

Marguerite Connolly. (1830-1904)

Marguerite was the first Metis woman to enter the Order of the Grey Nuns (1845). Her Cree mother, Mio Nipiy (Suzanne), who had been abandoned by Marguerite's father, HBC Chief Factor William Connolly in Montreal, sought refuge with the Grey Nuns upon her return to the Northwest.

William Connolly (b. 1786) was 15 years old when he entered the service of the North West Company in 1801 and was still very young when he met and married, à la façon du pays, a Cree woman, known as Suzanne "Pas de nom." during the winter of 1803-4 at Rat River House. They had six children, with Amelia, the eldest daughter, being born in 1812, either a few miles from Fort Churchill¹ or "possibly" at Fort Assiniboia.² Amelia Connolly went on to marry James Douglas the founding father of British Columbia and was remembered as Lady Douglas for decades after her death.

In 1841 Connolly's first wife had moved to a convent in St. Boniface, Manitoba. In 1832 William Sr. married his cousin, Julia Woolrich, in Montreal. Connolly willed his estate to his second wife, but Susanne's oldest son, John Connolly challenged the will resulting in the courts supporting his claim of the validity of the first marriage. The extension of legal rights to country wives was precedent setting in Canada.



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¹ N. de Bertrand Lugrin, *The Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island, 1843-1866* (Victoria, 1928), 10.

² Marion B. Smith, "The Lady Nobody Knows," *British Columbia: A Centennial Anthology*, Reginald Eyre Watters, ed., (Toronto, 1958), 473.