



# Gretna Chronicles

Gretna, Louisiana

Volume 33, Issue 8 An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

August, 2023

## Salem Lutheran Celebrates 150th!

Salem Lutheran Church recently celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and German heritage with a packed house at the German-American Cultural Center. The German “Friends” hosted the event and offered brats and pretzels, while Salem provided beer, wine and refreshments, in fine German style. Guests enjoyed Salem’s artifacts on display in the reception hall and were treated to a tour of the Center’s Museum.

Pastor Larry Beane, who has been at the church since 2005, spoke to guests, thanking them for attending and supporting the historic church located at 418 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Gretna.

Founded in 1871, Salem was the first Lutheran Church in Jefferson Parish. The first church was built in 1872 and replaced by the second church in 1913. Due to damage in the 1915 great hurricane and subsequent storms, this church became unsafe and was demolished in the 1940s.

The current church, completed in 1951 at a cost of \$120,000, is of Romanesque architecture, built of red brick and stone trim with biblical inscriptions carved over the entrances. Several elements of the previous churches have been incorporated into the building. Remnants of the 1913 church include the marble pulpit, lectern and baptismal font, windows in the baptistery, and the head of the Christ carving over the outside entrance doors. The three bells in the tower are from the first church. The eight circa 1960 windows depicting the life of Christ are hand blown French green glass with an internal layer of amber etched to produce the images.

Since 1871, generations of German-descended Gretna residents worshiped, married, raised children and had burial services in the church. Several members in the church today are descendants of original members from the 1800s. (Continued on Page 3)





**Times Past —**  
 By Stephanie Dieterich  
**Sweet Changes on 5th St.**

Have you noticed there is now another empty lot on 5<sup>th</sup> Street? The old white stucco building with red trim on 5<sup>th</sup> and Newton was recently torn down. The building had not been in service for some time and had deteriorated to the point of no return. Many neighbors were happy to see it go as the corner was the scene of quite a few auto accidents.

But what was the business originally? It was not the Los Toros Restaurant as many people remember. George Medina operated the popular Mexican restaurant for 25 years on 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Lavoisier in a converted Creole Cottage one block down. It's easy to confuse the two since Los Toros was also a white building with red trim before it was demolished around 2009.

The restaurant was across 5<sup>th</sup> Street from Dale



Michell's Esso full service gas station. In case you are too young to remember, a full service gas station was where you drove your car up to the pump for a wonderful

experience no longer available. Without getting out of your car, Gerald, the attendant at Dale's for many years, would greet you with a smile and proceed to put gas in your car. He would open your hood, check to see if you needed any water or oil and add it, if needed. He would then wash your windshield and check the air in your tires. You could tip him if you wished, and since gasoline ran from 36 cents to 57 cents a gallon through the 1970s, you usually did! Dale's also operated two auto wrecker lots, one across Lavoisier and another diagonally across 5<sup>th</sup> Street. All three corners have since become residential.

(Continued on page 3)



Inside the Matthews Store at the corner of Newton and Fifth Street. John Matthews, center, and his wife Amelia were the proprietors.



Gretna residents loved Los Toros Restaurant, which was located on Fifth Street and Lavoisier until it was demolished around 2009.

**"LOS TOROS in Gretna is a small, charming Mexican Restaurant. It serves first rate Texas-Mexican food in simple but pleasant surroundings." UNDERGROUND GOURMET.**

**Carta Blanca BEER**  
 served in heavily frosted steins.  
**BOHEMIA ALE from Mexico**

**DELUXE DINNER \$3.00**  
 also a la carte

**LOS TOROS**  
 TEXAS-MEXICAN Restaurant  
 539 Fifth St., Gretna, La.  
 361-9825 10 a.m. - 10 p.m. CLOSED SUNDAYS

**Welcome New Members!**

Jay & Sue Wilkinson  
 Christopher Relle

**CALENDAR**

- Aug 17 @ 7 pm** Annual Wine Tasting at Cultural Center for the Arts
- Sept 14 @ 6 pm** Annual Barbecue at GHS Museum Complex Backyard
- Oct 12 @ 6 pm** Annual GHS Birthday Party at GHS Complex Back-



## Sweet Changes on 5th Street (Continued from page 2)

John F. Matthews, a well-respected Gretna alderman and grocer, opened his grocery on the corner of Newton and 5th Streets around 1903. Matthews died in 1925 and his son John continued operation of the grocery. His residence at 433 Newton Street was connected to the store. In the 1930s Matthews organized a baseball team called Matthews Pets. Quite a few boys who played on his team became prominent Gretna citizens.



Once the site of the Matthews Store, this corner at Newton and Fifth Streets was occupied by numerous businesses. Long unused, the building was recently demolished.

By the 1940s Mr. and Mrs. Adam Hebert were living in the home and operating Hebert grocery.

In 1950 a grocery and meat market business at that location was listed for rent. Eugene Allwell relocated his meat market there from further down 5<sup>th</sup> Street, and the family moved into the home. Over time, in addition to a grocery, Allwell's sons ran an auto and motorcycle repair shop from the location. A paint store and a few other businesses also took up shop on the premises.

The stucco building sat on the footprint of the original building and was either a renovation or newer build from about 70 years ago. It too, was connected to the house next door. The home was also demolished along with the corner store building.

Every year, as long as I can remember, the chain link fence along 5<sup>th</sup> Street behind the store was completely covered with every imaginable color of sweet pea blooms tended by Laura Allwell. Word is that both of the now-cleared lots, Lavoisier and 5th and Newton and 5<sup>th</sup> Street, are going residential -- hopefully someone plants sweet peas!



## More From the Salem Celebration



*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 \$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/>

P.O. Box 115, Gretna, LA 70054-0115

Phone: 504.362.3854

Email: [directoroffacilities@gretnahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:directoroffacilities@gretnahistoricalsociety.org)

Facebook: @GHSGretnaLA

**Lisa LaFrance.....President**  
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