

JERSEY HOMESTEADS: A New Deal Community's Postal History

By Robert G. Rose



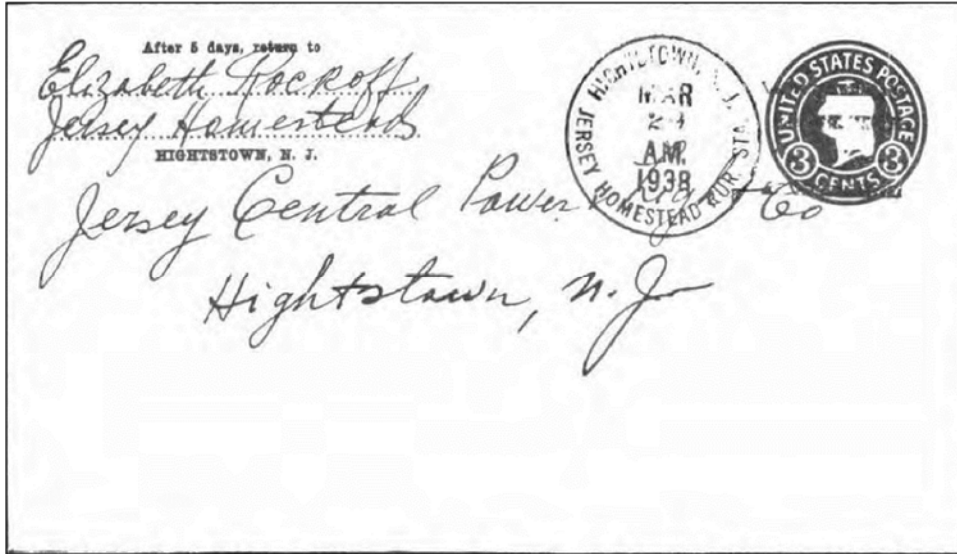
During the depths of the Great Depression of the 1930's, a planned community known as Jersey Homesteads was established in what was then a largely rural area in Monmouth County, New Jersey with the financial support of the federal government. Jersey Homesteads was one of 99 New Deal communities established during the depression. The federal government carried out this experiment in community and economic planning to help relieve widespread unemployment through the relocation of urban workers to rural areas. The creation of Jersey Homesteads was an attempt to demonstrate the economic feasibility of combining industry with part time agriculture in a planned community through the establishment of a cooperative garment factory and an agricultural association.¹ Jersey Homesteads was the largest of all the planned communities of that era, and included the construction of over 200 houses, a factory, a community center and school as well as a small retail center. The 1940 census counted a population of 698 residents.



Illustration courtesy Library of Congress

Fig. 1: Aerial view of Jersey Homesteads c. 1937-38.

A post office was established in Jersey Homesteads as a rural branch of the nearby Hightstown post office on October 1, 1936 and operated as such until October 15, 1940.² A cover with the rural branch station postmark is illustrated below in *Figure 2*.



Homestead Rural Station and Highbridge, NJPH, Vol. XII, March 1984, Whole No. 57

Fig. 2: Hightstown, N.J. Jersey Homestead Rur. Sta. March 29, 1938 handstamp postmark and four bar duplex cancel to Hightstown on a 3¢ postal stationery envelope.

However, Jersey Homesteads' life as a planned community was short lived. In April, 1939 the federal government declared the garment factory a failure and auctioned off its fixtures. In 1940, the agricultural cooperative association ceased operations. On October 16, 1940, notwithstanding these business failures, Jersey Homesteads opened its own post office. Illustrated below in *Figure 3* is a cover postmarked Jersey Homesteads on December 2, 1940 with a return card of the ill-fated Jersey Homesteads Agricultural Association, addressed to the Jersey Central Power & Light Company, perhaps paying its final electric bill.

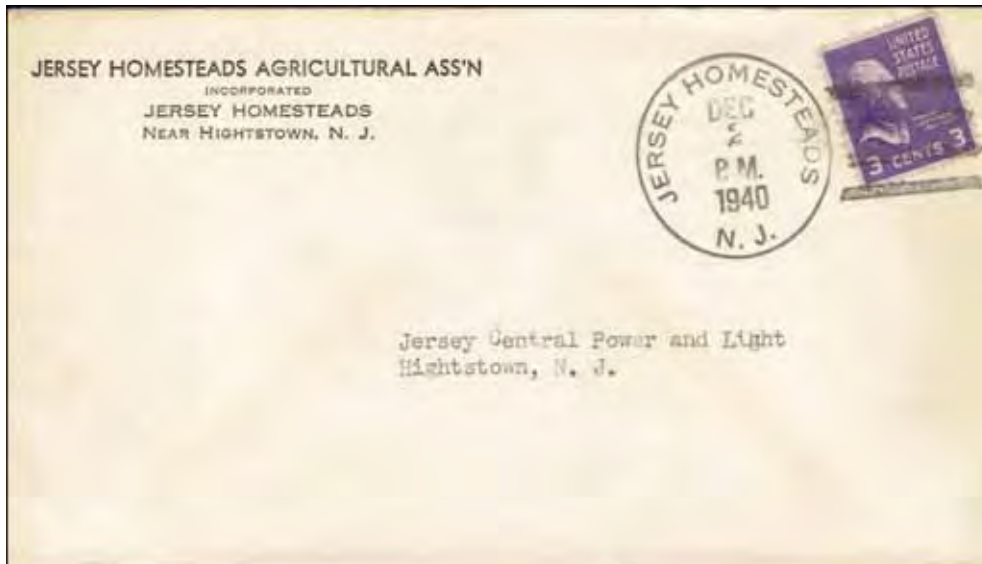


Fig. 3: Jersey Homesteads December 2, 1940 handstamp postmark and four bar duplex cancel with 3¢ Presidential Issue to Hightstown.

Beginning in 1943, discussions began with the federal government to terminate the project and end the subsidies it was provided. Illustrated below in *Figure 4* is a postcard with a handstamped postmark dated November 6, 1944. On November 6, 1945, following the death of President Franklin Roosevelt, Jersey Homesteads was renamed Roosevelt. However, the post office continued as Jersey Homesteads until April 16, 1946 when it was formally established as the Roosevelt post office.³



Fig. 4: Jersey Homesteads November 6, 1944 handstamp postmark and four bar duplex cancel with 1¢ Famous American Issue to Long Branch.

The community still lives today as Roosevelt Borough. In November 1983, the Jersey Homesteads Historic District in Roosevelt Borough was added to the New Jersey Register of Historic Places.



Photo from the National Registry of Historic Places⁴

Fig. 5: Roosevelt post office, zip code 08555, in Monmouth County. It reflects the Bauhaus style of architecture which was used when Jersey Homesteads was built.

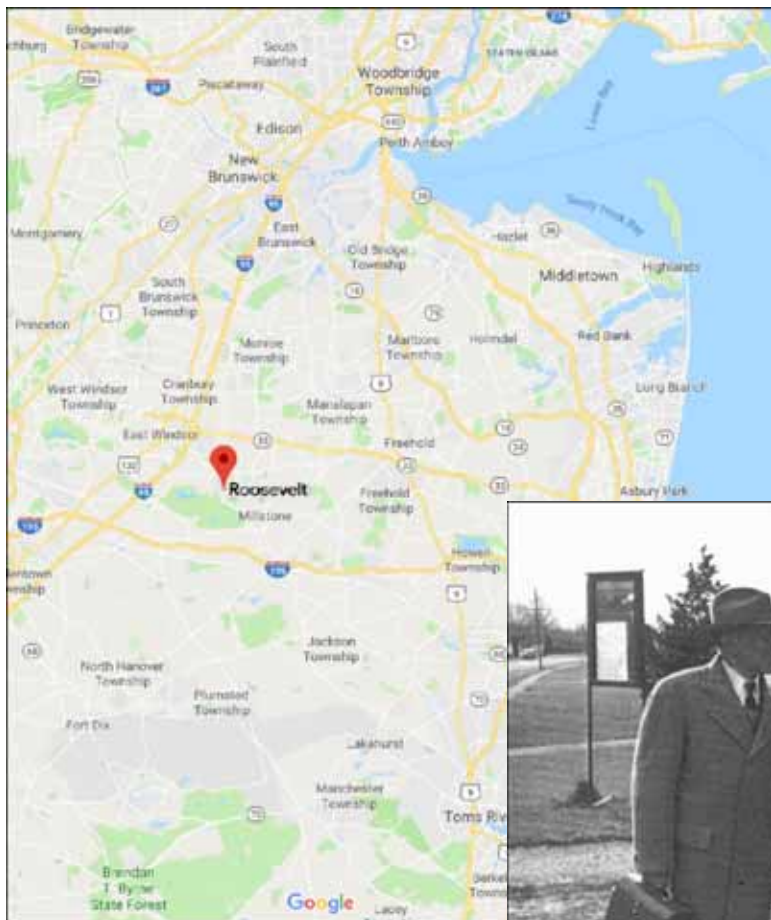


Fig. 6: Google map showing location of Roosevelt, NJ, once known as Jersey Homesteads.



Borough of Roosevelt Historical Collection, Special Collections Rutgers University Libraries
Fig. 7: The artist Ben Shahn (center), whose mural graces the local school, in front of the post office, c.1965.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ The community was organized by Jewish leaders and was populated with many garment workers from New York City attracted by the prospect of steady work in the community's cooperative garment factory and farming association as well as the ability to move into newly constructed subsidized community owned homes. A detailed chronological history of the community is found at the following Rutgers University Libraries website: <http://www2.scc.rutgers.edu/ead/manuscripts/roosevelthistoricalcollectionf.html> (retrieved August 8, 2019).
- ² John L. Kay & Chester M. Smith, Jr., *New Jersey Postal History* (Quarterman Publications, Inc., Lawrence, Mass. 1977) p. 92. This cover was originally illustrated in an *NJPH* article in which the author was not able to establish the date in *Kay & Smith* on which Jersey Homesteads began operating as a rural station of the Hightstown post office. Brandes S. Smith, *Homestead Rural Station and Highbridge, NJPH*, Vol. XII, March 1984, [Whole No. 57](#), p. 23. In a subsequent issue of *NJPH*, an unnamed author identified the page in *Kay & Smith* which listed its starting date as October 1, 1936. Anon., "Homestead Station – A Response," *NJPH*, Vol. XIII, September 1985, [Whole No. 64](#), p. 52.
- ³ Kay & Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- ⁴ National Register of Historic Places in the USA, By Apc106 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21849140>