



Harriet Tubman (Araminta Harriet Ross; 1820 – March 10, 1913)

BEST KNOWN FOR

Harriet Tubman escaped slavery to become a leading abolitionist. She led hundreds of enslaved people to freedom along the route of the Underground Railroad.

Quote

“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say; I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

– Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman was an African-American abolitionist, humanitarian, and Union Spy during the American Civil War. Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland in 1820. As a child masters to whom she was hired out beat her. Early in her life, Harriet suffered a severe head wound when she was hit by a heavy metal weight because when she was asked to help restrain a runaway slave, she refused. The injury caused disabling seizures, narcoleptic attacks, and headaches, which occurred throughout her life (Tubman, 2014).

In 1849, Harriet Tubman initially escaped to Philadelphia with two of her brothers, Henry and Ben. A notice of their escape was published offering large reward for their return. Harriet's brothers started to have second thoughts and decided to return to the plantation. However, Harriet had no plans to remain in bondage as she called it. Therefore, after seeing her brothers home safely, Harriet continued her journey alone traveling nearly 90 miles using the **Underground Railroad** to Philadelphia. Feeling relieved as she crossed into the Free State of Pennsylvania Harriet Tubman stated, “When I found I had crossed the line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven” (§ 8).

In December 1850, Harriet received a warning that her niece and her two children were going to be sold. Instead of remaining in the safety, Harriet Tubman decided to go back to rescue her family and other slaves. Traveling by night, this was the first of many trips by Harriet Tubman, who earned the nickname “Moses” for her leadership. “Over time, she was able to guide her parents, several siblings, and about 60 others to freedom” (Tubman, 2014, ¶ 9). Harriet Tubman made more than nineteen trips to rescue more than 300 slaves using the **Underground Railroad**. “One family member who declined to make the journey was Harriet’s husband, John, who preferred to stay in Maryland with his new wife” (Tubman, 2014, ¶ 9). The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, required law officials in Free States to aid efforts to recapture slaves. Therefore, Harriet Tubman guided slaves farther north into Canada, where slavery had been abolished in 1834 (Tubman, 2014).

Harriet Tubman was well known and respected and she became an American icon in the years after she died. Harriet Tubman was one of the most famous civilians in American history before the Civil War. Harriet Tubman continues to inspire generations of Americans struggling for civil rights with her bravery and bold action.

Reference

Tubman, H. (2014). *The Biography Channel website*. Retrieved from <http://www.biography.com/people/harriet-tubman-9511430>.

Dr. Paula J. Simpson