

New Digital History Project to Focus on the Underground Railroad

I'm excited to report that HSP has begun work on a new digital history project that will focus on the Underground Railroad.

Over the next year or so, my colleague Rachel Moloshok and I will be creating a prototype for a new web resource that will weave together the 19th-century manuscript journal and published book of William Still, who is known as the "Father of the Underground Railroad."

This effort will provide extraordinary insight into the experiences of enslaved individuals and families who passed through Philadelphia between 1852 and 1857 and the covert networks that aided their escape.

Philadelphia was an essential hub of anti-slavery activity, and Still served as chairman of Philadelphia's Vigilance Committee. Still's "Journal C ^[1]"— held in trust by HSP on behalf of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society papers ^[2]—records the personal accounts of fugitives who arrived in the city and provides rich content for discussion about slavery and escape. Twenty years after he began work for the Vigilance Committee, Still published *The Underground Railroad* ^[3] (1872), the most extensive contemporary compendium of the Underground Railroad's workings in this region.



Portrait of William Still from his 1872 book, The Underground Railroad [4] (call # E 441 A58 v. 125)



Pages from Still's "Journal C" [1]

We're currently knee deep in the planning for this first prototype. We plan to present digital images and text transcriptions for both Still volumes, with the transcriptions encoded in XML to match the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) guidelines [5] and allow for sophisticated searching and analysis. (Thanks to an earlier HSP effort, you can see images and text transcriptions of Journal C here [6].) We'll also be researching and writing biographies of some of the men and women featured in Still's works, as well as creating other contextual materials to help users better understand the significance of these volumes.

In late February, we met with members of our advisory committee of scholars, educators, genealogists, and public history professionals to discuss interpretive options and brainstorm possible web features. In the weeks and months ahead, we'll be getting feedback from our

target audiences and testing out web site features to see what works best.

You can follow our progress on this blog, or on our project page, [here](#) [7].

Stay tuned!



Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this project do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Links

[1] http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/1457

[2] <http://discover.hsp.org/Record/hsp.ead.at01-0490/Description#tabnav>

[3] <http://discover.hsp.org/Record/hsp.opac.v01-287349>

[4] http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/431

[5] <http://www.tei-c.org/index.xml>

[6] <http://hsp.org/history-online/digital-history-projects/pennsylvania-abolition-society-papers/journal-c-of-station-no-2-william-still-1852-1857-0>

[7] <http://hsp.org/history-online/digital-history-projects/william-still-digital-history-project>