



Gretna Chronicles

Gretna, Louisiana

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November, 2021

The President Presiding...

By Sylvia Schwarz, GHS

Hopefully, everyone has recovered from Hurricane Ida, that bad girl, and are looking forward to a festive Thanksgiving holiday celebration with friends and family.

- Our November General Membership meeting is traditionally our Memorial Service and election of new board members. This year will be no exception. The 2nd Thursday of the month is the usual meeting date, but this year it will be on Thursday, November 18, in order to avoid a conflict with Gretna's Veterans Day celebration.
- Date: Thursday, November 18, 2021
- Place: Historic Complex backyard
- Time: 6:00 p.m.
- Pray for good weather
- Those being memorialized are:



Leo Beane
 Kathy Clark
 Amery Englade
 Catherine Gegenheimer
 Cary Livingston
 Theresa Miller
 William "Bill" Scheffler III



Joyce Berthelot
 Mary Grace Curry
 Eddie Falterman
 Babson "B.J." LeBlanc
 Nola B. Marchese
 Gerald "Jerry" Puderer
 Ruth Ziifle

- Elections for the 2022 Board of Directors will be held at the November meeting. Looking at everything we have to accomplish at the November meeting, it will be a very busy meeting. Please don't miss it.
- You have been sent the proposed changes to the By-Laws. These changes will be voted on at the November meeting.
- A fundraiser for the Lafitte/Barataria community was held on October 1 at the Gretna Bingo Palace. Because of the unbelievable success of this event, the GHS was also able to contribute to the relief of the Town of Grand Isle. Thanks to all who attended.
- **Do Dues 'Cause Dues are Due.** Your 2019 dues were rolled over to 2021. Now is the time for 2022 dues! Don't miss the opportunity to pay yours at the November meeting.
- We also ask that you attend and honor our veterans who have sacrificed so much for us at the
- Veterans Day celebration on November 11 at the Gretna Marketplace. Music begins at 6:30 p.m. for this year's program, "Gretna Salutes Veterans Now and Forever."

GHS would like to wish Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours. We have so much to be thankful for!

**WELCOME TO OUR
 NEW MEMBERS ...
 Kyle and Gretchen Douglas**

Judge Joe Was Rocked

By M. Helen Williams

Retired 24th Judicial District of Jefferson Parish Judge Joseph F. Grefer and his granddaughter Emily Grefer, who currently lives in Edinburgh, Scotland shared a visit to the Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex where the judge is a popular member of the preservation society. They were especially interested in visiting the Creole Cottage known as the Kitty Strehle House so the 91 year-old judge could share his memories of a rocking chair that is featured in the bedroom there.

The house was named for Miss Catherine Strehle who was called “Aunt Kitty” by her family. She was an educator who taught school for 57 years and had a Jefferson Parish school once named after her, Catherine Strehle Elementary. She died in 1939 at age 81 shortly after a fall from her porch.



Emily Grefer, Judge Joe Grefer and the famous rocking chair at the Strehle House Museum. (Photo by Judy LeBlanc)

Born in 1930, “Joe” Grefer was related to the Strehle family and in Kitty Strehle’s first grade class at Gretna No. 2 Elementary School when he was six years old. In the afternoons, routinely all the children took a nap. She rocked young Joe in her lap to sleep every day in the same rocking chair featured in the Kitty house today.

Judge Joe said his cousin, Lois McCune, also an educator, inherited the rocker from their cousin, Kitty Strehle and upon McCune’s death, it was passed down to him. The chair has special memories for the 91 year-old. He, and his late wife donated the chair to the Gretna Historical Society for the museum.

Joe Grefer’s and Kitty Strehle’s mothers were friends and their fathers hunted together. Sadly both fathers died very young.

Emily Grefer, a graduate of Dominican High School in 2012 and LSU in 2016, is 27 years old and works as a marketing consultant in Scotland. Raised in Gretna, she is the oldest daughter of Judge Joe’s youngest son, Judicial District Court Judge Stephen C. Grefer and Maureen Grefer.

“After college, I wanted to continue traveling, so I did my master’s degree at Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland! I really loved it, so I stayed for another four years, and counting!” Emily said.

“I loved being able to spend an afternoon touring the Gretna Historical Society with my grandfather. He was really fond of his Great Aunt Kitty, so it was especially interesting to see where she lived. I never knew how important she was to so many Gretna students until we saw the newspaper clippings honoring her retirement. My grandfather said that when she taught him, she would rock him to sleep during nap time, much to the dismay of a few other students! So to sit in and see her rocking chair so many years later was a very special experience,” she said.

There is a lot more history in the Grefer family tree, including scary stories about the “Grefer House” and Julia Grefer Faucher, Judge Joe’s great grandmother. According to information from Judge Joe and pictures from the Gretna Historical Society, the house was built in 1827 and sold in 1860. It was resold in 1875 to the Grefer family where they lived until 1953. The story goes that the ghost of Julia is still roaming the house.

The home is still there, but is now part of the Rathborne property. It was located on Grefer Lane between the railroad tracks and the river. The street sign has been removed but the home remains. Judge Grefer said you could probably go inside if you asked!

Times Past — By Stephanie Dieterich

Remembering the Marine Hospital

During the 1840's New Orleans ranked as the 3rd largest city in the nation with the 4th busiest port in the world. The most impressive building adorning the riverfront at that time was not in New Orleans, but the imposing Gothic Revival style Marine Hospital in McDonoghville.

McDonoghville's outstanding landmark was located on square 54, bounded by Madison and Jefferson Streets, between Magellan and Bringer Streets. The square is the block behind Ceaser's Lounge on Monroe Street in Gretna. Only train tracks and river batture are there now.

The location for the hospital was chosen because Westbank land was less costly than in the city of New Orleans. It was also thought to be a healthier place away from the "great evils of the City" such as the slaughterhouses, shipyards and grog shops. The United States purchased the 300 square foot site from J.H. Howard in 1837 for \$6,000.

Robert Mills, a nationally prominent architect was the designer of the U.S. Marine Hospital at McDonoghville. Mills' other designs include the Washington D.C. Patent Office, the Treasury Building and the Iconic Washington Monument. Construction on the hospital started in 1838 but



The Marine Hospital was in McDonoghville. (LSU Libraries, Special Collections)

dragged on because of inadequate appropriations from the government. It was not completed until 1850. The final cost amounted to \$122,722.70, the most expensive Marine Hospital erected in the nation up to that date.

The Gothic style hospital spanned 160 feet across the façade and was 78 feet deep. The rear two wings extended 50 feet, creating a courtyard. It stood 135 feet high at the top of the cupola and was built of brick on a granite base. The hospital accommodated 269 patients and had long been needed to care for sick sailors in the New Orleans port.

Access to the hospital was by ferryboat. The hospital's physician and surgeon's yearly salary was \$1,500, but ferrying back and forth to work cost \$100 a year. The great

Bell Crevasse in 1858 flooded the hospital causing it to close and relocate to Jackson Barracks where it remained until 1861.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Louisiana state troops seized the abandoned hospital for use as a powder magazine. Precisely at midnight on December 28, 1861 the gunpowder stored in the Marine Hospital blew up. The tremendous explosion rocked the city for miles around. It shattered window panes and upset furniture, startling people from their sleep. Thousands of buildings were shaken as if an earthquake had occurred. It was felt as far away as Covington. Arson by a Northern sympathizer was suspected, but never proven. Eight thousand pounds of powder were destroyed as was the Marine Hospital. After the Civil War the government assessed the value of the land at \$25,000 and the rubbish which is all that remained of the once beautiful landmark at only \$100.

The Marine Hospital Service was started in 1798 and dedicated to the care of ill and disabled seamen in the U.S. Merchant Marine, the U.S. Coast Guard and other federal beneficiaries. The Marine Hospital Service eventually evolved into the U.S. Public Health Service.



This 1851 lithograph by John Bachman is titled "Birds Eye View of New Orleans", showing the Marine Hospital at right. (Image from the Historic New Orleans Collection)

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

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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

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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 \$20 per person. Monthly meetings are held at the St. Joseph's Auditorium at 7th and Newton Streets on the second Thursday of every month at 7:00 p.m. Guests and prospective members are always welcome to attend the meetings.

The society's newsletter, *Gretna Chronicles*, is published monthly and mailed or emailed to all members.

Gretna Chronicles

is published for the members and friends of the

Gretna Historical Society

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