

STORIES of New Jersey

There was nothing to do but move his press and type to Mount Pleasant; the flyer in politics was over. He did propose in the last issue of the *National Gazette*, October 23, 1793, to resume publication shortly, but this never came to pass. Freneau, however, was determined not to give up the newspaper business. The following year, in response to a notice that he was about to publish a new paper in Mount Pleasant, a number of persons in the county subscribed.

Publication, however, was delayed, partly by a forthcoming collection of his poems. Freneau worked on his poetry with infinite patience, though the original drafts seem to have been written easily enough. He constantly revised, cut, annotated and edited; he incorporated parts of some poems in others; and he never threw a poem away. There is good reason to believe that every poem he ever wrote found its way into one or another of the collections.

On May 2, 1795, his *Jersey Chronicle*, a tiny, eight-page weekly, was first published. In June the famous 1795 collection of his poetry came off his press. Not included in the volume are many of Freneau's romantic, imaginative poems, such as *The House of Night*. These were deliberate omissions. The pressure of the times had hardened the poet and led him to devote himself to realistic, purposeful writing. The *Jersey Chronicle* was expressive of this decision, as was his poetry of this period and after.

The *Jersey Chronicle* died from lack of interest with its fifty-second issue, and Freneau went to New York, where on March 13, 1797, he and Alexander Menut opened a printshop and began publication of *The Time Piece and Literary Companion*, a combination newspaper and literary magazine. Like its predecessors, *The Time Piece* starved for customers, and Freneau withdrew and retired to Mount Pleasant after one year.

The poet was only 46 years old, but the peacefulness of the New Jersey country was welcome after his stormy life. He still had his printing press at Mount Pleasant to amuse him, and his pen was still busy. To farming he paid little attention. The story is told that one day Mrs. Freneau, who was as practical as her husband was dreamy, found a slave asleep in a field of corn. Impatiently she took up the man's hoe, saying that she would show him how to work. The inexperienced lady cut down a hill of young corn together with the weeds. Chuckling, the slave cried, "Ho, ho, Missie Freneau, if that's the way you hoe, the corn'll never grow!"

"No wonder the farm doesn't pay," she exclaimed in exasperation, "When even the slaves talk in rhymes!"

Freneau's financial affairs, always a matter of disagreeable concern to him, became increasingly worse. The payment for the poems and essays that he contributed to various newspapers could scarcely support his family, and finally, in 1802, he was forced to the sea again. His love of sailing had disappeared, and it was only necessity that kept his hand on the tiller until 1807. In that year he retired once more to Mount Pleasant and began a new collection of his poems. The two-volume edition was not published until 1809.

Records at Freehold show sales of portions of the estate and foreclosures of mortgages on his property from time to time. His life there was quiet, broken by occasional trips to New York and devoted to poetry and long walks in the