

## Mary Ann Shadd Cary



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Mary Ann Shadd was born in Wilmington, Delaware on October 9, 1823 to parents Abraham Doras Shadd and Harriet Burton Parnell. Mary was the eldest of thirteen children who were born free from slavery because Abraham and Harriet were free blacks. Social activism was in her bloodline, her great grandfather was Hans Schad aka John Shadd who was a foreigner. Hans was originally from Hesse-Cassel which was a state of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe. Hans came into the United States as a Hessian soldier fighting for the British Army in the French and Indian War. Abraham Shadd was a shoemaker with shoe shops in Wilmington, Delaware and Chester, Pennsylvania. He joined the American Anti-Slavery Society, became the president of the National Convention for the Improvement of Free People of Color in Philadelphia, and was a conductor for the Underground Railroad in both Delaware and Pennsylvania. Because Abraham and Harriet were active in fighting chattel slavery Mary often witnessed her parents harboring runaway slaves in their home.

The Shadd family was forced to relocate to Pennsylvania from Delaware because it became illegal to educate black people in the state of Delaware. Upon settling in Pennsylvania Mary began attending a Quaker boarding school to complete her formal education. Mary didn't live with her family while she attended the Quaker boarding school, she graduated the school and returned to West Chester, Pennsylvania where her family lived. She used her education and entrepreneurial spirit to found a school for black children that provided them with a chance at a bright future. She also established schools in New York City and Norristown, Pennsylvania. [The Fugitive Slave Act](#) was passed in 1850 which threatened the safety and freedom of the Shadd family. In 1853, Abraham moved his family to North Buxton, Ontario, Canada to continue living in freedom. While in Canada Abraham was elected as the Counselor of Raleigh Township, Ontario in 1858; this election made Abraham the first black man to be elected to political office in Canada.

Mary along with Isaac who was her brother, moved to Windsor, Ontario where she began campaigning for free black people to move to Canada establishing themselves to thrive. In 1849, Mary published a twelve page pamphlet titled *Hints to the colored People of the North* encouraging black self-sufficiency; she also wrote a letter to Frederick Douglass criticizing black leaders, black churches and endorsed the use of education to help liberate blacks from slavery. During her time in Windsor Mary established an integrated school and published her second pamphlet titled *Notes on Canada West* in 1852. *Notes on Canada West* was written as a call to black Americans to move to the free lands of Canada. Between 1853 and 1854 Mary founded Canada's first anti-slavery newspaper called the *Provincial Freeman*; she became the first woman editor-in-chief of a magazine in North America. Isaac, Mary's brother contributed to the newspaper eventually became the manager and was also involved in social activism. The *Provincial Freeman* circulated throughout the United States and Canada as an instrument of empowerment specifically for blacks through positive information and imagery. The newspaper was in circulation from 1853 to 1861.

In 1855, Mary's interest in joining the Philadelphia Colored Convention was met with resistance due to her stance on blacks immigrating to Canada; to be a part of the convention she had to be voted in and received enough votes by a slim margin. During the convention she gave a speech so powerful that she was allowed extra time to speak; Frederick Douglass feared that she was celebrated but not fully respected because she was a black woman. Mary married a black barber named Thomas F. Cary from Toronto in 1856, the couple had two children but Thomas unfortunately died in 1860. After the death of Thomas Cary, Mary moved back to the United States with her children and was recruited by abolitionist to help enlist black people into the Union Army. After the conclusion of the Civil War Mary continued teaching and enrolled into the Harvard School of Law. In 1883, at the age of 60 Mary became the second black woman in the United States to earn a law degree.

Mary's age did not slow her down a bit. After completing law school she became a writer for the *National Era* and *The People's Advocate* newspapers, organized the Colored Women's Progressive Franchise in 1880, joined the National Woman Suffrage Association, and became the first black woman to vote in a national election. She died on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1893 due to stomach cancer

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in Washington D.C. but left her mark on the world and the people she touched. She literally dedicated her life to the education and liberation of her people, just like her parents did for the Underground Railroad. Miss. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, we proudly stand on your shoulders.

J.A. Ward

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfncrUgWWUs>

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