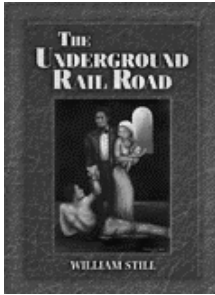


NEWS RELEASE



Plexus Publishing, Inc.

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William Still's *The Underground Rail Road*, Originally Published in 1872, is Restored to Print

Long-neglected book recounts stories of 19th-century African-Americans escaping slavery through the covert network known as the Underground Railroad. Plexus Publishing, Inc. will release a 2005 edition in cooperation with the author's descendants.

January 3, 2005, Medford, New Jersey—As Philadelphia's leading Underground Railroad "conductor" in the 1850s, William Still (1821-1902), a son of emancipated slaves, assisted untold numbers of fugitives heading north to freedom. Defying the accepted wisdom of the time, he also documented many of their firsthand accounts. His landmark book, *The Underground Rail Road*, was first published in Philadelphia in 1872, and will be returned to print in 2005 by Plexus Publishing, Inc.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made William Still's work particularly risky, both personally and for the clandestine operation he supervised for over a decade. Under the law, free northern states were prohibited from harboring so-called runaway slaves, and citizens who provided aid were subject to steep fines, civil penalties, and imprisonment. In spite of the risks, Still corresponded with, interviewed, and recorded the stories of hundreds of fugitives, concealing the records until the day he could safely make them public.

At least four editions of *The Underground Rail Road* have been published (in 1872, 1878, 1883 and 1970), according to John B. Bryans of Plexus, a southern New Jersey book publishing company. Bryans said he first became aware of the book in 2002 and was astonished to learn it was out of print. "William Still's work is a vital part of American history that has never received the widespread attention it deserves," Bryans said. "A little over a year ago Plexus got together with the Still Family Society, Inc.—a group representing a number of William Still's descendants in the area—to plan a new edition. The 2005 edition will be released on February 1, in conjunction with the start of Black History Month."

The nearly 200 slave narratives that appear in *The Underground Rail Road* are supported by over 60 black and white illustrations, hundreds of letters and newspaper clippings, and biographical sketches of leading 19th century abolitionists and other contributors to the cause. All of these materials were recorded, written, commissioned, or collected by William Still, primarily during the years 1850-1861 when he was chairman of the active vigilance committee of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. The 2005 edition includes the complete text of the 1872 edition, along with a new foreword by Professor Sarah Smith Ducksworth of Kean University (NJ), a biography of William Still, a new preface by Samuel C. Still, III (a living descendant of the author), and the author's preface from the 1878 edition.

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The personal stories William Still recorded comprise a unique and eye-opening survey of the African-American slave experience. As his interviews confirm, life on the plantation and on the journey north to freedom—often terminating in Canada, beyond the legal reach of southern slaveholders—was typically marked by pain, suffering, and humiliation. Among the book’s recurring themes are the profound fear of the auction block, beatings and torture at the hands of slaveholders, and the arbitrary destruction of families through the selling off of children, siblings, and spouses. The stories, which are by turns shocking, heartbreaking, and inspiring, include those of Henry “Box” Brown, who survived shipment from Richmond, VA, to Philadelphia in a 3-foot-long crate; Jane Johnson, whose highly publicized trial pitted her against a powerful U.S. dignitary who claimed her as his property; Ellen Craft, a light skinned house servant who made her escape from Georgia in the guise of a white male; and Peter Still—the author’s long lost brother—who was separated from his family at age six and, through a remarkable set of circumstances, was reunited more than 40 years later.

The Still Family Society, Inc., a New Jersey-based nonprofit organization whose members are primarily descendants of William Still living in the Philadelphia area (including southern New Jersey), has worked closely with Plexus Publishing, Inc. on *The Underground Rail Road* project. In addition to providing an original 1872 edition from which the text could be retyped, Still family members have taken important roles in the sales, marketing, and proofreading of the book. The original oil painting that appears on the 2005 edition dust jacket is by Francine Still Hicks, and was inspired by the book. The Still Family Society is available to present educational seminars on the subject of the Underground Railroad and other historical topics, and welcomes inquiries by phone (856-235-1506) or e-mail (wstillfamily@aol.com).

“Not only is the life of William Still one of the great sagas of the nineteenth century, but his *Underground Rail Road* is the primary record of the courage and independence of the many thousands who sought freedom,” said John Hope Franklin, James B. Duke Professor of History Emeritus at Duke University and author of *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African-Americans*. Professor Franklin added, “We are very fortunate to have this new edition of this important work.”

Entertainer and educator Bill Cosby said, “William Still’s book vividly brings to light the hardships and dangers faced by those who escaped slavery via the Underground Railroad. In documenting their experiences firsthand, Still preserved the single most authentic and important record of one of America’s darkest chapters, while at the same time providing abundant evidence that the human spirit can never be broken. *The Underground Rail Road* is a masterpiece—a powerful and triumphant work that demands our attention.”

Plexus Publishing, Inc., is a Medford, New Jersey based publisher of books and journals. Plexus books, including the 2005 edition of *The Underground Rail Road* (Feb. 2005/592pp/hardcover with dustjacket/illustrated/ISBN: 0-937548-55-3/\$49.50), are available in better bookstores and by contacting the publisher directly at (609) 654-6500, ext. 144; fax: (609) 654-4309; e-mail: info@plexuspublishing.com; Web site: www.plexuspublishing.com.

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