



Anton LaVey: Legend and Reality

compiled by his daughter Zeena and Nikolas Schreck February 2, 1998

Anton Szandor LaVey (1930-1997), along with Charles Manson, Timothy Leary, and other messianic pop *gurus*, was a notorious figure of the 1960s' subculture of social experiment. As the flamboyant High Priest of the Church of Satan and the author of the *Satanic Bible*, he served as an ideal bogeyman for the sensation-seeking American media of that tumultuous period.

His curious celebrity was based largely on a self-created legend. This carefully-orchestrated legend may, in the final analysis, be LaVey's most enduring legacy. LaVey disseminated his legend through interviews with journalists, personal discussion with his disciples, and two LaVey-approved [auto]biographies (apparently ghostwritten by LaVey himself). The first of these, 1974's *The Devil's Avenger* (credited to LaVey associate Burton Wolfe), embellished on the fabrications Wolfe had already sketched in his introduction to the *Satanic Bible*. The second, 1990's *Secret Life of a Satanist* (credited to Blanche Barton, LaVey's live-in secretary and mother of his son), contradicted many of LaVey's own claims in the earlier volume, while putting forth new legends for public consumption. As social historians and scholars of occult movements begin to study LaVey's life and times in an objective historical context, a wealth of information concerning the man beneath the Devil horns has come to light. This brief checklist is a concise guide to separating the deliberate prevarications from the human, all-too-human facts. For brevity's sake, only the most well-known aspects of the legend will be clarified here.

LEGEND: Claimed that "Anton Szandor LaVey" was his genuine birth name.

REALITY: Born "Howard Stanton Levey".

SOURCES: Birth certificate 4/11/1930, Cook County, Illinois. Confirmed by relatives.

LEGEND: Claimed his parents were Joseph and Augusta LaVey.

REALITY: Parents were Michael and Gertrude Levey.

SOURCES: Birth certificate 4/11/1930, Cook County, Illinois. Confirmed by ASL's daughter Zeena and daughter Karla according to her entry on ASL's death certificate.

LEGEND: Claimed he was introduced to the Dark Side by his Transylvanian Gypsy grandmother, who regaled him as a child with supernatural folklore and tales of vampires and werewolves.

REALITY: ASL's grandmother was not Transylvanian nor of Gypsy stock. She was a Ukrainian named Cecile Luba Primokov-Coulton ("Coulton" was Anglicized from "Koltonoff"). Despite his frequent claims, ASL had no Gypsy ancestry.

SOURCES: Relatives, including ASL's parents.

LEGEND: In 1945 the 15-year-old ASL was brought to the ruins of postwar Germany by his uncle, a U.S. Coast Guard officer. There the teenaged ASL was shown top-secret films inspired by Satanic cult lodges and their rituals. ASL claimed that the "German" rituals in his 1972 book *The Satanic Rituals* were actual transcripts of the filmed rituals he saw as a youth.

REALITY: Young Howard spent the entirety of 1945 in suburban northern California, and never visited Germany at any time in his life. The uncle who he claimed brought him to Germany was incarcerated at McNeill Island Penitentiary for involvement with Al Capone-related criminal activity during 1945, and was never in the armed forces. Allied martial law forbade U.S. citizens from visiting postwar Germany. The "German" rituals in the *Satanic Rituals* are written in extremely poor, Anglicized German. They are clearly uncredited adaptations of the short story *The Hounds of Tindalos* by Frank Belknap Long and H.G. Wells' famous novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.

SOURCES: ASL relatives, former wife Diane LaVey, *The Hounds of Tindalos*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Satanic Rituals*, Church of Satan member Rosalind Herkommer (who translated ASL's rituals into German).

LEGEND: The 15-year-old ASL played second oboe with the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, making him the youngest musician ever to play with that prestigious institution.

REALITY: There was no "San Francisco Ballet Orchestra" in 1945. The San Francisco Ballet was accompanied by a local orchestra, whose records show that none of its three oboists was named "Levey" or "LaVey".

SOURCES: San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum, San Francisco, California.

LEGEND: In 1947 ASL ran away from home and joined the Clyde Beatty Circus. The Circus employed the 17-year-old as a lion tamer. He then replaced the Circus calliope player, accompanying such famous Beatty acts as the Concellos, Harold Alanza, and the Cristianis.

REALITY: The voluminous Beatty archives show no record of a "Levey" or "LaVey" as lion tamer or musician. The Concellos, Alanza, and Cristianis were never Beatty performers; they worked exclusively for the Ringling Brothers Circus.

SOURCES: Beatty 1947 Route Books, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin (Wright, "SD", page 67); ASL relatives.

LEGEND: In 1948 the 18-year-old ASL was engaged to play organ at the Mayan burlesque theater in Los Angeles. There he met a young stripper named Marilyn Monroe, with whom he had a passionate love affair in the period before her rise to film stardom. According to ASL, Monroe had resorted to stripping to pay her rent. As proof of his relationship with Monroe, ASL later showed visitors a copy of Monroe's famous nude calendar inscribed "Dear Tony, How many times have you seen this! Love, Marilyn".

REALITY: ASL never knew Monroe. Monroe intimate Robert Slatzer and Harry Lipton, Monroe's agent in 1948, have exposed and discredited this tale. Lipton paid Monroe's expenses, including her rent. Paul Valentine, director of the Mayan Theater, has stated that the Mayan was never a burlesque theater, and that neither Monroe nor ASL ever worked for the Mayan in any capacity. Diane LaVey, ASL's former wife, has admitted that she forged the "Monroe" inscription on the calendar. ASL's former publicist Edward Webber claims ASL admitted he never knew Monroe.

SOURCES: Diane LaVey, Paul Valentine (Wright, "SD", page #68), Harry Lipton (Aquino-Lipton conversation 12/1/82), Robert Slatzer (letter to Aquino 11/27/82), Edward Webber (interview by Aquino 6/2/91).

LEGEND: ASL was exposed to the savagery of human nature during his stint as a San Francisco Police photographer in the early 1950s.

REALITY: San Francisco Police Department past employment records include no "Howard Levey" nor "Anton LaVey". Frank Moser, who was a SFPD photographer in the early 1950s, said that ASL never worked for the Department.

SOURCES: SFPD records, Frank Moser (Wright, "SD", page 68).

LEGEND: ASL studied criminology at San Francisco City College during the Korean War.

REALITY: SFCC has no record of ASL's enrollment at any time.

SOURCES: SFCC records (Wright, "SD", page 68).

LEGEND: ASL purchased the house at 6114 California Street (which would later become the headquarters of the Church of Satan - the infamous "Black House") because he discovered on first inspection that it was the former brothel of Barbary Coast madam Mammy Pleasant. The house was honeycombed with trapdoors and secret passageways, built by Pleasant to elude police raids.

REALITY: 6114 was ASL's parents' home. It was never a brothel, nor did Mammy Pleasant ever live or work there. ASL's parents first allowed ASL and his first wife Carole to live in the house, then transferred ownership of it to ASL and his second wife Diane in 1971. Such secret passages and hidden rooms that exist were constructed by ASL.

SOURCES: Relatives, San Francisco property records (Michael & Gertrude Levey, Joint Tenancy Grant Deed, July 9, 1971).

LEGEND: In the 1950s ASL traveled to Nice, France, where he recorded an album of organ music under the pseudonym of "Georges Montalba".

REALITY: ASL's first and only trip to France was in the mid-1970s, when his Dutch disciple Maarten Lamers, Amsterdam sex club owner, financed his voyage. The "ASL=Montalba" story appeared in 1989, when a gullible Church of Satan member found a Montalba album and suggested that it was similar to ASL's own music. ASL, never pleased by competition, responded with the preposterous "pseudonym" claim - which is still ardently supported by his posthumous followers.

SOURCES: Diane LaVey, Zeena LaVey.

LEGEND: ASL was the official city organist for San Francisco until 1966, playing for gala events such as government banquets and political meetings.

REALITY: San Francisco has never had an "official city organist". According to ASL's first wife Carole, his only income of \$29.91/week was generated by his regular engagement at the "Lost Weekend" nightclub, where he was the house Wurlitzer organist.

SOURCE: Julie Burford, Civic Auditorium, San Francisco, California (Wright, "SD", page 68). Carole LaVey's divorce proceeding records (Wright, "SD", page 68).

LEGEND: On the night of April 30, 1966 (the German Satanic festival of Walpurgisnacht), ASL in a "blinding flash" declared himself the High Priest of Satan, proclaimed that the Age of Satan had begun, and founded the Church of Satan as a religious institution.

REALITY: In 1966 ASL supplemented his income by presenting weekend lectures on exotic and occult topics, and by conducting "Witches' Workshops". He charged \$2 a head, filling his living room with the curious and establishing a local reputation as an eccentric. Professional publicist Edward Webber suggested to ASL that he "would never make any money by lecturing on Friday nights for donations ... it would be better to form some sort of church and get a charter from the State of California ... I told Anton at the time that the press was going to flip out over all this and that we would get a lot of notoriety". In the summer of 1966, long after the fictional founding-date invented later, a newspaper article about ASL's lectures offhandedly referred to him as "priest of the Devil's church". This mixture of Webber's idea and the newspaper's characterization resulted in the creation of the Church of Satan as a business and publicity vehicle. Jack Webb, a San Francisco Police investigator who knew ASL from the "Lost Weekend" nightclub, also suggested that he should form a church of some kind to exploit his recondite knowledge.

SOURCES: Edward Webber (interview by Aquino 6/2/91), Jack Webb, Diane LaVey.

LEGEND: ASL's trademark shaved head was the result of a ceremonial head-shaving on April 30, 1966, to formalize his role as High Priest of Satan. This ritual was performed in the tradition of the Yezidi devil-worshipping tribes of Iraq, who were said to have carried out a similar ceremony.

REALITY: ASL shaved his head in the summer of 1966 due to a light-hearted dare from his wife. The "LaVey look" had nothing to do with the Church of Satan founding nor any mystical meaning attached to it later. Nor do Yezidi *qawwals* (religious teachers) shave their heads.

SOURCES: Diane LaVey; Ethel S. Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 1941; C.J. Edmonds, *A Pilgrimage to Lalish*, Royal Asiatic Society, 1967.

LEGEND: In 1966 ASL personally designed the Baphomet emblem of the Church of Satan. He owns the right to this design, claiming it cannot be reproduced without obtaining licensing rights from the Church of Satan.

REALITY: The Baphomet emblem used by the Church of Satan was neither original to it nor created by ASL, hence cannot be trademarked. The original Baphomet dates at least as far back as the medieval Knights Templar. The artwork for the current emblem's goat/pentagram first appears in a 1931 book by Oswald Wirth. The complete emblem with the added circles and "LVYThN" Hebrew letters appears on the cover of a book by Maurice Bessy two years before the creation of the Church of Satan. Early photos of Church activities often show ASL or his disciples using the Bessy book as a photo-prop because of its prominent cover-Baphomet, and he included that book in his *Compleat Witch* bibliography. The Baphomet, including this rendition of it, is clearly in the public domain.

SOURCES: Oswald Wirth, *La fran-maconnerie rendue intelligible a ces adeptes - II, "Le compagnon"*, Paris: Derry-Livres, 1931, page #60; Maurice Bessy, *A Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural*, London: Spring Books, 1964 [the original edition of this work - *Histoire en 1000 images de la magie* - was published in 1961 by Editions du Pont Royal]; Thomas H. Hilton, *Sex and the Occult*, Vol. I, Los Angeles: Centurion Press, 1974; Church of Satan members, *The Black Flame* (a 1980s Church of Satan magazine).

LEGEND: One of ASL's most widely-accepted falsehoods is his claim that he served as technical advisor for the 1968 Roman Polanski film *Rosemary's Baby*. ASL also claimed to have played the curiously-uncredited part of the Devil in that film.

REALITY: ASL had no involvement with *Rosemary's Baby*. Polanski's close friend Gene Gutowski (original producer of the film) stated that there was no technical advisor, nor did ASL ever even meet Polanski. Producer William Castle, who details all aspects of the film's production in his autobiography, never mentions ASL. He does describe Polanski's diligence in basing the film exactly on the Ira Levin novel from which it was adapted, eliminating any need for technical advice. The father of the actress who played Mia Farrow's body-double in the Devil scene recalled that a young, very slender professional dancer played the part, dressed in a small rubber suit. In 1971 this suit was acquired by Studio One Productions in Louisville, Kentucky, for use in a low-budget horror film *Asylum of Satan*. Michael Aquino, technical advisor for that film, examined the suit and concluded that the 200-pound, 6-foot ASL could not possibly have worn it. [The suit was worn by a girl in the *Asylum* film.] Not a single member of the cast or crew of *Rosemary's Baby* has ever mentioned ASL's involvement. In 1968 a San Francisco theater did ask ASL to make an appearance at the film's local opening as a promotional event. This appears to have been ASL's only connection with the film that engendered the 1960s' popular interest in Satanism.

SOURCES: Gene Gutowski; William Castle, *Step Right Up! I'm Gonna Scare the Pants off America*, New York: Pharos Books, 1992; Diane LaVey, Michael A. Aquino (COS, page #17).

LEGEND: Jayne Mansfield, Hollywood sex symbol and actress, was a card-carrying Satanist and had an affair with ASL.

REALITY: Publicity agent Tony Kent, an associate of Ed Webber, arranged the meeting between Mansfield and ASL as a publicity stunt. ASL was smitten with the actress. Mansfield, who made no secret of her many affairs, denied knowing ASL intimately, and no associate of hers has ever confirmed any supposed romance with ASL. In a 1967 interview she said, "He had fallen in love with me and wanted to join my life with his. It was a laugh." According to ASL's publicist Edward Webber, Mansfield would ridicule her Satanic suitor by calling from her Los Angeles home and seductively teasing him while her friends listened in on the conversation. ASL's public claims that he had an affair with Mansfield began only after Mansfield's death in an automobile accident, which he also claimed was the result of a curse he had placed on her lover Sam Brody.

SOURCES: Edward Webber (interview by Aquino 6/2/91); interview with Mansfield quoted in *Jayne Mansfield* by May Mann, Pocket Books, 1974.

LEGEND: ASL wrote the *Satanic Bible*, his principal work, to fulfill his congregation's need for a scriptural guide.

REALITY: The *Satanic Bible* was conceived as a commercial vehicle by paperback publisher Avon Books. Avon approached ASL for some kind of Satanic work to cash in on the Satanism & witchcraft fad of the late 1960s. Pressed for material to meet Avon's deadline, ASL resorted to plagiarism, assembling extracts from an obscure 1896 tract - *Might is Right* by Ragnar Redbeard into a "Book of Satan" for the *SB*, and claiming its authorship by himself. [Ironically these *MiR* passages are the ones most frequently quoted by ASL disciples.] Another third of the *SB* consists of John Dee's "Enochian Keys", taken directly but again without attribution from Aleister Crowley's *Equinox*. The *SB*'s "Nine Satanic Statements", one of the Church of Satan's central doctrines, is a paraphrase, again unacknowledged, of passages from Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. The last words in the *SB* - "Yankee Rose" - have been puzzled over for years by readers. "YR" is actually the name of an old popular tune in ASL's nightclub repertoire.

SOURCES: ASL, *The Satanic Bible*; Ragnar Redbeard, *Might is Right*, Port Townsend: Loompanics (reprint), 1896; Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (Galt's speech, ca. pages #936-993); "Yankee Rose" by Sidney Holden & Abe Frankl (Irving Berlin Music, 1926).

LEGEND: ASL claimed that at the height of the Church of Satan's popularity there were hundreds of thousands of formal members.

REALITY: Diane LaVey (who administered the Church as High Priestess 1966-1984), Michael A. Aquino (senior Magister of the Church and Editor of its *Cloven Hoof* newsletter 1971-1975), and Zeena LaVey (High Priestess of the Church 1985-1990) have all affirmed that the figures claimed by ASL were grossly exaggerated. The membership of the Church of Satan never exceeded 300 individuals, several of whom were nonmember subscribers to the newsletter or ASL friends receiving complimentary mailings.

SOURCES: Diane LaVey, Michael A. Aquino, Zeena LaVey.

LEGEND: ASL claimed to be a multimillionaire, owning three homes in northern California, a convent in Italy, a chateau in France, a fleet of luxury automobiles, a 185-foot yacht, three salvage ships, and other property.

REALITY: During Diane [LaVey] Hegarty's 1988-91 lawsuit against ASL, and ASL's subsequent 1991 filing for bankruptcy, ASL stipulated under oath that he owned nothing more than 50% of the house his parents had given jointly to him and Diane, along with the personal items he kept therein. ASL's final years were subsidized by California state aid. Assessors declared the house to be in such poor repair as to be nearly worthless on the real estate market. Family members have attested to the fact that by the mid-1970s the LaVeys lived in near-poverty, frequently having to rely upon ASL's father's generosity. According to other LaVey relatives, ASL continued to rely on handouts from friends and relatives until the end of his life.

SOURCES: [*Hegarty v. LaVey* \(San Francisco Superior Court Case #891863\)](#), [*Anton LaVey Bankruptcy, Chapter 7* \(U.S. Bankruptcy Court, Northern California, Case #91-34251\)](#), Zeena LaVey, other relatives.

LEGEND: ASL was a close friend of Sammy Davis, Jr. and inducted him into the Church of Satan.

REALITY: Sammy Davis, Jr. was invited to accept an honorary membership in the Church of Satan by Michael Aquino. After Davis sent Aquino his acceptance on March 17, 1973, he was presented with the honorary membership on April 13, 1973 by Aquino and Karla LaVey alone. ASL did not meet Davis until August 1973.

SOURCES: Davis letter to Aquino 3/17/73; Church of Satan Priesthood Bulletin 4/30/73; Aquino, *COS*, Chapter 23; Sammy Davis, *Hollywood in a Suitcase* (pre-publication text, printed in *Daily News*, New York, 9/11/80), Karla LaVey.

LEGEND: ASL presented himself as a loving family man.

REALITY: ASL violently beat his wife Diane throughout their marriage. In 1984 a police report was made describing Diane being strangled into unconsciousness by ASL, who was in such a murderous rage that his daughter Karla had to pull him off Diane and drag her outside the house to save her life. ASL routinely physically beat and abused those of his female disciples with whom he had sex, forcing them into prostitution as part of his "Satanic counseling" and collecting their earnings. In 1986 ASL was a passive witness to the sexual molestation of his own grandson by a longtime friend who was later convicted of sex crimes with minors. In 1990 ASL informed a mentally-ill stalker of his daughter Zeena of her whereabouts and the time & location of a public appearance she was scheduled to make, deliberately endangering her life.

SOURCES: San Francisco Police records of ASL attack on Diane LaVey, Zeena LaVey, Diane LaVey, Stanton LaVey.

LEGEND: ASL had a deeply affectionate relationship with Togare, his pet lion.

REALITY: While ASL was always careful to portray himself to the public as an animal lover, in private he was cruel to and neglectful of his pets. When he was given Togare as a cub in 1964, he was ill-equipped to deal with such an exotic, wild animal despite his pretensions as a circus lion-tamer. As Togare became larger and more unruly, ASL frequently used an electric cattle prod to hurt and frighten him into submission. Many animal-rights proponents, including Togare's final owner Tippi Hedren, agree that it is detrimental to a wild animal's development to be raised in a domestic environment. ASL was arrested due to Togare's unruly behavior, and ASL was ordered to donate him to the San Francisco Zoo. After complying, ASL made only two visits to Togare. Due to the trauma of his early life, Togare needed special care at the Zoo and at every animal-care facility in which he subsequently lived.

SOURCES: Jack Castor (Lion Keeper, San Francisco Zoo), Diane LaVey, Zeena LaVey, Tippi Hedren (*The Cats of Shamballa*, McGraw-Hill, 1985).

LEGEND: ASL had a deeply affectionate relationship with his other pets.

REALITY: In the late 1960s ASL acquired a Doberman Pinscher (Loki) as an accent to his "sinister" image. ASL never took the time to housebreak or train Loki, and relegated him to the overgrown and unkempt backyard of the house, regardless of weather. If Loki ever tried to slip into the house for shelter, ASL routinely used Togare's cattle-prod on him to terrify him back outside. In his old age Loki developed such severe arthritis that he could not climb the stairs to the back door to eat, and began wasting away from malnutrition. ASL then gave him to one of his prostitute "students", who at least saw that Loki had a warm, inside home until he died a few months later. During her young childhood ASL's daughter Zeena once awoke late at night to hear slamming sounds and the shrieking of her German Shepherd puppy. Running downstairs, she saw ASL savagely beating the cowering, cornered dog with a

wooden plank. When Zeena begged ASL to stop and asked him what the dog had done to deserve such treatment, ASL screamed, "She won't listen to me! I'm going to force her to obey me!" ASL continued beating the dog until her face was covered with her blood, then dropped the plank and left the dog quivering in the hallway, so injured and frightened that she wouldn't let even Zeena come near her. This incident left the dog traumatized for a long time afterwards.

SOURCES: Diane LaVey, Zeena LaVey.

LEGEND: On ASL's original death certificate the date of his demise was recorded as October 31, 1997 (Halloween).

REALITY: An official investigation by the City of San Francisco determined that ASL's actual date of death was October 29, 1997 and that the "Halloween" date had been illegally written on the document.

SOURCES: [Death Certificate #380278667, San Francisco Department of Public Health](#); Dr. Giles Miller (attending physician at ASL's death), Physician's Amendment to Death Certificate, 11/26/97.

RESEARCH REFERENCES: Wright, Lawrence, "Sympathy for the Devil", *Rolling Stone* #612, September 5, 1991, *Saints and Sinners*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. Aquino, Michael A., *The Church of Satan*. San Francisco: Temple of Set, 1983. We extend our thanks to ASL's relatives and associates who contributed their memories.