



Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

Volume 34, Issue 3

An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

March, 2024

Love Blooms at the Complex

The 2024 Valentine's Day Weddings were again a rose bloomin' lovefest, run like a well-oiled machine under the direction of Sylvia Schwarz! Thank you to our faithful volunteers, the Marrying Judge Vernon Wilty, Blacksmith Tom Verrett, the Bagpiper John Rode and City of Gretna Proclamation Reader Summer Cook, who all did their thing to make it a romantic, runaway success.

Eight weddings were performed and one set of vows was renewed! Not a bad day when the most romantic day of the year fell on solemn Ash Wednesday.



Education Is a GHS Mission

As mentioned in its Articles of Incorporation, the GHS was organized exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes. The primary objects of the organization are to restore and preserve or create and maintain for posterity, as well as to promote for public appreciation, selected sites, buildings, structures relics and artifacts that have historical value and are associated with the development and growth of the City of Gretna. Further purpose is to educate its members and the public about the history of Gretna.

We have an ongoing education program of school tours to the GHS Museum Complex, as well as visits from travel writers, who educate the public as to the historic value and the entertainment side of tourism to Gretna.



Sanya – Tulane University architecture student.

To GHS Members: “Hi, I’m Sanya, and I’m from Sydney, Australia. I am a freshman at Tulane University majoring in architecture. I am doing a minor in historic preservation and this semester I am taking Intro to Historic Preservation. One of my assignments is to research a preservation society, and I chose the Gretna Historical Society because I really admire their work in the Gretna area and wanted to learn more about it. As part of the project we have to understand the history of the organization, the main structure and also fea-

tured projects. Thank you so much for your time and the opportunity to interview you!”

Travel writers Dannelle Gay and Veronica Bareman visited on Valentine’s Day Wedding Day for travel magazines to educate tourists about South Louisiana.



Special guests at the Valentine’s Day Weddings were Dannelle Gay from Wisconsin and Veronica Bareman from Michigan, both travel writers touring the GHS Museum.



← The GHS February Meeting included a second line celebration, and Royalty was selected by lottery. 2024 King Dwight Maness and Queen GiGi Bergeron led the parade.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:
Joy Acosta and Barbara Favre

CALENDAR
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.
May 9 @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.



Times Past —

By Stephanie Dieterich

RENAISSANCE—

A revival or renewed interest in something.

What is now referred to as “Old Gretna” has held the seat of Jefferson Parish Government since 1844. It was a thriving downtown business and shopping district with well-maintained homes for decades, and then it wasn’t!

The opening of the GNO Bridge in 1959 spurred the growth of new subdivisions and shopping districts along and across the new Westbank Expressway. Businesses in Downtown Gretna closed down or moved away. Residents left their older homes for modern brick ones in the newer neighborhoods.

Old Gretna began to stagnate, becoming undesirable.

Once beautiful homes and buildings were torn down for the likes of junkyards and parking lots or left to decay as property values declined.

In 1969, a few concerned citizens, alarmed by this tragedy, got together to form the Gretna Historical Society with the purpose of preserving and promoting the history of Gretna. Original members included society organizer and first President Lloyd Gomez, 1st Vice president Everette Gauthreaux, 2nd Vice president W. Richard White, 3rd Vice president Wayne Salathe, 4th Vice president James Titterington, Secretary Katherine Steiner, Treasurer Mrs. Joseph Billa, and Historian Henry Thoede.

Their first project was to raise money to restore the dilapidated David Crocket Fire Hall and the surrounding Strehle and White homes. Mission accomplished!

In 1972 the fire hall was heavily damaged by fire and once again the Society stepped up, raising the funds to rebuild and repair the damage.

In 1984 GHS President Ronnie Harris started a drive to save the Train Depot. It was no longer needed by the railroad who agreed to give it to the Gretna Historical Society if they would move it. At the time, it was located at 4th and Dolhonde Streets. The Society wanted to save it and move it back to its original location on 4th and Huey P. Long Avenue. Mayor White vehemently opposed the idea. He said it was “a hicktown depot” and would be an eyesore and make the city look foolish. Gretna Police Chief B. H. Miller Jr. called it “a shack about to fall down.” Luckily, Aldermen Uzee, Schexnayder, Marchese and Bush were in favor, with LeBouef being the only one against. So strongly did Mayor White feel against saving the depot, he vetoed the Alderman’s motion. The Aldermen overrode the Mayor’s veto and it was defeated by the same 4-1 vote.

GHS raised the money to move and restore the Train Depot; it is still owned and maintained by the GHS. Today it’s a focal point in Downtown Gretna and leased to the Gretna Farmers Market.

Society member Mary Grace Curry was the driving force getting the David Crocket Fire Hall, the Old Steam Pumper, Gretna City Hall, St. Joseph Church and Most Holy Sacrament Convent Complex listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

By 1985 the oldest parts of Gretna were designated a National Historic District, thanks to the hard work of Mary Grace Curry and other GHS members who tirelessly walked the streets to inventory the City’s historical buildings.

It was slow going at first but “Old Gretna” is now a coveted location. Businesses are moving in at warp speed. Houses don’t sit very long on the market and prices exceed those most everywhere else on the Westbank. Yes, Old Gretna is definitely experiencing a Renaissance and Gretna Historical Society was there from the start!



1906 Southern Pacific Freight Depot.

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
 P.O. Box 115
 Gretna, LA 70054-0115



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/>

P.O. Box 115, Gretna, LA 70054-0115

Phone: 504.362.3854

Email: directoroffacilities@gretnahistoricalsociety.org

Facebook: [@GHSGretnaLA](https://www.facebook.com/GHSGretnaLA)

- Lisa LaFrance.....President**
- Ray Markase.....Vice President**
- Sylvia Schwarz.....Recording Secretary**
- Holly Williams.....Corresponding Secretary**
- Sarah Daigle.....Treasurer**
- Stephanie Dieterich.....Historian and Archivist**
- Blaine Daigle.....Sergeant-at-Arms**
- Val Coles.....Parliamentarian**
- M. Helen Williams.....Board Member/Publicity**
- Paul Coles.....Board /Hospitality Director**
- Cheryl AmackerBoard Member/Membership**
- Monica Naquin.....Board Member at Large**
- Judy LeBlanc.....Director of Facilities**