



Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

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February 2024

Notice to Couples in Love!

The Gretna Historical Society invites you to marry in a truly romantic and awesome way without breaking the bank! Make your dream of a beautiful wedding a reality on Valentine's Day 2024. Enjoy a unique wedding experience in a beautiful setting in the spirit of Gretna Green, Scotland!

Valentine's Day, Wednesday, February 14, 2024

GHS Museum Complex

209 Lafayette Street, Gretna, Louisiana

Services provided include:

- **An official ceremony performed by Judge Vernon Wilty, the 'Marrying Judge'.**
- **Couples are escorted to the wedding site by a Scottish bagpiper, a Scottish tradition.**
- **Wedding vows are sealed by a blacksmith in the tradition of Gretna Green, Scotland.**
- **An official wedding photograph by a professional wedding photographer at no charge.**
- **A wedding proclamation from the City of Gretna.**
- **Many more surprises of the day!**

To schedule your Valentine's Day wedding, call Judge Wilty at 504.364.2760.

President Lisa LaFrance, left, thanked Kimberly Guise, Director of Curatorial Services at the National WWII Museum, who was guest speaker at the January meeting. She spoke about shipbuilding for the war with emphasis on the *SS Gretna Victory*, a Liberty Ship.



CALENDAR

Feb 8 @ 6 pm Membership Meeting/Mardi Gras Party at St. Joseph Gym.

Wear your Mardi Gras costume or regalia to the Feb meeting. Put your name in the lottery drawing to be GHS King or Queen 2024! *Monetary donations will be collected for the Gretna Food Bank.*

Feb 14 - Valentine's Day Weddings at GHS Complex (Closed Event)

Mar 14 @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.

Apr 7 - GHS Spring Tour of Homes - (Ticketed Event)

Apr 11 @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.



Times Past —

By Stephanie Dieterich

The Marrying Judges!

Mardi Gras celebrations start early this year. After the Mardi Gras parades, events and festivities that New Orleans has long been known for, the Lenten season begins the next day on Ash Wednesday. It so happens that Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day fall on the same day. What a better day to get married than on the feast day of St. Valentine, the patron saint of love and happy marriages?

Gretna was named after the Scottish town, Gretna Green, known as a destination for underage UK couples looking to elope. Marrying Judges here were more than happy to oblige New Orleans’ eloping lovebirds who only had to cross the river to Gretna to quickly tie the knot.

The Marrying Judges (Justices of the Peace) of the First Justice Court in Jefferson Parish and their service dates were: Ephriam Towner 1880-1896, Charles W. Rossner Jr. 1896-1908, Michael Dauenhauer 1908-1916, George J. Trauth 1916-1943, Leycester L. Trauth 1943-1984 and Vernon Wilty III 1984-present.

George J. Trauth was often called the Marrying Magistrate for the abundance of weddings he performed. He married near 20,000 couples during his 28 years of service. When not at his office in the Jefferson Parish Courthouse, couples would arrive at his Gretna home at 217 Derbigny. Arriving at all hours of the night, Trauth would gladly abide with a smile, even kissing the new bride after the ceremony. Bedridden for the last three years of his life didn’t stop him, he continued to marry couples from his bedside, but his wife, Theresa insisted he not work later than 10 p.m.

Leycester L. Trauth replaced his father, George, as Justice of the Peace. Judge Trauth or “Ces” as he was called, married 17,000 couples. He also married many couples from his home at 932 Newton Street. His wife, Ethyl, insisted he perform the ceremony in the den so as not to scratch the wood flooring in their living room. With all those weddings, he still made time in Mardi Gras 1948 to reign as the first King Gretna. “Ces” had a green thumb and enjoyed growing exotic plants in his hothouse.

The next and current Justice of the Peace, Vernon Wilty III, was elected in 1984. So far he has performed 27,991 weddings and is still counting. Judge Wilty’s grandmother, Izola Trauth, was George J. Trauth’s niece. George J. Trauth had an uncle named Maximillian Trauth who worked for the railroad and met a girl from Des Allemands, where he served as Justice of the Peace from 1916 until his death in 1930. His daughter, Elouise Trauth, finished his term. The occupation of Justice of the Peace appears to run in the Trauth family!

Many thanks to the Honorable Judge Vernon Wilty III for his generosity in performing our Blacksmith Shop Valentine’s Day weddings and keeping the family tradition alive! *(Continued on page 3)*



Judge George J. Trauth

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:
Herbert & Sandra Cretini Jr.
Jo Ann Klinner
Kimberly Guise

WELCOME BACK:
Robert Whitehurst

Judges, Continued from page 2



Justice of the Peace Leicester L. Trauth, who married 17,000 couples as judge, reigned as the first King Grela at Mardi Gras in 1948. He is shown with his wife, Ethyl.



The Honorable Judge Vernon Wilty III, shown performing his duties on a previous Valentine's Day, has been Gretna's "Marrying Judge" since 1984.

THE NEW ORLEANS STATES
Friday Evening January 28, 1916

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
MEET NEW 'MARRYING
JUSTICE' FOR GRETNA

Wife of 'Man Who Defeated
Dauenhauer Says He May
Kiss Brides

Hard as will be the job of equalling the record of his predecessor, Judge M. A. Dauenhauer, the "marrying justice of Gretna." For the frequency and celerity with which he tied the nuptial knot for frenzied eloping couples, George J. Trauth, who, in the election Tuesday, succeeded to these responsibilities, emoluments and privileges, is going about his preparations to take care of all comers, day or night, in a business-like fashion:—

First, he is having a brand new bell put on his front door, one of the kind that is sure to make a noise that will leave no doubt in the minds of any nervous pair of elopers that somebody will respond to their midnight ring—and respond in time to forestall any grim designs of a possible pursuing papa.

Then, too, he is sprucing up the parlor of his little Gretna home and most important of all, he has come to an understanding with Mrs. Trauth concerning the exercise of certain universally recognized privileges that go with his office. Mrs. Trauth, of course, is much delighted over Mr. Trauth's election, and it's nice to be able to have the first look at all the brides' "going away" dresses and hats, but there are certain details, more polite, perfunctory "duties," of course, that are incumbent upon the justice after the ceremony, in which the wife of the justice feels a lively interest.

Can Kiss Brides If
Wife Is Present.

"Oh, yes, I haven't the slightest objection to his kissing all the brides—once—if they are willing—and—well, if I am present," said Mrs. Trauth, with a nervous little laugh. "You see, I am very generous, and it really may be expected of him—in some cases, you know"—and that queer little laugh trilled out again.

Judge Trauth, sitting by, merely cleared his throat with a dignified what's-all-this-to-me sort of an air, and glanced at Mrs. Trauth with a look that was intended to be reassuring regarding any possible lurking uneasiness.



JUDGE G. J. TRAUTH.

The new "marrying justice" isn't as old as such a way of referring to part of his official functions might suggest. He is only 38, not bad looking and no bride—all other things being equal and with no intimation that the green-eyed monster is lurking about—need shrink from granting him one of the most prized privileges of his office. He was born and raised in Gretna and previous to his entering the primary was general foreman of the American Cotton Oil Company's plant. He received his early education in St. Joseph's parochial school in Gretna and later attended the Jesuits' College in this city. This is his first political office. As first justice of the district court, he, besides having a corner on the marrying and bride-kissing business, has important judicial responsibilities.

Gretna Chronicles succeeds the GHS Newsletter and the Gretna Historical Society Newsletter as the official source of news for the general membership of the Gretna Historical Society.

Gretna Historical Society

201-209 Lafayette Street
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Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex

1840s Strehle Family Cottage, 1859 David Crockett
 Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1 Fire Station (now Louisiana Fire
 Museum), 1840s White Family Cottage

Gretna Chronicles

is published for the members and friends of GHS

M. Helen Williams, Editor

To submit articles, call Helen at 504.450.8481

(or e-mail mhw500@cox.net)

ABOUT THE GHS AND HOW TO JOIN

The Gretna Historical Society was founded in Gretna, Louisiana, in 1969, by Lloyd E. Gomez (insurance man, volunteer firefighter, and community activist), who descended from Gretna pioneers, German immigrants Claudius and Catherine Nuss Strehle. The Society's articles of incorporation were drafted by Gretna attorney Everette F. Gauthreaux and signed in his law office on October 26, 1969. Today, the GHS operates the Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex at the corner of Lafayette Street at Second. It consists of three 19th century Creole cottages, a blacksmith shop, and the Louisiana Fire Museum. The GHS also owns and maintains the caboose and train depot on Huey P. Long Avenue at Fourth Street.

There are no requirements for membership in the GHS, other than the timely payment of annual membership dues of \$25 per person. Monthly meetings are held at the St. Joseph Complex Gym at 7th and Newton Streets on the second Thursday of every month at 6:00 p.m. The society's newsletter, *Gretna Chronicles*, is published monthly and mailed or emailed to all members.

Gretna Historical Society

<https://www.gretnahistoricalsociety.org/>

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