



Gretna Chronicles

Gretna, Louisiana

Volume 35, Issue 7

An Official Publication of the Gretna Historical Society

July, 2025

Times Past: From Decline to Divine



By Stephanie Dieterich

It's been 40 years since part of old Gretna, roughly bounded by First Street, Amelia Street, Ninth Street and Gulf Drive, became a National Register Historic District. GHS Historian Dr. Mary Grace Curry was largely responsible for its designation. She and a few other GHS members walked the streets to photograph and inventory the 737 buildings in the district. Of those buildings, 551 were chosen to be on the Register. In 1985, much of the housing stock in Gretna's Historic District was in need of repair or had fallen into decline. Renovation was infrequently seen. That slow pace of restoration is no more!

Renovation, restoration and new construction in the Historic District is going on now everywhere you look. Old Gretna has certainly turned itself around and is now a coveted location. Since our annual Gretna Historical Society Spring Tour of Homes 2025 was not held this year, we hope you enjoy a few "before and after" home transformations. Many are the homes of GHS members. GHS has certainly fulfilled its mission as a preservationist organization.



AMAZING TRANSFORMATION!

912-916 Eighth Street, Home of Peter and Jill Debroeck

AFTER RENOVATION: At left.
BEFORE RENOVATION: Below, front and rear. (It was so badly altered, it was considered an intrusion and not a contributing element to the historic district.)

(More *Decline to Divine Gretna Homes*, Page 3)



Travel Writer Tours GHS Complex

Crai S. Bower, a freelance travel writer, photographer and broadcaster who lives to “travel the world and share his experiences,” recently toured the GHS Museum Complex. Some Board members proudly showed the writer around.

Bower was enjoying a very different environment in South Louisiana than his home base in Seattle. The award winning journalist contributes to more than 30 publications and online outlets. We hope that Gretna will be included by this excellent travel writer when he features South Louisiana in the future.



July 10 Guest Speaker

Guest speaker for the July 10 meeting will be Violet Peters with Jefferson Parish 200. We are all looking forward to learning more about our

Bicentennial in 2025. This momentous occasion marks 200 years of rich history, culture, and community spirit!



Cemetery Tour 2025 Planning Meeting

Cemetery Tour meeting will be held on Thursday, July 17 at 6:00 p.m. at the Coles House at 516 Lavoisier Street in Gretna. For lots of fun and a noble cause, please join us. Call Paul Coles at 504-450-8232 for details.

CALENDAR

July 10 @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St Joseph Gym. Desserts needed for 130 people - Please bring your delicious desserts for this meeting. Our dessert maker is not available, so we are asking members to generously help!

Aug 14 @ 6 pm Wine Social at St Joseph Gym. Ticketed event - Wine Social \$5 per Person. Tickets will be available for sale at the July Meeting!

Sept 11 @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.

Crai S. Bower, center, a travel writer, and Patricia, his significant other, Patricia, and President Val Coles, right, discussed The GHS Complex when he toured the facility.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Francis Brignac
Beverly Butera
Linda Middleton
Grant Dozier
Simone Finn

WELCOME BACK

Jack and Vita Leftwich

TIMES PAST: From Decline to Divine, Continued



Originally, Gretna's National Register Historic District included 551 homes.



MARVELOUS CHANGES! 735 Huey P. Long Avenue, Home of Geri Mayville. Circa 1890. Described as an L-shaped shotgun with Eastlake porch and Italianate windows.

Above at left, after renovation. Above at right, before transformation.



MAKING HISTORY. 538 Weyer Street, Home of Joe and Anita Procido. Circa 1890. Described as a double shotgun with gablette front.

At left, after renovation.
Below, before transformation.



Gretna's National Historic District is roughly bounded by First Street, Amelia Street, Ninth Street and Gulf Drive.

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)

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

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 \$30 per person. Monthly meetings are held at the St. Joseph Complex Gym at 7th and Newton Streets on the second Thursday of every month at 6:00 p.m. The society's newsletter, *Gretna Chronicles*, is published monthly and mailed or emailed to all members.

- Val Coles.....President
- Blaine Daigle.....Vice President
- Sylvia Schwarz.....Recording Secretary
- Holly Williams.....Corresponding Secretary
- Sarah Daigle.....Treasurer
- Stephanie Dieterich.....Historian/Archivist
- Judy LeBlanc.....Sergeant-at-Arms
- Lisa LaFranceParliamentarian
- M. Helen Williams.....Board Member/Editor & Publicity
- Paul Coles.....Board Member/Hospitality & Programs
- Dwight Maness.....Board Member at Large
- Joe Miller.....Board Member at Large