

NJS Presents

Invited Talks

In this Issue:

Why Wench Betty's Story Matters – The Murder of a NJ Slave in 1784

By Sue Kozel

The author dedicates this piece to George Floyd because like Betty's life, his life matters.

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Each year, the NJ Council for the Humanities (NJCH) subsidizes at least 200 high-quality public humanities programs for host organizations throughout the state, providing opportunities for New Jersey communities to explore history, values, culture, and beliefs, and to engage in key questions with the support of a scholarly perspective. You can view more [here](#). This NJ Studies “Invited Talk” by Sue Kozel is a NJCH Public Scholars Project program, and thus far versions have been presented at the Paterson Museum, the NJ State Library in Trenton, and “Social Justice Matters.”

Thank you, and before I begin, I would like to light a candle for the memory of Betty, sometimes called “Wench Betty” in records. Betty was an enslaved African American woman who was murdered by her owner in 1784 in Upper Freehold Township, Monmouth County, NJ.

It's important to set the tone for our talk because when a murder occurs, a life is left unfinished and unfulfilled. I wanted us together to think about that reality. Whether we are gathered together, like today, for Black History Month, or any day of the year, we can reflect on why Betty's life matters in a historical context. Her life can also illuminate challenges in our modern world by showing us a historical context for injustice and race today.

Now, I would like to make some “thank you” comments because, as you know, none of us does our work alone.

- Thank you to the Paterson Museum for sponsoring this program, and to Heather and her team for being so welcoming.
- Thank you to the NJ Council for the Humanities for sponsoring this talk as part of the Public Scholars Project.
- Thank you to the NJ Historical Commission for a 2009 mini-grant to help fund my NJ research on Richard Waln. By accident, while doing that work, I found this file on “Wench Betty,” and I began a 10-year exploration of her story.
- Thank you to everyone who has encouraged and discouraged my research and scholarship. Your questions made me a better thinker.
- Thank you for attending. I look forward to a very engaging discussion of race, rights, social justice, history, and equality.

So, our focus today in part opens with this question, “Does one life matter?” What an absurd question. The answer is of course, yes! But sometimes individual lives are “lost” to history, accidentally or on purpose. And it is difficult for our “modern” minds to witness the horrors of the past. Who wants to talk about murder, rape, beatings, and racism when our nation was supposedly founded on principles of equality and freedom? Painful though it might be to examine her story, though, Betty’s life matters. Betty’s life is our compass because she was a casualty who was denied the same opportunities and rights as white members of the greater Monmouth County community. Her story is uncomfortable and yet must be heard.

How does the life of a murdered slave stack up to a Founding Father or that of a celebrity? Why focus on Betty? The answer depends upon the values held. Betty teaches us of the brutal

nature of NJ slavery. She was an enslaved woman murdered in 1784, in Monmouth County, a county that saw tensions between abolitionists, slave owners, and others who supported slavery. Sadly, most of what we know about Betty is based on the hours of her murder. Arthur Barcalow, her owner, whipped her for failing to listen, then ultimately killed her with a broomstick. Did Arthur pay for this? Was justice ultimately served? No. So, for today's talk, and we have less than an hour, we have much to consider. Primarily, I want to address:

I. Who was Wench Betty? Why she matters.

II. Details of her murder case, some key people involved, and legal challenges.

And, if you agree – a few questions and comments as we go deeper into her murder.

III. If time allows, a look at slavery in NJ with an emphasis on Upper Freehold, Monmouth County.

IV. Finally, your additional questions and comments.

To begin, let's think: what is special about Betty's life? Sometimes historians want to study subjects based their social "rank" or importance, based on standing or fame. Betty had neither. But as a human being, she of course deserved better. Everything is special about Betty's life because her story allows one to:

- Showcase how Betty stood up for her rights, and that action cost her her life.

- Highlight the intersection of multicultural histories illustrating community conflicts and consensus.
- Engage in a debate and discussion over the meaning of liberty in NJ – though in the North, slavery existed here, and the consequences of slavery cost Betty her life.
- Present part of the African American community in Western Monmouth County while discussing slavery and freedom.
- Capture a moment during the pre-Underground Railroad period where NJ was struggling with slavery, as a society with slaves.
- Discuss regional slavery and the diverse responses among all races to enslavement, especially as we approach the 250th anniversary of our nation’s birth in 2026. Betty’s story deserves to be told because freedom for some is not freedom for all. This point is important because when the Revolution ended in 1783, the issue of liberty was on General George Washington’s mind. Washington asked that all the slaves that fled to the British and served in their army be returned. Britain declined but returned eight of Washington’s own slaves, according to scholarly research. Certainly, the Declaration of Independence didn’t change Betty’s life as it did for her owner and other white men and women.
- So we have our focal point – Betty’s life was taken during the time of celebrating newfound freedom for American whites who struggled against the tyranny of the British in the Revolutionary War. But the same “liberty time,” as it was called, did not exist for African Americans.

Now, let’s go deep.

Who was Wench Betty? Why She Matters

The best place to start is with what we know about Betty. She is one of thousands of enslaved African Americans in the new nation. How many slaves were in NJ? In 1790, a few years after her murder, approximately 20% of New Jersey’s African American population of 14,185 was free. This means there were 11,423 enslaved African American New Jerseyans and just 2,762 free.

[43]
NEW JERSEY.

		Free white males 16 years and upwards, including heads of families.	Free white males under 16 years.	Free white females including heads of families.	All other free persons.	Slaves.	Total number.	Total number in each county.
MONMOUTH COUNTY.								
TOWNS.	Middletown	711	618	1343	60	491	3225	16,918
	Upper-Freehold	763	789	1532	108	350	3442	
	Lower-Freehold	819	778	1549	12	697	3785	
	Stafford	219	221	441	3	3	883	
	Dover	237	231	423	6	14	910	
	Shrewsbury	1094	1041	2161	165	212	4673	
MORRIS COUNTY.								
TOWNS.	Pequanack	4092	3938	7502	48	636	16216	16,216
	Roxbury							
	Morris-town							
	Hanover							
	Mendham							
MIDDLESEX COUNTY.								
TOWNS.	Amboy	149	108	246	31	48	582	15,956
	Woodbridge	871	774	1587	32	256	3320	
	Piscataway	537	514	982	10	218	2261	
	North-Brunswick	638	456	1010	3	205	2312	
	South-Brunswick	439	361	789	10	218	1817	
	South-Amboy	642	597	1196	8	183	2626	
	Windor	719	565	1318	46	190	2838	
GLOUCESTER COUNTY.								
TOWNS.	Waterford	3287	3311	6232	342	191	13363	13,363
	Newtown							
	Gloucester township							
	Gloucester town							
	Deptford							
	Greenwich							
	Woolwich							
	Egg Harbor							
Galloway								
BERGEN COUNTY.								
TOWNS.	New-Barbadoes	2865	2299	4944	192	2301	2261	12,601
	Bergen							
	Hackensack							
	Harrington							
	Franklin							
	Saddle River							

US Bureau of the Census. "Return of the Whole Number of Persons Within the Several Districts of the United States, According to 'An Act Providing for the enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States;' Passed March the First, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-One." <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1790.htm>.

So, Betty represents the majority of African Americans in New Jersey in her enslavement. Did all African Americans experience violence? I consider slavery itself to be a violation of human rights, and therefore a violent act. I share the thinking of Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lay who radically proclaimed this viewpoint in his 1738 book and his daily interactions with Quakers, non-Quakers, and enslaved African Americans.

Betty was a woman who seems to have had a sense of self, as evidenced in the court records. It appears the incident that led to Betty's death began when Betty defied her owner, Arthur Barcalow, in front of guests in a relative's home. He became outraged and whipped her there. He then followed her to his house, continuing to beat her and ultimately killing her. Again, we know so little about her, but we can imagine that she had a sense of self. Dare I suggest she felt a "freedom" to express herself similarly to the white people gathering on April 9, 1784, and her defiance was met with her murder? Could she have been her owner's concubine, raped as other slave women were? I was asked this question in a previous forum, and I must answer at this time that I don't know. Could she have had children? I don't know. Could she have been a free black woman living with Arthur? Given the name "wench" was used with her identity, it is very unlikely. The term "wench" is a racially adapted, sexualizing one that is often tied to enslaved women, and that word gives us an insight as to how she was perceived and her role. As we will discuss in detail later in the talk, Arthur and his brother do not list any slaves on tax ratable records; but slave owners, and people generally, have been known to lie when it comes to matters of money. Based on the totality of the evidence and circumstances in NJ at the time, I am convinced that Betty was enslaved by Arthur and thus refer to her as an enslaved woman throughout my research. Now, let's review the Coroner's Inquisition.

Details of Betty's Murder Case, Some People Involved, and Legal Challenges

What's in a name? This may seem a strange question, but the way Betty was described in the court documents illustrated her value according to those who witnessed the crime against her. Betty is listed as "Negro Betty," in the index for the *NJ Supreme Court Case Files 1704 – 1844*; our Betty is also called "a certain Black woman," "Betty the Wench of Arthur Barcalow," "said Wench," "the Wench," "Negro Wench," "his Negro Wench Betty" "his Wench," and the offensive N-word. As I've noted, she was murdered on April 9, 1784 in the home of her slave owner Arthur Barcalow, of Allentown (part of Upper Freehold), NJ. It is important to note that Betty was not called any of the derogatory names in the Monmouth County summary report text prepared by coroner James Cox following her death and dated April 17 (although the people he quoted used negative references). Cox himself referred to her as "Betty" and even listed a surname. It is illegible, but appears to be Lathen, Fathen, or Sathen.

We must talk a bit more about the Barcalow brothers now. The Barcalow brothers, Arthur and Derick, owned 218 and 219 acres each respectively in Allentown. While they were large landowners, they did not own the largest acreage in town. What is strange is that for the period 1778, 1780, and 1784, neither man is listed as a slave owner. In 1792, Derick alone is listed as a slave owner. Then in 1796 court records, Derick Barcalow (spelled Dirk Burhaloe – a handwritten error) came before the NJ Supreme Court, arguing over a young slave boy who he claimed as property. The young man's name appears to be "Sam." The other part of this record includes a slave named "Samuel Bone;" the same slave in question was to be brought by Barcalow to the NJ Supreme Court to be presented to Chief Justice James Kinsey. According to the Supreme Court case file, Barkalow refused to bring Sam to the court and said that "he would shoot any person who came for the negro." Sadly, I cannot tell what happened to Sam, whether he was freed,

remained a slave, ran away or was injured. We don't know if this may be a slave related to Betty or not. To date, though, no records uncovered dated after 1796 list Derick as a slave owner.

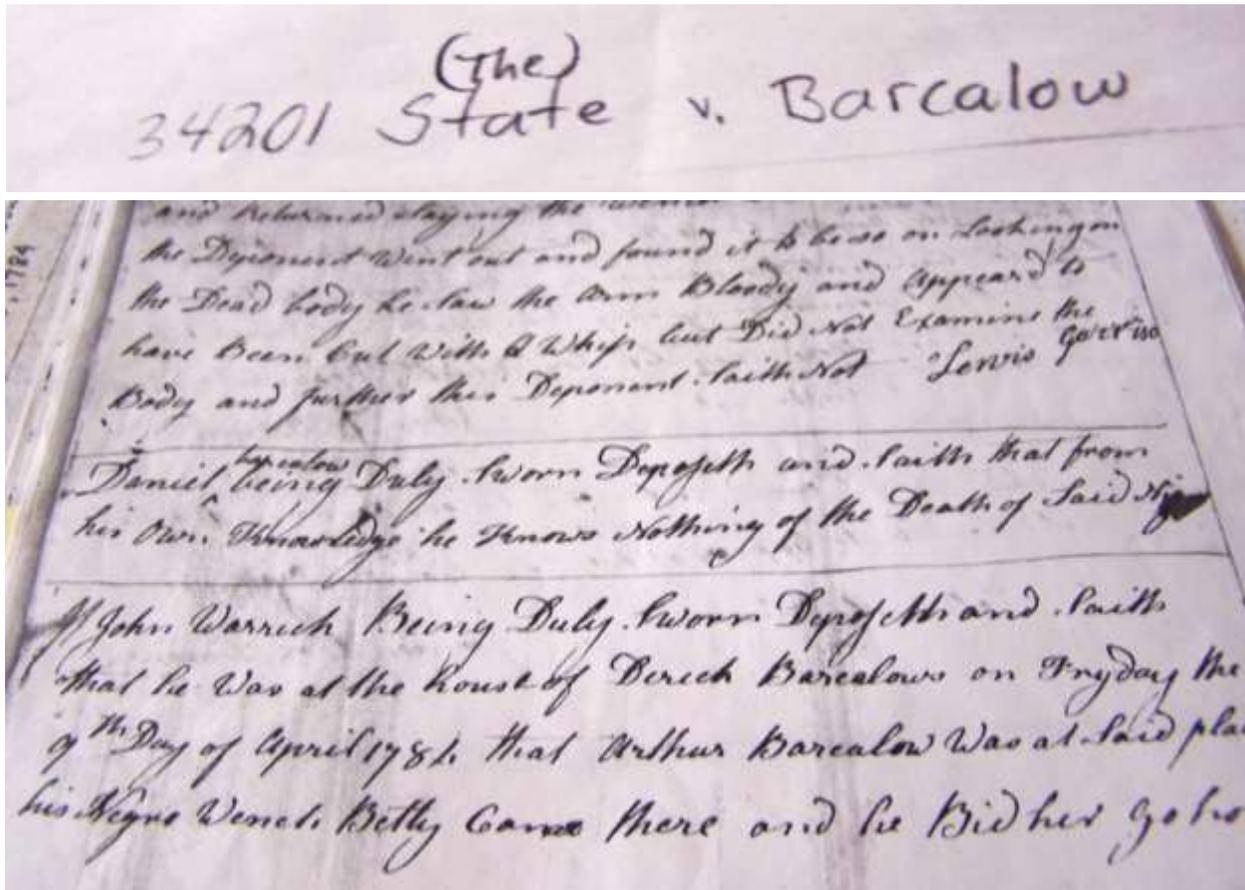
There is one more twist. One of our previous audience members, Nancy from Union County, was very kind and followed up with a note after an earlier presentation. She informed me that the Barcalows also were located throughout North Jersey, and that she also found a reference to an Arthur Barcalow in Kentucky. I found an Arthur Barcalow who filed his will in Kentucky in 1800, saying he still resided primarily in Upper Freehold. In the said will, he distributed at least three other slaves he owned and instructed his daughter to free one "negro wench" after she came to the age of 30. In the will, Barcalow's son also had his choice of a slave woman. Further research needs to be done to ensure that this really is Arthur the murderer of Betty. I have located Monmouth County documents about the sale of this land one year after his death, as specified in his Kentucky will.

The Coroner's Inquisition on April 17, 1784 noted that several people were in Derick's house for Betty's initial beating at the hand of Arthur, but some testified that they did not hear or witness the act. Some said they did not even hear the suffering of Betty when she was beaten with a whip. Finally, after leaving Derick's house and returning to Arthur's home, Betty sat in a chair in the kitchen only to be struck by Arthur on the head with a broomstick, a fatal blow.

When I first wrote about Betty's story as part of a New Jersey Historical Commission annual forum panel in 2008 and in a brief published story about Betty in 2012, I thought she was murdered in the same house where she was beaten. Then, returning to the documents, I saw that she actually left the first house (based on eyewitnesses, who followed Betty and her owner to his home). It was actually there, in his own home, that Arthur killed her. Yes, eyewitnesses followed Betty and Arthur from Derick's to Arthur's, and did not intervene. Even today, there is the

bystander effect, where some people will watch a violent act, standing back, maybe filming, and almost acting entertained or withdrawn from acting. Thankfully, or unfortunately, depending upon your perspective, these witnesses did not have smartphone technology to capture the moment.

Back to the inquisition into Betty's death: In this period and case, slave owners comprised part of the Coroner's Inquisition members. Without going further, let's talk together now and brainstorm. What do you think happened? Was Arthur Barcalow, a large landowner and the alleged murderer, given bail, charged, or set free? What do you think? *[When asked this, nearly all participants have said that Arthur would not have been charged for murder for killing an enslaved woman. People would have a chance to share why, and then I would continue].*



Actual text from the Coroner's Report, NJ State Archives, photograph by the author.

Actually, Arthur was found guilty and fined 500 pounds, a rather large sum at the time. The Coroner's report noted that Barcalow was "moved by the instigation of the Devil" and "did

kill and murder” Betty. The report noted that she did “languish,” meaning she suffered. The matter was recommended to the Grand Jury for action in the Monmouth County Oyer and Terminer Court, a court for serious crimes. Below are some of the testimonies of the witnesses for *The State of NJ v. Barcalow*, Case 34201, Coroner’s Inquisition.

Lewis Garrifon testified that Arthur Barcalow’s relative went into the kitchen to verify Betty was dead (as we will see in a moment, that relative was Derick).

Daniel Barcalow, another relative, said he knew nothing of the death and the court records blanked out an offensive word he used to describe Betty.

Parthenia Lawrence said she was at the house. She saw Arthur “take down a whip and go out with the same, but saw no violence offered to the negro wench.” Note that Parthenia is from a family that holds a large number of slaves.

(Now, I don’t know if individuals were suffering from a disability like hearing loss or had difficulty seeing in the light of day, but it should be very clear that when one is being beaten with a whip there will be pain, and I have to imagine Betty screamed. I also have to imagine there was blood, other loud noises, and ultimately when she was killed with a strike of a broomstick handle there was still more noise. Is it possible that Betty would not have cried out during this horrific assault?)

John Warrick said the initial incidence of whipping violence took place at the home of Derick Barcalow. (As I’ve noted, the available documents are confusing in that there appears to be movement between two large estates, but we should not let this confusion blur the violent outcome and loss of Betty’s life.) Warrick said that Betty entered a room and Arthur Barcalow “bid her go home.” When she refused to go home (to Arthur’s home) Arthur struck her with a “raw hide” whip and gave her “stripes.” Then she went to Arthur’s home, to the kitchen. Arthur

followed her, and Warrick and Joseph Brown followed Arthur to see if he would beat her more. Arthur did. Then, with one blow, Arthur struck her with a broomstick “on the head as she was sitting in a chair.” (It is unclear if Warrick and Brown watched from inside or outside the house, but at some point the onlookers seemed to leave and return when Arthur’s relative Derick entered the kitchen to confirm “she was dead.”)

For his part, **Derick Barcalow** stated that Arthur whipped her “because she would not go home when he bid her.” Derick says he went into Arthur’s house, and Betty was in Arthur’s kitchen sitting, dead.

As you can see, the records are confusing because, as I have noted, there appears to be some running around between the houses of the two brothers. But let’s be clear; the whip served as a tool of terrorism and brutality. Arthur Barcalow killed Betty, and he was ordered by James Cox, Coroner, to appear before the Oyer & Terminer Court in Monmouth County. I was quite surprised to see the sworn group assisting the Coroner reach an agreement that Barcalow should be charged with murder, especially since many of those responsible for finding Arthur guilty were slave owners. Are you surprised? Any comments?

Now we move on to the Monmouth County Oyer and Terminer Records for July – August 1784. The records of the Oyer and Terminer Court are just as puzzling. Within the minutes for the Oyer and Terminer Court, July 20 & 29, 1784, Arthur Barkalow (stet) is in the Sheriff’s custody (note the spelling change). On July 29, the Grand Jury ordered that the prisoner “be discharged upon giving security.” Arthur was supposed to pay five hundred pounds, while two other parties, a Peter Imlay and Arthur’s relative Derick Barkalow (stet) each had to pay 250 pounds. (It appears these individuals were just putting up the money in case Arthur failed to show up for his next court date.) But the records appear to end here. Barkalow is not listed as attending the Friday, July 30th

meeting of the Court, nor is he listed as having paid any fines in these records. He did not show, or maybe he was not required to do so? Again, the records are confusing. I thought it would be helpful to look at the identities for Upper Freehold/Allentown residents to determine who among the jury members owned slaves or not during this time period. Remember, Allentown is part of Upper Freehold Township.

Let's look at some Upper Freehold statistics for contextual frameworks. The 1778, 1780, and 1784 Upper Freehold tax records could theoretically show us whether or not Arthur and Derick listed slaves. I've already noted that, according to these records, Arthur Barkalow (another spelling) does not have any slaves, nor does Derick Barkalow, even in 1784, the year of Betty's murder. As I have also noted, I do not believe these records tell the full story, and I believe that Arthur owned Betty (at the least) based on the language in the court records and the record of his behavior toward her.

Now, the tax records might also help us identify which members of the Coroner's Inquisition from Upper Freehold owned slaves. (I know 12 men participated in the Coroner's Inquisition, but have not identified the towns of the remaining members who are not from Upper Freehold).

Jacob Hendrickson owned 1 slave in '78, in '80, and in '84

Peter Imlay "on the hill"¹ owned 2 slaves in '78, and 1 slave '84

Peter Imlay, Miller owned no slaves in '78 and '80, and possibly one in '84²

John Imlay (Judge) owned no slaves in '78, 1 slave in '80, and no slaves in '84

¹ "On the hill" is used to differentiate this Peter Imlay from another.

² The records are confusing as there are two individuals named Peter Imlay listed in local records. One is listed as "Peter Imlay on the hill" and one is listed as "Peter Imlay, Miller." It is unclear which one served on the inquisition.

John Imlay, Pines owned no slaves in '78, '80, and '84³

Alexander Montgomery owned no slaves in '78 or '80

William Montgomery owned 2 slaves in '78, and 3 slaves in '80

Michael Mount owned 2 slaves in '78, 1 slave in '80 and '84

It is clear that at least some of the men hearing the facts of the case owned slaves.

After the Coroner's Inquisition, the case went to the Grand Jury. Let's look at how many of the Grand Jury Members from Upper Freehold owned slaves, according to Upper Freehold tax records.

David Forman owned 2 slaves in '80

Richard Horsfield owned no slaves in '78, '80, '84⁴

John Imlay (Judge) owned 1 slave in '80 and '84

John Imlay (Pines) owned no slaves in '80 and '84⁵

Elisha Lawrence owned 3 slaves in '78, no slaves in '80, and no slaves in '84⁶

Arthur Lefferson owned no slaves in '78, '80, or '84⁷

William Montgomery (Major) owned 2 slaves in '78, 3 slaves in '80, and 2 in '84

Jesse Mount owned no slaves in '78, '80, and '84.

Samuel Mount owned no slaves in '78, '80, and '84

William Mount owned 1 slave in '78, '80, and '84

Benjamin Rogers not listed '78, owned 1 slave in '80 and '84

³ There is also confusion over which John Imlay served on the inquisition, the one listed "judge" or the one listed "pines." The list includes the illegible word that appears to be "jun" after Imlay's name.

⁴ However, he eventually did own slaves. When he died, his slaves that were to be freed, according to his will, became involved in a manumission dispute with his children in 1788. Quaker Richard Waln was involved with this manumission dispute.

⁵ Again, it is unclear which of these two Imlays served, so I am noting both.

⁶ Richard Waln also helped Elisha manumit slaves in his will.

⁷ Family members owned slaves, though.

The will of the Coroner's Inquisition appears to have been ignored by the Grand Jury. So let's think about Betty's legacy a bit more in light of this lack of justice. Betty's case was so violent that even slave owners from the Coroner's Inquisition initially voted to refer Barcalow to the Grand Jury. Still, her case is not mentioned in the New Jersey Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Slavery's report summarizing NJ laws addressing slavery and freedom from 1682 to 1788. I have not found a reference to Betty's case as impacting NJ law, but we know that in 1786, legislation was adopted that addressed violence against slaves.

Slavery in NJ with an Emphasis on Upper Freehold and Monmouth County

When Betty was murdered in 1784, she was not granted a natural right to liberty or life. Quakers in Upper Freehold Township, like Richard Waln, started saying that black slaves possessed a "natural right to liberty" in 1788, and joined with the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society to gather evidence for freedom suits before the New Jersey Supreme Court. The Enlightenment ideas that framed natural rights in the Declaration of Independence found their way into abolitionist writings too. Sadly, Betty did not have such a right given to her.

The American Revolution and its aftermath represented a perceived "liberty time" for white citizens. In New Jersey, single free women who owned fifty pounds of property joined with free black men who owned fifty pounds of property and white men to vote from 1776 up to 1807. The elixir of freedom and opportunities for free whites continued to pervade the public imagination, but slavery in NJ grew during and after the Revolution, according to the 1800 census. The struggle for black rights and freedom was not wholly embraced, although abolitionist activists lived in Upper Freehold along with slave owning families. Upper Freehold was on the border of East and West Jersey, with West Jersey communities being quicker in manumitting slaves to end slavery. In Upper Freehold, Quakers would sometimes worship in Chesterfield, across the

Province Line in West Jersey. Sometimes there is nostalgia in the modern township about the Underground Railroad being active in the region (which is important), but there is less interest in talking about the actual slavery. Betty's story is caught between two paradigms of historical memory and ultimately the truth, and I hope to explore these ideas in the Allentown Public Library, in Betty's hometown. We can't live in a pretend world where only good things happened, without providing balance with the actual historical truth.

While the crime's violent nature may have moved some slaveholders to recommend that Barcalow be charged with murder, it does not appear from the records that he ultimately served time. It has been suggested that the slave owners on the Coroner's team colluded to look sympathetic simply to avoid possible slave resistance. This idea was raised in a previous talk by an audience member. I have no proof of that theory at this time. Still we are left with unsettling questions. Did Arthur Barcalow go into a violent rage because Betty talked back to him, "defied" him? Did Betty seek to assert control over her own movements and choices? It seems she did. If it is true that she came to Derick Barcalow's house unwelcomed by her master Arthur, what does that say about her own thoughts of identity and freedom? Did Betty see herself as having a right to liberty, that is both the physical liberty of free movement, and the liberty associated with rights? She acted as if she could move from house to house, and she was killed for that independence of movement. Was Betty having a relationship with Derick and/or Arthur? Was she being raped by both of them?

With our time nearing an end, and because I would like to offer opportunities for questions, here are some key connections that put Betty's murder in more context. Rutgers University has a wonderful website with slavery-related laws, and we know that after her murder (if not because of her murder) a new law was enacted. I cannot find references to her case as a motivating factor for

the new law. “An Act To Prevent The Importation Of Slaves Into The State Of New-Jersey, And To Authorize The Manumission Of Them Under Certain Restrictions, And To Prevent The Abuse Of Slaves,” enacted March 2, 1786, changed the daily life of slaves, but their lives were not worth much. This new law fined persons who abused slaves at five pounds for the first offense and ten pounds for the second offense. Black lives are worth more than this amount. They’re priceless, like all life.

Monmouth County was a battle ground, as evidenced by petitions that were advocating and challenging slavery, even two years before the American Revolution. Several petitions in NJ opposed manumission for slaves while others advocated freedom in the 1774 and 1775 period. The January 12, 1774 “Petition of the Citizens of Perth Amboy to the General Assembly Opposing Slave Manumissions” illustrates the tensions during this period. Submitted to the Royal Governor William Franklin Esq., this petition contained numerous errors in language, with the signers stating that:

...wee [sic] do apprehend = from the Long experience wee [sic] have had of Negros [sic] = both in Slavery and freedom = that they are A Very Daingerous [sic] People to have general freedom in any Providence in his majafties [sic] Dominions.

The February 2, 1774 “Petition of Inhabitants of Middletown, Monmouth County to the Assembly, Opposing Slave Manumissions” also underscored the fear of slaves. Targeting the house of Representatives of New Jersey meeting in Burlington [sic], the petition noted that:

... there is a Great Number of Negro men women and children being slaves and are Daily Increasing in Number and Impudence that we find them very troublesome by Running about all times of Night Making and Taking and Riding people horses and other Micheifs [sic]...

The Monmouth County “Petition of Inhabitants to the General Assembly Opposing Slave Manumissions” dated February 2, 1774 also contained language very identical to the previous

petitions. Signers from Upper Freehold included Daniel Hendrickson, John Polhemus, John Taylor, and others who owned slaves, which illustrated that some Upper Freehold white citizens were in disagreement over the freedom for Monmouth County African Americans.

The “Petition of Inhabitants of Chesterfield Township, Burlington County to the General Assembly, Advocating the Gradual Abolition of Slavery,” dated November 9, 1775, argued that the “Evil Effects... of keeping Negroes in slavery” are “inconfistant [sic] with the concept of “Equity.” The petition requested the gradual abolition of slavery with males set free at twenty-one and females at eighteen years of age.

With the incorporation of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1789, a later period, there would be many regional and national petitions urging Congressional action to end slavery. A “Petition of Quakers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland to the Legislature advocating the Abolition of Slavery” on November 11, 1792 was addressed to the NJ Governor, his Council and the Afsembly [sic] of the State of New Jersey, describing slaves as the “opprefsed [sic] condition of thy African Race.” The petition quotes Matthew VII.12 as a warning to public leaders who will not act, noting, “therefore, all Things whatsoever ye would that Men Fhould [sic] do to you, do ye even fo [sic] to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Following this petition is a 1796 petition of Monmouth County residents proposing an end to slavery. One of the Jurors on Betty’s Coroner Inquisition, William Montgomery, signed the 1796 petition urging manumission and the end of slavery (though he had owned up to three slaves in Upper Freehold previously).

Let’s not forget that one of the earliest New Jersey petitions against the importing of slaves was dated April 1, 1761 and urged that the “vile and oppressive Trade” must end. The resolution targets the New Jersey General Assembly, and while it is greatly damaged, suggests that “Negroes

are numerous” and implies that this number of “unhappy people” will not be of benefit to New Jersey.

White Fear of African Americans in Monmouth County

During the Revolutionary War years, Monmouth County had brutal fighting between Loyalists and Patriots. Blacks ran from their owners embracing Lord Dunmore’s 1775 proclamation, which freed slaves who fought for the British against their patriot owners. A New Jersey slave named Titus ran from his owner in Shrewsbury, NJ, picking as his own name Colonel Tye. He terrorized for the British those Monmouth County patriotic plantations with slaves along the east coast. He was a liberator of slaves and ran a privateer ship of a mixed group of whites and blacks fighting for the British. Tye liberated himself, and whites feared him. Certainly the writing of Graham Russell Hodges, James Gigantino, Giles Wright, and Benjamin Quarles showcased Tye’s important example as a black freedom fighter.

New Jersey saw nearly 243 freed African Americans who were considered Black Loyalists join the British retreat to primarily Nova Scotia; nearly ten percent of the national 3,000 total. Monmouth County residents feared slave rebellions during the American Revolution because enslaved people ran to the British. That’s part of the story. Renowned scholar of the New Jersey African American experience Graham Russell Hodges wrote that 24 slaves from Monmouth County, joining with the British leaving for Nova Scotia after the Revolutionary War, traveled to a new freedom land in Canada and other parts of the British empire. My use of “new freedom land” refers to the detailed history described by Hodges and his quoting of Maya Jasanoff discussing the birth of a new “freedom generation” for formerly enslaved African Americans in the British lands. According to Hodges, only Black Loyalists who joined the British cause in 1782 or prior to that date were eligible for the retreat with the British. In Canada, these Black Loyalists

could begin a new life in freedom and without enslavement. I send much gratitude to Graham for sharing information with me when I was first researching abolition and opening the way with his landmark book on Monmouth County African American communities.

In 1781, nearly 25 runaway slaves who fought for the British on the *Malton*, a privateer ship, were brought for a military trial in Allentown, NJ. In 1772, there was a conspiracy for a slave revolt in neighboring Perth Amboy. Monmouth County was a breeding ground for slave rebellion and white fear among racists.

Two years after Betty's death, NJ passed an act to prevent the importation of slaves from Africa, therefore limiting the slave trade. The 1786 law did prevent African Americans freed in other states to relocate to New Jersey, and did heavily regulate the movement of NJ African Americans within the Garden State. In 1788, this act was supplemented by another law limiting the slave trade and issuing requirements that slave owners teach their slaves to read while repealing some provisions of the original law.

These images of slaves taking their own freedom certainly scared racist whites who had a white supremacist worldview. This particular group of whites sought to impose a race-based slave system on people of African, and many times Native American/indigenous, descent.

Finally, in Betty's backyard, Upper Freehold, we have some numbers of slaves and slave owners. The records show, in 1784, just 51 slaves in Upper Freehold, and, in 1808, 25 slaves. These numbers seem quite low, especially since the statistics jump to 250 slaves in 1790. But an examination and calculation of the Monmouth County Ratables as submitted by the Tax Assessor led to these numbers. Manumissions grow after 1790, but these slave numbers seem low, and scholars have noted that New Jersey's slave numbers in the 1800 census were most likely undercounted by 40%. Giles Wright noted in his statistical analysis of the 1800 census that slavery

actually increased both in Monmouth County and overall New Jersey from the 1790 totals. We all miss Giles.

Upper Freehold -1790 Published Census Information

Free white males of 16 years and upwards, including heads of families	763
Free white males under 16 years of age	789
Free white females including heads of households	1532
All other free persons	108
Slaves	250
Total number of population	3442

(16,981 people in all of Monmouth County)⁸

We see in Upper Freehold that there are slaves, listed as reported on tax rolls, and again these numbers appear to be quite low, considering that the 1790 Census indicated that Upper Freehold had 250 slaves. Where did the slaves go? They weren't freed, but instead were undercounted. I am going to suggest, again, that slave owners lied.

1780 - 42

1784 - 51

1789 - 42

1792 - 45

1808 - 25

For the cumulative tax years of 1780, 1784, 1789, 1792 and 1808 tax records show the township had 86 slave owners. The number of free blacks who owned improved and unimproved acres in Upper Freehold Township grew and are listed below.

1789 - 4

⁸Census Information as republished by the Hatha Trust,
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000120169259&view=1up&seq=51&size=125>

1792 - 7

1794 - 4

1796 - 5

1797 - 11

1808 - 7

These same men owned hundreds of acres in Upper Freehold as evidenced by the following statistics:

1790 - 274

1792 - 359

1794 - 310

1796 - 330

1797 - 645

1808 - 492

There were at least 94 free black men in Upper Freehold listed on tax ratable lists over the course of these years, showing at the same time slavery is continuing there is a break and growth in black landowners and farmers.

Let's open for questions, and thank you for your time!

I hope you will think about Betty's life, the woman she was that we can't know completely due to the circumstances of her life and premature death. We can imagine and uncover through some documents the restraints that framed how she lived under brutal enslavement, her desire of freedom, and her choices and hopes to create liberty. Her life mattered then, it still matters now, and I hope you will all continue your historical adventures resurrecting the past with your keen interests and digging.

Who has a question? A last comment? Thank you.

Sue Kozel researches and thinks about the answers to uncomfortable questions from a historical and interdisciplinary approach. Named a Public Scholar for 2020-2022 by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, she is able to share Betty's story with a wider public audience and the audience interactions have been rewarding. As an adjunct at Kean University, she received a New Jersey Historical Commission Mini-Grant to research Quaker Abolitionist and New Jersey businessman Richard Waln, and the research led to a co-edited book with Maurice Jackson (Georgetown), Quakers and their Allies in the Abolitionist Cause, 1754-1808. She also thanks Mark Lender and key Kean History faculty for encouraging her research into NJ Slavery. Due to COVID-19, her 2020 residential fellowship with the International Center for Jefferson Studies (supporting research projects on Thomas Jefferson, slavery and Monticello) will be rescheduled for August 2021, where she will continue investigating Quakers who worked for Jefferson at his slave plantations or sold him goods. Sue thanks everyone who has opened a door for her and most recently, Peter Onuf, Jefferson Scholar, who read her draft book chapter on the business ethics of Quakers working for Thomas Jefferson and provided thoughtful feedback. Additionally she would like to thank the late Giles Wright for his encouragement of her New Jersey slavery research, Graham Russell Hodges for his email correspondence to push her thinking on Monmouth County, and her colleague Maurice Jackson for his generosity of time in mentoring her research approach. She would also like to thank NJ Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal and editor Melissa Ziobro for this opportunity to share Betty's Story. Sue can be followed on her website, <https://skozelabolition.net>