



OHS Creighton Award Recognizes Hilary Bates Neary for *A Black American Missionary in Canada: The Life and Letters of Lewis Champion Chambers*

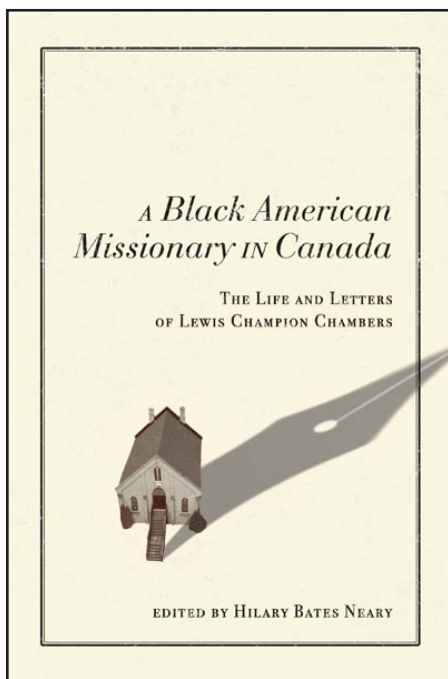
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The Ontario Historical Society is pleased to present the 2022-23 Donald Grant Creighton Award to Hilary Bates Neary for her book *A Black American Missionary in Canada: The Life and Letters of Lewis Champion Chambers*, published by McGill-Queen's University Press. The Donald Grant Creighton Award honours the best book of biography or autobiography highlighting life in Ontario, past or present, published in the past three years.

A Black American Missionary in Canada makes an important contribution to our understanding of Ontario's Black history. Using the life and letters of Lewis Champion Chambers—who had been born into slavery in Maryland, purchased his freedom, and became a missionary in Canada West—Neary casts new light on aspects of the Black experience on both sides of the border: slavery, the Fugitive Slave Act, the Underground Railroad, freedom, and, of course, the Black church. Writing in 1859, Lewis Chambers reported that “times is hard.” No doubt they were. The weather. The recalcitrant land. And not least the racism. But as Neary notes, the times were not only hard. There was community, Christian fellowship, and material success too.

Part biography, part history, and part primary document collection, *A Black American Missionary in Canada* crosses literary boundaries, and its author is to be congratulated for her research, analysis, and presentation. Clearly, *A Black American Missionary in Canada* was as much a labour of love as it was a scholarly project.

The OHS Honours and Awards Committee proudly presents the Donald Grant Creighton Award to Hilary Bates Neary.



A Message From Hilary Bates Neary

I am deeply honoured that my book about Lewis Champion Chambers has been given the Donald Grant Creighton Award by the Ontario Historical Society. My purpose in writing the book was to make Chambers better known to students of Ontario, Canada, and the United States, especially those wishing to learn more about the complex lives of African-Americans and African-Canadians in the nineteenth century. This award will happily further that purpose.

I became aware of [Lewis Chambers'] ministry when I was researching the history of the building that had been his church during his time in London, Canada West, 1860-63. Amazingly, that building had survived many decades of punishing Canadian winters and the neglect of subsequent owners; when the structure was threatened with demolition in 2012, I joined those hoping to save and restore this former church and to repurpose it into a centre for the interpretation of the Black history of London and area. One of my roles in the restoration effort was to learn more about the history of the Black experience in London and the part that the former AME/BME Church played in it. In the course of my research, I came across mention of Chambers's time in London in the annual reports of the AMA; on investigating further, I learned about the AMA archives, borrowed the Canada District letters on microfilm, and discovered the letters that Lewis Chambers had written to George Whipple. His voice immediately spoke to me of endurance, purpose, and spiritual strength, and I began to imagine a book that would communicate that voice to a wider audience.

Founded in 1888, the Ontario Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation and registered charity dedicated to the preservation and celebration of Ontario's history for people of all ages and cultural backgrounds. To learn more about the OHS's Honours and Awards Program, or to submit a nomination, please visit <https://ontariohistoricalsociety.ca/honours-awards/> or contact the Society's offices by telephone or e-mail.

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