



Discover the Mary Ann Shadd Cary House

A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places



NPS Photo of Mary Ann Shadd Cary National Historic Landmark by Katie Orr (left); Photo of Mary Ann Shadd Cary courtesy of National Archives of Canada, C-029977 (right)

Introduction

Before the 13th Amendment, laws like the **Fugitive Slave Act** and court rulings like the **Dred Scott Decision** affected all people of color in the United States. Many moved North, some as far as Canada, to escape racist laws.

Publisher, activist, teacher, and lawyer **Mary Ann Shadd Cary** was born free in a slave state. She was exceptional, but her migrations between the U.S. and Canada were typical. They are evidence of where African Americans moved in North America during the **19th Century** and her surviving D.C. home is evidence of where and how a woman of her status lived.



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About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places nominations for the [Greater U Street Historic District #98001557](#) (with [photos](#)) and the [Mary Ann Shadd Cary House #76002128](#) (with [photos](#)). *Discover the Mary Ann Shadd Cary House: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Places* was published in 2016. This lesson was written by National Park Service Historians, Katie Orr and Jenny Masur, and by Maria Lee, an independent Historical Anthropologist. It was edited by the Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education staff in Washington, D.C. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into classrooms across the country.

Objectives

1. Explain connections between African American migration patterns in the 1800s and events including the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, Dredd Scott decision, and Reconstruction;
2. Describe Mary Ann Shadd Cary's accomplishments and the cultural barriers she broke;
3. Write a persuasive speech *OR* Reproduce 19th century domestic technology in an art project *OR* Propose a solution to a local historic preservation controversy or challenge.

Materials for students

1. Map of the United States and Canada in 1860 showing where Mary Ann Shadd Cary lived;
2. Secondary source reading about Mary Ann Shadd Cary's life
3. Primary source reading by Mary Ann Shadd Cary about African American migration to D.C. during Reconstruction;
4. Contemporary photograph of the Mary Ann Shadd Cary House National Historic Landmark in Washington, D.C.

About the Place

The Mary Ann Shadd Cary House is a National Historic Landmark and privately owned. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is also a contributing property to the Greater U Street Historic District. It is located north of U Street in Northwest Washington, D.C. The site is not open to the public. See the National Register nomination files (at www.nps.gov/nr/) for these places to find out more.



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Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Time Period: Mid-19th Century and Reconstruction Era.

Topics: This lesson can be used in history and social studies curricula to learn about African American and women's experiences in the United States, the eras of Civil War and Reconstruction, and the history of slavery in the U.S.

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

US History Era 4

- Standard 4A: *The student understands the abolitionist movement.*
- Standard 4C: *The student understands changing gender roles and the ideas and activities of women reformers*

Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:

Theme I: Culture; Standards A-E

Theme II: Time, Continuity, and Change, Standards; Standards C-E

Theme III: People, Places, Environments; Standards A, D, G-I

Theme IV: Individual Development and Identity; Standards C, G, H

Theme VI: Power, Authority, and Governance; Standards F, H

Theme IX Global Connections; Standards A, B

Theme X Civic Ideals and Practices; Standards H, J

Relevant Common Core Standards

This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.2

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.5

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.9

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-12.10



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Getting Started Prompt

Were free African Americans, living in the United States before the Civil War, truly “free”?

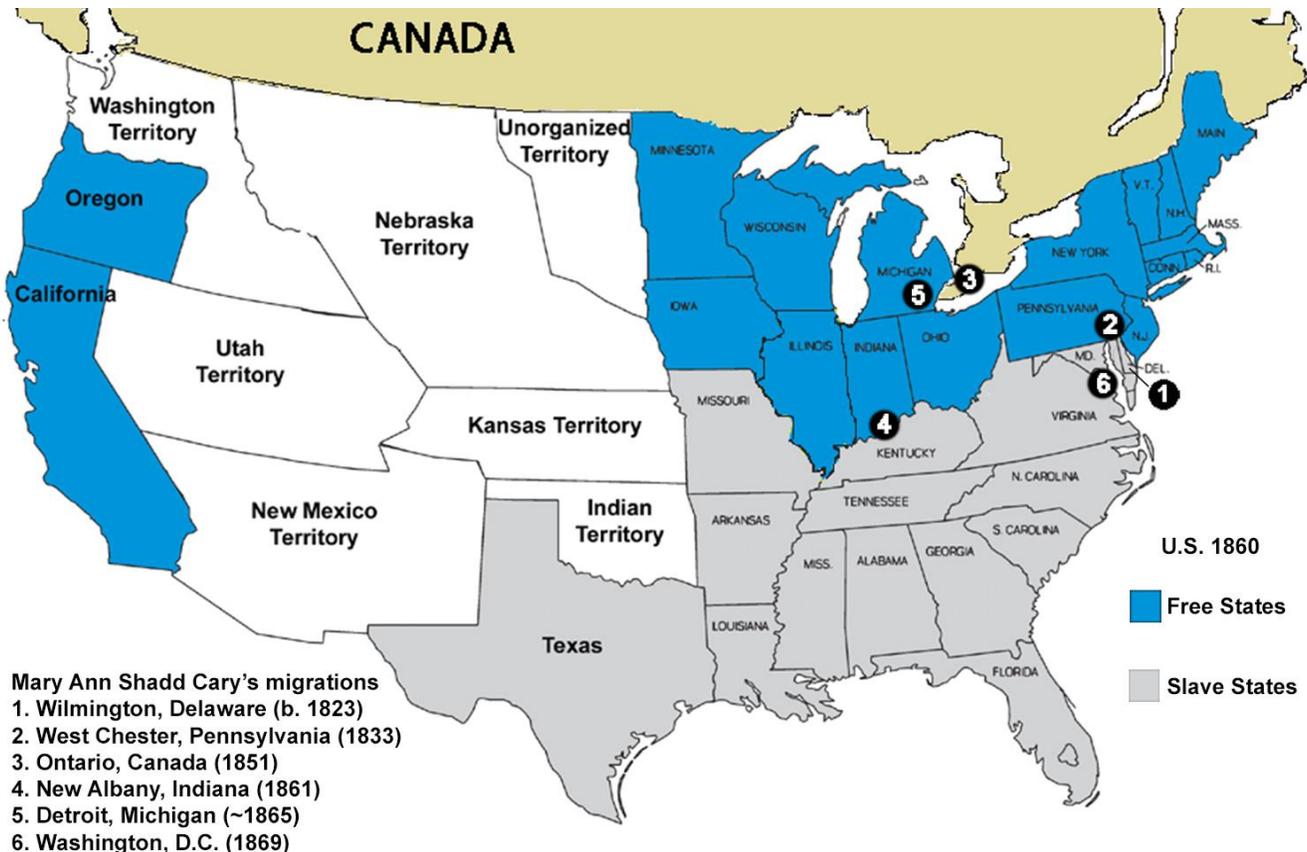
What historic place might you study to answer this question? Why?



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Locating the Site

Map 1: The U.S. in 1860, showing free and slave regions, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary's movements from her birth in Delaware to her death in D.C.



Caption for Map 1

States highlighted in blue abolished slavery by 1860. Some blue states had gradual emancipation. This meant children born after a certain date would be free but their parents may still be enslaved. The United States outlawed slavery after the Civil War with the 13th Amendment in 1865. Britain abolished slavery in 1833, including in Canada.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was a free African-American woman who lived from 1823 to 1893. Her parents were not enslaved and she was never enslaved.



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Questions for Map 1

1) List 2-3 major events that affected African Americans in the United States during Mary Ann Shadd Cary's lifetime.

2) Where did Mary Ann Shadd Cary live first? Where did she live second? Why do you think she moved to the second place?

3) When do you think Mary Ann Shadd Cary moved to Washington D.C.: during or after slavery? Why do you think so?



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Reading 1: “The Life of Mary Ann Shadd Cary”

By National Park Service historians

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was an American activist, writer, lawyer, and born a free woman in the slave state of Delaware in 1823. She lived through the slavery era in America, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. She was part of the “Underground Railroad” in Canada during slavery and recruited soldiers for the Union Army during the Civil War. After the war, she was a school principal and a lawyer in Washington, D.C.

When she was a young girl in 1833, Mary Ann Shadd moved with her family from Delaware to the free state of Pennsylvania. She attended boarding school until 1839 and then became a teacher. She taught black students in Delaware, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. She published a pamphlet on “Hints to the Colored People of the North” when she was 26.

Congress passed a Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. The law made it legal to force freedom seekers (people who escaped slavery) in free states to return to enslavement. The law could punish people like the Shadd family, who helped freedom seekers escape. It also threatened free black Americans. If free people of color could not prove they were free, they might be captured and sold in a legal market.

Mary Ann Shadd moved to Ontario, Canada in 1851 to join other black Americans who left the U.S. She married a man named Thomas J. Cary and had two children. Now Mrs. Cary, she opened a school for black and white students. She also wrote about freedom in Canada.

Cary became the first black, female newspaper editor in North American history when she published Canada’s first antislavery newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*. The paper’s motto was “Self-Reliance is the True Road to Independence.” Her writings were published in the U.S. and she encouraged enslaved people to escape.

In 1860, Cary’s husband passed away. She returned to the U.S. to help the United States when the Civil War started a year later. She recruited black soldiers to fight in the 28th Colored Infantry of the Union Army. Her base was in New Albany, Indiana, and Cary recruited over 1,500 African Americans to fight for the Union.

When the Civil War ended, Cary continued to help freed men and women. She returned to teaching and moved to Detroit, Michigan. There, she prepared African American students to be citizens during the early years of the Reconstruction Era. In 1869, she moved to Washington, D.C., and enrolled in the first class of Howard University Law School at age 46.



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The African American population swelled in the Capital city after it abolished slavery in 1862. It continued to grow after the war. Newcomers founded churches, schools, and businesses. Cary lived in neighborhoods with white and black residents, all from diverse backgrounds. Many had lived their entire lives under slavery until the War and could barely read. Some were middle-class and well-educated, like Cary and her peer, Frederick Douglass.

In D.C., Cary was still a political activist and writer as well as a teacher and principal at several D.C. schools. She wrote for a local African American newspaper *The New National Era* and gave public speeches to encourage African Americans to work together to recover from the slavery era.

Cary attended evening classes at Howard and taught local children during the day. She supported black women's right to vote. Cary was a member of the National Woman Suffrage Association and founded the Colored Women's Progressive Franchise Association. She earned her law degree in 1883 and spent the last ten years of her life working as a lawyer and advocating for women's suffrage.



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Questions for Reading 1: “The Life of Mary Ann Shadd Cary”

1) List four different roles or identities Shadd Cary filled during her life. What identities was she born with? What roles did she choose?

2) How did national politics effect where African Americans preferred to live in the 19th century?

3) Cary’s philosophy, “Self-reliance is the True Road to Independence,” guided her own life. In what ways might she want that philosophy to guide the African American community in Washington, D.C., after the war? Give specific examples and explain your answer.



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Reading 2: “Mecca of the Colored Pilgrim,” quotation by Mary Ann Shadd Cary

After the Civil War, Mary Ann Shadd Cary described Washington, D.C., as a “Mecca of the colored pilgrim” in an undated letter:

The Capital of the nation, the central point of national hopes and aspirations, is the Mecca of the colored pilgrim seeking civil, religious, social, and business enlightenment, and preferment or protection.

Here come men and women of the race from hamlet and city and plantation, from every state and territory, and the isles of the sea, give into the newness of American life offerings from their colored natives, ready-made and thoroughly trained monarchists, to tutor by precept and example, colored citizens of republican or democratic proclivities as the case may be.

Forty thousand colored citizens in a population rising two hundred thousand.

Source: Mary Ann Shadd Cary, 1823-1893, Papers, 1844-1884 Collection. Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.



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Questions for Reading 2: “Mecca of the Colored Pilgrim,” quotation by Mary Ann Shadd Cary

1) Why do you think Cary calls Washington, D.C., the “Mecca of the colored pilgrim”? Give two reasons. What evidence in the document supports your answers?

2) In what ways did Cary believe the established black community could help the newcomers?

3) How might these 19th century “colored pilgrims” promote Cary’s causes and her community? Why do you think so?



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Visual Evidence

Photo 1: Former Home of Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Washington, D.C., 2016



Credit: NPS Photo by Katie Orr



Discover the Mary Ann Shadd Cary House

Caption for Photo 1: Former Home of Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Washington, D.C., 2016.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary lived in a rowhouse in Washington, D.C., (pictured) from 1881 to 1885. Her home is a National Historic Landmark. This means it is recognized as a valuable historic place by the local D.C. government and the Federal government.

Cary's house was one of many rowhouses built in the U Street Corridor neighborhood between 1862 and 1900. Many of these houses were built for and by African Americans. The population boomed during Reconstruction and supported a thriving African American community during the "Jim Crow" era of segregation.

In 1974, another one of Cary's former homes in Canada was demolished. The private owners did not realize it was once the home of Cary until they discovered her personal letters in the pile of rubble. Some letters were lost, but many others were able to be preserved and submitted to The National Archives of Canada.



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Questions for Photo 1: Former Home of Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Washington, D.C., 2016.

1) Describe the building shown in Photo 1. How many levels does it have? What building materials were used? How many rooms might it have?

2) How is this building used today and who do you think uses it? List two different modern uses. For each use, explain what evidence you have to support that answer.

3) What can a historic place tell you about a person's life that her paper documents might not reveal? Use examples of the Mary Ann Shadd Cary House and the Canadian archive to explain your answer.



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Optional Activity 1

From the Paper to the Podium: Persuasive Writing and Speaking

Ask your students to identify an injustice in their community. Have them each write a persuasive essay meant to inspire members of the student body to unite against the injustice. Next, ask students to prepare a 2-3 minute speech based on their essays.

Afterward, engage in discussion of elements of persuasive writing and speech with the class. What was similar? What was different? Ask students how they felt as they tried to persuade their classmates, and to consider how Cary might have felt doing so as an African American woman in the mid-1800s. At the end of the activity, display your students' articles in the classroom or in the school halls as if they were 19th century editorial broadsides.



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Optional Activity 2

Nineteenth Century Urban Engineering and Home Comforts

Ask students to imagine what it was like to live in the Mary Ann Shadd Cary House in the 1880s. Prompt them with questions such as: Was there electricity in the 1880s? How would she have kept warm or cool? What technology might a middle class person like Mary Ann Shadd Cary have enjoyed in a growing urban neighborhood?

Next, assign students to individual or group engineering projects. Have them research and then choose a kind of home appliance or new technology for convenience that was available in a late 19th century home.

Students will take what they learn through their research and use it for an art project, using available resources (painting, descriptive poem, clay model, computer graphic, or even a short skit). Finally, organize a small classroom fair for students to display or perform their creative art to other students, teachers, and parents at the school.



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Optional Activity 3

Preserving History in your Community

Mary Ann Shadd Cary's house in Canada was demolished in the 1970s and precious historical evidence was lost with it. With that in mind, involve your students in community history and preservation with a service activity. Have students contact a historic preservation group to find out if there a historic site in their community that is in danger of being demolished or damaged by natural threats, like erosion, wildfires, rising water levels, and severe storms. Find out if the class can support preservation efforts. If no local historic sites are at risk, have students identify a place that they feel is sound but historically important and deserves more attention from the community.

Ask students to work in groups to identify the challenges the site faces and design a plan to overcome those challenges. Students should develop a presentation they can share with the class.

If time allows, invite local historic preservation groups, the site's stakeholders (descendants of an important family that lived there, for example), and local policy makers to attend. If the presentations are about a historic site or sites that are currently threatened, invite local journalists and community leaders to the event.



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Additional Online Resources

The websites listed below provide learners with additional information about African American history, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and historic places in Washington, D.C.

National Park Service

The National Park Service features historic places along the Underground Railroad on this [online travel itinerary](#). Learn more about the Underground Railroad by exploring photos and multimedia at one the National Park's newest national parks: [The Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park](#) in Maryland.

Online Travel Itinerary: [https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park:](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/Harriet_Tubman_Underground_Railroad_National_Historical_Park)
<https://www.nps.gov/hatu/i>

District of Columbia Office of Planning

Washington D.C.'s State Historic Preservation Office provides information about [city history](#) and documentation about historic places in the city, including the [U Street District](#).

D.C. Historic Preservation Office: <http://planning.dc.gov/page/dc-history>

D.C. HPO U Street District Documentation: <http://planning.dc.gov/node/592992>

Heritage Minutes

Heritage Minutes produced [audio recordings](#) based on written communications between Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Henry Bibb, a leading African-American figure in Canada during the Civil War. They discuss their differing points of view on how black communities should be organized.

Audio Recordings: <https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/mary-ann-shadd>

ActiveHistory.ca

ActiveHistory.ca produced an educational film on "Mary Ann Shadd Revisited: Echoes From an Old House". Available on [YouTube](#), the film documents the discovery of Shadd Cary's personal letters in 1974 after the demolition of her former home in Canada.

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/uGH0m3NChM0>



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Additional Online Resources (continued)

The National Geographic

National Geographic offers an interactive 3-D [online game](#) where players act as freedom seekers escaping bondage. The game includes [a classroom educator's guide](#). National Geographic also features an [online interactive activity](#) on "How Slaves Found Their Way North".

Online Game: <http://nationalgeographic.org/media/underground-railroad-journey-freedom/>

Educator's Guide: <http://nationalgeographic.org/media/underground-railroad-journey-freedom-educator-guide/>

Online Interactive Activity: <http://nationalgeographic.org/activity/how-slaves-found-way-north/>

The Schomburg Center For Research in Black Culture

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture highlights "[The Northern Migration: 1840s to 1890s](#)" under its project, "In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience". The online exhibit offers a historical overview, an image gallery, maps, and population charts related to the migration of free blacks from the South to the North.

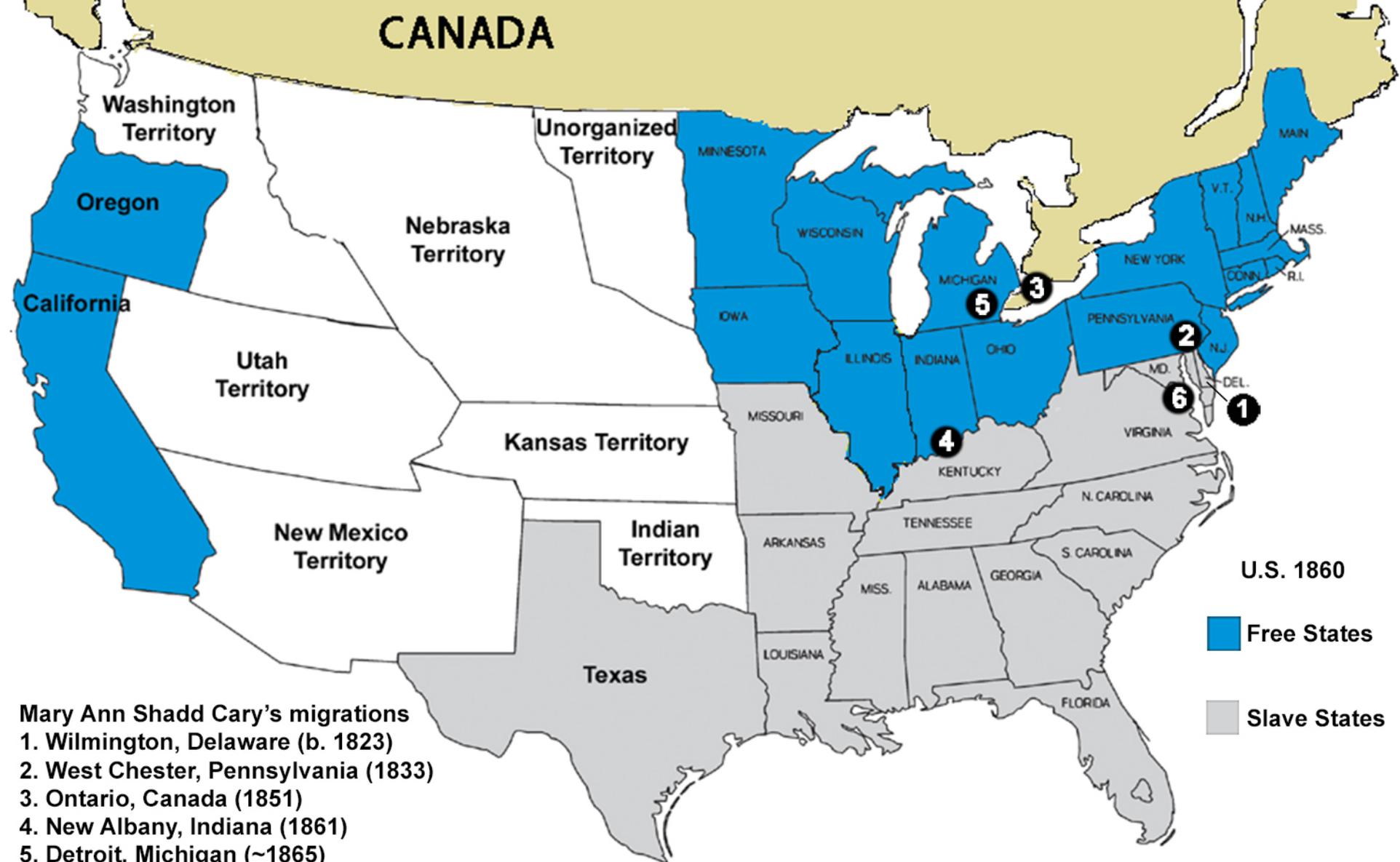
The Northern Migration: <http://www.inmotionaame.org/migrations/index.cfm>

Library of Congress

The John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress shares an [interview](#) on their blog with historian Kate Masur. Masur offers insight on the changes in Washington, D.C. during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era, especially in terms of living conditions of African Americans.

Interview: <https://blogs.loc.gov/kluge/2015/11/the-civil-war-reconstruction-and-the-transformation-of-african-american-life-in-the-19th-century/>

CANADA



U.S. 1860

Free States

Slave States

Mary Ann Shadd Cary's migrations

1. Wilmington, Delaware (b. 1823)
2. West Chester, Pennsylvania (1833)
3. Ontario, Canada (1851)
4. New Albany, Indiana (1861)
5. Detroit, Michigan (~1865)
6. Washington, D.C. (1869)



WEST END STATE COURT
1421
1870-1875
RENOVATED 1980

1421

Marie Ann Wald-Coy Burdette
1870-1875
RENOVATED 1980
Marie Ann Wald-Coy Burdette was a prominent African American woman in the community. She was a member of the National Association of Colored Women and the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women. She was also a member of the National Association of Public Health Nurses. She was a pioneer in the field of public health nursing and was one of the first African American women to be licensed as a public health nurse. She was also a member of the National Association of Public Health Nurses and the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women. She was a pioneer in the field of public health nursing and was one of the first African American women to be licensed as a public health nurse.