

When they finally arrived in Philadelphia, the Crafts were taken in by a white family. Ellen at first was skeptical and did not trust any white people. However, since then Mrs. Craft said, "I firmly believe that there are good and bad persons of every shade of complexion".



The Crafts were encouraged to move to Boston in the state of Massachusetts where abolitionist friends helped them settle into a home and taught them to read and write. They lived a safe life until the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, a federal law that applied to every state in the nation and which demanded that all freedom seekers be captured and sent back to enslavement. The Crafts were then helped to escape to England where they were free at last. After the Civil War ended in the United States in 1865, Mr. and Mrs. Craft returned to the United States to work for the improvement of conditions for African Americans living in the southern United States.

## Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery



The original story was written by Mr. William Craft. The version written in this booklet was revised by Nathalie Desmet in 2017 for use by Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital

Region, Inc.

ENJOY!

*Paul & Mary of Secord*

The story begins with Ellen. Ellen was the daughter of a slaveholder and a slave: her father had enslaved her mother. Ellen had the complexion of her father, which gave her fair, white skin. Her father's wife did not like this, so she decided to give Ellen as a gift to their daughter. This meant that Ellen was enslaved by her half-sister.

In the meantime, William was enslaved by a man who had him learn about carpentry. With the help of a cabinet maker, William became a very skilled carpenter. At one point, his enslaver found himself with a big financial debt and had to auction off William and his family. This moment was very hard for William, as he saw his little sister snatched away from



him and he was not able to do anything, not even cry for her. He said: "We were only slaves, and had no legal rights; consequently, we were compelled to smother our wounded feelings, and crouch beneath the iron heel of despotism."

(despotism - living situation in which people are cruelly treated by people in power)



There is one instance that is of special interest. In one of the trains Ellen sat next to a white woman and next to a few white men. The white woman was sad since the person she enslaved had escaped. She was convinced that what she and other white people were doing by enslaving

African Americans was the best for the African Americans. She was telling everyone about her son, a minister, who told her that enslaved people were much better off than free black people in the North. She said: "I don't believe there are any white laboring people in the world who are as well off as the slaves". However, the other men argued against her, giving her very intelligent comebacks and explaining that everyone should be free, no matter their color or race.

The trip seemed to be going smoothly, but on their last train, when they were very close to Philadelphia, the train conductor did not want to let William and Ellen pass without documents which stated their reason of travel. Fortunately, they were allowed to travel because of the bad medical condition of the man Ellen was pretending to be.

On the night of their escape Ellen got very upset because she was very nervous and scared they would get caught. However, she was brave enough and had the courage to proceed. Both William and Ellen were firm believers in God which really helped them maintain their strength to continue and complete their journey.

From this point onwards, until they reached the North, William called Ellen ‘master’ as they pretended to be enslaver and enslaved.

Throughout their journey, they encountered many different difficulties. Ellen tried not to speak too much so she would not reveal her male disguise. She pretended to be a very sick farm owner who was traveling to Philadelphia where his health would be restored.

In the first train they boarded, Ellen sat in the same train car as a man she knew. Fortunately, she was not discovered. In other train rides, men tried to convince her not to go to Philadelphia since they believed William would try to escape. One man even tried to buy William from Ellen! As they got closer to Philadelphia, Ellen was increasingly encouraged to remain in the South and William was encouraged to run away.

William and Ellen found each other and fell in love. They got married in December 1848. They were both horrified by the conditions they and all the other enslaved people around the country were living under, which motivated (encouraged) them to plan out their escape. However, they soon realized how hard this would be as they lived in Georgia: a state that was nearly impossible to escape from.



(Find Georgia and New York State in the map below—how many states did the Crafts have to pass through?)

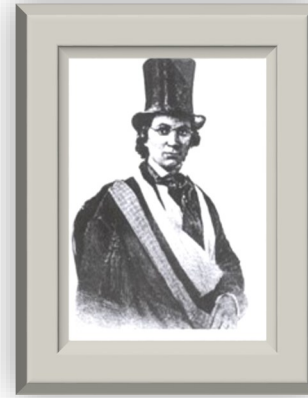
Soon after, William came up with a brilliant plan and recounts it like this: “Knowing slaveholders have the privilege of taking their slaves to any part of the country they think proper, it occurred to me that, as my wife was nearly white, I might get her to disguise herself as an invalid gentleman, and assume to be my master, while I could attend as his slave.” It was in this manner that

Ellen Craft would pretend to be an injured white man who enslaved Mr. William Craft. They would pretend that the injured white man, really Mrs. Craft, was sick and was traveling to Philadelphia in the state of Pennsylvania in order to get the health care that was needed. (Pennsylvania did not allow people to be held enslaved)



Mrs. Craft was at first hesitant about the plan. She thought it would not work and was scared that she and her husband would be caught. However, after some time reflecting, she agreed to proceed with the plan. This motivation to proceed was brought partly by her realization that her position as a black woman gave her no rights whatsoever. As a further matter, she was treated so poorly that it was like she wasn't a person. Moreover, she would not have children if she remained in slavery, since she did not want them to be enslaved or taken away from her. The only way for her to be treated with respect and to have children of her own would be to escape.

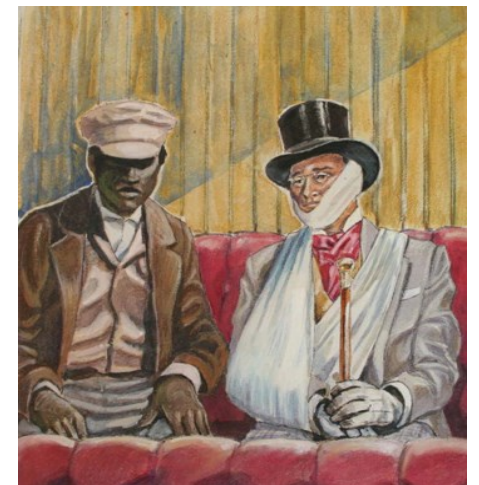
Once it was decided that they would put the plan into action, both Ellen and William Craft started gathering their disguises,



including clothes that were typically worn by gentlemen. They asked their enslavers for a brief leave and since they were both very hard-working people, their enslavers granted them permission to take a short "vacation".

Everything seemed in order, but then a problem arose: How would Ellen sign her name at the trains they would take, if she did not know how to read and write? Every time a person boarded a new train that person had to sign in a record book. Ellen then came up with the idea of pretending that her arm was broken, so she was not able to write.

The plan then started: Ellen dressed up as a man and William cut her hair. She wore a sling to pretend to have a broken arm and hand. She tied cloth bandages around her face in order to cover up some of her feminine facial features.





4) Using the map located on page 8 of this booklet, what ocean did Ellen and William Craft cross when they left the United States and traveled to England?

---

5) What is another name for England? \_\_\_\_\_

---

6) What type of transportation would Ellen and William Craft have to take to cross the ocean in 1850? This trip would take 6-14 weeks depending on weather conditions.

---

7) How might you have felt if you were in Ellen or William Crafts shoes? Describe your feeling here —

---

---

Represent your feelings in picture form here—

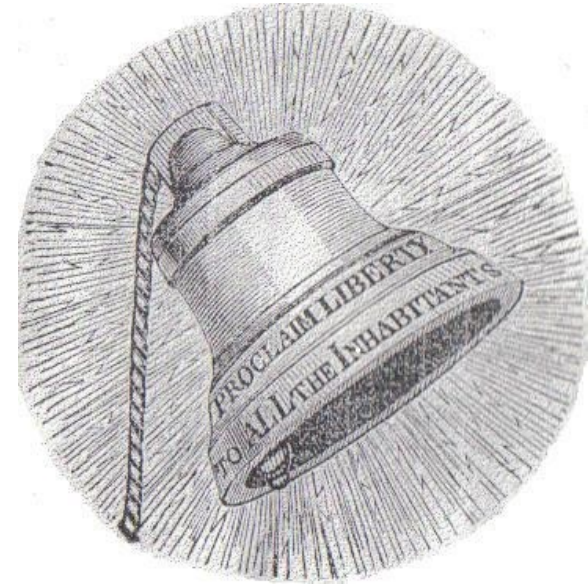
---

8) How does Ellen and William Craft's story inspire you? \_\_\_\_\_

---

# The Underground Railroad

## a New Interpretation of an Old Story



## The Liberty Bell

### “Proclaim liberty to ALL the Inhabitants in the Land”

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

---

Some questions for you to think about. Record your answers below for safe keeping.

1) What are the names of all the states Ellen and William Craft had to pass through on their way to freedom in New York State? Include Georgia and New York in your list.

---

---

---

1a) How would you feel if you took this journey as a freedom seeker?

---

2) How long would it take Ellen and William Craft to travel the approximately 1000 miles between Georgia and New York State? In 1848, when the Crafts escaped, trains in the United States travelled at 40 mph. Show your work below.

3) Why did Ellen and William Craft want to escape enslavement? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---