Pictures from Past and Present: Church of Saint-Laurent

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Pictures from Past and Present: Church of Saint-Laurent

JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M., PH.D.
The baroque façade of the Eglise Saint-Laurent, Paris.

*Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*

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*5me Arrondissement. Quartier du Faubourg St. Denis.*

Hand colored map by Aristide Michel Perrot, c. 1834, features the baroque façade of the Eglise Saint-Laurent.

*Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL*
In 583, Gregory of Tours mentioned this monastic church, begun as a chapel. It overlooked a Roman road, now the Rue du Faubourg Saint Denis. The present church, whose choir was dedicated in 1429, replaces an earlier one. Only the old tower remains from the twelfth-century church. The fifteenth-century church has been enlarged and reconstructed several times. During the revolutionary period, it was used as a Temple of Reason, then a Temple of Old Age (1798). It was restored to the Catholic Church in 1802. The monastic enclosure was removed when the Boulevard Magenta was put through in the nineteenth century, and its neo-Gothic façade dates only from 1865, built to fit the building to the new street.

Saint-Laurent was the parish church of Vincent de Paul from 1632 to 1660, and of Louise de Marillac from 1641 to 1660. Although she had requested burial at Saint-Lazare, the pastor overrode Louise’s wishes, and she was buried in the chapel of the Visitation in this church where she came to pray and to make her Easter Communion with the other sisters. Her remains lay here for 95 years, until 1755, when her body was transferred to the motherhouse. Marking the spot is the simple wooden cross with the words Spes Unica [“(Hail, O Cross, our) Only Hope”], from the hymn Vexilla Regis, the monument she requested in her will.
Several modern paintings and stained glass windows show Saint Vincent blessing Saint Louise and the first Daughters of Charity, and Saint Vincent performing works of mercy (galley convicts, slaves in Algiers, etc.) A small plaque also reads: “1660. Saint Vincent de Paul, founder of the priests of the Mission and of the Sisters of Charity, often visited the Church of Saint-Laurent, his parish church.” On one of his many visits to Parisian churches during his long stay, Pius VII came to Saint-Laurent in 1804.

Eglise Saint-Laurent et le Boulevard Magenta. Postcard dated 4 September 1906.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL
Guillaume de Lestocq (d. 1661), pastor of Saint-Laurent from 1627 to 1661, came with Adrien Le Bon (1577?-1651), the prior of Saint-Lazare, to offer the property of Saint-Lazare to Monsieur Vincent. After repeated and lengthy discussion and discernment, they succeeded. Lestocq assisted Louise on her deathbed and celebrated her funeral, since Vincent de Paul was ill and confined to his room. Lestocq would also send confessors from the parish to the Daughters’ motherhouse. A later pastor, Nicholas Gobillon (1626-1706), revered Louise de Marillac and wrote her first biography. To the right of the church is a small park, the Square Saint-Laurent, which marks the site of one section of the parish cemetery. Many of the earliest Daughters of Charity were buried, however, on the north side in another section opened in 1662, adjacent to the chapel where Louise herself was interred. Their remains were removed beginning in 1804 and placed in the catacombs of Paris. This removal was occasioned by public health concerns all through the city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

During the sack of Saint-Lazare, revolutionaries burst into its house chapel. Finding a reliquary of Saint Vincent, four of them brought it reverently to Saint-Laurent for safekeeping. They then returned to the task at hand — looting and pillaging.
Photos and a postcard featuring views of the bell tower and apse of Saint-Laurent.

*Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online; Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL*
Postcards featuring exterior views of the façade of Saint-Laurent, notable in particular for capturing the day-to-day street life of Parisians.

*Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL*
The baroque façade of the Eglise Saint-Laurent, Paris.

Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online http://stvincentimages.cdm.depaul.edu/
5ème Arrondissement. Quartier du Faubourg St. Denis.

Hand colored map by Aristide Michel Perrot, c. 1834, features the baroque façade of the Eglise Saint-Laurent.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL
Eglise Saint-Laurent (vers 1830). Sepia tone postcard featuring artistic rendering of the early façade with brief history of the church printed at right edge.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL
A mid-nineteenth-century photo of the Eglise Saint-Laurent taken by renowned French photographer Charles Marville; and a modern day photo of the façade.

*Public Domain*
The wooden cross which marks the spot where Louise de Marillac was once buried; and several of the stained glass windows honoring Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

*Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online*
Eglise Saint-Laurent et le Boulevard Magenta. Postcard dated 4 September 1906.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL
Several interior views featuring the aisle of Saint-Laurent.

*Courtesy St. Vincent de Paul Image Archive Online; Public Domain*
Photo featuring a view of the bell tower and apse of Saint-Laurent.

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