



Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

Volume 32, Issue 9

An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

September, 2022

Golden Girls of the GHS

By M. Helen Williams

The Golden Girls, Carol Lee!

(Part 3 in a Series of 4)

Val Coles calls her mom, Carol Lee Drumm Maness, “the old Gretna girl.” Born on Lavoisier Street on Jan 19, 1937, she was named for the doctor that delivered her, Carroll Gelbke and the Southern general whose birthday she shares, Robert E. Lee. Her mother, Velma Hindelang Drumm was the cafeteria manager at St. Joseph School. Her maternal grandfather Joseph Hindelang actually laid the cornerstone of the present St. Joseph Church. Her family was here prior to the Civil War.

“Although a true southerner, mom wasn’t your typical southern belle.

If she wanted something, instead of batting her eyelashes to get her way, she’d have threatened you with putting a size 11 shoe, you know where!” Val said.

“She was an integral part of this town that she loved for as long as I can remember. If you wanted to know who was related to who, she could tell you! She spent countless hours working for the Gretna Historical Society, giving tours, working the gardens in the museum backyard, learning how to be a blacksmith and anything else needing doing. She was either visiting schools with the German Heritage Cultural and Genealogical Society or planning an Oktoberfest to share her German Heritage. A charter member of the United Daughters of the



Carol Lee Maness

Confederacy, she was also a member of the Friends of the German-American Cultural Center and a board member of the Jefferson Historical Society, that recognized our family as a Pioneer Settler of Jefferson Parish.

“Anyone that knew mom knew she wasn’t a churchgoer. As St. Francis of Assisi said, ‘Preach the gospel always and if necessary, use words.’ This is how mom lived. Although a pistol when crossed, she was always there to help a friend or family member. She cared for more aging relatives than I can count and had a PHD in funeral arranging. She drove friends to doctor appointments and made nursing home visits. She’d call just to check in on homebound friends and relatives.”

Besides her family and the Gretna Historical Society, some of the things that Carol Lee loved best were Mardi Gras, traveling extensively, gardening, solving crossword puzzles, playing cards or trivia games and watching old movies. She went water skiing, snow skiing, white water rafting, canoeing, fishing, did her own home renovations, even made her own wine!

She went to work for First National Bank in high school and stayed until her children were born. After her children were grown she worked for many years as the office manager for Dr. Jerry Romaguera.

“Our childhood was always an adventure like driving to southern California by way of Oregon, with four kids and three adults in that un-air conditioned van. She and dad went cave exploring on their honeymoon and when they took us back to that same cave years later, the people that ran it actually recognized mom. As I became an adult out on my own and had a family she was always there to answer a how-to question. No need to Google when “the old Gretna girl” was around.”

From feisty Carol Lee, who left this world in 2010, in her immortal words as she sipped wine with the Golden Girls, c’est la vie!



From left, Anne Gauthreaux, Carol Maness, and Patsy Butts, with Elizabeth Schwarz in front.



The President Presiding...

By Sylvia Schwarz, GHS President

The Wine Tasting event was fabulous and fun-filled. Kudos to Ray Markase and his legion of helpers who were responsible for the success of the evening. The wine was marvelous, thanks to Joe Miller's selections. The musical interlude presented by Wally Boik on the piano was well received.

The charcuterie boxes prepared by the ladies led by Holly Williams and Judy LeBlanc were a big hit. It was nice that so many new volunteers helped with the boxes and set up. Also, a big thank you to our wine servers. I would mention their names but I am afraid I would forget someone.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR:

- Sept. 8 at 6 p.m. - Membership Meeting & BBQ, which was postponed from July. Once again, we are asking members to bring their scrumptious desserts. They will be blessed and made calorie free.
- ***Oct. 20 at 7 p.m. - St. Joseph Gym - Membership Meeting & Birthday Celebration. Please note: This meeting is being delayed by a week.***
- Nov. 10 at 7 p.m. - St. Joseph Gym - Membership Meeting & Memorial Program. Election of new Board Members will be held.
- Nov. 12 - The Cemetery Tour has been changed from Oct 15 to Nov. 12 due to a change of schedule by the City of Gretna. Details to follow.
- Dec. 8 at 7 p.m. - St. Joseph Gym - Christmas Party & Production.



Fun at the annual wine tasting



Welcome To Our New Members:

Gary Attardo, William Boo" Bourgeois, Irene Burrus, Elaine Cuny, Emile "Bubby" Gauthreaux, Ruby Langford, Susan Miller, Dixie Olsen and Erin M. Perdue



Times Past —

By Stephanie Dieterich

Batture Homes



Early batture settlement/New Orleans Public library, from Oliver Houck's book *Down on the Batture*, via NPR.

A shanty, a shanty, in old shanty town, the roof is so slanty, it's touching the ground!

The Batture as it's called in Louisiana is the thin strip of dry land between the Mississippi River and the levee. During high river stages it becomes part of the river.

It is said the first batture dwellers were newly freed slaves who had nowhere to go. Some became squatters on that thin strip of land. It was considered Federal land and didn't belong to the City, so no taxes were collected. City services such as roads, water or electricity weren't provided, but there were no building codes either. A shelter could be built with little more than a few nails and driftwood sourced from the river.

During the Great Depression the river communities swelled with down

on their luck citizens who had no jobs and couldn't afford to pay rent. Hundreds of homes became the Hooterville on the river. Other residents were educated and actually had jobs, but preferred the quiet river life. Having the river lapping at your door and watching the ships go by was the life they wanted. The river provided almost everything needed. Driftwood and discarded metal from abandoned ships provided materials for a home.

Catfish were always plentiful and river shrimp were easily caught. Many people had chickens and goats, grew vegetables in pots or tended gardens when the river was low. Feeding the family was cheap. Elaborate furniture was made from woven willow tree branches that were sold for extra income or bartered for goods.

These inhabitants, often called River Rats or River Gypsies, lived a mere 50 feet from the river; sometimes the river passed directly under their feet. They were always watching the weather and knew when flooding would occur and what precautions to take to avoid disaster. They were more secure having taking risk in their own hands rather than relying on the government. Their toughness and reliance was rooted in a deep connection to the river.



Home in the batture, near Southport, New Orleans/Curbed NOLA.

In the 1950s there were about 200 batture homes in the New Orleans area. Carrollton Bend, Southport on both sides of the Jefferson-Orleans line, Westwego and Algiers/McDonoghville had communities. The Southport community was the largest, once stretching for miles to Audubon Park. There was even a church and a tiny school. Threatened eviction was an ongoing struggle for years.

Finally when the Corp of Engineers raised the levees all the homes finally had to go. Ironically, 13 homes in Jefferson Parish sat where the parish had already raised their own levees around Southport. These homes were grandfathered in and 12 still remain. They are the last of the Batture homes from Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico. They now have water, electricity and P.O. boxes.

It was a way of life! It was called living on the edge and that's exactly what it was, on the edge of the river!



Pearl Mollere and her husband, Murphy, perch on the walkway of their home on the batture in Westwego.

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)

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

Facebook: [@GHSGretnaLA](https://www.facebook.com/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