

# Harriet Beecher Stowe – American Abolitionist

In 1863 Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe at the White House and said, “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war.” He was referring to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which helped to divide the nation over the issue of slavery.

Noted author Harriet Beecher was born on June 14, 1811, in Litchfield, Connecticut. Her father, Lyman, was a prominent anti-slavery preacher, a founder of the American Bible Society and the father of 11 children. Her mother died when Harriet was only 4.

Harriet became an avid reader and a good student. One of her favorite places was her father’s study, where she would snuggle up in the corner with a good book by authors such as Cotton Mather and John Bunyan. Often she would sit and watch her father prepare his sermons.

When Harriet’s father became president of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Harriet went with him. She began her literary career in 1834 when she won a writing contest sponsored by the Western Monthly Magazine. Afterward, she became a regular contributor of stories and essays to various periodicals.

In 1836 Harriet married the widower Calvin Stowe and had seven children. Her first book, *The Mayflower*, was written in 1843.

In Cincinnati, Harriet got a firsthand look at the tragedies of slavery. From the fugitive slaves who escaped through her family’s participation in the Underground Railroad, she learned about life in the South and about how cruel slavery was. She was outraged in 1850 when the Fugitive Slave Act was

passed, which mandated that all escaped slaves be returned, even if they were living in a free state.

Drawing on her personal experiences and encounters with slaves, Harriet wrote a series of 40 weekly articles about the realities of slavery that appeared in the abolitionist newspaper *The National Era* from 1851-1852. Her characters portrayed the inhumanity of slavery and the corrupting influence it had on the nation.

The articles were so popular they were put together in a book called *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which became the first book to feature a black hero. On the day of its release in March 1852, a record-breaking 3,000 copies of the book were sold. Within a week the number rose to 10,000, and within a year, to 300,000. By 1857 more than 700,000 copies had been sold. The book has been translated into more than 37 languages and has never gone out of print.

Instantly Harriet became a national spokesperson for the anti-slavery movement. Her book helped crystallize the anti-slavery movement in the North and set the stage for the Civil War.

Harriet went on to publish many other novels, books, essays and articles, as well as a volume of religious poems. She died on July 1, 1896, in Hartford, Connecticut.