

It may come as a surprise that the Dutch and Quaker farmers of Colonial times in Bucks County were considerable slave owners. Not until about 1770 did the Quakers work actively against slavery. In 1780, provisions of the Act of Assembly for the gradual extinction of slavery compelled every landowner of slaves to register them by a certain date or they would be declared free. As a matter of interest, Northampton Township registered 109, more than any other township in Bucks County. Henry Wynkoop was at the top of the list with 10, followed by Gilliam Cornell, Ann Lefferts, Catharine Tenant, George Parsons and Derik Kroesen. After several years elapsed, many inhabitants "from motives of benevolence and humanity" and a "Love of Freedom" set some of their slaves free, and so recorded the act at the courthouse. Both Henry Wynkoop and Gilliam Cornell did so. By 1830, slavery had pretty much disappeared in this area.

Although Judge Wynkoop freed his slaves, many stayed at his farm as it was the only home they knew. It was noted that the last request of many of his former slaves was to be buried around the base of a large tree near the back door of the mansion.

There have been many accounts of old houses in our community that contained hidden rooms which could have been used for concealing runaway slaves until after the Civil War. Some of these homes are now gone, and the existence of the "underground railroad" in our area is hard to prove. Lists of area where the "railroad" existed do not show Northampton among them, but the locations were usually known by very few people. Many houses built here in the mid 1700's did have hidden closets or spaces between floors. They were hiding places for the owner's family when threatened or used to conceal articles of wealth. Escaped slaves could have been given use of these places years later.



*Bennet house in Richboro, believed to have been built about 1744 by William Bennet.*

The old Bennett-Search house on Second Street Pike at Twining Ford Road, Richboro, perhaps was a stopping place for runaways. An old-time resident in 1970 remembered his grandmother telling him of seeing groups of escaped slaves sitting in the summer kitchen of that house. Later owners found what appeared to be an archway and a beginning of a tunnel at one end wall of the cellar. For many years there was a cemetery for slaves and their later generations just North of this house along Second Street Pike. Finally, unused and in disrepair, the cemetery site was reclaimed by weeds and then by the plow.

Accounts of a secret area in the mansion of Henry Wynkoop on Holland Road have been published, but do not agree with its location. One account believes it was a hidden room between the floors of the house. Another person, who believe he found it, wrote that it was a secret room near the front door. Since the house burned down years ago, the secret disappeared in the fire.

A death notice from the Bucks County Intelligencer, January 23, 1856 read: *"Thomas Brown, at residence of his son Benjamine, in Northampton, age 96 last Christmas Day. The deceased was formerly a slave in the Wynkoop family and was liberated by the act of Assembly abolishing slavery in Penna."*