

## Call for Papers

# **Black Lives and Freedom Journeys: The Legacies of the Still Family of Philadelphia**

**7–8 October 2021**

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Philadelphia activist William Still offers an exceptional opportunity to consider his remarkable life and legacy. Born to formerly enslaved parents on 7 October 1821, Still is best known for his work with the Underground Railroad. A clerk at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, he was for many years the chair of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, which offered direct aid to fugitives from slavery. Together with his wife Letitia Still, William Still provided domestic comforts and care to hundreds of refugees, visitors, and long-term guests in their Philadelphia household.

October 2021 provides an opportunity to commemorate Still's birth by thinking historically and broadly about Black American activism as well as the plight and persistence of refugees from violence and terror. These allied topics are highlighted in Still's efforts to document family connections among people whose escapes from slavery resulted in separations and to honor refugees' requests for assistance in bringing spouses and children to safety. Still spearheaded resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and chronicled these efforts through his careful record-keeping and publications. He also supported Black civil rights, leading a successful fight against segregation on Philadelphia's streetcars.

The conference will feature a keynote address by historian Mia Bay. The organizers welcome proposals for papers and panels on any aspect of Still's life and activism and on the broader movements in which he and his circle participated. Among the possible topics are his collaborations with his wife Letitia Still, the care work (food, shelter, medical care, transportation, and funds) provided by Black women to refugees from slavery, Philadelphia's central role in the Underground Railroad, and the resonance of Still's political engagement for racism, civil rights, and refugees in the present day. Papers that engage with Still's historical significance, the network of female Vigilance Committee members, the refugees themselves, the city, and other relevant themes broadly construed are encouraged.

While proposals for presentations in varied formats are encouraged, many panels will focus on pre-circulated papers of approximately 7,500 words, which will be due no later than 23 August 2021. To propose a paper or panel, please submit an abstract of no more than 500 words and a brief C.V. (no more than 3 pages) to [mceas@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:mceas@sas.upenn.edu), no later than 23 March 2021.

The conference organizers understand that many are feeling uncertain about making plans at this time. Please know that this event will take place as scheduled, whether in-person or online or perhaps as a mix of formats. We also understand that even if an in-person event can take place, individuals might still need to participate remotely, and we are preparing to accommodate those needs.