

From Arts & Architecture: Frances Kirtley Thatcher Memorial Plaque

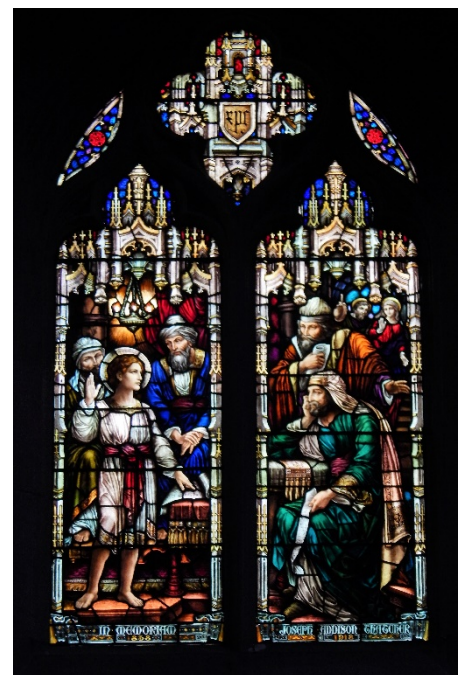
“Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness...” These words from Psalm 96:9 often open the Office of Daily Evening Prayer. For Frances Kirtley Thatcher, the significance of those words went directly to the heart of her spiritual life and deeply influenced her contributions to St. John’s Cathedral.

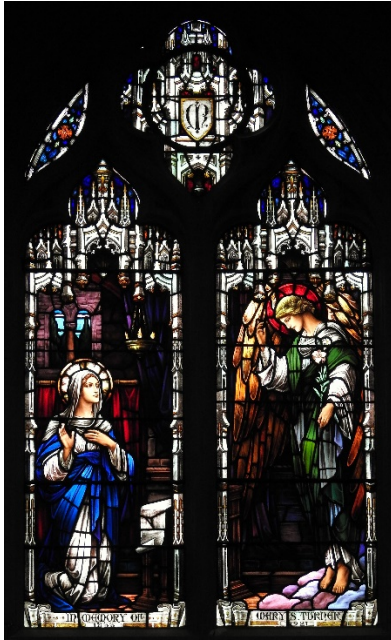


From 1884 until her death in 1928, Frances was a member of St. John’s Cathedral. During those nearly four and a half decades of humble service, she added much to the beauty of St. John’s, and to the holiness of the proper celebration of Holy Communion. Vestry minutes for April 5th, 1929, fifteen months after her death in January of 1928, record the establishment of a memorial fund in her memory with these words: “To perpetuate the memory of the late Frances Kirtley Thatcher, who was a communicant and devoted member of Saint John’s Cathedral and during her lifetime held in sacred devotion the service of the communion.”

The Frances Thatcher Memorial Fund, left in trust by her niece Mary Jeannette Anderson, provided funding for “the elements for all the communion services of Saint John’s Cathedral whether held in the Cathedral church or any of its chapels...and altar lights and all incidentals to said communion services....” It’s both fitting, and perhaps a bit ironic, then, that Frances’s memorial tablet, approved by the Vestry in May of 1929, was placed on the wall of the old sacristy, now the south wall of the Shannon Room, where it is the least visible of the memorial plaques in the cathedral.

Frances Thatcher, however, didn’t wait until after her passing to contribute to the “beauty of holiness” at St. John’s. In 1918, after the death of her husband, Denver banker Joseph Addison Thatcher, Frances commissioned the stained glass window of Jesus in the Temple from the New York firm of Gorham and Company. A few years later, in 1922, she commissioned another window from Gorham, the Annunciation window, this time in memory of her sister, Mary S. Turner. The windows are on opposite sides of the nave, the Jesus in the Temple window in the east aisle, and the Annunciation window in the west aisle. They are in themselves exquisite works of art of the highest quality, both visually recounting events in the life of Jesus. Frances also commissioned a third stained glass window, in 1927— this time for St. Martin’s Chapel. The Holy Communion window from the studio of Nicola D’Ascenzo of Philadelphia is dedicated to the memory of Frances’s parents, and attests, once again, to her deep and abiding devotion to the Holy Communion.

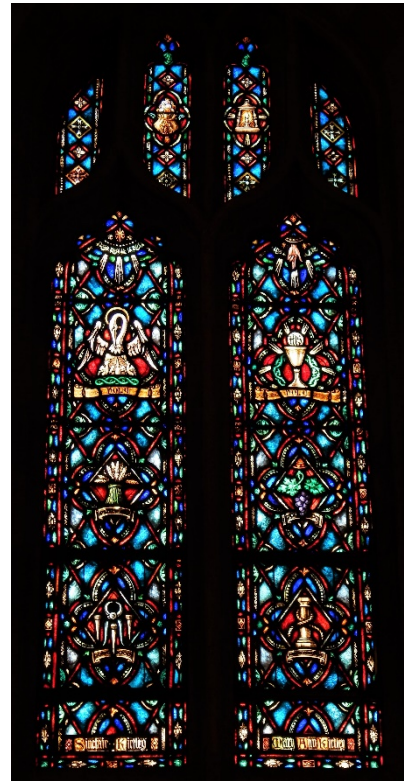




Frances St. Claire Kintley Kirtley, also known as Fanny, was born in Columbia, Missouri, on November 17th, 1842, daughter of Mary Anne Peebles-Breckenridge and St. Claire (Sinclair) Kirtley, “one of the eminent lawyers of the middle west,” according to her obituary in the *Denver Post*. She attended school at Monticello College, near Rockford, Illinois, and then, as the *Post* obituary reports, “when she completed her studies came west with an older sister.” In 1863, the Kirtley sisters headed for Central City, where they “joined the aristocratic little group in the mining camp which is renowned for the development of culture, art and music in the state,” according to the *Post*.

While in “the mecca for the pioneers,” Frances met and married Joseph Addison Thatcher, who owned a mercantile business in

Central City.” Although his mercantile operation, and subsequently a stamp mill (a mining machine used to crush raw ore) failed, Thatcher by 1870 had managed to buy and sell mines. He then bought a bank which in 1874 became the First National Bank of Central City. In 1883 Joseph Thatcher and Frances moved from Central City to Denver, where he established the Denver National Bank a year later, and where Frances began her involvement in community service as well as her more than forty year involvement with St. John’s Cathedral.



Frances Kirtley

Although by all accounts, Frances Thatcher was a modest and unpretentious woman, her involvement in Denver civic and charity affairs speaks for her thorough engagement in the life of Denver and St. John’s, even when she would not take credit herself for her work. According to the *Post* obituary, Frances Thatcher was a devout member of St. John’s, where she also participated in the Women’s Auxiliary, and she was a charter member of the board of St. Luke’s Hospital, then affiliated with St. John’s and the Episcopal Diocese. The *Post* also reports that until her death, “she retained the position of first vice president on the board of the St. Luke’s hospital charity ball committee,” as the last remaining woman of the group who established the organization fifty years before.

Frances Thatcher was also active in the Denver Women’s Club, and as a member of the west central field committee of the Y. W. C. A., she was responsible for the expansion of the Y. W. C.

A. throughout the west. Through her connections with other influential women in Denver in the 1880s and 1890s, Frances helped to organize the Delaney kindergarten, which ensured that children were in the charge of trained and paid teachers, a revolutionary idea for its time. The Delaney kindergarten later became part of the Denver Public School system.



On her 86th birthday, a year before she died, Frances Thatcher saw the publication of a cook book she compiled, which she sold for the benefit of the work of St. John's Women's Auxiliary. During her extended illness after she suffered a stroke in 1926, Frances was cared for by her niece, Mary Jeannette Anderson, the daughter of her sister Rebecca Kirtley Anderson. Mary Jeannette lived with Frances in the Thatcher House at 1560 Sherman Street, which after 1929 became the headquarters of the Rinquet Music School.



On January 16th 1928, Frances Kirtley Thatcher followed her husband in death, from a second stroke. They are interred in Fairmount Cemetery in a small, elegant, marble Greek Doric mausoleum, with this inscription on the door:

We are such stuff as dreams are made of and our little life is rounded with a sleep. After all when a man comes to die all that he will have left is what he has given away.

