

All Saints

In New Orleans, whether in halos or helmets, all saints fill a special place in the hearts of the populace. Whether marching in song (most often requested at Preservation Hall) or down the field, the city's devoted always want their Saints to be "in that number". Accordingly, All Saints' Day is a very special day in the Crescent City.

Officially observed in the Roman Catholic Church as the Solemnity of All Saints (and also known as All Hallows or Hallowmas), All Saints' Day is what most New Orleanians call that solemn day celebrated on November 1. It is to honor all the saints, known and unknown. In the Western calendar, it falls on the day after Halloween (October 31) and the day before All Souls' Day (November 2).



All Saints Day in New Orleans - Decorating the Tombs in One of the City Cemeteries, wood engraving by John Durkin published in *Harper's Weekly*, November 1885.

In New Orleans, All Saints' Day is that time of year that people bring flowers to the graves of their loved ones. They spend time sprucing up the tombstones, scrubbing or even whitewashing them to improve their appearance. By tradition, mums have been the flowers of choice,

but gladiolas are also a common selection. New Orleanians on this important day honor all the saints and their own dearly departed, especially missed by their families and friends.

New Orleans Magazine Editor Errol Laborde sees a connection between Halloween - All Saints' Day and Mardi Gras - Ash Wednesday, a pair of back-to-back holidays (where the day after is much more solemn than day before):

"We take Ash Wednesday more seriously than in most places because we play so hard on Mardi Gras. Jazz funerals are conducted by and for those who lived for the music."

"All Saints' Day, he continues, is "a moment in the year when New Orleanians in particular are more faithful at visiting cemeteries, partially because the carnival-enhanced spirit of Halloween the night before reminds us to do so. Even the cemeteries themselves, with their baroque above-ground tombs, tell of lives of generals, voodoo queens, politicians, rogues and relatives."

In Mexico, Portugal and Spain, private altars are built and special offerings are made, called *oferendas* in Spanish (*oferendas* in Portuguese). These gifts include sugar skulls, marigolds and the favorite foods and beverages of the departed. All Saints' Day in Mexico coincides with the first day of the Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*) celebration. Many have come to love the primitive art pieces connected with the celebration of "*Todos los Santos*", skeleton figures in numerous (and often humorous) settings.

Some people in New Orleans have found candies and confections to offer a somewhat religious experience. Pralines have been popular throughout the city's history, described as "one of the delicacies of New Orleans" by historian Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz (who arrived in Louisiana the year New Orleans was founded). Other types of sweets were also available. One early New Orleans confectioner was Nicolas Joseph Mioton (born 1791), who was killed in a duel on Bayou Road by Edouard Antoine Tremé, son of the faubourg's founder, Claude Tremé.

One modern-day New Orleans native, Hayward Simoneaux, has found a way to celebrate chocolate and honor the saints, as well. He has become one of the best-known chocolatiers in Santa Fe, New Mexico's high altitude capital city. Interestingly, the city's full name when founded was *La Villa Real de la Santa Fé de San Francisco de Asís*

("The Royal Town of the Holy Faith of St. Francis of Assisi"), honoring the faith of one saint in particular. Thirteen years ago (1999), Hayward opened *Todos Santos* (All Saints) Chocolates and Confections located in a tiny store at 125 E. Palace Avenue, Suite 31, tucked away in the back of the beautiful Sena Plaza Courtyard.



Shop sign for *Todos Santos* Chocolates and Confections

Chocolate has been used as a drink for nearly all of its history, dating back before the Olmec. The Maya probably created the first modern chocolate beverage over 2,000 years ago. By the 15th century, the Aztecs adopted cacao into their culture and often used chocolate beverages as sacred offerings. Chocolate was considered a luxury good throughout the Aztec empire, and cocoa beans (which the Aztecs believed gave them wisdom) were also used as money. The Aztec adaptation of the beverage was called *xocolatl*, made much the same way as the Mayan version, and was first introduced to Europeans when Montezuma drank his daily from cups of gold. Hernán Cortés brought chocolate back to Europe.

Chocolate candy came along centuries later. The chocolate-making process changed greatly with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution.

A Dutch family named van Houten undertook the mass production of chocolate bars and related products. Their “Dutch process” of treating the chocolate with alkali removed its bitter taste, and mechanical mills were created to squeeze out cocoa butter, facilitating hard, durable chocolate.

Hayward Simoneaux, who grew up in Lakeview and attended Metairie Park Country Day School before heading off to the Parsons School of Design, has put his own interpretation on this New World treasure known as chocolate. He started off his journey, he told me, by collecting antique chocolate molds. He followed this up with studying candy-making techniques from a teacher in Gaithersburg, Maryland. He learned to use his signature gold and silver leaf applications while working as an art framer.



Hayward Simoneaux in his Santa Fe shop, *Todos Santos*

It wasn't long before Hayward was fashioning his confections in the shape of *milagros* (literally “miracles”), representations of everyday objects, body parts and symbols such as the flaming heart that believers offer to saints either in gratitude or for protection. Simoneaux adds an additional ingredient to his chocolate *milagros*, a

thin veneer of edible 23 carat gold or silver leaf. Gilded *milagros* are his signature pieces at "*Todos Santos*".

The folk custom of *milagros* or ex-votos is prevalent in parts of North, Central, and South America (as well as New Orleans) and can be traced back to ancient Iberians who inhabited the coastal regions of Spain. These spiritual emblems or icons, which are prayer items asking a saint to help with some particular problem, are often in the form of a body part where the malady occurs.



Milagros in Chocolate

They may be small metal castings or larger replicas, as seen at the St. Roch Cemetery in New Orleans. There braces, shoes, crutches, numerous feet and hands and other replicas of body parts line the walls.



St. Roch Cemetery in New Orleans

As part of a religious act of devotion, *milagros* can be offered to a saint as a reminder of a petitioner's particular ailment or need, or in thanks for a prayer answered. The Shrine and Cemetery of Saint Roch give the surrounding New Orleans neighborhood its name. As a saint, St. Roch is especially venerated in connection with the plague. He is invoked (amongst other things) against: cholera, epidemics, knee problems and skin diseases. He is the patron saint of: bachelors, falsely accused people, invalids and apothecaries.

Simoneaux uses Valhrona chocolates in the molds he designs and makes himself, and other superior packaged chocolates such as Michel Cluizel and Knipschildt are offered for sale. The shop also offers chocolate sardines wrapped in foil in tin canisters that look just like the real thing. It sells its own and flavored truffles (the best selling being the dark chocolate ones) in flavors as varied as red chile-tangerine and black pepper. Hayward was recognized as one of the top 10 artisan chocolatiers in the country by *Chocolatier* magazine in 2001 and has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Town and Country*, *Vogue* and on the Food Network.

"Humidity is not great for candy making," Hayward informed me. The clear, dry atmosphere of Santa Fe is better for candy-making. On rainy or humid days like those in New Orleans, the cooking and setting-up time can increase substantially. Sugar attracts water, so the humidity can adversely affect one's recipe.

Hayward's shop is like a fiesta, a visual feast for the eyes, very much like Mardi Gras. This September the shop was filled with colorful *Dia de los Muertos* figures and papier-mâché coffins filled with chocolate eyeballs, fingers and hearts. There were cans, with saints beautifully painted in Peru (such as St. Sebastien and St. Francis of Assisi), filled with delicious chocolates.

But amongst all the *santos*, there was also a bit of playful naughtiness all around. A whole display case of colorful risqué and buxom Pez dispensers was on hand, which an artist in Albuquerque custom-paints. There was everyone from a topless chamber maid and Wonder Woman to the Hindu Lord Ganesh, Michelle and Barack Obama. Or one could choose chocolate Buddhas, a twelve-piece box of astrological signs or the kama sutra set. If one was feeling a little guilty after that last purchase, he could select the "after dinner saints", suggested for consumption after any sin. They come in a box of four, eight or twelve saints. Redemption is always on hand.

Hayward travels back to his hometown usually once or twice a year, sometimes alternating Jazz Fest and Mardi Gras. Late September 2012, he had just returned from the Crescent City and his saints were all sold out. *Todos los santos* gone! His busy season is October to May for beautifully packaged selections. There are white chocolate mice and chocolate mushrooms. The flavors of his chocolates are modern: caramel and coffee; chipotle chile and tangerine chocolate; as well as many others.

Chocolate is not the only thing Hayward has cooking. From chicken and sausage gumbo to grillades and grits, he keeps the flavors of New Orleans dear to his heart and palate. In many ways he is very old-fashioned, having neither an e-mail address nor a website. But one can reach him by phone (505-982-3855), and he'll be glad to mail out his remarkable chocolates.

A few words of explanation must be provided to point out the difference between All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. In Western Christianity, All Souls' Day is observed principally in the Roman Catholic Church and some churches of the Anglican Communion. This day is the commemoration of *all* the faithful departed (not just the saints) and is celebrated November 2, or, if this be a Sunday or a solemnity (formal rite or ceremony), on November 3.

The theological basis for the Roman Catholic feast is the doctrine that the souls of the faithful who (on departing from the body) have not been perfectly cleansed from venial sins, or have not fully atoned for past transgressions, cannot immediately attain the Beatific Vision, and that the faithful on earth can help them to do so by prayers, almsdeeds and especially by the sacrifice of the Mass.

Purgatory is the name given to the final purification of all the souls who die in God's grace and friendship, but are still imperfectly purified. Though purgatory is often pictured in art as a place rather than a process, the concept of purgatory as a place is not actually part of the Church's doctrine.

In New Orleans, people remember all the saints and souls together on All Saints' Day. As for those other Saints (the ones who could use a victory from time to time), they think about them all year round.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"All Saints"
Ned Hémard
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