

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Lead: She was Harriet Beecher Stowe, the little lady who made the big war.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In 1850 a series of laws were passed by the Congress of the United States that came to be known as the Compromise of 1850. This secured relative peace between North and South and delayed by a decade the coming Civil War. One the parts of the compromise was a strengthened Fugitive Slave Law. It was passed to

block the growing campaign by abolitionists and others opposed to slavery who were trying to help slaves escape captivity.

One of those most offended by the new Fugitive Law was Harriet Beecher Stowe, a housewife, mother of seven children, daughter of the famous Protestant preacher Lyman Beecher. She lived in Brunswick, Maine where her husband was a professor at Bowdoin College. As a confirmed abolitionist, she felt it was her moral duty to help runaway slaves. She complained to a relative that the new law made her feel helpless and then set out to write a novel dramatizing the evils of slavery.

The vehicle she chose was a story serialized in the weekly abolitionist newspaper, *National Era*. Despite her lack of firsthand experience with slavery, her rich narrative and vivid descriptions were convincing. Periodically, a new chapter would describe the lives, challenges, sufferings and pleasures of a cast of characters whose names were soon world famous. Little Eva, Sambo, Quimbo, the tragic Lucy, cruel master Simon Legree, and, of course, Uncle Tom.

***Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold three million copies before 1860. It confirmed the worst fears of the abolitionists, offended many white southerners who thought its**

descriptions of slavery to be extreme, spurred the forces that brought together the Republican Party, and enflamed and hardened opinion on all sides of the questions of slavery and states' rights. When Abraham Lincoln first met Mrs. Stowe in 1862 he is said to have greeted her, "So this the little lady who made this big war."

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Wilson, Forrest. *Crusader in Crinoline*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Publishing Company, 1941.

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