

He Helped Over 800 Slaves Escape- The Life of William Still

By Yolanda Spivey (February 12, 2014)

When he was just a young boy, William Still helped a slave escape. And over his lifetime, he went on to help as many as 800 more slaves escape to their freedom. Born on October 7, 1821, in Burlington County, New Jersey, Still was known and often referred to as "The Father of the Underground Railroad."

Still vowed to keep records of each slave he helped, which he did. He carefully detailed where they came from, why they were escaping, any aliases they used, the families they left behind and where they were going. He even helped his brother Peter escape and both didn't know they were related until he documented Peter's story and recognized the story being told. Peter was one of the two brothers his mother unfortunately had to leave behind in slavery.

Levin Still, the father of William Still was born a slave but saved up enough money to buy his freedom. He then married a slave woman by the name of Charity and the couple had four children who were born into slavery.

Charity and her four children eventually ran away to freedom but were later recaptured. When she ran away again, she had to leave her oldest two children behind, Levin Jr. and Peter.

Once freed, the Still family had fourteen more children and William Still was the youngest.

William Still began his work as a clerk for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society subsequently becoming the chairman of the organization.

Working with a connection of safe houses in New Jersey, New York, New England and Canada, William Still risked his life helping runaway slaves escape to freedom. Harriet Tubman even traveled through his "station" on several occasions. The meticulous records he kept on each runaway were eventually published after the Civil War.

William Still once said, "The heroism and desperate struggle that many of our people had to endure should be kept green in the memory of this and coming generations."

To this day, the writings are contained in a book and is considered a source of historical details on the working of the Underground Railroad.

Source: PBS.org

