

# HARRIET TUBMAN



Harriet Tubman, one of nine children, was born a slave in Dorchester County, Maryland, in the 1820s. Her original name was Araminta. Her childhood was characterized by the separation of her family, when three of her sisters were sold to distant plantations, and by physical violence, which left Harriet with permanent scars and debilitating physical injuries. Her most severe injury was inflicted as punishment for refusing to help restrain a runaway slave. She was struck in the head with a two-pound weight, causing permanent brain damage that left Araminta to suffer seizures, severe headaches, narcolepsy, and intense dream states (which she considered religious experiences) for the rest of her life.

Araminta's father was freed from slavery by a previous owner's will when he was 45; the freedom of the rest of the family had been similarly provided for, but Araminta and the others were not freed. Powerless to contest, Araminta's father remained with his family, continuing to work as a timber estimator and foreman for his former owners. There were many free African-American people on Maryland's eastern shore at that time, and many families were composed of both free and enslaved members. In 1844, the still enslaved Araminta married a free black man named John Tubman, and changed her name to Harriet. It's unknown whether or not John and Harriet had any children; if they did, they would have been slaves, since a child's status was dictated by that of the mother.

Five years later, after the illness and death of her owner, Harriet Tubman escaped to Philadelphia. Initially, her two brothers, Ben and Henry, accompanied her, but when a \$300 reward was offered for their return, the brothers felt it would be in their best interests to return to the plantation. Harriet, who had no intention of remaining a slave, continued on alone. The Underground Railroad, a network of safe stopping places, already existed, and Harriet made use of it to travel the 90 miles to Philadelphia. About crossing into freedom, she later said: "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."