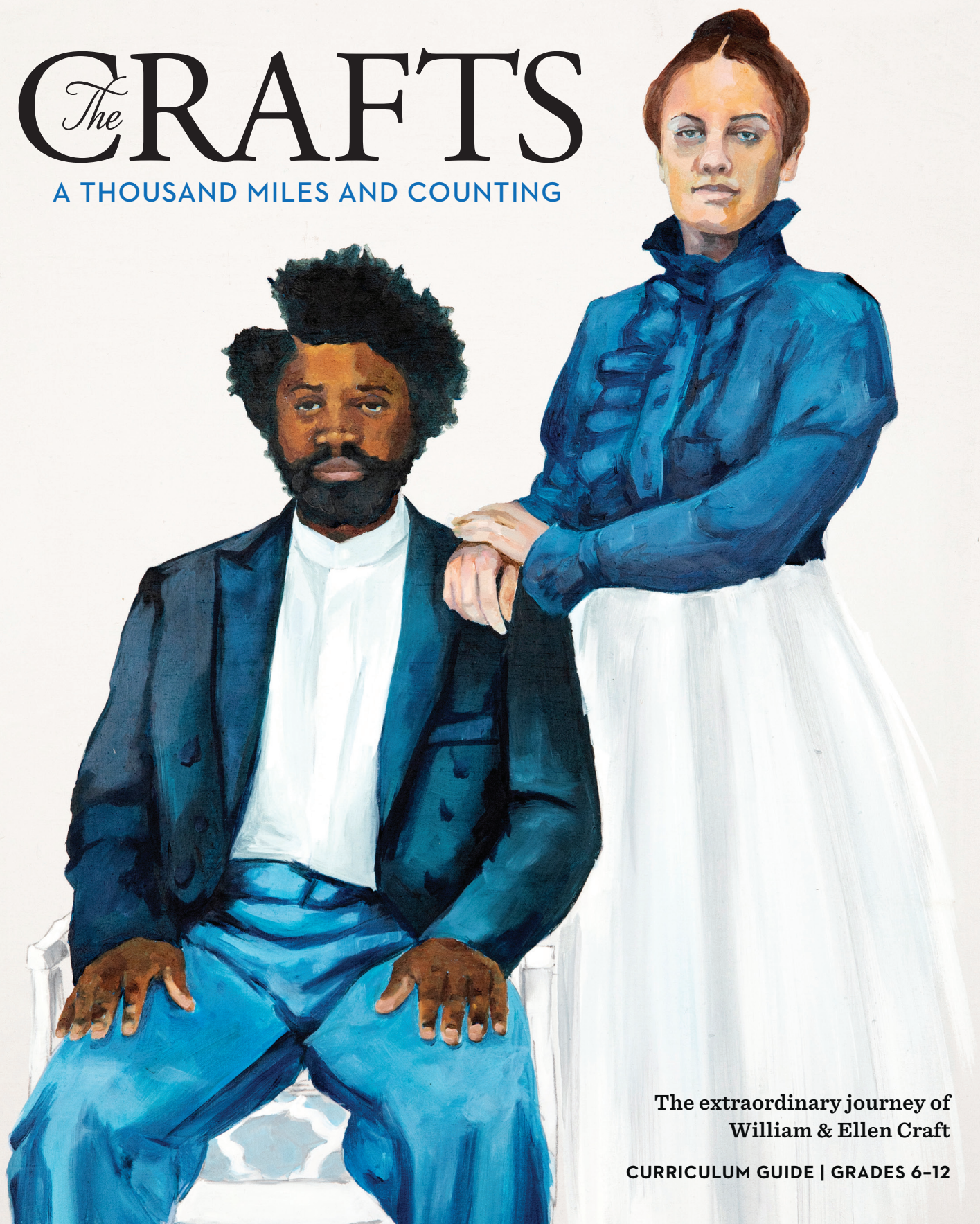


# *The* CRAFTS

A THOUSAND MILES AND COUNTING



The extraordinary journey of  
William & Ellen Craft

CURRICULUM GUIDE | GRADES 6-12



Ellen founded the Woodville Co-operative Farm School and devoted herself to educating for more than 18 years.



**“The story of William and Ellen Craft is one of incredible triumph in which two people, uplifted by their enduring love and commitment to each other, found the strength to defy the limitations unrighteously imposed upon them to pursue their inherent right to freedom.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Paula S. Wallace**  
SCAD President and Founder



# William & Ellen Craft



“Directly and indirectly, the fugitive slaves probably did more to bring about the abolition of slavery than any other one agency. The Northern people learned from the lips of these fugitives — from the strange, romantic, pathetic and tragic stories they told ... They learned from the sufferings of these fugitives, from the desperate efforts which they made to escape, that no matter what might be said to the contrary the slaves wanted to be free.”<sup>2</sup>

Booker T. Washington



“We thought of plan after plan,  
but they all seemed crowded  
with insurmountable difficulties.”<sup>3</sup>

William & Ellen Craft



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One December morning in 1848, William and Ellen Craft, an enslaved couple from Macon, Georgia, risked everything to live free. From Macon to Savannah, Charleston to Boston, they faced many dangers and the never-ending fear of discovery. Their story demonstrates courage, inventiveness, and determination in the relentless pursuit of what should've been theirs from birth: liberty.



# ..... An Extraordinary Path to Freedom .....



Ellen disguises herself as a white man.

## An Ingenious Idea

**The cornerstone** of their plan hinged on Ellen's light skin. With the right props, William was convinced that she could pose as a frail white man traveling to Philadelphia with William acting as her "servant." Most of their 1,000-mile journey would take them through states where people were enslaved. Despite the risks, the Crafts collected everything they needed. After days of planning, prayer, and trepidation, William cut Ellen's hair and she donned her disguise. Because she couldn't write, Ellen bound her arm in a sling in case she was required to sign any documents along the way.

## A Rocky Departure

**After quietly leaving their home**, they took separate paths and arrived at the train station. William boarded the carriage reserved for enslaved people while Ellen purchased the tickets for Savannah, their first stop. Once seated, they could not relax as each faced separate perils. William, from his window, saw the white cabinetmaker he worked for talking to the ticket-seller. The man looked at the passengers and into the carriages as William shrank in fear. They later learned that the man had a premonition of the Crafts' escape, but he didn't recognize Ellen in her disguise or see William cowered in the train's aft.

Once the train left the platform, Ellen looked around her carriage to discover that a man she'd known since childhood sat next to her! At first she thought Mr. Cray was there to seize her, but she remained calm and decided to pretend she was hard of hearing.

"It is a very fine morning, sir," he said. Ellen faced the window. He repeated the sentiment more loudly, which attracted other passengers. "I will make him hear," he said and shouted, "It is a very fine morning, sir." Ellen politely bowed, replied "yes," and turned back to the window. When someone said that it must be hard to be deaf, Mr. Cray nodded and said, "I shall not trouble that fellow any more."

## Nautical Journey

**Near dusk**, with Macon far behind, the train arrived at the Central of Georgia Railway terminal in Savannah. From there, they boarded the steamer General Clinch, bound for Charleston, South Carolina. Ellen retired to her cabin early to avoid suspicion, but the captain and some passengers thought her actions strange. They questioned William, who prepared flannels and medicine as an act to make them believe he was a caregiver for an ailing person. Afterward, he slept on deck.

In the morning at breakfast, the captain told Ellen, "You have a very attentive boy, sir; but you had better watch him like a hawk when you get on to the North." The Crafts



endured what seemed like endless discussion among the passengers of how abolitionists gave enslaved people “the hellish spirit of running away” and how to swear at them to make them “humble as dogs.”

Once in Charleston, William and Ellen stood in fear on the boat, afraid that someone from Macon might have telegraphed ahead to have them stopped. After all the passengers left the quay, Ellen’s clever disguise saw them easily settled into a hotel before they faced the next leg of their journey.

## Continued Dangers

**In the morning**, they prepared to board a steamer to Wilmington, North Carolina. The ticketing officer fiercely asked William, “Boy, do you belong to that gentleman?” William said that he did. The officer ordered Ellen to register their names. She indicated her “injury” and asked him to sign, but he refused. This attracted the attention of the other passengers. Luckily, a fellow traveler intervened, saying “I know his kin [friends] like a book,” and the Crafts boarded undetected. Later that night, the captain said to Ellen, “It was not out of any disrespect to you, sir; but they make it a rule to be very strict at Charleston.”

In Wilmington, they took the train bound for Richmond, Virginia. At a stop along the route, Ellen was invited to sit in a special compartment reserved for families, along with a man and his two daughters. Before the train started, the man questioned William about “the gentleman and his ailments.” For the remainder of the trip, Ellen had to endure polite conversation with the man and his daughters, at last feigning sickness to avoid further inquiries.

The Crafts had another anxious moment on the train from Richmond to Washington, D.C. An elderly woman mistook William for a man she’d enslaved who had become a fugitive. Ellen remained composed. “No, that is my boy,” she said. The woman persisted and yelled at William, “you runaway rascal!” Realizing that she’d mistaken his identity, she had a spirited conversation with another passenger about how her husband,

**“Had we not been sustained by a kind, and I sometimes think special, providence, we could never have overcome the mountainous difficulties.”<sup>5</sup>**

William & Ellen Craft

on his deathbed, had freed all the people he’d enslaved. Explaining her desire to nullify the will, she asserted, “I don’t believe there are any white laboring people in the world who are as well off as the slaves.” A young man argued with her at length. When she left the train, he told Ellen, “What a ... shame it is for that old whining hypocritical humbug to cheat the poor ... out of their liberty!”

The Crafts arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, the last Confederate port, on Christmas Eve after four days of travel. There, an officer interrogated the couple, intent on preventing their journey to freedom. “Right or no right, we shan’t let you go,” the officer said, as they tried to board their last train. A bell rang, signaling imminent departure. Under the crowd’s disapproving gaze, the officer relented: “I calculate it is alright; let this gentleman and slave pass.”

They reached Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on Christmas, finally free. William and Ellen rested there for three weeks and learned to read and write. They traveled next to the safety of Boston, Massachusetts.





## Not Quite Free

### When the Fugitive Slave Act passed in 1850,

Boston and other northern cities in free states no longer provided haven. It declared: *That any person who shall knowingly and willingly obstruct, hinder, or prevent such claimant ... from arresting such a fugitive from service or labor ... be subject to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars, and imprisonment not exceeding six months. ...*

Those who'd escaped were captured and returned to their last enslavers. Again, Ellen and William needed to run. They fled to Nova Scotia, Canada, before boarding the S.S. *Cambria* for England where newspapers heralded their arrival. Activists welcomed the couple and provided them with resources.

After settling near London, they each pursued diverse ventures that included teaching, operating a boarding house, and various commercial undertakings. William even traveled to the Kingdom of Dahomey, now known as Benin, Africa, pleading with kings to halt trade of enslaved people.

### GREAT EXCITEMENT IN BOSTON—THE RIGHT COURSE.

The attempt to enforce the Fugitive Law in Boston has given rise to more excitement than has been witnessed in any other city. The slave catchers are from Georgia, and it is understood that they obtained warrants from Judge Woodbury for the arrest of William Craft and his wife, alleged to have escaped several years ago from slavery in that State. The warrants having been placed in the hands of the United States Marshal, he undertook to serve them, but thus far, owing to the opposition of white and colored citizens, has been unable to accomplish his purpose. The newspapers report that the colored

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In 1860, the Crafts published *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, hailed in abolitionist circles. While early editions listed William as its only writer, later editions celebrated Ellen's joint authorship.

In a few days after we landed [in Liverpool, England], the Rev. Francis Bishop and his lady came and invited us to be their guests; to whose unlimited kindness and watchful care my wife owes, in a great degree, her restoration to health.

We enclosed our letter from the Rev. Mr. May to Mr. Estlin, who at once wrote to invite us to his house at Bristol. On arriving there, both Mr. and Miss Estlin received us as cordially as did our first good Quaker friends in Pennsylvania. It grieves me much to have to mention that he is no more. ... It was principally through the extreme kindness of Mr. Estlin ... and a few other good friends, that my wife and myself were able to spend a short time at a school in this country, to acquire a little of that education which we were so shamefully deprived of while in the house of bondage. ... During our stay at the school we received the greatest attention from every one; and I am particularly indebted to Thomas Wilson, Esq., of Bradmore House, Chiswick (who was then the master), for the deep interest he took in trying to get me on in my studies. We shall ever fondly and gratefully cherish the memory of our endeared and departed friend, Mr. Estlin. We, as well as the Anti-Slavery cause, lost a good friend in him.<sup>7</sup>



## The Heroes' Journey

**In 1868**, three years after the Civil War and almost two decades after they fled Macon, the couple returned to the U.S. and were revered and celebrated for their bravery. In 1870, they leased land in South Carolina, where Ellen established a school and William farmed. After a single season, the Ku Klux Klan burned their crops. Disappointed but defiant, the couple moved again—this time to Woodville, Georgia, where they purchased 1,800 acres. For more than 18 years, they successfully ran the only Black-owned farm in the county, as well as the Woodville Co-operative Farm School. In 1890, the Crafts moved to Charleston, where Ellen died the following year. William died nine years later, in 1900. Both had dedicated their lives to abolition, equality, and education; their legacies and calls to action lead others to pursue the same goals today.

### The Colored School of William and Ellen Crafts.

Liverpool. He returned to this country in 1870, and took measures to start a school for colored pupils about thirty miles from Savannah, at Hickory Hill. Here a building was hired, with a plantation, but the house was burned down the next year, as was believed, by an incendiary. Mr. Crafts and his wife are now engaged in getting up a school about nineteen miles from Savannah, at a place called Woodville. A plantation of eighteen hundred acres has been purchased by funds obtained from Boston, and the title-deeds just obtained.—*N. Y. Evening Post*.

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The Crafts were fervent crusaders for abolition, equality, and education.







Ellen boards the train disguised as a white man. William must board a separate carriage for enslaved people.



## Activity 1



The Crafts relied on their inventiveness, determination, daring, and devotion to fulfill their dreams. What parts of their story provide evidence of those characteristics?

**Write your observations below, then share and compare your responses with those of a friend.**

Characteristic	Evidence
Inventiveness	
Determination	
Daring	
Devotion	





## Activity 2



The moving first-person stories of the Crafts and other fugitives from slavery during the pre-Civil War era aroused sympathies and provided undeniable evidence supporting demands for emancipation. Demanding equality and an end to the institution of enslavement, the abolitionist movement united audiences through speaking events, publications, and lobbying. These advocacy efforts extended into activism through direct assistance to fugitives from slavery, usually in aiding escapes or in establishing new lives as free people.

[Supporting individuals or ideas]

### I can be an advocate by...

Example: Treating people with dignity

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**Advocacy and activism are tools that are used to create social and political change.**

**Identify a cause or issue that moves you to participate in a solution. List ways you can be both an advocate and an activist in its support.**

[Helping to achieve a goal]

### I can be an activist by...

Example: Starting a group that practices and promotes respectful dialogue

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**Reflect on the roles of activism and advocacy. Does one or the other seem best suited to your strengths?**

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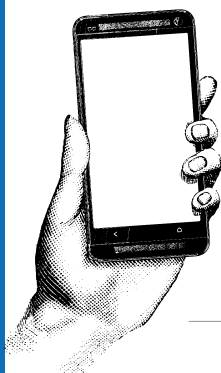
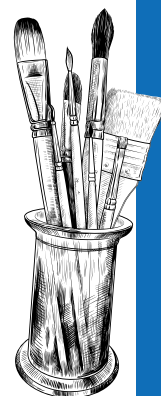
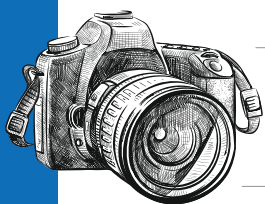


# Activity 3



In this guide, important events in the Crafts' lives are told through words, a map, newspaper reproductions, and illustrations. Combine these storytelling methods and others to create a first-person account of your life that includes your dreams for the future.

**Consider how stories are told by artists, including songwriters, photographers, film directors, and more. Choose events that are the most relevant to your story and use this page to brainstorm ideas for your project.**





## Craft Medallion

Installed inside the SCAD Museum of Art, the William and Ellen Craft bronze medallion commemorates the couple's daring escape to freedom. The medallion was cast by SCAD graduate Andrew MacDonald (M.F.A., illustration, 2014).



## Glossary

**abolitionist** n. 1. A supporter of the abolishment of slavery in the United States before the Civil War. 2. A person who supports the end of inhumane laws or practices.

**emancipation** n. The freeing of a person or persons from the control of another or others.

**enslavement** n. 1. The act or process of placing someone in captivity for purposes of servitude without the possibility of escape. 2. Being classified as property for the benefit of another person.

**Fugitive Slave Act** n. A law passed by Congress in 1850 that allowed the capture of African American people who had escaped to free states and made any assistance of their escape a federal violation.

**quay** n. A wharf, dock, or pier, often referring to one built of stone.

**steamer** n. A boat or ship that moves by steam power; oceanic steamers were equipped with sails. The *General Clinch*, the steamship by which the Crafts traveled overnight from Savannah to Charleston, was built in 1839 and measured 131 feet by 24 feet by 8 feet, 8 inches.

**telegraph** n. Before the invention of the telephone, the telegraph was the fastest means of sending messages, or telegrams, across long distances. Coded electrical pulses were sent to a receiving station, translated to text, and delivered to recipients.

**trepidation** n. The fearful expectation of a coming threat.

## Citations

<sup>1</sup> Paula S. Wallace, "SCAD celebrates the valor of William and Ellen Craft," press release, February 11, 2016, <https://www.scad.edu/about/news-press-and-recognition/2016-02-12-scad-celebrates-valor-william-and-ellen-craft>.

<sup>2</sup> Booker T. Washington, in Barbara McCaskill, *Love, Liberation, and Escaping Slavery: William and Ellen Craft in Cultural Memory* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Ellen and William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (1860). Project Gutenberg, [gutenberg.org/ebooks/585](http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/585).

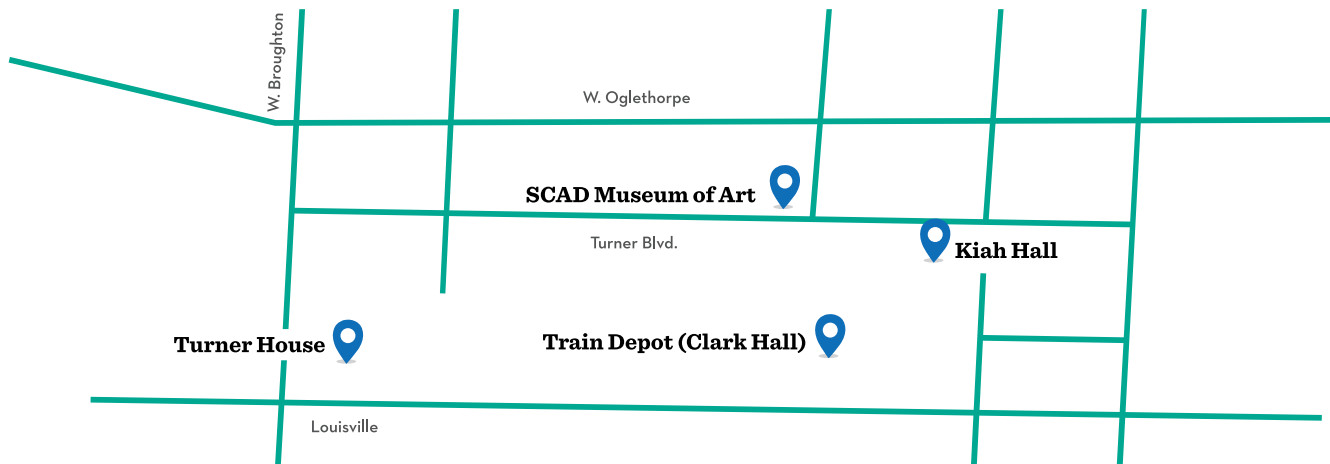
<sup>4</sup> "Daily U.S. Mail Steam-Packet Line," *Savannah Daily Republican*, December 23, 1849. Digital Library of Georgia, [gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn82015878/1849-12-23/ed-1/seq-1/](http://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn82015878/1849-12-23/ed-1/seq-1/).

<sup>5</sup> Ellen and William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.

<sup>6</sup> "Great Excitement in Boston—The Right Course," *The National Era*, November 7, 1850. Library of Congress, [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026752/1850-11-07/ed-1/seq-2/](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026752/1850-11-07/ed-1/seq-2/).

<sup>7</sup> Ellen and William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.

<sup>8</sup> "The Colored School of William and Ellen Craft," *Carson Daily Appeal*, April 9, 1874. Library of Congress, [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86076199/1874-04-09/ed-1/seq-2/](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86076199/1874-04-09/ed-1/seq-2/).



### SCAD Museum of Art

The SCAD Museum of Art is housed in an 1853 Savannah gray brick structure that was once a depot for the Central of Georgia Railway, which the Crafts traversed on their journey to freedom. A National Historic Landmark, it is the only surviving antebellum (pre-Civil War) railroad complex in the U.S.

### Clark Hall

Clark Hall was constructed in 1887 for the Central of Georgia Railway complex. Renovations in 1910 linked the building to the railway's sheds, which were constructed of Savannah gray brick in 1859 and used as a freight warehouse. Savannah gray bricks were made by hand by enslaved people at Hermitage Plantation.

Clark Hall is named for Robert G. Clark, thanks to a generous gift from the Clayco Foundation.



To learn more about the Crafts extraordinary journey, watch the SCAD-produced documentary *A Thousand Miles and Counting* at [scadmoa.org/crafts](http://scadmoa.org/crafts).

In the film, William and Ellen Craft's daring escape from slavery is retold by descendants of the Craft family—Gail DeCosta, Peggy Trotter Dammond Preacely, and Vicki Davis Williams—along with Dr. Walter O. Evans, a member of the SCAD Board of Visitors and benefactor of the SCAD Museum of Art's Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art, and Joël Díaz, director of the museum's Walter O. Evans Center for African American Studies.

### Kiah Hall

Like Clark Hall, Kiah Hall is one of the original buildings of the Central of Georgia Railway complex. It is named for artist, educator, cultural preservationist, and activist Virginia Kiah. In 1959, Kiah established a museum for Black art in her Savannah home. She was also a founding member of the National Conference of Artists.

Kiah had a close, decades-long relationship with SCAD and cared deeply about creating a positive and accepting environment for students to learn and create. In 1986, SCAD awarded her an honorary doctorate of humanities. A year later, she was appointed to the SCAD Board of Trustees where she would serve until 1997.

### Turner House

Turner House is named in honor of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, an influential Black Methodist minister who was born free and became a champion of emancipation. Turner moved to Savannah in the 1870s to serve as pastor of the St. Philip's African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was located near what is now the SCAD Museum of Art.

Artwork by Shanequa Gay, SCAD B.A., painting, 2015



Shanequa Gay is an Atlanta native whose work evaluates traditional storytelling to develop imaginative dialogues and alternative strategies for self-imaging. Through a multidisciplinary practice, she explores the historical and contemporary social concerns of hybrid cultures and spiritual worlds through the gaze of the African-Ascendant woman progenitor.



# SCAD

MUSEUM OF ART

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The Savannah College of Art and Design is a private, nonprofit, accredited university offering more than 100 academic degree programs across its locations in the U.S., Europe, and online via SCAD eLearning. For more information, visit [scad.edu](https://scad.edu).

SCAD is committed to using language that honors the humanity of all people. While this curriculum guide includes some historical terminology, SCAD encourages the use of the word enslavement when referring to the subjugation of William and Ellen Craft and all other enslaved people. By providing historical context for the enslavement of African Americans, SCAD seeks to play a central role in ensuring a just, equitable, and inclusive future. Learn more at [scad.edu/inclusion](https://scad.edu/inclusion).