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ENLIGHTENMENT, EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT:

A Study of the Chautauqua Movement
in Kentucky

By

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B.A., University of Louisville, 1966

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ABSTRACT

The Chautauqua movement has been called "culture under canvas" and "the university of the people." What began as a training camp for Sunday School teachers on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in western New York State in the 1870's, grew and spread over the midwest for the next fifty years. There were some other permanent Chautauqua establishments, but none seemed to last as long as the original. What did last were traveling tent shows called Chautauquas that brought enlightenment, education, and entertainment to thousands of people over the summer months until the movement died because of technological advancements such as talking movies, radio, and the automobile.

The circuit Chautauquas were quite well known in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois, but newspaper accounts show that they also spread into many states of the Ohio Valley and the South. Although there was a standard Chautauqua pattern that evolved over the years, each state and even each town added its own particular flavor to the pattern. Chautauqua in Kentucky was similar to Chautauqua in other states, and while it was not a major cultural phenomenon, it did have an impact on people who lived in rural and mountainous regions and thus were

isolated from metropolitan areas and all that they had to offer. As the various circuits traveled throughout Kentucky from June through September, lecturers brought ideas, world news, and culture to those who might not otherwise have been exposed to such informative refinement.

The Chautauquas faded away and as a cultural influence had little lasting impact on Kentuckians, except in individual memories. However, one cannot say that the Chautauquas were, therefore, unimportant; they were significant but primarily only during the times they were popular.

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CHAPTER I

"THE MOST AMERICAN THING IN AMERICA":

AN OVERVIEW OF CHAUTAUQUA

The search for entertainment occurs daily all across America when children and adults turn on their televisions. If they should acquire a sprinkling of education and a dash of culture along the way, so much the better. There was, however, a day in our nation's history when entertainment, education, and culture were not so easily accessible. Around the turn of the century, children and adults had to wait for that special event of the year, when they could put aside their chores and come to the large brown tent outside town in an open field by the lake. After spending winter evenings listening to discussions of last year's lecture on "Pathways to Power," remembering the Seton Indian lore, humming the lingering melody from a concert by the Cavan Welsh Singers¹, townspeople eagerly awaited the coming of the Chautauqua, described by Theodore Roosevelt as the "most American thing in America."²

The Chautauqua movement actually began in 1874 in New York state when the Reverend John Heyl Vincent developed an idea for the instruction of Sunday School

teachers. His plan was to have those interested in such instruction attend his camp for two weeks in the summer on the shore of Lake Chautauqua in western New York state. His goal was to provide some management and organizational skills, uniformity of instruction, and a curriculum for teachers. Exhibits and demonstrations were given; classes were taught. The days were filled with instruction, the evenings with concerts and fireworks. Those who attended were enthusiastic about their experiences and spoke very favorably about their training sessions. The next summer, the next, and the next, the camp was packed with people seeking to uplift themselves and, by returning to their communities with their newly acquired education, uplift others as well. By 1878, five hundred people attended the Chautauqua Assembly when Dr. Vincent announced the formation of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, which would become by 1888 a home study reading "group" numbering 100,000 members. Thousands of people in remote areas of the Midwest enrolled in the C.L.S.C. in order to improve themselves and to make themselves feel as if they were in touch with others who were also randomly scattered over the West. With the popularity of the C.L.S.C. growing, the Chautauquan, a magazine, was developed to further strengthen the invisible ties that existed among all these people who hungered for

enlightenment in their isolated farming communities.

By 1890, several other Chautauqua assemblies had formed, always located if possible by a grove of trees and a body of water. The programs were patterned after the original New York Chautauqua to bring educational lectures, concerts, and planned recreation to those who wanted to belong to this popular movement but who lived in areas too far away to attend the camp in New York. The New York Assembly was no longer limited to being a training ground for Sunday School teachers but had broadened considerably to include anyone who was interested in moral uplifting and self-improvement.³

The name "Chautauqua" began to take on a new meaning when, by the early 1900's, the more or less permanent assemblies gave way to the innovative planning of the manager of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau of Chicago, Keith Vawter. The Lyceum Bureau was a booking agency which scheduled various speakers, lecturers, and writers who spoke on educational subjects during the winter months all over the U.S. The Bureau made travel arrangements, sold tickets, and did whatever was needed to guarantee an audience for such famous people as Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, and Julia Ward Howe. When Vawter devised the plan of combining the winter lyceum concept with the lecturers who were booked into the summer assemblies, he

threw in the newly formed idea of a traveling tent performance, and the Chautauqua circuit was born.

The movement was extremely popular, had many imitators, and traveled with energy and enthusiasm summer after summer across the rural communities of our country from 1904 until it finally came grinding to a halt in the 1930's. The Chautauqua movement begun by Dr. Vincent for Sunday School teachers attained a totally different purpose and flavor than he had originally planned, with the name "Chautauqua" remaining the only similarity between the two.

A typical Chautauqua was brought to a community in this way: a person called a booker would travel by train to Main Street, U.S.A., and would set up a meeting with the leaders of the town--the school superintendent, bankers, store owners, ministers, and the newspaper editor. He would give them a speech about how the town was going to have a unique opportunity to improve its people, adults and children alike. He would convince them that it was their civic duty to sponsor the Chautauqua, which could be scheduled for one week into their town. How else could the townspeople ever hear the golden voice of William Jennings Bryan, or receive instruction on the latest theories of crop management, or enjoy the music of Kryl's Bohemian Band? The booker would describe a program

guaranteed to morally uplift everyone in town, and all the town's leaders had to do was to sign a contract that made them responsible for selling a set number of season tickets to the week's performances. A season pass would enable its holder to attend any portion of the program, which was held morning, afternoon, and evening.

A month before the Chautauqua was due, an advance man would arrive in town with posters to be tacked up on posts and displayed in windows. Tickets to buy would be available from the merchants. Excitement would build as the women would begin to plan their chores so as to be able to attend all the lectures. Whatever could be fixed ahead would be--at least as much as possible in those days before the freezer and the microwave oven. Men also made plans to attend the evening sessions even if it meant returning home late at night with the family asleep in the horse-drawn farm wagon. Everyone sacrificed in the hunger for culture.

The day before the Chautauqua was due to open, the tent crew arrived by train to set up the huge khaki tent, which would seat a thousand people, first on benches and later in folding wooden chairs. The crew was customarily comprised of college boys eager to travel for the summer and willing to withstand the admiring glances of the town maidens and the open admiration of the younger children

who may have dreamed of such a glamorous life too. After the crew had erected the tent and installed the ticket booth for individual ticket sales, its main job for the week was to police the grounds to keep them clean, roll up the sides of the tent if the weather was hot--as it often was in the summer--and to help in case of a storm. At the end of the week, this same crew became the clean-up detail that packed the tent and all of the equipment and moved on to the next town.

On the daily trains, sometimes twice a day, the lecturers and entertainers would arrive. The people would not travel in a group as one would expect of a circus troupe, but rather in twos and threes, divided according to which day they performed. The first-day entertainers would arrive on, say, the morning train, meet the town leaders, have tea at the home of the mayor, rest, perform in the evening, stay in the local hotel for one night, leave on the morning train (which brought additional second-day people) and move on to the next town in the chain that snaked its way over its route all summer. There would be probably three to four separate tents and tent crews in the chain with all the different groups of lecturers, politicians, scientists, entertainers continually traveling to each scheduled stop on the route, always in the same order.

Each tent would have its own superintendent, who would supervise the week's activities. This person, either a man or a woman, would introduce speakers, oversee further ticket sales, be of service to the performers, and caution them about the moral image they had to maintain. It just would not do for any Chautauquan to ever be seen drinking, playing cards, or dancing. And please be discreet about smoking! Also in the troupe was the Junior Chautauqua Lady whose sole responsibility was to supervise the children, who were too restless and energetic to sit still for hours in the stifling heat of the tent, the warm air stirred only by the funeral parlor fans brought by the ladies. The children were taught songs and crafts, and practiced skits, which they would perform or display at the end of the week.⁴

As the system became more sophisticated over the years, the superintendent also became responsible for booking the next year's Chautauqua before this year's even left town. Such a selling technique kept the booking agents alert as to which performers were sure-fire crowd pleasers and which were not. When a community was willing to schedule for next year immediately, the agent knew he had pleased the townspeople with the acts that had been booked. If the people felt uplifted and felt as if they had indeed been exposed to a high level of culture, the

Chautauqua was contracted for another year.

The contract always put the burden of ticket sales on the community backers. All the agent had to do then was deliver the tent and the talent. If the ticket sales fell below the contracted amount, the backers had to make up the difference out of their own pockets. Even if such a thing happened, the backers often felt that the Chautauqua was so important that they would sign a new contract anyway because it gave them something to look forward to all winter.

There were times when a community would lose money on a Chautauqua commitment, but for the most part, the circuits made money for everyone involved. At the height of the summer circuits, there were six to seven thousand, one-week assemblies, with 28-30 million people in attendance. This is an extraordinary figure for attendance, when the entire population of the U.S. was 100,546,000 in 1915.⁵ Five hundred lecturers each delivered the same lecture seventy-five to one hundred times over a summer. As many as seven thousand people were employed as musicians, entertainers, managers, and crews, and as much as \$7,000,000 was made over a summer.⁶ The price to those events varied, based perhaps on the

size of the community being served, the year, and the general economy.

At Woodland Park in Lexington, Kentucky, admission, in 1888, without overnight accommodations, cost \$3.00 for the season, which lasted two weeks. If a person wanted to attend a single evening performance the charge was 25¢.⁷ In Owensboro, Kentucky, in 1905, admission to the Chautauqua Park auditorium cost 15¢ for children and 25¢ for adults, but there were no overnight accommodations.⁸ In Louisville, Kentucky, in the years between 1928 to 1932, the cost of a season's pass was \$1.50 for one week, allowing the holder to attend any or all of the three daily events scheduled.⁹

According to one source, the community backers might need to guarantee \$1,000 to the bureau that supplied the Chautauqua, and would, therefore, need to sell only 400 tickets at \$2.50 each for the season. Anything sold after that was profit for the bureau. The expenses for a six-day Chautauqua might be six to seven hundred dollars, but total receipts could be as high as \$2,000, including season passes, daily tickets for individual performances, and even with 10¢ added for advance reserved seats.¹⁰

The Chautauqua seems to have been the same everywhere it went. It flourished in the midwest rural areas but was certainly quite visible in other states like

Kentucky. However, it did not have the same social significance in a town of a few thousand as it might have in a community of five hundred. When the Chautauqua came to small towns like Weldon, Illinois, it was set up in a typical Chautauqua tent and controlled by the Chautauqua managers and crew. In Weldon, as in other stops along its route, the khaki tent with red trim and folding wooden chairs were the traditional symbols of the traveling Chautauqua. It set up annually in the school yard in the years around 1920 and was eagerly awaited by the entire population of 600, and attended by everyone. The townspeople had little, if any, say about the type of program presented, nor did they care. They bought their tickets and went. The shows were musical, dramatic, educational, or religious, with something for everyone. Chautauqua performers came in on the train and would stay overnight at Minnie Colescott's hotel, which was downtown on the one main street in Weldon. It was white, Victorian-style, and had a veranda that went around the front of it.

Weldon was a town in which everyone knew everyone else. One could walk over the whole town in a half hour. The roads were not paved but were oiled in the summer to keep down the dust. The sidewalks were brick or wooden, depending on the section of town they were in. Weldon was

a town with no crime and no locked doors. Teenage girls could walk up and down the main street on a summer evening without fear and on Saturday night could attend a band concert. The town was primarily Methodist. It was into this provincial Midwest setting that the Chautauqua came each year. The people of Weldon felt it was high-class and cultural and eagerly awaited it from one year to the next. It stayed about a week and gave the town a variety of performances to attend and enjoy. There was a handsome trumpet player, a comedy play about an electrician, and lectures for everyone, although the women attended more than the men did. There was also a children's director, who taught the little ones games and songs, primarily to keep them from annoying their mothers, who wanted to attend the lectures. It was a "wonderful time for everyone."¹¹

Endnotes

¹Winchester Chautauqua News, Redpath Chautauquas, July 9-16, 1924.

²George S. Dalgety, "Chautauqua's Contribution to American Life," Current History, April 1931, p. 39.

³Joseph E. Gould, The Chautauqua Movement, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1961), pp. 3-12.

⁴Victoria and Robert Ormond Case, We Called It Culture (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1948), pp. 22-41.

⁵U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part I (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 8.

⁶Albert Edward Wiggam, "Is the Chautauqua Worthwhile?," The Bookman, June 1927, p. 402.

⁷The Kentucky Chautauqua Assembly, Program Handbook, Lexington, Kentucky, June 26-July 6, 1888, p. 39.

⁸Advertisement, The Messenger (Owensboro, Kentucky), May 28, 1905.

⁹Personal interview with Mary Stack, June 18, 1985.

¹⁰Roland W. Baggett, "Christian Culture, R.F.D.,"
Outlook, August 5, 1931.

¹¹Personal interview with Irene Brown, June 16,
1985.

CHAPTER II

"THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY": THE CHAUTAUQUA IN WESTERN KENTUCKY

The story of Chautauqua in Kentucky shows a diversity in style and organization for the different Chautauquas that performed here. No one Chautauqua troupe can be said to have been unusually exceptional or outstanding. It seems as if all the Chautauquas were always well received and no one ever had unkind comments about them locally. They all followed what came to be a standard pattern of travel, performance, entertainment, length and acceptance. The variety was in the towns they visited and in the names of the lecturers and entertainers. Some of the people who traveled with Chautauquas in other states came to Kentucky and some did not. Thus, the Kentucky Chautauqua movement was not different from those in other states except perhaps in the fact that it was not a sustained movement as it has the reputation of having been in the midwestern states of Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri, also known as the "Chautauqua Belt."¹ It did not appear in the same towns repeatedly year after year for the thirty-odd years that it was popular in Kentucky. From newspaper accounts of

individual performances, no single explanation accounts for this curiosity. It would appear in some towns for a few years and then not be there for some succeeding years. One can only surmise that economics dictated when and where the Chautauqua would be held. If the managers could see that one route was more successful than another, the less successful stops would be dropped. It was this way in any state, not just in Kentucky.

When Chautauqua came to Kentucky, it was not always in the famous khaki tent. In Lexington in 1888, there was a Chautauqua grounds called Woodland Park, and the meetings were held in wooden buildings and a "great tent." In Lebanon, the Chautauqua was so well received by Former Governor Proctor Knott that he gave his property to the Lebanon Chautauqua Association so that the Chautauqua would have a permanent home in that area. In Lebanon Junction, the Chautauqua was performed in the Elks Club building. In Louisville, one locally generated Chautauqua was performed in the Auburndale School building. Most places in which the Chautauqua performed in Kentucky had the usual tent, but there were exceptions.

The Redpath Chautauqua appears to have been the most common one to travel in Kentucky, with stops in Louisville, Winchester, Bowling Green, Danville, Elkton, Russellville, and Frankfort. Another circuit, the

Alkahest Chautauqua, came to Paducah and Owensboro. Redpath was the more well-known of the two, having had extensive exposure in many parts of the country, as the Redpath circuits seemed to go almost everywhere.

Owensboro must have been the earliest Kentucky stop in 1915 for the Alkahest Chautauqua, which came there from May 28 through June 3 under the auspices of the Owensboro Woman's Club. As often happened, the Chautauqua was advertised in the local paper, in this case The Owensboro Inquirer, May 24, 1915. The featured speakers were to be Senator LaFollette, Frederick Warde, and Charles Zueblin, with "an array of musicians never equalled on a Chautauqua Circuit."

The buildup for the coming event was designed to make those who did not have advance tickets feel guilty or at least eager to participate by buying individual tickets. Since the Owensboro Woman's Club was sponsoring the Chautauqua, the townspeople were assured that they were to be congratulated for contributing to local charities and improvements by buying their tickets. Each day of the Chautauqua Week, from Friday, May 28 through Thursday, June 3 was designed to appeal to a different group:

Friday: the Opening Ceremony

Saturday: Literature and Drama Day

Sunday: Sacred Day
Monday: Music Festival Day
Tuesday: Civic Betterment Day
Wednesday: Children's Day
Thursday: Political Day

Those who purchased season tickets could attend any performance--there were three a day except for the first day, which had only one evening performance--and those who preferred could buy tickets for individual performances as they chose. This particular Chautauqua was the first under the sponsorship of the Owensboro Woman's Club, and that organization was anxious for it to be successful. Consequently there was almost daily newspaper coverage of the previous day's events and advertisements for "coming attractions." In his opening address Dr. E. E. Bomar, the pastor of the First Baptist Church, referred to the Woman's Club as being "in the forefront in public ideals and good enterprises." The Alkahest Company was described as presenting only the best performers and the talent was promised to be of the "highest quality." The same newspaper article urged its readers to go to their own churches on Sunday morning as there would be no performances at that time, but later in the day there would be programs of sacred music and lectures. The Sunday meetings were advertised as free

with an offering being collected, a fact which boasts of the early financial success of this Chautauqua. The financial obligation of paying for this week must have been secured by advance ticket sales and individual sales during the first two days. An editorial in the Sunday paper said that the circuit Chautauquas were more important than the "Mother Chautauqua" in New York because the circuits were the "people's university," since they brought to the masses the most important thinkers in the country and promoted lofty ideals. Those who heard the speakers were often inspired "to do something and be something."²

Community betterment and self-improvement were two common themes that dominated the Chautauqua circuits. When noted lecturer Charles Zueblin spoke, he emphasized that a community should act as one body to improve the work of local schools, to provide vocational education for its students, to supply playgrounds for children, to build and maintain roads, and that the State had a duty to provide all these things with the help of the local community.³

When an outside speaker presented such ideas to a community and when children were given a special day in the Chautauqua schedule, the emphasis was clear: today's children are important for tomorrow, and this town needs

to give them the best! However, local children were not the only important issue on the Chautauqua agenda, as a variety of nationally known speakers brought various issues to the public's attention. James F. Stutesman, ex-U.S. minister to Bolivia and Carnegie fund lecturer, brought an appeal for patriotism and high principles to insure universal peace. Frederick Warde spoke on Shakespeare. A play called "Just Plain Judy" was performed. A concert and a magician entertained. There truly was something for everyone, and all who participated came away feeling uplifted by the wonderful Chautauqua in Owensboro in the summer of 1915.

Also in the early summer of 1915, there was an ad in The Paducah Evening Sun on June 3 promising from June 8 through June 14 seven full days and nights of art, oratory, music, literature, science, recreation, government, and fellowship--all for the grand price of \$2.00 for the "season" (the seven days). The Chautauqua grounds apparently could change from year to year, as in the ad, the readers were told that the Chautauqua grounds "this year will be at Tenth and Broadway."

As was usual, there was a variety of events planned during the week. The weather was pleasant, which helped draw the crowds to the large tent. One performance featured a band concert by Vincent Lozito and the

seventeen-piece New York City Marine Band; another highlight was a program of Boy Scout drills; yet another was an instructive talk aimed at the ladies by Mrs. H. S. Newman from the Agriculturist College of Georgia. Her topic was "Cheese as a Meat Substitute," and was favorably received by the ladies who loved her lectures and demonstrations on home economics.

As popular as the home improvement lectures were, nothing could top the "Civics Day" pageant and lecture planned for Friday of Chautauqua week in Paducah. The featured speaker was Charles Zueblin of Boston who was considered a civic expert. The title of his speech was "How to Improve the Home Town." His arrival was greeted with much fanfare when his train arrived at noon on the day of his speech. The entire Rotary Club met the train and escorted him to the Palmer Hotel where he was their guest for lunch. That afternoon he was treated to a tour of the city. At 7:30 that night all of the participants in the civics pageant were asked to line up at the Carnegie Library. Many organizations in Paducah participated in this event, which was organized by the Civics Department of the Woman's Club. Some groups who took part were the Paducah Mother's League, McCracken County Equal Rights Association, the D.A.R., the Boy Scouts, the Elks Big Brother Movement, and various school

and church leagues. Each organization and participant filed across the stage while Mrs. R. B. Phillips, President of the Woman's Club, narrated a sketch about each one. At this strategic point, after the townspeople had seen their friends and family members star in this important show, pledge cards for the next year's Chautauqua were circulated. In this way, supporters hoped to insure another successful Chautauqua, and, too, asking for a commitment a year in advance was just what the Chautauqua managers promoted to insure their futures too. In addition, such a pledge said to the townspeople that Chautauqua was important and had long lasting value to the town and all who attended. After the cards were collected, the main speaker, Mr. Zueblin, was ready to tell his audience how to improve their hometown. The town newspapers called the evening an "epoch making event."⁴

It appears that any performance after this would be anticlimactic but Saturday's play "The Romancers" was received just as enthusiastically as Friday's pageant and lecture. The afterglow of uplift and enlightenment carried the faithful through Sunday afternoon's universal service and lecture, while Chautauqua managers continued to secure pledges for the next year, thus assuring Chautauqua of another summer tour that would definitely include Paducah.

It was a Redpath Chautauqua that came to Elkton, Kentucky, in the summers from approximately 1913 to 1928, with lapses during the World War I years. Elkton was a small town of approximately one thousand people with one-third of them Black. The people were primarily Protestant--Baptist, Methodist, and Church of Christ. Elkton had a typical small town flavor: everyone knew everyone else, many families were related to each other, the center of town had the Court House with the usual malingerers. The town was supported by the rural population but had also in town those necessary for the smooth operation of it, the lawyers, teachers, ministers, bankers.

The Chautauqua would arrive by train, and the tent was erected by the local businessmen and high school boys.³ This custom was a departure from having a tent crew that traveled with the Chautauqua, but just as various lecturers and entertainers were put before the public's eye, it is conceivable that various management techniques would also be tried in a search for the most efficient. In Elkton, the performers stayed primarily in the hotels or boarding houses for the week they were there.

As one would expect and hope, the people of Elkton remembered mostly the entertainers and lecturers, with the

great William Jennings Bryan heading the list.

Mrs. Alzeda Johnson Gill, age 86, told of her father, A. S. Johnson, standing beside Bryan during one of his speeches. It was raining so hard that the tent leaked right over where Bryan was standing. When it became apparent that the people wanted to hear Bryan anyway, Mr. Johnson got an umbrella to hold over Bryan's head while he talked.

Another famous Chautauquan fondly remembered by people in Elkton was the great band leader and composer, John Philip Sousa. Jimmy Whitsett told of seeing Sousa when he was about four. The Chautauqua grounds that year were right across the street from his house. Sousa was hot, it being July and him being dressed as a conductor would and having just finished one of his rousing marches. He was standing to the side of the crowd wiping his face and head with his handkerchief, when Mr. Whitsett, then four-years-old, asked him if he were hot. He replied that yes he was and he would love to take a bath to cool off. Mr. Whitsett invited Sousa to his home across the street, and, surprisingly, he accepted! Only in the friendly atmosphere of a small town could a child invite a person of Sousa's fame home for a bath and have his invitation accepted.

Other remembered entertainers included a man who spoke fourteen languages and would take a person from the audience, ask his name, and tell what the man's heritage was from his name. The person who gave a lecture illustrating with chalk drawings as he or she spoke always made a hit with the children, as did the magicians and the various musical performances. Mrs. Pearle Edwards, age 74, still remembers being impressed by a woman, probably a singer, billed as "The Lady in a Web," and it appeared that her head was caught in a spider's web because of the way her hair was styled! Chautauqua in Elkton was remembered fondly by the elder residents as being a time of inspiration as well as entertainment.⁵

Another location in Kentucky that was extremely successful for the Chautauqua was Lebanon. This Chautauqua also had permanent buildings to house the performances and lectures. By the early 1900's the tone and flavor of the Chautauqua had changed, and entertainment and education seem to be the main thrust of the movement, with religion being less important than it was at Woodland Park. The Chautauqua in Lebanon ran yearly from 1904 until 1928. Former Governor Proctor Knott, a resident of Lebanon, was so convinced of the value of Chautauqua that in 1907 he allowed the local Chautauqua committee to rent his home, "Lea Rigg," so that they could

have a convenient spot for the Chautauqua, as it was less than a half-mile from Main Street. The Proctor Knott Chautauqua Association, as the committee officially called itself, acquired title to the Governor's land and retained it until Chautauquas were no longer booked into Lebanon. In 1932, the property title returned to the family.

The residence on the property had burned before 1907, and the Association had a large auditorium built in 1908, as well as a large dining hall. The auditorium was 100' x 100', with the stage 30' x 18', and would hold 2,500 people. The grounds were planted with flower beds, walks were laid, and additional buildings erected as needed, thereby establishing the Chautauqua as a permanent entity in Lebanon. Behind the auditorium was a large baseball diamond, and annual baseball tournaments became a feature of the Chautauqua season. The Chautauqua League was comprised of teams from Lebanon, Campbellsville, Bardstown, Columbia, and Greensburg. Other track and field contests were also held, attracting young athletes from those and other towns as well. A brochure describing planned events was printed and distributed to the neighboring towns so that teams and individuals could plan to attend and participate.

The Chautauqua company provided sites for campers who could either rent a plot for \$1 if they had their own

tent, or for \$3.50 to \$5.75 for the season, if they wanted to rent the tent too. The tents formed an orderly village of Chautauqua enthusiasts who stayed for the entire eleven-day season. Add to the tent rental, the \$2.00 cost of an adult season ticket, and one could insure a seat at the performances for \$5.50 to \$7.75 for the entire program.

The finest of Chautauqua talent was booked into Lebanon through the Redpath Chautauqua Circuit, and while some of the more famous names do not appear on the schedules of other Kentucky Chautauquas, they did come to Lebanon. William Jennings Bryan was probably the most famous of the Chautauqua lecturers, and the day he was scheduled was called "Bryan Day." The advertisement brochure distributed in advance of the season, said this of him:

This will be a great day. Thousands will come from surrounding country. No man stands higher in the esteem of Americans than Bryan. The years only serve to bring out the true quality of the man and make him more loved and trusted.

Other famous speakers included Senator Ben Tillman, "Pitchfork Ben" of South Carolina, L. J. Beauchamp, George R. Stuart, Strickland Gilliland. The titles of their lectures were illustrative of what became known nationally as "Mother, home and heaven lectures," speeches designed to promote ideal qualities of morality.

Titles such as "Take the Sunny Side," "Mistakes or Blunders of Humanity," "Reason and Religion," "A Plea for the People," "The Old World's Ways," "The Man of Sorrows" surely gave the audience the inspiration they sought by coming to the Chautauqua.

Naturally, there was also entertainment. Miss Edith Rubel, a violinist from Louisville, was favorably received. Her press critic said, ". . . her usual faultless style showed plainly the wonderful talent possessed by this young artist." Also booked into Lebanon was Edgar Bergen, a young ventriloquist, and his "friend" Charley McCarthy. Also performing were the National Chautauqua Band and Orchestra, the Mendelssohn Quartette Company, Rosani the Juggler, the Chicago Glee Club, bellringers called the Parkland-Newhall Company, Miss Maude American Stevens who did characterizations. The list of talent seems to be endless. The fame of some Chautauquans, of course, spread far beyond the Chautauqua tent or lecture hall, while for others it died when the movement ended. Each newspaper article, advertisement, advance brochure, or season program spoke of each lecturer or performer in the most glowing terms. Each was always the best there ever was and was always received most favorably by the audiences, and Lebanon had them all!⁶

Endnotes

¹Truman H. Talley, "The Chautauquas--An American Achievement," The World's Work, June 1921, p. 175.

²"The Chautauqua," Owensboro Daily Inquirer, May 30, 1915, p. 4.

³"Large Audiences Delighted With the Chautauqua," Owensboro Daily Inquirer, May 30, 1915, p. 1.

⁴"Chautauqua's Pageant Good," Paducah Evening Sun, June 12, 1915, p. 1.

⁵Personal interview with Mrs. Maxine Friend. Mrs. Friend is my neighbor, and when she learned of this research project, she talked with several of the older residents of Elkton and recorded their remembrances of the Chautauquas that came to Elkton.

⁶"Chautauqua Season Tickets For Sale Here," The Courier-Journal Magazine, August 29, 1948, p. 22.

CHAPTER III

"A FEAST FOR THE MIND": THE CHAUTAUQUA IN LOUISVILLE

The Chautauquas that originated in Louisville were often different from those that appeared in other places in Kentucky. Louisville was larger than other Kentucky towns but still retained a rural flavor where its boundaries touched farmland. In the years from 1916 through 1930 the Chautauquas appear to be one of three types. First there was the kind that was sponsored by a local group and consisted primarily of Kentucky lecturers. This type was designed for the betterment of the particular community in which it was located. The second type was developed by Louisvillians for the betterment of those out in the state, and it was held in many locations throughout the state. The third was the type that was sponsored and controlled by a large organization outside the state, like the Redpath Chautauquas, and came to Louisville as it would to any other town as part of a larger circuit.

In 1917, The Auburndale Improvement Club in South Louisville sponsored a Chautauqua that was designed to attract the farmers and their wives and also to promote

the Auburndale community. The program was not one of moral uplift but rather full of practical information of interest to farmers and their wives. It was not a part of the Redpath Chautauqua, which was the most frequent one found in Kentucky, and which did come to Louisville for many years.

The Chautauqua met on the school grounds at Third Street and Palatka Roads and had a program varied enough to attract people of all interests. The three-day program began on Sunday, October 5, 1917, with an address by Reverend H. Burns from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Lunch of fried chicken was served at noon by the ladies of the club and dinner at five. The afternoon lectures were similar to those in other Chautauquas. At 2 p.m., H. H. Cherry, President of Western State Normal School (now Western Kentucky University) spoke on "Community Patriotism" and W. I. McNair, secretary of the YMCA, spoke at 3 p.m. on the "Modern Sunday School." After dinner, topics changed to items of interest to farmers. The 7 p.m. speech was "New Agriculture," delivered by the director of United States extension work (unnamed), and the 8 p.m. lecture was "The Rural School" by T. J. Coates, President of Eastern State Normal School. Over the next two days many farm-related topics were introduced to the public--fruit growing, soil building,

livestock feeding, boys' agriculture clubs, the Farm Loan Bank, and the role of women on the farm. There were prizes offered to encourage displays of school work, needlework, and canning.

On Monday and Tuesday nights special entertainment was offered to attract attention to the Auburndale school, which hosted the event. The program on Monday consisted of a competition between local schools with recitations and songs by students. On Tuesday, from 9 to 12 p.m. a dance was held to benefit the Auburndale school fund. This school was particularly proud of its faculty, which boasted of having three teachers, all of whom were college graduates. Nearly seventy years ago, this was quite a feat for a predominantly rural school, and it helped boost attendance which it may have needed since it served a rural area where attendance may have been poor during planting and harvesting seasons. In addition to having such a fine faculty, Auburndale School was considered one of the best facilities in the state because it had steam heat and electric lights, due to the efforts of the Auburndale Improvement Club.¹

The primary speaker, H. H. Cherry, a well-known educator in southern Kentucky, said that Kentucky needed to "avoid waste," which he considered the State's most serious problem. He told his audience that waste came

from petty ideas, ignorance, and the lack of principles. Without expanding ideas, education, or solid goals, he said, the people would soon see deserted farms and schoolhouses. Cherry urged people to remember their churches and to not waste what God had given them.²

While the Auburndale Chautauqua appears to be a local effort to bring education to its community, there was a move in the spring of 1919 to sponsor a series of county Chautauqua schools throughout the state over the summer months. The Board of Trade met in Louisville and planned the three-day sessions that were to meet in sixty Kentucky counties, with its goal to reach into remote areas especially to reach those people who lived far from educational centers or universities. At this time Kentucky was considered backward in learning, being twenty-seventh in the nation in education. Mr. John B. McFerran of Louisville gave \$1,000 to help fund the project, and the City was asked to donate \$25,000 more to insure its success. Eventually, half of the \$25,000 needed for financing the project was donated by the Bankers' Association of Kentucky.

The project had the support of many important civic leaders, the United States Department of Agriculture, the State Department of Education, Roads, and Health, and the University of Kentucky College of

Agriculture. The meetings were to be held in the county seat of each county, with lecturers to come from many other places. It was planned that the meetings would be instructive and interesting. Similar to the Auburndale Chautauqua, topics important to rural life were to be the main interest; lectures and demonstrations covered hog and poultry raising, dairying, fruit growing, bee keeping and public health. Special emphasis was to be put on school, farm, health, and morale.

McFerran had visited schools in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois and was positive that Kentucky schools were inferior to those in other places, especially schools in rural areas. Other members of the Louisville committee included James Speed, Publicity Manager of the College of Agriculture, Judge R. W. Bingham, and John M. Atherton, respected members of the community. They all asked for the support of local churches in the communities scheduled to be visited by the Chautauquas.³

The whole idea of summer school Chautauquas was greeted quite favorably by community leaders. Fred M. Sackett stated on the editorial page of the April 16, 1919 Courier-Journal that the Kentucky program meant "better living, more refinement, stronger citizens and greater income" for the people in the State.⁴

Later in the spring, the Executive Committee of the State Development Committee (as the organization came to be called) met again to make final plans. The meeting was attended by state educators and representatives from the State Board of Health, Eastern State Normal School, the Kentucky Red Cross, the YMCA, the Knights of Columbus and the Boy Scouts. The work of this committee was the first of its kind ever proposed in the state, and it was hoped and expected that these planned county meetings would encourage better health and better education on even the most remote farms.⁵

With much fanfare and publicity, on July 6, 1919, The Courier Journal boasted

One of the most unique and pretentious efforts ever made by a State to promote its own prosperity starts tomorrow.

Tomorrow came, and the first of the farmers' community meetings opened at the Fern Creek Fairgrounds. People could attend by auto or by taking the "interurban car," or train, from Louisville, and dinner was to be served from six to eight p.m. by the Mothers League of Fern Creek School. In addition to the informative daily lectures, movies of the most modern farm methods were planned. At this time, there were clubs that promoted growing various products, and the movies were designed to show the best ways to increase production of pigs, poultry and

strawberries. Also there was a movie showing how to build a concrete silo.

Although Chautauqua was customarily associated with a program of moral uplift and cultural enrichment, these meetings were not. Mr. James Speed, the manager of this Chautauqua, informed the public that this was not an uplift movement and that it did not seek to project a patronizing attitude that was associated with the Chautauquas in other communities. He said that the War (WWI) had taught people that there should be cooperation between local communities and the United States government. People should learn what the Federal government could and would provide to the farmers and then should ask for those things.⁶

On the opening night of the Kentucky-sponsored Chautauqua, 500 people attended to hear D. S. E. Brewster of the American Red Cross speak; the afternoon meeting was not as well attended because the harvesting was under way. The whole Chautauqua was scheduled for only three days, rather than the usual seven to ten days. During this time, everything scheduled was related to improving conditions for the farmer. Dr. Gregory Morgan of the UK Agriculture Extension Office urged the farmers that they should organize a united movement and cooperate with each other for community betterment. He stressed that the

object of this organization was to study life on the farm and how it could be improved. He proposed to study ways to decrease the cost of farm production and to get the best price for farm products. Then in the evening the featured speaker, Rev. Dr. E. Y. Mullins, told his audience that the best life involved being of service to mankind. This first of the Chautauqua summer schools, as they were called, did have some of the cultural flavor of other Chautauquas; music was provided and Dr. Mullins gave an inspirational talk; therefore, it wasn't exclusively farm related. The speaker for the final day was Mr. Virgil Chapman who was the State Supervisor of Rural Schools. He spoke about problems that concern teachers even today: better salaries, teacher shortages, and the high cost of education. Chapman complained of some rural schools having to close because the War had caused a lack of teachers. Before the War, it was customary for teachers to board at the homes of students. After the war, since some rural schools had closed, boarding was difficult. Mr. Chapman pleaded for larger, more reasonable salaries for teachers so more people would be attracted to the profession, and oddly enough, he spoke in favor of consolidating even more rural schools. Such consolidations, he argued, should afford schools the opportunity to offer a varied curriculum in all grades.⁷

Thus the first of the summer schools came to a close, as it prepared to move on in typical Chautauqua fashion to another small town. The schedule for the rest of the summer shows a series of two-, three-, or five-day meetings, with the lecturers covering several counties at once:

July 14-19	Rockcastle, Whitley, Bell, Knox, Clay counties
July 21	Lincoln and Mercer
July 24-26	Pulaski and McCreary
July 28-30	Marion, Taylor, and Green
July 31-Aug. 1	Washington, Nelson, and Bullitt
Aug. 4-6	Oldham, Henry, and Carroll
Aug. 7-9	Gallatin, Kenton, and Boone

There were no brown tents trimmed with red, no tent crew, no flashy entertainers to bring a taste of culture to the unsophisticated. There were, instead, speeches titled "Home Making," "Consolidating Rural Schools," and "Health For Sale." The farmers saw movies, too, on the control of flies and mosquitos, on cholera, and growing strawberries.

This schedule does not show that Chautauqua summer schools were planned up through September. By the end of the summer, the State Development Committee was pleased because approximately 85,000 people all over the state had attended, and the Chautauqua had been extremely popular.⁸

The last of the summer schools was held in Paintsville, the county seat of Johnson County, in eastern Kentucky. This Chautauqua appears to have been the grand

finale of the efforts begun by the Board of Trade. Even though this meeting lasted only three days also, it appears to have been reported in the Courier-Journal with greater enthusiasm, and it reached a greater degree of intensity than other similarly planned meetings had. Farmers were urged to attend and to stay for the entire three days. They were told the popularity of the summer meetings indicated that the state's farmers needed and wanted a farmer's organization that would push for better roads and better cooperation between banker and farmer. Those who attended were urged to form farmers' clubs, and their wives were urged to form homemaking clubs. In addition to such striving for "revolution," the farmers of Johnson County were shown that growing fruit trees could be profitable for them and were urged to promote that area for future fruit production. Apples from the local farm of Fred VanHoose were used to illustrate the point. Those apples must have had a great impact because today the apple festival held in autumn in Johnson County is one of the major state festivals.⁹

Thus, at the end of the summer of 1919, the inspired events planned by the State Development Committee came to a close. It appears to have functioned for one year only, but it is likely that this summer of education was the inspiration for other Chautauquas that appeared in

later years throughout Kentucky.

Although the efforts of the State Development Committee were shortlived, there was one Chautauqua that visited the same site for at least twelve years. Crescent Hill in Louisville was the home of a Redpath Chautauqua that set up in a large tent on the grounds of the Louisville Water Company at Frankfort Avenue and Stilz Lane. In true Chautauqua manner, it promised something for everyone. In the years from 1916 to 1928, these Chautauquas brought cultural programs of lectures and music to those who attended.

The Crescent Hill Forward Club sponsored these Chautauquas and was responsible for scheduling them through the Redpath booking agency, for selling tickets, and for taking subscriptions for the next year. Every morning, children were admitted at no cost, and a trained storyteller was in charge of a children's program. Parents were then free to attend and enjoy the many lectures and musical programs. Tickets were sold by members of the Forward Club and were also available at the Henry Watterson Hotel in downtown Louisville.

In the early days of the Crescent Hill Chautauquas, many of them lasted for seven days, but there did not seem to be overnight accommodations. Those attending lived primarily in Louisville and attended by

walking or riding the bus from town. By 1920, World War I had been over for some time, but the remembered war effort gave rise to lecturers and speeches on the Chautauqua circuit. The public was ready to hear about the war, to learn moral lessons from it, but ready to turn away from the horrors of it and enjoy being exposed to a more refined way of life. With the Chautauqua due to open on July 10 of that year, advertisements began to appear in The Courier-Journal a week before the Chautauqua was scheduled--advertisements which gave the "programme" as consisting of concerts, light opera, lectures on timely topics and vaudeville numbers for the entire family to enjoy. The headlined speakers and the titles of the lectures illustrate the diverse range of topics scheduled for the week. Dr. Henry E. Rompel, the civilian pastor of the Great Lakes Training Station lectured on "Facing the Task," the task being community service. He said that it was everyone's task to forget the "war spirit" and to adopt a "peace mind." He felt that the public was neglecting such necessary virtues as courtesy, kindness, chivalry, and helpfulness. He appealed to the youth, saying that adults should set the examples for the youth to follow.

On the same bill, and thus emphasizing the diversity of the program, was Henry A. Adrian, who lectured on

horticulture in general, and the work of Luther Burbank in particular. His entire lecture would have appealed to farmers, and it is conceivable that with Crescent Hill at that time on the edge of town, there would have been farmers attending the lectures. He spoke of the evolution of grains and the grafting of plants to create new ones. He proposed to grow a tomato above ground on a plant and then to grow potatoes below ground on the same plant. Another idea he proposed was to grow potatoes and beans on the same plant. A great advantage of such a plant was that insect control could be increased, because the farmer could destroy insects harmful to both plants at the same time.

On July 16, the week of this same Chautauqua, C. G. Gordon spoke in an appeal to people to move back to the farm. Even in those days of small towns and plenty of open spaces, there were those who extolled the virtues of living on a farm rather than in the city. He said that food production was the problem of the future, and that during the War, Germany would have starved to death if it had not paid any attention to its farms and food supply. Mr. Gordon said that the countrysides needed to be made more attractive in order to overcome the lure of the city. A key to that attractiveness was to have good roads and more vocational training for the youth. He appealed to

the young to leave their books and forget having their heads in the clouds and to come down to earth. Otherwise, he said, the country would be headed for disaster.

In a different vein on the next day, July 17, Donal H. McGilbeny told his audience that a revolution would never happen in the United States as long as there was an American Legion post in every town. In addition, he maintained that crowded industrial centers contributed to social unrest and warned America not to follow the path of the Russians. In order to avoid such a problem, the public would need to put the best possible leaders in office, and that would reduce unrest.

Interspersed between these very serious lecturers, a wide variety of musical performances entertained the public. There was a community song service on Sunday with Mrs. W. J. Horn directing the chorus. The Sibyl Sammis choir presented a program of classical and popular songs. The New York Opera Singers performed at the afternoon performance on Wednesday of this Chautauqua Week, but unfortunately, the rain made it very difficult for people to hear the music and many patrons stayed away.¹⁰

By 1924, there were two Chautauquas in the city of Louisville, both sponsored by community improvement clubs in their areas. The Shawnee Welfare Club sponsored a Chautauqua in the West End of Louisville, while the

Crescent Hill Forward Club was still sponsoring a Chautauqua too. They were scheduled at the same time in the same year and had identical programs, with the opening in Crescent Hill and the program moving the next day to Shawnee. As heavy as the previously discussed Chautauqua was in serious lectures, this one was much lighter. There was a Punch and Judy puppet show, a character impersonator, a harp ensemble, a comedy, various dramatic readings, a ventriloquist--the famous Edgar Bergen--a concert by the Metropolitan Orchestra with a discussion afterward by Martha Scott on "How to Listen to Music." Those who attended this Chautauqua were surely entertained as well as educated by the performers.¹¹

Three years later, in 1927, the demise of the Chautauqua in Louisville was imminent. After 1928, the Chautauqua was gone from Crescent Hill, and the one sponsored by the Shawnee Welfare Club was cut from seven days to five. Additionally, Redpath had been replaced as the booking agent by a smaller one, the Loar Independent Chautauqua Company. The Shawnee Welfare Club retained control of the Chautauqua and was ultimately responsible for its success or failure. The Shawnee Welfare Club was a community organization for people who lived west of 28th Street and between Cedar and Garland Streets. The purpose of the Club was to provide a library and community center

for the Shawnee neighborhood. A committee of twenty-five men in the Club agreed to underwrite the Chautauqua contract with Loar, and officers were elected from the twenty-five to preside over the production of the next year's Chautauqua. The President of Loar Independent Chautauqua, Oscar Hale, presided at the meeting to select the officers. This entire arrangement, though novel at this time in the history of the Chautauqua movement, was reminiscent of the early days when a booking agent would come to a small town and contact the business leaders who would then underwrite the Chautauqua for their town. So, although the Club was trying to raise money for its building projects, the Chautauqua was billed as being nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and sponsored for the good of the community.

A large tent was erected at the corner of 40th and Broadway, and the Chautauqua was billed as "a feast for the mind." The talent was selected by the committee and obtained through Loar. The programs for this Chautauqua of 1927 included the Lions Male Quartet of Kansas City, Ralph Parlette, a nationally known speaker whose speech was entitled "Getting the Most for Me," the Elwyn Dramatic Company, a chalk talk by cartoonist John E. Bockewitz, and various other musical groups and lecturers. Although as many as seven hundred people attended some of the

performances, Chautauqua was on the decline, appearing in Louisville only three to five more years.

The Chautauquas that came to 40th and Broadway in Louisville were well remembered by Mrs. Mary Stack, who grew up on 34th Street. She and her girl friends would walk from their homes to the Chautauqua. Their parents did not mind their going because it was a decent place for young girls to go. Even at night, then, people could walk around without fear of anything happening to them. There were a couple of boys usually walking with them, one the brother of one of the girls. Mrs. Stack's parents did not go because they did not see it as something important for them to do, but the children went because it was fun and because it was something to do in the summer. They sat on backless benches, but there were folding chairs for the adults attending. No food was served at these Chautauquas; the boys and girls in Mrs. Stack's group walked home for their meals as they were so close.

The morning and afternoon performances were often lighter in tone than the evening ones, with lectures illustrated with chalk and/or felt on an easel, or sometimes by puppets. In the evenings there were serious lectures, musical groups, skits, vocalists, and play readers. A play reader was one person who would act out whole plays alone just by changing part of his or her

costume and his or her voice. A season ticket for the week's performances cost about \$1.50 and allowed the ticket holder to attend each of the three daily performances.

A highlight Mrs. Stack remembers of the 1928 Chautauqua was the unit of city government. All the young people who attended formed a "junior municipality" and elected a mayor and members of all boards and departments in the city of Louisville government. The purpose of this was to present the young people with a course in citizenship. They met each morning, broke into groups representing various departments in city government, and passed ordinances. One day of the week the members of the junior municipality went on a field trip to City Hall and met Mayor William B. Harrison. Mrs. Stack was elected to an office and remembers the trip to the Mayor's office as being enjoyable as well as educational.¹²

In 1928, the Chautauqua was planned again by the Shawnee Independent Chautauqua, a committee of businessmen and elected officers, who no longer used the Loar Independent Chautauqua. The musical acts booked included the Hoosier Male Quartet, the Ernest Toy Trio, the Novelty Four Company, and a whistler, Miss Frances Sellers. Pietro La Verdi entertained the audience with his impersonations. In addition to that, he performed as a

ventriloquist and crayon artist. The lectures that year gave the audience what they sought of moral uplift and words to guide their lives, and the lecture titles were indicative of that desire: "Fiddling While the World Burns," "Tomorrow's Citizen Today," and "Character Studies of Great Literary Men." In addition, the Chautauqua goers were treated to a performance of "The Taming of the Shrew."

By the end of the 1920's, public interest in the Chautauqua in Louisville was waning. The newspapers carried large ads of movies, concerts, and plays coming to various local theaters. There were so many ways to be entertained, people no longer needed the Chautauqua for enlightenment, education, or entertainment.¹³

Endnotes

¹"Auburndale Chautauqua Opens Session Sunday," The Courier-Journal, October 5, 1971, p. 5.

²"'Avoid Waste,' Says Cherry," The Courier-Journal, October 8, 1917, p. 5.

³"Board of Trade Pushes County Chautauqua Schools," The Courier-Journal, April 15, 1919, p. 1.

⁴"Rural Chautauquas," The Courier-Journal, April 16, 1919, p. 3.

⁵"State Uplift Men to Meet," The Courier-Journal, June 19, 1919, p. 4.

⁶"Farmers Are to Meet To-Day," The Courier-Journal, July 7, 1919, p. 12.

⁷"Community Center Movement in Kentucky Favorably Launched; Meeting in Fern Creek," The Courier-Journal, July 8, 1919, p. 1.

⁸"Reports Show 85,000 Have Attended Meetings," The Courier-Journal, September 4, 1919, p. 1.

⁹"Big Meeting in Johnson County," The Courier-Journal, September 20, 1919, p. 3.

¹⁰The Courier-Journal carried numerous articles on the Crescent Hill Chautauquas from at least 1919 through 1928.

¹¹"Crescent Hill and Shawnee to Alternate Programs," The Courier-Journal, June 30, 1924, p. 16.

¹²Personal interview with Mrs. Mary Stack, June 18, 1985.

¹³All of the information about the Shawnee Chautauquas was taken from numerous articles in The Courier-Journal from 1924-1928.

CHAPTER IV

"GETTING THE CHAUTAUQUA SPIRIT": THE CHAUTAUQUA IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN KENTUCKY

As early as 1887, there was a Chautauqua Assembly in Lexington at a campground owned by the city called Woodland Park. Although the word "Chautauqua" is used, this program was somewhat different than the traveling tent shows usually called Chautauqua; it was more like the original Chautauqua in New York. There were some scattered around the United States that were similar to Mother Chautauqua, in that they were located in permanent homes and were governed by a local board of directors, an executive committee and also elected officers. The Lexington group belonged to a national "Assemblies of America," and had as its purpose the "intellectual, moral, and religious teaching of all who attended." The program ran for two weeks and was similar to the later traveling shows, but longer. One noticeable difference was that because the Assembly lasted two weeks, and because many Chautauquans rented or brought tents and stayed on the grounds, the program was much more detailed with some activities occurring simultaneously. The following daily schedule shows that the primary emphasis was to instruct

Sunday School teachers in various skills they might find useful in their home churches:

A.M.	8:00	Devotional Hour (Auditorium)
	9:00	Sunday-School Normal. Beginning Class.
	9:00	Secular Normal. Theory Class.
	9:00	Chorus (Tonic Sol-Fa System).
	10:00	Sunday-School Normal. Intermediate Class.
	10:00	Inductive Bible Studies.
	10:00	Kindergarten - Primary Class for Teachers.
	10:00	Children's Sunday-School Class.
P.M.	4:00	Secular Normal. Practical Application.
	4:00	Inductive Bible Studies.
	4:00	Primary Sunday-School Teachers' Class.
	5:00	C.L.S.C. Round Table.
	6:00 to 7:00	Saxton & Trost's Brass Band.

In addition to the above activities, there were other lectures and meetings for other family members to attend. The following schedule is for only one day, Friday, June 29, 1888:

A.M.	9:00	<u>Meeting of College Association.</u> 1. "The Colleges and the Farmers." Dr. F. L. Howe, Polytechnic Institute, Louisville, Ky. 2. "How Far Should Colleges Regulate the Personal Conduct of their Students?" Prof. W. E. C. Wright, Berea College.
	11:00	<u>Lecture:</u> "Thackery." Mr. Leon H. Vincent.
P.M.	2:30	<u>Lecture:</u> (with costumes) "City Life in Jerusalem." Mr. P. M. VonFinkelstein.
	4:00	<u>Conference</u> on Sunday Observance-- Religious and Legal.
	7:30	<u>Elocutionary Prelude</u> , by Prof. Pinkley.
	8:00	<u>Lecture:</u> (with Stereopticon Illustrations) "In and about

Shakespeare's Home." Rev. W. L.
Davidson.

The Assembly offered conferences for the state college system and wanted all those interested in education to plan to attend the Chautauqua. The schedule could have been the forerunner to the state Kentucky Education Association meetings that are now held annually every spring.¹

The newspaper account of this particular Assembly of 1888 was written with the flowery prose common to the period. It spoke of the Chautauqua grounds presenting a "beautiful picture to the artistic eye," and of the "intellectual and physical enjoyments of its many pleasures." Included in the article was a list of people who had come to stay in the tents for the Assembly. The speaker for one afternoon program was Dr. P. S. Henson whose lecture title was "Grumblers." The newspaper spoke of him as

. . . humorous, sparkling, logical, interesting, effervescent, and fervent, and he cannot help but please.

What a glowing description of Dr. Henson, guaranteed to make the readers anxious to attend his--or others'--lectures for sure! Unfortunately, rain poured down in torrential style the first few days of that Chautauqua, making muddy roads and paths all over Woodland

Park. In spite of the rain, 2000 to 2500 people attended the meetings and lectures. It was easier to attend and took less time to arrive at the meetings, for those who were staying in the tent city which had grown inside the Park boundaries than for others who had to depend on streetcars to take them from their rooms rented in the city. There was no haphazard plan for tent placement, but rather an orderly arrangement of tents and streets emphasized the careful way the entire event was planned. The Assembly furnished tents without floors for \$6.00 for the season or with floors for \$8.00. Considering the rain that fell in 1888, those who had not ordered floors were probably sorry--and wet!²

Furnishings for the tents could also be rented for approximately \$6.00 per season and included a double cot, sheets, pillow case, blankets, wash-stand, bowl and pitcher, lamp and oil, one chair, mirror, table, broom, and straw for filling ticks. A visitor could also buy a meal ticket for \$10.00 for the season and for \$3.00 could buy a season pass to all events. Therefore, for the sum of \$27.00, a Chautauquan could enjoy, for two weeks, programs that were considered the best in education, religion, and entertainment and stay dry and fed as well!³

The printed program assured the visitors to Woodland Park that many amenities had been assured. There

were electric lights strung in the tent city for the protection of those returning to their temporary homes after the last lectures. Woodland Park boasted of a police department, a post office, a pay telephone station, and a baggage storage area, all to help assure the visitor of the high quality of control and care in planning that had occurred. Attending Chautauqua at Woodland Park was truly an Event.

In spite of all the care taken to think of and provide for everything that a demanding public might want, it is obvious from the high tone set by the program handbook and by the newspaper accounts that this sort of Chautauqua was quite different from the traveling shows that developed later as a result of the needs of rural America. This somewhat permanent Assembly addressed the needs of the refined, the cultured, the educated. It was tightly controlled by its own Board of Directors and therefore quite different from what was to come after the turn of the century. I do not think it was interested in providing uplift and enlightenment to the masses but rather to those who already had those qualities.

In the eastern part of Kentucky, traveling Chautauquas were also very much in evidence during the first quarter of this century. Ashland, Winchester, and London each was visited by a Redpath Chautauqua in various

years.

On June 25, 1914, The London Gazette commented on the editorial page that the public wanted it to return. Already 200 of the 400 needed subscriptions had been acquired to insure the return of the Chautauqua to London in 1915. Usually the Chautauquas were scheduled to return approximately the same time each year, but there is no mention in The London Gazette in the summer of 1915 of the Chautauqua coming back to London.

There was, however, an ad in The London Sentinel on August 19, 1915, for the Farmers Chautauqua that was scheduled for September 1, 2, and 3. The bill promised speeches of interest to farmers and music for all. Those planning to attend were urged to bring their lunches and spend the day. Some topics for speeches were to be rural cooperation, the necessity for good roads, fruit and legume growing--all which appear to be fairly common themes whenever the Chautauqua was billed as a "Farmers Chautauqua."

Also in 1915, on July 1, a train pulling a Chautauqua car arrived in Winchester in the evening. Four college men made up the tent crew and spent the next two days preparing for the Sunday opening of Chautauqua week. The crew members were from Iowa, Michigan, Alabama, and Kentucky and spent the summer traveling with the tent.

Tickets were \$2.50 each for the week's sessions, but by July 1, only a few were left--a measure of the anticipated success of the Chautauqua.

The Winchester Democrat was published only on Tuesday and Friday mornings. Because it was not a daily publication, all the important community news was published on the front page. The paper urged everyone to buy the few remaining tickets and told its readers that "everybody, everywhere, every day is talking chautauqua and Winchester is getting the chautauqua spirit."⁴

From the printed schedule, this Chautauqua was predominantly musical with such performers expected as the Music Makers' Quartet, Savoranoff's trio, Italian tenor Signor Bartolotta, the Orchestral Club, Francesco Pallaria and his Concert Band, and Alice Neilson, soprano of the Metropolitan and Boston Opera Companies. At this time, in this first newspaper account of the event, only one line tells that dramatic attractions are expected, but they are not listed.

There was one part of the Chautauqua that was eagerly anticipated in Winchester, and that was the children's program. The children who attended were going to learn about the cultures of other lands, and each day, the folk tales and dancing of a particular country were to be taught to the children. Monday the schedule called for

folk tales and dances of India; Tuesday Russia; Wednesday Germany; and Thursday Scandinavia. This way, the entire week's program was structured. In addition, the children's workers were ready to deliver a pair of talks to the parents on the value of story telling and play for children. Once again, people were told their children were important, and once again, the Chautauqua's appeal to all ages was emphasized.

As the Winchester newspaper was printed only twice a week at that time, it wasn't until July 13 with the Chautauqua gone that the readers were told what a success the week had been. The news article was again on page one and promoted a particular philosophy that illustrated how popular and valuable the Chautauquas were. It was

. . . a great University where men, women, and little children sat at the feet of culture for a week having their senses broadened, and their ideals lifted higher and higher⁵

The writer of this praise went on to state that no price was too great to pay for the good received by the community from "this transportable college." Thinking people everywhere accepted Chautauqua because it shook them from whatever moral, political, or cultural stupor they had been in over the year. Readers were told that having Chautauqua return year after year to a community helped change the flavor of the town from one that was

educationally static to a town that was vibrant, growing, and intellectual. Chautauqua meant that residents could become educated without leaving their communities, unless a person required specialized training. Chautauqua was touted as being good for the growth of the community as well as individuals and therefore good for business. Young men would not have to leave their homes in order to acquire a good education; they could get it when Chautauqua came year after year.⁶

The appearance of Redpath Chautauqua in Kentucky seems to have slowed during the years of World War I, but by 1922 it was traveling in full swing and went to Ashland. While the Chautauqua in Winchester in 1915 was heavy with music, the one which came seven years later to Ashland was much more balanced. It had music, of course, but each day offered other features as well. One of the most enjoyable seems to have been the performances of John B. Ratto, who did character impersonations complete with makeup. He gave lectures about famous historical men such as General Pershing, King Albert of Belgium, Lloyd George of Great Britain, Presidents Wilson, Lincoln and Washington. Ratto would turn his back to the audience and continue speaking while he changed his makeup from one character to another. The public loved his act, some of which was serious and some comic. He even impersonated

such well-known composers as Mozart, Verdi, Mendellsohn, and Liszt, constantly changing his appearance as he talked.⁷

Other attractions of the Ashland Chautauqua included a medley of college songs, a lecture by Elwood T. Baily of California who said that everyone should get aboard the engine of self and accomplish things worthwhile. People were urged to do something that would make a lasting impression for the good of humanity.⁸ Other lecture titles included "The Paralysis of the Soul," the Sunday afternoon lecture by Dr. C. H. Wilhelm of Illinois, and "Let's Get Together" by Charles O. Jordan of Pennsylvania who spoke of the important relation that should exist between those on farms and those in cities.⁹

Endnotes

¹The Kentucky Chautauqua Assembly Program Handbook, Lexington, Kentucky, June 26 to July 6, 1888.

²"Kentucky Chautauqua," The Kentucky Leader, June 29, 1888, p. 1.

³The Kentucky Chautauqua Assembly Program Handbook, p. 39.

⁴"Chautauqua," Winchester Democrat, July 2, 1915, p. 1.

⁵"Chautauqua," Winchester Democrat, July 2, 1915, p. 1.

⁶"Come and Gone," Winchester Democrat, July 13, 1915, p. 6.

⁷"Chautauqua Opens With Unusually Good Program," The Ashland Daily Independent, July 14, 1922, p. 1.

⁸"Chautauqua Program Opens With Dunbar Concert, Fine Lecture," The Ashland Daily Independent, July 16, 1922, p. 8.

⁹"Splendid Weekend Program Is Presented At Chautauqua Tent," The Ashland Daily Independent, July 17, 1922, p. 1.

CHAPTER V

"NOTHING BUT WIND AND CHAFF"?: THE END OF THE CHAUTAUQUA MOVEMENT

It is phenomenal that a movement which affected thousands of people could have ended as it did. It simply faded away. There was no single factor that caused its end but rather several, which smothered "the most American thing in America." Although the majority of the newspaper accounts in various towns which hosted the Chautauquas were favorable, there were those people who did not think Chautauqua was as wonderful as others did. As in any popular cultural movement or influence, there are those who think it is beneficial and those who do not.

The writer for an article in The Nation said in 1915 that the Chautauquas were a "strange medley of emotional and intellectual titillation." This anonymous writer was upset about the comparison between the traveling Chautauquas and the original in New York. He felt that the summer shows provided a three-ring circus of amusement and instruction and brought only a fleeting glance of education and enlightenment to the masses.¹ In a similar vein, twelve years later, another critic wrote that the poor Chautauquas had "a lot of platitudinous and

misinformed nebulosity exuding from the pompous and perspiring personality of some superheated lecturer, who is wound up to go off for sixty minutes every twenty-four hours." A speaker on the Chautauqua circuit could be doomed to mediocrity because no one would ever hear him except in small towns of no great importance. Even the great William Jennings Bryan was criticized as being probably the greatest drawback to Chautauqua ever. He was considered progressive and forward-looking in his politics yet regressive in everything else. This same anonymous writer felt that Bryan had a medieval mind and unfortunately every other Chautauqua speaker was classed with him.²

Many of those who heard Bryan loved him, probably because he spoke about the advancement of common people at the expense of the wealthy. However, those who felt negatively about Bryan, felt it with great intensity. He was said to have been "possessed of a magnificently profound ignorance on almost every subject except those with which the Chautauqua audience was already thoroughly familiar; and since he consequently told them only what they already knew, but told it with the tongue of a master orator, he was regarded as the greatest mind of all time." In addition, this author felt that the whole Chautauqua movement had little educational or moral value to offer

because rural people could not tolerate change nor any progressive thought. He felt that Chautauquas tried to pass on the torch--not of intelligence--but rather of intolerance.³

In spite of Sinclair Lewis' statement that the Chautauqua was "nothing but wind and chaff and the heavy laughter of yokels," there were those who felt that the Chautauquas served a true need with the American public. They brought people out of isolation and linked them to the outside world.⁴ The more sophisticated of the public could scoff, but thousands of rural Americans were reached by the culture under canvas. The khaki tents trimmed in red became a great forum for the promulgation of ideas about world affairs as well as inspiration for self improvement. They promoted thinking about a wide range of topics, everything from political controversy to personal health. Chautauqua has been credited with being an instrument of national proportions that helped the schools and the press spread enlightenment.

Historians may argue that because the Chautauqua movement was not strong enough to last past the Depression that it could not have had much historical impact. However, there are some improvements that were made in the daily lives of many Americans that can be directly related to the Chautauqua movement. Despite Chautauqua's

detractors, one must remember the ideas introduced to America by Chautauqua speakers. These concepts were often accepted because they were presented with the approval of the Chautauqua. Otherwise, America might never have endorsed such radical notions as a graduated income tax, separate courts for juveniles, pure food laws, the school lunch program and free textbooks, a need for slum clearance, court reform, a balanced diet and physical fitness. While these all seem to be a part of our everyday lives today, they were all new at one time and as such, promoted from the stages of Chautauqua.⁵

After World War I, Chautauqua speakers were utilized to spread the word about a variety of topics: the advantages of voluntary enlistment, the selective service act, information about war loans and patriotism.⁶ One community, and there were probably others, felt compelled to install a public playground for its children because of the advice of the "story lady" who supervised the children. A hardware store owner expressed the sentiments of many when he stated that he had not been able to go to school much, but his children were in college, and he did not want them to be ashamed of him. Therefore, he was glad to be able to take advantage of the educational forum of the Chautauqua.⁷ As far as being a driving force in United States history, the Chautauqua

movement was not, but when the small influences are multiplied again and again in Kentucky and all the other states affected by them, one must say that the Chautauquas did indeed have an impact.

Most Chautauquas were conservative, and lecturers spoke against liberality. The success of a Chautauqua often depended on three things: its "Mother, Home, and Heaven" lectures, its music and drama, and its promotion of conservatism. Its lecturers were constantly monitored to make sure they were on track with their lectures and did not say anything shocking. Men and women who performed on the Chautauqua circuits were expected to maintain a decorous image and not to mingle with the townspeople for fear of lowering the moral standards of the circuit. Daily reports of conduct traveled to and from the booking agency and the circuit, with the managers constantly on the lookout for any indiscretions.⁸

This maintenance of high standards was one of the prime reasons Chautauqua lasted as long as it did, but it also helps define one reason for its demise, human nature being what it is. One can stand only so much righteousness, and with many advances in the field of entertainment, the moralistic lectures of the Chautauqua soon gave way to the more exciting pleasures of the movie theater, the circus, and the stage.

These were certainly not the sole reasons for the waning of the Chautauqua's popularity. There were others as well. The Depression contributed, but even by the time that occurred, Chautauqua had already begun to lose its popularity. Many communities were unable to sustain enthusiasm for the movement because of a lack of local funds. By the late Twenties, there were no real burning issues for the lecturers to present. The often-repeated themes became tired and trite to the audiences who had been attending for many years.⁹ In addition, one major technological advancement played a most important role in subduing the Chautauqua: the automobile. More and more people were able to buy cars (a new Ford Coupe cost \$495.00 in 1930)¹⁰ and go wherever they wanted on the improved roads that Chautauqua lecturers had promoted for years. Thus, no longer did people have to wait for entertainment to come to them; they could seek it for themselves.

What happened to the Chautauqua in Kentucky?

There is no evidence to support any theory other than the Chautauqua faded away because of changes in the public's interest. What was happening in Kentucky at the end of the 1920's to capture the interest of the public?

A comparison of The Courier-Journal for June 1, 1920, and June 1, 1930, shows that while there were no

advertisements for any amusements in Louisville in 1920, in 1930 there were several pages of them. On the national scene in 1920, President Wilson was being urged to rewrite a treaty with Mexico's new government, and he was beginning to gear up for the Democratic National Convention. Locally, the main concerns were the leaf price of tobacco and a fifty cent per gallon tax on whiskey stored in warehouses. On the sports page, there were reports about the Indianapolis 500, racing at Churchill Downs, and a baseball game between the Chicago Cubs and the Cincinnati Reds. These activities in the sports section of the paper were the only ones the public could have participated in. There were no ads for movies or any other entertainment, but there were many ads for ointments reputed to cure rheumatism, eczema, itchy skin, pimples, grey hair, curly hair, or baldness. In addition, many companies advertised their services or products for sale.

As a contrast, by June 1, 1930, The Courier-Journal presented a wide variety of activities available to the public. This was a Sunday edition, which was (and is) larger than the daily, and that may account for the large number of advertisements for entertainment. Nationally there were four major reasons for the waning interest in Chautauqua: movies, radio, cars, and good

roads. Each of these four was important enough to have one or more pages devoted to it in The Courier-Journal of 1930. The big news, in addition to the movies that were listed, was "talkies," movies with sound! There was a circus on stage at the Brown and even a night club to go to, the Lido Venice.

The Courier-Journal had several pages of things to do and places to go in the Chevrolets and Fords for sale. For tourists there was a map of the United States with a cross country route showing how to get from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco by auto. There were also ads for cruises and airplane rides. The radio schedule covered a full page in The Courier-Journal that day, with many detailed discussions of the acts and performers for the public to enjoy. Further stories the next two days added to the growing list of entertaining activities, including a golf tournament and a company picnic at Fontaine Ferry Amusement Park.

It is obvious that by 1930, the tastes of Kentuckians had changed from what they had been a decade earlier. People appeared to be more interested in pure entertainment and less in moral uplift and enlightenment. The newspapers brought the reading public news of the world; no longer were people isolated in their remote villages, unable to travel except in a horse-drawn wagon.

Instead, by 1930, Kentuckians were linked by technology to everyone worldwide. There was no longer the need for the link provided by the Chautauqua circuits which had moved slowly over the summer landscape.

Kentuckians, no doubt, had heard many speeches on the same topics as other audiences, had listened with enjoyment and fervor, and, when it was time, had allowed the movement to die. Just as the Chautauqua circuits slowly closed in other parts of the country, so did the movement in Kentucky. Today all that remains of this once lively trend is "Mother Chautauqua" in New York--still a permanent establishment designed to promote enlightened thinking and cultural activities--and the memories of hundreds whose lives were touched by this "most American thing in America."

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- ²Albert E. Wiggam, "Is the Chautauqua Worthwhile?" The Bookman, June 1927, pp. 399-401.
- ³Roland W. Baggett, "Christian Culture, R.F.D.," Outlook, August 5, 1931, p. 429.
- ⁴George S. Dalgety, "Chautauqua's Contribution to American Life," Current History, April 1931, p. 39.
- ⁵Joseph E. Gould, The Chautauqua Movement (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1961), pp. 81-82.
- ⁶Truman H. Talley, p. 183.
- ⁷Marion Johnson Castle, "Chautauqua: The Intellectual Circus," Forum, June 1932, p. 369.
- ⁸Roland W. Baggett, p. 429.
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- ¹⁰Advertisement, The Courier-Journal, June 2, 1930, p. 6.

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