

Julia Greeley, Denver's angel of charity

February's celebration of Black History Month in the United States traces its roots back to the 1920s, although it gained more formal recognition in the '70s. All during February, we'll be sharing stories of holy and often unknown black Catholics.

Born into slavery in Hannibal, Missouri, Julia Greeley first went to Colorado with the family of the first territorial governor, William Gilpin. She gained her freedom after the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. As a slave, a beating resulted in a drooping eye.

While in Colorado, Greeley fell in love with the Catholic faith. Converting in 1880, she immediately immersed herself in the devotional and sacramental life of the Church; she attended daily Mass and took up intense fasting, along with constant prayer.

Greeley found great joy in her love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which she saw as the font for her many charitable and service-oriented ministries. She was known to spread the devotion, even using it as a tool to evangelize Denver's firemen. The love she had for Jesus' heart was expressed in her own merciful love for all she encountered.

Greeley took on a life of poverty, living in union with the poor of Denver. Taking on odd jobs like cooking and cleaning, she used her meager salary to finance a ministry to the poor.

In her trademark floppy hat, the holy woman dragged a red wagon filled with goods to distribute to her city's poor. At times, she even took to begging for them.

A witness of God's love and mercy to all, Greeley's life shows

the dignity of every life – especially those on the peripheries. Many of those whose lives she touched were among the nearly 1,000 mourners at her funeral in 1918. The canonization cause of Greeley was recently advanced by the U.S. bishops.

- [Read more about Julia Greeley.](#)
- [Read more about the contributions of black Catholics to the U.S. Church.](#)