Thank you for coming this evening!

For those attending in person, please grab a seat.
We will pass around a sign in sheet.

If you have a beverage, please take a coaster.

For those online, the presentation will begin soon.

South Brunswick
PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

Pathways to Freedom: Understanding Juneteenth and Central New Jersey

A South Brunswick Historical Society Presentation
June 2026

South Brunswick
PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

Agenda

- Introduction
- Sign-in sheet
- Presentation
- Q&A
- Upcoming events and information

South Brunswick
PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

This presentation will highlight national context of Juneteenth and its overall impact, placing historical context on its unique tradition. We will also share local connections in Central NJ, specifically the story of freedom seekers in our area.

South Brunswick
PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

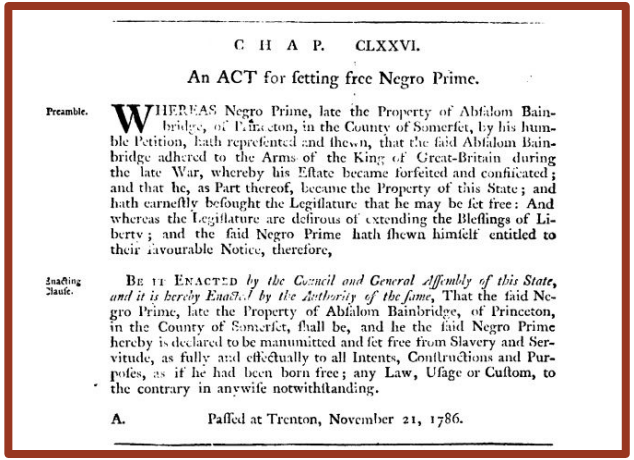
A note on historical empathy

- Throughout this presentation, you may notice differences in word choice used to describe the topics we are discussing
- Historical empathy is something that looks to change the narrative about how we use language to describe the situation or condition of someone or something
- In the context of early-American history and Juneteenth, some aspects of this discussion apply as well
- We want to emphasize the humanity of the individual rather than place labels based on the condition applied to them by others

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

3 and 1/2 points: contextualizing Juneteenth nationally and locally

- Effective January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation made it so all enslaved peoples in the Confederate States were declared legally free
- In places of Confederate control, both locally and in many Western states not occupied by the Union Army, enslavement continued
- New Jersey, made up of large Quaker populations, developed gradual emancipation in the 18th century, but saw declines during the Antebellum Period
    - Two thirds of the remaining enslaved peoples in the North were located in NJ (Legislating Slavery in New Jersey)



CHAP. CLXXVI.

An ACT for setting free Negro Prime.

Preamble. WHEREAS Negro Prime, late the Property of Abſalom Bainbridge, of Princeton, in the County of Somerſet, by his humble Petition, hath repreſented and ſhewn, that the ſaid Abſalom Bainbridge adhered to the Arms of the King of Great-Britain during the late War, whereby his Eſtate became forfeited and confiſcated; and that he, as Part thereof, became the Property of this State; and hath earneſtly beſought the Legiſlature that he may be ſet free: And whereas the Legiſlature are deſirous of extending the Bleſſings of Liberty; and the ſaid Negro Prime hath ſhewn himſelf entitled to their favourable Notice, therefore,

Enacting Clauſe. BE IT ENACTED *by the Council and General Aſſembly of this State, and it is hereby Enacted by the Authority of the ſame*, That the ſaid Negro Prime, late the Property of Abſalom Bainbridge, of Princeton, in the County of Somerſet, ſhall be, and he the ſaid Negro Prime hereby is declared to be manumitted and ſet free from Slavery and Servitude, as fully and effectually to all Intents, Conſtructions and Purpoſes, as if he had been born free; any Law, Uſage or Cuſtom, to the contrary in anywiſe notwithſtanding.

A. Paſſed at Trenton, November 21, 1786.

"An Act for setting free Peter Williams, a Negro, late the Property of John Heard," Acts, 8th G.A., 2nd sitting, ch. LIII, p. 110 (1784) https://slavery.princeton.edu/sources/act-setting-free-negro-prime

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

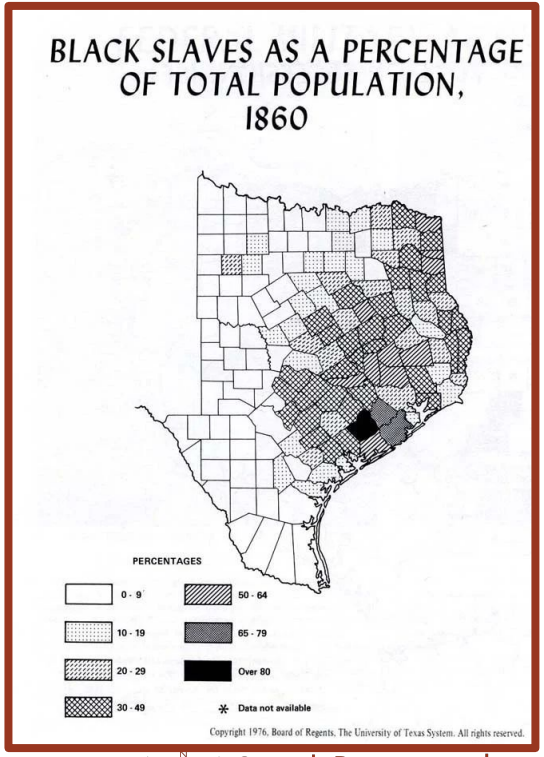
The long road to freedom

- Existing since the earliest colonial settlers in the colonial United States, Chattel Slavery, or the forced enslavement of an individual classified as property of another, was the predominant form that took place
- Even through gradual emancipation and the outlaw of enslavement in various territories, a variety of issues contributed to the prolonged institutionalization until June 19th, 1865
    - Geneva Smith, “Legislating Slavery in New Jersey,” The Princeton Slavery Project, https://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/legislating-slavery-in-new-jersey#anchor-references

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

Surrender and escape

- As the North began to enclose the Southern Confederate States and upon Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse in April 1865 led to a number of slaveholders fleeing to Texas before/during the war's conclusion
- Texas remained largely untouched by the Union Army due to its geographic location and Confederate occupation
  - Garrett-Scott, Shennette, Rebecca Cummings Richardson, and Venita Dillard-Allen. "'When Peace Come': Teaching the Significance of Juneteenth." *Black History Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (2013): 19-25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24759690.
- The Union did not need to go into Texas during the middle of the war due to their success cutting off the Confederacy from the west at the Mississippi River in 1863

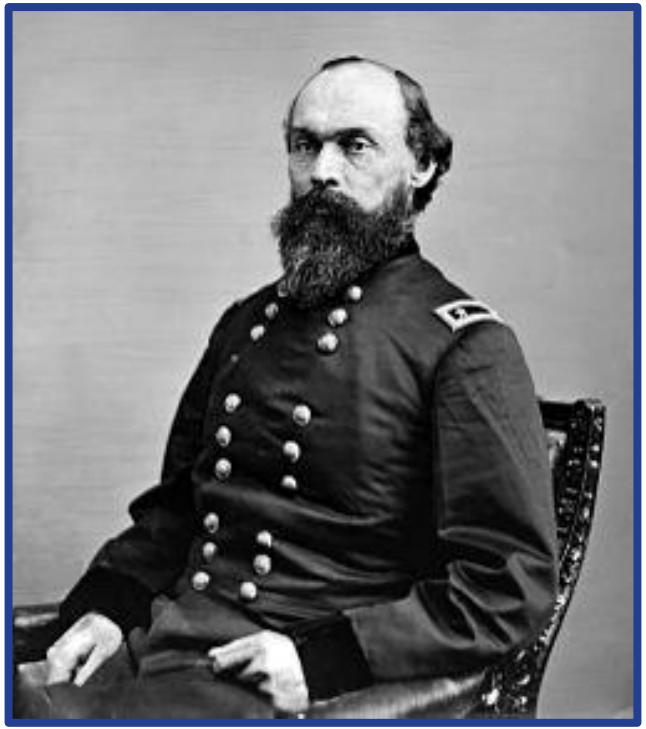


"Percentage of slaves in 1860," https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/slavery.

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

General's Orders

- Two months after the Civil War, Brigadier General Gordon Granger arrived to Galveston Texas with 1,800 additional federal troops
- Granger, a career military officer, was born in Kentucky and served in both the Mexican American War as well as the Civil War
- It was here that Granger occupied the Ashton Villa, the former HQ of the Confederate Army and read General Orders No. 3
    - "Garrett-Scott, "Teaching the Significance of Juneteenth, 19"



South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

The Galveston Daily News.

HOUSTON, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 1865.

HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF TEXAS,
GALVESTON TEXAS, June 19, 1865.

General Orders, No. 3.

The people are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, *all* slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labor.—The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes, and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere. By order of

Major-General GRANGER.

(Signed,) F. W. EMERY, Maj. & A. A. G.

Jubilee

- June 19th became known as “Emancipation Day” or “Jubilee Day” in many Afro-Texan and subsequently African American communities
- Songs, parties, sporting events, and homemade fireworks highlighted the early celebrations
- Throughout the lower South and West, celebrations were thought to rival those of Independence Day, and by the 1890s, “Juneteenth” became more commonly used for the celebrations
- These meetings were also representative of free and formerly enslaved people’s goals of civic engagement, where gatherings would often be used to “enact citizenship rights in the realms of both formal and informal politics.”
    - “Garrett-Scott, “Teaching the Significance of Juneteenth, 20”

Juneteenth Band, 1900, University of North Texas Libraries, texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth124054/m1/1/?q=emancipation

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

Juneteenth over the years

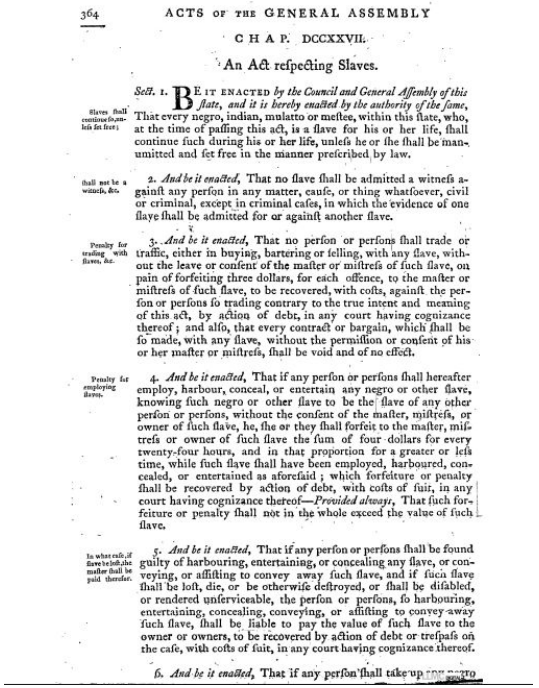
- Juneteenth celebrations continued throughout history, with varying historical contexts applying certain social and cultural trends onto the idea of the holiday over time
  - Early 1900s Jim Crow period
  - Post-war celebration and nationalism
  - The Civil Rights Movement
  - 21st century reconciliation
- Since being recognized as a federal holiday in 2021, social awareness of Juneteenth has continued grow

JUNE 19-19

JUNE 19
EMANCIPATION DAY
CORNER 5TH & BROAD

Local connections

- As one of NJ's original colonies, Middlesex County population of Black residents grew after the American Revolution to 1,827, according to the 1800 census
  - The total county population was 17,890
  - Of that 1,827 --- 1,564 were enslaved
  - 263 free Black residents
    - New Jersey Slavery Records
- "An Act Respecting Slaves" was passed in 1798 helped lead to a statewide gradual emancipation law in 1804
- A variety of loopholes were included in the law to continue the idea of forced, contractual, labor or servitude
  - Smith, "Legislating slavery in NJ"



364 ACTS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CHAP. DCCXXVII.

An Act respecting Slaves.

Slaves shall continue (unless set free)

Sect. 1. BE IT ENACTED *by the Council and General Assembly of this State, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same,* That every negro, indian, mulatto or meſtee, within this ſtate, who, at the time of paſſing this act, is a ſlave for his or her life, ſhall continue ſuch during his or her life, unleſs he or ſhe ſhall be manumitted and ſet free in the manner preſcribed by law.

ſhall not be a witneſs, &c.

2. *And be it enacted,* That no ſlave ſhall be admitted a witneſs againſt any perſon in any matter, cauſe, or thing whatſoever, civil or criminal, except in criminal caſes, in which the evidence of one ſlave ſhall be admitted for or againſt another ſlave.

Penalty for trading with ſlaves, &c.

3. *And be it enacted,* That no perſon or perſons ſhall trade or traffic, either in buying, bartering or ſelling, with any ſlave, without the leave or conſent of the maſter or miſtreſs of ſuch ſlave, on pain of forfeiting three dollars, for each offence, to the maſter or miſtreſs of ſuch ſlave, to be recovered, with coſts, againſt the perſon or perſons ſo trading contrary to the true intent and meaning of this act, by action of debt, in any court having cognizance thereof; and alſo, that every contract or bargain, which ſhall be ſo made, with any ſlave, without the permiſſion or conſent of his or her maſter or miſtreſs, ſhall be void and of no effect.

Penalty for employing ſlaves.

4. *And be it enacted,* That if any perſon or perſons ſhall hereafter employ, harbour, conceal, or entertain any negro or other ſlave, knowing ſuch negro or other ſlave to be the ſlave of any other perſon or perſons, without the conſent of the maſter, miſtreſs, or owner of ſuch ſlave, he, ſhe or they ſhall forfeit to the maſter, miſtreſs or owner of ſuch ſlave the ſum of four dollars for every twenty-four hours, and in that proportion for a greater or leſs time, while ſuch ſlave ſhall have been employed, harboured, concealed, or entertained as aforeſaid; which forfeiture or penalty ſhall be recovered by action of debt, with coſts of ſuit, in any court having cognizance thereof—*Provided always,* That ſuch forfeiture or penalty ſhall not in the whole exceed the value of ſuch ſlave.

In what caſe, if ſlave be loſt, the maſter ſhall be paid therefor.

5. *And be it enacted,* That if any perſon or perſons ſhall be found guilty of harbouring, entertaining, or concealing any ſlave, or conveying, or aſſiſting to convey away ſuch ſlave, and if ſuch ſlave ſhall be loſt, die, or be otherwiſe deſtroyed, or ſhall be diſabled, or rendered unſerviceable, the perſon or perſons, ſo harbouring, entertaining, concealing, conveying, or aſſiſting to convey away ſuch ſlave, ſhall be liable to pay the value of ſuch ſlave to the owner or owners, to be recovered by action of debt or treſpaſs on the caſe, with coſts of ſuit, in any court having cognizance thereof.

6. *And be it enacted,* That if any perſon ſhall take up [illegible] negro

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY

Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

Local connections continued

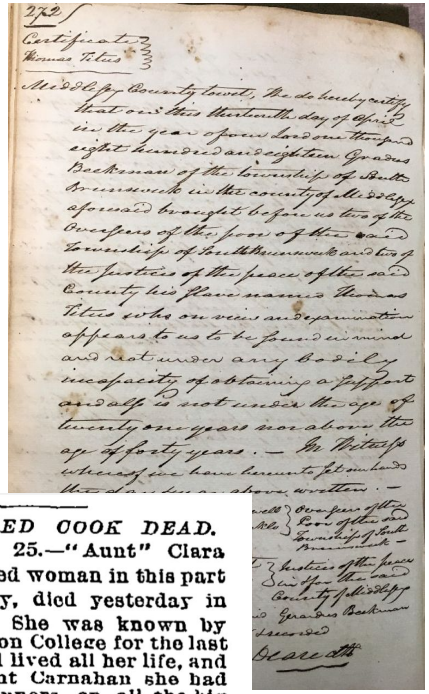
- Gradual emancipation led to even greater interstate slave trade
- NJ State Legislature continued to add provisions allowing for certain conditions of “if this or this, then it is this”
  - While few protections were given, the lukewarm stance on emancipation lasted until 1846
- “An Act to Abolish Slavery” in 1848 changed enslaved peoples to “apprentices for life” rather than freeing them
- New Jersey reluctantly ratified the Thirteenth Amendment in January 1866, the last northern state to do so, which freed the final 16 enslaved people in the state
  - Smith, “Legislating slavery in NJ”

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

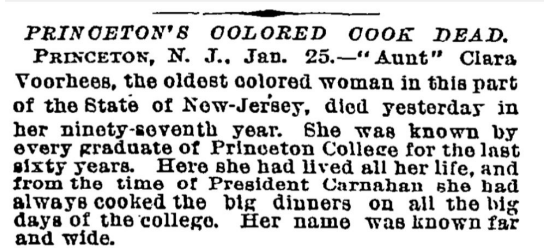
The South Ward Question

- South Brunswick, just as the majority of NJ towns has its own share of stories about enslavement and the freedom of its Black residents prior to 1866
- Notable entries include: Titus Farm/Thomas Titus, Peter Ridley, and Clara Voorhees and Flora Stryker
- While we do not have direct reference to celebrations of the Juneteenth Holiday in South Brunswick within a direct historical record, it is possible that, as our town was home to free and formerly enslaved African Americans, members of the community were active in celebrations locally
    - New Jersey Slavery Records Map: https://records.njslavery.org/s/doc/page/home

Manumission of Thomas Titus (1818)



Obituary announcing the death of Clara Voorhees (1892)



PRINCETON'S COLORED COOK DEAD.

PRINCETON, N. J., Jan. 25.—"Aunt" Clara Voorhees, the oldest colored woman in this part of the State of New-Jersey, died yesterday in her ninety-seventh year. She was known by every graduate of Princeton College for the last sixty years. Here she had lived all her life, and from the time of President Carnahan she had always cooked the big dinners on all the big days of the college. Her name was known far and wide.

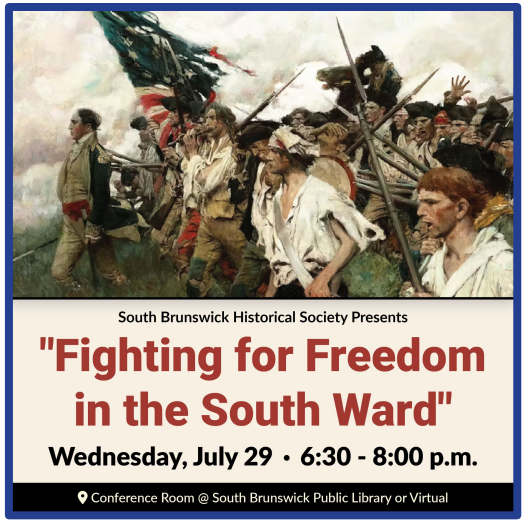
South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

South Brunswick
PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect

Thank you!
Any questions?

Additional Business

- Join the SB Historical Society Email List!
- Next event: “Fighting for Freedom in the South Ward”
  - July 29th 6:30 PM
- Check out our local history display!
  - Behind IS Desk
  - Free SB Zines
  - Flyers for events
  - Handouts



Become part of the South Brunswick Historical Society!

Scan the QR code above to be notified of South Brunswick Historical Society events, information, and updates throughout the year! All are welcome to attend events to learn more about our Local History! If you have any questions, please email Kelan Amme, Local History Librarian:
kamme@sbpl.info

South Brunswick PUBLIC LIBRARY
Inspire • Empower • Discover • Connect