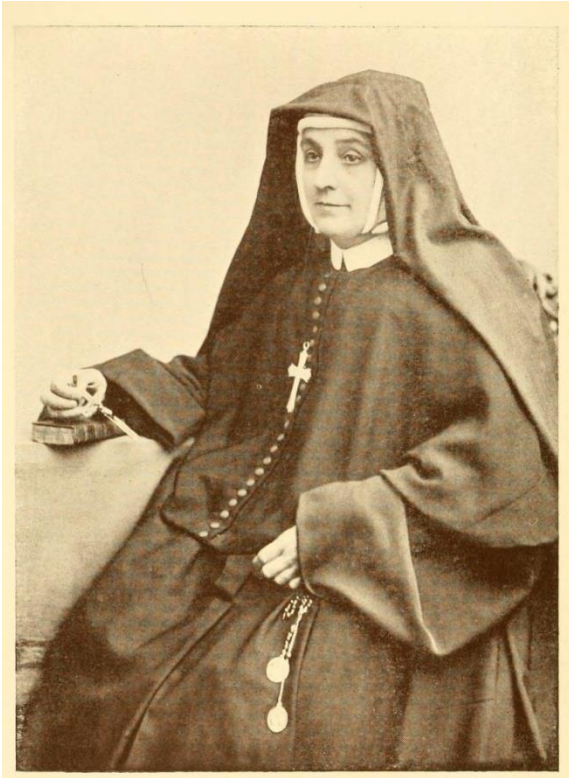


Take a look at Cornelia Peacock Connelly, “that incorrigible woman” who’s on the road to sainthood!



Today, on the day she died in 1879, we consider Venerable Cornelia Peacock Connelly, who is currently on the road to canonization (sainthood)--possibly becoming Philadelphia’s second native-born saint after St. Katharine Drexel. St. Stephen’s, then a fledgling Episcopal church, stands out as an early and significant site within her extraordinary path. The church preserves physical evidence of that contact as part of our shared history. When orphaned, Cornelia was taken in by an extensive blended family that counted among the founders and active congregants of St. Stephen’s,

the Peacocks and the Montgomerys. She was baptized there at 22 in 1831 by one such relation, its founding rector, Rev. James Montgomery, before her marriage to a newly-ordained Episcopal priest, Pierce Connelly. Her subsequent life, as rector’s wife and mother in Natchez, Mississippi, changed dramatically to that of a Roman Catholic convert who in 1846 founded a unique community of Roman Catholic sisters—commanded to do so directly by the Pope--in England, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. The SHCJ was dedicated to progressive women’s education for both the privileged and the urban poor (especially child laborers), and is active internationally today, including around Philadelphia.

Mother Connelly's path is famously singular. To support her husband's desire for a second ordination, this time as a Catholic priest, she consented to separation with perpetual chastity, though officially married. To follow her own calling to establish and run the community of teaching sisters, she remained true to those vows when Pierce later left the Catholic church and demanded her return to him. When she refused, he took the three children and denied her access to them. She faced constant difficulties and criticism as a woman (particularly with a troubled husband), as an independent-thinking authority often at odds with the local hierarchy, and as a Roman Catholic within a largely Protestant England. Her life is now, deservedly, the subject of considerable study and discussion from many perspectives.

Members of her extended family are buried at St. Stephen's. The closest was just brought to light in the new Furness Burial Cloister, the Duval vault, which may house the first children of her beloved sister Addie (Adeline Maria Peacock Duval). I recently found pew markers for various branches from these early decades (Peacock, and Duval) that were saved when the box pews were removed beginning in 1989.

—Suzanne Glover Lindsay, St. Stephen's historian and curator