



# Gretna Chronicles

Gretna, Louisiana

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## New Characters in Cemetery Tour

By M. Helen Williams

The news is out! There will be eight all new characters in the annual 11th Hook & Ladder Cemetery Tour to be held on Saturday, October 25, 2025. The tour starts at the Red Maple Restaurant, which is right next door to the old historic burial ground. After enjoying delicious food from the Red Maple buffet, you will be escorted through the Hook & Ladder with a stop midway through the tour for a complimentary toast with wine.

To get a ticket for the tour, go to the White House in the Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex, 209 Lafayette Street in Gretna (504-362-3854) or get one at the upcoming October Membership Meeting. Tickets are \$30 per person which includes the food at the Red Maple and the tour. You choose your tour time to attend. Tours run every 15 minutes beginning at 5:00 p.m. All proceeds from the event go to the upkeep of the cemetery.

So what's going on with the Cemetery Tour this year you ask? Well, according to Paul Coles, tour chairman, "Five German and three Italian ancestors will enlighten and entertain you with stories of themselves and their families. You will hear new stories and learn more about the way of life in Gretna back in the day."

One ancestor, **Mary DiBenedetto Ribaul**, portrayed by Lisa LaFrance, raised nine children and was known to be an excellent cook.

**Frederick John Hinkel Sr.**, played by Chase Dickey, was a Purple Heart recipient of WWII, and **Gustave Schwarz**, played by his grandson Irvin Schwarz, was a hero in WWI.



The 2024 cast for the Hook & Ladder Cemetery Tour.

**Joseph John Panepinto**, a craftsman who was said to have an analytical mind, is portrayed by Judge Jay Wilkinson.

Paul Coles portrays **Peter Moulliet Sr.**, who settled in Mechanikham in 1849.

Dave Neeb portrays **Charles Neeb, his great-great grandfather** who earned his living at a cotton mill in Gretna.

**Anthony Joseph Taravella**, who was the proprietor of Jefferson Florist on Lafayette Street, is portrayed by Peter DeBroeck.

And, an unexpected performer, the Rev. "Father Gary" Copping portrays **John Hepting** who owned a moss factory!

So, get those tickets to make sure you have your place reserved for this tantalizing performance!

# Patriot's Day Celebration at the September Meeting!



## Cemetery Tour Committee Schedule for October

A Cemetery Tour meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 15 at 6:00 p.m. at the White House. There will be a walk-thru at the Hook & Ladder Cemetery on Wednesday, October 22 at 6:00 p.m.

### CALENDAR

- Oct 9 @ 6 pm Barbecue & Birthday Party at GHS Complex Backyard.**
- Oct 25 Hook & Ladder Cemetery Tour - Ticketed Event \$30 per person. Light refreshments at the Red Maple and tour - you pick your tour time. Tickets available now at White House & at the October meeting.**
- Nov. 13 @ 6 pm Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.**
- Dec 11 @ 6 pm Christmas Party at St. Joseph Gym.**

#### **WELCOME NEW MEMBER:**

BRENDA SEYMOUR

#### **WELCOME BACK:**

JOE & ANITA PROCIDO



## Times Past —

By Stephanie Dieterich

### Ooh-wee, Ooh-wee baby! Gretna Fest is almost here!

This year the Gretna Heritage Festival is supposed to be getting back to its roots with a smaller footprint. This year the event will run 3 days from October 3-5 with 5 stages and 50 acts.

But what exactly were its roots?

In 1989 Mayor Ronnie C. Harris unveiled a master plan for tourism in the City of Gretna. The Gretna Economic Development plan included 15 projects:

1. Gretna Zoo Cruise
2. River Batture Park
3. Bicycle Path
4. Louisiana Railroad Museum
5. Gretna Market
6. Depot/Visitors Center
7. German Interpretive Center/  
Jefferson Parish Archives
8. Gretna Heritage Festival
9. Louisiana State Fire Museum
10. Gretna Historic District
11. Gretna/Algiers rail line
12. Cabot/Dedalo Museum
13. 4<sup>th</sup> Street Extension
14. Antique Auto Showroom
15. Westbank Expressway/Franklin Street  
Beautification

Some of these things would come into fruition, some came and went, and some never materialized at all. But notice number 8, Gretna Heritage Festival.

In 1991, the Gretna Historical Society held its first Spring Festival that became an annual spring time event. The April 10, 1994 Spring Fest name was changed to the Gretna Heritage Festival. This free event was held for one day from 10 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. The one block footprint included one stage where Gretna native Frankie Ford provided the entertainment, thrilling the audience with his mega hit, “Sea Cruise,” and other songs. Frankie Ford would continue to close out the event every year until 2013. The event also included a parade, the Houma Indian dancers, a kite contest, a gumbo and jambalaya cook off as well as art and craft booths and plenty of good food and beverages.

In 1995, the Gretna Economic Development Association began sponsoring the Gretna Heritage Festival, moving the event from spring to October. Frankie Ford was once again the musical performer where he drew 5,000 people to the event.

In 1996, the Fest was held from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m. The lineup included Frankie Ford, Charmaine Neville, and Clarence “Frogman” Henry. There was an auction, a heart walk, 5K and 1 mile races, a Harley Davidson and classic car show, arts and crafts and of course, there was food!

Over the years this successful event went from one day to two days... and then three days of music, food, crafts, and merriment. Local bands and world famous musicians entertained larger and larger crowds under the many stages within the larger and larger footprint. Guests came from all over the world to little downtown Gretna.

When Mayor Harris envisioned the Heritage Festival in 1989 it was to commemorate the contributions of various ethnic groups, including the Germans who founded Gretna. The Festival kicks off by “tapping the keg” at the German Beer Garden. The Italians, Asians, and Hispanics are now also represented at Gretna Fest, each having their own area. I doubt he ever dreamed the scope of what this event would become.

Although Gretna Historical Society doesn’t usually get the credit, we know it was GHS Spring Festival that planted the seeds of this wonderful event that would grow to become one of the largest annual events ever held not only in Gretna, but on the entire Westbank and in Jefferson Parish.

Although it’s not actually a “Sea Cruise” during the Gretna Fest you can cruise the Mississippi River, from Gretna’s ferry landing to Canal Street. “Ooh-wee, Ooh-wee baby!”

#### Gretna honors its own Roots important to Frankie Ford

**S**ince 1989, the song has had millions of rock and roll fans singing “ooh-wee, ooh-wee baby.”

“Sea Cruise,” the mega-hit with the unforgettable line, pops up in movies, television shows and remembrances of oldies. And the song’s creator, Gretna native Frankie Ford, has become a legend of sorts, reaching his 50th birthday in 1994.

**When:** April 10.  
**Where:** Hwy P, Long Avenue and Fourth Street in Gretna.  
**Highlights:** Entertainment by Gretna native Frankie Ford, parade at 11 a.m., games, refreshments, live music. Houma Indian dancers and gumbo and jambalaya cook-off.  
**Call:** 226-9112.

**Festival fun**  
Gretna Heritage Fest spotlight Frankie Ford.

stage Festival April 10. Although his career has taken him all over the globe, his Gretna roots are important to him.

“The always been a home here,” Ford said.

The festival, on Hwy P, Long Avenue and Fourth Street in old Gretna, will feature a parade at 11 a.m., gumbo and jambalaya cook-off, arts and crafts booths and plenty of good food.

Ford, who spends most of his weekends on the



Frankie Ford, who rose to fame with “Sea Cruise,” poses with a vintage microphone at his Gretna home.

*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

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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 \$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.

## **Gretna Historical Society**

<https://www.gretnahistoricalsociety.org/>

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