

MOSES ROPER'S BIOGRAPHY

TEACHER TOOL 1 AND STUDENT HANDOUT 1

Moses Roper was born into slavery in Caswell County, NC in 1815. He was sold away from his mother and family when he was only six years old. Over the next 20 years, he tried at least 15 times to escape from several different enslavers. Most of them retaliated with brutal punishment after each capture. Finally, he managed to escape to the North by serving as a steward on a ship sailing from Savannah, Georgia, to Poughkeepsie, New York.

While in the North, he learned that slave catchers were on his trail so he gained passage on a ship to England. There he became acquainted with abolitionists who helped him to learn to read and write and gain a basic education. They encouraged him to give antislavery lectures. After recounting his story many times as a lecturer, he wrote *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery*. It was published in London in 1837 and in Philadelphia the following year. A best seller on both sides of the Atlantic, the book went through multiple editions and attained the widest readership of any book penned by a Black North Carolina native in the 19th century.

Roper lectured more than 2,000 times across Britain and Ireland. According to historian Hannah-Rose Murray, Roper was "bold, blunt and brave. He was unafraid of challenging white fragility and exposed the brutalities of slavery despite the personal and financial cost to his reputation."

Roper married a British woman, Anne Price, in 1839. Over the course of their relationship, they had four daughters. In 1844, Roper sailed with his young family to Canada. He later explained that he chose Canada because it was "as near as I can get to my relations (who are still in bondage) without being again taken." He returned to Britain in January 1846, arriving in Liverpool to settle "private" business. He then visited Britain again without his wife and family in the mid-1850s. At this point, it appears his relationship with his wife may have broken down. After 1861, he set sail for the Americas by himself. Over the next 30 years, he tried his hand at lecturing and farming. In 1891, he was found dead at a train station in Boston with his faithful dog, Pete, by his side. A story told by a Roper descendent states that Roper was going home to die and be buried with his mother and other family members when his body was found.

Today there is no marker or plaque for Roper in his home county of Caswell, nor is there recognition of him anywhere in North Carolina. However, editions of Roper's slave narrative can be found in many libraries in his home state and online at <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/roper/menu.html>.

There is public acknowledgement of him with a plaque in Apalachicola, Florida, one of the places where he was enslaved.

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