

The Calling Card



**The monthly e-newsletter of the
Society for Women and the Civil War**
<http://www.swcw.org>

**The Board of Directors wishes one and all
the happiest of holidays!**



Godey's Lady's Book, December 1860.

Give the Gift of Membership!

This holiday season, surprise and delight the Civil War enthusiast in your life with a gift membership in the Society for Women and the Civil War. Gifting is fast and easy -- just go to our website:

[Gift Membership - copy \(swcw.org\)](http://swcw.org)

The 2024 Conference on Women and the Civil War

SWCW is proud to announce our Partner for
The 24th Conference on Women and the Civil War:
Kennesaw State University's
Center for the Study of the Civil War Era

The conference will be held July 26 - 28, 2024 in Atlanta, Georgia.
Conference details are coming in January!

News of Note

Exhibit of Note: *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad.*

Between 1830 and 1865, an estimated 100,000 enslaved persons embarked on a journey to freedom along the Underground Railroad, aided by a clandestine and ever-changing group of white and free black operatives. Photographer Jeanine Michna-Bales has spent more than a decade meticulously researching fugitive slaves and the ways they escaped to freedom. While the unnumbered routes of the Underground Railroad encompassed countless square miles, the path Michna-Bales documented encompasses roughly 2,000 miles and is based on actual sites, cities, and places that freedom-seekers passed during their trek from Mississippi to

Canada. This exhibition features beautifully dramatic color photographs, ephemera, and narratives that together tell the story of the Underground Railroad, and how it brought together people from different races, genders, social levels, religions, and regions in a common cause.

Through Darkness to Light is currently on view at the Gettysburg Museum of the American Civil War at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum & Visitor Center. To learn more about the exhibit, and see the full traveling schedule through 2026, visit this website: [Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad | EUSA](#) For more information about seeing the exhibit in Gettysburg, visit this website: [- GettysburgFoundation.org](#)



Jeanine Michna-Bales, *Decision to Leave*, Magnolia Plantation on the Cane River, Louisiana, 2013

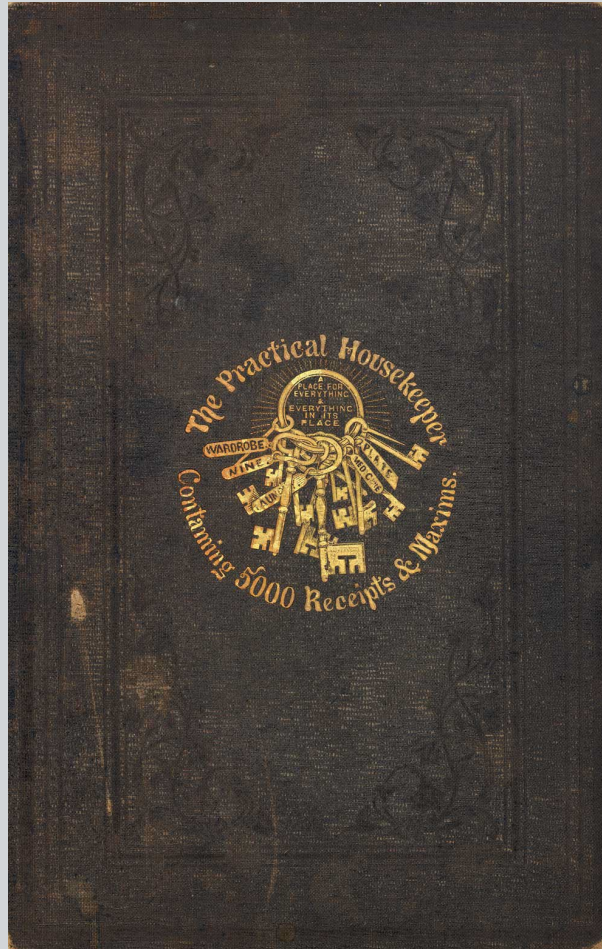
Research Resource

Feeding America: The Historic American Cookbook Project

[Feeding America: the Historic American Cookbook Project \(msu.edu\)](http://msu.edu)

Feeding America is an online collection of some of the most important and influential American cookbooks from the late 18th to early 20th century.

The digital archive includes 76 cookbooks from the Michigan State University Libraries' collection as well as searchable full-text transcriptions. The website also features a brief history of American cookbooks.



The Practical Housekeeper by Elizabeth F. Ellet, 1857

DONOR LIST

SWCW offers our deepest thanks to these contributors
who supported our work in 2023:

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Individuals wishing to donate to our General Fund or Scholarship Fund should visit our website at [Donations - Society for Women and the Civil War \(swcw.org\)](https://www.swcw.org). SWCW is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and all donations are tax-deductible.

Woman of the Month



Ellen Craft (1826-1891) and William Craft (1824-1900)

For Ellen Craft and her husband William, the month of December 1848 promised more reason to celebrate than any they'd ever experienced. After years of careful planning and preparation, this was the optimal time, they decided, to implement their plan to gain freedom.

Their plan is heralded as one of the most brilliant escapes from slavery in American history; however, it's far less well known than the exploits of Harriet Tubman, Harriet Jacobs or Frederick Douglass.

The Crafts' ingenious plan is documented in their 1860 narrative, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*. From its preface, "It is true, our condition as slaves was not by any means the worst; but the mere idea that we were held as chattels, and deprived of all legal rights--the thought that we had to give up our hard earnings to a tyrant, to enable him to live in idleness and luxury--the thought that we could not call the bones and sinews that God gave us our own: but above all, the fact that another man had the power to tear from our cradle the new-born babe and

sell it in the shambles like a brute, and then scourge us if we dared to lift a finger to save it from such a fate, haunted us for years.”

Over the years since its initial publication, their narrative has been reprinted by four different publishers. It has been expanded, reconstructed and reformatted by various authors. Barbara McCaskill, Professor of English at the University of Georgia, researched a variety of primary sources to expand their narrative in her work *Love, Liberation, and Escaping Slavery: William and Ellen Craft in Cultural Memory*. The children’s book editor, Donald Lemke, documents their escape from subjugation in a graphic history format titled, *The Brave Escape of Ellen and William Craft*. The writer, Ilyon Woo, reconstructs their escape with vivid detail in her 2023 New York Times best seller and prose reconsideration, *Master Slave Husband Wife: An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom*.

The Savannah College of Art and Design honored the bravery and originality of these two important figures by detailing their lives with a documentary film, *A Thousand Miles and Counting*.

When Ellen left her life as an enslaved person, she was dressed elegantly in a fashionable suit, stayed in the best hotels and traveled in first-class accommodations the entire route from Macon, Georgia, where she lived, to Philadelphia. But there was a twist: Ellen was disguised as a man, William Johnson, a very sick plantation owner traveling to Philadelphia for special treatment.

Resembling her father, Ellen could easily pass for white. She was the daughter of Major James Smith, a rich slaveholding cotton planter, and Maria, a young enslaved mulatto who was assigned to work in his house. Due to Ellen’s appearance, the plantation mistress frequently brutalized her. Ellen’s work in this wealthy household, though painful, gave her the opportunity to absorb the language and observe the behavior and nuances of southern aristocracy. The escape plan she and William formulated required Ellen to disguise herself as

Johnson, because a “southern lady” surely would never travel alone with an enslaved male. She feigned illness during the trip, which discouraged conversation and interaction, justified dining alone in her room and provided a rationale for traveling north with her loyal manservant. Her right arm was placed in a sling to imply it was impaired, covering for her inability to write.

William took the role of Johnson’s devoted enslaved valet. His appearance was well suited for this role, and it enabled him to nurture the ailing Johnson. He was a skilled cabinet maker, and it was customary for him to travel throughout the region. This travel gave him the opportunity to acquire knowledge that was important for the journey north. Though the money he earned as a cabinet maker was confiscated by his owner, he was allowed to earn separate funds that he kept. He used this money to pay for the many expenses on the route to freedom.

They selected the Christmas season for their departure because it was one of the few time periods that “favored” enslaved persons could possibly get a pass. A pass provided documentation of their permission to be away from the plantation, usually to visit nearby relatives for a few days. The holiday pass also served as sufficient justification for their initial absence.

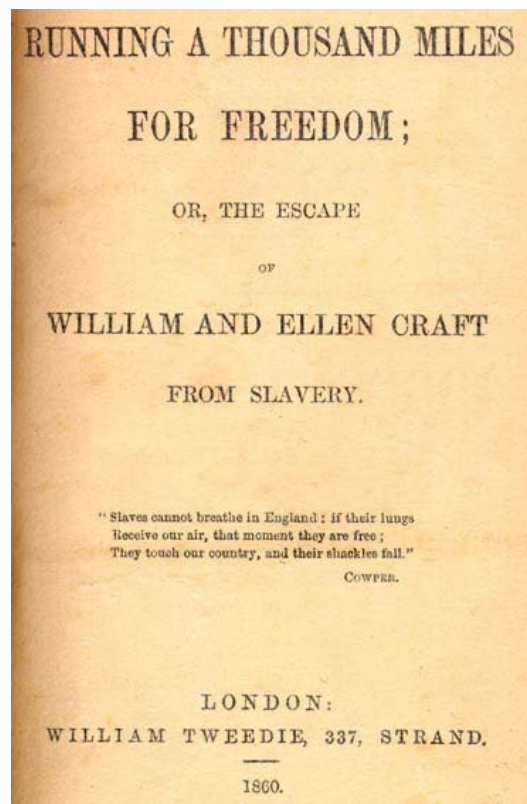
The Crafts’ quest for freedom was well designed, but failure would result in severe consequences: brutal whippings, mutilated bodies, sale to the “deep” South or worse. From the beginning of their journey to the end, they faced harrowing experiences that caused them to question their ability to succeed.

The morning of departure, Ellen purchased train tickets to Savannah, the first leg of the journey. She chose a window seat in one of the best carriages but was filled with fear when she saw that the gentleman who approached to be her seat mate was Mr. Cray, a very close friend of her master who had known her for years. Her fears subsided when he greeted her, “It is a very fine morning, sir.”

Purchasing steamer tickets from Charleston, South Carolina, to Wilmington, North Carolina, proved to be a nearly unsurmountable challenge. To prevent white abolitionists from transporting and freeing enslaved persons, slaveholders purchasing tickets had to provide verification that each enslaved person with them was indeed their property. Often, this policy detained travelers for days. The Crafts were able to get around it only because a military officer from their previous steamer happened by and vouched for them.

With much joy and relief, Ellen and William arrived safely in Philadelphia precisely on December 25, 1848. Freedom, what a magnificent Christmas gift!

--SWCW Board Member Lavonda Broadnax



Submissions Requested

The Calling Card accepts notices of the achievements of our members; activities of the Civil War & Women's History communities; educational and archival resources; and essays for our Woman of the Month column.

Send your submissions to swcw1865@gmail.com with *Calling Card* in the subject field.

(Submissions may be edited for brevity or clarity.)

The Calling Card is distributed on the 15th of each month, and our deadline for same-month submissions is the 10th.

Editor: DeAnne Blanton, SWCW Board Member and President Emerita

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CHRISTMAS MORNING.



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