



Harriet TUBMAN

(1822 - 1913)

Harriet Tubman was an African American woman who escaped slavery and became one of the leading figures helping other slaves escape to freedom.

Her Early Life

Harriet was born, Armintha 'Minty' Ross, in Dorchester, Maryland. Her parents were slaves. From a young age, she was made to work as a house slave and later on she was forced to work on the plantation fields. She worked there until she escaped.

During this time, Harriet suffered physical violence from her owners.

The most serious of these injuries occurred when she was a teenager. Harriet had been sent to collect supplies from a dry goods store, and she came across a slave who had left the fields without permission. The slave owner ran out, demanding that Harriet help him capture this slave. She refused, allowing the slave to escape. In a final attempt to catch the slave, the slave owner tried to throw a heavy weight at him. He missed, and hit Harriet's head instead. This accident caused her to suffer seizures, severe headaches and intense dreams for the rest of her life.

In 1844, Harriet married a freed slave named John Tubman.

The brave escape

In 1849, Harriet's owner died from an illness. In fear of being sold away and separated from her family, Harriet and her brothers, Ben and Henry, decided to escape. Not too long afterwards, a notice was posted for their capture with a reward of \$300. Scared of what would happen to them if they were found, Ben and Henry decided to go back to the plantation. Harriet however, decided to carry on, and using the networks of the Underground Railroad, she fled to Philadelphia.

The Underground Railroad

During this time there were states in the northern United States where slavery was outlawed. The Underground Railroad was a network of helpful people, safe houses (called 'stations') and secret routes to help slaves escape.

The people that helped the slaves escape were called 'conductors'. Slaves would move from station to station at night, hiding in the woods or sneaking onto trains until they finally reached the north and freedom.



The 13-cent Harriet Tubman stamp was issued on February 1, 1978.

Moses of the Slaves

Harriet soon began to miss her family and friends in Maryland. The following year, news came that her sister and two children were to be sold. Harriet returned to Maryland and led them to freedom. This was the beginning of her mission to help to free slaves. She became a conductor in the Underground Railroad.

Harriet led 19 different escapes, helping around 300 slaves to escape to freedom.

There was a reward for her capture, but Harriet was never caught. She was brave and clever, and had learned a few tricks that made the escapes successful. These included escaping on a Saturday night. Runaway posters were not printed until Monday mornings, so this meant that slaves had extra time on their side to make their escape.

Harriet was nicknamed "Moses" because she led her people out of slavery, just like the Moses in the Bible did.

Guide, Spy and Leader

During the American Civil War, Harriet worked with the North to defeat the South. She believed joining forces would ensure the freedom of all black men, women and children from slavery.

She worked as a nurse to look after sick and injured soldiers, and also helped to organize a military campaign.

In 1863, she worked alongside Colonel James Montgomery, and helped as advisor and guide in the campaign to free slaves at the plantations along the Combahee River. This attack freed over 750 slaves.

Harriet campaigning for women’s rights

Harriet’s life was not easy, and even in later life she faced financial struggles. She continued to campaign, and focused her energies on women’s right to vote. She worked alongside other campaigners such as Susan B. Anthony.

Harriet as a symbol

Harriet is a symbol for the African American people today, as her efforts freed hundreds of slaves. Although she was not a very tall woman, she was brave, and she made great achievements. Monuments have been created to celebrate her work. In 1978, the United States Postal Service issued a stamp in honour of Harriet Tubman.



HARRIET TUBMAN.

A woodcut of Tubman in her Civil War clothing

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