*Fig. 5: A September 3, 1932 4-bar cancel on a reply post card (shortly before the temporary change to being a Pennsylvania post office). It is signed by Postmaster Thomas G. Cairns.*



An interesting example of this hand canceller being used as a receiving cancel is illustrated in *Figure 6*. This letter arrived at Treasure Island but the troop had left. The Postmaster used the canceller on both the front and back of the envelope and forwarded it to the Scout's home address but he wasn't there either! Then, it was forwarded to Penns Grove, NJ (where it had originated). Apparently, the Scout received it and kept it through the years.

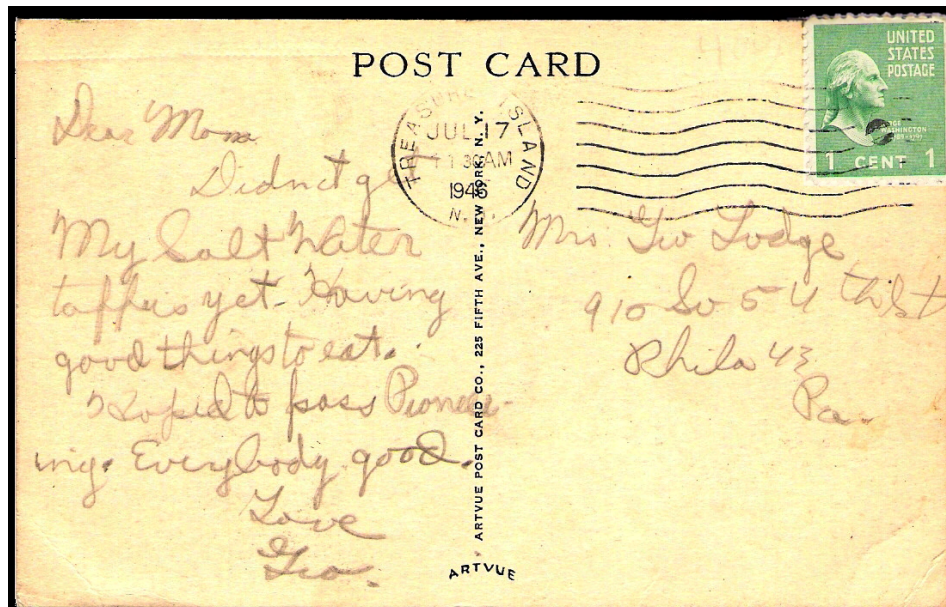


*Fig. 6:* A much travelled cover sent to Treasure Island, and returned to sender. The cover was cancelled on its arrival and departure from Treasure Island, with an Aug. 3 (inverted) 1937 4-bar cancel.



*Fig. 6a:* Treasure Island used as a receiver cancel.

Around 1940, Treasure Island started using a machine canceller which was in service for several years. An example is shown in *Figure 7* from July 1946 on a post card.

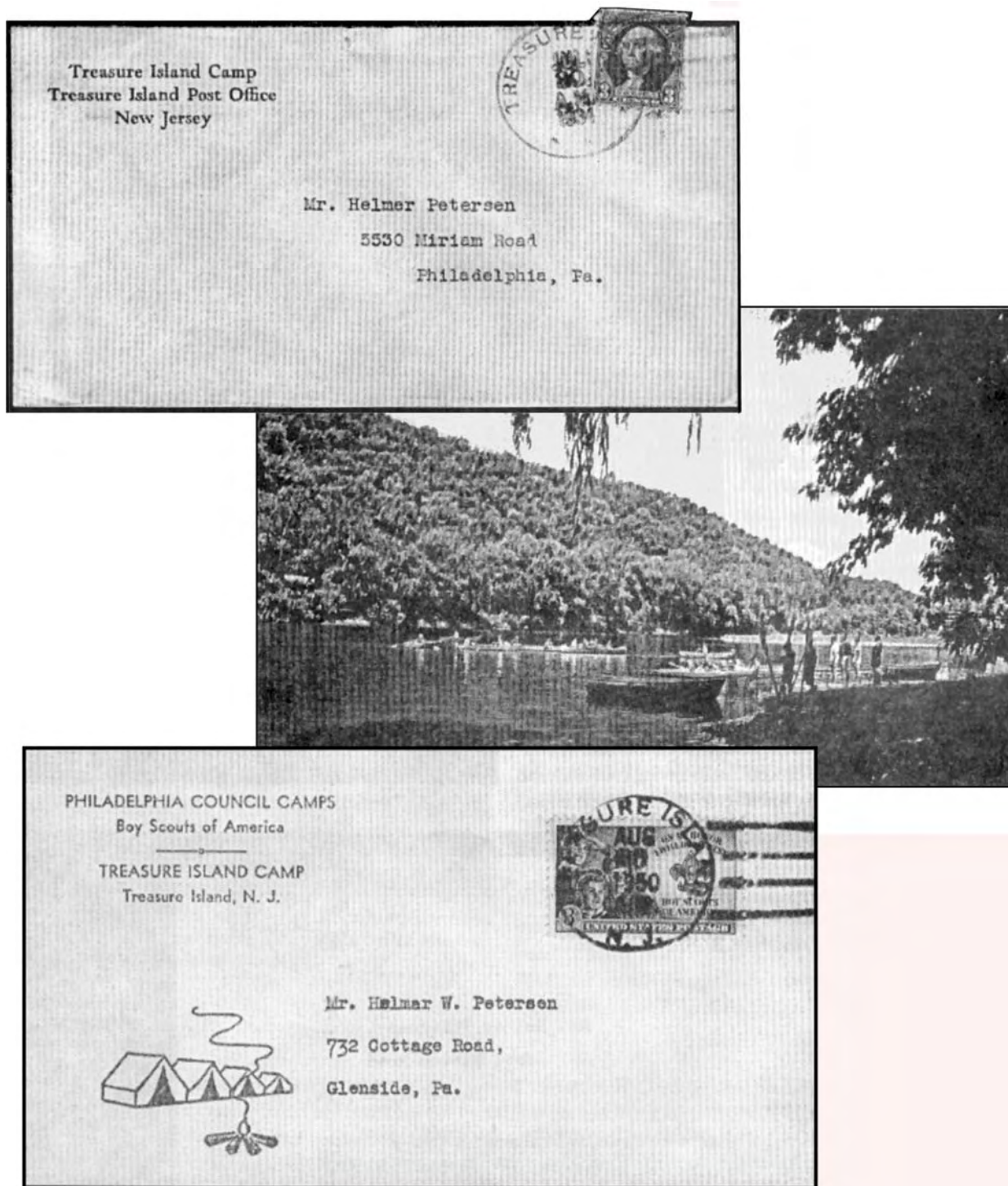


*Fig. 7:* The Treasure Island machine cancel, used in July 1946.



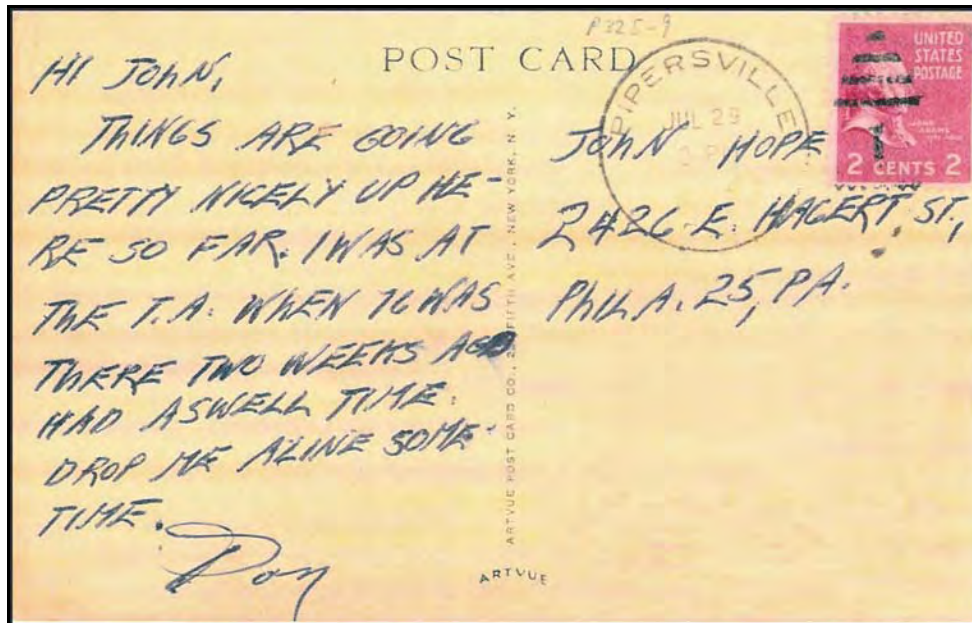
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About 1950, the hand canceller was once again used, and was clearer in most cases than the machine canceller.



*Fig. 8: A pair of corner card covers for Treasure Island Camp, one from 1930 and the other from 1950 – both using the 4-bar duplex canceller. The post card view shows canoes on the Delaware River, and was used in the 1940s with a machine canceller.*

After the Treasure Island Post Office was closed on June 15, 1953, mail was cancelled at Pipersville, PA. An example of the hand cancel used on 29 July 1953 is shown in *Figure 9*.



*Fig. 9: July 29, 1953 (year date almost illegible) cancel on a post card sent from Treasure Island – which now receives a Pipersville, PA cancel, as the Treasure Island post office was closed on June 15, 1953.*

An interesting point about this post card is that when Don Ross bought it in 2000 he realized that this was a post card that he had personally mailed 47 years earlier!

In 1959, with the addition of Marshall Island to the Treasure Island reservation, this cover was issued with a special cancel from Marshall Creek, PA – used no doubt because of the same name. Marshall Island was of course not in New Jersey, and there was never a post office in this section of the reservation.



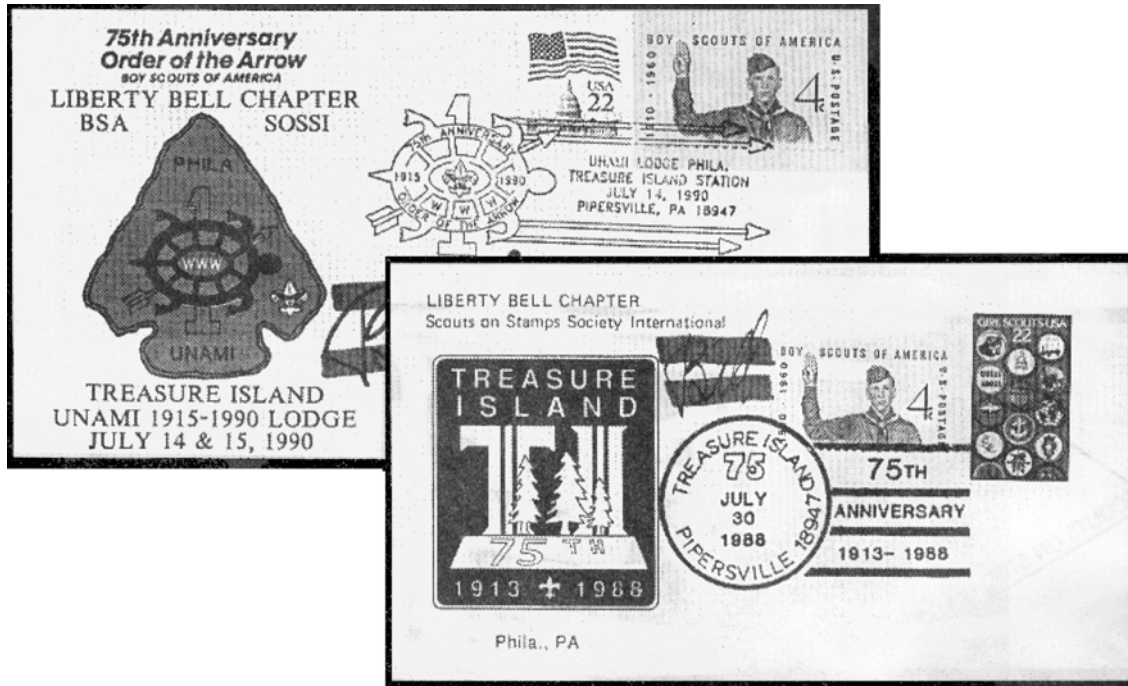
*Fig. 10: Commemorating the addition of Marshall Island to the Treasure Island Camp reservation. Note the “interstate bridge” between NJ and PA.*



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[Many covers exist after 1953, when there was no longer a New Jersey cancel. Mail from Treasure Island was carried to Pipersville for cancelling – the “gateway” and docks for this camp were on the western side of Treasure Island; campers and mail crossed to Pennsylvania, not to New Jersey.]

In 1997 *SOSSI Journal*, the Liberty Bell Chapter of SOSSI, led by Ted Zubar, prepared special 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary covers for the founding of Treasure Island Scout Camp and of the Order of the Arrow at Treasure Island. Since that time, the Liberty Bell Chapter has prepared a number of other philatelic items for Treasure Island Camp.



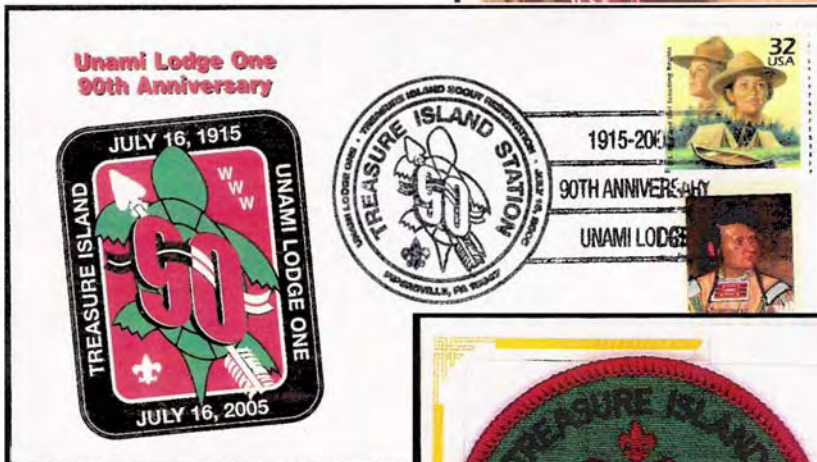
*Fig. 11: 75th Anniversary covers for Treasure Island (1998) and Order of the Arrow (2000), with special Treasure Island cancels from Pipersville, PA.*



*Fig. 11: An oversized Treasure Island post card was prepared for the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Boy Scouts of America in 2000 with a Posted on Treasure Island point-of-origin cachet. It was cancelled in Philadelphia with a BFreeFranklin cancel on the Scouting 32¢ commemorative stamp.*

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Several instances of special Treasure Island Station cancels exist, all substations of Pipersville, Pennsylvania; they did carry the original Treasure Island name. A few are shown below.





## Closure of the Treasure Island Scout Reservation:

It is with some sadness that we report that Treasure Island, unlike Scouting, will not achieve a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 2005, floods inundated the islands, causing a great deal of damage:

In April 2005, storms caused the highest flooding since 1955. As a result, Treasure Island was closed to summer campers in 2005 for the first time in twenty-five years. The council spent more than \$1 million to rehabilitate the camp in preparation for reopening in June 2006. On June 28, 2006, the camp was once again inundated. Its future was in doubt, but it opened again successfully in 2007. On September 10, 2008, the Council Executive Board voted to close Treasure Island for the 2009 season and will evaluate the future of the reservation.<sup>9</sup>

In 2008, the Cradle of Liberty Council issued a report on the future of its camps, in which they indicated the many problems which now face Treasure Island:

*In many ways Treasure Island has remained exactly the same while the world has changed around it. Actions we have taken as recently as the 1990s to solve camp issues like trash or sewage are now illegal. Regulations, permits and inspections are more extensive and more expensive to comply with due to TI's ecological status and physical location.*

*Logistically, the issues regarding the Pennsylvania side continue to accumulate. Parking is an issue year round. All food, propane, fuel oil and other deliveries have been made substantially more complicated. We are no longer allowed to unload on River Road next to the canal bridge. The PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has also closed the canal bridge to our camp vehicles due to structural issues.*

*The condition and location of camp facilities create our largest on-island problems. While the septic system for the Dining Hall has been replaced, the staff area septic system is in poor condition. The shower house septic systems are unknown quantities. Our ability to professionally service our latrines is limited and at times means hand shoveling waste into trash cans with removal to the Pennsylvania side. Improvements to these items require extensive permits and expensive labor. This is most recently evidenced by the Dining Hall septic system that was expected to cost \$90,000 and take months, but actually stretched to three years and over \$250,000. This work has also been accompanied by a now required annual NJ inspection. All work performed must now be reported and approved. The type of repairs we have made for years are no longer possible.*

*On Wednesday July 16, 2008, The Delaware River Basin Commission voted on and approved the designation of the river as "special protection waters." That designation limits direct discharges of wastewater into the river and has major ramifications should some of our facilities be investigated.*

*TI now has annual NJ Fire systems and Electrical inspections. These inspections include an increased scrutiny of new work performed since the last inspections. Even having qualified volunteers perform work at Treasure Island has become harder due to these licensing, inspection and permit issues....*

*And due to the largest overall obstacle, all our dreams, plans, efforts and expenditures must be viewed with the understanding that they are lost should the river flood again. With no*

ability to insure the property, Treasure Island should probably be listed as a long term liability rather than an asset in our financial accounting.<sup>10</sup>

A wonderful tradition thus will likely pass into the pages of history.

[Our thanks again to Scouts on Stamps Society International  
<http://www.sossi.org/journal/journal.htm> .]

## ENDNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Kitts, Bennett D., "Treasure Island Continued," SOSSI Sept/Oct 2009, interesting addenda to the 2008 (third) article is SOSSI on Treasure Island.
- <sup>2</sup> These previous SOSSI articles include "Treasure Island, Philately from a Classic American Camp," by Douglas Uzakewicz and Don Ross, Nov/Dec 1997; "An International Custom and a Classic American Camp," by David W. Cooper, May/June 2000, relating the creation of a point-of-origin cachet in 2000; and "History and Philately of the Treasure Island Scout Camp," in the November/December 2008 issue of the SOSSI journal by Don Ross with input from Lawrence Clay.
- <sup>3</sup> Arch, Brad, "Treasure Island & Yards Creek, More Scouting in New Jersey," *NJPH*, May 1996, Vol 24, No. 3, Whole number 118. (shows a 1938 4-bar TI cancel to Mass.)
- <sup>4</sup> Englund, Arne, "New Jersey Summer Post Offices," *NJPH*, Aug. 2005, Vol. 33, No. 3, whole number 159.
- <sup>5</sup> Walker, Jim, "Hunterdon County Postal History, Part 5: DPOs," *NJPH*, Aug. 2008, Vol. 36, No 3, Whole No. 171.
- <sup>6</sup> Ed. Note: Ross indicates this island was first known as Marshall's Island, but other sources ([David L. Eby, "America's Oldest Boy Scout Camps" at <http://www.usscouts.org/scoutcamp/oldestcamps.asp> indicate that it was called Ridges Island. Extensive research by Stanley H. Lipson at Kean University has netted no definite answer, even after examination of tax maps and consultation with the Hunterdon County Historical Society. He hypothesizes that numerous floods have shifted the boundaries of these islands frequently, leaving their names a bit amorphous. Trying to match old maps to their current configurations was almost impossible. [Email correspondence with Dr. Lipson, 11/16/2009]  
In 1959, a second adjacent island, known then as Marshall Island, was added to the Treasure Island camp – that island being in the State of Pennsylvania. This makes it unlikely that the original island bore that name as well.
- <sup>7</sup> This article was written before the proposed closing of the Treasure Island camp.
- <sup>8</sup> Dr. Lipson, op cit., indicates there were 5, not 4 BSA camps with post offices, the fifth being Massawepie, NY. All but Ten Mile River, NY were seasonal post offices. Every reference he has (including some 1911 postcards) indicates that the original name of Camp Owasippe was "Camp White."
- <sup>9</sup> Wikipedia article, with sources, at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasure\\_Island\\_Scout\\_Reservation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasure_Island_Scout_Reservation) (May 17, 2009).
- <sup>10</sup> *The Future of Camping in the Cradle of Liberty Council*, Report dated July 2008 at <http://www.colbsa.org/openrosters/DocDownload.asp?orgkey=1112&id=46784> (May 17, 2010).

