Mary Ann Shadd Cary Sculpture by Donna Mayne | Photo by Christopher L.M.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was born in 1823 and died in 1893. Concern for the struggles of freedom seekers made her execute a bold move to Windsor, Canada West in September 1851, as a young, single woman with the goal of opening a school and providing support or settlement services (as we would now call them).

Shadd was an abolitionist, suffragette, journalist, educator, lawyer, and the first Black female newspaper publisher in Canada. She is a person of National Historic Significance in Canada and a member of the US Women's Hall of Fame. Shadd published the Provincial Freeman newspaper, established a racially integrated school for Black refugees in Windsor, was an outspoken anti-slavery activist, and advocate of women's rights, and much more. She is celebrated on both sides of the border with plaques, national historic sites, schools and more named in her honour.

In 2017, the City of Windsor's Arts, Culture and Heritage Fund (ACHF) grant program awarded $2,500 to local sculptor Donna Jean Mayne to create a clay bust of Shadd, which led to the eventual creation of a full sculpture commissioned by the University of Windsor. In 2022, the institution unveiled the commemorative bronze sculpture of Shadd at its downtown campus.

In 2023, Museum Windsor welcomed a bicentennial display honouring the 200th anniversary of Shadd's birth, and including biographical information and a few artifacts from the museum's collection. The exhibit was supported by the Essex County Black Historical Research Society, Library and Archives Canada, Toronto Public Library, and Archives of Ontario, and was curated by Irene Moore Davis. In 2024, Canada Post unveiled a commemorative stamp featuring the only known image of Shadd in purple with a floral background and the Provincial Freeman crest under her likeness. The stamp marked the first time Canada Post has honoured both a father and daughter on individual stamps. Shadd's father, Abraham Shadd, was featured on a Canadian stamp in 2009.

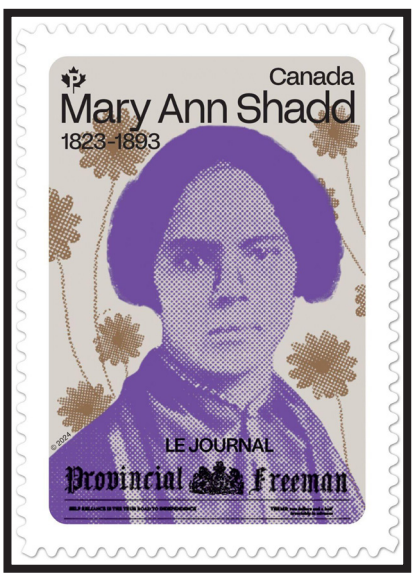
Poem by past Poet Laureate Mary Ann Mulhern

Mary Ann Shadd,
a black child
Taught by Quakers
Became a teacher

The Underground Railroad
Brought Mary Ann to Canada
Where she led children
Into the magic of words
Mary Ann Shadd
taught girls and boys
How to follow
Pathways to the universe
Sun, moon, planets and stars

She led by example
Became
the first woman in Canada
To found, edit and publish
a newspaper
"The Provincial Freeman"

To this day
Mary Ann Shadd's message
Brings hope, sings of peace



Canada Post 2024 stamp