

HARRIET TUBMAN

Civil Rights Activist (c. 1820–1913)



Harriet Tubman was born to enslaved parents in Dorchester County, Maryland, and originally named Araminta Harriet Ross. While the year of Araminta's birth is unknown, it probably occurred between 1820 and 1825.

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

The line between freedom and slavery was hazy for Tubman and her family. Harriet Tubman's father, Ben, was freed from slavery at the age of 45, as stipulated in the will of a previous owner. Although similar manumission stipulations applied to Rit and her children, the individuals who owned the family chose not to free them.

Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery in 1849, fleeing to Philadelphia. Tubman decided to escape following a bout of illness and the death of her owner in 1849. She initially left Maryland on September 17, 1849.

Tubman made use of the network known as the Underground Railroad to travel nearly 90 miles to Philadelphia. She crossed into the free state of Pennsylvania with a feeling of relief and awe, and recalled later: "When I found I had crossed that 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."

Rather than remaining in the safety of the North, Tubman made it her mission to rescue her family and others living in slavery.

She was able to guide her parents, several siblings and about 60 others to freedom, who earned the nickname "Moses" for her leadership.

The dynamics of escaping slavery changed in 1850, with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law. Law enforcement officials in the North were compelled to aid in the capture of slaves, regardless of their personal principles. In response to the law, Tubman re-routed the Underground Railroad to Canada, which prohibited slavery categorically.

In December 1851, Tubman guided a group of 11 fugitives northward. There is evidence to suggest that the party stopped at the home of abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass.

Harriet Tubman remained active during the Civil War. Working for the Union Army as a cook and nurse, Tubman quickly became an armed scout and spy. The first woman to lead an armed expedition in the war, she guided the Combahee River Raid, which liberated more than 700 slaves in South Carolina.

Adapted from Harriet Tubman Biography - <http://www.biography.com/people/harriet-tubman-9511430>