

Harriet Tubman 1822-1913

Harriet Tubman was born in Maryland as Araminta Ross in the spring of 1822. (She later changed her name to Harriet in honor of her mother, and to Tubman when she married.) She was the fourth of nine children and they were all slaves.

Harriet began as a house servant, but 7 years later she was a strong teenager, and was sent to work in the fields. But Harriet was strong in other ways as well. When a plantation overseer tried to beat another slave, Harriet blocked the doorway to protect the slave. The overseer picked up a two-pound weight and threw it at the slave. Instead the weight hit Harriet in the head. From this injury, Harriet suffered from seizures the rest of her life.



Harriet rescues her 70-year-old parents. From **The Animated Hero Classics: Harriet Tubman**

When Harriet was about 27-years-old, her slave owner died and his wife decided to sell some slaves to pay off mounting debts. Harriet decided it was time to take her freedom into her own hands. She escaped to the north, but her husband did not follow her. She began with a piece of paper given to her by a white neighbor with two names. She would soon find the first house on her path to freedom. At the this house she was put into a wagon, covered with a sack, and driven to her next destination. This dangerous system of people helping slaves at specific points along the way to a state free of slavery was called the "Underground Railroad."

When Harriet finally made it to the "free" state of Pennsylvania (where there was no slavery), she went to Philadelphia, where she found work and saved her

money. This was the first time in her entire life that she was paid for her work!

Within a year Harriet secretly returned to Maryland to bring her sister and her two children to freedom. The trip was very dangerous and she risked her life to save the lives of her family.

But Harriet wasn't finished. She made the trip back again to rescue her brother and two other men. When Harriet travelled back the third time, she went to look for her husband, only to find that he had taken another wife. Instead, she found other slaves seeking freedom and led them to the north.

Again and again Harriet returned to the South to help slaves escape. Harriet would begin her escapes on Saturday night, knowing that notices about runaway slaves would not be placed in the newspaper until Monday morning. If she encountered slave hunters, Harriet would turn back south until they lost her trail. Sometimes Harriet even carried a gun that she used to urge those in her group to keep going. When they became tired and thought they could travel no further, she showed them the gun and said, "You'll be free or die." A live runaway could do great harm by going back, but "a dead one could tell no secrets."

By the time Harriet was in her early 40s, there was a \$40,000 reward for her capture. But nothing could stop Harriet. She traveled into the south 19 times and led 300 slaves to freedom. She even rescued her 70-year-old parents. Harriet became known as an American "Moses." She died in 1913 at the age of 93.



Credit: "Portrait of Harriet Tubman." Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University