

## STORIES of New Jersey

the Railroad, two elderly Quaker teachers, Sarah Grimke and her sister, Mrs. Angelina Weld, and Angelina's husband, Theodore.

If it happened that the road between New Brunswick and Perth Amboy was also being watched, the escaping Negroes were brought to Matawan and lodged by Quakers in a large, red brick house on the main street. Under a huge four-poster bed on the second floor a trap door, covered by a rug, led to a secret chamber, 9 by 15 feet. Runaways almost suffocated in the airless room while slave-catchers searched the vicinity and even the house itself.

When the crossing at New Brunswick was safe, passengers were brought directly to Rahway where fresh horses were waiting to start for Jersey City, the last station in New Jersey. In the event of danger north of the Raritan River, detour routes led around Metuchen and Rahway to Elizabethport, or around Newark to Jersey City. Along the way there were many barns to give shelter when warning came.

One barn off the main line outside of Newark was on the farm of Alexander McLean, a Jersey City newspaperman. McLean's place was used when the bridges over the Passaic and Hackensack Rivers were being watched. Fugitives came during the night, sometimes without notice. Early in the morning food was brought to them in the hay loft, where horse blankets had been provided in advance. A ladder at the rear of the barn was used for emergency exits. Children were taught to be silent about strange Negroes who came and went by night.

After spending the day in the barn, fugitives were sent on to the ferries at Jersey City by way of Newark or Belleville Turnpike and Newark Avenue. The fugitives were brought to New York City just in time to make the night trains for Albany and Syracuse. At the piers spies watched the wagons and coaches night and day. Many captures occurred here because drivers had to show how many passengers they were carrying when paying fares. When slaves were detected, Underground conductors who mingled with the crowd drew close to the frightened Negroes and led them to hideaways close by. Often the fugitives were hurried into a house by the front door and out on another street through the back. Then off to the waterfront they rushed to be hidden on Hudson River coal barges in which they almost choked to death from coal dust.

Some skippers risked taking on a slave to get extra help, for water had to be pumped constantly from the loaded canal boats. Small sloops and schooners were also used to ship the slaves to safe ports farther north. The Jersey City Underground station very often gave assistance to 25 or 30 runaway slaves in one night. This cost a hundred dollars for fares alone.

Contributors' names were kept secret, and an agent might not even know who his coworkers were in towns a few miles away. The protection of secrecy was especially necessary in the large towns of Trenton, Newark and Jersey City, where public opinion was unfriendly to abolitionists and escaped slaves. In 1848 a meeting of the Newark Abolition Society was broken up by a riot. A mob entered the meeting hall, broke all the seats and windows and burned all the books and papers. The City Marshal and other officers were present but did nothing to restore order or prevent the destruction of property.

In Jersey City, not only were there riots, but the antiabolition feeling grew so strong that the churches refused to permit anyone to speak from their pulpits against slavery or to condemn Congress for passing the harsh Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Later the abolitionists grew in number, and in 1857 the Congregationalists organized a church society where free speech was encouraged. Out of this society came the Tabernacle, the most popular church in Jersey City during the Civil War.