



## Resistance, Resilience & Strength: The Life of Harriet Ann Jacobs

*"Though one of God's most powerless creatures, I resolve to never be conquered."* Harriet Jacobs

### Overview

There are few stories that illustrate the resilience and strength of enslaved women, and the myriad of ways they resisted enslavement, more than Harriet Ann Jacobs. Born enslaved in Edenton, North Carolina, after years of resisting her enslaver's unwanted advances, Harriet made the brave choice to flee her oppressive situation. Her only option at the time became hiding in a small attic space, with only room to lay on a mattress. With unimaginable fortitude, she remained in that tiny space for almost seven years, when finally, in 1842, a free Black man named Peter helped her escape via the Maritime Underground Railroad. Harriet went on to become an anti-slavery activist, an abolitionist author, and eventually post-Civil War, a relief worker dedicated to assisting the newly freed people in the South. In this lesson, students will learn about the life of Harriet Ann Jacobs and gain an understanding of North Carolina's Maritime Underground Railroad through reading, discussion, a timeline activity, primary source review, and creative writing.

### Grades

8-12

### Materials

- Runaway Advertisement for "Harriet," attached
- Map of location of Edenton, NC, sample attached
- [Historic Edenton's Harriet Jacobs Walking Tour Brochure](#)
- Timeline of the Life of Harriet Jacobs (for reference), attached and also available [here](#)
- Excerpt from [Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl](#), attached
- Letter from Harriet Jacobs to Ednah Cheney (1867), attached

### Additional Resources

- [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#): The mission of NTF is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression.
- NC African American Heritage Commission's [Freedom Roads Trail](#): Freedom Roads is a statewide trail system that recognizes the places (from rivers to towns) that were crucial to the efforts of freedom seeking throughout the state, as well as the freedom seekers and their allies, whose stories testify to the indomitable spirit found in thousands who strove to be free and aided them in success.
  - *Freedom Roads sites include designations in the National Park Service's [Network to Freedom Underground Railroad program](#), as well as other sites and routes recognized by historians and/or archaeologists as significant to African American freedom seeking in North Carolina.*

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*This material is based upon work assisted by a grant from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), funded by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of ASALH or the Department of the Interior.*

- [Historic Edenton](#)
  - An additional lesson plan that focuses more Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is available [here](#)
- [Somerset Place](#)
- [NC Literary Hall of Fame, Harriet Jacobs](#)
- [The Shores of Freedom: The Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina, 1800-1861](#)

### Duration

60 minutes

### Preparation

- Student must understand expectations for respectfully discussing "[hard history](#)" such as enslavement. While this history brings up difficult topics such as racism and racial violence, such history represents a part of our shared state and national history that students must understand in order to comprehend its impact on the present. To ensure students are able to respectfully and empathetically discuss such topics, teachers must ensure a foundation of civil discourse, respect and empathy in the classroom. For techniques on building such a classroom community, see Carolina K-12's classroom management activities in the Database of K-12 Resources under the "[Activities](#)" section and specifically [Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom](#).
- Students should also be prepared in advance for the mention of unwanted advances towards Harriet Jacobs from her enslaver.

### Procedure

#### Introduction to Harriet Jacobs

1. As a warm up, project the attached runaway ad and have students take a few minutes to silently observe the image while jotting down observations. Ask a student volunteer to read the text and discuss:
  - What is this document and who created it? When was it created? What was its purpose?
  - How is Harriet described? What skills is she said to have?
  - What additional skills and traits can we infer based on what is shared?
  - What is the stated reason for her running away? Why might she actually have chosen to flee?
  - How reliable is this source?
  - How much is offered for her capture and what might this tell us?
  - What is Harriet risking by seeking her freedom? What might this tell us about her?
  - Where was this ad placed? What do you know about Edenton?
2. Let students know that the document they are viewing was placed in 1835 by Dr. James Norcom, a plantation owner in Edenton, NC. Project a map of the location of Edenton, NC for students to view (sample attached.) Ask them to consider what would have been taking place around Edenton and North Carolina in 1835. Ask students to consider this and what they already know about slavery, along with the specific location of Edenton, and to hypothesize the pros and cons of Harriet's location in terms of her potential success (or not) in escaping.

3. Let students know that while in many cases, an advertisement like this is sadly the only record of an enslaved person’s life, in the case of Harriet, we know much more. Tell students they will be learning about the entire life of Harriet, who is actually Harriet Ann Jacobs, throughout this lesson. Ask students to share what they already know about Harriet Jacobs, if anything and let them know (spoiler alert!), that she not only has one of the most incredible stories of resilient escape known, but she went on to write about her experiences in her autobiography, “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.”
4. As an introduction to Ms. Jacobs, tell students they are going to view a brief 6-minute clip of an actor portraying her [here](#). Let them know this is a clip from The American Place Theatre’s “Literature to Life Stage Presentation of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs,” performed by actress Cherita Armstrong. Tell students as they watch to jot down thoughts regarding what they learn and glean about rights, control, and choice. Afterwards, allow students to debrief what they noted regarding these three themes, and further discuss:
  - What sense do you get about Harriet’s life and situation from this clip?
  - Considering the actual advertisement for Harriet that we just read, and the portrayal you just viewed (which is based on the actual words of the real Harriet Jacobs), how might you describe her? What sense do you get of her personality?
  - What is Harriet “determined” to do?

#### **Timeline of Harriet’s Ann Jacob’s Life and Escape in Edenton, NC**

5. Next, provide students with a print out of Historic Edenton’s walking tour that focuses on the life of Harriet Jacobs, attached and available [here](#). Individually or in partners, instruct students to read the overview of the life of Harriet Ann Jacobs (1813 – 1897) and to also browse the walking stops that are part of Edenton’s tour. Tell students to create an illustrated timeline of Harriet’s life as they read. Their final timeline should have at least 15 entries with a description of what was taking place in Harriet’s life. Students should choose at least 5 timeline entries to illustrate in some way (either with a symbol, a small drawing, etc.) A complete sample timeline of entries is attached for reference.
6. After the class has completed the reading and started (if not finished) creating their timelines, layer in more information for them by letting them know you are going to read a brief excerpt from Harriet’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. (A recommended excerpt is attached, which includes Harriet’s description of her hiding space in her grandmother’s attic and what the experience was like for her. Let students know they will hear Harriet refer to a “Mr. Flint,” which is a pseudonym for Norcom. The work was published without the actual names of those involved for protection of Harriet and her family.)
7. Afterwards, have the class report out on their timeline entries and create a master timeline of Harriet’s life while also discussing the excerpts read aloud. As you review her life, further discuss:
  - Of the various things you’ve learned, what do you believe were some of the most pivotal moments of Harriet’s life and why? (Answers may stem from the loss of her parents to being given to a three-year-old when she was instead expecting her freedom, to desiring her freedom so much that she was willing to stay in a small attic for almost seven years.)
  - We’ve gleaned that Harriet had an incredibly strong spirit, and had strong women such as her grandmother as influences. Why do you think she finally chose to runaway?

- The small attic Harriet hid in for almost seven years was only 9 by 7 feet, and 3 feet high, barely enough room to move in and not tall enough to stand in. How did Harriet describe this experience?
- Harriet certainly didn't realize she'd be hiding for seven years. Why did she have to hide for so long and how do you think she was she able to do this, a feat that is almost unimaginable for most of us?
- How was Harriet finally able to leave hiding and escape to the North? What do you already know about the Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina?

### **Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina**

8. Explain to students that traditionally when we think of slavery, we have visions of large plantations and enslaved people working in cotton fields. In actuality, along coastal areas, the culture of slavery and enslaved people, mingled with free Blacks and freedom seekers, was much more complex. Referred to as a “maritime underworld” and “underside of slavery” by historian David Cecelski, Black people of all backgrounds and life status worked and moved with more independence in towns like Edenton, largely based on the vast skillset they had. Provide students with a “mini-lecture” including information such as:
- Between 1800 and 1860, Blacks composed approximately 45 percent of the total population in the nineteen tidewater counties of North Carolina, including Chowan County (where Edenton is located.) “During the antebellum period coastal ports like Edenton were crowded with Black seamen. They worked as stewards and cooks on most ships and held skilled crew positions on many vessels. Ferrymen, nearly always slaves, departed from local docks to convey passengers and goods. At the wharves, slave women peddled fish, oysters, stew and cornbread to hungry sailors and found a ready market for laundry services. Slave artisans caulked, refitted, rigged and rebuilt as necessary to keep wooden vessels at sea.” ([Source](#))
  - These back watermen, at times with the assistance of citizens of other races and occupations, composed the Underground Railroad in coastal North Carolina and helped “runaway slaves to survive as fugitives in the tidewater wilderness, to identify sympathetic seamen, and to arrange passage to free territory. Their stories reveal a complex, tumultuous, and dissident undercurrent to coastal life in the slavery era. While wealthy planters and merchants held the reins of power, drafting and denouncing the punitive laws of antebellum North Carolina, lowly watermen, slave stevedores, piney woods squatters, reclusive swampers, and even slaveholders’ wives and children defied those laws and forged a realm apart, an ‘underside of slavery’ that sustained tenuous pathways by which fugitives might pass from land to sea. Their conspiratorial acts represent a dramatic and untold chapter in the history of North Carolina.” ([Source](#))
  - It was this maritime culture that assisted Harriet Jacobs in her escape from Edenton by sea in 1842. In her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861), Jacobs describes how the Edenton African American community, including Black seamen, arranged for her escape on a schooner bound for Philadelphia.”
  - “In 1842 a free Black man named Peter helped Harriet Jacobs make her escape by ship from Edenton. During the years when Jacobs was concealed in town, Peter continually kept in touch with her. Probably with the help of Black sailors, Peter finally identified a sea captain who would provide Jacobs and another enslaved woman passage aboard his ship on a voyage to Philadelphia. Jacobs later admitted that the obligatory bribe would have paid “for a voyage to England,” but her family and Peter somehow raised enough to pay off the captain. Peter had made meticulous arrangement in all respects. He met Jacobs under cover of dusk at her hideaway and escorted her through the streets of Edenton. He had a rowboat and two oarsmen waiting for her when she arrived at the wharf, and lookouts had been posted to detect any intruders. The captain set sail immediately, and Jacobs soon found herself safely in Philadelphia.” ([Source](#))

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- As evidenced in Harriet’s case, finding passage on a ship to free territory was not a spur of the moment thing. It was a difficult, risk-laden process that required months or even years [as evidenced in Harriet’s case] of risky planning. “A single wrong step, misplaced trust, or rash inquiry could doom a runaway slave. Success depended as much on patience and prudence as daring and courage.”

9. Discuss:

- When you visualize what I just described, bustling docks and waterfront towns, where expert Black boatmen, fisherman, sales people, etc. are working in various overt and subtle ways, how does it differ from what you usually envision when considering slavery?
- Why do you think Black people risked so much to help others, often strangers, as Peter did with Harriet?
- What did it take to operate this network successfully?
- When you think of how remarkable the history of the Maritime Underground Railroad is, why is it that we don’t know more about it? (On one hand, we are fortunate to know anything about this network at all. Since it was such a risky, and at the time illegal undertaking, there is very little written record about these happenings. Also, however, this opens up a good discussion regarding how our society often chooses to ignore the parts of our history that don’t fit with the traditional concept of “American Exceptionalism.”)
- How should Harriet Jacobs and the rich history of the Black maritime community and Underground Railroad be remembered and honored in towns such as Edenton?
  - Today, **Colonial Waterfront Park in Edenton, NC** is recognized as part of the [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#), since it is where African American watermen worked to identify sympathetic seamen and to arrange passage on ships for enslaved persons to a free state. This includes Harriet Jacobs, but countless others (known and unknown) as well. The mission of NTF is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression.
  - The nearby **Somerset Place Plantation** is also part of the [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#).

**Culminating Activity: A Letter from Harriet Jacobs After Her Return to Edenton**

10. Remind students that Harriet Ann Jacobs went on to lead a successful life of service. After the Civil War, she spent time helping freed people by distributing relief supplies, teaching and providing nursing care – actually returning to Edenton, NC to help those she once knew. Provide students with a copy of the attached letter from Harriet Jacobs to Ednah Dow Cheney, from 1867. Ednah Dow Cheney was a Boston abolitionist and secretary of the New England Freedmen's Aid Society. Harriet wrote from her grandmother's old house, giving a report on the state of those recently-freed. Tell students that they should read the letter, then use everything they have learned about Harriet to write an imaginary response to her from Cheney. Their imagined response should include what they would like to say to Harriet regarding her inspirational life and experiences. (For instance, how might they lift Harriet’s spirits, celebrate her for the adversity she has overcome, encourage her to keep doing the important work she is engaged in, etc.?) In their letter back to Harriet from Ednah Cheney, students should answer:
- What about Harriet’s life has inspired you and why?

- What questions would you like to ask?
- What might you say to inspire her to continue her work?
- How can you use your letter to honor her resilience, resistance, and strength?
- Why will Harriet's life story be important to future generations?



# **\$100 REWARD**

**W**ILL be given for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl **HARRIET**. She is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address. Being a good seamstress, she has been accustomed to dress well, has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion, and will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery. As this girl absconded from the plantation of my son without any known cause or provocation, it is probable she designs to transport herself to the North.

The above reward, with all reasonable charges, will be given for apprehending her, or securing her in any prison or jail within the U. States.

All persons are hereby forewarned against harboring or entertaining her, or being in any way instrumental in her escape, under the most rigorous penalties of the law.

**JAMES NORCOM.**

*Edenton, N. C. June 30*

TT&W

## Location of Edenton, NC





### Time Line of the Life of Harriet Jacobs

- 1813: Harriet Ann Jacobs is born into slavery in Edenton, N.C. to Delilah and Elijah Jacobs.
- 1815: John S. Jacobs, Harriet's brother, is born. Even though all were enslaved, Harriet enjoyed a close-knit family life.
- 1819: Harriet's mother dies. At age six, Harriet is sent to live with her "owner," Margaret Horniblow, in Edenton. Though she was enslaved, Miss Horniblow does teach Harriet how to read and write. Harriet remains enslaved to Ms. Horniblow over the next 6 years, although it is assumed that upon Ms. Horniblow's death, Harriet will be freed.
- 1825: Margaret Horniblow dies. Now age twelve, Harriet is not emancipated and is instead willed to the woman's three year-old niece, Mary Matilda Norcom. Harriet and her brother John are forced to move to the house of Dr. James Norcom, Mary Matilda's father. Over the years, Dr. Norcom makes unwanted sexual advances towards Harriet, and his wife's vindictive jealousy causes her to treat Harriet with cruelty as well.
- 1826: Harriet's father dies.
- 1828: Harriet's grandmother, Molly, is purchased by Hannah Pritchard when Molly's owner dies. Hannah petitions the Chowan County Courthouse to free Molly, and she is emancipated on April 28, 1828. (Molly had actually been freed during the American Revolution, but was sold back into slavery.)
- 1829: Dr. Norcom forbids Harriet to marry a free black carpenter that she has fallen in love with. She tells the man she loves to leave for a free state, and to spite Dr. Norcom, then enters into a liaison with Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, an unmarried white lawyer and future US Congressman. Their union produces Harriet's son Joseph. Harriet is expelled from the Norcom house and goes to live with her freed grandmother, Molly.
- 1833: Dr. Norcom continues to pursue Harriet, and she continues to fight back and stand her ground. He threatens to send her away to her son's plantation if she does not submit. Louisa Matilda, Harriet's daughter by Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, is born in 1833.
- 1835: Norcom acts on his threat and sends Harriet to his son's plantation several miles outside of Edenton. In June, when she learns her children will soon arrive to be "broken in," Harriet runs away. She conceals herself in a small attic above a storeroom of her grandmother's home for the following six years and eleven months, until 1842. Her brother John and her two children are jailed until September (Norcom's attempt to make her return) and then sold to a trader acting for Samuel Tredwell Sawyer. The children go to live with Harriet's grandmother in Edenton. John goes to Sawyer's plantation outside Edenton.
- 1837: Samuel Tredwell Sawyer is elected to Congress. He leaves for Washington, D.C., taking Harriet's brother John with him.
- 1838: Harriet's brother, John, runs away from Samuel Tredwell Sawyer.
- 1840: Harriet's daughter, Louisa Matilda, is reunited with her mother before leaving for Washington, D.C. with Sawyer, his wife and their baby; after five months there, she is taken to her cousin's home in Brooklyn, N.Y.
- 1842: In June, after almost seven years in hiding, Harriet uses an established maritime escape route (NC's Underground Railroad) to flee Edenton, bound for New York. She leaves behind her son, uncle and grandmother. Upon arrival in New York, Harriet briefly works as a nursemaid for the Willis family.
- 1843: Harriet and her brother John are reunited in New York. Harriet arranges for her son, Joseph, to be sent to her in Boston.
- 1849: In Rochester, N.Y., Harriet and John work in the Anti-Slavery Office and Reading Room, where they meet Frederick Douglass, Amy Post and other abolitionists.
- 1850: Dr. Norcom dies in Edenton; his daughter, Mary Matilda, and her husband, Daniel Messmore, try to capture Harriet and return her to slavery.
- 1852: Harriet's former New York employer, Ms. Willis, arranges her purchase from Mary Matilda and Daniel Messmore, and Harriet is officially freed.

- 1853: Harriet's grandmother, Molly, dies in Edenton, N.C. Harriet begins writing her book.
- 1858: Harriet completes her manuscript and visits England to sell her book.
- 1861: In Boston, Harriet self-publishes her book, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, using the pseudonym Linda Brent. The British edition follows the next year. Meanwhile, Confederate soldiers fire on Fort Sumter, April 12; the Civil War begins.
- 1862-1868: Harriet performs relief work among freedmen in Washington, D.C., Alexandria, Va., and Savannah, Ga. During this time period, she helps open a school in Alexandria, VA and runs a boarding home in Cambridge, MA.
- 1863: President Abraham Lincoln signs "The Emancipation Proclamation."
- 1865: Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrenders at Appomattox, April 9, ending the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated, dying April 15. The Freedman's Bureau is formed to educate, help and employ former slaves. Harriet Jacobs spends her time helping freed slaves by distributing relief supplies, teaching, and providing health care. She had returned to her childhood home in Edenton, North Carolina, to help those she once knew.
- 1892: Harriet sells her grandmother's house in Edenton, NC
- 1897: Harriet dies and is buried next to her brother in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Mass.
- 1998: An official NC Historical Marker is installed in Edenton honoring Harriet Jacobs.

## Excerpts from Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

### Coming Up for Air

A small shed had been added to my grandmother's house years ago. Some boards were laid across the supports at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small attic, never occupied by anything but rats and mice. The attic was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest point was three feet high. There was no admission for either light or air. My uncle Phillip, who was a carpenter, had very skillfully made a concealed trap door, which communicated with a storeroom.

To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air was stifling; the darkness, total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that I could not turn on the other without hitting the roof. The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary and I slept such sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest has passed over them.

I knew morning only by the noises I heard. In my small den, day and night were all the same. I suffered for air even more than for light. But I was not comfortless. I heard the voices of my children. There was joy, and there was sadness in the sound. It made my tears flow. How I longed to speak to them! I was eager to look on their faces; but there was no hole, no crack, through which I could peep.

### The Lesser of Evils

This continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day. Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave. I was never cruelly overworked; I was never lacerated with the whip from head to foot; I was never so beaten and bruised that I could not turn from one side to the other; I never had my heel-strings cut to prevent my running away; I was never chained to a log and forced to drag it about, while I toiled in the fields from morning till night; I was never branded with hot iron, or torn by bloodhounds. But though my life in slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships, God pity the woman who is compelled to lead such a life!

My food was passed to me through the trapdoor my uncle had contrived. My grandmother, uncle, and aunt would seize such opportunities as they could to chat with me at the opening. But of course this was not safe in the daytime. It must all be done in darkness.

### Taking a Breath

It was impossible for me to move in an erect position, so I crawled about my den for exercise. One day I hit my head against something, and found it was a small tool for drilling. My uncle had left it sticking there when he made the trapdoor. I said to myself, "Now I will have some light. Now I will see my children." I bored one hole about an inch long and an inch broad. I sat by it till late into the night to enjoy the little whiff of air that floated in. In the morning I heard the merry laugh of children, and presently two faces were looking up at me, as though they knew I was there. I longed to tell them I was there!

The heat of my den was intense, for nothing but thin shingles protected me from the scorching summer's sun. But I had my consolations. Aunt Nancy brought me all the news she could hear at Dr. Flint's. From her I learned that the doctor had written to New York to a colored woman, who had been born and raised in our neighborhood. He offered her a reward if she could find out anything out about me. He soon after started for New York in haste, saying to his family that he had important business.

### Too Close for Comfort

Autumn came, with a pleasant abatement of heat. My eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, and by holding my book or work in a certain position near the opening I managed to read and sew. That was a great relief to the tedious monotony of my life. But when winter came, the cold penetrated through the thin shingle roof, and I was dreadfully chilled. The kind grandmother brought me bedclothes and warm drinks. Often I was obliged to lie in bed all day to keep comfortable; but with all my precautions, my shoulders and feet were frostbitten. Oh, those long, gloomy days, with no object for my eye to rest upon, and no thoughts to occupy my mind, except the dreary past and the uncertain future!

I was thankful when there came a day sufficiently mild for me to wrap myself up and sit at the loophole to watch the passersby. Southerners have the habit of stopping and talking in the streets, and I heard many conversations not intended to meet my ears. Several times I heard allusions to Dr. Flint, myself, and the history of my children. The opinion was often expressed that I was in the Free States. Very rarely did anyone suggest that I might be in the vicinity. Had the least suspicion rested on my grandmother's house, it would have been burned to the ground. But it was the last place they thought of.

### **Seven Years of Solitude**

Dr. Flint and his family repeatedly tried to coax and bribe my children to tell something they had heard about me. One day the doctor took them into a shop, and offered them some bright little silver pieces and gay handkerchiefs if they would tell where their mother was. Ellen shrank away from him, and would not speak; but Benny said, "Dr. Flint, I don't know where my mother is. I guess she's in New York. When you go there again, I wish you'd ask her to come home, for I want to see her, but if you put her in jail, or tell her you'll cut her head off, I'll tell her to go right back."

I lived in that dismal hole, almost deprived of light and air, and with no space to move my limbs, for nearly seven years. My body still suffers from the effects of that long imprisonment, to say nothing of my soul. Countless were the nights that I sat at the loophole scarcely large enough to give me a glimpse of one twinkling star. There, I heard the patrols and slave-hunters conferring together about the capture of runaways, knowing how rejoiced they would be to catch me.

Season after season, year after year, I peeped at my children's faces, and heard their sweet voices, with a heart yearning all the while to say, "Your mother is here." Sometimes it appeared to me as if ages had rolled away since I entered upon that gloomy, monotonous existence. At times I was stupefied and listless; at other times I became very impatient to know when these dark years would end and I should again be allowed to feel the sunshine and breathe the air.

My restlessness increased. I had lived too long in bodily pain and anguish of spirit. Always I was in dread that slavery would succeed in snatching my children from me. This thought drove me nearly frantic. At last Providence opened an unexpected way for me escape. My friend Peter came one evening and asked to speak with me. "Your day has come, Linda," said he. "I have found a chance for you to go to the Free States."

### **Free at Last**

The anticipation of being a free woman provided almost too much for my weak frame. I made busy preparations for my journey, and for my children to follow me. Grandmother stole up to me as often as possible to whisper words of counsel. She insisted upon my writing to Dr. Flint as soon as I arrived in the Free States and asking him to sell me to her. She said she would sacrifice her house, and all she had in the world, for the sake of having me safe with my children in any part of the world. I resolved that not another cent of her hard earnings should be spent to pay rapacious slaveholders for what they called their property.

I was to escape in a vessel; but I forbear to mention any particulars.

On the day of my departure I made arrangements to go on board at dusk. The intervening time I resolved to spend with my son. I had not spoken to him for seven years, through I had been under the same roof and seen him every day. It was an agitating interview for both of us.

## Letter from Harriet Jacobs to Ednah Cheney

Edenton, April 25th

Dear Mrs Cheney

I felt I would like to write you a line from my old home. I am sitting under the old roof twelve feet from the spot where I suffered all the crushing weight of slavery. thank God the bitter cup is drained of its last dreg. there is no more need of hiding places to conceal slave Mothers. yet it was little to purchase the blessings of freedom. I could have worn this poor life out there to save my Children from the misery and degradation of Slavery.

I had long thought I had no attachment to my old home. as I often sit here and think of those I loved of their hard struggle in life -- their unfaltering love and devotion toward myself and Children. I love to sit here and think of them. they have made the few sunny spots in that dark life sacred to me.

I cannot tell you how I feel in this place. the change is so great I can hardly take it all in[.] I was born here, and amid all these new born blessings, the old dark cloud comes over me, and I find it hard to have faith in rebels.

the past winter was very severe for this region of Country[.] it caused much suffering, and the freedmen with but few exceptions were cheated out of their crop of cotton. their contract masters shiped it for them, and when they ask for a settlement, they are answered I am daily expecting the returns. these men have gone to work cheerfully, planted another crop without the returns to live on until their present crop is made. many of the large plantations of the once wealthy Planter, is worked under the control of Colored Men. the Owners let [rent] their Plantations to the freedmen in preference to the poor Whites. they believe the Negro determined to make money, and they will get the largest portion of it. last years experience I think will be a proffitable lesson[.] many will learn to act for themselves. Negro suffrage is making a stir in this place. the rebels are striving to make these people feel they are their true friends, and they must not be led astray by the Yankees. the freedmen ask if Abraham Lincoln led them astray, that his friends is their friends his enemies their enemies.

I have spent much of my time on the Plantations distrubuting seed and trying to teach the women to make Yankee gardens. they plant everything to mature in the summer, like their corn and cotton fields. I have hunted up all the old people, done what I could for them. I love to work for these old people. many of them I have known from Childhood

there is one School in Edenton well attended. on some of the Plantations there is from 15 to 25 Chrildren that cannot attend School, the distance is so far. some of the freedmen are very anxious to establish Plantation schools, as soon as the more advanced Schools, can send out teachers. many of the freedmen are willing and will sustain their teachers. at present there is a great revival in the colored Churches. the Whites say the Niggers sung and prayed until they got their freedom, and they are not satisfied. now they are singing and praying for judgment. the white members of the Baptist Church invited the colored members to their Church, to help them sing and pray. I assure you they have done it with a will. I never saw such a state of excitement[.] the Churches have been open night and day. these people have time to think of their souls, now they are not compelled to think for the Negro.

my love to Miss Daisy [Cheny's daughter]. I send her some Jassmine blossoms[.] tell her they bear the fragrance of freedom.

Yours Truly

H Jacobs