



Harriet Tubman Biography (1820–1913)

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

Who Was Harriet Tubman?

Born into slavery in Maryland, Harriet Tubman escaped to freedom in the North in 1849 to become the most famous "conductor" on the Underground Railroad. Tubman risked her life to lead hundreds of family members and other slaves from the plantation system to freedom on this elaborate secret network of safe houses. A leading abolitionist before the American Civil War, Tubman also helped the Union Army during the war, working as a spy among other roles.

After the Civil War ended, Tubman dedicated her life to helping impoverished former slaves and the elderly. In honour of her life and by popular demand, in 2016, the U.S. Treasury Department announced that Tubman will replace Andrew Jackson on the centre of a new \$20 bill.

Early Life and Family

Tubman's date of birth is unknown, although it probably occurred between 1820 and 1825. She was one of nine children born between 1808 and 1832 to enslaved parents in Dorchester County, Maryland. Her mother, Harriet "Rit" Green, was owned by Mary Pattison Brodess. Her father, Ben Ross, who was owned by Anthony Thompson (Thompson and Brodess eventually married).

Physical violence was a part of daily life for Tubman and her family. The violence she suffered early in life caused permanent physical injuries. Tubman later recounted a particular day when she was lashed five times before breakfast. She carried the scars for the rest of her life.

The most severe injury occurred when Tubman was an adolescent. Sent to a dry-goods store for supplies, she encountered a slave who had left the fields without permission. The man's overseer demanded that Tubman help restrain the runaway. When Tubman refused, the overseer threw a two-pound weight that struck her in the head. Tubman endured seizures, severe headaches for the rest of her life. She also experienced intense dream states, which she classified as religious experiences.

The Underground Railroad

Between 1850 and 1860, Tubman made 19 trips from the South to the North following the network known as the Underground Railroad. She guided more than 300 people, including her parents and several siblings, from slavery to freedom, earning the nickname “Moses” for her leadership.

Tubman first encountered the Underground Railroad when she used it to escape slavery herself in 1849. Following a bout of illness and the death of her owner, Tubman decided to escape slavery in Maryland for Philadelphia. She feared that her family would be further severed and was concerned for her own fate as a sickly slave of low economic value.



Death

Tubman died of pneumonia on March 10, 1913, surrounded by friends and family, at around the age of 93. As Tubman aged, the head injuries sustained early in her life became more painful and disruptive. She underwent brain surgery at Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital to alleviate the pains and "buzzing" she experienced regularly. Tubman was eventually admitted into the rest home named in her honour. She was buried with military honours at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn.



HARRIET TUBMAN
CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST | C. 1820–1913

Born into slavery, Harriet Tubman escaped to the North in 1849 and became a leading abolitionist, guiding numerous slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad. She was buried with military honors in Auburn, New York.

QUICK FACTS

- Physically abused as a slave
- Traveled 90 miles to freedom
- Guided other slaves to safety
- Civil War spy
- Conducted Underground Railroad for eight years

"I had reasoned this out in my mind, there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other."

BIOGRAPHY

Create a piece of artwork like this one for the life of Harriet Tubman