TOMB OF MARIE LAVEAU

MARKS THE SPOT:

NEW ORLEANS LEGENDS AND LORE

Marie Laveau
Chicken Man
Sallie Ann Glassman
Delphine Lalaurie
Devil Baby
Voodoo
The following is excerpted from the book *City of the Dead: A Journey Through Cemetery #1*, New Orleans, Louisiana by Robert Florence © Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, @ pages 60-63:

“Marie Laveau (c. 1794-1881)

Marie Laveau was the reigning Voodoo priestess of the nineteenth century. Voodoo as a social phenomenon came into its heyday during the 1800’s. Laveau’s guidance Voodoo thrived as a business, served as a source of spectacle and entertainment, and was what Voodoo is in its pure form is religion: forms of worship American colonies through the slave trade.

Due to slavery, the entire life of the transplanted African was tragically. Naturally the religious beliefs and practices would change. The African religion under the strain of slavery ultimately gave rise to the New-World phenomenon known as “voodoo.” More than any one person, Marie Laveau transformed the religious practices of African slaves into a major social
institution of nineteenth-century New Orleans. On many levels, her life was an embodiment of New Orleans Voodoo.

To begin with, New Orleans Voodoo is steeped in Catholicism. Marie Laveau, the renowned Voodoo figure in the history of North America, has been buried in a Catholic cemetery which has a separate section for Protestants. She was a devout Catholic who attended Mass at the St. Louis Cathedral nearly every day. Her first public record appears at the Cathedral, where she was married to Jacque Pépin on August 4, 1819. To a greater extent than her predecessors, Marie Laveau would mix holy water, Catholic prayers, incense, and saints into the African-based Voodoo rites.

New Orleans Voodoo, like New Orleans culture, is a mixture. Marie Laveau was a mixture: She was a free person of color, born to Charles Laveau, a wealthy planter, and a mother who sources indicate could have been a mulatto slave, a Caribbean Voodoo practitioner, or a quadroon mistress. Marie may also have been part Choctaw. The objects and actions employed in the practice of New Orleans Voodoo are called “gris-gris.” “Gris” is the French word for grey, signifying a mixture of black and white magic, magic which can be used for different purposes.

Marie Laveau’s gender is indicative of New Orleans Voodoo. Her sect, like the African religion upon which it is based, Marie Laveau Voodoo as an impresario. Voodoo ceremonies in Marie Laveau’s time were looked upon by some people as entertainment; she was the one who introduced this show-biz element. She understood theatrical staging, possessed...
people would line up and pay to see. These performances, and her general voodoo practice, were highly lucrative. Aspects of nineteenth-century New Orleans were also business-oriented, and she was a consummate businesswoman.

Marie Laveau could very well be the person who eternally solidified the relationship between the City of New Orleans and the practice of Voodoo. But despite her significance, much confusion surrounds her life, and this tomb. For example, the commemorative plaque states that this is the “reputed” burial place of Marie, nee ‘Laveau’, married carpenter Jacques Paris. He died in 1831 and has become the “Widow Paris.” She thereafter became common-law wife to ship captain Christopher Glapion, who had distinguished himself in the Battle of New Orleans. The names Laveau, Paris and Glapion are all accounted for in the tomb.

Yet the date of death, 1897, is not hers, but closer to her daughter’s. So the question is, which one of them is buried here? Some say that it is Marie; others believe neither are here. Many people think it is not known if they have switched between the St. Louis #1 and #2 cemeteries. The answer is unclear and perpetually debated, as there are endless discrepancies in recorded information about her, much of it being legend. Yet even if neither are buried here, her remains would not necessarily be inside. Since most popular forms of gris-gris, it is likely that a Voodoo practitioner switched them shortly after her entombment.

In a sense, it does not really matter if Marie Laveau was buried here, as she has been accepted as her final resting place and for generations the devoted and curious have been visiting this site, conducting all kinds of rituals, leaving all kinds of gris-gris. You never quite know what you will find upon visiting this gravesite, from a statue of a monkey and a cock, to a wedding cake couple circled in coconut, cayenne, and honey, to a freshly dead rat wearing Mardi Gras beads.
But you will always find the innumerable “X’s” blanketing this tomb and several others. The origins of this proverbial New Orleans Voodoo practice contrary to popular belief, it is not rooted in age-old local ritual. An amount of X’s scrawled throughout the cemetery, it would appear the legions of Voodoo practitioners make their way through the City of the Dead on a regular basis. Although more Voodoo is practiced at this one tomb than any single tomb in the United States, many people who worship through Voodoo and genuinely live never left a mark on the structures of the City of the Dead.

The thousands of X’s are largely the result of tour groups, who have to practice Voodoo. Their instructions always include breaking a brick tomb (notice the neighboring tombs depleted of their bricks) and a combination steps which involve spinning around three times, scratching knocking on it, or rubbing a foot on it or hollering at it or kicking it slightly, if not very, differently from everyone else) and then leaving an offering or a wish granted.

So is this or is this not real New Orleans Voodoo? It is, in that there is a reasonable dictionary definition of Voodoo. Practitioners create ritual as however, the Glapion family who owns the tomb does not call this “Voodoo” “vandalism,” and have complained that they can no longer read through what one family member considers “graffiti.” There and hotel concierges instructing wish seekers to scratch three travel books which recommend the practice. But one of the most striking accounts of this practice appearing in a major supermarket tabloid, the story of two million dollars in the Missouri State Lottery after scratching tomb.”
Controversy persists over where Marie Laveau and her namesake daughter are buried. Some say the latter reposes in the St. Louis No. 2 (Hauck 1996) in a "Marie Laveau Tomb" crypt most likely contains the remains of another voodoo queen, Marie, Marie Comtesse. Numerous sites in as many cemeteries could be the final resting place of one or the other Marie Laveau (Tallant 1946, 129), but the prima facie evidence favors the Laveau-Glapion tomb in St. Louis No. 1 (figure 1). It comprises three stacked crypts with a "receiving vault" below (that is, a repository of the remains of those displaced by a new burial).

A contemporary of Marie II told Tallant (1946, 126) that he had been present when she died of a heart attack at a ball in 1897, and insisted: "All them other stories ain't true. She was buried in the graveyard they call St. Louis No. I, and she was put in the same tomb her mother and the rest of her family."

That tomb's carved inscription records the name, date, and age (62) of Marie II: "Marie Philome Glapion, décédé le 11 Juin 1897, Soixante-deux ans." A bronze tablet affixed to the tomb under the heading "Marie Laveau," that "This Greek Reputed Burial Place of This Notorious 'Voodoo Queen'" a reference to the original Marie (see figure 2). Corroborative that she was interred here is found in her obituary ("Death" 1881) notes that "Marie Laveau was buried in her family tomb in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1." Guiley (2000) asserts that, while Marie Laveau I is reportedly buried here, "The vault does not bear her name."

I was struck by the fact that the initial two lines of the Laveau-Glapion tomb read, "Famille Vve. Paris / née Vve."

"Vve." is an abbreviation for Veuve, "Widow"; therefore translates, "Family of the Widow Paris, born Laveau."
Laveau. I take this as evidence that here is indeed the "family tomb." Robert Tallant (1946, 127) suggests: "Probably there was once an inscription marking the vault in which the first Marie was buried, has been changed for one marking a later burial. The bones of the Widow Paris must lie in the receiving vault below."

The Laveau-Glapion tomb is a focal point for commercial voodoo tours. Some visitors leave small gifts at the site-coins, Mardi Gras beads, candles, etc.-in the tradition of voodoo offerings. Many follow a custom of making a wish at the tomb. The necessary ritual has been variously described. The earliest version I have found (Tallant says that people would "knock three times on the slab and ask a favor," noting: "There are always penciled crosses on the slab, the crosses away, but they always reappear." A more recent source advises combining the ritual with an offering placed in the attached the X, place your hand over it, rub your foot three times against the bottom, throw some silver coins into the cup, and make your wish (Haskins 1990). Yet again we are told that petitioners are offerings of food, money and flowers, then ask for Marie's help after turning around three times and marking a cross with red brick on the stone (Guiley 2000, 216).

Editor's Note: In recent days a controversy has arisen regarding the practice of marking the alleged final resting place of Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau with X's in the infamous "wish spell" ritual popularized through the past several decades by certain companies, groups and individuals in the Orleans tourism industry.

At the center of the controversy are attacks on this web site for posting stories about the legacy of Marie Laveau and the enduring legend of the "wish spell" X-marking practice. We have been repeatedly accused of being a criminal activity. To clarify, the threats one individual within the industry who is not a native of South, yet who, ironically, makes a living by the daily exploitation of the legends and folklore of this City.

The X practice is now so well-known, having been documented in hundreds of books, newspaper reports, web sites, local histories and travel brochures over the years, that what began as well-intentioned attempts to stop what some see as desecration have been given more "teeth" with the threat of arrest, prosecution and imprisonment.

Those caught in the act of marking on the Laveau tomb, or any other edifice within the historic New Orleans cemeteries, may be subject to The markings are, understandably, frowned upon by the Glapion family -- who have complained literally for years to put an end to the activity. Now that regulatory action has been taken in response to the family's ongoing appeals, the local tourism seems to suddenly be singing a different tune.

At no time has this website or any member of its editorial staff endorsed the marking practice that is associated with the place of Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau. The goal of this website and our associated

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Every great legend is based in fact and a responsible folklorist or story-teller will acknowledge this, even when the legend is more colorful, this would be folly to many of the people whose stock and trade sake of tourism, but in the interest of true preservation, forgotten and wherever possible should be provided so that the Intelligent Traveler is able to better appreciate the merits of a real know when he or she is hearing just that.

Beginning with this page, and on other pages to come, we will provide not only the legend and lore as it has been passed generations of Old New Orleans folk, but also the facts, the root of the legend to begin with. In this way we honor and inform and entertain but we also demonstrate a respect for you, our virtual and perhaps one day real-life visitors, and for the legends and lore that have made the City of New Orleans so beloved the world over.

We choose to inform rather than defend. You may be the judge of whether or not we have been successful.

Jane J. Wichers, Editorial Director


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In Search of Marie Laveau

The following are some places of interest that any fan of Marie Laveau must pay a perfect visit to the haunts of this most famous Voodoo Queen of New Orleans.

1801 Dauphine Street Marie-Laveau's Father's Home
1900 block of North Rampart Street (in Faubourg Marigny) - Dowry House
1016, 1028, 1022, 1020 St. Ann (originally 152 Rue St. Ann) - St. Louis No. 1, Crypt No. 3 - Alleged Burial Site of Marie Laveau
723 Rue Dumaine - New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum
729 Bourbon Street - Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo

MORE CAN BE FOUND CLICK HERE TO LEARN ABOUT MARIE LAVEAU THE VOODOO QUEEN OF NEW ORLEANS www.hauntedamericatours.com/voodoo/Marielaveau/

New Orleans Voodoo Queen

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