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“All I can say is that [the homesteads] certainly put a lot of people on their feet through that depression. It was terrible, that depression.”

— Mrs. Leonard Hubert,
original homesteader



ARROWHEAD AND LAVAQUE ROADS (top) intersect the Duluth Homesteads community. The intersection became the scene of considerable activity when clearing and construction began. Mr. and Mrs. Einar Nelson, who operated a small store on the outskirts of Hermantown on Lavaque Road and Highway 53, delivered refreshments to the workers from the back of their truck. Buttermilk, as they recalled, was a big favorite.



THE HOMESTEADERS cleared much of the land themselves. Some managed to borrow teams from the local farmers for heavier work (bottom). Once the land was sufficiently cleared, tractors could be used (top).

THE DULUTH HOMESTEADS

A Successful Experiment in Community Housing

Timothy J. Garvey

THE BACK-TO-THE-LAND movement of the 1930s was very appealing to many unemployed people caught in cities during the economic depression. The idea of the land as a source of liberty, opportunity, and security had long held a prominent place in American thought, but as conditions worsened in the industrial centers, rural life came to look increasingly inviting. Part of this longing for the land was naïve, for economic blight affected the country as well as the city. However, the idea of subsistence farming also attracted more practical advocates, and in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal administration the vague longing was translated into the con-

struction of nearly 100 communities across the country. Although it comprised only a small part of the New Deal legislation of the 1930s, it was a significant effort because of the success portions of it eventually enjoyed — greater success than the obstacles, its opponents, and the controversies surrounding it might have led one to expect.¹

The design of these communities varied, but their purpose was to redistribute people concentrated in urban centers to rural or suburban locations. There the government built “modern but inexpensive” houses in groups ranging from about twenty-five to three hundred. Each individual homestead was situated on a plot of land large enough to allow a family to produce a substantial amount of its required food, thereby reducing what many considered to be the largest single item in the family budget. Liberal terms were arranged, and the homesteads were sold to families on marginal incomes who did not qualify for relief but would not otherwise have had a chance to purchase a home.²

The communities themselves were designed in such a way as to accommodate a variety of political and social ideals. Some were little more than suburban extensions of existing cities with as much interaction as any other suburb. Others were more isolated and were planned as experiments in communal co-operation. Physically they ranged from groups of houses built along already existing roads to “greenbelt cities” planned as separate units with unique relationships between dwellings, open spaces, and their street systems. Despite the diversity and flexibility of the program, though, it soon drew a considerable amount of publicity, controversy, and opposition — in varying degrees — and was eventually repudiated by the administration itself.³

Opposition to these community projects came for a variety of reasons and cut across political party lines. Senators Thomas D. Schall, Minnesota Republican, and

¹Paul W. Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program*, 11–12, 110–114, 130, 327 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1959). For additional examples of the back-to-the-land sentiment of the 1930s, see Ralph Borsodi, *Flight From the City: An Experiment in Creative Living on the Land* (New York, 1933); William Duryea, *A Living From the Land* (New York, 1934); Maurice G. Kains, *Five Acres and Independence: A Practical Guide to the Selection and Management of the Small Farm* (New York, 1935).

²United States Department of Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, *A Homestead and Hope*, 6 (quote), 8 (Washington, D.C., 1935).

³For more on the New Deal community program, see Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*; Russell Lord and Paul H. Johnstone, eds., *A Place on Earth: A Critical Appraisal of Subsistence Homesteads* (Washington, D.C., 1942); Joseph A. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935–1954* (Columbus, Ohio, 1971); William E. Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932–1940* (New York, 1963).

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Harry F. Byrd, Virginia Democrat, both saw the sinister inspiration of communism in the projects. Authors Harold M. Ware and Webster Powell, on the other hand, envisioned the creation of new groups of industrial serfs for exploitation by big business.⁴

The chief criticisms of Ware and Powell centered around the government's claim that the federal subsistence homestead program would provide families with economic security. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 had provided \$25,000,000 to be used for loans to finance the program. Terms of these loans allowed the homesteader thirty years to repay the government and, while there was general agreement that this amount of time was necessary, Ware and Powell felt that it also created overwhelming problems. They predicted a situation in which people with families would move to the homesteads at the average age of forty and have no hope for actual ownership of their homes until age seventy. This "arithmetic of age," coupled with the tremendous efforts required to work the land and hold part-time jobs to earn the homestead payments, would soon disillusion even the staunchest of those involved. Their argument was that the projects were to be peopled "by homesteaders who are too old ever to recross the ocean of debt that isolated them from 'normal' commercial and economic life of America. . . . In 1935 the Federal Government has established what is in effect a state of serfdom."⁵

MINNESOTA WAS ASSIGNED two of the communities developed under this program, one located at Hermantown, near Duluth, the other in Austin. Both projects were examples of twenty-three industrial-type homestead communities built near cities which could offer the homesteaders seasonal or part-time employment. These were generally more successful and less controversial than any of the other communities planned.⁶

The Duluth project was not yet fully under construction when Ware and Powell delivered their criticisms of the program in an article published in *Harper's Magazine*. Although they also criticized the administration and efficiency of the program, the authors' main charge was that the entire concept upon which federally financed subsistence homesteading was based doomed it to economic failure from the beginning. The Duluth experience clearly demonstrated that the gloomy predictions of Ware and Powell were not universally accurate.

The Duluth Homesteads, or Jackson Project as it was known locally, was first begun by the Department of Interior's Division of Subsistence Homesteads. President Roosevelt had charged the department with the administration of the program, and Harold L. Ickes, then Interior secretary, formed the division on August 23, 1933, and named Milburn L. Wilson as director.

From the outset Wilson believed that problems are best identified and solved by those closest to them. Moreover, he realized that local citizens would be more receptive to programs controlled by those they knew and trusted. As Paul W. Conkin has noted, Wilson believed that "decentralization of organization and local participation had to be at the heart of any lasting subsistence homesteads program."⁷

To achieve decentralization of control, a corporate system was devised. On December 2, 1933, Ickes announced the formation of the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, the stock of which he — as Interior chief — would hold in trust. Then local corporations were formed in the areas in which projects were to be located. The idea was to have the federal corporation act as parent corporation to the locals and hold their stock. In this way, the Interior Department was able to maintain ultimate control while still managing to decentralize much of the day-to-day administration of individual projects.⁸

While the federal corporation was not formally announced until December, word of the arrangement was circulated to those interested in applying for projects before that time. In Duluth it was the Chamber of Commerce that initially contacted the government with its proposal. William H. Woodbury, chairman of the chamber's Subsistence Homesteads Committee, applied to Wilson on November 17, 1933, for money to fund a Duluth project. His letter was accompanied by plans offered by Duluth's "local," the Northeastern Minnesota Subsistence Homestead Corporation. Its proposal called for the construction of fifty-two units on 400 acres of land in the vicinity of the present site. These units were to be of four types ranging in cost from \$955 to \$1,277, and the corporation was asking for a total of \$122,719 to cover the cost of the houses, the land (at twelve dollars per acre),

⁴Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 118, 163; Harold M. Ware and Webster Powell, "Planning for Permanent Poverty: What Subsistence Farming Really Means," in *Harper's Magazine*, 170:513-524 (April, 1935).

⁵*A Homestead and Hope*, 5, 6; Ware and Powell, in *Harper's Magazine*, 170:521 (quote).

⁶Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 110. The Austin colony was unique, writes Conkin, in "being located near a one factory town and in being sponsored by the president of that one factory, George A. Hormel of the Hormel Packing Company. Seventy per cent of the homesteaders at Austin were to be Hormel employees. . . . To some critics of subsistence homesteads, such communities as Austin were only proof of their contention that the subsistence homesteads program was anchoring a new group of industrial serfs for exploitation by big business." For more on the Austin community, see Lord and Johnstone, eds., *A Place on Earth*, 58-64. A third industrial-type community of only fourteen units was built at Albert Lea by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration; Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 334.

⁷Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 96 (quote), 98.

⁸Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 106-107.

“. . . It was during the hard times, and some people were only working three days a week. By having a place like this they could have a garden spot, a cow, pigs, and a few chickens. . . . In the beginning it was meant to be a subsistence farmstead, and it was a good idea with conditions as they were then. . . .”

—Art Olson,
Hermantown resident

and certain livestock and goods which were to have been provided for each homesteading family. The families chosen to occupy the project were all to be screened carefully and, once accepted, were immediately to pay \$200 toward the purchase price. This information, backed with payment schedules and other assurances, was sent to Wilson through C. F. Clayton, senior agricultural economist for the United States Department of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus, after he had examined and approved of the plan. Duluth's application was in good order and was accepted that winter. By April 29, 1934, the government's representative, E. L. Middleton, was in town to make arrangements for having the site surveyed.⁹

In the meantime, however, the federal program began to falter. Legal questions arose about expenditures by local corporations. Adverse decisions by the comptroller general of the General Accounting Office “restricted and at times almost blocked” the work of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. The concept of local control was under philosophical as well as legal attack, and Ickes, who strongly favored centralization, on May 12, 1934, federalized the subsistence homesteads program. Local input was reduced to a minimum. Within a year the bad publicity generated by this and other problems resulted in a major change of administration. All concerns of the Interior Department's Division of Subsistence Homesteads were transferred to the

⁹W. H. Woodbury to M. L. Wilson, November 22, 1933, in Duluth Homesteads Papers, Special Collections, Archives, University of Minnesota, Duluth (Northeast Minnesota Historical Center); Northeastern Minnesota Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, loan application, 1, 8, 28; Jackson Farmers' Club, Jackson Project file; both in St. Louis County Historical Society vertical files, Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, Duluth.

¹⁰Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 120, 152–154.

¹¹*Duluth News-Tribune*, April 30, 1935, p. 8, May 20, 1936, p. 3; Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 112–113, 125, 156, 162.

¹²Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 171 (quote). The first figure is estimated from the amount requested by the Northeastern Minnesota Subsistence Homestead Corporation (\$112,719), divided by the proposed number of units to be built (52); the second figure is from Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 333.

newly formed Resettlement Administration which had been created under the authority of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 and placed under the direction of Rexford G. Tugwell.¹⁰

IN DULUTH very little had been done on the project during this time. After Middleton's visit in April, 1934, the land was surveyed and purchased and initial work was begun to ready the plots. H. Earl Farnam of the Chamber of Commerce had been appointed manager, and Irene Lowe, a representative from the division, was reviewing applications. When the Resettlement Administration took charge of the subsistence homesteads in mid-May, 1935, however, work in Duluth ceased entirely. The homesteads were only a small part of a much larger land usage program in the Resettlement Administration and took a back seat to many of the other, newer concerns. Most homestead projects elsewhere in the country were under construction by that time and were simply completed according to the division's plans. In Duluth, though, so little work had been done to that point that Tugwell's people had what amounted to almost a clean slate. They took charge of the project and were able to replan all but the location according to their own specifications, but this stalled construction. The only work completed during the 1935 season was brush clearing and well digging.¹¹

By the following summer, though, the planning was completed, and as construction began a significant change was soon apparent which made the delay well worth while. The Resettlement Administration had designed much higher quality housing for the Duluth project. An administrative order had been sent to the planners on September 23, 1935, which “required all houses to contain inside toilets, baths, and electric wiring.” The average cost per unit at Duluth rose from an early estimated \$2,168 (with a portion of this set aside for the homesteaders' provisions) to \$11,714 (with no allowance for provisions), and the homes were much more substantial than those built in some of the earlier projects.¹²

Between 1936 and 1947, the administration of the homesteads underwent four more changes, but, while

these resulted in some administrative reshuffling, none of them had much real effect upon the Duluth Homesteads. Once finally begun the project was simply completed as planned. The only change involved an early expansion. When construction started in 1936, there were plans for forty units with barns. As they got under way, however, the government decided to add forty-four more without barns. By March 15, 1938, eighty-four homesteads were occupied. Judging by the lot numbers assigned, the land was originally divided to allow for fifty units in each group, but the condition of some of the lots apparently made them unsuitable for construction. In fact, at least one of the houses was built on land so swampy that a sump pump is still in use today during the winter and spring months.¹³

The houses themselves, though, are of very good quality. Situated on roughly five to ten acres each, they are brick-sheathed and insulated and have stood for almost forty years with few signs of aging. Four types of homes were made available, ranging in size from two to four bedrooms. Homesteaders were given a size according to the number in their family, and once the model was assigned there was a drawing to determine exactly which home would go to which family. Everything was done as fairly as possible.¹⁴

Still open to speculation, however, is whether the selection of the homesteaders themselves was carried out in an equitable manner. It is quite clear that the spaces were not filled on a first-come-first-served basis. Most of the selection process was handled by two representatives from the Resettlement Administration, Orton F. Keyes and Bessie W. Cook. They interviewed, investigated, and finally chose the first batch of residents in 1936. Their criteria for selection are somewhat unclear, but a bulletin published by the Department of Interior sheds some light on the problem since it describes the required characteristics of the homesteader. Major qualifications were need, character, age, children in family, prospects of employment, physical condition, and farming experience. While these do give some idea of what

the investigators sought, certain things must have been given more weight than others and much would have depended upon the interviewer's impressions.¹⁵

Mistakes were made, and the Duluth project was no exception. Leonard and Esther Hubert, two of the original homesteaders, remarked on one type of problem in a recent interview:

Mrs. Hubert: One family over here didn't know a pea seed from a corn seed. They only lasted about a year and a half.

Mr. Hubert: They put cabbage seeds in like radish seeds and they had cabbages coming up so thick. . . . It was funny how some people knew so little and still they tried to make a go of it.

Mrs. Hubert: The people next door to them didn't know any more. Then right across the road from them were some more of their friends and they knew even less. None of them stayed on very long.

Mr. Hubert: That's what I can't understand. You remember I told you about a friend of mine who never got a place while I did? Now I don't know why, because, goodness gracious, that man forgot more than all of those other people ever knew about farming. He was born and raised on a farm.¹⁶

Need was another category which was occasionally juggled. The division wanted to maintain a \$1,200 income ceiling for prospective homesteaders, but when the Resettlement Administration was put in charge, it

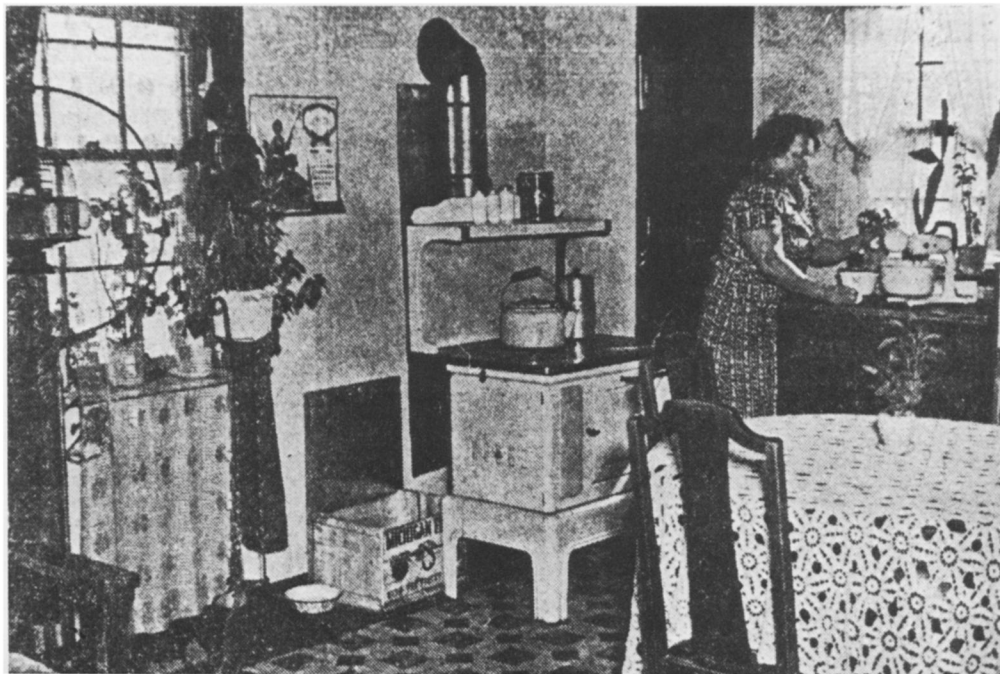
¹³*Duluth Herald*, March 1, 1938, p. 2; author interview with Mr. and Mrs. E. L. Brechlin, original homesteaders, May 9, 1976, transcript, p. 2; transcripts of all of these interviews are in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

¹⁴*Duluth News-Tribune*, March 7, 1937, p. 4; Zona B. Peterson, "10th Anniversary of Duluth Homesteads," 1, mimeographed history in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

¹⁵*A Homestead and Hope*, 15-16. According to several of the original homesteaders, Mrs. Cook apparently did most of the screening.

¹⁶ Author interview with Leonard and Esther Hubert, original homesteaders, April 8, 1976, p. 15.

THIS IS THE combined kitchen, dining room, and living room in the home of Mrs. Ben Anderson, as it looked in 1939.



BEAUTIFICATION of yards and cultivation of gardens started as soon as warm weather arrived the spring after the homesteaders moved in. This resident is unloading a trailer full of black dirt.



raised this to \$1,600. In Duluth it was probably even higher. It has been suggested that there may have been as many as ten applicants for each available homestead in the first group of forty, but by the time the second forty-four were completed, many who had once been interested were no longer in a position to move to the project. As a result, Keyes and Cook were forced to bend certain rules in order to fill all of the homes. One of the area farmers claimed that “they took pretty near anybody” toward the end just to attain full occupancy, but this does not seem too likely. E. L. Brechlin, one of the last few to be assigned a homestead, is probably closer to correct when he said that “you had to be in a certain wage bracket but they widened that out somewhat after they built the second batch of units.”¹⁷

THE PROBLEMS of initial selection were all solved and full occupancy of eighty-four units was achieved by mid-March, 1938. At first, while the suitability of the homesteaders was tested, they were allowed only to rent. Seven months later, however, on October 23, 1938, in accordance with the administration’s wishes, and “because of the fine attitude of homesteaders in improving their units, developing community activities, and paying up their obligations to the government,” it was announced that the homesteaders would be allowed to form a co-operative association to buy their homes

from the government. Associations of this sort had been formed in at least thirteen other projects by that time, so the procedure was fully worked out.¹⁸

First a price based on the homesteader’s ability to pay was determined, and a contract was made between the homesteaders’ association and the government. Under the terms of this contract the Resettlement Administration or its successors were given supervisory rights and ultimate decision-making powers, while the association was charged with daily management of the project and allowed to hold title to the property. All original homesteaders were given the choice between accepting a forty-year purchase (tenure A) contract at 3 per cent interest or a lease (tenure B) contract. However, upon leaving the project, even those holding tenure A contracts lost the rights to their homesteads. Residents having those contracts were required to allow the association to purchase their homes for the equity that they had built up to that point. Any new occupants arriving after the establishment of the association were forced to assume tenure B contracts for a one-year trial period, after which time the association could decide to issue them tenure A contracts. Regardless of their contract, each homesteader was expected to pay a small monthly amount to cover the cost of the association’s management responsibility.¹⁹

A slight snag developed as this procedure was being followed in Duluth. The homesteaders felt that the Resettlement Administration’s first suggested price of \$3,050 to \$4,167.50 per unit was too high. In their opinion it “did not give enough consideration to the relative values of the various types of units and locations.” The Resettlement Administration agreed to reappraise the project and set a new price. Finally one was agreed upon, and on August 1, 1939, a mortgage note was issued to the Duluth Homestead Association for the amount of

¹⁷A *Homestead and Hope*, 6; Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 187; author interview with Art Olson, an early area resident, May 3, 1976, p. 2 (first quote); Hubert interview, 3; Brechlin interview, 3 (second quote).

¹⁸*Duluth Herald*, March 1, 1938, p. 2; *Duluth News-Tribune*, March 7, 1937, p. 4, October 23, 1938, section B, p. 5 (quote).

¹⁹Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 215–216. The Duluth homesteaders were given forty years to pay off the mortgage.

\$225,742. This was less than 23 per cent of the government's original investment and meant that the average price each homesteader would pay for his home and property was \$2,687.40 plus interest.²⁰

Despite the fact that this seems today to be a remarkably small amount, at that time, for those people, it was a formidable sum. With it went many new responsibilities. As Conkin has stated:

When a resettlement client moved into a new community, . . . he was moving into a new world, with a standard of living heretofore hardly dreamed of by anyone in his economic status. His new home had often cost as high as \$5,000 or \$6,000; his farm or subsistence plot and the out-buildings had cost up to \$4,000 more. . . . Even granting that all . . . facilities were turned over to the homesteader without any cost or any obligation for repayment — and they were not — the settler was still left in a situation that required a larger income than in the past. Taxes were higher; maintenance was increased; an electric bill, perhaps a phone bill, and probably a larger heating bill were added to his expenses.²¹

This was certainly just as true of those in Duluth as anywhere else. Hubert, for example, was an electrician for United States Steel, and remembers working only half-time in those days and bringing home less than twenty dollars for two weeks. He and his family were paying only fifteen dollars rent in West Duluth before moving to the project but were expected to pay twenty-eight dollars “right off the bat” in their new home. In addition to this, both Hubert and Brechlin mentioned having to buy automobiles to go back and forth to work, and all homesteaders were faced with the problem of obtaining their own tools, seed, livestock, and anything else they might need to live and work on their newly acquired land.²²

Is it any wonder, then, that Ware and Powell were so skeptical about the homesteaders' future? Many people considered the increase in responsibility to be far too great in light of the poor wages available, and they regarded the lengthy purchase period as a contractual perpetuation of the homesteaders' plight. However, what was apparently never considered was that the mettle of industrious but previously unlucky families might be enough to make the program work despite unfavorable conditions. This was certainly true at the Duluth Homesteads. Most of those chosen for that project proved to be diligent, resourceful, and able to turn their new opportunity into a success. The homesteaders themselves turned out to be the single most important factor in the subsequent good fortune of the entire project.

A tour of the homes and property today provides one

striking sign of the industrious nature of the homesteaders. It is almost impossible to find any in need of repair, and those still occupied by the original homesteaders (and as of April, 1976, there were twenty-two of these) are among the best cared for of the group. While this may be partly a result of prosperity, the good condition of the homes does allow the outsider some insight into the general nature of the community.²³

A MUCH TRUER and stronger indication of the homesteaders' personal drive and willingness to co-operate may be seen in the records of the Duluth Homestead Association, particularly in the minutes of the board of directors' and general members' meetings. Some of the most telling information those minutes yield are records of the construction and improvements done on the project. Before making any changes in the home, out-buildings, or land, the homesteader was required to apply to the board for a building permit in which the nature of the change, plans, and estimated cost were explained. This served a double purpose. First, it protected the association which, after all, was responsible for managing and maintaining the quality of the dwellings and property. Second, records of the permits issued were sent to Washington, D.C., enabling the central administration to keep tabs on the uses to which the homesteads were being put.²⁴

Despite the additional work these permits required, most of the residents were happy to be allowed to finally make changes. Until the association was formed, the government had discouraged major remodeling. Residents were on trial to see if they would be suitable inhabitants. The condition of the houses and the property was to be maintained in order to ensure their livability for others if the first family did not stay. Anne Holt remembers some of the problems this brought about:

Most of the houses built on this side of Arrowhead Road were built with the first forty. The second group had an entirely different layout because there was a lot of complaint on these homes. They were built “southern style,” so they said. They had basements for these houses, but still they put the laundry room there where my kitchen [now] is. Now you would just love to come in and find somebody trying to wash in a little laundry room — a little cubbyhole like that. People might come walking in on you on Monday

²⁰*Duluth News-Tribune*, March 12, 1939, p. 1, 7, May 4, 1939, p. 6; Duluth Homesteads Association, mortgage note, August 1, 1939, A-fsa 2351, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

²¹Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 188.

²²Hubert interview, 1, 5, 9; Brechlin interview, 4.

²³A local realtor recently sold one of the homes and approximately four of the ten acres of land for over \$40,000.

²⁴Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administra-

“These homes were pretty bare, but they were a home. A good substantial home — well built. Not only well built, but built with good materials. So that was the main thing — you had a good start.”

**—Leonard Hubert,
original homesteader**

morning when you were trying to wash. And in those days they didn't have automatics, you know. It was just the conventional washers and they were much more sloppy. . . . Of course we had ours moved down to the basement too, after a while, but at first you weren't allowed to do those things because the government had all the say-so. They told you that if you made any improvements or changed anything and you had to move out or did move out you would have to restore it to its original state. Of course then you weren't going to go ahead and do much changing. You never knew what might happen.²⁵

However, when the association took charge and the permit system was begun, many residents made changes. From October 23, 1939, to the end of the year, the board issued permits for nineteen jobs, and one for a more substantial undertaking (installation of double doors on a garage) was tabled to be referred for advice to Corrine Jahren, the government's representative in Duluth at that time. During the first ten years of the association's existence, permits were issued for 184 changes — an average of over two changes made on each homestead. A large number of these were for general remodeling (thirty-eight) and changes to outbuildings provided on the first forty units (twenty-six), but during that time there was also one permit issued for a multiroom addition, eight for new garages, three for remodeling garages into dwellings, one for a large separate greenhouse, and even one for central air conditioning.²⁶

Nor did these simple permits represent the only changes made on the project. Another function of the association was the granting of “maintenance A loans.” These were usually small amounts of money lent to homesteaders with tenure A contracts to help them tion, application for alterations and improvements (form FSA-361), copies in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

²⁵ Author interview with Nels and Anne Holt, original homesteaders, April 26, 1976, 1–2, 5.

²⁶ Board of directors minutes, November 27, 1939, p. 2. These figures are compiled from a survey of the board minutes to the end of 1948, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

²⁷ Advisory committee minutes, August 6, 1946, p. 1–2, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

²⁸ Advisory committee minutes, August 6, 1946, p. 1–2, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

purchase materials for the repair or improvement of their property. The loans recorded were even more numerous than the simple permits, for many of the alterations begun by the homesteaders had to be financed in this way. Some homesteaders refused to go through the paper work involved in obtaining the correct permit, and this fact did not escape the board of directors' notice. On August 6, 1946, a special advisory committee formed to consider this matter recommended that the homesteaders be reminded of their obligation to obtain permits for making changes.²⁷

Of greater interest here, though, is this committee's accompanying analysis of three types of changes which had been made to that date. The first category involved “beautification” of the homesteads and included landscaping and general decoration. The second covered special adaptations ranging from the erection of backyard clothes poles to the upgrading of electric fixtures. The third, entitled “Additions to Housing Quarters,” was clearly the most important:

The final classification involves the expansion of the living quarters of the house itself through the addition of rooms, either by building on to the present house or finishing a portion of the house which was not originally intended for living quarters, such as constructing attic rooms and enclosing porches. This type of improvement enlarges the housing facilities and in most instances clearly results in an increase of value because of the expansion of living quarters.²⁸

In another context these statements may seem to be somewhat propagandistic, but here, written to accompany a gentle, scolding reminder, an interpretation of that sort is improbable. In any case, this summary and the recorded loans and building permits represent a substantial list of accomplishments.

Another indication of the industrious nature of the homesteaders is found in records and memories of the farming which took place on the project. Not only did they plant gardens for food for their own tables, but within a few years many were producing food for sale in town as well. The Huberts have noted that some of the area farmers resented this situation, but this did not deter the homesteaders. In the first ten years, for in-

“[The co-operative store] was a little two-by-four place, and you could go up there about two or three nights a week and get your groceries and things. It was a tiny place just up here on the corner.”

—Mrs. Charles Anderson,
original homesteader

stance, nineteen chicken coops were built — many to house large numbers of chickens.²⁹

Nels and Anne Holt had 200 to 300 which they kept for egg production, and the entire family worked on the business. As Mrs. Holt said:

We had to candle them to remove all the spots and that's a lot of work. When we moved out here Jack [the eldest son] was ten and we must have started having the chickens when he was twelve or thirteen so he was able to be a big help. Evenings we used to sit and fix the eggs. We candled and boxed them. We sold them all by boxes. He [Holt] had an egg route that he delivered before he went to work. We had our regular customers.³⁰

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Anderson, on the other hand, put their homestead to a number of uses before settling on one business. Anderson explained:

I worked on the buses for many years but I figured that when I retired I would still want a job. I sure did get a job! What we had started with was raspberries. We grew them for several years but then the war started up and . . . I had to quit growing raspberries and just take care of my job. . . . Then when that [World War II] was over with I went into the strawberry business. We were in that for a number of years. That got to be an awful headache so I figured I would go into something else and I started in with evergreens a little at a time. Out of strawberries and into evergreens. That's what we did and we're still in it.³¹

Even today when the Andersons are past retirement age, they maintain a thriving tree and shrubbery business on their homestead property.

Of course, not everybody developed a business on their land. Most homesteaders simply used the land to produce enough food to supplement the small incomes they were receiving in those days. In many cases this was what pulled them through the depression. Hubert gives a strong indication of this when he remembers:

I felt, before I got this opportunity, that I'd never be a family man. I'd never get enough money to build a home and have a piece of land of my own or anything. I just didn't feel as though I'd ever

be able to do that. . . . I was trying but I couldn't seem to make that headway. But then I got that opportunity to come up here and get a home and a piece of property and have a garden and a cow . . . that cow, good old Daisy, I bought that cow for seventy dollars. That cow gave me about twelve or fourteen calves and boy, meat every winter. . . . I attribute getting back on my feet to the few animals I had and this home. Now I've paid off my two homes twenty years ago and have been able to save money ever since so that now we have ample to live on for the rest of our days.³²

The extent to which the land was used, then, differed quite a bit. It is apparent today, however, that each family took advantage of the opportunity to improve its situation. People worked hard on their homesteads and made them successful according to their individual needs.

IT WAS EVIDENT from the outset that these people were achievers. This characteristic was sought during the selection process and it seems that, for the most part, the choices were well made. Even greater than individual accomplishments, though, were those of the group. This group potential was another feature overlooked by Ware and Powell in their 1935 article. The homesteaders were not forced to face the many financial burdens alone but shared similar problems with others. Though a person or a family might encounter some difficulties, the support of a group with like goals and problems made it much easier for the homesteaders to make their way through hard times. Many clubs and organizations were formed by the residents for just this reason, but, again, the homestead association stands out among these as being by far the most influential. Shortly

²⁹ Hubert interview, 13. The number of chicken coops is obtained from a survey of the board minutes to the end of 1948, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

³⁰ Holt interview, 7.

³¹ Author interview with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Anderson, original homesteaders, April 9, 1976, p. 1.

³² Hubert interview, 14. The two homes referred to are his original homestead and the government-built barn which he and his son converted to a two-bedroom house after World War II.



THE CO-OPERATIVE STORE was an inexpensive and convenient place for the homesteaders to shop. Joan Peterson and Ruth Sundstrom buy some groceries from Albert Anderson.

after its incorporation it became the focal point for much of the homestead activity. In addition to the purely administrative matters this organization dealt with, many of its actions stand out as definite attempts to help the homesteaders. These fall into two general classifications: those intended to help the individual and those which were to be of benefit to the group.

Most of the first type of action involved carrying families through difficult periods. Among the association's papers is a mimeographed set of instructions entitled merely "Homestead Association Activities." One recommendation was that no family be allowed to become more than three months behind in its payments. After that it was felt that the homesteader was too far in debt to catch up and was liable to endanger the success of the entire project. Though this was the official policy, delinquencies were obviously tolerated longer than this — especially in the earlier years. The board of directors reported to the quarterly membership meeting on October 11, 1940, that "Very little trouble is being experienced in making collections."³³

However, the minutes of the monthly board meetings indicate otherwise. At the meeting on January 13, 1941, the directors decided the problem of delinquencies of two months (or more) was so great that a form letter would be composed and sent to the parties in question in

³³"Homestead Association Activities," 8-9, a mimeographed and apparently incomplete publication that may be part of a larger Farm Security Administration publication; board of directors' report to the quarterly membership meeting, October 11, 1940; both in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

³⁴Board minutes, January 13, 1941, September 14, 1942, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

³⁵Quarterly membership meeting minutes, October 12, 1945, p. 2, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

an attempt to induce them to bring their payments up-to-date. By September 14, 1942, it was still a problem, however; twenty-nine homesteaders, or almost 35 per cent, were delinquent in their payments.³⁴

The situation was repeatedly discussed in board meetings, but firm action was seldom taken. There seemed to be an unspoken agreement to give homesteaders with problems the benefit of the doubt as long as possible. The elected representatives on the board were homesteaders themselves and were willing to take the chance of a possible loss both to them and to the people they represented rather than evict another family with whose problems they could easily sympathize. This sympathy was rewarded with eventual payment in almost all cases. In a report to the membership in October, 1945, the manager, Leif O. Selbak, mentioned that the fund which would have been drawn upon to cover any losses resulting from nonpayment was "about 100% intact."³⁵

In cases where members became severely ill and were unable to support themselves for a time, the association stepped in directly to help. At the quarterly membership meeting of April 12, 1946, for instance, a motion was made and passed calling for the circulation of a list "asking for donations for assistance" for two families "on account of severe illnesses." In January, 1947, Helmer Ruth volunteered to work out a plan for a "sick benefit fund" to help homesteaders. At the February 11 meeting of the board, he presented a proposal for a special fund which would be started with \$100 from the association and would cost the members twenty-five cents per month. The benefits were exactly worked out:

- a. Fifty Dollars in case of the death in the family of the father or mother.
- b. Payment of the house payment for each

month, that the wage earner of the family is sick and unable to work, for a maximum of three months in any one year.

- c. Five Dollars funeral spray in case of death in the immediate family.
- d. Three Dollar floral plant in case of confinement in the hospital of the father or mother.

This was accepted at the quarterly membership meeting of April 14, 1947, and, according to the fluctuation of the fund at periodic reports, it was frequently used.³⁶

It should be clearly understood, however, that the association was very reluctant to help individuals who were not in desperate need of that help. The minutes record many instances in which individuals approached the board with a request to buy tools, materials, or even extra lots owned by the association. In each case the board denied the request, preferring to keep the organization's possessions for use by the entire membership. Indeed, this was the philosophy behind almost all of its actions. With the homesteaders all beginning on an equal footing, the association made a conscious effort to distribute benefits equally. Thus, almost all efforts of the board were made in the interests of the group rather than the individual.

The primary group benefits resulted from a reasonably shrewd management of the association and its holdings. A prime example is found in records involving the organization's possessions. When the Resettlement Administration finished building the project, certain tools and supplies were left for the use of those moving in. Until August, 1939, they were in the government's charge, but when the association was formed, it assumed the responsibility. Among the "tools" were a cement mixer and an old bulldozer. The homesteaders were allowed to rent these from the association as they needed them, but it was soon evident that the heavier equipment of this sort was not always in demand. As a result, the board began renting them to outsiders. By 1941, the old bulldozer had become so popular that contractors were taking it on a monthly basis with the association collecting a tidy \$350 per month even though it was in need of repair.³⁷

Ruth remembers that when the government's auditors discovered this they were "up in arms because we weren't supposed to be in that type of business," but this did not stop the association. One Stanley Hicks was hired to take charge of the machine, and the association continued to have a good income from it for a few more years. As late as April 9, 1946, Hicks attended one of the board meetings to let it know that he planned to take a leave of absence from his county job and would be "using the machine extensively this summer. The Association would thereby net a considerable sum of money." As it turned out, the income that year was \$1,643.25 but, due to the need for major repairs on the

tractor, the net was only \$265.07. Still, the total in the "tractor fund" was \$2,708.89 by the end of 1946.³⁸

Renting heavy equipment was only one of the ways in which the association earned its money. Other income was obtained when monthly homestead payments and prepayments made by the homesteaders were invested to produce interest income. The amounts certainly did build up, but in analyzing the annual financial reports, a clear indication of the association's growth is somewhat difficult to discern. The organization did, after all, begin operations with a liability of over \$225,000, so any total financial picture would necessarily be printed in red ink despite the year's earnings. However, the government payments were regularly scheduled, so the degree to which the association was able to get ahead of these payments is a fair measure of its "profit." The problem with this is that a good deal of the profit was turned back to benefit the membership and it is therefore spread out in extant records.

The easiest way to measure profit is by looking at the "cash balance" or "cash on hand" entries in the annual reports.³⁹ By the end of 1940, after less than a year and a half of operation, this amount had reached \$12,058.55. The same entry reached its highest figure — \$41,273.49 — at the end of 1946. In addition to this, \$7,540 of the government debt had also been paid off ahead of schedule by this time. Spread over eighty-four homesteads this is approximately ninety dollars each. Today this is a relatively small amount, but at that time it was significant. The membership could clearly see its association working for it.⁴⁰

ANOTHER WAY in which the association spent some of its earnings was in helping to fund other co-operative ventures in the area. The board was allowed by the organization's bylaws to "set aside a sum not exceeding five percent (5%) of the annual net income to be used for the purpose of promoting and encouraging cooperative organization."⁴¹

³⁶ Membership minutes, April 12, 1946, p. 2, January 10, p. 2, April 14, 1947, p. 1; board minutes, February 11, 1947, p. 1; welfare fund proposal, February 12, 1947, all in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

³⁷ Board minutes, August 26, 1941, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

³⁸ An additional \$840, the amount of the investment in the Hermantown Locker Plant, was in the 1946 tractor fund; "Annual Report of the Duluth Homestead Association, January 1, 1946 through December 31, 1946"; author interview with Helmer Ruth, an original homesteader and now Hermantown mayor, April 9, 1976, p. 1-2; board minutes, April 9, 1946, p. 1; all in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

³⁹ The title of this entry varied.

⁴⁰ Annual reports, 1940 through 1946.

⁴¹ "By-Laws of the Duluth Homestead Association," 12, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

“We had good times up here. The people had very good times. Dances — you know, we were young then, we liked to dance and have parties. . . .”

**—Leonard Hubert,
original homesteader**

This was done at certain times for the two most successful co-operatives, the Hermantown Community Store (formed before the incorporation of the association) and the Hermantown Locker Plant, Inc. (opened late in 1945). Both of these were owned and operated by the area residents with the homesteaders playing the major role in each. The association bought their stock during the 1940s and eventually owned 100 ten-dollar shares of the store and eighty-four ten-dollar shares of the locker plant.⁴²

While in operation the co-operatives both proved to be very helpful to the homesteaders and other Hermantown residents, but when chain stores moved out to the area in the early 1950s, they could not compete and soon went out of business. A 1950 audit of the association's records shows that the stock held in these two ventures had been “distributed to the members as a special dividend” between 1947 and early 1951, but there are conflicting accounts of these shares after that time. Brechlin, for instance, mentioned that he did not get any money from his shares while Hubert, in discussing the store, said that many people “got money that they never put into it.” Regardless of the eventual worth of the stock, however, the savings and convenience offered by these co-operatives greatly benefited the homesteaders, and the association's actions in helping to fund them were very worth while.⁴³

Due to the nature of the subsistence homesteads program and the backgrounds of those involved, the drive to find and maintain economic security was a

strong one in the homesteaders' community. Naturally, a good share of the association's managerial activities revolved around financial concerns such as those just mentioned. The organization was continually trying either to make more money for the group or save more money for the individual. Also, because these ventures required precise records, they stand out sharply today in the minutes, audits, and official communications from that time. However, the nonfinancial contribution of the association should not be overlooked, for it too was important to the project's ultimate success.

From the very earliest days the homesteaders often got together socially. Even with the great amount of work facing them, for instance, they managed to find time for three major parties in July and August of 1937. By the fall of that first year the Duluth newspapers were carrying many notices of club meetings, parties, study clubs, and committee meetings held by the homesteaders, and soon after that a socially oriented Homesteaders' Club was formed. This community spirit continued to grow over the following years. In 1947, a large party was planned for the homesteaders' tenth anniversary, and one of the residents, Zona B. Peterson, pieced together a short history of the project for the occasion. In it she recalled highlights of the previous ten years. Right along with the incorporation of the Duluth Homestead Association and the beginning of the co-operative store, she recalled dances, picnics, assorted clubs, an annual fair, a chorus, a Red Cross group, and even a “ladies” volleyball team which traveled around the area “playing neighboring towns” and “at the Proctor Fair.”⁴⁴

The association took an early and active part in this, first through encouragement and later by providing some of the needed funding. At a November 10, 1941, meeting of the board, the manager suggested the appointment of a committee of homesteaders who would prepare programs “such as Christmas party [sic] for the children, Speakers programs, Movie entertainments, A Dinner-Dance, also to provide funds to cover expenses, etc.” Following this suggestion a motion was made and carried that “in the event of a deficit over and above receipts, that the Association be allowed to use the Interest Income of the Association to cover such a deficit if it occurs.”⁴⁵

This, of course, opened the door to future spending for social events. While these expenses never totaled

⁴²Membership minutes, October 13, 1944; board minutes, January 9, 1945, p. 2, February 10, 1948, p. 2; in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

⁴³Lawrence R. Graving and Karl F. Honigman, certified public accounts, “Duluth Homestead Association: Report on Audit of Accounts and Records for the Period from January 1, 1947, to January 31, 1950,” dated April 17, 1950, p. 3 (first quote); Brechlin interview, 2; Hubert interview, 6 (second quote); all in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

⁴⁴Peterson, “10th Anniversary of Duluth Homesteads,” 4, in Duluth Homesteads Papers. A scrapbook of clippings and memorabilia about the Duluth Homesteads and its activities owned by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Anderson of Hermantown includes a handwritten invitation to a get-acquainted picnic on August 29, 1939 — the third big party of the summer.

⁴⁵Board minutes, November 10, 1941, p. 2, in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

more than the \$404.46 spent in 1946, the association did, nevertheless, provide money for many of the membership's social functions during the 1940s. There can be no doubt that these community gatherings and the togetherness they generated kept more than a few of the homesteaders from leaving the project during bad times. The community was, after all, somewhat isolated and could be a lonesome spot. The Huberts recalled that there was only "one little store" on the Miller Trunk Highway, the main road between their homestead and Duluth and "only a couple of farm houses" on the route to West Duluth. The distance was approximately five miles and the roads, especially in the area of the project, were poor. The homesteaders were forced to turn to each other for company and, for the most part, did so successfully. Some were simply too "homesick" for the city and eventually had to return to it, but most became involved in what their new community had to offer and thrived there.⁴⁶

THE HOMESTEADERS, in fact, became so completely convinced of the merits of their situation that, through the association, they attempted to obtain additional homesteads for the Hermantown area. Their first official attempt was in the form of a resolution sent to Congressman Jesse P. Wolcott, chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee, on April 16, 1947. This resolution requested passage of the housing bill then before Wolcott's committee. The bill in question was the Wagner-Ellender-Taft bill which was to have provided 810,000 more public housing units over a six-year period. Whether Gordon T. Johnson, then president of the board and author of the letter, was aware of Wolcott's friendship with private housing interests is unknown, but the letter was, of course, not heeded by the congressman. Wolcott did everything in his power to tie up the bill in his and the Rules Committee and managed to stall it until 1949. In the meantime, a year after its first attempt, the board instructed its manager to write Senators Joseph H. Ball and Edward J. Thye of Minnesota, simply "requesting a priority for the construction of 100 additional homes for people in low income brackets, on land available on this Project."⁴⁷

By the end of 1948, passage of the bill must have seemed close at hand, for on December 8 a group of four homesteaders, the manager, and one other area resident gathered at the Hermantown School to form the Hermantown Housing Association. Its purpose was to begin preparing for the anticipated building of 100 to 200 new low-income housing units in the area. Its first task was to publicize its immediate acceptance of applications. While not officially involved in this new organization, the homestead association was soon called upon to come to its aid. Shortly after publicly stating its goals and calling for applications, the Hermantown Housing Associa-

tion was swamped with correspondence. Since the group had no headquarters of its own, Kenneth Kellett, chairman of the housing association, appealed to the homesteaders' board for help. Johnson answered on December 20, 1948, that the board had "agreed that it will be permissible [*sic*] to use the Duluth Homestead Association office to receive correspondence and keep necessary records for the Hermantown Housing Association. . . . The Board of Directors wish the Hermantown Housing Association success in securing more homes for Hermantown."⁴⁸

Regrettably, that success was not forthcoming. The Democratic majority in both houses did manage to pass the bill in 1949, and later that same year President Harry S Truman signed it into law. However, the congressional elections of the following year cut the Democratic margin significantly and strengthened the opposition to public housing. This, combined with the shifting of gears which took place at the outset of the Korean conflict, caused appropriations for housing to falter and finally be reduced to little more than a token amount. Hermantown and the homesteaders never received their additional housing.⁴⁹

These unsuccessful attempts by individuals and by the association to secure additional government-financed housing illustrate some underlying assumptions and convictions held by the homesteaders. In the first place, these people wanted to see their community grow and improve and were actively working to achieve those goals. Second, and more important, such efforts indicate the homesteaders and their neighbors saw the success of the Duluth Homesteads after only ten years of operation and felt that other public housing of that sort could be equally successful and would be a welcome addition to the community. Surely, then, their actions in this matter stand as a solid answer to Ware, Powell, and others who had offered such gloomy predictions in the mid-1930s. The homesteaders in Duluth were not saddled with anything like the "permanent poverty" mentioned in those prophecies. To them, even at that early date, the project was a complete success.

Ironically, just as Congress was taking steps in the 1940s to initiate more public housing, the Federal Public Housing Authority was attempting to dispose of the projects built in the previous decade. The entire reform

⁴⁶ Annual Report, 1946; Hubert interview, 4 (first quote); Anderson interview, 8 (second quote); all in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

⁴⁷ Gordon T. Johnson to Jesse Wolcott, April 16, 1947; board minutes, April 13, 1948, p. 2; in Duluth Homesteads Papers; Leonard Freedman, *Public Housing: The Politics of Poverty*, 17-33 (New York, 1969).

⁴⁸ Kenneth C. Kellett to Gordon T. Johnson, December 16, 1948, Johnson to Kellett, December 20, 1948 in Duluth Homesteads Papers; Freedman, *Public Housing*, 19.

⁴⁹ Freedman, *Public Housing*, 19.

THIS IS THE WAY the home of Charles Anderson, an original homesteader, looks today. The Andersons still have a thriving evergreen and shrub business on their land.



program of the New Deal was in disfavor in the 1940s, and those programs with which Tugwell had been working were under strong attack. He and his work were considered to be too radical by that time and a movement was under way to try to eradicate the policies and programs he had begun. Congress took the first action toward completely ending governmental involvement with the subsistence homesteads when, in 1944, it enacted legislation which provided that any homesteader, regardless of the length of his occupancy on the homestead, would be given a quitclaim deed as soon as he made full payment. The deed was to have "no reservations, conditions, or restrictions whatsoever."⁵⁰

In Duluth, though, when only fourteen homesteaders had taken advantage of this proposition by the end of 1948, the government became impatient. A representative from Washington met with the association's members at the quarterly meeting on January 14, 1949, and strongly encouraged them to refinance their homes so that the government could end its involvement. Following this and much correspondence with officials in the central office, the board decided on February 22 that "it would be to the interest of us all to refinance and pay off the Government."⁵¹

⁵⁰Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 214, 231 (quote), 233.

⁵¹Gordon T. Johnson to membership, n.d. (quote), in Duluth Homesteads Papers. A survey of the release deeds in the Duluth Homesteads Papers reveals that only fourteen were dated prior to 1949. In late 1948, the Public Housing Administration threatened to sell the mortgage note they then had to a private buyer; Roy M. Little to L. O. Selbak, November 9, 1948, Duluth Homesteads Papers.

⁵²Graving and Honigman, "Audit of Accounts and Records," 2, 5; A. A. Rusch to R. Vern Eckman, January 10, 1950, in Duluth Homesteads Papers; *Duluth Herald*, January 27, 1950, p. 5.

⁵³Anderson interview, 6.

THIS MARKED the beginning of the end for the association. Within a year seventy-five of the homesteaders had refinanced and the board had liquidated most of the association's holdings, including \$36,000 in series G government bonds. A substantial amount of the revenue resulting from these transactions was forwarded to the government to help pay off the total debt. The money held in some of the other funds was redistributed to the membership according to the amount each had paid in. On January 4, 1950, less than ten and a half years after the mortgage was first issued, the association made its final payment to the government. Three weeks later on January 26 at the Spalding Hotel in Duluth, H. W. Rogers from the Public Housing Administration presented the paid mortgage note to the homesteaders⁵²

Despite the seeming finality of this action, however, the association was still not finished with its responsibilities. In order to allow the government to sever its ties, the association had been forced to purchase the deeds of nine of the homesteaders who had refused to go along with the liquidation. Some of these may have been unable to obtain loans elsewhere or had other personal reasons for holding out, but others were simply stubborn in their refusal to refinance. Mrs. Anderson remembers that these few "figured that if they hung on for forty years the government would eventually get sick and tired and write them off. There are still some hard feelings on the part of some who feel that if we had just stuck together the government would have written us off as a bad debt I guess. But most of them did pay up." These homesteaders, then, were allowed to continue with their original payment schedules. The only difference with the new arrangement was that they were paying their neighbors instead of the government.⁵³

For the next four years the association assumed a relatively low profile in the community. The meetings of

the board became annual rather than monthly, and the only real activity consisted of collecting payments and keeping records of the outstanding accounts. The capital outlay made by the association in 1950 to purchase the nine deeds was gradually paid back, and 90 per cent of this income was channeled back to the membership in yearly dividends.⁵⁴

Finally, by 1954 only four holdouts remained. Board members decided that a separate corporation would be formed to buy these four deeds from the homestead association. This would release all of the funds tied up in the organization, allowing them to be distributed to the membership. On January 24, 1954, the Jackson Holding Company was officially incorporated under Minnesota law. Stock was sold at ten dollars, and fifty-two people bought 479 shares. This fund and a loan of \$6,500 borrowed from the Duluth National Bank were used to purchase the Duluth Homestead Association's remaining properties and begin the new company's operations. On May 31, 1954, the association received \$4,605.72 from the Jackson Holding Company (75 per cent of the total value of the property sold). This, coupled with other cash on hand, totaled \$5,393.17 and was distributed to fifty-seven eligible members following a special ballot on September 7. The legal liquidation of the association also took place at that time, and by 1955 it no longer existed.⁵⁵

In the meantime the holdouts continued paying on their regular schedules for another four years. By July 19, 1958, though, they had all paid off their balances and been issued their deeds. Stockholders at a special meeting the following month decided to liquidate this corporation as well, and a dissolution certificate was officially filed on December 9 of that year. With that action all loose ends had been tied and the Duluth Homesteads, which had been started twenty-five years earlier with William H. Woodbury's proposal to Milburn L. Wilson, had officially passed to private, individual ownership.⁵⁶

Though 1958 marks one official end, the influence of the group continues to be felt in Hermantown today. The homesteaders' efforts and achievements have played a major role in shaping that area, making it a successful and desirable residential district. Their homes have been well kept. A good deal of their land has either been developed for their own use or subdivided so that new homes could be built. The district school system has grown from a number of one- and two-room schools scattered throughout the area to a large, centrally located complex which services not only Hermantown but a portion of the surrounding area as well. More important, however, has been the effect the homesteaders have had on the basic nature of Hermantown. Helmer Ruth, in discussing the changes, has noted that he and his fellow homesteaders "were a large group so we were quite a factor in this community — politically, socially, and

otherwise. . . . We were the catalyst which made this community begin to grow. We changed it from a strictly farming area to a suburban one."⁵⁷

IN SUMMING UP the stories of these various "back-to-the-land" programs, Paul W. Conkin wrote:

Despite the fact that the New Deal communities were repudiated as part of government policy and that government controls over the communities were removed before most of the social experiments had been completed, the program resulted in approximately 100 completed communities and housing for approximately 10,000 families. . . . For each dollar expended, the communities represented more tangible, enduring achievements than most other relief expenditures.⁵⁸

The Duluth Homestead project was among the most enduring and successful of these various experiments — whether or not compared to any of the other communities that were built. In concluding their 1935 predictions, Ware and Powell said that homesteaders' thinking patterns would have to be changed in order for them to survive. They claimed that the people living in these projects would have to be taught to lower their sights and to become "content with subsistence as a future."⁵⁹ The homesteaders in Duluth proved them wrong. Their part of the experiment, at least, was successful for the individuals involved and for the area.

⁵⁴A resolution to this effect was placed before the membership in 1950. There is no record of the vote count, but one existing balance sheet for 1953 in the Duluth Homesteads Papers indicates that this was the practice for funds accumulated in that year.

⁵⁵Jackson Holding Company, certificate of incorporation, January 24, 1954; Jackson Holding Company, minutes, May 19, 1954, p. 2, 3, 14, 15; in the possession of Eckman, Mellum and Fillinworth, attorneys, Duluth; Duluth Homesteads Association, balance sheet, May 31, 1954; "Official Ballot for Adjourned Special Meeting of Duluth Homestead Association To Be Held on September 7, 1954"; both in Duluth Homesteads Papers.

⁵⁶Jackson Holding Company, minutes, July 19, 1958, p. 23; Eckman to Corporation Division, Minnesota Secretary of State, December 9, 1958, both owned by Eckman, Mellum and Fillinworth, attorneys.

⁵⁷Ruth interview, 2.

⁵⁸Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World*, 331.

⁵⁹Ware and Powell, in *Harper's Magazine*, 170:524.

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