



Julia Greeley

1835-55-1918

Archdiocese of Denver

The Julia Greeley story is inspired by a courageous, faith-filled woman who overcame slavery and poverty to become a source of hope to others even less fortunate than she. By the time Julia died in Denver in 1918, she was so well known for her outreach to the poor that her funeral attracted a spontaneous crowd of 1,000 mourners, according to a newspaper account of the day.

For years, Julia was a welcome and familiar sight on Denver's streets. When she appeared wearing her signature floppy black hat and pulling a little wagon, it meant she was on her way to bring clothing and encouragement to somebody in need. "Old Julia," as she came to be known, did her ministry at night, hobbling on a lame foot, after she had worked all day as a housekeeper, cook and "nanny" to a prominent Colorado family.

"She was ... a woman with a wide-winged spirit," wrote Frances Wayne, the *Denver Post* reporter who covered Julia's larger-than-life funeral. Her legacy, Wayne wrote, included "eighty-five years of worthy living... unselfish devotion... and a habit of giving and sharing herself and her goods."

Julia started with everything stacked against her. She was born into slavery on a Missouri farm sometime in the 1840s, and in that cruel setting, she was physically abused. She lost an eye in

a beating and became permanently lame. As a free woman after the Civil War, Julia took jobs as a housekeeper and nanny, and eventually went to work in Denver for the family of William Gilpin, the first territorial governor of Colorado.

In Denver, Julia lived in a tiny apartment in the city's future LoDo area, near Black and Walnut streets. Through her work for the powerful Gilpins, Julia was connected by only a few degrees of separation with Denver's influential and wealthy families.

But her heart was elsewhere: She loved children and the poor, and she had special compassion for firefighters, who in the 19th century faced daily dangers from rickety fire-prone buildings. On her daily journeys to visit poor homes, she also took holy cards and prayerful encouragements to fire stations across Denver. Her love for little children was legendary. She was known as especially tender and gentle "nanny" with the Gilpin children and the children of other families. In fact, the only known photo of Julia shows her cradling one of her young charges.

Julia also was known for her commitment to her Catholic faith. Of course, when she served the poor and indigent, Julia never questioned their creed or belief; all she wanted to do was lift up anyone who struggled and suffered as she had done. On her own time, Julia continued her unshakable devotion and trust in Jesus Christ. Every day she trudged to daily mass at her parish, Sacred Heart Church on Larimer Street. She had a deep love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devotion familiar to many Catholics as the special recognition of the heart of Jesus beating with love for each and every human being.

In what many regard as a fitting capstone to her remarkable life, Julia died on June 7, 1918, the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And it was in Sacred Heart Church, the parish, that her unexpectedly awesome funeral was held which attracted such huge crowds of mourners.

In the 21st century Julia's fame has grown even larger. In late 2016, her heroic life was officially recognized by the Catholic Church, which began the canonization process to declare Julia a saint. Today her official name is Servant of God Julia Greeley.

Timeline

- 1835-55 Julia is born a slave in Hannibal, Missouri
- 1865 Julia probably emancipated from slavery
- 1869-71 Julia employed by Richardson family in St. Louis, Missouri
- 1879-80 Julia employed by Gilpin family in Denver
- 1880 Julia baptized conditionally at Sacred Heart Church
- 1882 Julia with Gilpins at Edgerton, Colorado
- 1883 Julia cooked for Teachouts at Edgerton
- 1883 Julia cooked for Sherwin family in Cimarron, New Mexico
- 1884 Julia cooked briefly in Denver brothel
- 1885 Julia worked for Snyder family in Cheyenne, Wyoming
- 1886 Julia worked for the Tysons at Fort D.A. Russel
- 1886-87 Julia worked in Laramie, Wyoming
- 1887 Julia testified in Gilpin divorce trial
- 1893-94 Julia worked for O'Donnell family in Denver
- 1896 Julia worked for Young family at Fort Logan
- 1899 Julia living at 1421 28th Street, Denver
- 1901 Julia professed in Third Order of St. Francis at St. Elizabeth's
- 1904 Julia listed as cook, living at 2913 Walnut
- 1905 Julia bestowed name on Francis Xavier Lee
- 1910 Julia working for Ryan Sisters at 5127 Lowell Blvd.

- 1912 Julia informed of \$100 contingent request from Mrs. Gilpin
- 1914 Julia first visited Urquhart House at 4270 Hooker
- 1916 Julia's only photograph taken in McDonough Park
- 1917 Julia visited Mother Pancratia Bonfils, who was then dying
- 1917 Julia was living at 2821 Walnut Street.
- 1918 Julia died in St. Joseph Hospital, Denver on June 7, 1918. Buried from Sacred Heart Church at Mt. Olivet Cemetery.
- 2011 Julia Greeley Guild organized
- 2016 Archbishop Aquila hires Roman postulator and petitions opening of cause for canonization
- 2017 Julia's body exhumed and buried in Cathedral Basilica of Sacred Heart

Prayer for the Cause of Julia Greeley

Heavenly Father, your servant Julia Greeley dedicated her life to honoring the Sacred Heart of your Son, and to the humble service of your children, especially the poor. If it be in accord with your holy will, please grant this favor I now ask through her intercession, [mention your intention]. I also, in the Name of Jesus, whose Sacred Heart filled Julia's heart with love for all she met, that I may follow her example of humility and simplicity in loving you and my neighbor. Amen