

## Mary Ann Shadd Cary (1823-1893)

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*You have a right to your freedom and to every other privilege connected with it and if you cannot secure these in Virginia or Alabama, by all means make your escape without delay to some other locality in God's wide universe.*

—Mary Ann Shadd Cary

Born to a free African-American family in Wilmington, Delaware, MaryAnn Shadd was the first of 13 children. Her father was an abolitionist and a conductor on the [Underground Railroad](#). From an early age, Mary was exposed to the anti-slavery movement, where she developed a good grasp of the issues and honed her debating skills. As it was against the law to educate blacks in Delaware, the family moved to West Chester, Pennsylvania, where she attended a Quaker boarding school. At age 16, she returned to Wilmington to teach in a school for black children. Subsequently, she taught in New York and Morristown, New Jersey.

In 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act was passed. This Act allowed free northern blacks and escaped southern slaves to be rounded up and sent to the South. This law also increased the flow of traffic on the Underground Railroad, which assisted escaping slaves to travel from the southern slave-holding states to the northern states and Canada. As blacks could no longer take their freedom for granted within the United States, Canada became a beacon of hope. Mary and her brother, Isaac, fled to Windsor, Ontario, in 1851.

In Canada, she continued her teaching and established a school that was open to people of all races, while continuing to devote herself to the abolitionist cause working on behalf of fugitive slaves. At this time, slave owners were desperately attempting to deter runaway slaves from seeking refuge in Canada. In order to quash horror stories concocted by southern slaveholders to thwart black immigration, Shadd published a forty-four-page pamphlet entitled *A Plea for Emigration or Notes on Canada West in Its Moral, Social and Political Aspect: Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies and Vancouver's Island for the Information of Colored Emigrants*. In this pamphlet, she extolled the virtues of Canada, listed opportunities available to blacks in Canada, and urged them to move north of the 49th parallel.

She teamed up with Samuel Ward of the Anti-Slavery Society and others to publish a newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*, with the motto "Self Reliance Is the True Road to Independence." Subsequently, she became editor of the *Freeman* and, in so doing, was the first black female editor and publisher in North America. She married Thomas Cary, a Toronto barber, and lived in Chatham, Ontario, until his death four years later.

During the Civil War, she became an Army recruiting officer. After the Civil War, she returned to the United States and moved to Washington D.C., where she opened a school for black children and enrolled in Howard University Law School. Establishing the Colored Women's Progressive Franchise Association, she was an ardent advocate of women's rights, urging black women to discern their specific economic and political position and to fight for equal rights and opportunities.

Gaining her L.L.B. degree, she is considered to be the first black female lawyer in the United States. After graduation, she launched an attack on the judicial system challenging the House of Representatives for the right to vote and was one of the few women to vote in federal elections during the Reconstruction period.

In 1893, Mary Ann Shadd Cary died of cancer.

<http://blackhistorypages.net/pages/mashadd.php>