



Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

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February, 2026

GHS Honored in Carnival ‘Float’

By M. Helen Williams

Do you remember miniature Mardi Gras floats from back in the day? Some were made from shoe boxes and some much grander. Some were large enough to seat small children.

Many attendees at the recent Mayor’s Mardi Gras Party were impressed with the stunning “float” created by Kathleen Burgdahl, with help from Beth Owens and Julie Bowes, all longtime members of the Twilight Garden Club. They used the lovely float for a centerpiece at the garden club table at the event.

Kathleen Burgdahl’s creation paid honor to the Gretna Historical Society Valentine’s Day Weddings held at the Blacksmith Shop, a site within the GHS Museum Complex on Lafayette Street in Old Gretna. She wove in Mardi Gras colors with a bride and groom, chilled champagne, wedding rings on a heart, a lovely rotating lit crystal vase, and a picture of the GHS Blacksmith Shop to depict all a float should be.

The Twilight Garden Club was founded in Gretna on June 29, 1953, federated in 1954 and incorporated in 1991. It is a member of the National Garden Clubs, Inc. Louisiana G. C. Federation, Inc., District II.

The club has 25 members that meet once a month on second Mondays at rotating members’ homes where a luncheon is served. The membership includes many members who have completed programs to become Master Gardeners. The club also participates in several community programs annually. For more information about the Twilight Garden Club, call Kathleen Burgdahl at 504-289-5056.



**WELCOME
NEW
MEMBERS**

James "Jim" Brown
Sue Cambre
Randy and Elsa Chesnut
Gus Cramond
Mimi Drago
Neal Giroir
Debbie Giroir

Verna Lasseigne
Michelle Smith
Sidney Thompson
Kirk Toups
Welcome Back!
Kirt Garcia
Ronnie & Donna Harris

Meet the New GHS Officers and Board Members



The new GHS Officers and Board Members to serve through 2026 were sworn in by Mayor Belinda Constant, right. They included, from right to left: President Val Coles, Vice President Blaine Daigle, Corresponding Secretary Holly Williams, Treasurer Sara Daigle, Recording Secretary Jeannie Radosta, Parliamentarian Sylvia Schwarz, Sergeant at Arms Judy LeBlanc, Historian/Archivist Lisa LaFrance, Board Member-Program Paul Coles, Board Member Dwight Maness and Board Member Renee Poche. Stephanie Dieterich, Historian/Archivist and M. Helen Williams, Board Member-Publicity were unable to attend the ceremony.

Do You Remember Old Fifth Street Businesses?

BEAUTIFUL WHITE BALL GOWNS ARRIVING DAILY

Racks are bulging with "After Five" dresses, both long and short. Imported beaded tops \$20 up.

Ample stock of skirts which zip on and off to make long or short.

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99 Fifth Street Gretna
Lea Billa, Owner



The water tower (above) was later moved across the street.

Don't bicker about the sticker—we'll dicker



Here's **PROOF** Clay-Dutton will dicker on **EVERY** remaining '69 **Mercury** or Lincoln!

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CALENDAR

- Feb. 12 @ 6 pm** Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.
- Feb. 14** Blacksmith Shop Valentine Weddings.
- Mar. 12 @ 6 pm** Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.
- Apr. 9 @ 6 pm** Membership Meeting at St. Joseph Gym.
- Apr. 12** Ticketed event. Spring Tour of Homes.

NOTE: Your \$30 annual "Dues are Due" NOW for Year 2026. Unpaid dues after the March 12 meeting will result in names purged from the

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Times Past – 5th Street Memories

By Stephanie Dieterich

If you are not old enough to remember, at one time 5th Street in Gretna was a thriving commercial corridor! Some called it the Algiers - Gretna highway, or just the Highway. The street was paved in 1936, a year after Gretna City Hall moved into its new building at 522 5th Street which is today the city water plant. On the other end of the street at Hamilton, now named Stumpf, Emma Whiteside was operating Whiteside's Tavern. She eventually grew the business into a large restaurant and bar with a banquet room for weddings and meetings. Gradually businesses filled the entire river side of 5th Street with Garden Park, Gretna's first subdivision, developing on the other side.



Gattuso's was the first grocery on the street, followed by a Piggly Wiggly that later became Casey Jones, a Gretna institution whose slab is still there at Willow Drive.



One auto dealer on 5th Street was Leson Chevrolet, now the site of the Gretna Police Station, somewhat ironic since Gretna's first police chief was Peter Leson! On the corner of Richard Street was Billa Motors, a Hudson Auto dealership. When Hudsons were no longer produced, Joe Billa's wife Lea opened Mar-JoLee's, a bridal and formal dress shop that was a favorite for Gretna brides and ball goers. Jerry Broome owned Deep South Mercury (later Clay-Dutton Lincoln Mercury), and if you wanted to buy foreign, there was Tri Parish Auto Sales that sold Datsuns. Daul-Stumpf's Shell Service Station on the corner of Hamilton Street took care of your auto service needs, checking fluids, tire pressure and filling your car with gas for the cost of 20 cents a gallon in 1945.

Carlo Ditta's concrete plant with its tall heaps of rocks and sand could not be missed. Gretna's water tower now stands even higher on the site. Klein's one stop drug store and a doctor's office took care of your health needs. There was Joe Relle real estate, West Side Home Improvement Company, Jerome's School of Beauty, a Frostop Drive-in and the Hawaiian Room Lounge. Leon Wolfe's Fastway was open till midnight for groceries, alcohol and cigarettes. The entire front of the store rolled up like a garage door; the Royal B now occupies the location. Duffy's Hardware was packed and had whatever you were looking for as there were no Home Depot's or Lowe's at the time. A Singer sewing machine store sold and repaired machines, a necessity when ladies actually sewed their clothes. Jimmy Hendricks owned Hendricks Appliance Co. and also sold the newly popular television sets. Since color was not available, they only came in black and white-- the remote was your kid!

There were many more businesses that opened and closed, but with the opening of the four lane superhighway with service roads to the new GNO Bridge and the newly opened Stumpf Shopping Center in 1958, the decline of 5th Street began.

The long awaited 5th Street Revitalization Project just broke ground on January 16. Its completion will surely bring life back to the long neglected corridor while also creating demand for the adjoining "OGP," Old Garden Park neighborhood. A win, win, long overdue!

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

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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

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 \$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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- Val Coles.....President**
- Blaine Daigle.....Vice President**
- Jeannie Radosta.....Recording Secretary**
- Holly Williams.....Corresponding Secretary**
- Sarah Daigle.....Treasurer**
- Stephanie Dieterich and Lisa LaFrance.....Historians/Archivists**
- Sylvia SchwarzParliamentarian**
- Judy LeBlanc.....Sergeant-at-Arms**
- M. Helen Williams.....Board Member-Publicity**
- Paul Coles.....Board Member-Program Director**
- Dwight Maness.....Board Member**
- Renee Poche.....Board Member**