Popularized with a name that reflected the technological marvel of its day, the Underground Railroad was a resistance movement and secret network that helped enslaved people emancipate themselves to lives of freedom. While people held in bondage sought freedom and self-determination through escape and flight from the earliest days of the nation, this activity intensified in the years prior to the Civil War.

Underground Railroad activity represents a different kind of 19th-century battlefield. Like a battlefield, the events that took place on this ground and the people who participated in them are long gone. Like a battlefield, the fight was for freedom and the risks were life and death. And, like the secret network that the national monument commemorates, the history here may not be immediately obvious.

You won’t see Harriet Tubman represented here in structures and statues; rather, she is memorialized in the land, water, and sky of the Eastern Shore where she was born and where she returned again and again to free others. Tubman would easily recognize this place. The landscapes and waterways that she navigated and used for sanctuary on her Underground Railroad missions have changed little from her time.

The national monument boundary encompasses an approximately 25,000-acre mosaic of federal, state, and private lands in Dorchester County, Maryland. It includes large sections of land that are significant to Tubman’s early years and evoke her life while enslaved and as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. The national monument includes the following areas. There are no national park facilities on these sites:

- **Stewart’s Canal**, dug by hand by free and enslaved people between 1810 and 1832 for commercial transportation. Tubman learned important outdoor skills working navigating the canal and when she worked in nearby timbering operations with her father, Ben Ross. Stewart’s Canal is part of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and, while part of the national monument, will continue to be owned, operated and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- **Home site of Jacob Jackson**, a free African American man who received a coded letter to help Tubman communicate secretly with her family. He was a conduit for a message to alert her three brothers, Henry, Benjamin, and Robert that she would soon come to guide their escape from slavery to the north. The Jacob Jackson Home Site was donated to the National Park Service by the Conservation Fund for inclusion in the new national monument.

You can continue your exploration on the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, an All-American Road, the highest level of designation for a scenic byway in the US. The byway is a 125-mile driving tour of more than two dozen historic sites and scenic vistas associated with Tubman that lie both within and outside of the national monument. [www.harriettubmanbyway.org](http://www.harriettubmanbyway.org)

“The difference between us is very marked. Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way.”

Frederick Douglass to Harriet Tubman, Rochester, August 29, 1868
On the Edge of Freedom

“When I found I had crossed that line [into freedom in Pennsylvania], 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 Tubman

A decade and a half before slavery was abolished in the United States and a little more than 100 miles from the safety of Pennsylvania, Harriet Tubman operated on the edge of freedom. Born in Dorchester County, Maryland, in 1822, Tubman emancipated herself from slavery in 1849 at age 27. She earned the nickname “Moses” for risking her own life about 13 times to guide more than 70 people—many of them beloved family and friends she had left behind—from lives of slavery to new lives of freedom.

Tubman’s deep Christian faith sustained her as she served as a nurse and a spy for the Union army. Her knowledge about tidal stream areas helped her to lead raids along the Combahee River in South Carolina, the first woman to lead an armed assault during the Civil War. Tubman eventually settled with her extended family in Auburn, New York, was active in the women’s suffrage movement, practiced her faith, and founded a home for the elderly and disadvantaged.

“...I never met with any person of any color who had more confidence in the voice of God, as spoken direct to her soul.”

Abolitionist Thomas Garrett, describing Tubman

From wretchedly humble beginnings, Harriet Tubman lived her principles and achieved fame in her lifetime. Her death on March 10, 1913 was reported in the New York Times, followed a year later by a grand commemoration of her life with Booker T. Washington delivering the keynote address. Tubman’s story is a reminder that civil rights can be fragile, but a single person who takes personal action to fight for those rights can be an inspiration.