Saints That Ain't

Back when I penned this article in 2006, I had to explain to my readers that the title did not in any way imply a connection to the Crescent City's once bag-worthy football team, even though they are indeed of the non-canonized variety. The 1980 season was especially bad with disheartened fans calling their team "the Aints" and going so far as to show up to games sporting brown paper bags over their heads. Since that time, however, (and since writing the article), New Orleans' beloved Saints have won a spectacular Super Bowl (XLIV) in 2010, with quarterback Drew Brees completing 32 of 39 passes for 288 yards and two touchdowns. That made him Super Bowl MVP and entitled him to at least the aura of beatification. The Saints defeated the Indianapolis Colts by a score of 31–17, earning them their very first Super Bowl win.

Nor does this article refer to the most requested song at Preservation Hall, "The Saints", which in its lyrics fails to name any particular paragons of virtue "in that number." The popular song with obscure origins, full title "When The Saints Go Marching In," evolved in the early 20th century from a number of similarly titled gospel songs. After a number of recordings in the 1920s, and a memorable one by Louis Armstrong in 1938, the spiritual has become more of a "hot" jazz standard, closely associated with the city of New Orleans.

I also mentioned New Orleans streets named for saints, which (more accurately) were named for important individuals: Saint Louis (for the King of France) and St. Charles (for Charles III, King of Spain) being the most obvious. Saint Philip was named for France's Regent from 1715 to 1723, the *Duc d'Orléans*. A few decades earlier, René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle claimed the entire Mississippi River basin for France, naming the area Louisiana in 1682 after Louis XIV of France, the Sun King. When St. Louis Street was first laid out in the New Orleans, Louis XV was King of France. He became *roi* at the age of five in 1715 upon the death of his great-grandfather, Louis XIV. France, of course, had a long line of kings named Louis, and Louis IX (1214 – 1270) was the only King of France to be canonized. Saint Louis, who reigned from 1226 until his death, is remembered for his great charity. Beggars were fed from his table, and he ate afterward from their leavings. He also washed their feet, ministered to lepers and daily fed a multitude of the poor. So instead of naming a street for an actual monarch or person, the saint was often chosen in his place.


(Real Saint) Louis street sign in the French Quarter

Sometimes this naming concept had curious results. Rue Saint Adrian was named for Adrian de Pauger, the royal engineer, who laid out the city of New Orleans in 1721 after a plan by Le Blond de la Tour. The street then became Saint Ursula, and finally Ursulines.

The real Saint Adrian was sent to Canterbury, England, in the late 600s. According to Saint Dunstan, also of Canterbury, Saint Ursula was the Christian daughter of a British king who didn't relish marrying a pagan monarch. Opting for virginity, she set sail in the company of eleven (or eleven thousand) other virgins. This is probably due to misreading "11 M" as eleven thousand instead of eleven martyrs. All of these ladies ended up in Cologne. Refusing to deny their faith, they were tortured to death by Huns.

Saint Ursula's true story may be lost in the mists of time, but not that of the Ursuline nuns. The Ursuline Convent, oldest building in the Mississippi Valley, still stands on Chartres and Ursulines even after Katrina. And, yes, there's also a Pauger Street.
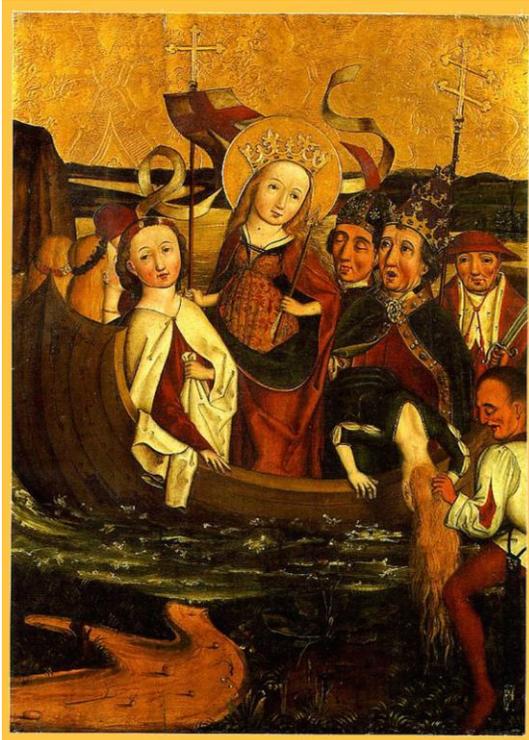
The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula   *Ursuline Convent, New Orleans*
(German, 16th century)

The Archdiocese of New Orleans has church parishes named in honor of two saints named Francis, one Uptown on State Street for Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/1182 - October 3, 1226) and the other on Metairie Road for Saint Francis Xavier (April 7, 1506 - December 2, 1552). There is also a New Orleans priest, Francis Xavier Seelos, born on January 11, 1819, in Fussen, Bavaria, who is well on the road to sainthood. His Holiness Pope John Paul II proclaimed Father Seelos "Blessed" in 2000. His Feast Day is October 5. Saint Francis of Assisi was the also the founder of the Franciscan order and the namesake of the California city, "San Francisco," founded in 1776.

There is also a beautiful ante-bellum mansion outside of New Orleans named "San Francisco," but its name has no connection to any saint named Francis. It was named *Saint Frusquin*, which evolved into "San Francisco." *Saint Frusquin* is not a holy person at all but French slang for "everything one owns, the whole kit and caboodle, the shirt off one's back or one's last red cent." "*Et tout le saint-frusquin*" can be translated as "and all that jazz." Or if one prefers the French explanation: "*On appelle saint-frusquin ce qui constitue la propriété de quelqu'un, ses biens, ses hardes, et quelquefois aussi son argent.*"

The plantation home was so named *Saint Frusquin* since Valsin Bozonier-Marmillion, renovating the structure built by his father, spent perhaps too freely on his River Road money pit. Valsin and his wife completed their Rococco masterpiece in 1860. The profile of the house's deeply overhanging decorative cornice gives the edifice a styling called "Steamboat Gothic." Crowned by a dormered hip roof, the home has a richly decorated interior.

San Francisco Plantation, River Road, Garyville, Louisiana

Saint Frusquin was also the name of the only thoroughbred to beat *Persimmon*, famous 1896 Derby winning racehorse of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. Mentioned in "Ulysses" by James Joyce, *Saint Frusquin* was bred and raced by Leopold de Rothschild and went on to become an outstanding stud. He was the great-great grandfather of *Count Fleet*, American Triple Crown winner.

Saint Frusquin, thoroughbred and stud

Also popular in New Orleans is Saint Expédité whose apocryphal origins are subject to debate. Hometown hagiography has it that a crate of holy relics came to Parisian nuns in 1781 from the Denfert-Rochereau catacombs marked "*e spedito*" in Italian indicating "expedited" delivery. One version explains this as the way Expédité's statue arrived at the Old Mortuary Chapel at Our Lady of Guadalupe on Rampart Street. In either case, this patron saint of speedy solutions was venerated long before these events are said to have occurred. It is still not known if this saint ever existed, but he is portrayed as carrying a cross entitled *Today* and crushing under foot a crow called *Tomorrow*. Thousands pray to him in São Paolo, Brazil, annually on his April 19th Feast Day. Not surprisingly, modern-day computer users pray to him for greater bandwidth.

Statues of St. Expedite, New Orleans (left) and France (right)

Our Lady of Guadeloupe (left) and the Église St-Pierre Prades, Languedoc-Roussillon, France (right)

Then there's that other local favorite saint who wasn't even a Christian. Named by Governor of Louisiana William Charles Cole Claiborne, Saint Tammany Parish was created by proclamation on December 22, 1810. Tammany was really Tamanend (circa 1625 – circa 1701), the chief *sachem* of the Lenni-Lenape Indians who negotiated peace with William Penn. During the American Revolution patriots gave the name Saint Tammany to a festival celebrating freedom of the common man. The "New York Tammany Society" was founded in 1789 growing out of the earlier "Sons of Liberty" and later becoming "Tammany Hall". Aaron Burr turned this social club into a dynamic New York political machine that almost made him President in 1800. One vote stopped him. Ironically, one of those votes that gave

Thomas Jefferson the one vote win was that of William Charles Cole Claiborne.
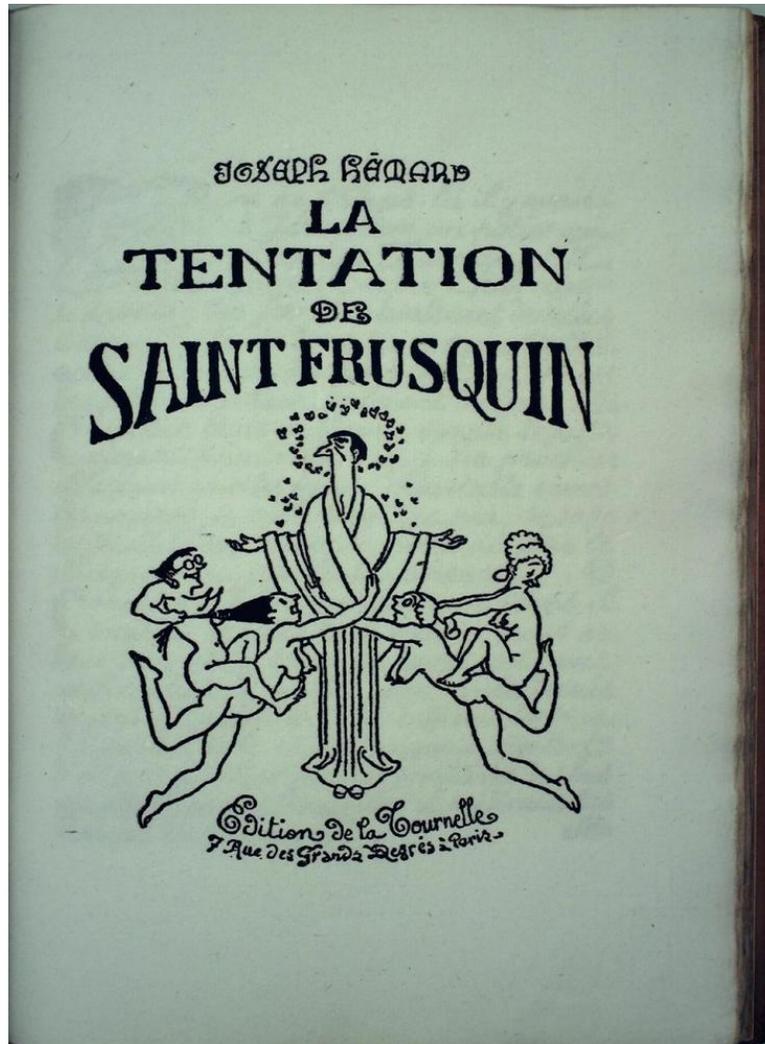
La Tentation de Saint Frusquin, by Joseph Hémard

Joseph Hémard (1880 – 1961), prolific artist and popular French book illustrator (no known relation to this author) produced an amusing, yet naughty, book on the fictitious *Saint Frusquin* in the 1930s. With a reputation for illustrating novels, Hémard sometimes lent his humorous touch to a number of unlikely texts. He published several editions of French codes of law accompanied by risqué and risible illustrations. The artist's work has been described as "satirical, absurdist, and frequently erotic," which his creation, *La Tentation de Saint Frusquin,* aptly demonstrates.

The saintly embodiment of the French colloquialism, "*tout le saint-frusquin,*" it is all playfully interpreted artistically by Joseph Hémard. The phrase, which we learned earlier as roughly translated as "all one's means and possessions," sets the basis for personifying *Saint Frusquin* as an actual saint.

Antique weathervane representing Tamanend, of the Lenni-Lenape

For those of us in the Greater New Orleans area, saints, whether real or fictitious, have for hundreds of years played an important part in the area's long and varied history.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Saints That Ain't"
Ned Hémard
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