

STORIES of New Jersey

Navesink hills to the north. The War of 1812 stimulated several timely poems written in the vein of Revolutionary efforts. The harsh, vindictive spirit that these showed was little like the kind, tenderhearted Freneau who enjoyed feeding the farm animals but was apt to disappear when the time came to kill the chicken for dinner.

In 1818, while the family was away, Mount Pleasant was partly burned. A faithful slave saved several family portraits and some fine furniture, but the correspondence, manuscripts and documents that Freneau had gathered were lost. His printshop, which the fire missed, is still the connecting room between the kitchen wing and the main part of the house. Lacking money to rebuild the old mansion, the poet and his family moved to a farmhouse near Freehold, owned by Mrs. Freneau's brother. For the next 17 years he lived here, and his short, trim figure, dressed like that of any of the farmers thereabouts, was familiar to the people who lived along the road to Freehold, two miles from his home. Occasional trips to New York broke the monotony of the passing years.

Freneau was still hearty at 80 and strong enough to brave the worst weather. On December 18, 1832, he set out on foot from Freehold for his home against the wishes of his friends while a freezing blizzard was whitening the ground. Blinded by the whirling snow and slowed by the cold, he lost his way, wandered into a swamp and fell, unable to go on. When he was finally found, his deep-set, gray eyes had closed forever.

They buried him next to his mother on the old family estate at Mount Pleasant. The grave, marked by a granite shaft and surrounded by a tall iron railing, is shaded by a huge sycamore tree. This lone monument to the Poet of the Revolution overlooks a broad sweep of quiet countryside. About 50 yards away is the farmhouse, from which a long maple-flanked drive leads to Highway US#9. The property, known as Poet's Dream, is now for sale to the highest bidder, with or without the grave.