



Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

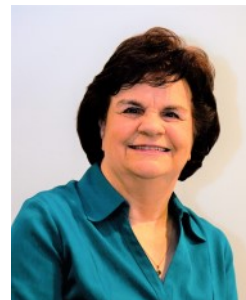
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May, 2022

The President Presiding...

By Sylvia Schwarz, GHS President



We all enjoy our monthly meetings with good food and good fellowship, but there is a serious side to the Gretna Historical Society. We have many new members, so the GHS Board feels we should reiterate the purpose and goals of the GHS, so our new members know and our older members understand why we are and who we are.

The mission of the Gretna Historical Society is other than educational purposes, to restore, preserve and maintain those historical sites, artifacts and structures that have historical value to the City of Gretna and the Westbank of Jefferson Parish. To this end we hope that all our members will be advocates for this purpose.

- The April Meeting was a celebration of Easter and springtime and very well attended. Some members, both ladies and gentlemen, wore Easter hats to add to the spirit of the evening.
- Police Chief Arthur Lawson was guest speaker who entertained everyone with his take of growing up in Gretna, as well as giving very reliable information about the police department. We thank him for his service and sharing such good information with us.



LOOKS
LIKE
EASTER!



CRAWFISH BOIL

There is no regular meeting in May 2022.

But there is a Crawfish Boil!

The deadline to purchase tickets for the May 12 Crawfish boil is **May 7**. Tickets are \$15 per person. You must have purchased your tickets by this date. No tickets will be sold after that or on the date of the boil. Tickets are available at the GHS Museum Complex NOW! **Desserts donated for the Crawfish Boil would be appreciated!**





**Welcome To
Our New
Members**

**Susan Marse
Edith Wattigny**

**And To
Rejoining
Members**

**Sandy Sider
Samuel Krush**



***Times Past* — By Stephanie Dieterich** **Gretna High School, “Part Two”**

In the years after World War II the population of Jefferson Parish exploded.

Between 1947 and 1957 the population increase was five times greater than that of New Orleans. In ten years, Jefferson Parish Public School system’s attendance grew from 11,000 to 26,000. Enrollment was increasing faster than facilities could be provided.

In 1955, two new consolidated public high schools were opened. On the Westbank, Gretna, Marrero and Westwego High Schools were combined to become West Jefferson Consolidated High School and on the East Bank, Kenner, Harahan and Metairie High Schools were joined to become East Jefferson Consolidated High.

The older high school buildings were used for lower classes. The school system added Jr. High Schools (later called Middle Schools,) for 7th, 8th and 9th graders. Gretna High School became Gretna Jr. High. Gretna High Principal Alvin Gehring continued on as principal at Gretna Jr. High until 1964. Coach Henry Hatty succeeded him and held that position for many years.

As enrollment grew, portable buildings were erected along 10th Street to accommodate the ever-increasing population. Adult education classes were also held there in the evenings.

The old Gretna High School gymnasium, on the corner of 10th and Weyer Street, today the site of the Boys & Girls Club, was used for teen dances in the late ’50s. Some of the musicians who performed there included Gretna’s own Frankie Ford, Little Mummy (Marvin Gauthreaux) and Mac Rebennack, who was later known as Dr. John.

Nunez Grocery was located behind the school where soft drinks and po-boys were sold and students could dance to the jukebox music. Teacher Ethyl Trauth had a Coke machine in her shed across from the school for students’ use.

Living directly across the street from Gretna Jr. High, on the corner of Huey P. Long Avenue and 10th Street, my brother and I played on the school grounds and rode bikes on the circular drive. During hurricanes the building was used as an evacuation center. We watched as people arrived carrying pillows and blankets. It seemed like fun, but my mom thought we would be fine in our home.

On Sunday, October 5, 1975, tragedy struck Gretna as smoke was seen coming from the building. Firemen cut the driveway chains to enter the school grounds. Once inside the school, firemen

discovered that seven separate fires had been set. Since cell phones were not yet available and our house was the closest location, firemen came in and out of our home during the fire to make important phone calls.

Over 130 firemen from David Crockett, Gould, Terrytown and Marrero Fire Departments battled the blaze for over three hours to no avail. Throngs of citizens watched in horror, many with tears in their eyes as the relentless fire consumed the building, collapsing the walls and ceilings. There was no saving the grand building. The rubble that was left smoldered for days. So many memories, what a terrible loss. Arson was suspected, however the oiled wood floors were believed to contribute to accelerating the fire. Sadly, no one was ever charged!



The grand Gretna High School building, circa 1926-1975.



The school building, after the 1975 fire.

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