

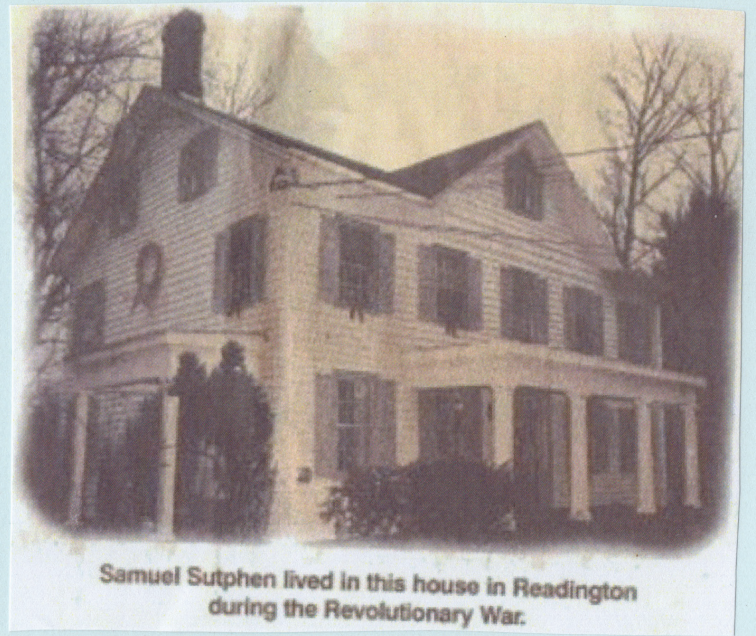
Free Sam:

The Story of an Enslaved Man and his Fight for Freedom

By Katya Duong



Dedicated to
Samuel Sutphen
or Free Sam



Samuel Sutphen lived in this house in Readington during the Revolutionary War.

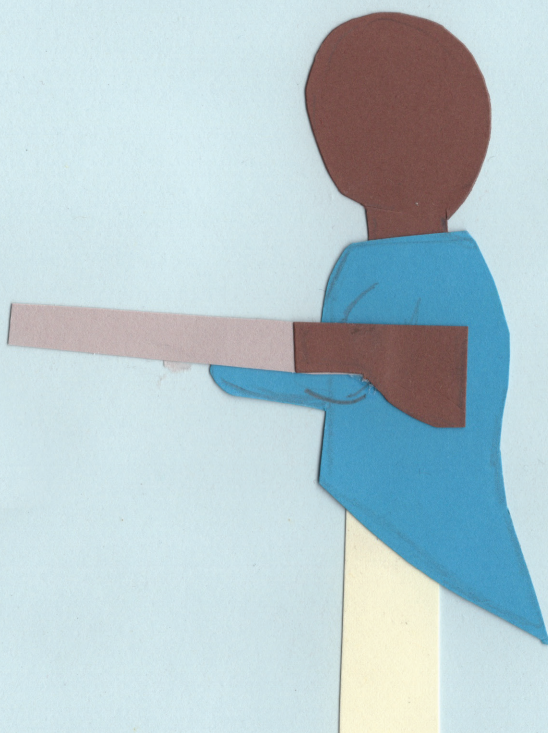


Sam was born enslaved around 1747 in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. To be enslaved was to be property under the law, to be owned by someone else. Your labor and decisions were not your own and you were not celebrated as an individual. Enslaved people often did not know their birthdays or who their fathers were. Many enslaved people who ended up in the USA had been born in Africa, but others like Sam were born in the Americas.

New Jersey was the last state in the North to abolish slavery. They did this through a process called gradual emancipation. Enslavers created a loophole in the law. They could split apart families and abandon children of enslaved families after they were one year old.

We do not know Sam's exact age because enslavers did not bother to write down the birthdays of enslaved people.

During the Revolutionary War (1775–1783), enslaved people could be sent to fight in the place of their enslavers. Since the militia would not accept any unwilling enslaved people, Sam's enslaver made a deal with him. He promised Sam his freedom if Sam fought in his place. At the age of 29, Sam agreed to this deal in the hopes of gaining his freedom.

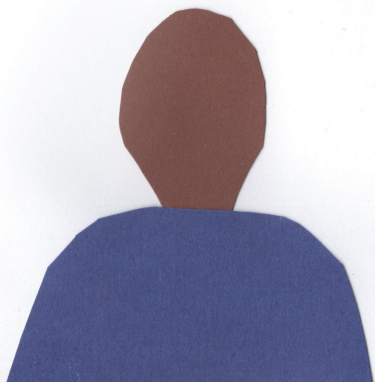
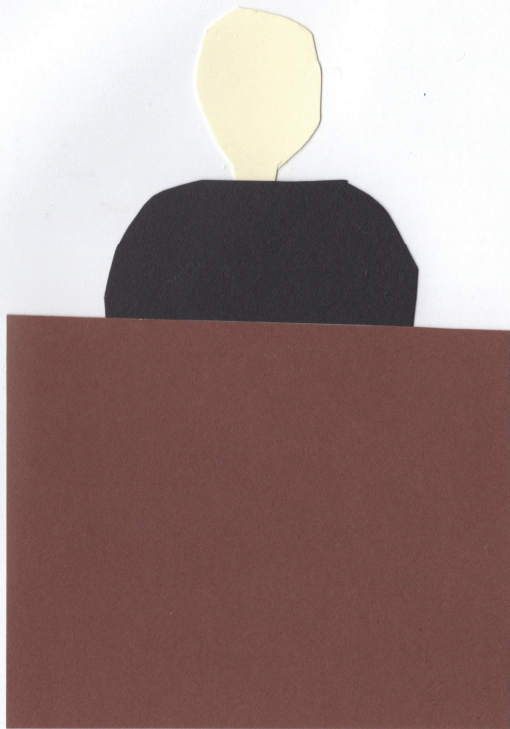


As the Revolutionary War approached, more and more enslaved people were being bought and sold because New Jersey allowed enslaved people to serve in place of their enslavers. Sam's experience of being enslaved and willing to fight for freedom was not unique.

Sam fought multiple tours throughout the Revolutionary War. In the Battle of Monmouth, when the snow was up to his knees, in the middle of the night the British snuck up on Sam and his fellow soldiers. Sam was shot in his right leg before he was able to escape. Between tours, Sam planted corn for his enslaver. In the Battle of Millstone, Sam courageously faced a British soldier taking him prisoner. For his bravery, Sam was awarded a musket by General Dickinson, which he considered a great honor.



After the end of the war, Sam returned to his enslaver and demanded his freedom. But slavery was not an honorable institution, and enslavers were not legally forced to keep their promises to those they enslaved. Sam's enslaver refused to set him free, instead selling him to another enslaver until he was eventually bought by Peter Sutphen.



New Jersey
Elected
Simon Gutphen
to sit to
1834
Hon L. Bond
October 30 1833
on Lt. Hon. Mr. Schenk
June 4th 1834
Letter to L. Bond 18 July 1834
Letter to Hon. Th. Huntington
Feb. 27. 1835. Let to Hon
L. Bond Feb 19. 1836
Oct 7 June 1832

After 20 long years of additional servitude, Sam was finally able to buy his freedom. Once he was free, beginning in 1832, he applied for a soldier's pension five times before it was accepted. Sam was rejected because he was enslaved fighting in place of someone else, his service wasn't considered his own. After applying for a pension five times, he was awarded a soldier's pension of \$50 a month.

Sam's life is a powerful reminder of what courage, determination, and commitment truly mean. His journey, filled with trials and triumphs, teaches us that courage isn't about being fearless, it's about standing up for what's right even when we're scared.

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