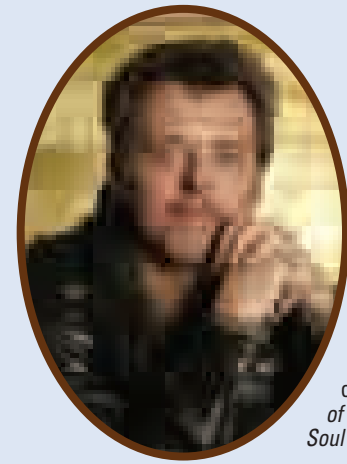


# Saintly Paths in L.A.



J. Michael Walker, author of *All the Saints of the City of the Angels: Seeking the Soul of L.A. on Its Streets*.

**Many streets in the City are named for saints (including the City itself).**

As most of you know, many place names here in California were named after Catholic saints – San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, San Gabriel, Santa Ana, San Pedro, San Mateo, San Jose. And *La Reina de Los Angeles* – Los Angeles – was named after St. Mary, the “queen of the angels.” Often, although not consistently, the places were named by the Franciscan friars, the original European colonizers of our area, according to the saint’s feast day when the land was “discovered” and named.

Recently, a new historical book was created by an artistic and literary genius, J. Michael Walker. The book is *All the Saints of the City of the Angels: Seeking the Soul of L.A. on Its Streets*. I was fortunate enough to meet Michael in my office in the City Clerk’s Records Management Division in the Piper Technical Center sometime before I retired in 2001. His focus was on this masterpiece. This article is not a book review but a summary of another facet of the history of the City that we all need to be aware of.

Michael’s concept for this volume has a historical background dating back to 1769. His intent was to bring to life the street names reflecting names of different saints from the Catholic church and other denominations. These streets, avenues, roads, etc. were named mainly by real estate developers. Often the pretentious names added character to the otherwise mundane names of the land expansions. This fascinating concept found its identity

because of the Spanish and Mexican influence in our great City.

There are 103 “Saintly Streets,” according to J. Michael Walker. I will venture to introduce you to only a few. The remainder you will have to discover on your own through Michael’s great book. Mr. Walker may be contacted at [jmichael@allthesaints.com](mailto:jmichael@allthesaints.com) or [allthesaintsofla.blogspot.com](http://allthesaintsofla.blogspot.com).

Thanks to J. Michael Walker for giving my readers and me this rich opportunity to tell these tales. He certainly is a “saintly man” himself.

## San Julian Street and Place

This street established in 1883 is one block west of San Pedro Street and runs from Fifth Street to Pico Boulevard. Today, San Julian Street is the heart of skid row in the City. This decidedly dismal street has been in this condition for at least 20 years. Was its life expectancy foretold by the Greek-like tragedy of St. Julian?

A synopsis of the legend is that, as a boy of aristocratic parents, San Julian is told a terrible prediction by a beast in the forest that he would kill his parents. Never to return home, he later makes a good life for himself and his wife. One day he leaves to hunt a deer. Later, a couple passes by his home and are invited in by Julian’s wife to remain for dinner. In time, the three people realize they are Julian’s parents. They are invited to spend the night in Julian’s bed. The wife sleeps on hay by the hearth, waiting for her husband. When Julian returns, it is dark. He goes into his bedroom and sees two people embracing each other. In anger, he shoots the two of them. His wife, near the hearth, gives a nightmare cry to let Julian know whom he has killed!

## Santa Monica Boulevard

This lengthy boulevard dates back to 1893. It runs from the Pacific Ocean to Silver Lake. It was named probably in 1770 by explorer Gasper de Portola in honor of the feast day of Santa Monica, mother of St. Augustine. Monica was a fourth-century widow with three children. Her eldest son, Augustine, was a very bright lad. He was constantly in trouble, and Monica went through years of worrying, pleading and crying over the boy. It is noted that she cried so much the ground became damp from her tears. Monica became a saint because she continued to love her son even when he did wrong; she never lost hope for his redemption. In time, Augustine gave up his wayward ways and became a highly regarded Catholic philosopher, theologian and writer. He wrote *City of God*, amongst other works, that are still vital today, 1,500 years after being written.

## Santa Susana Pass and Old Santa Susana Pass Roads

This isn’t really a street. The formidable entrance to this pass is one of the most incredible small, single-erupted mountainous rocks ever seen with embedded boulders having been pushed out in all directions over the elevation, looking more like a planned Hollywood set than reality, sitting on the edge of Topanga Canyon Boulevard. This is why I chose this saintly masterpiece. This pass weaves westward from Topanga Canyon Boulevard to the Los Angeles County line in Chatsworth. It sits within the Santa Susana Mountain range that divides the Simi and San Fernando Valleys. Santa Susana was named by the Franciscan friars who colonized California at least 200 years ago. It is supposed that these priests named the area while traveling the difficult terrain by foot or horse from the Mission San Fernando through to the Chumash villages in the western valley or further north to Mission San Buenaventura. These mountains were and continue to be a geologic and botanical wonder for many reasons. It is believed that this area contains evidence dating back 10 million years. As far as I can determine, the name of the pass comes from a third-century Roman martyr, about which little is known. Nevertheless, this majestic pass certainly deserves its saintly name.

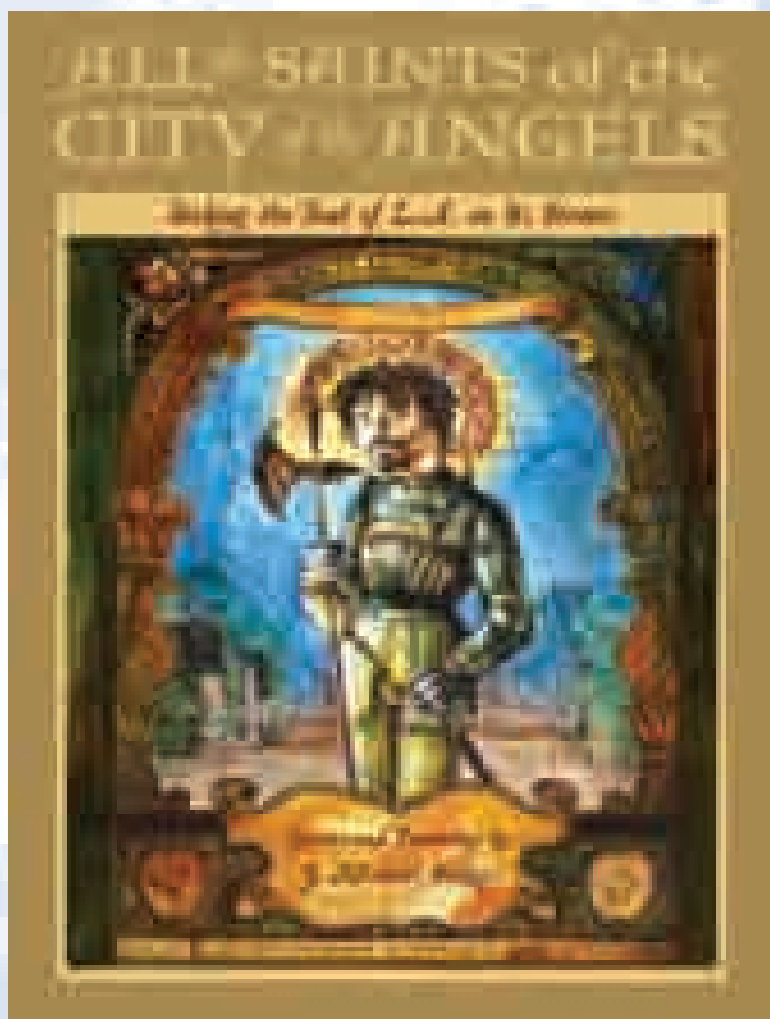
## St. Cloud Road

This road was established in 1923. It runs between St. Pierre Road and Cuesta Way, north of Sunset Boulevard in Bel Air Estates. Alphonso Bell, a Los Angeles farmer, oilman and real estate investor, discovered the name St. Cloud while touring France. He was taken by the name. The appellation comes from a boy prince who eventually became St. Cloud in the sixth century. He came from a difficult background: He was orphaned as a child, and then nearly killed by an uncle who murdered his older brother to gain their throne. At eight years old, he was alone and lived in hiding for another decade, finally realizing that “all which appears most dazzling in worldly greatness is no better than smoke.” He then abandoned life as it was, cut off his hair and became a monk. He roamed in a lonely environment, as a “cloud.” This youth practiced an austere life, mastering his passions. He studied with the Benedictines before returning to Paris. It was in the City of Lights that, with his own profound wisdom that light seemed to emanate from his forehead, he founded his own community at the place that bears his name.

St. Cloud’s name is defined as “out of the mist.” And it is most appropriate that Alphonso Bell chose the name for his road where his Bel Air dream home is in “a spot where the wings of care are folded and the soul has calm.”

## St. Louis Street

This street was established in 1875. It is four blocks west of Soto Street from the north of Cesar Chavez Street to the end of Hollenbeck Park in Boyle Heights. This street is one of the few in Los Angeles that was given a saint’s name by a pioneer in Los Angeles by the name of William H. Workman, civic leader and mayor from 1886 to 1888. He was also the son-in-law of Andrew Boyle, of whom Boyle Heights is named. Workman dedicated his life to the expansion of Boyle Heights as a functioning community with schools, churches, parks and dedicated homes for its citizens. He took it upon himself to go to the City Council to request a water process to grow exotic plants and trees. He was responsible for having the first bridge built across the L.A. River. His hard, dedicated work, as well as his last name,



The cover of *All the Saints of the City of the Angels: Seeking the Soul of L.A. on Its Streets*.



Santa Susana Pass and Old Santa Susana Pass in 1937.

# History Comes Alive!

by Hynda Rudd,  
City Archivist (Retired),  
and Club Member



Tales From the City Archives

ironically, were similar to that of the saint named for St. Louis Street. St. Louis was the patron saint of construction workers, masons and builders.

## San Pedro Street

This very old street, dating back to the 1780s, ran to Rancho San Pedro. Today it runs south on Temple Street, ending on Avalon Boulevard in Rosewood.

Historically, in the 16th century, the explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo entered the harbor in 1542. At that time the area was inhabited by the Tongva Indians. The name San Pedro was bestowed on the area in 1603, by another Spanish explorer, Sebastian Vizcaino, after the second-century bishop of Alexandria, St. Peter. The formal title then was St. Peter's Bay. By the 1820s, with other European infiltration, the name was once more revised to Bahia de San Pedro.

In the 19th century, this dirt road connected San Pedro to El Pueblo. It was a 30-mile run and was the main thoroughfare for commercial and business enterprise. It was also the route of many seafaring individuals to enter or leave the western area of the young United States. Many also arrived from foreign countries to find work and a new lifestyle in Los Angeles. Also, fishing was a huge success by the Japanese, Chinese, Sicilians and Croatians. Fish including sardines, mackerel, albacore and abalone were plentiful.

In the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, Japanese settlers moved to San Pedro for work or because of the San Francisco earthquake. Many worked in canneries around the bay of San Pedro. Others moved north closer to the City, forming Little Tokyo. Life prospered for the Japanese until the World War II invasion of Hawaii by Japan. American citizens of Japanese descent were sent to internment camps, like Manzanar in the Owens Valley. After the war, Little Tokyo continued to prosper, but the Japanese experience in San Pedro diminished.

An interesting sidebar to this story dates back to 1734. A cartographer, Don Jose Gonzales Cabrera Bueno, was compiling a work on the navigation of Sebastian Vizcaino's account of his travels to California in 1602. Bueno noticed that, due to misinterpretations of dates, which included saintly anniversary feast days, San Pedro should have been named Ensenada de San Andreas (St. Andrew's Cove). If this was to have been true, St. Andreas is the patron saint and protector of fisherman and often portrayed as an elderly man, who might have been seen as a kindly man in a boat inviting all who traveled near to join him at the warm, gracious sea.

## St. Elmo's Drive

This drive was established in 1927. In mid-city, it runs east and west between West Boulevard and La Brea Avenue.

Two saints played a role in the naming of this drive. One was Peter Gonzalez, a 13th-century priest. He preached to sailors, shunned honors and lived amongst the poor. The other saint was a third-century hermit, Erasmus, who lived on Mount Lebanon. He preached to nonbelievers, avoided most everyone else and survived by whatever food ravens brought him. In time, both became patron saints of sailors, and their formal names were combined to be called St. Elmo.

St. Elmo became the savior to sailors all

over. Sailors commented while on the seas of the protection of St. Elmo and his lofty lighted tapers. Columbus and his men often credited St. Elmo for saving them from harsh and disastrous circumstances at sea. The term "St. Elmo's Fire" refers to this saint.

The Los Angeles area of St. Elmo Drive had a difficult beginning. The citizens of the community in 1927 struggled economically, socially and culturally. In the mid 1960s, some residents took it upon themselves to bring life and good health to this den of sadness. Inspiration from a few brought invigoration and "St. Elmo's Fire" that is now known as "St. Elmo's Village."

## Santo Tomas Drive

Established around 1947, the drive is between Stocker and Martin Luther King in the Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw area. This is a plaza in southwest Los Angeles, and is the oldest regional shopping center in the nation. This drive was named after a 1791 mission founded south of Ensenada in Baja California.

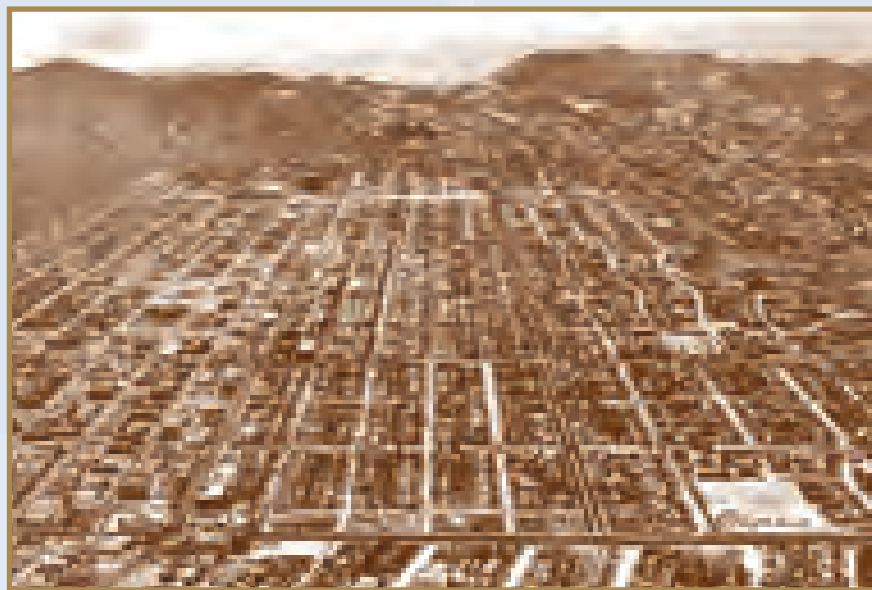
Nearly a century after the demise of the original mission, the name reappeared as a drive overlooking the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw shopping center. It was named in honor of St. Thomas of Aquinas, the philosopher and translator of Aristotle and Plato. Aquinas was also the patron saint of students and academics. Coincidentally, in that exact area, an educational facility opened. It is the Marlton School, named in St. Thomas' "Student Prayer." The school is the only public school in the Los Angeles Unified School District for deaf students.

## San Fernando and San Fernando Mission Roads

The old Road to San Fernando Mission runs from Lincoln Heights northwest to Mission San Fernando Rey.

The San Fernando Mission was founded in 1797 by Franciscan Fr. Fermin Lasuen, successor to Father Junipero Serra of the Franciscan Missions. This Mission eventually produced much food for the citizens of El Pueblo and elsewhere. The patron saint of this area was Ferdinand III of Castile. In Spain he was known as *Fernando el Santo*, a 13th-century king. He was considered a faithful and just ruler. As a patron saint he was known to care for the poor as well as the governors.

The area of the Mission suffered many problems. There was grief at many levels, including changes of leadership. The Tongva and Chumash Indians, native to the area, were brought in as property. They were fed food alien to them and were forced to subscribe to conditions foreign to them; disease and infections became prevalent. Imported cattle overran fertile land. Too much attention was paid to religious issues, and not enough on the military that abused the local natives—particularly women. Mortality was an issue, where, out of every five births, two would die before the age of two. In 1812, there was an earthquake, and the Mission suffered serious damage. By the 1830s, more deterioration occurred. In 1879, and again in the 1930s, the main building was partially restored. But with the 1971 Sylmar earthquake, the Mission church was destroyed; in time it was rebuilt. Of importance is the fact that this Mission is situated in the City of Los Angeles, not in the city of San Fernando.



St. Elmo's Drive is near the Wilshire/La Brea District.



Front Street, San Pedro Harbor, in 1909.



An illustration of St. Cloud Road from J. Michael Walker's *All the Saints of the City of the Angels: Seeking the Soul of L.A. on Its Streets*.

Historic photos courtesy Security Pacific Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, Carolyn Cole, Photo Director