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## STORIES of New Jersey

By 1640 the Dutch and the English in America had agreed to return each other's escaped slaves. One of the purposes of the New England Confederation in 1643 was to arrange for an exchange of the fugitives. This action could not stop escapes, however, since there were always places to hide and persons willing to aid runaway slaves.

During the Revolutionary War some slaves found liberty with the British in New York. Others joined robber bands that terrorized farm districts on the edge of the Pine Barrens and other forest regions. Still others escaped to the Ramapo Hills in the northernmost part of the state and there mingled with Indians, deserting Hessian soldiers, Tory refugees and other outlaws.

Slaves were first recorded in New Jersey in 1680, when there were 60 or 70 on a plantation at Shrewsbury. Later slave ships were calling at Camden and Perth Amboy, and in 1762 slaves were still being sold on the block at Camden. At Perth Amboy, in 1776, there was but one household employing free white servants. Somerset County, in 1790, averaged one slave to every six free persons, and by 1800 the same average prevailed in Bergen County. There were then 12,422 slaves in New Jersey. With the exception of New York, no state north of the Mason and Dixon Line had so large a slave population.

But during the years that slavery was growing in New Jersey there was also springing up a movement against it. This was particularly strong among the Quakers. In two letters, written in 1786, George Washington pointed out the existence of systematic attempts to aid and protect fugitive slaves in western New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Washington, a slaveholder who advocated the gradual abolition of slavery, wrote that it was not easy to capture fugitives "when there are numbers who would rather facilitate the escape of slaves than apprehend them when runaways."

The Quakers of southwestern Jersey were members of the influential Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, which had been against importing slaves since 1696. The campaign against slavery grew steadily stronger, until in 1776 the Philadelphia Meeting would not accept slaveholders as members. In 1780 the Quakers at Haddonfield disowned two members who refused to release their slaves. At last, in 1795, after a century of patient work, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting could boast that not one slaveholder worshiped in its large congregation.

The antislavery feeling among the Quakers spread gradually to other groups. This was brought about largely by John Woolman, a Jerseyman, and Anthony Benezet of Philadelphia. Woolman (1720-1772), a Mount Holly tailor and itinerant Quaker missionary, was born at Northampton in Burlington County. He was one of the first men to suggest publicly the abolition of the slave trade in America. Not only did Woolman speak at meetings all along the eastern seaboard, but he also wrote and published pamphlets attacking slavery. In time his ideas spread, eventually reaching New Jersey legislators, and in 1768 the special courts to deal with Negroes were abandoned; in 1769 a tax of £15 was laid on the purchase of each slave imported into the colony; and in 1778 the special criminal laws for Negroes were discarded.

Anthony Benezet crusaded for 40 years against slavery. His work in obtaining release of free Negroes who were being kidnaped into slavery led in 1775 to the organization of The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage. Composed of members of various religious denominations, it was the first antislavery organization in America and the forerunner of the societies for the complete abolition of slavery.

New Jersey's first abolition society was organized at Trenton in 1786, and another was formed in Burlington in 1793. A year later the Abolition Society of Salem was active in the defense of kidnaped Negroes, purchasing their freedom if necessary. New Jersey had five representatives at the first convention