

# STORIES of New Jersey

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44 Chestnut Street, Newark, New Jersey

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## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN NEW JERSEY

### FOR SALE

A Negro Woman, about 35 years old, healthy, sober and honest, and understands all kinds of housework, will be sold with or without her child, a boy of two years old.

This advertisement, in a Trenton newspaper on December 15, 1811, was similar to many notices appearing in periodicals all over New Jersey during the early 19th century. It was no rare occurrence to have slave mothers separated from their children. It was no rare occurrence to have slaves beaten. Thousands of Negroes fled from bondage because of the harsh treatment they received or because they had a human desire for liberty. But the laws of the Nation and the various states insisted that slaves were property and had to be returned to the owners.

Every day during the early 1800's New Jersey newspapers published notices such as this:

### \$30.00 REWARD

Ran away on the 24th, of December last, a negro boy named Major or Charles...Said boy is about 18 years of age, 5 feet 11 inches high, and speaks low when spoken to...The above reward will be given to any person who will lodge him in any jail so that I may get him ...John Minor--Hillsborough Township, Somerset County  
--January 19, 1818

It is not known whether Major was ever returned to his master, but it is possible that some white persons, at the risk of a jail term, secretly assisted him to escape.

There were people who made a practice of forwarding slaves into freedom illegally; they shared the task of providing secret shelters, or "stations," at regular intervals for the fugitives. This escape system was known as the "Underground Railroad," and those who led the slaves from station to station were called "conductors." In charge of every station was another trusted accomplice, the "agent." As early as 1810 the Underground Railroad was doing a thriving business, but slaves had been fleeing from the time they were first brought to Virginia in 1619.