



# Gretna Chronicles

Gretna, Louisiana

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July, 2023

## Helen Cox Back in Gretna!

News of the permanent closing and intended demolition of Helen Cox High School in Harvey rang a bell in the heads of GHS Board Members, and cousins, Val Coles and Holly Williams.

The school's namesake Helen Cox, Gretna resident and longtime educator, was their great-great aunt. The Cox family had presented a picture of Helen Cox to the school soon after its opening in 1969. The cousins went on a mission to make sure that the picture, if it still hung in the school, would be salvaged.

Val and Holly went to the school and received the portrait from Principal Melanie Moore. It needed a little tender love and care, but will be displayed at the July meeting. Val will be guest speaker, telling members about Helen Cox and her wonderful legacy in Gretna and Jefferson Parish.

The portrait will be permanently housed in the Ignacius Strehle House at the GHS Museum complex. There is a section in the Ignacius House dedicated to schools and education. This is very appropriate since Helen Cox grew up on Lafayette Street, next door to the White House.

The school named after Helen Cox was once a middle school (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade), then became a junior high school (7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> grade) and in 2004 Helen Cox became a high school (9<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade.)



The portrait of Gretna's Helen Cox was retrieved recently by Holly Williams, left, and Val Coles, center, with the help of Melanie Moore, principal of Helen Cox High School in Harvey. Jefferson Parish plans to close and demolish the school.

## CALENDAR

**July 13 @ 7 pm** General Meeting at St. Joseph Gym  
**Aug 17 @ 7 pm** Annual Wine Tasting at Cultural Center for the Arts  
**Sept 14 @ 6 pm** Annual Barbecue at GHS Museum Complex Backyard



The June meeting featured Kirt Garcia, center, speaking on the D-Day heroic deeds of Sgt. John Ray from Gretna. Shown with him are president Lisa LaFrance, left, and program director Ray Markase.



## Times Past —

By Stephanie Dieterich

### Ya Mamma's Mynezz!

Have you noticed the recent billboards around town announcing Blue Plate Mayonnaise has a new look but the same legendary taste? Although the logo is new, it appears closer to one of the original labels that displayed a “Blue Willow Ware” plate, from which the Blue Plate name originated. Now, instead of the older Asian motif, the new design incorporates magnolias, a riverboat and a pelican, giving homage to the brand’s southern roots.

Blue Plate, has always been recognized as a New Orleans brand, but it was originally made in Gretna.

The large Southern Cotton Oil Company, an important factor in the cottonseed industry, had some very early “crude” mills, one of which was in Gretna. The company employed a food chemist

named David Wesson who developed a method for

**Blue Plate was originally made in Gretna.**

deodorizing cotton seed oil, making it desirable as a food oil. Prior to this, cottonseed oil was mostly used as a lubricant, and cooking was done with animal fat or lard.

In 1899 David Wesson formed the Wesson Oil Company, an offshoot of Southern Cotton Oil. The liquid vegetable oil and shortening was then marketed as Wesson & Snowdrift. With this new liquid oil, salad dressings and mayonnaise were easily made at home with a few other ingredients and a mixer. Wesson often published recipes in the newspaper using their oil.

In 1927 Wesson - Snowdrift started making their own mayonnaise or “mynezz” as some locals prefer to say. In 1929, Blue Plate Foods was founded as a subsidiary of Wesson Snowdrift. Production of the mayonnaise, one of the first commercially produced, began in a small warehouse in Gretna. Blue Plate mayonnaise is considered the first commercially prepared and distributed mayonnaise in the country. The

commercial production of the mayonnaise in a city renowned for its food was a delightful culinary modernization.

It is said that the po-boy, one of New Orleans most iconic foods, was invented during the 1929 street car strike. Could there be a connection between the invention of the po-boy and Blue Plate Mayo, both born in 1929?

In addition to mayonnaise, coffee, oleo margarine, salad dressing, French dressing, barbecue sauce, strawberry jam and peanut butter were once sold under the Blue Plate label.

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The *Jefferson Parish Review* published this photo, saying, “Little cotton seeds make big business. In the center is shown the Southern Cotton Oil Co., and left, that of Blue Plate Foods, Inc. on the west bank of the Mississippi River.”



## Ya Mamma's Mynezz! (Continued from page 2)

Wesson - Snowdrift and Blue Plate Foods relocated to a much larger riverfront location on the Gretna-Harvey line. At one time this was considered the largest manufacturer of its kind in the world. There was a factory of Wesson Oil products as well as a railroad shipping terminal for bulk cottonseed oil.

It wasn't until 1941 that Blue Plate Foods moved across the river into their new ultra-modern, Art Deco building at 1315 South Jefferson Parkway in New Orleans. This unique three story concrete building was designed by August Perez Jr. and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Production ceased at this location in 2000 and the landmark building was turned into the Blue Plate Artists Lofts.

Hunt Foods purchased the company in 1960, but the Blue Plate franchise returned to its Louisiana roots with the purchase from Reily Foods Company in 1974. Blue Plate "Mynezz" is now made in Knoxville, Tennessee.

### Welcome New Members!

Shana Relle  
Naomi Gibbs  
Aubry & Sandra Guillot



Wesson Oil and a fresh egg  
make  
**MAYONNAISE**

Few things are easier to make than good mayonnaise.

Wesson Oil and a fresh egg—beaten together and seasoned to taste—and you have a mayonnaise you'll be proud of!

Quickest results are obtained if the oil and egg are not too cold. The ordinary temperature of your kitchen is just right.

Break an egg in a bowl—

Add about a tablespoonful of Wesson Oil.

Beat vigorously with an egg beater or a fork—until the oil and egg are thoroughly mixed. How long will that take? Perhaps while you count fifty—not as fast as you can count but as fast as you can beat.

Add another tablespoonful of oil and beat again—vigorously. Two tablespoonfuls and beat again. Two or three more and beat again.

Your mayonnaise will begin to thicken a little.

Then add Wesson Oil about four tablespoonfuls at a time, beating well after each addition—until your

mayonnaise is as thick and stiff as you want it. The more oil you beat into it the thicker your mayonnaise will be. Most women use about two cupfuls—some more. [Never add more than a quarter cupful of oil at any one time].

After your mayonnaise is made, add seasoning. Mix a half teaspoonful of salt, a teaspoonful each of sugar and mustard, a generous pinch each of paprika and red pepper—add a tablespoonful of lemon juice or vinegar and stir until the salt and sugar are dissolved—then pour into the mayonnaise and beat well.

With Wesson Oil Mayonnaise as a base you can make many delicious fancy salad dressings in a very few minutes—for instance—

**CELERY MAYONNAISE** · Combine one-third cupful of tender celery, which has been put through a food chopper, with one-half tablespoonful lemon juice, and one cupful of Wesson Oil Mayonnaise. Use with any green vegetable salad, or with potato, cucumber, tomato, chicken, fish or egg salad.

## 150th Anniversary For Gretna's Salem Lutheran

Founded in 1871, Salem Lutheran Church of Gretna has a lot to celebrate. And the church is doing just that, with a "German Heritage Event" on Saturday, July 22, at the German-American Cultural Center, 519 Huey P. Long Avenue.

Featuring German beer and wine, refreshments and music, the event will be held from 6 until 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15 per person, available at Salem Lutheran Church, 418 Fourth Street; at the German-American Cultural Center, 519 Huey P. Long Avenue; and at the Gretna Welcome Center, 1035 Huey P. Long Avenue. (Advance sales only)

The GACC Museum will be open for the event.

*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  
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## 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

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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 \$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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