

Harriet Beecher Stowe sat near the front of the church on a wintry Sunday in 1851. But she was not thinking about the sermon. Instead she was thinking about a place far away from snowy Brunswick, Maine. Harriet was remembering something she had seen seventeen years before on a bright summer day in Kentucky.

Then Harriet was a young woman—just twenty-two years old. She was a teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio. She had crossed the Ohio River with her sister Catherine to visit a friend. During their visit they had ridden through the plantations of Kentucky. They had seen slaves at work in fields and in plantation houses.

As she thought about her summer in Kentucky, Harriet pictured a terrible scene. An old black man—a slave—was being beaten by two other slaves while their white masters looked on. With each blow of the overseers' fists upon the old man in her imagination, Harriet winced in the church pew.

After church she returned home. But the scene that Harriet had imagined was still in her thoughts. She went to her desk and wrote down what she had imagined.

Harriet was born and raised in New England, where the movement to outlaw slavery was just beginning. But the Beechers moved to Ohio in 1832, when Harriet was nineteen. There she taught with her sister Catherine. In 1836 she married Calvin Ellis Stowe. While in Ohio, she also began writing for local journals.

But this story was different from anything she had ever written! It spilled from her mind onto the paper. It came alive as she showed slavery in all its cruelty.

Harriet wrote to her editor at the *National*

*Era*, a journal for which she had written other stories. "I am working on a story which will be a much longer one than any I have ever written," she explained. "I feel now that the time is come when a woman who can speak for Freedom is dutybound to do so."

Sometimes as she wrote she would look up from her paper to see her own children around her. She would imagine that they were slaves. A horrible thought. To imagine children who could not be free.

Slowly her story took shape. She titled it *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life among the Lowly*. The story began appearing in parts in the *National Era*.

As the months passed, Mrs. Stowe's story about slavery was becoming the most widely read story of the day. A Boston book publisher decided to print the story as a book when it was completed in the *National Era*.

In two days the book's first edition was sold out. In less than three weeks twenty thousand copies were sold. In its first year the book was bought by three hundred thousand Americans, a fantastic number in a country of twenty-three million people.

Many people in both the North and the South, including President Abraham Lincoln, thought that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped to bring about the beginning of the Civil War. The book demanded that people take sides. It made slavery an issue over which people felt compelled to fight.

On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect. Harriet hoped that the evil of slavery that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had brought into the light was at last at an end. She sat on a balcony in Boston on that day and

watched as crowds paraded through the streets to cheer the news of the proclamation. She sat quietly, watching and remembering. Then she heard her own name being shouted. The

crowd below had seen Harriet Beecher Stowe on the balcony, and they gathered below to cheer her.

## CHECK YOUR READING

1. **Harriet Beecher Stowe remembers a scene that took place**
  - A in a school in Cincinnati
  - B on a plantation in Kentucky
  - C on a mountainside in Vermont
2. **She remembers an old slave being beaten by**
  - A his white master
  - B a couple of bandits
  - C two other slaves
3. **Harriet Beecher Stowe grew up**
  - A in the South
  - B in New England
  - C in Europe
4. **Before she married, Mrs. Stowe had**
  - A taught school
  - B lived on a plantation
  - C worked in a store
5. ***Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written originally as**
  - A entertainment for friends
  - B a full-length book
  - C a story for a journal
6. ***Uncle Tom's Cabin* was different from anything Mrs. Stowe had written before because it**
  - A was written about her children
  - B took a stand for freedom
  - C was concerned with women's rights
7. **The number of copies of the book that were sold the first year was**
  - A 2000
  - B 1,000,000
  - C 300,000
8. **Mrs. Stowe's book was popular because it**
  - A was a romantic love story
  - B exposed the hardships of slavery
  - C was a story about pioneers
9. **President Lincoln thought that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped to start the**
  - A Civil War
  - B War of 1812
  - C American Revolution
10. **After the Emancipation Proclamation, Mrs. Stowe hoped that**
  - A slavery was ended
  - B more of her books would be sold
  - C she could stop writing books