Julia Matilda Cater was born on 28 June 1811 into an upper class family with strong connections with the Catholic community and clergy. Having entered the Sisters of Charity, Cater was professed as Sr M Lawrence in 23 January 1833. Below is a copy of her vows.

Cater was the youngest of the five pioneer Sisters, twenty-seven years of age when she came to Sydney and the only English woman. Cater was one of the two Sisters the English Government offered to pay for their teaching services to the Colony. Dr Ullathorne acknowledged her wit and solid education, and her artistic talent was evident from the decoration on her vow formula.

Having arrived in Sydney to her new life, she changed her religious name to Sr M Magdalen Chantal. Since Sisters were commonly called ‘Mrs’ at the time, people would not have had to use this mouthful often. Like the other Sisters, Cater had difficulties with the new environment, and Bishop Polding particularly mentioned when writing to England that Cater was badly affected by the mosquitoes. In an 1844 letter to Archbishop Murray of Dublin, Polding attributed Cater’s discontent in the Colony to her frail health.

As well as visiting the Female Factory, Cater was put in charge of the Catholic Orphan School at Parramatta and was commended by Polding for organising it ‘admirably’.

Cater, like Cahill and O’Brien wrote home to Ireland in the early years to try to reclaim her dowry. This was to alleviate the financial deprivation the Sisters suffered in Australia. The Sisters found it both embarrassing and distressing to deprive the mission in Australia of the small aid it received from overseas funding by accepting funds from the Church.

Cater returned to Ireland in 1846, but eventually left the Irish Congregation, later joining the Benedictine Oblates. She finally left religious life and took the position of governess in a French family.