



Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

Volume 33, Issue 4 An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

April, 2022

GHS Hosts GEDA Meeting

The White House was the setting for the March meeting of GEDA, the Gretna Economic Development Association of which GHS is a member. Guest speaker Amie Hebert, Gretna's director of recreation, spoke about the upcoming Crawfish Cookoff on April 23. Guests enjoyed a demonstration in the museum's Blacksmith Shop by Irvin Schwarz, who did a great job as blacksmith for the evening.

GEDA has been the longtime host of Gretna Fest and the support of many other annual events including all City-sponsored activities such as the Gretna Farmers Market, Gretna Artwalk and Lundi Gras. GEDA serves Gretna through business networking and focuses on its economic growth. You will recognize the GEDA slogan, "Small City, Big Heart!"



The President Presiding...

By Sylvia Schwarz, GHS President



- We had such a fabulous General Meeting in March. Most members sported either the Irish green or their Italian colors. In assessing the crowd, the number of Irish and Italians were just about equal in number. The reading of the Gretna memories and what was best about living in Gretna brought memories to almost everyone present. Nostalgia was prevalent.
- Oh course, as usual, Ray Markase's "Gretna Tawk," was hysterical, reminding us all of the sayings we heard as children. Good laughs!
- Our April meeting was moved up a week to April 7 because the regular meeting date falls in Holy Week. April's meeting will host Police Chief Arthur Lawson who will reminisce about his growing up in Gretna.
- To add a festive air in the spirit of Easter, we ask that all the ladies wear their best, most beautiful Easter bonnets to the April 7 meeting and that the gentlemen wear an Easter hat as well.
- Because of Covid, we will not have our Annual Spring Tour of Homes. Many homeowners are still reluctant to allow a large group of people into their homes at this time. We look forward to next year's event.
- Wonderful News! The food pantry at Gretna Food Bank is packed from ceiling to floor with more than enough food to feed any disadvantaged person(s) in Gretna. We will suspend our food drive until a need arises. Cheers for our membership for giving back.

Gentle Reminders:

**The next meeting will be on April 7
at 7 p.m. in the St. Joseph gym!**

The May meeting on May 12 at 6 p.m. will be the annual Crawfish Boil in the GHS Back Yard.

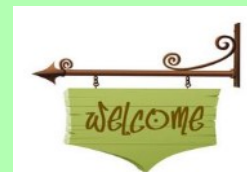
Tickets will be on sale as of April 26, but an amount for the crawfish has not been quoted to us yet. Details will follow.



Welcome

**To Our New
Members**

Royce J. Blanchard
George Bruce
Joseph & Dina Lalley
Bill & Stephanie Watts



And To Rejoining Members
Jeff Lacaze
Victor & Antoinette (Toni) Richard

Times Past — By Stephanie Dieterich

Gretna High School, “Part One”



Way back in 1904, Miss Helen Cox, a teacher at McDonogh 26 Primary School, conceived the idea of a high school in Gretna. Her dream started becoming a reality in 1905 when high school classes were held at Lee’s Hall on Lavoisier and 3rd Streets.

By 1906 the demand was so great that classes were moved to the Parish Courthouse at Newton and 3rd Streets.

By the end of 1906 the first high school in present day Jefferson Parish, McDonogh-Jefferson, opened. It was located in Brooklyn Pastures at Ocean Avenue and the Public Highway, now River Road. Miss Cox was the principal and at her insistence, remained a teacher as well. She was the highest paid teacher in Jefferson Parish at \$280 per month.

When the parish was planning a new high school to replace McDonogh-Jefferson, it was not without a fight. Residents of the First Ward in McDonoghville protested the relocation of the new school. They fought for it to remain in their ward, favoring the present site in Brooklyn Pastures. The citizens of Wards Two, Three and Four wanted it built in the rear of Gretna on a square of land owned by Jefferson Parish at 10th Street. Copernicus Street, now Huey P. Long Avenue, was closed from 10th to 11th Streets and the new school was erected in the middle of the property. Copernicus Street behind the school was renamed Nicholls Avenue.

Gretna High School, one of the city’s most impressive buildings, was three stories high and built of red brick. Greeting you as you climbed the front steps were stately columns that supported a balcony embellished with masonry railings and decorative urns. Above the balcony were three arched windows topped by a crested pediment.

In 1926 Miss Cox led the first students into the new building and continued there as a teaching principal until her retirement in 1942 after 51 years in the school system. Alvin G. Gehring, a graduate of Gretna High and a member of the faculty for seven years, succeeded Miss Cox. He remained principal until Gretna High closed.

A sandwich shop sat on the property behind the school that was run by Emma Whiteside. Her 15 cent roast beef sandwiches were a big hit. On the corner of 10th and Weyer was the school auditorium/gym that today is the home of the Boys & Girls Club - Westbank Unit.

The students felt privileged to attend the high school and receive a diploma after 11 years, many knowing that their parents didn’t get that opportunity. Lifelong friends were made, spouses were met and some went off to war. Many regard it as the best years of their lives. College was not always an option for that generation, but graduates of Gretna High School were prepared to take on the world!

The last graduating class of Gretna High School was in 1955. To give thanks for many good memories, the Class of 1955 dedicated a marker at the school site. The marker includes a photo of the school and inlaid bricks engraved with the names of the class members.

The Jefferson Parish School Board decided to consolidate Gretna, Marrero and Westwego High Schools into one school. West Jefferson High School opened in 1955 as one of the largest high schools in the state. The Gretna High building then became Gretna Junior High School.



McDonogh-Jefferson High School, 1908-1926.



Gretna High School building, circa 1926-1975.

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)

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

- Sylvia SchwarzPresident
- James Rolf.....Vice-President
- Cheryl Amacker.....Recording Secretary
- Lisa LaFrance.....Corresponding Secretary
- Sarah Daigle.....Treasurer
- Stephanie Dieterich.....Historian and Archivist
- Sue McLetchie.....Parliamentarian
- Holly Williams.....Sergeant-at-Arms
- Ray Markase.....Board Member at Large
- Monica NaquinBoard Member at Large
- M. Helen Williams.....Board Member at Large
- Chris Ziifle.....Board Member at Large
- Judy LeBlanc.....Director of Facilities

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