

## MAIN MENU

- » HOME
- » GENERAL TUBMAN
- » BOOKER T. WASHINGTON  
» TRIBUTE TO HARRIET TUBMAN
- » FREEDOM TOUR
- » MEMORIAM
- » HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS
- » PHOTO GALLERY
- » HARRIET TUBMAN DAY
- » HERITAGE PRODUCTION CO.
- » HARRIET TUBMAN'S  
» COLORING BOOK CLUB
- » DESCENDANTS:  
» EVELYN ROSS TAYLOR
- » THE DEDICATION OF THE  
» HARRIET TUBMAN HOME  
» VISIT THE HARRIET TUBMAN  
» HOME
- » WILMINGTON FRIENDS  
» MEETING HOUSE
- » THOMAS GARRETT
- » THOMAS GARRETT DAY
- » HARRIET TUBMAN'S  
» CIVIL WAR PENSION  
» APPOQUINIMINK MEETING  
» HOUSE
- » CAMDEN MEETING HOUSE
- » STAR HILL A.M.E. CHURCH
- » TUBMAN-GARRETT  
» RIVERFRONT PARK
- » TUBMAN-GARRETT PLAQUE
- » CLEARFIELD FARM
- » CHARLES BLOCKSON
- » KOSTMAYER - H.R. 3863
- » SEN. PAUL SIMON (IL) S. 2809
- » DELAWARE

## They Called Her Moses

### HARRIET TUBMAN

By MARGARET BARTON DRIGGS  
Photos by AARON LEVIN

Some likened her to Joan of Arc for her charisma and simple faith. She had dreams and visions, and extraordinary things happened to her. She led a charmed life through incredible dangers.

John Brown called her "General"; Frederick Douglass felt humble in her presence; Queen Victoria honored her with an invitation to England and the gift of a silk shawl. The Quaker Thomas Garrett said of her, "If she had been a white woman, she would have been heralded as the greatest woman of her age." To her own people she was, simply, "Moses", and their haunting spirituals—veiled messages—enlarged the metaphor to sing of Jordan and the Promised Land.

Harriet Ross Tubman was an illiterate slave born in the Bucktown district of Dorchester County on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. She escaped to freedom, alone, in 1849. For the next 11 years she returned to the South 19 times to lead more than 300 slaves north across the Mason-Dixon Line and sometimes into Canada.

Martin Lake, a fellow slave and friend of Harriet Tubman, took another path, one that led him north to freedom and south again to the plantation he had worked in slavery. He left a slave and returned to become master of the land. Descendants of Martin Lake and of other Bucktown slaves, living links to the courage of Harriet Tubman, gather in Bucktown twice a year to commemorate their forebears and recall their Bucktown roots.

At the junction of Bucktown, Green Briar, and Bepitch Ferry Roads, 12 miles southeast of Cambridge, stands a quaint country store. Beside the dot on the map the word Bucktown appears. Bucktown is not really a town, but a farming district, and the store's only patrons seem to be the great white roosters and gray guinea hens that huddle in its lee on a winter's day.

Across the road, long ago, stood another store, once the scene of a terrible drama played out between slaves and master—perhaps not an uncommon scene for its age, but one which, unlike so many others, did not escape history. The heroine was a 16-year-old slave girl named Harriet, destined to become as a Moses to her people.

A marker placed by the Maryland Civil War Centennial Commission stands in a field on Green Briar Road just a mile west of the store. Oral tradition has it that this is the site of the Brodess plantation where Harriet Tubman was born in 1820. Her parents, Benjamin and Harriet Green Ross, then slaves of Edward Brodess, were the grandchildren of Negroes who had come shackled from Africa in 1725. They were Ashanti, of the region by that name in what is now Central Ghana on the west coast of Africa.

It was a fall evening in 1835, and the slaves were cleaning up wheat and husking corn. Jim, the slave of a farmer named Barnett, seeing the chance for escape, ran to the Bucktown store. Harriet followed him. So did McCracken, the overseer. McCracken cornered Jim and demanded that Harriet help capture and tie up the runaway. Harriet refused. Instead, as Jim went out the door, she closed it and stood against it, blocking McCracken's pursuit.

## FREEDOM TRAIL SB 186

- » **ADVISORY COMMITTEE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD UNDERGROUND RAILROAD** »
- » **NPS UNDERGROUND RAILROAD STUDY UNDERGROUND RAILROAD** »
- » **CONGRESSMAN LOUIS STOKES H.R. 1635**
- » **SEN. MOSELEY-BRAUN - S. 887**
  
- » **UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM**
  
- » **NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER**
  
- » **WILLIS PHELPS U.S.C.T. 1862-1865**
  
- » **FREE FOR CHRISTMAS BY LERONE BENNETT, JR**
  
- » **UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MARYLAND (PDF)**
  
- » **GRANT HELPS BRING TUBMAN TO LIFE**
  
- » **NEW STATUE FOR HARRIET TUBMAN**
  
- » **HARRIET TUBMAN ORGANIZATION CAMBRIDGE, MARYLAND**
  
- » **CONTACT US**



Picture courtesy of Cayuga Museum (Click picture to enlarge)



Harriet Tubman "The Conductor" By Carl A. Pierce (click picture to enlarge)



In Memory of Harriet Tubman (click picture to enlarge)

The enraged overseer picked up a 2-pound weight from the counter and hurled it at her, hitting her in the forehead. The blow nearly killed her, and disabled her for months. She was left with an ugly scar, and she was never afterwards free of a strange affliction that caused her to have sudden, unexpected sleeping seizures.

Harriet had reason enough to be bitter already. She had seen her sisters Linah and Sophy sold off the plantation just the year before. She herself was only seven when she was sent away from her family to care for a baby. "I was so little," Harriet remembered, "that I had to sit on the floor and have the baby put in my lap, and that baby was always in my lap except when it was sleep or when its mother was feeding it." She balked at working in the house, resented whippings, and became known as a sullen, insolent girl, good only for work in the fields. The idea of escaping took hold early.

Dr. Virgie Lake Camper, of Cambridge, a descendant of several slave families, recalls that her grandfather, Martin Lake, many times heard Harriet say that she planned to escape. But it was not until 1849, after five years of marriage to John Tubman, a free man, that she finally left.

For years she had hoarded her meager earnings from hiring out, and selling vegetables with the idea of buying her freedom, only to find that her value had increased far beyond her ability to pay.

John Tubman, whom Martin Lake characterized as a weak, timid man, had no interest in Harriet's desire to be free. Ironically, it was through John Tubman that she learned that she already had a possible claim to freedom. A clause in the will of her mother's former owner, had left Harriet's mother to a Mary Pattison "to serve her and her issue" until the slave should become 45. The phrase seemed to signify manumission (formal emancipation), but was not clearly enough worded to be interpreted as such in the courts of that day. So Harriet's mother and all her children remained slaves. The knowledge that the whole family could have been free but for a technicality, rankled most in Harriet, who had already suffered so many indignities and disappointments. Her bitterness and determination to escape intensified.

Then came rumors that Harriet and two of her brothers were to be sold to a cotton plantation in the deep South. At last, Harriet fled but, legend has it, not before stopping by a window of the house where her parents were working to sing: "I'm bound to leave you/ Bound for Jordan's other side." With full knowledge of her meaning they went on working as if nothing had happened, while their daughter slipped away.

In the years before Edward Brodess had come of age, Harriet had served his administrator, Dr. Anthony C. Thompson, who hitched her to a plow and proudly showed her off to his friends as being strong as any man. Now, she put this strength, as well as her knowledge of nature, to its best use. She followed the North Star and observed on which side of the trees the moss grew. With the guidance of an unknown Quaker woman in Dorchester County, she found her way to Philadelphia and freedom via the Underground Railroad. Once there, she did not turn her back on the past. Instead, she bent all her efforts toward rescuing those she had left behind.

"I was free and they should be free," she said. "I would make a home in the North and bring them there." In the decade that followed, Harriet returned to Dorchester County time and time again, swiftly and silently emptying the county's plantations of their slaves.

When the chanting of "Steal Away," "Go Down Moses," and "I Looked Over Jordan" went up among the slaves and continued for days, and spread from hut to hut, from house to house and from plantation to plantation, it was understood, but never said, that Harriet was on her way. Those who could were to steal away to the designated spot on the first of the month or at the new moon, and she would lead them away. She had no chariot, not could she part rivers, but she had her own two



good legs and knowledge of the woods and the route, and of people who helped along the way. She would come in the night, gather up her charges and leave again quickly. It is said that she inspired the great spiritual "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" – words indeed well suited for passing along the information that Harriet was making another swing through the South.

In her heart, Harriet carried the same kind of wrath that made Moses break the tablets. She carried a shotgun with her on her missions, and she would say to her charges, "If you don't follow me when I go out, I'm going to kill you. Go forward and live or turn back and die." They always went. Along the Underground Railroad it was boasted that Harriet's train never ran off the track and she never lost a passenger.

Echoing Patrick Henry's denunciation of England's rule in America, Harriet said of herself and for all her race: "There's two things I've got a right to and these are death or liberty; one or the other I mean to have. No one will take me back alive. I shall fight for my liberty and when the time is come for me to go, the Lord will let them kill me." But by the grace of God and her own special genius, the time never came.

In 1857, with the financial backing of Senator William Henry Seward, she bought a farm in Auburn, New York, and settled her parents there. Later, Seward, as Secretary of State, petitioned Congress in vain in her behalf for compensation for her wartime services.

During the Civil War she served as spy, nurse, and liaison between the Union Army and freed slaves. As a spy, she penetrated Confederate lines, leading raids that destroyed Confederate property and liberated slaves. As matron of the Colored Hospital at Fort Monroe, Virginia, she improved sanitary conditions, reorganized the kitchen, and expedited the flow of supplies.

After the war she returned to Auburn to establish a home for aged and needy blacks. She participated in the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, supported the temperance movement, and worked on behalf of women's suffrage. Having given everything she owned to help her people, she died penniless in March, 1913, at the age of ninety-three, a free American, surrounded by people she had delivered from bondage and helped to a better life. Her death made headlines in newspapers around the world.

Harriet Tubman's lifetime of courage reached beyond the slaves she helped. Dr. Virgie Camper's grandfather, Martin Lake, inspired by Harriet's success, escaped on his own. Knowing the way himself, he did not wait for Harriet.

Lake made at least three attempts before he succeeded. Usually after a thwarted attempt, he would be whipped. Other slaves administered the whipping so that they would learn a lesson from it. After the whipping they were made to rub salt into the wounds. There were no hard feelings, Martin told his sons, because slaves were forced to do what they did.

"Now my granddaddy was a strong, big, sort of wicked man," says Virgie Camper. "He wasn't afraid. Daddy used to tell us how his father would walk at night and sleep during the daytime in culverts. A culvert under a bridge was the only safe place to be. Once, he hid up in a hollow tree. His pursuers trailed him to the foot of the tree with dogs and built a fire at the bottom to smoke him out. He didn't say what he did so he wouldn't sneeze, but he didn't sneeze, and he stayed in there." His pursuers eventually gave up and left.

During the Civil War Martin Lake served in the Union Army. Afterwards he returned to Bucktown and settled there. He married Amanda Camper who, born in 1858, was many years younger than he. Their only son, Monroe Lake, was 12 years old when his father died. "So my daddy," says Mrs. Camper, "hired out and took care of his mother and sisters. He hired out to the Brodess family faithfully through a difficult period in their lives. "And as a result of that, the Brodesses gave them each

a little piece of land. I think they gave each child an acre." The land is on Green Briar Road, adjoining the land where Harriet Tubman was born.

Monroe, too, sank his roots deep into Bucktown. He worked the Brodess farm and surrounding land, buying up, whenever he could, land that Martin and Harriet had worked in slavery. When he died in 1975, he left a substantial amount of the Brodess plantation to his surviving sons.

Left on the land now are few traces of the human struggle that took place there in the last century. There are the Negro graves, separate from the white, many of them unmarked and forgotten; the faces of the living, with familial traces of those Pinders, Campers, Clashes, Jacksons, Lakes, and others who worked side by side with Harriet; there is the little church. And there is a tradition stronger than any trace left on the land.

On the third Sunday of every June, old residents of the Bucktown district gather at Bazel's Methodist Episcopal Church for a service in memory of Harriet Tubman. It is one of the few times in the year that the old church is open now that the black population, with the exception of the Lake family, has moved away.

**Addie Clash Travers**, a retired businesswoman and civic leader, established Harriet Tubman Day in 1970, after being inspired by reading about Harriet's heroism. Mrs. Travers, born in Bucktown in 1913, two months before Harriet died in Auburn, New York, is related to Harriet through the Rosses.

---

Descendants of Martin Lake, a fellow slave and friend of Harriet Tubman, return twice each year to the Bucktown church in the District where their forebears lived. From left are: Monroe Lake, Jr., Fred Lake, Virgie Lake Camper, Addie Clash Travers, and Victoria Lake Waters. OPPOSITE. Photo of Harriet Tubman from the Enoch Pratt Collection.

FAR LEFT. A view today of the marsh at Scotland Creek, at the edge of the Lake property which was once owned by the Brodess family, Harriet Tubman's masters. It was one of Harriet's jobs as a child to guard muskrats here.

ABOVE. The Bazel Methodist Episcopal Church is the scene each June of a memorial service for Harriet Tubman.

LEFT. This historical marker stands at Bucktown for all to see and learn about Harriet Tubman's great contributions.

**Maryland Magazine – Summer 1980**  
**University of Maryland**  
**515 W. Lombard Street**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Floor**  
**Baltimore, MD 21201**  
**(410) 706 -7820**

**DORCHESTER COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**303 GAY STREET**  
**CAMBRIDGE, MD. 21613**