

Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman was born between 1820 and 1825 in Dorchester County, Maryland in the United States. She was born into slavery, as her mother was already a slave and owned by Mary Pattison Brodess. Harriet's father was also a slave, but was freed at the age of 45 due to his owner's wishes after his death.

Harriet's Early Life

Harriet's real name was Araminta Harriet Ross. Her early life was very hard. She was a field hand slave, so had to work out in the plantation fields every day in the burning sun. She was often whipped and beaten. Once, a lead weight was thrown at her and it hit her head. After this, she suffered terrible headaches and narcolepsy.

Growing up

In 1844, Araminta married a free black man called John Tubman. Not much is known about John. It was around this time that Araminta changed her name to Harriet.



Born

Around 1820

Died

10th March, 1913

Age

Approximately 93 years old

Narcolepsy

An illness where the sufferer falls asleep very suddenly at any time in the day, whatever they are doing.

Five years later, Harriet escaped slavery with two of her brothers. She decided to leave after her owner died. She left Maryland with her brothers on 17th September, 1849 but her husband would not leave with her.

However, once they had left her brothers had second thoughts, so Harriet made sure they got safely back to the plantation and she left again, heading for Pennsylvania, which was a free state.

Escape

Harriet used the Underground Railroad to travel nearly 140km to Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. She crossed to the free state with a great feeling of relief and awe. She said,

"I found when I 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."

Harriet's Mission

Harriet made it her mission to rescue family and friends from living in slavery. Over the following years, she returned to Maryland at night to guide her parents, siblings and others to safety.

She was always risking her own life. A reward was set for anyone who captured her. By 1860, she had returned to the plantation 19 times and saved over 300 people from slavery. She earned the nickname 'Moses', as she was compared to the man in the Bible who led slaves to freedom.

Harriet would carry a gun with her for defence and she was not afraid to show it to enemies on her numerous trips. She was proud that she had never lost a fugitive or allowed one to turn back. She always had her faith in God too.

Harriet's Achievements

Harriet saved over 1000 people. She continued her good work during the American Civil War, when she became a nurse and spy. She passed information onto Colonel Montgomery, passing unnoticed through the enemy territory. She had very little money, so earned her living through selling pies, gingerbread and root beer.

After the war, she returned to Auburn in New York and helped free black people begin their new lives. She turned her home into the Home for Indigent and Aged Negroes, where her parents and many others lived their last days.

She was a poor woman and contracted pneumonia. Unable to pay for medicine, she died in 1913, aged around 93.

She had shown such courage and care for others, and not thought about the danger she was in herself. She had saved so many lives and changed people's thoughts about slavery. She made them see it was wrong and helped slaves see themselves as people with self-worth.

Harriet Tubman Questions

Answer the following questions in as much detail as you can and in full sentences.

1. How was Araminta's father freed from slavery?

2. Why was Araminta's early life hard?

3. What year did Araminta get married and what changed for her?

4. Why did Harriet take her brothers back to the plantation after they all escaped?

5. Why did Harriet head for Pennsylvania?

6. How did Harriet feel when she crossed the line to Pennsylvania?

7. Why did Harriet keep returning to Maryland?

8. What was the reward set up for?

9. Why was she given the nickname 'Moses'?

10. What two things helped her on her journeys?

11. Why do you think she turned her home into a Home for Indigent and Aged Negroes?

12. What do you think the most important thing was that Harriet achieved?
