

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 134

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED NOVEMBER 12, 2021

Sponsored by:

Senator TROY SINGLETON

District 7 (Burlington)

SYNOPSIS

Designates October 7 of each year as “William Still Day”.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



SJR134 SINGLETON

2

1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** designating October 7 of each year as
2 “William Still Day”.
3
4 **WHEREAS**, William Still was born on October 7, 1821 in Burlington
5 County, New Jersey as the youngest of eighteen children; and
6 **WHEREAS**, William’s parents, Levin and Charity Still, were born into
7 slavery, his father eventually bought his freedom and his mother
8 escaped slavery in Maryland; and
9 **WHEREAS**, During a time when laws prohibited Blacks from learning
10 to read and write, William taught himself to do so; and
11 **WHEREAS**, In 1844, William moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
12 and married Letitia George in 1847 with whom he had four
13 children; and
14 **WHEREAS**, In 1847, William was hired as Clerk for the Pennsylvania
15 Society for the Abolition of Slavery (“the Society”) and assisted
16 fugitive Africans who came through Philadelphia on the
17 Underground Railroad; and
18 **WHEREAS**, Upon passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, William
19 was appointed Chairman of the Society’s Vigilance Committee that
20 aided fugitive Africans; and
21 **WHEREAS**, William was a major leader within Philadelphia’s free
22 Black community that played an essential role in the Underground
23 Railroad; and
24 **WHEREAS**, William personally provided room and board for many
25 Africans who escaped slavery and stopped in Philadelphia on their
26 way to Canada, and he raised funds to assist runaways’ passage to
27 the North; and
28 **WHEREAS**, In fact, William was instrumental in financing several of
29 Harriet Tubman’s trips to the South to liberate enslaved Africans;
30 and
31 **WHEREAS**, William ultimately helped hundreds of enslaved Africans
32 escape from slavery including his brother, Peter Still; and
33 **WHEREAS**, William also became a civil rights advocate in the North
34 and worked to improve race relations; and
35 **WHEREAS**, In 1859, William wrote a letter to the press protesting the
36 racial discrimination that African Americans faced on Philadelphia
37 streetcars; and
38 **WHEREAS**, In 1867, he published A Brief Narrative of the Struggle for
39 the Rights of Colored People of Philadelphia in the City Railway
40 Cars; and
41 **WHEREAS**, In 1872, William self-published his well-known book The
42 Underground Railroad wherein he documented the stories of
43 formerly enslaved Africans who escaped slavery; and
44 **WHEREAS**, The Underground Railroad is the only first-person account
45 of Black activities on the Underground Railroad that is written and
46 self-published by an African American; and

SJR134 SINGLETON

3

1 **WHEREAS**, The Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection
2 houses William’s writings dating from 1865 through 1899, which
3 include 140 letters relating to his family matters; now, therefore,
4

5 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the*
6 *State of New Jersey:*
7

8 1. October 7 of each year is designated as “William Still Day”
9 in New Jersey.
10

11 2. The Governor is respectfully requested to annually issue a
12 proclamation and call upon public officials, private organizations,
13 and all citizens of this State to observe “William Still Day” with
14 appropriate awareness activities and programs
15

16 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.
17
18

19 **STATEMENT**
20

21 This joint resolution designates October 7 of each year as
22 “William Still Day” in New Jersey.

23 William Still was born on October 7, 1821 in Burlington County,
24 New Jersey. His parents were born into slavery. His father
25 eventually bought his freedom and his mother escaped from slavery
26 in Maryland. William taught himself to read and write. William was
27 hired as Clerk for the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of
28 Slavery (“the Society”) and assisted hundreds of fugitive Africans
29 who came through Philadelphia on the Underground Railroad.
30 William was appointed Chairman of the Society’s Vigilance
31 Committee and became a major leader within Philadelphia’s free
32 Black community, personally providing room and board for many
33 Africans who escaped slavery and stopped in Philadelphia on their
34 way to Canada. William helped finance several of Harriet Tubman’s
35 trips to the South to liberate enslaved Africans.

36 William self-published The Underground Railroad wherein he
37 documented the stories of formerly enslaved Africans who escaped
38 slavery. The Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection houses
39 William’s writings dating from 1865 through 1899.