



Greetings!

The Penn Square Music Festival and LancasterHistory are thrilled you'll be joining us on Friday, February 3 for a special performance of *Sanctuary Road* at the Gardner Theater.

*Sanctuary Road* is a modern opera based on the writings of William Still. Still was born free in New Jersey, the youngest son of parents who escaped from slavery on the eastern shore of Maryland. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, he organized an abolitionist network that aided hundreds of freedom seekers who passed through Pennsylvania. At great risk, he maintained records of their lives and published their first-person accounts in 1872 as the book *The Underground Railroad*. *Sanctuary Road* honors the courage and humanity of individuals escaping to freedom, while celebrating the inspirational, collective power of the movement and the storytelling that keeps its lessons alive.

Written by Pulitzer Prize-winner Paul Moravec with libretto by Mark Campbell, *Sanctuary Road* was first staged as an opera in March of 2022 by the North Carolina Opera. Penn Square Music is proud to present the second fully staged performance with orchestra at the Gardner Theatre. There will be additional performances on Friday February 3 at 7:30 pm and Sunday February 5 at 3:00 pm. Friday's performance will be preceded by a panel discussion at 6:30 featuring Paul Moravec, Mark Campbell, Dr. Leroy Hopkins, and Fergus Bordewich. Hopkins is Professor Emeritus of German at Millersville University and a founding member of the African American Historical Society of South Central Pennsylvania. Bordewich is the author of *Bound for Canaan: The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement*.

Below you will find a guide for educators with answers to frequently asked questions about the Underground Railroad and links to resources on the Underground Railroad, William Still, and the opera. Those links are followed by suggestions for lesson plans that will prepare students for the performance and engage them in the classroom after. In addition, we've teamed up with actor, director, and educator Lenwood Sloan for [a theatrical reading of a letter written to William Still by William Whipper](#), a successful African American businessman and conductor on the Underground Railroad based in Columbia, Pennsylvania. The letter was included in Still's 1872 book. The short video is the perfect introduction to Still and the local history of the Underground Railroad right here in Lancaster County.

We hope these are helpful in your classrooms in the days leading up to and following the performance. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any additional questions, and we'd love to hear what your students come up with!

Sincerely,

Scott Drackley  
Founder and Director, Penn Square Music Festival  
[Scott.Drackley@pennsquaremusic.com](mailto:Scott.Drackley@pennsquaremusic.com)

Robin Sarratt  
Vice President, LancasterHistory  
[Robin.Sarratt@lancasterhistory.org](mailto:Robin.Sarratt@lancasterhistory.org)

Mabel Rosenheck  
Director of Education, LancasterHistory  
[Mabel.Rosenheck@lancasterhistory.org](mailto:Mabel.Rosenheck@lancasterhistory.org)

Find Penn Square Music Festival on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and at [pennsquaremusicfestival.com](http://pennsquaremusicfestival.com)  
Find LancasterHistory on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and at [LancasterHistory.org](http://LancasterHistory.org)

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# About the Underground Railroad

The following text was adapted from a lesson plan produced by [the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center](#) in Cincinnati. Additional context specific to Lancaster County was added by historian Randolph Harris based on his own research and analysis.

## What was the Underground Railroad?

The Underground Railroad was a network of individuals, homes, and hideouts that helped enslaved people in the United States escape to freedom. In many places, it was not a physical railroad. Rather, the term described a network of people helping others escape slavery. "Underground" captured the secrecy of the movement and "railroad" referred to transporting people to freedom. The Underground Railroad often used railroad terms. Those who guided enslaved people were called conductors. Hideouts and homes where the enslaved hid along the route were called stations. The naming of the civil rights movement that became known as The Underground Railroad first appeared in print in abolitionist newspapers during the late 1830s or early 1840s. However, it is likely the term was part of common speech in the years shortly before it appeared in print.

## How did the Underground Railroad operate in Southeastern Pennsylvania?

The understanding of the underground railroad as metaphor may hold true in states such as Ohio, New York, and the New England region where anti-slavery activities were intense and apparent, but where real railroads were established much later. However, Pennsylvania and especially the Southeastern region of the Commonwealth possess a unique heritage in this chapter of American History. Recently uncovered evidence shows that, at least in this area, the actual railroad was sometimes used as a transport system for the formerly enslaved, and that underground places and spaces were routinely used to hide those in their quest for freedom. (For examples of these unique transportation and concealment methods, see research uncovered by Randolph Harris at <http://undergroundrroriginspa.org/>.)

While the movement's roots grew from spontaneous anti-slavery actions in many places in the United States going back to the wake of the American Revolution, historians generally agree that the City of Philadelphia and the farming-dominated counties to the west along the Mason-Dixon Line were sites of early and especially active resistance to slavery in America.

## What was it like to travel on the Underground Railroad?

Traveling on the Underground Railroad was difficult and dangerous. Passengers would often travel by foot at night. They would sneak from one station to the next, being careful to not get caught by patrollers. Stations or depots were usually around 20 miles apart. Sometimes they would have to wait at a station for some time until they knew it was safe to travel again.

Since enslaved people escaped in secrecy, no one is quite sure how many escaped. There are estimates that say over 100,000 escaped, including 30,000 during the peak years before the Civil War. The Underground Railroad operated quietly, by word-of-mouth. Very few people kept

written records to protect both the conductors and the passengers seeking freedom. If captured, enslaved persons would be forced to return to slavery. People caught helping escaped enslaved persons faced arrest and jail. This applied to people living in both slave states and free states.

#### Who were the conductors?

Many people from various backgrounds worked as conductors and provided safety for the enslaved along the route. Some conductors were formerly enslaved people such as Harriet Tubman who escaped using the Underground Railroad and then returned to help others escape slavery. Others were successful African Americans who were born free in the north like William Still in Philadelphia and William Whipper in Columbia, Lancaster County.

#### Who was William Still?

William Still was born free in New Jersey in 1821. He was the youngest son of parents who escaped from slavery on the eastern shore of Maryland. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, he organized an abolitionist network that aided hundreds of freedom seekers who passed through Pennsylvania. At great risk, he maintained records of their lives and published their first-person accounts in 1872 as the book *The Underground Railroad*.

#### Vocabulary

*Abolitionist*: a person who speaks out against slavery

*Conductor*: a person who helped enslaved persons along their route to freedom

*Passenger*: a person escaping slavery

*Patroller*: a person who captured escaping enslaved persons and returned them to their owners

*Slave Trader*: a person who purchased and sold enslaved persons

*Stations*: a safe house where escaping enslaved persons could rest

*Enslaved Person*: We say that the millions of people of African descent brought into North America and the United States were “enslaved” as opposed to being “slaves.” Use of this term draws attention to the person’s forced condition rather than labeling them with the permanent brand of a condition he or she did not choose.

*Freedom Seeker*: We call them “freedom seekers” as opposed to fugitives, runaways, or contraband. People who took their own initiative to leave enslavement on their own or with help from others were indeed violating the laws of the period. However, this term recognizes that these people were acting in self-preservation and in opposition to a system that was contrary to the spirit of a nation where all men were said to be created equal.

## Additional Resources

Digital Resources on Slavery, Abolition, and the Underground Railroad

- [Gradual Abolition in Pennsylvania](#) (LancasterHistory Digital Exhibit)
- [The Underground Railroad in Lancaster County](#) (LancasterHistory Interactive Timeline)

- The Struggle Against Slavery: The Local Perspective on a National Divide (LancasterHistory Lesson Plan, [Instructor Packet](#), [Student Packet](#))
- [Timeline of Anti-slavery, Abolitionism, and Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania and the U.S.](#)
  - Map and other materials about the [Underground Railroad in Lancaster County](#)
  - Map of [Underground Railroad sites in Lancaster City](#)
- [More Lesson Plans on the Underground Railroad](#) (Gathered by the [House Divided](#) project at Dickinson College)

#### Digital Resources on William Still

- [Full Text of William Still's \*The Underground Railroad\*](#)
- Recording of William Whipper's letter to William Still describing his experience escaping from slavery.
- [Uncovering William Still's Underground Railroad](#) (Digital resource from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania)
- [William Still's National Significance](#) (Article, timeline, and links gathered by the library at Temple University which houses archives related to Still.)

#### Lectures and Documentaries

- "Vigilance: The Life of William Still, Father of the Underground Railroad," Lecture at LancasterHistory featuring Andrew Diemer, PhD (Taking place January 26, 2023. The lecture will be uploaded to [LancasterHistory's YouTube](#) shortly thereafter.)
- ["A Slave for Life if I So Chuse": Abolition and Slavery in Lancaster County.](#) Lecture at LancasterHistory featuring Cory James Young
- ["Demystifying the Underground Railroad."](#) Lecture at LancasterHistory featuring Dr. Spencer Crew
- ["Underground Railroad: William Still Story"](#) (PBS Documentary)

## Lesson Planning Ideas

### Before the Performance

#### Introducing Opera

Introduce students to opera as an art form and mode of storytelling that uses music to communicate about events, feelings, and ideas.

- Explain what an opera is by showing one or both of these videos.
  - ["What is Opera?"](#) (25 minutes total, Focus on first five minutes)
  - ["Kids meet an opera singer"](#) (6 minutes)

- Ask if students know or have been to any musicals. Discuss differences and similarities between musicals and operas.
  - In an opera there is no spoken dialogue.
  - Operas are a different kind of music. (They'll hear opera singing in ["Kids meet an opera singer"](#).)
- Ask Students
  - Why would someone write a whole story in the form of songs?
  - Why would they write it to this kind of music? How does that kind of music make them feel?

## Introducing the Underground Railroad

Introduce students to William Still and the history of the Underground Railroad, especially as it existed in Lancaster County.

- Explain what the Underground Railroad was.
  - Show map and other materials about the [Underground Railroad in Lancaster County](#).
  - Show map of [Underground Railroad sites in Lancaster City](#).
- Explain who William Still was and why his book, *The Underground Railroad*, is important.
  - Play video recording of William Whipper's letter to William Still describing his experience escaping from slavery: <https://youtu.be/cB2zc1bViC4>

## Brainstorm questions for the performers.

There will be a question and answer session after the performance where students will have the opportunity to ask questions to the performers. What questions do they about opera, the Underground Railroad, or William Still?

## Word Splash

1. Have students brainstorm words, thoughts, or phrases associated with
  - a. Opera
  - b. The Underground Railroad.

These ideas can be written in various ways using different colors, different style writing, etc. in a creative way on a white board, blackboard, smart board or large sheet of paper. Students might write their words or phrases on post it notes and then group them together on a board or wall to see how many had similar ideas.

2. Revisit the board after the performance. Was it what they expected? Would they use different words or phrases now?

## After the Performance

### Storytelling and Sanctuary Road

This is an open-ended lesson that has no right or wrong answers connected to it. It is meant to make your students think about their own family stories as well as the stories of William Still. If time is limited, consider steps 1-3 as a stand alone exercise.

Before the lesson begins, have this statement front and center on the black board or other visual board: "Preserve every story, every fact, every event." (This is a line from the *Sanctuary Road* opera.)

1. Begin the lesson by asking students what the opera they have seen was about.
2. Tell your students a story related to your family or ask your students if they know a family story that has been handed down to them. Emphasize that stories are meant to be remembered and shared. Listen as they share their stories.
3. Think about the stories you've told or have heard. Why are they so important to remember? Take time to listen to their responses.
  - Why would William Still want his stories to be remembered?
  - Mr. Still's stories were filled with pain as well as surprising humor. Remember Henry "Box" Brown. Some of our stories can be painful as well as happy.
4. Assignment: Tell students to ask their parents for a family story that they would like you to remember. Take time to write it down and bring it to class. In class, students will gather in small groups to share their stories. In groups:
  - Tell your group what this story says about their family.
  - Why is it important to remember and share?
  - What happens if we forget or fail to hand on these stories?
5. Have your students come together to take one more look at the statement on the board. What does it mean to you now?

### Writing or Drawing Activities

Imagine the experience of a freedom seeker escaping on the underground railroad. What do you think it was like to escape from slavery? What obstacles would freedom seekers face on their journeys? Would they have been scared? Happy? What would have kept them going when things were difficult?

or

Imagine the experience of a conductor on the underground railroad or members of a family in a station house along the underground railroad. What obstacles would they face in assuring the safety of freedom seekers? Would they have been scared? Happy? What would have kept them going when things were difficult?

- Write a letter from a freedom seeker to a conductor or from a conductor to a freedom seeker once the seeker has found freedom.
- Create a comic strip or a small mural to illustrate an escape to freedom and the possible obstacles along the way. How could you draw the freedom seekers and the conductors on the underground railroad to show how they felt (scared, determined, happy) at different times during their journey? Look at *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold or *Harriet and the Promised Land* by Jacob Lawrence for inspiration. (If you do not have access to those books, you can see previews of the artwork on Amazon. Lesson inspired by ["Using Art to Tell a Story"](#) plan featured on *A House Divided* website.)