



# Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana



Volume 35, Issue 2

An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

February, 2025

## *Installation of New GHS Officers*

By Lisa LaFrance, Outgoing President

As I reflect on the past two years, I am filled with gratitude and pride. Serving as president of the GHS board has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, and it has been an honor to work alongside such dedicated and talented individuals.

Together, we've faced challenges, celebrated achievements, and made decisions that will have a positive impact on the future of GHS for years to come.

To the board and loyal staff, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your trust, collaboration, and willingness to engage in thoughtful dialogue. Your passion for the GHS mission is what drives its success, and I have no doubt that you will continue to lead with vision and purpose in the years ahead.

To my successor, Val Coles, I wish you all the best as you take on this role. I have every confidence that your leadership will guide this board to new heights, and I look forward to supporting you in my new role as Parliamentarian.

To the members, I couldn't have asked for a warmer welcome. It's been wonderful getting to know all of you!

Thank you once again for allowing me the privilege of serving as your president. It has truly been an honor.



Incoming GHS President Val Coles, left, thanked outgoing President Lisa LaFrance for the society's successes during her tenure.



At the January meeting, Mayor Belinda Constant, far right, installed the Board Members and officers for the next calendar year. Those installed included, left to right, Corresponding Secretary Holly Williams, Treasurer Sarah Daigle, Historian/Archivist Stephanie Dieterich, Board Member at Large Dwight Maness, Recording Secretary Sylvia Schwarz, Sergeant at Arms Judy LeBlanc, Vice President Blaine Daigle, Board Hospitality & Programs Paul Coles, Board Member/Editor & Public Relations Helen Williams, Parliamentarian Lisa LaFrance, and President Val Coles. New Board Member at Large Joe Miller was not present.

## Members Take Notice!

Don't forget to tell sweethearts about the Valentine's Day Weddings on Friday, Feb. 14! Tell them it's a way to a beautiful wedding without breaking the bank!

They can join the couples that will marry at the Gretna Historical Museum Complex at 209 Lafayette Street in Gretna. The "marrying judge," Jefferson Parish Justice of the Peace Vernon J. Wilty III, will make everything nice and legal for their lifetime of togetherness as he has done for many.

The weddings are scheduled throughout the day. Couples have to call in advance to Judge Wilty's office at 504.364.2760 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. The couples must obtain a marriage license. He will tell them what to do next.

Already married couples might want to experience a vow renewal that is also possible at the Blacksmith Shop on Valentine's Day. The vow renewals do not, of course, include obtaining a marriage license, but a time must be reserved by calling the judge's office.



Troy Williams, Tammy Damico and Judge Vernon Wilty.



George Pipher and Tracy Meyers.



John Scurich with American Friends of Lafayette was guest speaker at the January meeting. He spoke about the 200<sup>th</sup>

### CALENDAR

**FEB 13** @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym - Mardi Gras party and trivia contest.

**FEB 14** Blacksmith Shop Valentine's Weddings

**MAR 13** @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at the Gretna Cultural Center for the Arts (**Note: New Location for Meeting**)

**APR 6** GHS Spring Tour of Homes - 1-5 pm. Ticketed Event, \$25.

**APR 13** @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St Joseph Gym.

### Welcome Back

Glenn & Faye Mitchell

### Welcome New Members

Brenda Lawson	Lloyd & Bonnie Andrus
Brett & Ruth Lawson	Margaret Thompson
Jason & Beverly Hippler	Marianne Terrebonne
Carol Alcantar	Mike & Kim McCluskey
Armand & Dionne Daigle	Jennifer Stansbury
Barbara Charbonnet	

### Dues Are Due!

Membership dues were increased to \$30 per person for 2025. Dues are due now and can be paid at the February Meeting!!

If you are 85 as of January 1, 2025, you are no longer responsible to pay dues. Please inform Judy LeBlanc at the next meeting.



## ***Times Past —***

**By Stephanie Dieterich**

### ***The Marrying Judge — Keeping It in the Family***

It's that time of year again when GHS hosts the Blacksmith Shop Valentine's Day Weddings. Before Gretna became Gretna, the little German community of Mechanickham had a Justice of the Peace who was very accommodating and would perform "quickie" marriages to a large amount of eloping couples crossing over the river from New Orleans. Due to the high numbers of weddings performed, the judge became known as the "Marrying Judge." The names of the village's early "Marrying Judges" are unknown, but the ones on record for the 1st Justice Court are:

Ephriam "Eph" Towner	1880-1896
Charles W. Rossner Jr.	1896-1908
Michael A. Dauenhauer	1908-1916
George J. Trauth Sr.	1916-1943
Leycester L. Trauth.	1944-1984
Vernon J. Wilty, III	1984-Present

George J. Trauth was the first Trauth to serve as Justice of the Peace in Gretna and was widely known as "The Marrying Magistrate." (Trauth was the first husband of Emma Whiteside.) Trauth was elected Gretna's Chief of Police but only served from February to May in 1915. He then ran against Justice of the Peace Michael Dauenhauer, a position he won in January of 1916.

A newspaper article mentions Trauth quickly preparing his little Gretna home by sprucing up the front parlor for the frenzied eloping couples eager to tie the knot at all hours of the day and night. A new bell was installed on his door, one of the kind that was sure to make a noise that left no doubt in the minds of any nervous pair of elopers that somebody would respond to their midnight ring, and respond in time to forestall any grim designs of a possible pursuing angry papa. Trauth's new wife, Theresa said she had no objections to her husband kissing the brides if they were willing, and well, if she is present. So devoted was Trauth that he married couples beside his death bed during the last months of his life. It is said he married around 20,000 couples in his 28 years on the job.

Judge Leycester "Cess" Trauth became Justice of the Peace after his father's death. Like his father, he performed many "after hours" weddings, at his home on Newton Street. He performed 17,000 marriages in 40 years. (Cess was also the first King of Grela.)

Judge Vernon Wilty III has been Justice of the Peace since 1984 and is still going strong. He gener-



Two views over time of Judge George J. Trauth.

ously performs the GHS Valentine's Day weddings and has tied the knot on over 29,000 couples, way more than any of the previous judges!

Judge Wilty's grandmother was Izola Trauth Wilty. Her father, Louis F. Trauth and Judge George J. Trauth were brothers. Meanwhile their uncle Maximillian Trauth who took up residence in Des Allemands was elected Justice of the Peace there in 1916. He served until his death in 1930 when his daughter finished out his term.

So I guess you can say the occupation of Justice of the Peace runs in the Trauth family. It certainly has in Gretna for the last 109 years!

*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](mailto: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 \$30 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](mailto:directoroffacilities@gretnahistoricalsociety.org)

Facebook: @GHSGretnaLA

- Val Coles.....President**
- Blaine Daigle.....Vice President**
- Sylvia Schwarz.....Recording Secretary**
- Holly Williams.....Corresponding Secretary**
- Sarah Daigle.....Treasurer**
- Stephanie Dieterich.....Historian/Archivist**
- Judy LeBlanc.....Sergeant-at-Arms**
- Lisa LaFrance .....Parliamentarian**
- M. Helen Williams.....Board Member/Editor & Publicity**
- Paul Coles.....Board Member/Hospitality & Programs**
- Dwight Maness.....Board Member at Large**
- Joe Miller.....Board Member at Large**