

Harriet Tubman

Abolitionist, Freedom Fighter

Civil War Issue

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Harriet Tubman, (Araminta Green Ross) was born a slave on a plantation in Maryland. Her father was Benjamin Ross and her mother's maiden name was Harriet Green. Harriet was 22 years old when she married John Tubman, a freed slave.

In 1849 when Harriet was 29 years old, she heard rumors that she was about to be sold and using the Underground Railroad for the first time, she fled to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In December of 1850, Harriet made her way to Baltimore, Maryland, from where she led her sister and two children to freedom.

The Underground Railroad was a league of activist antislavery individuals who hid the runaway slaves, gave them food, shelter and clothing, and then conducted them to the next safe shelter. The journey was the first of 19 increasingly dangerous and arduous trips into Maryland, where over the next decade, she conducted over 300 fugitive slaves along the Underground Railroad to Canada. By her extraordinary courage, ingenuity, persistence, and iron discipline, which she enforced upon her charges, she became the railroad's most famous conductor and was known as the "Moses of her people."

Rewards offered by slaveholders for Harriet Tubman's capture eventually totaled \$40,000. Abolitionists, however, celebrated her courage. John Brown, who consulted her about his own plans for the raid on Harpers's Ferry, referred to her as "General Tubman". Harriet was also a friend of the well known abolitionists, Ralph Waldo Emerson and William H. Seward. From 1862 to 1865 she served as a scout and spy, as well as nurse and laundress, for Union forces in South Carolina. During one campaign, she helped free more than 750 slaves. After the Civil War ended, she was instrumental in establishing schools in North Carolina for freedmen. In 1857 she led her own aged parents to freedom and in 1858 placed them on a small farm she bought near Auburn, New York.

After the Civil War, Harriet settled in Auburn with her parents and began taking in orphans and the elderly, a practice that eventually led to the foundation of the Harriet Tubman Home for Indigent Aged Negroes. The home later attracted the support of former Abolitionist comrades and the citizens of Auburn and it continued in existence for some years after her death. In the late 1860s and again in the late 1890s Harriet applied for a federal pension for her Civil War services. Some 30 years after her service a private bill providing her a pension of \$20 a month was passed by Congress.

Harriet Tubman died on March 19, 1913 in Auburn, New York.

Sources:

Encyclopedia Britannica

Encyclopedia Africana