

Harriet Tubman



Harriet Tubman was born into northern slavery in Maryland in 1820 and her sense of independence led her to escape in 1849. She devoted her life to helping to rescue other slaves, including her own family and non-family members. She worked with the 'Underground Railroad' which included hidden routes and homes to let escaped slaves move from location to location, offering food, shelter and clothes as they headed to freedom. Tubman played a major role in the abolitionist movement to allow Black Americans their freedom.

Tubman was born a slave in Maryland's Dorchester County around 1820. At age five or six, she began to work as a house servant. Seven years later she was sent to work in the fields. As part of a slave family, Harriet witnessed and experienced a lot of violence as well as the separation of her various family members as they were sold into slavery to other plantations. While she was still in her early teens, she suffered an injury that would follow her for the rest of her life. Always ready to stand up for someone else, Tubman blocked a doorway to protect another field hand from an angry overseer. The overseer picked up and threw a two-pound weight at the field hand. It fell short, striking Tubman on the head. She never fully recovered from the blow, which subjected her to spells in which she would fall into a deep sleep.

Around 1844 she married a free black named John Tubman and took his last name. (She was born Araminta Ross; she later changed her first name to Harriet, after her mother.) In 1849, in fear that she, along with the other slaves on the plantation, was to be sold, Tubman resolved to run away. She set out one night on foot. With some assistance from a friendly white woman, Tubman was on her way. She followed the North Star by night, making her way to Pennsylvania and soon after to Philadelphia, where she found work and saved her money. Once she



was there, she set about a personal mission to help other members of her family to escape, which eventually became a mission for all other slaves. The following year she returned to Maryland and escorted her sister and her sister's two children to freedom. She made the dangerous trip back to the South soon after to rescue her brother and two other men. On her third return, she went after her husband, only to find he had taken another wife. Undeterred, she found other slaves seeking freedom and escorted them to the North.

She was given the title of 'Conductor' of the Underground Railroad and was so successful that many called her "General Tubman" as well as "Moses" for her leadership qualities.