


 *The Indicator*

 *Third Annual Chautauqua, June 1-3, 1995*

The Friends of the University of Iowa Libraries will present their third annual Chautauqua, June 1-3, 1995. Entitled "The Dream and the Deal: Federal Support of the Arts and Public Projects in the 1930s" the program will address the nation's reaction and response to the Great Depression. Planned this year to coincide with the Annual Alumni Reunion Weekend and housed in a traditional Chautauqua tent, the program will offer the two key ingredients of all Chautauquas, education and entertainment.

The celebration begins Thursday, June 1, with a picnic and band concert hosted by the University Alumni Association. On Friday and Saturday, June 2 and 3, the schedule features presentations on the photography, politics, literature, music, theater, and public projects of the 1930s. The University Libraries has significant material in many of these area and will mount an exhibition in the North Lobby of the Main Library showcasing these rich holdings.

Nick Natanson, an Iowa American Studies Ph.D. who currently serves as an archivist in the photographic section of the National Archives, Washington, D.C., will be the featured Friends dinner speaker in addition to lecturing on the Chautauqua stage. Natanson's work deals with the photography project of the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s.

Other Chautauqua lecturers are Professor Rebecca Conard, public historian from Wichita State University, who will present her study of the role the Civilian Conservation Corps played in developing the Iowa State Park system, and Professor Kathleen Farrell of the Iowa Communication Studies Department who will discuss the relationship between politics and literature during the thirties ferment.

In addition to the abovementioned lectures, the Chautauqua will feature two staged readings of Federal Theatre manuscripts, a presentation by the Iowa City Footlitters of James

Thurber's "Many Moons", a play for adults as well as children, and several showings of 1930s films.

The three day event culminates with a reception and concert opening the exhibition in the Libraries' North Lobby, "The Dream and the Deal."

The Friends of the University Libraries want to share this exciting event with all communities: the campus, the city, and the state. If you would like more information or would like to contribute time or ideas, please contact Margaret Richardson at the Libraries (319)335-5626.

Memories of Chautauqua

Circuit or "tent" Chautauqua was the offspring of the lyceum movement, which began in Massachusetts around 1826, and of the Chautauqua assemblies held at Lake Chautauqua, New York, after 1874. Lyceum programs, aimed at self-improvement, provided lectures and discussions on literary, scientific, and moral topics. After the Civil War, lecture booking agencies such as the Redpath Lyceum Bureau scheduled appearances throughout the country by such prominent figures as Susan B. Anthony, P.T. Barnum, Henry Ward Beecher, Wilkie Collins, Mark Twain, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

At about the same time, the first of a long sequence of educational summer sessions was conducted at Lake Chautauqua. Originally religious in tenor, these sessions soon grew to become almost a summer university with courses offered by the Chautauqua Normal School of Languages and a school of library training.

As the popularity of the institutional Chautauqua grew, it became clear that all interested people could not travel to western New York for the summer. Soon independent Chautauquas were established in small cities in states such as Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Kansas, and Iowa. These sessions shared many characteristics with the lyceum programs, so it seemed only natural that lyceum bureaus offered some of their more prominent lecturers and performers to the independent Chautauquas. As one might easily infer, the efficient management of travel and booking dates posed a problem for lyceum

bureaus seeking to supply far-flung independent Chautauquas. In 1904, Keith Vawter of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, who was from Iowa, moved toward a solution by launching the first Chautauqua circuit. In effect, Redpath offered a package deal to towns wishing to sponsor a Chautauqua. The agency would supply the talent, tents for outdoor shows, advertising, and work crews.

Town boosters handled the advance ticket sales and guaranteed the contract with Redpath. While circuit Chautauqua presentations included entertaining performances, the educational tone of institutional Chautauqua and lyceum was never abandoned, so local support often rose from a sense of civic pride.

By 1912 there were circuit Chautauqua offices throughout the United States providing a variety of booking networks which covered the country from North Carolina to New Mexico and from Michigan to Mississippi. Shortly after World War I, there were twenty-one circuits providing programs for 8,520 towns and 35,449,750 people. While Chautauqua was a nationwide movement, Iowa was always at its center.

At the height of its popularity, tent Chautauqua could offer a week-long sequence of programs for each town on its docket. There would be performances by lecturers, humorists, actors, interpretative readers, musicians, or magicians. Usually about half of a Chautauqua program consisted of music. One could expect Swiss bell ringers, orchestras, glee clubs, string quartets, oratorio artists, and ethnic bands. Grand opera stars such as Alice Neilson and Madame Schumann-Heink toured with Chautauqua. There might be a dramatic presentation by a group like the Ben Greet Players, a demonstration of sculptural technique by Lorado Taft, or some magic and ventriloquy by the young Edgar Bergen.

The backbone of Chautauqua was the lecture, however. Religion, temperance, and politics proved to be the most popular subjects. Before radio became a valuable campaign tool, politicians found touring with circuit Chautauqua a useful way to gain national exposure. Warren Harding and Herbert

Hoover did so. In the early years of this century, the Progressive Movement owed much of its success to the forums provided by Chautauqua. Robert La Follette, William Jennings Bryan, Joseph Folk, and Hiram Johnson toured the circuit in an effort to undermine the "standpatters."

For better or worse, circuit Chautauqua did not survive the 1920s. Radio and film took their toll, as did saturation of the market and the almost inevitable decline in quality of the programs. For several decades, however, Chautauqua was a vital force in American cultural history. It brought new information, opinions, and entertainment to a sizable population, hastening an end to cultural isolation.

Some of our readers have their own memories of Chautauqua and below are some of their reminiscences.