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Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Kit Coleman

The Shifting Public Memory of Canadian Female Journalism

Honorable Mention

Introduction

ON JUNE 30, 1855, MARY ANN SHADD CARY, A FREE BLACK woman from a prominent black family and editor of *The Provincial Freeman* (a black abolitionist newspaper printed in Chatham, Ontario, Canada) wrote the following to identify her own achievements in journalism: “To colored women, we have a word—we have broken the Editorial ice, whether willingly or not, for your class in America, so go to Editing as many of you as are willing and able.” Shadd Cary did indeed break the “Editorial ice” as the first black female newspaper editor in both Canada and the United States. Despite her significant contributions to the history of the Canadian press, it would be another woman—almost 50 years later—who would be heralded as Canada’s first female editor. This distinction would be claimed by Kathleen (Kit) Coleman, an Irish immigrant who came to Toronto, Canada at the end of the nineteenth century. Writing for *The Mail and Empire’s* “Women’s Kingdom” column from 1889 to 1898, Coleman was recognized as one of the most popular female journalists of her time. Mary Ann Shadd Cary would claim her rightful place in Canadian public memory alongside Kit Coleman—but not until 1970.

This paper explores the ways that these two female journalists have and have not been remembered in Canadian public memory. Kit Coleman—a white Irish immigrant—and Mary Ann Shadd Cary—a black fugitive from the United States—were two very different women with two very different

stories. Their contributions to the Canadian press and how they were and are remembered in history raises questions of historical significance. Why is Kit Coleman better remembered in early Canadian history than Mary Ann Shadd Cary? What does this say about public memory and the exclusion of black history in Canada? What changes occurred over the twentieth century to allow space for Shadd Cary in Canadian public memory?

Background

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was born in Delaware in 1823 to a prominent, free black family. Scholars who have studied the life of Shadd Cary argue that she emigrated to Canada in 1851 to teach the growing number of fugitive slaves who had fled to Western Canada after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, and because she wished to participate in the building of free black communities in Canada¹. Once in Canada, Shadd Cary became a strong advocate for emigration, and often clashed with other prominent black male leaders over the best way to aid black refugee settlers. Shadd Cary began to speak openly against the Refugee Home Society, an organization ran by prominent black leader Henry Bib, aimed at aiding ex-slave settlement in Canada. Scholars argue that Shadd Cary disliked the Refugee Home Society because she felt it inhibited black progress in Canada, as it was funded by white charity and encouraged segregated black schools, churches and communities.² Rodger Streitmatter in *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* argues that Shadd Cary believed that self-reliance was the key to black Canadians' progress in Canada and encouraged black immigrants to assimilate into Canadian culture. For Shadd Cary, Canada would not be a temporary home as many other black leaders saw it, but a permanent settlement.³

Scholars have also noted that Shadd Cary's outspokenness on topics of nationalism and emigration, and her willingness to debate openly with black male leaders about how to build black Canadian communities, challenged nineteenth-century gender conventions.⁴ Henry Bib, chairman of the Refugee

1. Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: the Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

2. Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: the Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*; Rodger Streitmatter, "Mary Ann Shadd Cary," in *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington, KY: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1994); Carla L. Peterson, "Colored Tourists," in *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

3. Rodger Streitmatter, "Mary Ann Shadd Cary."

4. Shirley Yee, "Finding a Place: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the Dilemmas of Black Migration to Canada, 1850-1870," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 18, no. 3 (1997).

Home Society and editor of a prominent black newspaper in Canada, *Voice of the Fugitive*, used his paper to speak out against Shadd Cary and publicly criticize her views.⁵ Scholars have demonstrated that in an effort to counter the influence of the *Voice of the Fugitive*, Shadd Cary started her own paper: *The Provincial Freeman*.⁶ Fully aware of how her gender might impact the circulation of the paper, Shadd Cary named Samuel Ward and Rev. Alexander McArthur as editors. Due to an economic depression in Canada, *The Provincial Freeman* folded in 1857. Shadd Cary then returned to the United States during the Civil War as a recruiter for the Union army. At age sixty, Shadd Cary got her law degree from Howard University and practiced law until her death in 1893.⁷

Shadd Cary spent only a decade in Canada but contributed significantly as an educator and editor to the formation of black communities in Ontario. While Shadd Cary was in the United States working on her law degree, another woman started her own journey in Canada. Scholars explain that in 1884 and at the age of twenty, Kit Coleman immigrated to Canada from Ireland, leaving behind a ruined marriage and a recently deceased daughter as she began her life in Canada completely destitute.⁸ Her financial situation forced Coleman to work as a freelance writer, which eventually resulted in a more stable income after she landed a position at the Toronto-based *Mail and Empire* in 1889. As historian Marjory Lang in *Women Who Made the News* explains, papers were hiring women at the turn of the twentieth century as a way to attract female subscribers. *The Mail and Empire* hired Coleman to write and edit the women's column "Women's Kingdom."⁹ Initially, "Women's Kingdom" was only half a page and focused mostly on fashion, but soon, Coleman's clever prose earned her hundreds of subscribers. She was given a full page to write about topics that were often seen as outside of the women's sphere.¹⁰ Shifting first to write about her traveling experiences, she soon moved on to writing about politics and social issues.

In 1898, Coleman traveled to the United States to convince the Secretary of War, Russell A. Alger, to let her cover the American-Spanish War in Cu-

5. Rodger Streitmatter, "Mary Ann Shadd Cary."

6. Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: the Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*.

7. Ibid.

8. S. M. Crean, "Chapter 1: Rebels and Adventurers," in *Newsworthy: the Lives of Media Women* (Halifax, N.S: Goodread Biographies, 1987), 15-28.

9. Marjory Lang, *Women Who Made the News: Female Journalists in Canada, 1880-1945* (Montréal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

10. S. M. Crean, "Chapter 1: Rebels and Adventurers."

ba.¹¹ Her persistence on the matter finally annoyed Secretary Alger so much that he let her go, making Coleman the first known female war correspondent. Her work in Cuba earned her great respect and admiration in both the United States and Canada.¹² Once back in Canada, she continued work on her very popular “Woman’s Kingdom” column. In 1904, Margaret Graham invited Coleman to accompany a group of fifteen other female journalists to the St. Louis Expedition. After a struggle with the Canadian Pacific Railway over the granting of courtesy passes to male journalists but not female journalists, Linda Kay in *The Sweet Sixteen* argues that the sixteen women began discussing the need for their own organization, one to rival the male dominated Canadian Press Association.¹³ That same year, the Canadian Women’s Press Club (CWCP) was founded, and Kit Coleman was named its first president. Coleman continued to work for *The Mail and Empire* as well as serve as president of the CWCP until 1911, when she resigned from journalism due to failing health. In 1915, Coleman died at the age of fifty-one. As scholars explain, Coleman became the most admired and popular columnist of her day, with a huge readership of both men and women.¹⁴ That legacy would continue on after her death.

As a result of the work of professional historians who began writing about both of these women’s lives in the 1970s, we know the details and broad outlines of Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Kit Coleman. Prior to the 1970s, however, very little was known about the life of Mary Ann Shadd Cary and her contributions to the Canadian press. Kit Coleman was widely remembered but the stories that surrounded her were more celebratory than analytical.

Historiography

Scholars who have studied the life of Mary Ann Shadd Cary and other black immigrants to Canada have explored how and why black narratives are often forgotten in history, and how their erasure is a result of their marginalization throughout history. Robin Winks, one of the earliest scholars to study black people in Canada, published *Blacks in Canada: A History* in 1971. His work provided a sweeping study of black Canadians from the time of slavery under

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Linda Kay, *The Sweet Sixteen: The Journey That Inspired the Canadian Women’s Press Club* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

14. Marjory Lang, *Women Who Made the News: Female Journalists in Canada, 1880-1945*; S. M. Crean, “Chapter 1: Rebels and Adventurers.” B. M. Freeman, *Kit’s Kingdom: the Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

both France and Britain in the seventeenth century to the 1970s. He argues that black people have largely been forgotten in Canadian history. Due to the endemic prejudice in Canada, they were never able to assimilate and they failed to create a viable community.¹⁵ Other scholars followed Wink's lead in studying the lives of black people in Canada, specifically looking at segregation and discrimination in Canadian schools and the workplace. Likewise, they concluded that black erasure was a result of the endemic prejudice in Canada.¹⁶

More recent scholarship on Canadian black history is also framed around black erasure. Both Sharon Beckford and Katherine McKittrick have studied exclusively black erasure in Canadian history. Beckford's "A Geography of the Mind: Black Canadian Women Writers as Cartographers of the Canadian Geographic Imagination" centers on the exclusion of black people from Canada's history as a result of Canadians seeing the struggle of black men and women being confined to American history.¹⁷ McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* argues that Canadian history has been deliberately rewritten to frame Canada as a safe haven in the era of United States slave fugitives, and crosscuts with narratives of Canadian paternalism. Black people in Canada are not nor were ever seen as Canadians but transients, refugees, and always outsiders. McKittrick concludes that blackness in Canada was named American or Caribbean but never Canadian, contributing to the erasure of blacks in Canadian history.¹⁸

Like this work, scholarship directly about Mary Ann Shadd Cary also focuses primarily on why she was forgotten for so many years in Canada. Rodger Streitmatter's *Raising Her Voice* suggests that prejudice has resulted in the erasure of black women. Unable to see black women as anything other than victims—enduring oppression and passively submitting to it—he argues that historians saw black women as powerless and dismissed them as unimportant to the historical narrative.¹⁹ Carla Peterson's "Doers of the Word" suggests that black women in the North who took part in resistance movements and worked to "elevate their race" through education and community building

15. Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, vol. 2 (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1997).

16. Tracey Adams, "Making a Living: African Canadian Workers in London, Ontario, 1861-1901." *Labour / Le Travail* 67 (2011): 9-43; Daniel G. Hill, *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Toronto, ON: Stoddard Publishing Co. Limited, 1995).

17. Sharon Morgan Beckford, "A Geography of the Mind," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 2007): pp. 461-483.

18. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006).

19. Rodger Streitmatter, "Mary Ann Shadd Cary."

were often lost because historians chose instead to focus on slavery narratives of the South, which were viewed as more important to accomplishing the civil rights aims of the Reconstruction era.²⁰ She also argues that the ways black women took part in resistance movements forced them to negotiate the boundaries of private and public spheres, thus impacting their visibility in both their own time and subsequent periods.²¹ In Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Jane Rhodes further suggests that Mary Ann Shadd Cary was forgotten as part of the price she paid for her boldness in transcending boundaries of sex, color, and class.²² As Rhodes shows, Shadd Cary often had to hide her identity as the editor of *The Provincial Freeman* in order to keep her subscribers happy.

Since Kit Coleman was never forgotten in Canadian public memory, scholars have not had to grapple with her erasure from history. Yet, they have also not grappled with questions about why and how she was remembered or about how the public memory of her changed over time. This paper draws on a range of printed sources and explores why Shadd Cary was forgotten and why Coleman was remembered. It identifies the 1970s as a turning point for both Shadd Cary's and Coleman's memory in Canada. The feminist movement and changes in the historical profession turned greater attention to the stories of women and people of color, bringing Shadd Cary out of obscurity and allowing for a more analytical approach to studying the life of Coleman. By the end of the decade, both women were remembered as feminist icons and central to the history of women in Canadian journalism. More serious attention would follow in the 1980s and 1990s, where both Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Kit Coleman would find a place in Canada's public memory.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary's Absence

Mary Ann Shadd Cary experienced both sexism and racism that acted as barriers to not only her career, but also to her memory. When Shadd Cary died in 1893, there was no mention of her passing in Canadian newspapers, despite the significant role she had played in the history of the Canadian press. Any attention of Shadd Cary's existence in the press from 1923 to 1961 was tied to that of the memory of John Brown, a famous white American abolitionist who attempted a failed slave uprising at Harper's Ferry. In the 1920s, several articles surfaced about John Brown, highlighting his life and his time spent in

20. Carla L. Peterson, "Colored Tourists," in *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

21. Ibid.

22. Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: the Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*.

Shadd Cary's adopted hometown of Chatham. These articles are found primarily in the *Windsor Star*—the nearest city to Chatham—with the exception of one article found in *The Gazette*, a Montreal-based paper. All the articles make reference to *The Provincial Freeman* but cite Isaac Shadd, Shadd Cary's brother, as its publisher or editor. Shadd Cary is referenced in three of the seven articles as a fellow publisher or editor.²³ One article, published in 1927, does mention that it was possible that Shadd Cary may have been the chief editor based on some remaining copies of *The Provincial Freeman*.²⁴ Besides these sparse accounts, no other account was made about Shadd Cary during this period.

It is unlikely that publishers of these news articles were deliberately leaving Shadd Cary out—it is more probable that they simply did not find her relevant or important. As Streitmatter pointed out, black women were seen as unimportant to the historical narrative, and this is likely the case of Shadd Cary. Furthermore, the fact that she is only mentioned in the context of a white man or her brother is evidence of the racial and gender boundaries that still existed in the early twentieth century. The majority of the articles that make any mention of Shadd Cary are about John Brown because his story was seen as worth telling, not her own or even her brother's.

Additionally, only one publisher in 1927 took the time to research who might have been the real editor of *The Provincial Freeman*; however, this article only places Shadd Cary in the context of her brother, evidenced by its title, "Isaac Shadd and His 'Provincial Freeman.'"²⁵ The confusion over who might have been the true editor of *The Provincial Freeman* is a result of the gender barriers Shadd Cary encountered in her lifetime. In the same article written about how she broke the "editorial ice," Shadd Cary bids adieu to her readers, informing them that she will pass on the running of the business to a man in an effort to allow the paper to prosper. Although her resignation was only ceremonial, she continued to edit the paper but did not take credit for it well after this article. Her remarks demonstrate the societal restrictions placed on her due to her gender and any serious research about *The Provincial Freeman* would have made it clear that Shadd Cary was indeed the editor and publisher of the paper, not her brother Isaac Shadd.²⁶

Another factor that contributed to the loss of Shadd Cary's memory was

23. "Old Newspaper is Aid to Research," *The Windsor Star*, Feb 10, 1923, p. 23; "Famous John Brown Once a Resident of Chatham," *The Windsor Star*, May 12, 1923, p. 23.

24. "Isaac Shadd and His 'Provincial Freeman,'" *The Windsor Star*, May 5, 1927, p. 4.

25. "Isaac Shadd and His 'Provincial Freeman,'" p. 4.

26. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, "Adieu," *Provincial Freeman*, June 30, 1855, p. 66

limited circulation as a result of her race. The fact that most of the articles about John Brown and Isaac Shadd were from the *Windsor Star* shows how historical accounts of black people in Canada were limited to areas where black Canadians lived. Shad Cary's paper was circulated solely among black Canadians. Once *The Provincial Freeman* folded in 1856, there were no other black newspapers in print in Canada until the late twentieth century.²⁷ Without a platform for the black community to circulate Shadd Cary's work, she was lost to public memory.

Race and gender would prove to be a barrier for black female journalists that followed Shadd Cary. In 1946, Carrie Best was the next black woman to start a black-run newspaper and later, in 1968, was one of the first black women to work for a white Canadian newspaper, writing for the *Pictou Advocate*.²⁸ In 1980, a small group of black journalists met to discuss a need for a black professional organization to encourage Canadian newspapers and broadcasters to hire more Black journalists, demonstrating that even after almost a hundred years since Shadd Cary, race and gender was still a major barrier in the Canadian press for black women.²⁹

Early Celebration of Kit Coleman

Unlike Mary Ann Shadd Cary, who had no access to a professional organization during her lifetime, Kit Coleman was a founding member of the Canadian Women's Press Club (CWPC). This helped bring greater attention to her life and achievements after her death, ensuring that she was not forgotten. When Kit Coleman passed away in 1915, news of her death was published in newspapers across Canada. *The Edmonton Journal* based out of Alberta reported that "Prominent Journalists Attend Kits Funeral." *The Star Phoenix* of Saskatchewan announced, "Kit, Beloved Newspaper-Woman Passes Away," and the *Victoria Daily Times* from British Columbia declared, "Noted Newspaper Woman Writer Dead." From the time of her death, Coleman was celebrated and remembered for her literary achievements with articles calling her a "big-hearted newspaper woman," "the first woman to win distinction in newspaper work in Canada," "well known writer," and a woman of "beautiful

27. *The Clarion* was founded in 1946.

28. "Carrie Best," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, accessed December 11, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/carrie-best>.

29. "The Case of the Invisible, Visible Black Journalist," Canadian Association of Black Journalists (Canadian Association of Black Journalists, February 28, 2020), <https://www.cabj.news/blog/bkhtk3otalo3n2ajy2na23iy4futp>.

character and rare literary ability.”³⁰ It is important to note that all these articles only mention one of her great achievements in journalism: her involvement with the CWPC, reflecting that while her work as a journalist was significant, her recognition after her death was tied directly to her involvement in the CWPC.

Coleman enjoyed fame as a writer for *The Mail and Empire* while alive, attracting thousands of subscribers, both men and women. Her fame as a writer and her boldness in demanding pay raises for her work made her the perfect leader for the newly founded Canadian Women’s Press Club. She was named the first president of the CWPC in 1904 and worked up until her death in 1915 for the organization. Her early work laid the foundation for the organization as she helped create the goals of the CWPC and aided in initial recruitment of members.³¹ As an organization, the CWPC was dedicated to guarding women’s interests in the field and creating networks between female journalists in Canada. It also sought to raise the standard of writing among women journalists by providing workshops and professional development in an effort to gain the respect of their male colleagues.³² The CWPC grew rapidly over the next decade, attracting hundreds of professional female journalists to its ranks. It continued to thrive until the 1970s, when women’s status in Canada improved and a need for such a club was in decline. By 2004, the CWPC officially came to an end but also by this time, Coleman’s treatment in public memory had grown more sophisticated.³³

During its peak in membership in the early twentieth century and after the death of Kit Coleman, the CWPC used Coleman to remind the public of their organization’s goals and achievements. Whenever the CWPC’s activities and accomplishments surfaced in the Canadian press, such as the 25th anniversary of the organization or information about the next conference, Kit Coleman was always mentioned.³⁴ Common among these articles was recognition given to Kit Coleman as not only the first president of the organization, but also as one of the firsts in the field of female journalism. Coleman was remembered as a “pioneer” that “blazed the trail for the battalion of Canadian

30. “Kit, Beloved Newspaper-Woman Passes Away,” *Star-Phoenix*, May 21, 1915, p. 6; “Noted Newspaper Woman Writer Dead,” *The Victoria Daily Times*, May 24, 1915, p. 12; “Prominent Journalists Attend Kit’s Funeral,” *Edmonton Journal*, May 26, 1915, p. 6.

31. B. M. Freeman, *Kit’s Kingdom: the Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman*

32. Linda Kay, *The Sweet Sixteen: The Journey That Inspired the Canadian Women’s Press Club* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

33. *Ibid.*

34. *The Winnipeg Tribune* Jun 19, 1926, p. 5; “Writers Celebrate 25th Anniversary,” *Edmonton Journal* Feb 28, 1933, p. 10.

women who are following this profession today,” the “first regularly employed editor of a women’s page in Canada,” and the “first woman to win distinction in newspaper work in Canada.”³⁵ In one article, Coleman is called a “crusader in the interest of women’s freedom and a free press.”³⁶ These articles all place Coleman at the forefront of the profession, placing an emphasis on the important role she had in bringing about the CWPC and its goals, which were to raise the standard among female journalists and help them be seen as equals to their male counterparts.³⁷

The CWPC also produced materials on the life of Coleman and her accomplishments. In 1934, the Hamilton Ontario Branch of the CWPC published a pamphlet titled, “Kathleen Blake Coleman, Pioneering Canadian Newspaperwoman: An Appreciation” written by Mabel Burkholder, a member of the CWPC. The appreciation, like the newspaper articles, highlights Coleman’s involvement with the CWPC but goes further by also highlighting her notable accomplishments in life, such as her work as an investigative journalist and her time in Cuba as a war correspondent. The appreciation paints Coleman as a pioneer to the journalism profession and one who broke barriers for other female journalists, arguing that Coleman helped make the profession of journalism for other women possible.³⁸

In describing Coleman’s many adventures, Burkholder conveys the sense that the majority of Coleman’s work as a journalist was writing about her time spent in Cuba, or her time spent traveling to new places and uncovering nasty truths about how poor people lived, or her time interviewing famous people and uncovering scandalous facts about politicians.³⁹ By focusing on what set Coleman apart from other female journalists rather than what made her the same, Burkholder frames Coleman as a pioneer among female journalists and argues that Coleman taught “men the value of women’s work” because she was able to write more successfully about the same topics they were writing about.⁴⁰ Burkholder concludes by claiming that Coleman had to do the work of two men to prove that she was half as good as one, but that she was able to meet this task and other obstacles placed in her way with great success. Her

35. *The Ottawa Citizen*, Feb 22, 1928, p. 14; *Edmonton Journal*, July 6, 1956, p. 23; “Women’s Press Club to meet in Toronto,” *The Winnipeg Tribune*, Jun 19, 1926, p. 5; “22 Years old,” *Calgary Herald*, Jun 21, 1926, p. 7; *The Province*, May 22, 1935, p. 5.

36. *The Northern Sentinel*, Oct 28, 1954, p. 9.

37. Linda Kay, *The Sweet Sixteen: The Journey That Inspired the Canadian Women’s Press Club*

38. Mabel Burkholder, “Kit”, *Kathleen Blake Coleman, Pioneer Canadian Newspaperwoman: an Appreciation* (Hamilton, ON: Hamilton Women’s Press Club, 1934).

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

work as a journalist helped raise the standard of writing among female journalists while at the same time inspiring others to work just as hard as she had. Coleman's memory is used in this pamphlet to benefit the CWPC because it promotes their own goals; yet it is also the reason why Coleman was present in Canada's public memory in the first half of the twentieth century.

Finally, the social connections that Coleman was able to create with other prominent journalists and Canada's elite during her lifetime often helped her stay present in Canadian public memory well after her death. Funding for the publication of "Kathleen Blake Coleman, Pioneering Canadian Newspaperwoman: An Appreciation" came from three of Canada's most elite women: Lily Hendrie, Eunice Oaks, and Caroline Elanor Wilkinson.⁴¹ Lily Hendrie was practically royalty in Hamilton, Ontario and was married to William Hendrie, a successful businessman and horse breeder. Eunice Oaks was the wife of Sir Harry Oaks, Canada's wealthiest man. Caroline Eleanor Wilkinson was a famous Canadian poet. Furthermore, Coleman's connections to other prominent journalists is evidenced in newspaper articles. In 1928, the *Ottawa Citizen* published an article about Newton MacTavish, editor of the *Canadian Magazine*, where MacTavish is quoted for his reminiscences of his days at *The Mail and Empire* stating that Kit Coleman was "blazing the trail for the battalion of Canadian women who are following this profession today."⁴² In 1931, *The Gazette* published an article about Charlotte Whitton, a journalist for *The Queen Journal* and private secretary to Thomas Law, who was then serving as a member of parliament. The article explained that Whitton traveled to Hamilton to "deliver the first of four addresses for the window being placed in the Hamilton library to the memory of Mrs. Katherine Coleman (Kit), one of the first and most noted of Canadian newspaper woman."⁴³ In 1933 and then again 1954, both *The Edmonton Journal* and *The Northern Sentinel* mentioned Kit Coleman in connection to Gertrude Watts, who was a founding member of the CWPC and president of the Edmonton branch.⁴⁴ All these newspaper articles serve as examples of how Coleman's professional connections, often made possible through the CWPC, aided in her remembrance after her death. Although Coleman may have been remembered on her own merits for her pioneering role in the profession of female journalism,

41. Mabel Burkholder, "Kit," *Kathleen Blake Coleman, Pioneer Canadian Newspaperwoman: An Appreciation*

42. *The Ottawa Citizen*, Feb 22, 1928, p. 14.

43. *The Gazette*, Jan 16, 1931, p. 8.

44. "The Top Shelf," *The Northern Sentinel*, Oct 28, 1954, p. 9; "Writers Celebrate 25th Anniversary," *Edmonton Journal* Feb 28, 1933, p. 10.

her connection with the CWPC helped bring greater attention to her life and literary achievements after her death.

Feminism and the Politics of Historical Memory

The 1970s were a turning point for how public memory was framed for Kit Coleman and Mary Ann Shadd Cary. The new attention given to the two women greatly contrasted how they had been remembered at the start of the century. Scholars cite the rise of feminist movements across the globe as key motivators in writing women's history.⁴⁵ Judith P. Zinsser, in "Women's History/Feminist History," called the 1970s a "decade of challenge and transformation" in women's history. During this time, scholars began to investigate other issues in women's history such as class, race, and the intersectionality of women's history and black history.⁴⁶ The shifts in the historical profession that embraced women's and black history changed the ways in which Coleman and Shadd Cary were remembered. As Zinsser points out, "women often came to their feminism through stories of exemplary women from their cultures past. These heroines offered possibilities and gave images of alternative lives."⁴⁷ The authors, journalists, and amateur historians who wrote about Shadd Cary and Coleman during this time period sought to raise these women up as feminist icons through the celebration of their life and achievements. These influencers' early works paved the way for more historical and professional ways to remember these two significant women.

In 1977, two amateur historians, Jim Bearden and Linda Butler, published the book, *Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary*. This book was the first major attention Shadd Cary received in Canada and book reviews began to appear in newspapers across Canada. The *Calgary Herald* called Shadd Cary, "a women to be reckoned with in the Canada West" the *Windsor Star's* headline read, "Mary Ann Shadd: Black, female and brave—a folk hero comes back to life"; and the *Red Deer Advocate* exclaimed that Shadd Cary was a, "Canadian freedom fighter and educator."⁴⁸ The media's attention and subsequent reaction reflected the way that Shadd Cary was framed in *Shadd: The*

45. Bonnie G. Smith, "Gender I: From Women's History to Gender History," *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, (2017), 266-281.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Judith P. Zinsser, "Women's History/Feminist History," *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, (2017) p. 238-265.

48. "Mary Shadd fought for black rights," *Calgary Herald*, Jan 20, 1979, p. 120; "Mary Ann Shadd: Black, female and brave—a folk hero comes back to life," *The Windsor Star*, Jun 3, 1978, p. 18; *Red Deer Advocate*, Apr 22, 1987, p. 35.

Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary. Bearden and Butler celebrated her life in their book and spent over two thirds of the book focused on Shadd Cary's time in Canada, even though she only lived there for eleven years of her life. This focus helped frame Shadd Cary's memory as a Canadian rather than an American.

Bearden and Butler also framed Shadd Cary as a feminist by highlighting the times in her life where she encountered gender discrimination. Although Shadd Cary also faced opposition due to her race, Bearden and Butler gave little attention to this aspect of her life. Rather, *Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary* portrays Shadd Cary as a woman who constantly had to fight against men who were determined to put her in her place. One example of this portrayal is the amount of time that Bearden and Butler devoted to recounting Shadd Cary's feud with Henry Bib. The story covered nineteen chapters of the thirty-eight-chapter book, even though the feud only lasted two years.⁴⁹ Throughout these chapters, Bearden and Butler took time to contrast the way that Shadd Cary acted with what was acceptable for a woman to do at the time. Bearden and Butler explained that Shadd Cary was seen as "hot headed" and that she "misbehaved badly" for a woman of her time.⁵⁰ They also made efforts to explain the context of Henry Bib's commentary about Shadd Cary. For example, Bearden and Butler looked at an article written by Bib in reference to Shadd Cary. After providing a copy of the original source, Bearden and Butler explained that, "In those days, that line about 'adding nothing to her credit as a lady' was one of the nastier things that might be said of a woman."⁵¹ By outlining the context of Shadd Cary's time, Bearden and Butler framed Shadd Cary as a woman ahead of her times—a woman who stood up for herself and spoke her mind despite social norms. By choosing to frame her life this way, Bearden and Butler portrayed Shadd Cary as a feminist.

Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary was instrumental in bringing Shadd Cary out of obscurity. However, it was the feminist movement itself that created space for such a book—a book about a strong, independent, Canadian black woman who transcended the boundaries of gender. Shadd Cary's life had been extraordinary, and Canadian feminists were ready to receive her with open arms.

Only one year after the publishing of *Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary*, journalist Ted Ferguson published a book titled *Kit Coleman*

49. See chapters 7-25.

50. Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler, *Shadd: the Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary* (Toronto, ON: NC Press, 1977), 75.

51. Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler, *Shadd: the Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary*, 75-76.

Queen of Hearts. Similar to *Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, reviews about the new book began to circulate through Canadian newspapers. The *Windsor Star* stated that because of Kit, “newspapers would never be the same”; the *Ottawa Citizen* ran an article about the book titled, “Ask at Your Peril: Kit Coleman, pioneer of the advice column in Canada, pulled no punches”; and the *Star-Phoenix* proclaimed, “Coleman, feisty nasty red-head.”⁵² Although Kit Coleman had never been forgotten in Canadian public memory, these articles reflected a new way of remembering Coleman that likewise reflected the way that Ted Ferguson framed her life. Rather than focusing on her time spent with the CWPC, Ferguson focused Coleman’s life on what she had written about in “Women’s Kingdom.”

The majority of *Kit Coleman Queen of Hearts* covered excerpts from “Women’s Kingdom” grouped into eighteen chapters, each with a different topic and introductory commentary by Ferguson. In the introduction of the book, Ferguson argued that Coleman’s popularity grew because of her success in shocking her readers with her “new women” ways that rejected Victorian values.⁵³ The resulting chapters of *Kit Coleman Queen of Hearts* included examples of the way she defied the gender norms of her time through her writing. A few of the most prominent examples include: Chapter 4, a compilation of Coleman’s commentary on politics; Chapter 7, Coleman’s complaints about the hurdles that a working woman faces in Canada; Chapter 10, Coleman’s frustrations with fashion; and Chapter 17, all the work Coleman did while in Cuba covering the Spanish American War. Ferguson framed Coleman’s life by the ways in which she fought against the gender barriers of her time, arguing that “the prospect of having to fight a herculean battle—to prove that women could do as well as men and should be respected for their professionalism—appealed to Kit almost as strongly as the idea of making her living with a pen.”⁵⁴ Both *Kit Coleman Queen of Hearts* and *Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary* highlighted historic Canadian women that modern feminists could look to for inspiration and strength in fighting their own battles against gender inequality.

52. *The Windsor Star*, 23 Dec 1978; *The Ottawa Citizen*, 2 Sep 1978 ; *Star-Phoenix*, 10 Nov 1978

53. Ted Ferguson, *Kit Coleman: Queen of Hearts* (Markham, ON: PaperJacks, 1978), 1-6.

54. *Ibid.*

Deepening Engagement with Kit Coleman and Mary Ann Shadd Cary

Early scholarship on Coleman and Shadd Cary celebrated their lives as feminists, while later scholarship in the 1990s produced a deeper and more holistic reflection on their lives. In “Women’s History/Feminist History,” Zinsser explains that as feminist narratives increased over the 1970s and 1980s, historians sought to pay more attention not only to women’s achievements but also to the work they did in the home. This new approach aimed to look at women holistically and to stop confining them to the, “narrow parameters of traditional men’s history.”⁵⁵ True to Zinsser’s analysis, the 1990s brought a more professional and holistic way of remembering Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Kit Coleman.

Barbara Freeman wrote 1989 *Kit’s Kingdom* as part of her graduate work at Carleton University. One of her critics noted that the book resulted from “the emergence of women’s studies as a new discipline at universities across Canada.”⁵⁶ Freeman explained in her introduction that her interest in Coleman came as a result of reading Ted Ferguson’s book *Kit Coleman Queen of Hearts* and that as a radio journalist, she came to see Coleman as a role model. Freeman admitted that she used to view Coleman as a feminist like herself, but after learning more about Coleman’s life and work, she discovered that Coleman was not the feminist that she initially thought she was. Freeman’s book critiques the work done by Ferguson, as Freeman clarified that although Coleman was ahead of her era, she was also “imbued with Victorian mores.”⁵⁷ To demonstrate this complexity, Freeman cited several examples in Coleman’s work that often seems to contradict the modern feminist narrative. One such example is the detailed essay Coleman wrote about the Chicago Canal in 1893. Coleman stated that, “such a topic should interest women because, being far more intelligent than given credit for, they wanted to be better companions to their husbands and better mothers to their children.”⁵⁸ This example demonstrates that although Coleman felt women could and ought to be interested in more than just fashion and homemaking, she also believed that a women’s interest in anything intellectual was a result of their desire to better fulfill her motherly and wifely duties.

55. Judith P. Zinsser, “Women’s History/Feminist History.”

56. Dora Sklove, “A Colorful, Contradictory Mother” *Edmonton Journal*, May 26, 1990, pg. 75.

57. *Ibid.*

58. B. M. Freeman, *Kit’s Kingdom: the Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman*, p. 85.

Freeman's work exemplified the more holistic approach to women's history as outlined by Zinsser. Freeman's detailed analysis of Coleman's life demonstrated that Coleman walked a fine line between what was acceptable for women at the time as well as what was seen as more daring.⁵⁹ She is not as Ferguson portrayed her—a feminist in the more modern sense. Freeman also included a detailed account of Coleman's life outside of journalism, remarking that her time spent as a travel journalist was actually quite short—only three years of her twenty-five year long career.⁶⁰ Much of Coleman's writing in *The Mail and Empire* after 1895 was of a more maternal and “womanly” nature. She often wrote about her experiences with her two children and gave advice to the subscribers that wrote to her. Freeman argued that stories about her children allowed Coleman to fill her column with new stories each week and helped give her authority as a maternal figure.⁶¹ Although Coleman continued to try and provide a more intellectual aspect to her column, her writing pushed the boundaries of what was seen as acceptable material for women of her time.

Freeman's work demonstrated how a greater emphasis on women's studies as a discipline culminated in a more professional and holistic approach to studying women in history. Freeman's work changed the way that Coleman was remembered in public memory. No longer was she seen as simply a feminist icon but rather as a complex woman influenced by the societal and cultural norms of her time.

Professional historical scholarship about Mary Ann Shadd Cary also began to emerge in the 1990s. Even though most of the scholars that wrote about Shadd Cary were from the United States, their research dealt with topics about gender ideologies, national identity, and racism in Canada. Their findings were published in Canadian historical journals such as *The Canadian Historical Review* and the *Canadian Review of American Studies*. Rather than focus on the ways that Shadd Cary broke gender stereotypes, scholars such as Shirley Yee, Jane Rhodes and Peggy Bristow looked at Shadd Cary in the broader context of what it meant to be a black woman in the nineteenth century.⁶²

In “Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders in

59. B. M. Freeman, *Kit's Kingdom: The Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman*, p. 6.

60. *Ibid.*, 81-105.

61. *Ibid.*, 89.

62. Peggy Bristow, “Whatever You Raise in the Ground You Can Sell It in Chatham: Black Women in Buxton and Chatham, 1850-65,” in *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 69-142.

Ontario, 1850–70,” Yee explored how Shadd Cary challenged the notion of “true” womanhood in the context of other black women in Ontario. Yee argued that “participation in community activities was considered a part of a Black woman’s social responsibility.” Shadd Cary’s own experiences in Canada demonstrated that she was not much different from other black women, who likewise worked to help build their communities.⁶³ This does not detract from Shadd Cary’s significance in Canadian history; it simply helps contextualize her life. In “Whatever you raise in the ground you can sell it in Chatham: Black Women in Buxton and Chatham, 1850-65,” Bristow used Shadd Cary’s life as one example among many of how black women “shared a tradition of resistance and survival” in nineteenth century Canada. Bristow argued that Shadd Cary was a part of a larger movement of black women that resisted their imposed inferior status and survived in Canada because of this resilience. Finally, in “The Contestation over National Identity: Nineteenth-Century Black Americans in Canada,” Rhodes looked at the contributions Shadd Cary made to the contestations of national identity in Canada as part of a bigger problem that would later be known as “double consciousness” or “an often tortured self-awareness of one’s racial and national selves, of one’s Africanness and Americanness.”⁶⁴ Rhodes argued that Shadd Cary chose to come to Canada as an act of disidentification with the U.S. and often skewed the reality of life in Canada in her writing in an effort to encourage black people to embrace Canadian identity. Work done by Yee, Bristow, and Rhodes demonstrates a deepening engagement with Shadd Cary during this time as these scholars chose to look at Shadd Cary’s life from a more critical lens rather than simply celebrating her life.

Public Space in the 21st Century

As a result of the increased attention given to Shadd Cary and Coleman in the historical profession, Shadd Cary and Coleman have been brought into public spaces and into public memory, thus constructing a new level of remembrance for these women. Today, Toronto commemorates Shadd Cary’s with statues on the grounds of Windsor University and the BME Freedom Park in Chatham, a mural celebrating black Canadians in downtown Windsor, and three Canadian documentaries by *A Scattering of Seeds*, the *Toronto Star* and *The London Free Press*. Canada preserves Coleman’s memory in a museum exhibit

63. Shirley J. Yee, “Gender Ideology and Black Women as Community-Builders in Ontario, 1850–70,” *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (1994): 53-73.

64. Jane Rhodes, “The Contestation over National Identity: Nineteenth-Century Black Americans in Canada,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30, no. 2 (2000): 173-184.

at the Workers History Museum in Ottawa, on a plaque outside the *Toronto Mail* from Canada's Federal Heritage Designations, and two Canadian documentaries by *A Scattering of Seeds* and *Historica Canada*. These public spaces celebrate Coleman and Shadd Cary as significant women in Canada's past and as complex characters who transcended barriers of race and gender, reflecting both the shift in public memory since the 1970s as well as the deepening engagement of professional historians since.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary's and Kit Coleman's memory has changed and evolved over the last one hundred years. The invisibility of black women in Canadian history obscured Shadd Cary's role in the history of Canadian journalism until the feminist movement. Coleman's story differed because she was connected with a woman's professional organization only open to white women. The Canadian Women's Press Club initially paid attention to Coleman's accomplishments that were then celebrated again during the feminist movement. During the feminist movement, both Shadd Cary and Kit Coleman were honored as feminist icons. Later in the 1980s and 1990s, shifts in the historical profession that embraced women's and black history finally directed more serious attention to these women. Today, both Kit Coleman and Mary Ann Shadd Cary are seen as significant and have a place in Canada's public memory.

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