

The Underground Railroad: Triumph over Tragedy

The Underground Railroad was a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the Northern States and to Canada. The network was not run by any single organization or person. Rather, it consisted of many individuals – some white but predominantly black. The exact dates of its existence are not known, but it operated from the late 1700s until the Civil War. According to one estimate, the South lost 100,000 slaves between 1810 and 1850. For the enslaved person, running away to the North was anything but easy. The first step was to escape from the slaveholder. For many enslaved, this meant relying on his or her own resources. For many fugitive slaves, Philadelphia played a significant role on their journey to freedom, where they received shelter, food, clothing, money, and much more along the way.



Map of routes taken by fugitive slaves journeying north.

Primary Sources

- ❖ Journal C of the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia kept by William Still : containing notices of arrivals of fugitive slaves in Philadelphia with descriptions of their flight, 1852-1857 [electronic resource]
- ❖ Pennsylvania Abolition Society papers (1748-1979) [0490]
- ❖ Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society records (1837-1856) [Am.216]
- ❖ Cox-Parrish-Wharton papers (1700-1900) [Collection 0154]
- ❖ Simon Gratz collection (1343-1928) [Collection 0250A]
- ❖ James Hamilton papers (1713-1905) [Collection 0258]
- ❖ Logan, Fisher and Fox family papers (1700-1930) [Collection 1960]
- ❖ The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia (1839-1844) [Am.3375]
- ❖ Dreer collection [Collection 175]
- ❖ Claude W. Unger collection (1706-1937) [Collection 1860A]

Secondary Sources

- ❖ Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *The Underground Railroad: An Encyclopedia of People, Places, and Operations*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2008. [REF E 450 .S65 2008]

- ❖ Still, William, and James P. 1836-1910 Boyd. *Still's Underground Rail Road Records: With a Life of the Author Narrating the Hardships, Hairbreath Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom : Together With Sketches of Some of the Eminent Friends of Freedom, and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisors of the Road.* Rev. ed. Philadelphia: William Still, 1886. [E 441 .A58 v.126]

Other Sources of Information:

American Philosophical Society - 104 South 5th Street, Philadelphia – www.apsmuseum.org

Haverford Library - 370 Lancaster Avenue, Haverford – www.haverford.edu/library/

Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL) – <http://clir.pacscl.org/>

Swarthmore College – Friends Historical Library – 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore, PA –

www.swarthmore.edu