



# Gretna Chronicles

Gretna, Louisiana



Volume 32, Issue 12

An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

December, 2022

## Missing Chris Ziifle

By M. Helen Williams

Chris Ziifle, longtime devoted board member of GHS and beloved resident in the Gretna community, passed away peacefully on November 7, 2023 just before her 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday.



At the GHS November meeting, Rene Poche, Chris's special friend brought her favorite jacket so she could be at the meeting, in absentia.

A fireball of a lady, Chris was well known in Gretna for her years as the "Gun Packin' Mama" and owner of the Gretna Gun Shop. She and her husband, Ralph, ran the business together for 66 years. She continued to operate it after his passing in 1983.



Everyone in the neighborhood knows the story of then 75-year-old Ms. Chris who holed up in the gun shop during Katrina, refusing to leave, protecting that the guns wouldn't end up on the streets!

Always heavily involved in the community, after retirement she devoted all of her time to serving the Gretna Food Bank, German-American Cultural Center where she was also a board member, and at the GHS. She loved the Gretna's Farmer's Market and was a regular most every Saturday morning.

Her very last endeavor to serve was to found Ms. Chris's Backpack Project. When volunteering at the Gretna Food bank, she realized there was a need not being addressed in the community. "I thought to myself that it would be really nice to go out and bring badly needed supplies to everyone that was homeless," she said, with a big emphasis on "everyone."

She, many generous locals and her group of "Angels," made the Ms. Chris's Backpack Project quite the success as they distributed essentials in blue and pink backpacks. They drove the streets and replenished essential supplies as needed in those color coded backpacks!

Chris was quick to give advice, help others, and volunteer when the need arose. She was a lovely vision in her German outfit at so many events in Old Gretna. A strong willed and determined individual, she was loved by so many and will be missed dearly in the future. A public Memorial Celebration of Life will be held early in 2023; details to follow.





By Sylvia Schwarz, GHS President

## *The President Presiding...*



This being my last newsletter, I have decided to make it spectacular, or not!

We would like to thank Ray Markase for another successful Hook & Ladder Cemetery Tour, as well as the actors, tour guides, grounds crew and inside workers. Thanks to Shirley Kleinpeter for the wine and chocolates served in the cemetery. Despite the cold and windy weather, we had a great turnout.

Just a few announcements:

- Do dues 'cause dues are due! Beginning at the December General Membership Meeting/Christmas party, dues will be collected for 2023. Make your check out to "GHS" or mail it to P.O. Box 115, Gretna, LA 70054-0115.

**\*\*REMINDER !! Dues for 2023 are \$25 a person\*\***

December in Gretna is a busy time. Here are a few dates you may want to remember, so mark your calendar.

- Dec. 9 - Caroling on the Huey, Memorial Square, 7:00 p.m.
- Dec. 10 - Shop the Huey Holiday Market - 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. (Find for Sale GACC German beer, soft drinks, brats & pretzels and St. Joseph Restoration's new church ornaments!)
- Dec. 15 - GHS General Membership meeting/Christmas party and Installation of Officers and Board for 2023, St. Joseph Church gym, 7:00 p.m.
- Dec.16 - Christmas Concert on the Huey, Memorial Square, 7:00 p.m.
- Dec. 18 - Living Nativity sponsored by St. Joseph Church, Huey P. Long median at 6<sup>th</sup> St., 6:00 p.m.



If you can't find anything to do, you are not looking very hard since these are all FREE events.

In January 2023 the GHS along with the Friends of the German-American Cultural Center are planning a "Celebration of Life" remembering Chris Ziifle. We will keep you informed as plans progress. We certainly miss Chris.

**Welcome To Our  
New Members:**

Ron and Catherine Hubbard, and Victor Salas



## ***Times Past —***

**By Stephanie Dieterich**

### **Play Ball!**

The earliest references of baseball in the U.S. are a 1786 diary by a Princeton University student who describes playing “baste ball,” and a 1791 Pittsfield Massachusetts ordinance that banned the playing of “baseball” within 80 yards of the town meeting house and its glass windows. Another early reference reports that “base ball” was regularly played on Saturday in 1823 on the outskirts of New York in an area that is today Greenwich Village.

After the Civil War baseball games became more common. By the turn of the century it was everywhere, the most popular sporting event of all.

Not wanting to miss out on all the excitement, in 1902 Jefferson Parish opened Gretna Park, a baseball field in the Town of Gretna. The field was described as being near the cemeteries on Newton Street, even possibly built on top of one.

This newspaper article appeared in a 1902 edition of *The New Orleans Item*:

“Perhaps the only person dissatisfied with the sporting state of affairs in Gretna is Rabbit Moore, the Parish undertaker and embalmer. He is employed to bury those animals and persons, the expense of whose funds must be borne by the public treasury. Before his graveyard was appropriated by the baseball players he had to bring the deceased a few blocks at most for internment. Now he must take them in a wheelbarrow away up above the protection levee.”

The Louisiana Parish Baseball League’s season opened at the new Gretna Park. The park’s grandstand and bleachers held 1,000 spectators, a large crowd considering the area only numbered around 5,000 at the time. Fans came from all around. Ladies attended free of charge. Tallyho service (a horse-drawn coach) operated between the park and the ferry, and the Algiers/Gretna streetcar line.

There were four clubs in the league -- Gretna, Kenner, St. Charles and Algiers. Gretna team names included the Nationals of Gretna, Silver Bells, Nine Sluggers, Pelican Jumpers of Mc Donoghville, Shamrocks of Gretna and the Zu Zus.

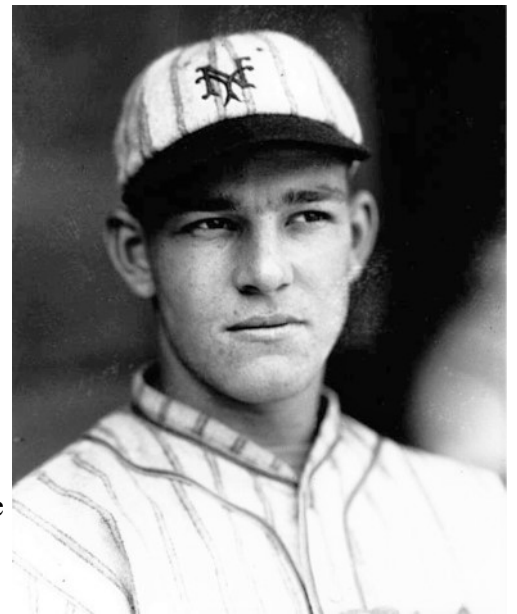
Names of the players read like a who’s who of Gretnites. There was an Ott, but since Mel wasn’t born until 1909 it was most likely a relative, perhaps his dad or an uncle. Baseball obviously ran in his genes!

Other names include: L. Trauth, Bernardi, Rapp, Langridge, Fleury, Evans, Strohmeyer, Huber, C. Neeb, G. Neeb, W. Strehle, W. Spies, J. Favalora and L. Samuel. There was A. Rouprich, J. Donewar, M. Fink, A. Delery, M. Gruhler, P. Scheffler, L. Gegenheimer, E. Burmaster and A. Terrebonne, the names went on and on. It seems everyone of ball-playing age in Gretna participated and they were good, winning many games.

Many of these family names are still around in Gretna 120 years later. There is a good chance you are either related to, or know someone who is related to these players.

The exact location of the park and when it closed are a mystery. The best guess is between Newton and Lafayette Streets, south of 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

Although he most likely never played at this Gretna Park, Melvin Thomas Ott “Master Melvin” put Gretna on the map. So gifted, he bypassed the minor leagues and went straight to the major league. He played for the New York Giants his entire career from 1926-1947. He was an All Star for 11 consecutive seasons and the first National League player to surpass 500 career home runs. Mel is one of only four players in history – and became the first National League player – with at least 1,800 runs scored, 1,800 RBI and 1,700 walks. He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1951. Gretna is so proud of its home-grown baseball legend that there is now a park named in his honor.



Mel Ott, Gretna’s baseball hero, honored with a park in his name and a statue of him at bat.

*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 \$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. 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

- Sylvia Schwarz .....President
- 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 Naquin .....Board Member at Large
- M. Helen Williams.....Board Member at Large
- Chris Ziifle.....Board Member at Large
- Judy LeBlanc.....Director of Facilities