

Around and About New Jersey

TEACHERS GUIDE

PROGRAM FOUR

THE STILL FAMILY REUNION

by

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I. SYNOPSIS

For more than 120 years the Still family has been holding reunions. In recent years they have gathered in the town of Lawnside, Camden County, which was founded as a refuge for escaped slaves. The reunion is an occasion for expressions of pride in the Still family's African-American history.

The day begins with a church service at the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. After church, the family gathers at the home of Clarence and Verline Still. A group of visiting students help the family prepare traditional foods such as pork and chicken barbecue, collard greens, and sweet-potato pie.

Gloria Still, the family storyteller, recounts how their ancestor, Charity Still, ran away from slavery in Maryland to join her husband Levin Still, who had purchased his freedom from his owner and settled in New Jersey. Years later Charity Still was reunited with her son, Peter, whom she had been forced to leave behind. Peter eventually managed to buy his own freedom and later that of his family. We also learn about his two brothers born in New Jersey -- William Still, who became active in the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia; and James Still, who was a self-taught herbalist in Medford.

The reunion ends with a toast to freedom as everyone joins together in the "Electric Slide," a popular dance.

II. KEY WORDS

Slave hunters - people who caught runaway slaves and brought them back to their owners

Underground Railroad - an informal network of people who aided the escape of slaves from the South to the North and Canada

Abolitionists - people who opposed slavery and wanted the United States to abolish it

Quakers -- members of the religious sect known as the Society of Friends whose belief in the equality of all human beings led many of them to oppose slavery

III. CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS

6.1: ALL STUDENTS WILL UTILIZE HISTORICAL THINKING, PROBLEM SOLVING, AND RESEARCH SKILLS TO MAXIMIZE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF CIVICS, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, AND ECONOMICS.

By the end of Grade 2, students will:

A. Social Studies Skills

1. Explain the concepts of long ago and far away.
4. Retell events or stories with accuracy and appropriate sequencing.

Building upon the knowledge and skills gained in the previous grades, by the end of Grade 4 students will:

A. Social Studies Skills

1. Explain how present events are connected to the past.
2. Apply terms related to time including years, decades, centuries, and generations.
5. Distinguish between an eyewitness account and a secondary account of an event.
6. Distinguish fact from fiction.

STANDARD 6.4 (UNITED STATES AND NEW JERSEY HISTORY) ALL STUDENTS WILL DEMONSTRATE KNOWLEDGE OF UNITED STATES AND NEW JERSEY HISTORY IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND LIFE AND EVENTS IN THE PAST AND HOW THEY RELATE TO THE PRESENT AND FUTURE.

Building upon knowledge and skills gained in preceding grades, by the end of Grade 4, students will:

A. Family and Community Life

1. Discuss how families long ago expressed and transmitted their beliefs and values through oral tradition, literature, songs, and celebrations.

2. Compare family life in a community of the past to life in a community of the present.

B. State and Nation

8. Discuss the value of the American national heritage including:

- Diverse folklore and cultural contributions from New Jersey and other regions in the United States
- History and values celebrated in American songs, symbols, slogans, and major holidays

STANDARD 6.6 (GEOGRAPHY) ALL STUDENTS WILL APPLY KNOWLEDGE OF SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND OTHER GEOGRAPHIC SKILLS TO UNDERSTAND HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN RELATION TO THE PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT.

Building upon knowledge and skills gained in preceding grades, by the end of Grade 4, students will:

A. The World in Spatial Terms

1. Use physical and political maps to identify locations and spatial relationships of places within local and nearby communities.

D. Human Systems

1. Describe the development of transportation and communication networks in New Jersey and the United States.

IV. THEMES

A. Effect of Slavery - Slavery had a devastating effect on the lives of African Americans.

B. Acts Against Slavery - Individual slaves purchased their freedom or escaped and helped others to do the same.

C. Family Pride - The Still reunion embodies expressions of pride in family history.

V. CORE ACTIVITIES

A. EFFECTS OF SLAVERY

1. Objective

Students will describe the effect of slavery on the lives of African Americans.

2. Before Viewing the Program

Explain to the class that the program they are about to see deals with a family reunion, but it also contains information about the effect of slavery on this particular African-American family. Students should pay special attention to how slavery shaped the lives of Charity and Peter Still.

3. After Viewing the Program

Ask the students to write a paragraph imagining what Peter Still might have said to his mother or Charity still to her son, when they were reunited. You might ask volunteers to read their essays to the class.

B. ACTS AGAINST SLAVERY

1. Objective

Students will interpret the individual actions of black Americans against the institution of slavery.

2. Before Viewing the Program

Divide the class into four groups. Ask each group to focus on how one of the following Still family ancestors took action against the institution of slavery (Levin Still, Charity Still, William Still, and Peter Still).

3. After Viewing the Program

Each group should meet to discuss how its assigned Still family ancestor personally opposed slavery. One person from each group should present his/her group's findings to the whole class.

C. FAMILY PRIDE

1. Objective

Students will identify the ways that a reunion may express pride in a family's history.

2. Before Viewing the Program

Explain to the students that one of the themes of this program is family pride. Ask them to pay attention to the various ways that the Stills express their family pride.

3. After Viewing the Program

Ask the students to make a list of the ways that the Stills express their family pride (e.g. stories, poems, the toast, attendance at the reunion, T-shirts, sermons in church, etc.).

VI. ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

A. WRITTEN ACCOUNT OF STILL FAMILY HISTORY

1. Objective

Students will interpret a primary source and illustrate it with a drawing.

2. After Viewing the Program

Reproduce and distribute the account of the Still Family history written by Dr. James Still in the "Supplementary Materials" section of this guide. Read it aloud to the class, while the students follow along. Explain antiquated language and historical background, such as the fugitive slave laws that required the return of escaped slaves. Ask the students to draw pictures illustrating one of the incidents mentioned in this account.

B. THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN NEW JERSEY

1. Objective

Students will identify some of the routes of the Underground Railroad through New Jersey.

2. After Viewing the Program

Reproduce and distribute the blank map of New Jersey and the list of some of the stops on the Underground Railroad in the "Supplementary Materials" section of this guide. Ask the students to draw and label on the map the four routes.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. FOR STUDENTS

Mann, Peggy and Vivian W. Siegal. *The Man Who Bought Himself: The Story of Peter Still*. New York and London: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975

A retelling of the story of Peter Still based on Pickard's *The Kidnapped and the Redeemed* (1855) (see below).

Still, James. *Early Recollections and Life of Dr. James Still*. 1877; Reprint, Medford: Medford Historical Society, 1971.

The autobiography of the famous "Doctor of the Pines." Contains Dr. Still's account of his father's purchase of his freedom, his mother's escape from slavery, and his brother Peter's purchase of his own and his family's freedom. Also contains an account of the first Still family reunion at the home of Dr. Still outside of Medford, New Jersey.

B. FOR TEACHERS

Pickard, Kate E. R. *The Kidnapped and the Redeemed*. 1855; Reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968.

The author of this book met Peter Still in Alabama, when he was working at a female seminary, in order to earn money to purchase his own freedom. Tells of how he was reunited with his mother in New Jersey and his attempts to purchase the freedom of his family. The circumstances of his separation from his mother were changed to protect her from slave hunters.

Still, William. *Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, Etc. . . .* Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1872.

Contains a detailed version of the history of Peter Still's purchase of his own freedom and that of his family. Written by Peter Still's brother, William, who was active in the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia. Also, contains an account of the meeting of the two brothers in Philadelphia.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

AN ACCOUNT OF THE STILL FAMILY HISTORY WRITTEN BY DR. JAMES STILL

I was born in Washington Township (now Shamong), Burlington County, State of New Jersey, April ninth, one thousand eight hundred and twelve, at what was called the Indian Mill. . . My father's name was Levin Still and my mother's name was Charity. They were born in Maryland, and were slaves. My father bought his freedom, and then undertook to free his wife by bringing her to New Jersey. . . .

My mother. . . was born a slave, and in slavery reared to womanhood. Four children were born to her in her time of servitude, two sons and two daughters. Her anxious spirit longed for freedom, and no way presented itself but that of flight, and escape by flight she effected at a convenient season, leaving two little boys in bondage, and taking with her two little daughters. She fled to New Jersey, and took up her abode there. Often did she have cause to tremble for fear of her old taskmaster, well knowing that the law was against her, and that he had a right by the laws of her country to claim her and her children, and carry them back to slavery. . . .

The loss of the two little boys left behind in slavery was a great grief. She frequently spoke of them, and wondered where they were, whether dead or alive. Forty-five years rolled away and on their bosom bore here long-absent son Peter to her arms again. . . . He served in slavery. . . , and by saving and industry was enabled to buy his freedom of his master whilst living in Alabama. Having purchased his freedom he set out toward the North to look for his relations, of whom he knew nothing, and had heard nothing from the time he was five years old. He came to Philadelphia in eighteen hundred and fifty, found his own brother clerk in the Anti-Slavery office there, and from him learned the whereabouts of his mother and brothers. From thence he came to my house, and we took him to

see our mother. . . After spending a little time among the relatives whom he had never before met, he made up his mind to try to relieve the family whom he had left behind in slavery.

He set his face southward, and, reaching Alabama, told his wife and children of his success in the North, and set about planning to release them. . . . He bade them a hopeful farewell and came North to consult friends. . . . Some counseled one way and some another. . . .

A gentleman finally volunteered to go and bring his family to him. This person reached Alabama, found those who he was seeking, and succeeded in conveying them several hundred miles on their way North. He was overtaken, however, by their master, who captured them, carried the slaves back to bondage, and killed the man who had generously volunteered to risk his life in their behalf.

Peter, at hearing this news, was nearly heartbroken. He next proposed to collect money to purchase his wife and children. After traveling about for five years, he gathered the sum of five thousand dollars, with which he bought them. They were delivered to him in eighteen hundred and fifty-five, the wife, two sons, and a daughter. They arrived at my house on January thirteenth of that year, and after showing his family to anxious friends who were interested, Peter settled down with them in Burlington, New Jersey.

*Early Recollections and Life
of Doctor James Still (1877)*

Four Routes of the Underground Railroad Through New Jersey

New Jersey was intimately associated with Philadelphia and the adjoining section in the underground system, and afforded at least three important outlets for runaways from the territory west of the Delaware River. Our knowledge of these outlets is derived solely from the testimony of the Rev. Thomas Clement Oliver, who, like his father, traveled the New Jersey routes many times as a guide and conductor.

Probably the most important of these routes was that leading from Philadelphia to Jersey City and New York. From Philadelphia the runaways were taken across the Delaware River to Camden, where Mr. Oliver lived, thence they were conveyed northeast following the course of the river to Burlington, and thence in the same direction to Bordentown. In Burlington, sometimes called Station A, a short stop was made for the purpose of changing horses after the rapid driver of twenty miles from Philadelphia. The Bordentown station was denominated Station B east. Here the road took a more northerly direction to Princeton, where horses were again changed and the journey continued to New Brunswick.

Just east of New Brunswick the conductors sometimes met with opposition in attempting to cross the Raritan River on their way to Jersey City. To avoid such interruption the conductors arranged with Cornelius Cornell, who lived on the outskirts of New Brunswick, and, presumably, near the river, to notify them when there were slave-catchers or spies at the regular crossing. On receiving such

information they took a by-road leading to Perth Amboy, whence their protégés could be safely forwarded to New York City.

When the way was clear at the Raritan, the company pursued its course to Rahway; here another relay of horses was obtained and the journey continued to Jersey City, where, under the care of John Everett, a Quaker, or his servants, they were taken to the Forty-Second Street railroad station, now known as the Grand Central, provided with tickets, and placed on a through train for Syracuse, New York.

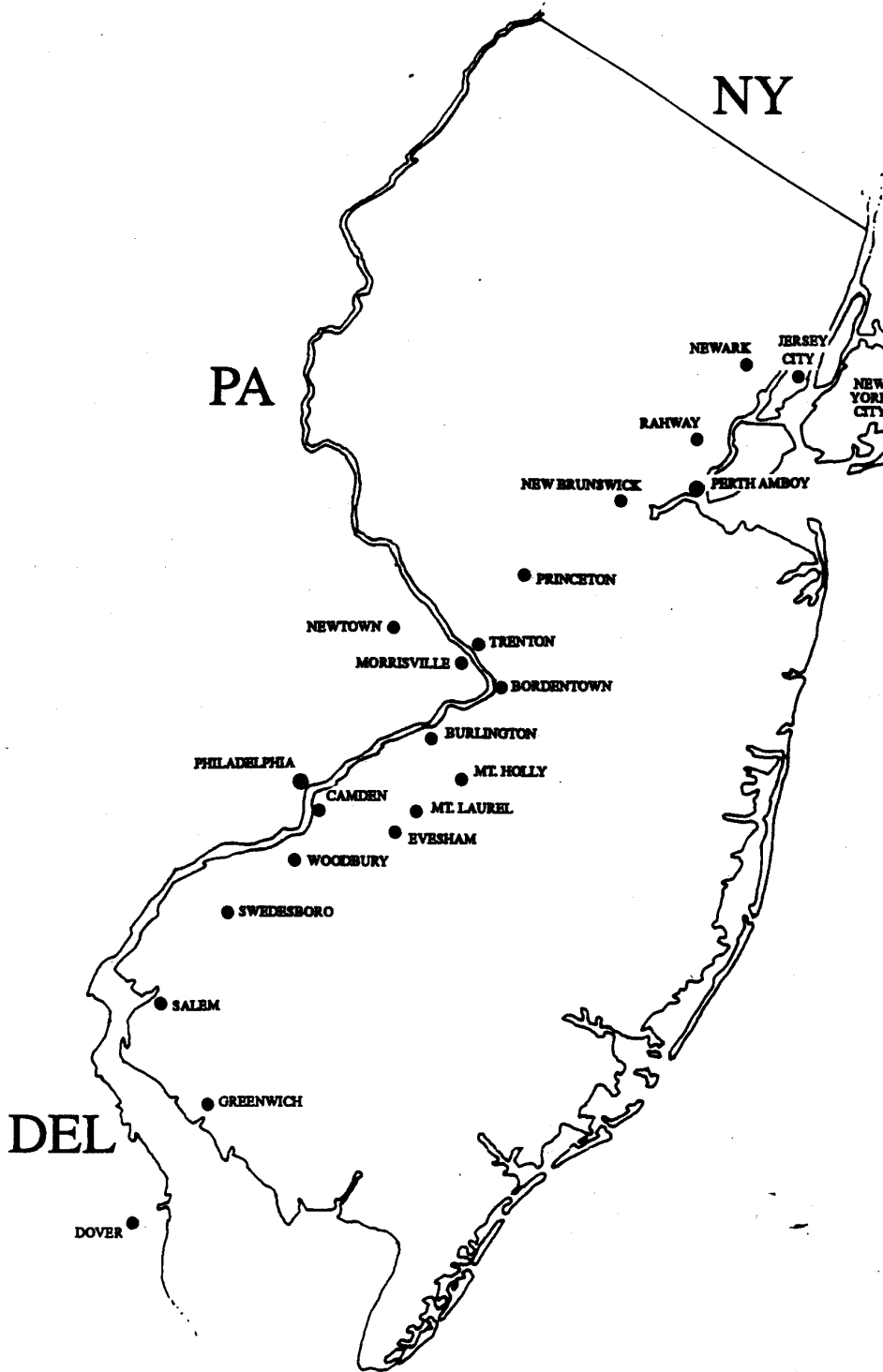
The second route had its origin on the Delaware River, forty miles below Philadelphia, at or near Salem. This line, like the others to be mentioned later, seems to have been tributary to the Philadelphia route traced above. Nevertheless, it had an independent course for sixty miles before it connected with the more northern route at Bordentown. This distance of sixty miles was ordinarily traveled in three stages, the first ending at Woodbury, twenty-five miles north of Salem, although the trip by wagon is said to have added ten miles to the estimated distance between the two places; the second stage ended at Evesham Mount; and third, at Bordentown.

The third route was called, from its initial station, the Greenwich line. This station is vividly described as having been made up of a circle of Quaker residences enclosing a swampy place that swarmed with blacks. One may surmise that it made a model station. Slaves were transported at night across the

Delaware River from the vicinity of Dover, in boats marked by a yellow light hung below a blue one, and were met some distance out from the Jersey shore by boats showing the same lights. Landed at Greenwich, the fugitives were conducted north twenty-five miles to Swedesboro, and thence about the same distance to Evesham Mount. From this point they were taken to Mount Holly, and so into the northern or Philadelphia route.

Still another branch of this Philadelphia line is known. It constitutes the fourth road, and is described by Mr. Robert Purvis as an extension of a route through Bucks County, Pennsylvania, that entered Trenton, New Jersey, from Newtown, and ran directly to New Brunswick and so on to New York.

From Wilbur H. Siebert,
The Underground Railroad
(1898)



Underground Railway Routes
in New Jersey, 1860