



The Library Company OF PHILADELPHIA

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## **BUILDING ON STRENGTH: The Albert M. Greenfield Foundation Funds Start-up Phase of the Library Company's Program in African American History**

PHILADELPHIA November 1, 2007: The Library Company is pleased to announce the launch of a **Program in African American History**, to begin in 2008. Generously funded by The Albert M. Greenfield Foundation, this new initiative will build on one of the greatest subject strengths of the Library Company's holdings.

"We are excited to be part of this effort to preserve and make available an important part of American history," said Janet Guth, a trustee of The Albert M. Greenfield Foundation. "This program reflects a long-standing interest of both the Foundation and the Library Company, and will provide a way for the public to have increased access to exceptional materials." 2008 provides a unique opportunity to launch this program, as it marks the 200th anniversaries of two moments crucial to African American freedom in the United States: the ending of the overseas slave trade and the maturation of Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law, the first emancipation statute in the world.

Accumulated throughout the Library Company's 275-year history, the Afro-Americana Collection teems with stories. Lorene Carey researched *The Price of a Child* (the first book selected for the One Book, One Philadelphia program) using the Collection. That novel is based on the real-life story of



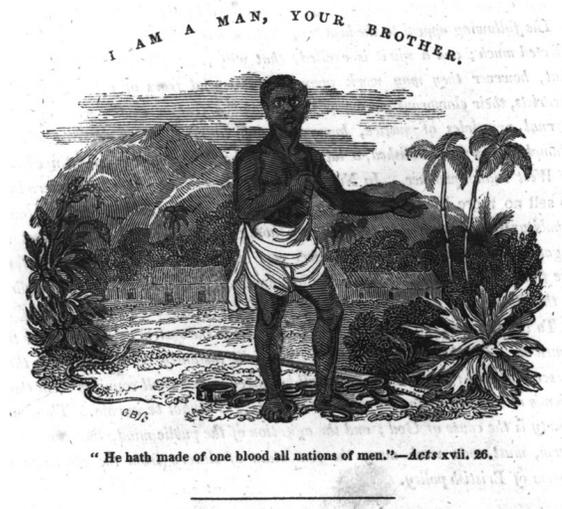
Rescue of Jane Johnson and Her Children from *The Underground Railroad* by William Still (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872).

Jane Johnson, a southern slave passing through Philadelphia with her North Carolina master and two sons. In a dramatic showdown with Johnson's master, William Still, an intrepid "conductor" of the Underground Railroad, and fellow rescuer Passmore Williamson spirited Johnson and her children away to freedom. Williamson spent several months in prison for the



incident, which became a struggle of wills between a resolute abolitionist and a determined pro-slavery federal judge. The non-fiction version of the story can be read in Nat and Yanna Kroyt Brandt's *In the Shadow of the Civil War*, another book researched at the Library Company.

The much-used Afro-Americana Collection comprises over 13,000 titles and 1,200 images from the mid-16th to the late-19th century, including books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, broadsides, and graphics documenting the western discovery and exploitation of Africa; the rise of slavery and antislavery movements in the new world; the development of racial thought and racism; descriptions of African American life, slave and free, throughout the Americas; slavery and race in fiction and drama; and the printed works of black individuals and organizations. The entire collection is listed in the Library Company's online catalog, and approximately 300 images are available through an online digital image catalog. Both are accessible from the Library Company's homepage, [www.librarycompany.org](http://www.librarycompany.org).



Title page vignette to Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, not gradual Abolition* (London, 1824).

The Library Company's programming during the next five years will focus on making the collection accessible to the public. Short-term fellowships will be offered to scholars for use of the Afro-Americana Collection, and the Library Company will partner with the School District of Philadelphia to present summer sessions for history teachers focused on ways to use original source materials from the Afro-Americana Collection in classrooms across the city.

The Library Company's 2008 exhibition will be *Black Founders and Foundations: A Portrait of a Revolutionary People*, organized by Phillip Lapsansky, Curator of Afro-Americana at the Library Company for more than 35 years. The exhibition will focus on the rise of free black communities in the North, from the end of the Revolution into the first few decades of the 19th century. The Philadelphia community will be the lens through which most of the story is viewed, complemented by representations of people and activities from other northern black communities.



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Accompanying the “Black Founders” exhibition will be a conference on “Atlantic Emancipations,” at which scholars will present papers on topics such as the foundations of abolitionism, black emigration movements, and the migrations of people of color to different locales in the Atlantic basin. Co-sponsored with the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at Penn, the Rochester Institute of Technology, and Temple University, the conference will be held April 10-12, 2008. For more information or to attend, please contact the Library Company at 215-546-3181 or [sthompson-nowak@librarycompany.org](mailto:sthompson-nowak@librarycompany.org).

For almost forty years the Library Company’s Afro-Americana Collection has helped nurture and sustain the research and scholarship that has firmly cemented African American studies to academic and popular culture, and this new initiative will continue and expand that tradition.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE LIBRARY COMPANY**

The Library Company of Philadelphia is an independent research library concentrating on American society and culture from the 17th through 19th centuries. Free and open to the public, the Library Company houses an extensive non-circulating collection of rare books, manuscripts, broadsides, ephemera and works of art. The mission of the Library Company is to preserve, interpret, make available, and augment the valuable materials within its care. It serves a diverse constituency throughout Philadelphia and the nation, offering comprehensive reader services, an internationally renowned fellowship program, an online public access catalog, and regular exhibitions and public programs. Located at 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, it is open to the public free of charge from 9:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday. The Library Company can be found online at [www.librarycompany.org](http://www.librarycompany.org).

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