



- *Businesswoman*
- *Founder*
- *Philanthropist*

Emily Harvie Thomas Tubman

1794–1885

Inducted 1994

Emily Tubman's life extended from the time of George Washington through the Civil War and Reconstruction. She was born as Emily Harvie Thomas in 1794 in Hanover County, Virginia. Her parents moved to Kentucky when she was very young; she grew up in Frankfort. At the age of 24, she came to Augusta for a visit and met Richard Tubman, a wealthy planter, whom she soon married. Tubman was 28 years her senior, but they were well suited to each other, as neither really belonged to the sedate, slave-owning class. He was an Englishman who made his fortune exporting cotton, tobacco, and indigo. She had grown up on the frontier. When Richard Tubman died 18 years later, Emily found herself responsible for a large estate. She summoned her brother, a graduate of Yale, to train her in the basics of civil law.

Richard had left a gift of \$10,000 to the University of Georgia, on the condition that the legislature permit his estate to free all of his slaves. The legislature refused to accept this gift that would allow freed slaves to live in Georgia. With that option gone Emily began to investigate places where she might help her slaves settle. In the end, she offered them the choice to go and settle in Liberia in West Africa, or continue to work for her in Georgia. Roughly a third chose to go to Liberia, and Emily equipped them fully, arranging their travel, and continuing to support them for a time. In Liberia they took the name of Tubman, and their farming community, "Tubman Hill," prospered.

Emily Tubman was shrewd enough to realize that the Southern one-crop economy was headed for calamity, so she invested wisely in railroads and

industries and more than doubled the value of her late husband's estate. Unlike most Confederate fortunes, hers

"As to the importance of the Orphan School established by our brethren in Midway ... I have felt interested in its success, and contributed in a small degree to its support."

– Emily Harvie Thomas

survived the Civil War. In using her wealth she was guided by the belief that she was only its steward, not its owner. She kept no records of her charitable giving, saying it was strictly between her and the Lord. Her faith was simple, direct, and practical. Impatient with the complexities of doctrine and church order in mainstream churches, she was attracted to a young denomination, the Disciples of Christ. She became one of its principal benefactors. Its founder, Alexander Campbell, was a frequent guest in her home. She gave generously to help with the building of, and the pastoral expenses of the denomination's churches in Augusta, Atlanta, Savannah, Athens, and Sandersville, as well as sites in Kentucky. She also contributed generously to the building and endowment of Christian colleges in Kentucky and the Midwest. In Augusta, she provided a number of low-cost housing units for widows and the elderly. She gave land to the ex-slaves who had stayed with her, and equipped them to be independent farmers.

Emily Tubman also founded the first public high school for girls in Augusta, the Tubman School. Its aims went far beyond simply training girls to be household servants. It offered college-preparatory courses in the Arts and Sciences. Today, the Tubman Middle School in Augusta still bears her name.

Emily Thomas Tubman died in 1885 at the age of 91 after a life distinguished by achievement and service. The scope of her giving and her foresight have had a far-reaching effect. Marking the 200th anniversary of her birth, the City of Augusta this year unveiled a statue of her at the corner of Greene and McIntosh Streets in front of the First Christian Church.

Additional Resources

Richmond County Historical Society
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