

## Still, William



Picture  
William Still

1 William Still (1821-1902), was an African American abolitionist, writer, and businessman. In the mid-1800's, Still became involved in antislavery causes and began assisting escaped slaves who traveled through Philadelphia on their way to freedom in Canada. For his efforts, abolitionists and former slaves referred to Still as the "father of the underground railroad." The underground railroad was an informal system that aided slaves who fled to the northern United States, Canada, or other places that prohibited slavery.

2 Still was born in Burlington County, New Jersey, on Oct. 7, 1821. His mother was an escaped slave from Maryland, and his father was a former slave who had purchased his own freedom. Still was the youngest of 18 children. He had little formal schooling, but he learned to read and write. He married Letitia George in 1847, and the couple had four children.

3 Also in 1847, Still began working for the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery. After the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made it a crime to aid runaway slaves, Still chaired the society's vigilance committee, which helped to provide safe lodging for hundreds of fugitives. One of the former slaves who arrived at Still's office seeking assistance was Peter Friedman, a fugitive from Alabama Still recognized as his older brother.

4 Still kept detailed journals and preserved the records of former slaves who traveled through Philadelphia. The journals became part of the source material for his book *The Underground Railroad* (1872). The book highlighted the efforts of free blacks and the courage and resourcefulness of the escaped slaves.

5 Still was a successful businessman. In the early 1860's, he opened a store that sold stoves. He later started a coal business that made him wealthy. He also continued efforts to improve the lives of free blacks. Still worked to end discrimination against African Americans on Philadelphia streetcars. He also worked for groups that aided elderly and poor blacks, as well as the orphaned children of black soldiers and sailors. Still died on July 14, 1902.

See also [Underground railroad](#).

### **Contributor:**

• Matthew Clavin, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History, University of West Florida.

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