

# Ontario Women: Vanguards of Society

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## Mary Ann Shadd Cary, teacher, newspaper publisher, writer, activist

Mary Ann Shadd Cary (1823-1893) was an American abolitionist (a person who fought to abolish slavery) and teacher. She was invited to move north to Canada by activist and newspaper publisher Henry Bibb, to open and run a school for black students.

Mary was born to free parents in Delaware in 1823, and grew up with the intent to teach and run schools to better the futures of black children. While she met with success running a school in the States, she was interested in the idea that Henry Bibb presented, of building a northern black utopia, and moved to Ontario in 1851, opening a racially integrated school near Windsor.

Henry published his own newspaper, *The Voice Of The Fugitive*, on issues facing black Canadians and Americans. Mary argued with Henry's published stances on various issues - whether free black people ought to assimilate into Canadian culture, or establish their own distinct culture within their communities. Mary believed in integrated education; Henry believed in self-sufficient black communities. Mary and Henry had a serious falling-out in 1852. Not long after, Mary moved to Toronto and started her own newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*. This was the very first woman-run publication in Canada - and because of the stigma against women at the time, Mary hid her involvement by putting a man's name on the masthead as publisher.

*The Provincial Freeman's* motto was "Self-reliance is the true road to independence" and it made lots of arguments about both the appeal of moving up to Canada from the States and starting black communities, and how those communities should operate. It was distributed throughout Canada West and the northern U.S. states. After Henry Bibb's death in August 1854, *The Provincial Freeman* became the preeminent black newspaper in Canada West. As well as articles on abolition, racism, emigration to Canada, temperance, education, and women's rights, there were other international news stories, fiction, letters from readers, and advertisements.

After *The Provincial Freeman* closed sometime in 1860, Mary moved back to the United States, recruiting black people for the Union army during the Civil War. She also attended law school, after petitioning to be the first woman allowed in, and became one of the first black women to get a law degree. She was also the first black woman to cast a vote in an American national election after campaigning for the vote. She practiced law until her death in 1893.

Shadd travelled around the USA giving speeches and handing out pamphlets about abolition and emigration to Canada for free black people in America:



*Certain that neither a home in Africa, nor in the Southern States, is desirable under present circumstances, inquiry is made respecting Canada.... To set forth the advantage of a residence in a country, in which chattel slavery is not tolerated, and prejudice of color has no existence whatever ....*

Mary's legacy has been commemorated with a bronze bust and historical plaque in Chatham; nearby, the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum has her printing press on display.



Learn more at

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