



Venerable Pierre Toussaint
Philanthropist

Date of Birth: June 27, 1766

Date of Death: June 30, 1853

-A former slave from the French colony of Saint-Domingue. He was brought to New York City by his owners in 1787.

-Upon arrival in New York he was sent to apprentice with one of New York's leading hairdressers.

-His owner, Jean Berard died in St. Domingue of pleurisy, and Pierre used the money he made as a hairdresser to support Madame Berard.

-After being freed from slavery in 1807, Toussaint became a noted philanthropist of the poor of the city. He used the money he made from being a hairdresser for the upper echelon to do his good works. He even paid for the freedom of his sister Rosalie and his wife to be, Juliette Noel.

-In 1811 he married Juliette and with her performed many charitable works in the city. Among them, they opened their home as an orphanage, employment bureau, and a refuge for travelers.

-Pierre attended Mass daily for 66 years at St. Peter's Church in New York.

-Pierre contributed funds for the building of Saint Patrick's Cathedral on Mulberry Street.

-Toussaint was also a benefactor of the first New York Catholic school for Black children, St. Vincent de Paul on Canal Street.

-He died on June 30, 1853 at the age of 87.

-In the 1950s, the John Boyle O'Reilly Committee for Interracial Justice began researching and publicizing his life story.

-Cardinal Cooke, authorized a canonization committee to study further his life story and based on their findings in 1991 his successor, Cardinal O'Connor, began the official process for canonization.

-Toussaint's body was exhumed from the Old St. Patrick's cemetery for examination and reinterred in the new Cathedral. He was the first layman buried in the crypt below the main altar of the Cathedral on Fifth Avenue.

-In 1996 he was declared venerable by Pope John Paul II.