

Archaeologists: Site of Harriet Tubman's father's home found

April 20 2021, by Brian Witte



In this image provided by the Maryland Department of Transportation, items found at an archaeological site near Church Creek, Maryland, are displayed on March 25, 2021. State officials say the site is the former home of Harriet Tubman's father, Ben Ross. (Maryland Department of Transportation via AP)

Archaeologists in Maryland say they believe they have found the homesite of famed abolitionist Harriet Tubman's father.

The homesite of Ben Ross was found on property acquired last year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an addition to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, officials said Tuesday. An archaeology team led by the State Highway Administration conducted research that led to the find.

Archaeologist Julie Schablitsky described the finding as a connection to Tubman.

"She would've spent time here as a child, but also she would've come back and been living here with her father in her teenage years, working alongside him," Schablitsky said in a news release. "This was the opportunity she had to learn about how to navigate and survive in the wetlands and the woods. We believe this experience was able to benefit her when she began to move people to freedom."

Tubman was born Araminta Ross in March 1822 on the Thompson Farm near Cambridge, Maryland, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. She escaped from slavery to become a leading abolitionist who helped slaves escape through the Underground Railroad.

"This discovery adds another puzzle piece to the story of Harriet Tubman, the state of Maryland, and our nation," said Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford, who attended a news conference at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center at Church Creek, Maryland.



In this image provided by the Maryland Department of Transportation, an 1808 coin is shown that was found at a site on Maryland's Eastern Shore, is displayed on March, 25, 2021, near Church Creek, Md., where archaeologists believe Harriet Tubman's father lived. (Maryland Department of Transportation via AP)



In this image provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, items recovered from an archaeological site on Maryland's Eastern Shore that state officials believe to be the home of Harriet Tubman's father, Ben Ross, are displayed in a case, Tuesday, April 20, 2021, in Church Creek, Md. (Laury Marshall/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service via AP)

The archaeology team began searching for evidence linked to her father in November. When they returned in March to continue their search, Schablitsky and her team found artifacts dating to the 1800s, including nails, glass, dish fragments and even a button. On Tuesday, they announced confirmation that the artifacts were evidence of Ross's cabin.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bought the 2,600-acre Peter's Neck property for \$6 million last year. The property contains 10 acres bequeathed to Ross by Anthony Thompson in the 1800s. As outlined in Thompson's will, Ross was to be freed five years after Thompson's death in 1836. Ben Ross was freed from slavery and received the land in the early 1840s.



In this photo provided by the Library of Congress, Harriet Tubman is seen in a photograph dating from 1860-75. A Chicago elementary school long named for a biologist who promoted racist ideology will be renamed for abolitionist Harriet Tubman. The renaming of Louis Agassiz Elementary School to Harriet Tubman IB World School comes as part of the Chicago Public Schools' review of school names. (Harvey B. Lindsley/Library of Congress via AP)

"When we protect vulnerable habitats, we help preserve the stories of those who came before us, like Harriet Tubman's father, Ben Ross," said USFWS Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System Cynthia Martinez. "Acquiring Peter's Neck last year was a critical addition to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, as the area is predicted to naturally convert to marsh by 2100 because of sea-level rise."

The Ben Ross home site will be highlighted on the historic Thompson Farm, where Ross and his family were enslaved. It will be added as a new point of interest to the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway. The byway is a 125-mile, self-guided scenic drive that includes more than 30 sites related to Harriet Tubman's life and legacy.

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