



# Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

Volume 33, Issue 1 An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

January, 2023

## Our New President

By M. Helen Williams

Meet our new president who will serve for the 2023 term. She is Lisa Sanchez LaFrance, a senior vice president with a 38-year banking career. Her expertise is leadership and managing business development, good prerequisites for the presidency of Gretna Historical Society.

“I grew up in Old Gretna, behind the Expressway Bowling Alley. My dad was an inspector for the City of Gretna. I have a wonderful,

*“I’m honored to work side by side to preserve our Gretna Heritage ...”*  
*Lisa LaFrance*

fun husband and together we share four children, four grandchildren and a huge extended family,” she said.

Lisa has always had a passion for history and people, so being a member of Gretna



Lisa Sanchez LaFrance

Historical Society fit her to a ‘T.’ “I’ve studied our GHS mission statement -- preservation and culture....my goal is to be true to it, continue the society’s good work, and look to add value only where together, we see an opportunity to explore. I’m a believer in collaboration.

“I’m honored to work side by side to preserve our Gretna heritage, promote community engagement, and provide the education and resources needed to sustain a successful historical society for many years to come. GHS plays a vital role in the success of our city. We go hand in hand with economics, local government, law enforcement, etc. We create the culture that attracts the best. Our property values are increasing and the economy is good here because of our historic district and what GHS has helped to preserve.

“We can be very proud of the progress made by the many GHS members and boards before us since its founder, Lloyd Gomez, began in 1969.

### Dues for 2023 are now due!

Dues are \$25 annually per person. Please note that 85-year-old members do not have to pay dues. Notify Judy LeBlanc if you are 85 so she can exempt you from this fee.

You can pay your dues at the January meeting, drop off at the GHS Complex Office or mail to “GHS, P. O. Box 115, Gretna, LA 70054-0115.”

**The next meeting is Thursday, January 12, at 7 p.m., at St. Joseph gym.**

“We have a unique and entertaining social club atmosphere that motivates our membership. I’d like to see us inject more history, education to develop the passion to bring about more action taken by members...volunteering, spreading the message....community engagement. It’s important for our future.”

### Welcome to our new Members!

Loretta LaFrance rejoined. New members are Margaret Spahr, Rose Willig, Marilyn Bankston, Jane Henson, Jean Hunn and David LaFrance.

## Celebrating Christmas With a Lot of 'Ho Ho Ho's!'



THANK YOU TO ALL THE CAST AND THE WORKERS BEHIND THE SCENES WHO MADE THE EVENING SO MUCH FUN!





## *Times Past —*

By Stephanie Dieterich

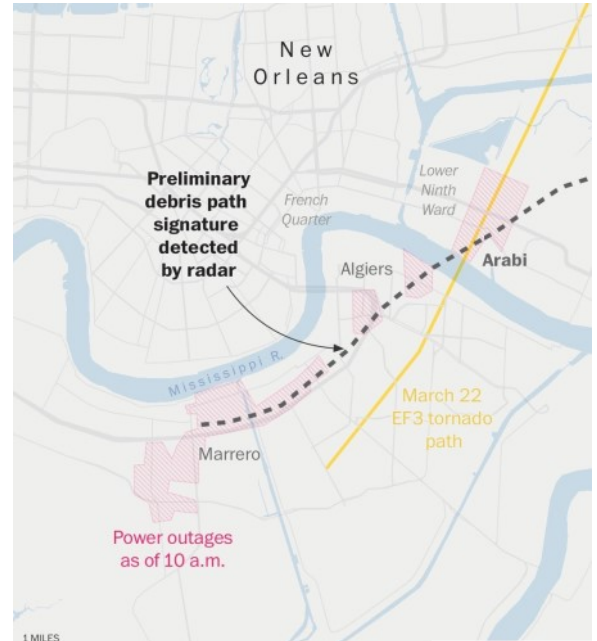
### *You Can't Escape Mother Nature!*

They say history repeats itself! After getting pounded by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and again by Hurricane Ida in 2021, (both hurricanes hit on August 29 exactly 16 years apart) we breathed a sigh of relief to get through this hurricane season unscathed.

Unfortunately Mother Nature was not done with us yet. A tornado that originally wasn't supposed to come to Gretna made a last minute detour to visit our city. After trashing parts of Marrero and Old Harvey, the tornado hit Gretna a little before 4:00 a.m. on December 14, 2022.

Devastation was inflicted on many historic structures in both the Old Gretna and Suburban Park neighborhoods of Gretna. At least 11 buildings were so destroyed that the city has slated them for emergency demolition. A total of 81 properties were damaged. This is the second tornado this year to have hit Gretna. The first tornado that was in March hit around Claire Avenue.

We already have our hurricanes, keep the tornadoes in Kansas! Let Dorothy and her ruby slippers deal with them there. They are not welcome in South Louisiana, but lately seem to frequent us more.



This map shows the path of the December 14, 2022 tornado that caused significant damage in Gretna.

**LARGEST SERVICE FACILITIES ON THE WEST SIDE**

**CLAVERIE MOTORS**

AL 3374      Derbigny & Third Streets—Gretna      AL 3374

AL CLAVERIE President           DICK BOHN Vice-President

A tornado struck the industrial area of Gretna in April of 1953. The back wall at Claverie Motors collapsed, damaging 115 new voting machines stored there by Jefferson Parish.

February of 1899 when temperatures in Gretna fell to 6 degrees, the coldest on record. Residents were at the mercy of fireplaces and coal burning stoves to keep their drafty houses warm. At least they didn't have to worry about frozen pipes because they most likely didn't have indoor plumbing.

Yes, we felt lucky escaping a hurricane this year, but at what cost? You can't escape Mother Nature!

In the past, April of 1953 saw Jefferson Parish hit hard with a widespread tornado. In Gretna, the industrial area along the riverfront sustained the most damage. Claverie Auto, located on Derbigny between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the river, had a 450 foot long back wall collapse. Stored inside were 115 new Jefferson Parish owned voting machines that were damaged. The Continental Can Company at Front and Derbigny Streets sustained serious damage when a large brick wall was knocked out. The well-fed ice house on Front Street around Newton also sustained damage. A huge radio tower looked like matchsticks after the event and the home of Mrs. Joseph Adams at 1116 8<sup>th</sup> Street was moved from its foundation.

Our recent tornado left many without power after snapping poles and knocking out electric and cable lines. Nine days later, Mother Nature decided to give us a little lagniappe in the form of an Arctic blast with temperatures in the 20's for three days. But, we shouldn't complain. Our ancestors weathered a cold snap during Carnival time in

*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

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(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 \$25 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/>

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Facebook: @GHSGretnaLA

- Lisa LaFrance.....President**
- Ray Markase.....Vice-President**
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- Sarah Daigle.....Treasurer**
- Stephanie Dieterich.....Historian and Archivist**
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