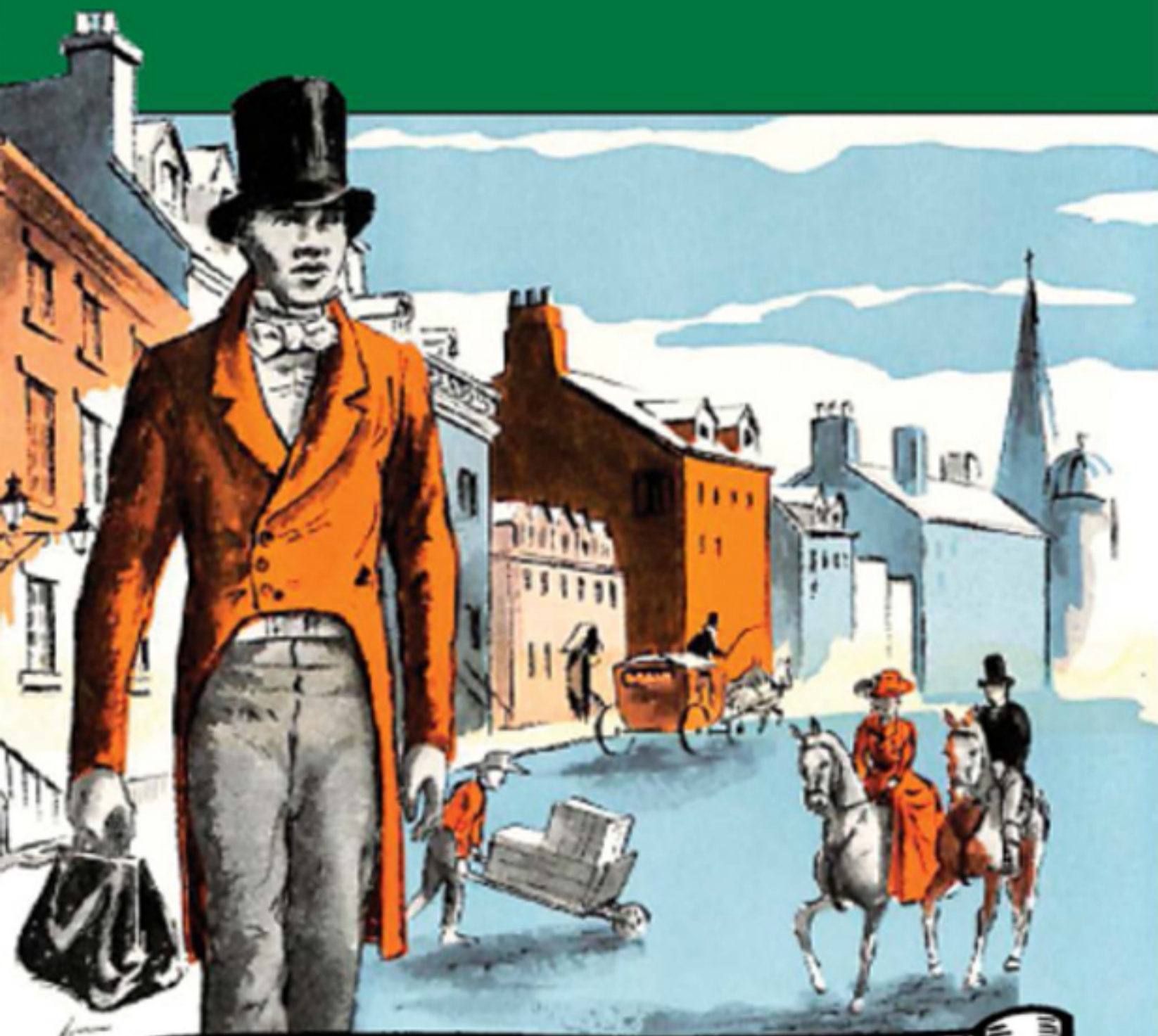


Pierre Toussaint

Pioneer in Brotherhood



Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Arthur and Elizabeth Sheehan

Pierre Toussaint

Pioneer in Brotherhood

by Arthur and Elizabeth Odell Sheehan



Illustrated by Salem Tamer

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Portraits in Faith and Freedom

SET 6: NEW YORK AMBASSADORS OF BROTHERHOOD

Pierre Toussaint: Pioneer in Brotherhood

John Hughes: Eagle of the Church

Alfred E. Smith: Sidewalk Statesman

Statement on Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Bethlehem Books is bringing back this series of biographies originally made available in the 1950s and 1960s by publishers who wished to introduce young people to a wide range of arresting and faithful Catholic lives. Slightly edited now for the modern reader, these biographies present key people and events from the past that help us reflect anew on the meaning of freedom. They depict how powerfully men and women of faith have formed and influenced the world in which they live.

Web Resources

To access printable maps, a timeline, and other information, visit <https://www.bethlehembooks.com/pierre-toussaint-pioneer-brotherhood-863>

About Usage of Outdated Terms in This Book

In republishing the books that form our *Portraits in Faith and Freedom* series, the editors considered whether it would be worthwhile to update the authors' usage of words like "Indian" and "Negro" to the more current preferences: "Native American" and "African American." Though some editing at times proved reasonable, it was found that changing the original terms did not always work well for the context of the times in which the story takes place. Additionally, in these works—written in the 1950s and early 1960s—it is clear that the authors, as well as the original publishers, held attitudes of genuine interest and respect for Native Americans and African Americans. For that reason, in most cases, we have let the words stand.

In *Pierre Toussaint, Pioneer in Brotherhood*, the authors portray Toussaint's striking personal dignity, which always transcended his social status as a slave. The term "Negro" loses any bitterness in someone like Pierre Toussaint, whose inner freedom quietly returns the vocabulary of an earlier day to the common plane of simple, objective reference.

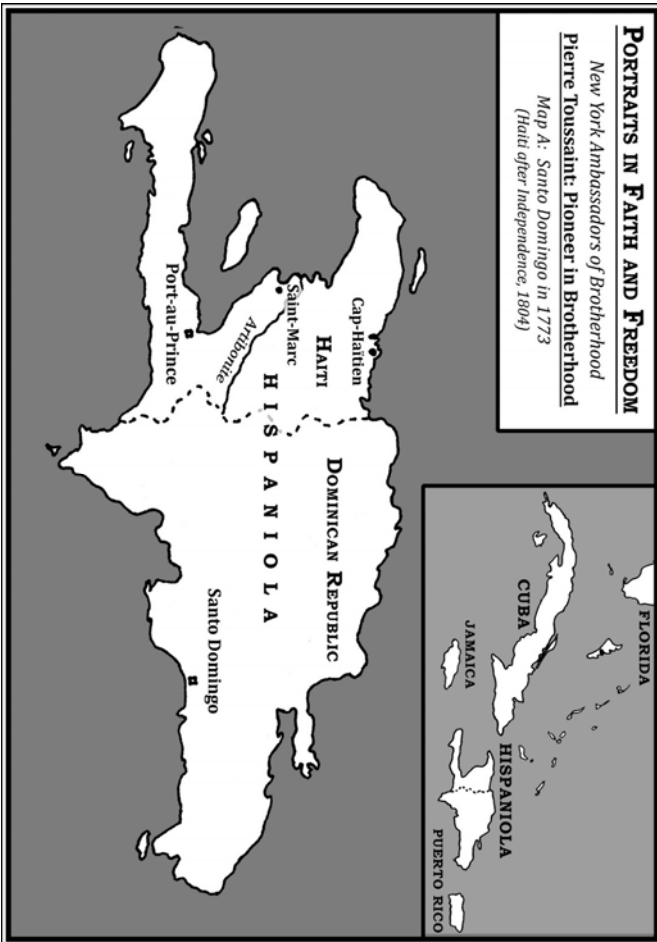
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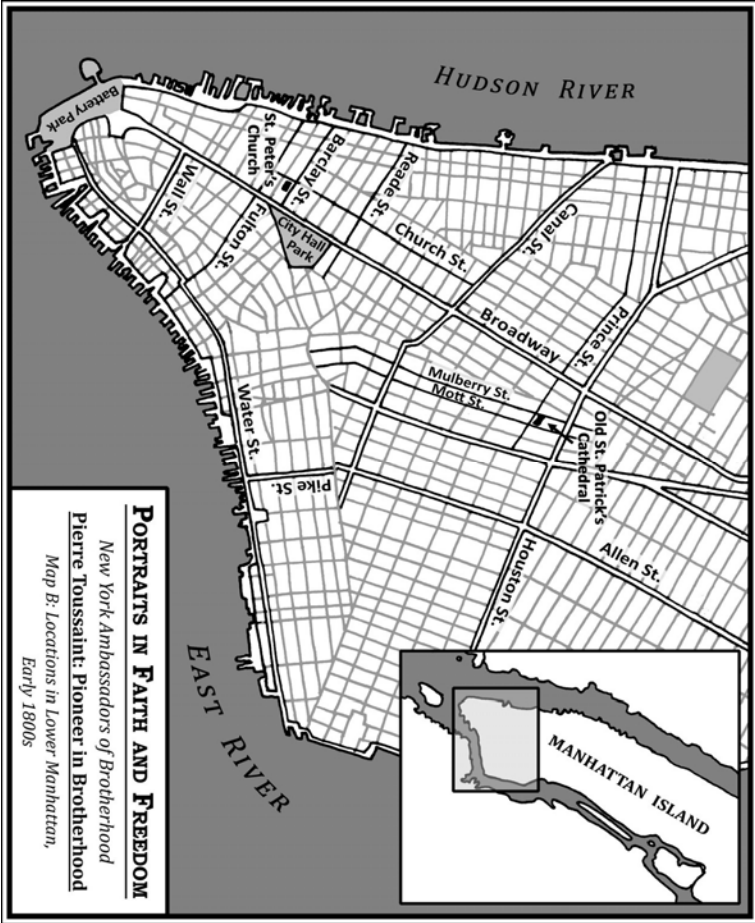
TO OUR MOTHERS

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Maps





1. Saint Marc, 1773

THE CARIBBEAN SUN blazed brightly on a September morning, as the doors of the church swung back in a burst of triumphant music and people began hurrying out. The solemn high Mass, central event of the week in the town of Saint Marc in the French colony of Santo Domingo, was over.

The doors folded against the white stone walls of the church, hiding the royal decrees nailed to them. They were old ones anyway, and everyone who could read had read them. Besides, the West Indian subjects of Louis XV, King of France, Count of Navarre, and Lord of Lands Beyond the Seas found little to interest them in the edicts that had come out from Paris under the great seal of yellow wax.

Everyone in the crowd had more important concerns on a Sunday morning. To the planters, the Mass was not only a religious but a social event, a relief from the week-long sameness of life on the isolated plantations. To the Negroes, even though many were not allowed to go to church, Sunday was a blessed day of rest from the backbreaking labor of cane and coffee field. Since before dawn they had been coming into town along all the hilly roads that led down from the surrounding countryside, for Sunday was also market day in Saint Marc.

“*Maman, Maman.*” A shrill voice rose above the noisy talk. A small boy could be seen darting here and there through the crowd.

“Here, son.” A tall young Negro woman stepped forward quickly. She grasped the child’s hand and steered him firmly away from the people. “After this, Pierre, don’t run away from me. Then you won’t get lost.”

The child did not hear the rebuke. As the crowd thinned a bit, he began to dance, keeping beside his mother with small capering steps, all eyes for the bustling activities around them.

Pierre was a slave child, his dark features showing plainly his Congo ancestry. In Santo Domingo a man’s fortune depended largely on the color of his face. White for the wealthy French plantation owners. Black for the slaves. And in between, faces of many dusky hues belonging to those of mixed blood, the *gens de couleur*.



“This way now, Pierre.” Ursule drew her son by one arm toward a handsome carriage waiting before the church rectory. Madame Bérard, their mistress, was just getting in. A Coachman in a bright red jacket held open the door of the elegant equipage that had been polished and shined for its Sunday trip into town. The street and the side streets nearby were lined with still other carriages, their horses and coachmen ready to move toward the valley where the rich plantations lay.

But the planters were in no hurry to get started. Back home, it would be a dull day. Here one could exchange greetings and catch up on the latest news.

They stood in leisurely groups, the men in their long-tailed coats with the shiny buttons, their gold watches glinting in the noonday brightness. Most of them wore high hats and their hair in wigs, fastened with black silk ribbon. The women were dressed in rich muslins, with huge sleeves and frills of lace. The clear tropical sun made their faces appear very pale.

“*Bon jour, bon jour*, Ursule.” Madame Bérard spoke in French instead of the customary Creole—a sign of special affection. Ursule had been her personal maid almost as long as either could remember.

“Good day, Madame.”

Ursule bent quickly to adjust the richly-upholstered cushions of the carriage seat. The road to the plantation was rough and could give the carriage riders a wicked jolt now and then.

“And how is Pierre today?” Madame Bérard smiled warmly at the little boy, for even in a household where all slaves were treated with kindness, Pierre was bound to be the favorite. His merry disposition, his willingness to help, even his pranks pleased her. He was only seven years old, and not yet obliged to work, but she found herself thinking of excuses to have him around the house most of the time.

“Oh, thank you, Madame, I’m well,” the boy answered. He looked up expectantly. Already he was smelling the wonderful things that were cooking on the little braziers over at the marketplace.

Madame Bérard laughed. “I know, you’re thinking of all those sugar and coconut cakes you’ll be eating later on.” She opened her embroidered purse and handed him a coin. “Now mind, don’t make yourself sick!”

“Thank you, thank you, Madame.” Pierre jumped up and down in his excitement.

Madame Bérard turned to Ursule.

“Why not take Pierre over to the new theater for the afternoon performance? Volange is playing, and our little mimic here ought to like that.” Volange had been the rage of Paris, and Pierre, a born imitator, often amused everyone at the plantation with his comic impersonations.

Ursule hesitated. "Thank you, Madame, that is very kind, but . . .

"There are seats in back for you and Pierre," Madame Bérard explained, seeing the slave woman's doubt. The mistress was quite familiar with the arrangement of the new theater, for the Bérards had a great interest in it, and had contributed generously toward it. They hoped it would mean a new beginning for theatrical entertainment in Saint Marc. Until the new theater was built, performances had been given from time to time in the open air, and at the mercy of sudden tropical rainstorms.

Ursule smiled as she recalled an unfortunate experience. "Madame no doubt remembers the time it rained all during the play, and I tried to hold the umbrella over her and Mademoiselle De Pointe?"

Madame Bérard laughed. "Between the rain and the wobbling umbrella we saw little of *that* performance," she said crisply. Then, as she settled back in the seat of the carriage, she added, "But speaking of De Pointe—I had a long letter from my daughter yesterday."

"I hope all is well with them in Paris," said Ursule quickly. She knew that mail from abroad had been received at the plantation on the day before, when she had been down at the river washing.

She was thinking not only of the Bérard children, but of her own mother Zénobie who for the second time had made the voyage with them to Paris. There were the three other girls, De Pointe's sisters, and three brothers besides Jean Jacques, the oldest, who would one day be master of the plantation.

"Yes, thank God, all the children are in good health." Madame Bérard seemed lost in her own thoughts as she continued, "Sometimes I feel that with so many of my family in Paris, my husband and I should be there too. Perhaps some day when Jean Jacques has finished his studies—"

The boy Pierre had been listening eagerly, and now he voiced the question on Ursule's own lips as he eagerly put in, "And Gran'mère, is she in good health too?"

"Zénobie is very well, Pierre. When she has De Pointe settled in school, she will soon be back with us. Of course, De Pointe is a little lonely just now. She says she misses the plantation and her mother—yes, and you too, Pierre, her little playmate."