

CHAUTAUQUA IN IOWA

By *Harrison John Thornton*

There is a certain obvious connection between chautauqua and the lyceum as it developed in the American scene. Beginning with little groups of neighbors in small New England communities applying themselves to a selected plan of study, the lyceum evolved into a system of mass indoor gatherings assembled across the country to hear peripatetic lecturers, some of whom were among the most brilliant speakers in the nation—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Wendell Phillips, Henry Ward Beecher, John B. Gough, George William Curtis, Booker T. Washington, and many another. Within the two decades following the Civil War the lyceum platform had fallen into the hands of less eminent speakers and general entertainers whose program, in the many communities visited during the winter season, was known as the “lyceum course.”

Following in the wake of the lyceum, chautauqua, like its predecessor, continued to challenge the conventional conviction that “formal learning” was an affair of the regular schools, confined to childhood and adolescent years. Believing that mental and cultural growth was a process commensurate with life itself, the founders of chautauqua regarded their institution as an agency of adult education and sought, by various means, to be guides and teachers to the immense out-of-school population. Never pretending that chautauqua’s educational system was a substitute for college, they yet hoped to give to their studious followers the “college student’s general outlook upon the world and life, and to develop the habit of close, connected, persistent thinking.”¹ As in the case of the lyceum, chautauqua passed through changing phases. It is necessary for the student of the movement to have these in mind as historical patterns and cultural judgments take shape in his thought.

There was and is an original unit of Chautauqua whose name, to be correct, should be spelled with a capital letter. It made its appearance in the state of New York at the outset of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In its initial stages it gave no hint of what extraordinary consequences were to flow from a simple beginning.

¹ John H. Vincent, *The Chautauqua Movement* (Boston, 1886), 75.

It was in the early 1870's that two zealous Methodists, one a minister, the other a layman, found themselves drawn together by their mutual interest in improving the quality of Sunday School teaching. In their many discussions, the Rev. John H. Vincent argued for a series of teachers' institutes at which pedagogical methods suitable for Sunday School purposes could be examined. Lewis Miller liked the idea, but proposed that the meetings be held outdoors, in the belief that a combined program of study and recreation would be something novel and would prove attractive to regular school teachers particularly, but also to others. Vincent's conservative instincts were overcome, and in August, 1874, the Sunday School Teachers' Assembly organized by these two men held its first session in southwestern New York.²

One could almost believe that the leaders were inspired in their selection of the locale for this gathering. It was in Chautauqua County, on the shore of a lovely lake bearing the same intriguing name. To this day no one knows for sure its meaning, though many romantic legends have evolved out of the search for interpretations. The term is commonly accepted as being of Indian derivation.

A daily average of 4,000 persons was present during the two weeks of that Methodist-sponsored institute.³ Twenty-five hundred were in actual residence during the entire period. It was reported that 10,000 persons were present on one occasion, to hear the preaching of the Rev. Thomas de Witt Talmage.⁴ The program of study provided for attendance at lectures and sermons, for instruction in methodology, and for written tests.

So pronounced was the success of this venture that there was little question of another session the following summer. Nor was there hesitation about the locality. The Chautauqua woodland was a place of great natural beauty, and Lake Chautauqua was seriously compared by seasoned travelers to Como and Killarney.

The second season brought new features to the program. Though Sunday School pedagogy was still considered the primary purpose, and examinations to measure proficiency were solemnly conducted, elements of nonreligious education were admitted to the curriculum. In the broadening

² *Ibid.*, 19-21; Leon H. Vincent, *John Heyl Vincent* (New York, 1925), 117.

³ G. L. Westgate, *Official Report of National Sunday School Teachers' Assembly Held at Fair Point, Chautauqua, August 4-18, 1874*, 6, 172, 180-81.

⁴ *Chautauqua Assembly Herald*, May 10, 1877, p. 2.

mind of John Vincent there was no essential demarcation between the secular and the sacred. "Things secular," he wrote, "are under God's governance, and are full of divine meanings." It was as much in order to study the heavens, the earth, and the sea, as to search into the treasures and mysteries of Holy Writ.⁵ And so, from this point forward, Chautauqua rapidly became a place for the summer-time study of literature, science, history, the social sciences, foreign languages, the arts, and virtually all the subjects found in the curriculum of a conventional academic establishment. Indeed, a college of liberal arts was organized on the margin of the lake, beneath the trees where the Erie and Seneca once followed their primitive ways and fought their bloody tribal feuds. For a brief season, Chautauqua even held a university charter from the legislature of the state of New York. In the light of these considerations, the Institution does not hesitate to put forward the claim that it is the oldest continuing summer school for serious academic study in the country.

In making its empirical development through the years, and giving increasing emphasis to the arts and sciences, Chautauqua never surrendered the spirit of piety with which it began its life. Denominational distinctiveness early went by the board, and most of the churches responded to the invitation to set up summer headquarters on Chautauqua's spacious grounds, and to dwell and work together in a spirit of unity. Roman Catholic services have been held beneath the leafy canopy, and many of the faithful make their way to nearby community churches to attend mass. Every morning during the season the chaplain for the week leads the audience in the massive amphitheater in religious study; at dusk each Sunday the cherished vesper service of "Old First Night" (August 4, 1874) is repeated on the lake shore.

In this brief review of the original Chautauqua, mention must be made of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. John Vincent was troubled by the broken contact and the long silence between assemblies from one summer season to another. He was concerned, moreover, with discovering an effective device whereby the clientele could continue in the winter the habits of study acquired during the summer months. The fruit of his searching was the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle whose enrolled members were pledged to carry forward certain prescribed reading in literature, science, history, religion, and philosophy through a four-year

⁵ Vincent, *The Chautauqua Movement*, 30-31.

period. Those who endured, and presented evidence of accomplishment, were entitled to attend recognition ceremonies at Chautauqua, pass through the Golden Gate into the Hall of Philosophy, and receive a diploma of merit. It is estimated that about a million persons committed themselves to this program (though not all endured to the end). It has been called the first book club in America. The reading prescribed for the members has maintained a worthy standard through the years. The first book chosen in 1878 was John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People*. Other early selections were Charles Merivale, *A General History of Rome from the Foundation of the City to the Fall of Augustulus*; Horace Bushnell, *The Character of Jesus*; Lyman Abbott, *A Study of Human Nature*; Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Warren Hastings*; and Richard T. Ely, *An Introduction to Political Economy*.⁶

The fame of the original Chautauqua spread throughout the land, and not only in all the states of the Union but in several foreign countries imitative chautauquas made their appearance. These independent units never had official connection with the New York group, but in their prototype they found guidance and inspiration. By lovely lakesides, in sequestered valleys and woodland clearings, on hillsides and mountain slopes, they found fertile flowering. Drawn by the magic name of chautauqua, increasing thousands of Americans gathered each summer in great canvas enclosures, or more permanent buildings, to engage in devotional exercises, attend informative or inspirational lectures, and listen to better music than had previously been their fortune. Thus, for several days or weeks, the followers of this new movement found release from the routines and tensions of daily living, and returned to their homes with new impressions and judgments of the world that lay beyond their local experience. They were cheered through the long winter by the memory of the past season, and sustained by happy anticipation of the next summer's chautauqua.

The people of Iowa were much affected by both the original and the independent chautauquas. Through July and August each year an unorganized contingent of Iowans joined the swelling throng from all the other commonwealths in the nation-wide hegira to the lakeside in western New York. They went to spend the whole or a portion of the season at Chautauqua. Some stayed at the hotels or at rooming or boarding houses, of which there has

⁶ For extensive bibliography of C. L. S. C. selections, cf. Arthur Eugene Bestor, Jr., *Chautauqua Publications, An Historical and Bibliographical Guide* (New York, 1934).

always been an ample number; others leased lots within the official enclosure and built summer homes, or cottages as they are most commonly called. Through the years they joined in the great song and worship services, listened to preachers of national and international reputation such as Phillips Brooks, Frank W. Gunsaulus, Shailer Mathews, and Harry Emerson Fosdick. They attended the lectures of such scholars as Henry Drummond, Moses Coit Tyler, Herbert B. Adams, Richard T. Ely, John B. McMaster, John Fiske, Herman E. Von Holst, Edward Eggleston, Albert Bushnell Hart, Andrew D. White, James (Lord) Bryce, and Charles W. Eliot. The voices of Jane Addams, Alice Freeman Palmer, Mary A. Livermore, and Ruth Bryan Owen were heard within the Amphitheater, as were also those of Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Theodore Roosevelt made five visits to Chautauqua; Franklin Roosevelt, four.

Iowans entered heartily into the program of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. Local reading circles were organized and active at Ackley, Brighton, Burlington, Belle Plaine, Grinnell, Davenport, Corydon, Muscatine, Des Moines, Iowa City, Marshalltown, Council Bluffs, Strawberry Point, Humboldt, Grundy Center, Afton, Legrand, Sioux City, Wapello, Indianola, Hopkinton, Winterset, Hamburg, Decorah, Fairfield, Washington, Tabor, Keosauqua, Cedar Rapids, Dubuque, Manchester, and many other communities. Some cities in the state, with more Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle members than could be contained in a single unit, established multiple organizations. Des Moines, for example, at one time had thirty circles in operation, and, for more effective administration, formed them into two federations: the Chautauqua Union and the Chautauqua League. Iowa City had a union composed of four divisions, one for each section of the town.

In addition to these associations with the original and continuing Chautauqua, now known as Chautauqua Institution, Iowa was well endowed with independent chautauqua units. As stated previously, these establishments were never officially connected with the New York Assembly even though all pirated the striking name and were closely imitative of it in certain procedural phases. Some of them were friendly to the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, commending it to their patrons. A few even set up a replica of the "Golden Gate" and, acting for the New York Insit-

tution, presented the diplomas, sent from Chautauqua, to local readers who were unable to journey eastward for the ceremony of recognition. Individuals who had appeared on the New York program frequently accepted invitations from the independents, and, on occasions, officials from Chautauqua, even John H. Vincent himself, would make a good-will visit.

These fixed, local chautauquas achieved their greatest extension during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, though some continued through the first decades of the twentieth. Iowa could come close to claiming priority both in organizing an independent, and in being the last of the states to retain one. A chautauqua was established at Clear Lake as early as 1876, only two years after Vincent and Miller launched their innovation in New York.⁷ The final surviving independent in the commonwealth appears to have been at Mediapolis, close neighbor of Burlington. It finally succumbed in 1944, forty years after its organization.⁸ In the number of active independents, Iowa was probably the leading state in the Union. Forty-seven were in operation in 1906.⁹

The organization and purpose of the independent units everywhere were generally the same as those for the Johnson County Chautauqua Association, incorporated in 1906. The declared object was "to hold an annual public assembly, and to employ talent to entertain and instruct the public in science, philosophy, history, literature, music, economics and art."¹⁰ The articles of incorporation for the chautauqua at Clarinda, after making much the same statement, added that the objective was also "to disseminate sound knowledge on moral, social, and economic questions, to inculcate the principles of the Christian religion and to advance the highest interests of the home, the church, and the state."¹¹ Shares of stock in the Johnson County Association were to be issued in denominations of ten dollars which conveyed voting privileges to the owner, but no member of the corporation was to derive pecuniary profit from its activities prior to a final dissolution of the property holdings.¹²

⁷ Hugh A. Orchard, *Fifty Years of Chautauqua* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1923), 43.

⁸ *Burlington Iowa Hawkeye-Gazette*, July 16, 1945.

⁹ *Talent*, 16:53-9 (December, 1905); 17:50-60 (September, 1906).

¹⁰ Pearl R. Kiser, "History of Iowa City Chautauqua" (M. A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1935), 75-6.

¹¹ Bertha Waterman, "A History of the Chautauqua at Clarinda, Iowa" (M. A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1937), 2-3.

¹² Kiser, "History of Iowa City Chautauqua," 76.

Intellectually, the emulative units were less pretentious in performance than the declarations of purposes, with their allusions to the arts and sciences, would lead one to expect. Here is an example of that imitativeness of terminology and procedure in respect to the original Chautauqua that became conventional, even automatic, with the independents. But none of them ever seriously approached the academic level of their prototype in terms of a study system, either during the weeks of the assembly or in the long interval between seasons. It is generally true to say that the model for the locals was not the system of summer school study, with an impressive curriculum of history, literature, social science, foreign languages, musicology, and similar subjects, and the habit of sustained library usage, but rather the popular amphitheater platform at the New York lakeside with its program of informative and inspirational lectures, musical events, plays, pageants, and nonsectarian religious exercises. The latter were given expression in a community union service on Sunday mornings during the chautauqua period, and also, in some instances, in a daily Bible-study hour.

Generally speaking, the fixed, local, independent chautauquas declined as the circuit chautauquas arose, though some, as has been seen, continued to hold their ground not only parallel with the circuits, but even to outlast them. A circuit was composed of a group of towns or villages, more or less adjacent, pledged to receive an associated company of performers or "talent," as it was commonly referred to, through a designated number of days. Each community was visited by the same group on successive days during the period contracted for. This might be for several weeks, or as little as three, four, or five days. The general tendency was for the season to grow shorter as the chautauqua movement ran its course. In the earlier phases, the practice was common for the patrons from many miles around to descend upon the chautauqua rendezvous, set up tents, and establish what took on the appearance of a "canvas city." This was true in both the independent and circuit phases. In time, however, instead of greeting each platform item with equal fervor, patrons became more selective as to what sessions they would attend, and many preferred to pay for individual performances rather than purchase season tickets for all of them.¹³ The whole organization was under the management of a chautauqua bureau of which a great number appeared and flourished as the third phase of the chautauqua movement appeared and expanded.

¹³ This became most obvious in chautauqua's period of decline.

The circuit system was not original with the chautauqua movement. It was used by the lyceum before it, as that institution passed beyond its first phase of local groups studying together in search of individual improvement to the practice of listening to visiting lecturers. The circus, carnival, and traveling tent drama, or road show, even the showboats moving from one river town to another, obviously were circuit practitioners. Chautauquans did not appreciate this association, however, and were at much pains to repudiate any comparison between themselves and other itinerant entertainers. It cannot fairly be said that this dislike proceeded from snobbery or self-righteousness. It arose rather from the conviction and the fact that chautauqua took an advanced position on public and private morals and desired the cultural and spiritual elevation of its following. The carnival connotation came usually from critics, whimsical or savage, who found those they considered to be "uplifters" and "dogooders" extremely irritating, or from those who, confused by the similarity of paraphernalia: tents, freight cars, and gaily colored posters, assumed that the parallel was thus established between the circus and chautauqua.

In a sense it can be said that the itinerant or circuit chautauqua arose out of the thought that if Mohammed could not go to the mountain, the mountain might go to Mohammed. Clearly, not all who desired were able, from considerations of convenience or expense, to journey to the Lake Chautauqua Assembly, or even to a nearer independent at an attractive vacation locale. But a chautauqua coming right into the community, offering its treasures for a modest sum, and requiring a minimum of interference with the daily habits and obligations of the people, established a situation that was attractive and available to almost everyone. The popularity of the idea was indicated by the mounting response that greeted the circuit arrangement as it spread enormously through the land.

The key to the system was a "talent"-controlling bureau located in a cosmopolitan center. Field workers were sent into a territory to organize a chain of communities into a circuit and proclaim the worth of chautauqua. The movement was represented as the ally of the church, the school, and the home in the work of elevating and enriching the life of the people. After developing a favorable atmosphere, the next step was the creation of a citizens' committee in each town to promote a chautauqua there. This committee labored to stimulate enthusiasm for the venture, reach agreement on the dates and duration of the chautauqua period, spearhead the drive

for the sale of season tickets, and provide guarantees that the minimum amount of income required by the bureau would be forthcoming. The latter feature seemed to give point to the complaint of certain critics that, unlike the church and school, chautauqua was a profit-making institution. This charge, however, can hardly be sustained. The price of a season ticket for the average chautauqua was from two to three dollars; out of this source, together with general admission charges for individual performances, the cost of administration, talent, and all other expenses had to be paid. Thus, the charge to the patron was small, while the bureau's income was seldom if ever inordinately high; sometimes, in lean seasons, it was discouragingly low and even, on occasions, represented a loss on the venture. In general, chautauqua was not a money-making institution, and the elements of public service and moral idealism were usually and sincerely present in the managerial mind.

The circuit chautauquas spread swiftly and extensively through the United States and far exceeded the scope of the independents. Not only did they take root in every state of the Union, but in Canada, Alaska, Great Britain, several European countries, Australia, and New Zealand. They even reached into Asia, as Chinese students studying in this country sent back reports of this unique folk institution. As they multiplied, so also did the number of bureaus whose business it was to supply the operating staffs and the talent for the circuits they created. Iowa had a leading role in the transition of chautauqua from the independent to the circuit stage. This was due in large degree to the boldness of concept, the organizing and managerial genius, and the driving energy of Keith Vawter, a native-born Iowan who spent much of his life in Cedar Rapids. Not only did his career make a deep impact on the life of his state but on the whole nation also, as the work he did so much to initiate spread across the land.

When Vawter was a student at Drake University in 1895 he was already interested in lyceum management, particularly in booking lecturers and other "talent" for lyceum "courses" which many communities sustained as a winter enterprise. In 1899 young Keith Vawter organized the Standard Lecture (or Lyceum) Bureau with an office in Des Moines, and in its management gained valuable experience for the work he was to do. In 1902 he joined the Redpath Lyceum Bureau in Chicago, and thus made contact with that notable name so closely connected with lyceum activities. James Redpath is credited with being the creator of the booking office

system for lyceum performers, and his name continued to be freely employed as chautauqua began its traveling period. In 1903 Vawter organized the Redpath Chautauquas at Chicago.¹⁴

The following year, Vawter began the adaptation of the circuit plan to chautauqua. In this he appears to have been a prime figure.¹⁵ He is credited with having said: "The people in general cannot go to the Chautauqua; it is too far away and too expensive a trip. I will take the Chautauqua to them."¹⁶ Assembling the necessary impedimenta — huge canvas tents, portable platforms and lighting systems, pianos, and benches for the audience — he persuaded a small number of communities to receive the company of performers whose booking manager he was.¹⁷ It was a novel adventure for chautauqua which, since John H. Vincent and Lewis Miller had launched their great experiment, had been associated with some fixed and attractive location to which faithful and affectionate chautauquans journeyed.

To Vawter's dismay, the venture was a financial failure to the extent of \$7,000. "We told you so," declared the timid who were opposed to radical innovations. "Good," said unfriendly critics who resented this disturbing intrusion into an established preserve by an upstart Iowa youth.¹⁸ But Vawter had courage and perseverance; in 1907 he tried again. After close analysis of his experience, he cut down expenses by more careful attention to travel schedules, talent grouping, and general circuit administration. This time, a measure of success attended his efforts. Here was encouragement, but "five long, lean years of unflagging toil and devotion to his ideal" were ahead.¹⁹ Progressively, however, people became more interested, even enthusiastic. Newspaper acceptance and cooperation increased. Church and

¹⁴ *Who Was Who in America*, 1:1275 (1897-1942).

¹⁵ Cf. *Lyceumite and Talent*, 5:39-42 (March, 1912); Orchard, *Fifty Years of Chautauqua*, 113; Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York, 1951), 598; George S. Dalgety, "Chautauqua's Contributions to American Life," *Current History*, 34:39 (April, 1931); cf. also Richard G. Sherman, "Financial Aspects of the Circuit Chautauqua" (Seminar Study, State University of Iowa, 1951), 13n.

¹⁶ *Lyceum News*, 1:6 (June, 1911).

¹⁷ The number of communities involved is not clear from discoverable records. In the periodical, *Lyceumite and Talent*, 2:19 (September, 1908), the figure is given as fifteen chautauqua assemblies; Dalgety, *Current History*, 34:40 (April, 1931), asserts it was thirty-three.

¹⁸ *Lyceum News*, 1:6 (June, 1911).

¹⁹ Quoted in Program, Le Mars, Iowa, Chautauqua, July 2-8, 1916.

pulpit support was forthcoming. The circuit system was assured, asserted the *Lyceum News*, which was giving attention to chautauqua affairs, and "Vawter's optimism [was] justified."²⁰

Vawter was now thoroughly committed to the circuit method. In 1908 he left Chicago and set up his headquarters in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, so as to be, he said, at a more central point in his field of operations.²¹ By that year he had two circuits reaching not only across Iowa but into Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kansas, and Missouri as well and involving ninety-four assemblies in as many towns. These assemblies, known as the Redpath-Vawter Chautauqua System and the Western-Redpath System,²² varied in length from six to twelve days.²³ By 1911 Vawter had increased the number of his circuit assemblies (towns) to 140 and had extended his field to the states of South Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming, and Oklahoma.²⁴ In 1915 more than 300 communities were embraced by the Redpath-Vawter Chautauqua Systems.²⁵ Meanwhile, Vawter had become associated with C. A. Pepper, who also became one of the country's leading chautauqua managers, to operate the Redpath Chautauquas of New York and New England.²⁶ Vawter's contacts, like his importance to the chautauqua movement, were very wide, not only through the office he held in the national organizations of the circuit chautauqua and the circuit lyceum, but also through his association with the notable bureau managers throughout the United States, the lecturers and other performers who formed the varied group known as the "talent," and the millions to whom his name was synonymous with chautauqua.

In September, 1916, a great company of professional chautauqua folk gathered for a banquet at the Congress Hotel in Chicago to do honor to the man whose abilities and labors counted for so much in developing to immense proportions the third and last phase of chautauqua. Acting as toastmaster, Louis J. Alber, himself a prominent lyceum and chautauqua figure, expressed the thought of all present when he said to Vawter:

²⁰ *Lyceum News*, 1:7 (June, 1911).

²¹ *Lyceumite and Talent*, 2:43 (April, 1908).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5:23 (September, 1911).

²⁵ *The Lyceum Magazine*, 25:16 (June, 1915).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

Will anyone ever know how many communities your idea has redeemed, and how many thousands, even millions of individuals the chautauqua has recreated, inspired to loftier purpose and greater service, and given the impetus to know more of the truth that it might make them free? You builded better than you knew, Mr. Vawter, when your idea gave such tremendous impetus to this experiment in democracy. And so I propose this toast, dear friends, to our honored guest: That many years may be his . . . and that his Ideal may live forever to bless the future generations.²⁷

It was inevitable that Vawter would have his imitators; rival circuit managers quickly appeared. Associated with Vawter in his second venture in 1907 was Charles F. Horner who, following a period of school teaching and administration, had entered lyceum and chautauqua work the previous year. In 1912 he purchased Vawter's interest in the Western Redpath Chautauqua System.²⁸ From his base in Kansas City, Missouri, Horner became one of the large circuit operators in the land. Many other competitors pressed into the field that was expanding so phenomenally, and, to a striking extent, the precedent of adapting Redpath's name was continued. Horner called his circuits the Redpath-Horner System. Harry P. Harrison managed the Redpath-Chautauquas of Chicago, and his brother, W. V. Harrison, the Redpath-Chautauqua System of Cleveland, Ohio. There were also the Redpath-Brockway Chautauqua System of Pittsburgh, the Redpath-Chautauqua Systems of New York and New England, and some others. Additional powerful circuit systems were the Lincoln Chautauqua Series, with headquarters in Illinois; the Alkahest Chautauqua System, operating in the southern states; the Jones, Acme, and the Travers Systems, based in Iowa; the Radcliffe Chautauqua System with its offices in the national capital; the Midland of Chicago; the Cadmean Chautauqua System operating out of Topeka, Kansas; the Pennsylvania Chautauqua Association of Swarthmore, whose scholarly manager was Dr. Paul M. Pearson, father of the columnist Drew Pearson; the Ellison-White Chautauqua System whose field of operations extended from Colorado to the Pacific slope and into western Canada. Beyond these there were scores of other managerial systems.

²⁷ *Lyceum News*, 6:4-5 (September, 1916).

²⁸ *Who's Who in America*, 1942-43, 1109; *Lyceumite and Talent*, 3:36 (July, 1909); 5:35 (April, 1912).

The statistical results of these activities are difficult to arrive at. While some measure of regional and national lyceum and chautauqua association was achieved, no regular compilations of reliable figures are discoverable. But estimates were periodically made while the system flourished, and from a study of these a report may be ventured as of the early nineteen twenties when the circuit chautauqua reached its apogee. Between 8,500 and 10,000 separate assemblies had come into existence grouped into scores of circuits. Some assemblies were in every state of the Union. More of them were in the Middle West (the "chautauqua belt," some called it) than in any other section, and Iowa, with about 500, led all states.²⁹ The aggregate annual attendance at all meetings has been estimated at up to 40,000,000, but, of course, in this vast throng were many duplications. Over 5,000,000 season tickets were purchased in 1920, and their holders would attend most of the season's performances. Another estimate claims that in one year 7,000,000 season tickets were sold.³⁰ The study of attendance figures led Glenn Frank to say that "one out of every eleven persons — men, women, and children — in the United States attend a lyceum or chautauqua program some time during every calendar year."³¹ The number of separate programs given in all the chautauqua assemblies approached the 100,000 mark in 1921. One leading bureau manager put the estimated income for a single year at \$20,000,000.³² This is a low figure for some 10,000 assemblies, and would account for slight, if any, profit. The estimate, therefore, is not necessarily reliable.

It is to be remembered, however, that the financial returns from the circuits were often precarious. In the Redpath-Vawter Chautauqua System in 1922, for example, the Five-Day Circuit of 157 towns showed a profit of \$12,000, or about \$80 per town; the Star Circuit operations in 105 towns achieved \$8,500 profit, again about \$80 a town; the Seven-Day

²⁹ Charles F. Horner in *Boston Evening Transcript*, Jan. 29, 1921; *World's Work*, August, 1924; *New York Tribune* (Magazine and Book Section), August 19, 1923, p. 2.

³⁰ *Philadelphia North American*, June 21, 1919; Bruce Bliven, *Collier's Magazine*, September 8, 1923, p. 7; data from program of a dinner celebrating the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Swarthmore Chautauqua System in 1912. The dinner was on January 7, 1921; *Philadelphia North American*, July 16, 1921; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Jan. 29, 1921.

³¹ *Century Magazine*, 98:411 (July, 1919).

³² *The Designer and the Woman's Magazine*, February, 1923; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Jan. 29, 1921; Bliven, *Collier's Magazine*, September 8, 1923, p. 6.

Circuit of 98 assemblies suffered a loss of \$14,700, or close to \$150 a town.³³

Chautauqua has been variously described as the "people's university," "the parliament of the people," and a great "folkmote" of the New World.³⁴ Such terms are doubtless extravagant, yet they have a measure of aptness. John H. Vincent's innovation, as has been noted, had an educational purpose, both religious and academic. As he declared when launching the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, "This organization aims to promote habits of reading and study in nature, art, science, and in secular and sacred literature." But the study was to be carried on "in connection with the routine of daily life," that is, without interruption of the pursuit of a livelihood in office, shop, field, factory, or kitchen. Vincent did not seek to achieve either a substitute or an equivalent for formal advanced education. The best he hoped for was to induce in his clientele "the college student's general outlook upon the world and life, and to develop the habit of close, connected, persistent thinking." But even this limited though laudable objective was far beyond the procedure and purpose of the independent, much less the circuit, chautauquas. These had no reading or serious academic program. The educational factors were found in the informative lectures dealing with travel, invention, current events, and, to some extent, social and economic problems.

The concept of the chautauqua gathering as a "parliament of the people" or New World "folkmote" in the old Anglo-Saxon tribal sense is to be loosely interpreted. It was not regarded primarily or specifically as an assembly to debate public issues and controversies, though such discussions by the traveling platform speakers did occasionally occur, and, doubtless, debates were resolved and judgments made in the minds of many listeners. In a few instances a show of hands was called for, and a resolution adopted. It was, however, a firm rule among chautauqua managers that such things were to be avoided since they tended to incite controversy and create dissension. The original Chautauqua at New York sometimes permitted spirited debate on contentious subjects, with "both sides being heard," but for the rest, such occasions were rare. If the chautauquas were committed to

³³ Vawter Collection, Auditor's Report, 1922. (This collection is in the possession of the author.)

³⁴ Boston *Evening Transcript*, Jan. 29, 1921; Glenn Frank in *Century Magazine*, 98:411 (July, 1919); Herbert B. Adams, *Report of the United States Commissioner of Education, 1899-1900*, 1:314.

any crusade it was for "general goodness and uplift." That was a worthy course to take, and one need not necessarily be a cynic if he add, it was also a "safe" one since practically everyone was for it. Chautauqua did not come to divide communities but to contribute to their harmony, instruction, and pleasure. And it always believed it was engaged in adult education.

The audiences that assembled under the great canvas tops all over Iowa and across the land were composed of the ordinary run of people to be found anywhere in the Republic. It is probably true to say that chautauqua was a middle class movement. But the term can scarcely be used as implying that the working and wealthy elements held aloof. The great tents were seldom set up in the large manufacturing towns and so did not invade the habitat of either "proletarians" or "plutocrats." This was not with the design of avoiding capital or labor. It was simply that chautauqua was a small community movement. Unlike the rural regions, large industrial centers were well endowed with instructional and recreational facilities and institutions. If in the "chautauqua belt" there were both the economically affluent and the luckless, the distinction seldom hardened into class consciousness, and was lost within the inexpensive and generous encirclement of the chautauqua tent.

Consequently, chautauqua catered to farmers, tradesmen, businessmen, skilled and unskilled workers, doctors, bankers, lawyers, clergymen, housewives, and children. Regional variations brought to the composite audience fishermen from New England, cowboys from the Southwest, lumbermen from the Northwest, miners, oil and factory workers, teachers, superintendents, principals, and students from the high schools and the small college towns. Any chautauqua audience was a microcosm of American society.

The immediate force that drew the multitudes of people to the white or brown canvas enclosures was, of course, what was widely described as the "talent." These were the traveling artists welded into a company by the managing bureau to traverse the circuit and repeat their same performances before every affiliated assembly. Each person or small group followed in sequence until every community member of the circuit had been visited. In this manner, the first day performers in town number one of the chain would appear on the first day in all of the towns. Likewise, the talent for day number two in town number one would be responsible for day number two all the way around. The talent was composed of lecturers, singers, instrumentalists, interpretative readers, humorists, and such general entertain-

ers as magicians, jugglers, etc. Relatively late in the chautauqua period came the theatrical players who eventually overcame the popular prejudice against actors and anything suggestive of the theater.

It is probably true to say that, for the great proportion of the whole chautauqua period, the lecturer occupied the place of first importance in the hierarchy of talent. These were graded from the lords of the platform who had previously achieved eminence as political, pulpit, social, literary, journalistic, national, or international leaders, down to recent college graduates who had a flair for public expression. Of course, the big honors and emoluments were at the top among the big men.

Chautauqua audiences easily came under the oratorical spell. They were thrilled by the bold master of words, provided he remained comprehensible in substance and vocabulary. If in folly or arrogance his eloquence took flight beyond his auditors' range, he lost his hold, and the hour of opportunity vanished. The grand manner could produce rapture, yet the conversational mode, a little elevated, and inoffensive folksiness were preferred, as were also travel, national, and inspirational themes. "Mother, home, and heaven" topics were welcomed in a chautauqua tent, though demand was firm that they be sincerely dealt with.

A legion of speakers from the national and state legislatures, from the pulpits, and from college and university faculties flocked to the circuit platforms. Travelers, authors, inventors, generals, admirals, and former and future presidents of the United States did not scorn to follow the chautauqua trail. For a while, a Congressman who had appeared on chautauqua said little about it when he returned to Washington, but as the political and financial advantages of speaking to such vast and popular audiences were realized, the period of hesitation passed for many, and the opportunity was increasingly welcomed.³⁵

A list of the names of lecturers on the chautauqua circuits would include, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, a large percentage of those who were prominent in American politics, religion, letters, humor, entertainment, travel, and public affairs. Among these performers, taken from the records quite at hazard, were William Jennings Bryan, Robert M. La Follette, Thomas Marshall, James A. Burns, Jonathan P. Dolliver, Mark Sullivan, William Howard Taft, Warren G. Harding, Glenn Frank, Ralph Parlette, James Whitcomb Riley, Madame Schumann-Heink, John Philip

³⁵ Dalgety, *Current History*, 34:41 (April, 1931).

Sousa, William (Billy) Sunday, Sam Jones, Maud Ballington Booth, Will Rogers, Strickland Gillilan, Opie Read, Paul Pearson, Russell H. Conwell, Stephen Wise, S. Parkes Cadman, Irvin S. Cobb, Ida Tarbell, Edna Ferber, Edgar Bergen.

William Jennings Bryan has been commonly called the "prince of chautauqua lecturers." In the fashion of our day he doubtless would be described as "Mr. Chautauqua." Bryan was active in all three phases of the movement, but most so on the circuits. He was in enormous demand, and from springtime in the South to the end of summer in the North he toiled over chautauqua's dusty trails. Year in and year out, the multitudes flocked to hear him as long as his strength and life endured. During 1919 he delivered 50 lectures in 28 days in Washington and Oregon. Someone took the trouble to make the computation that Bryan spoke to from 60,000 to 100,000 persons a day when at the height of his chautauqua career.³⁶ The great canvas walls bulged and strained at the seams, and sometimes were torn apart, when Bryan was to speak. At one assembly during his northwest tour, in July, 1919, over 7,000 single admissions were added to the audience of regular season ticket holders. At another, during the same year, the people stared incredulously at the spectacle of almost a thousand automobiles parked around the tent.³⁷ Like any other trouper, Bryan accepted all the hardships of circuit travel: taking trains late in the night, and in the morning before sunrise, or spending half the night in bleak railroad stations; riding the caboose of freight trains; eating on occasion in "greasy spoon" cafes and sleeping in cheerless small town hotels; driving over rough dirt and muddy roads in early vintage, side-curtained motor cars. Such unloveliness composed the nonglamorous side of chautauqua that the talent had to face.

But in spite of all the chautauqua performer had to endure, William Jennings Bryan was the picture of imperturbability before the tented audience. Fortified by great blocks of ice and pitchers of ice water, the golden-tongued orator was idolized for his endurance and for what he had to say. His "sacrifices" for chautauqua were marked and appreciated. "He could make a million dollars a year as head of a corporation," an admirer proudly declared. "But he is content to go with the chautauqua and make a few thousand." It was recognized that he was not without reward, how-

³⁶ *Lyceum Magazine*, 35:15 (August, 1926).

³⁷ Gladstone Park (Oregon), *Lyceum Magazine*, 29:31 (August, 1919).

ever. "He gets \$250 at the gate for his work," it was observed. "He is reportedly worth \$200,000, has much land and two houses."³⁸ So popular was Bryan, and in such enormous demand, that he commonly delayed making specific acceptance of his invitations until ready to take the road on an itinerary. He would then assemble his own sequence of towns. Presumably, some such scheme was necessary, yet it sometimes gave offense, brought him under criticism, and was the despair of harassed circuit managers.³⁹

Bryan's subject matter may be gathered from the titles of his lectures: "The Ideal Republic," "The Passing of Plutocracy," "A Conquering Nation," "The Old World and Its Ways," "The Value of an Ideal," "Brute or Brother," "The Prince of Peace." The latter was probably his most popular platform subject. At the end of his flaming peroration, his quotation from William Cullen Bryant's "To a Waterfowl" unflinchingly left his audience in a state of ecstasy:

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

Sometimes this master of the platform art would give his auditors a choice of subject. At Waterloo, Iowa, in 1917, for example, he asked for a show of hands as to whether he should speak on "The Making of a Man," "Equal Suffrage," or "The Liquor Question." It was symptomatic of Midwest social morality that the last mentioned was the overwhelming preference, whereupon he proceeded to "flay the liquor interests unmercifully."

Powerful currents of idealism and inspiration flowed through Bryan's utterances whether the theme was politics or religion. During the latter part of his chautauqua career he had much to say about the Darwinian hypothesis. He held it in detestation and opposed it bitterly. At the close of one of his general lectures during the early nineteen twenties in a small South Dakota town, the present writer heard him say: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, I am sure you would be disappointed if I did not say something about the subject that has somehow become associated with my name—the false doctrine of organic evolution." He ridiculed the concept

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 26:8-9 (July, 1916).

³⁹ Charles Edward Russell, *Bare Hands and Stone Walls* (New York, 1933), 320.

and poured satire and scorn on the scientists and pedagogues who taught it. Referring to his opponents, who charged that he was not competent to speak on the subject because he lacked the training that would entitle him to a serious hearing, he confided to his audience that he was the possessor of a large number of academic degrees (most of them *honoris causa*, however), and that some day he would have a calling card printed with his degree abbreviations attached to his name. He would send it, he said, to all his critics, and "challenge every son of an ape to match it if he can." In his battle against evolution he gave his life, as he struck his last ineffective blow in the Tennessee "monkey trial" in 1925.

Bryan gave an enormous amount of his chautauqua energy to the Middle West and was a very frequent visitor in Iowa. In the community of Clarinda alone he stood upon the platform seven times between 1897 and 1922.⁴⁰ During the first four of these, nature was in stormy mood, yet the attendance was record breaking on each occasion. Frequently, Bryan's visit to a community was considered such an event that a "special day" was proclaimed in his honor as, for example, his visit to Oskaloosa in 1905:

Today was Bryan Day at the Oskaloosa Chautauqua, and the capacity of the facilities at the grounds were tested to their utmost in caring for the crowds. The distinguished Nebraska orator drew people for many miles, and excursion rates were given on all railways. All roads led to Oskaloosa, and while the day was hot and threatening, hundreds took advantage of the opportunity to hear the twice candidate for president and hero of the silver wing of the Democratic party. . . . The lecture of Mr. Bryan was upon the theme, "The Value of an Ideal." The gentleman, always an excellent talker, has combined much of excellence in his talk. He pleads for the higher, better politics. Words are plentiful with the son of Nebraska; they fall from his lips as water pours over Niagara. . . . The ease with which he speaks is in itself an entertainment, and not one of the audience that filled the tent and crowded about the exterior was not pleased with the talk. Mr. Bryan's lecture occupied the greater part of the afternoon . . .⁴¹

The type of instruction and entertainment that, summer after summer, swept through the chautauqua tents of Iowa and all other commonwealths may be well illustrated by the bill of fare presented at the Le Mars chautauqua in July, 1916. The program proper was preceded by a children's

⁴⁰ Waterman, "A History of the Chautauqua at Clarinda, Iowa," 69.

⁴¹ Oskaloosa *Daily Herald*, July 15, 1905.

parade beginning at the railroad station as the assembly supervisor stepped off the train. A marching band, flags, and banners featured the procession. Plans for the children were included in every day's activities. In the mornings the "Tell Me a Story Lady" brought hero tales of wild adventure and noble striving. There were games, athletics, field trips, and picnics. In this year when the land was resounding with the presidential campaign cry that "Wilson kept us out of war," the management was convinced that every one of the children "will be mighty glad to dress up in special costume and take part in a spectacular international pageant on the big chautauqua platform the last night [in which the costumed characters were to be] Indians, Puritans, Colonial maidens, soldiers, George Washington, Columbia, Uncle Sam, and children of all nations."

The formal program was as follows:

TENTH ANNIVERSARY REDPATH-VAWTER CHAUTAUQUA SYSTEM

LE MARS, July 2-8, 1916

MOTT SAWYER — Superintendent

LETA BONNIFIELD — Play Specialist

PROGRAMS BEGIN PROMPTLY

BE ON TIME

SUNDAY

Half Past Two

Opening Exercises and Important Announcements

Opening Program

The Kellogg-Haines Singing Party

With the classiest opening concert you ever heard

Three O'Clock

Chaplain E. H. Lougher

A vigorous and searching address on "The Shackles of the World"

Admission 35 cents

Four O'Clock

Vesper Service

Half Past Seven

The Kellogg-Haines Singing Party

In songs of sincere purpose and great beauty

Admission 35 cents

MONDAY

Nine O'Clock

The Junior Chautauqua

"Tell Me A Story Lady" in journey to the Lower World.

Rehearsal and Games

Half Past Two

The McGrath Brothers

The boys who discovered what a banjo was really made for

Three O'Clock Henry Augustus Adrian
 Recounting the marvelous discoveries of Luther Burbank, the
 wizard of the plant world

Admission 35 cents

Half Past Seven The McGrath Brothers
 They play the big, fine music on the old banjo

Quarter Past Eight Col. George W. Bain
 A veteran Southern orator beloved by millions. For twenty-
 five years a headliner.

Admission 35 cents

TUESDAY

Nine O'Clock The Junior Chautauqua
 A trip to the jungles of Africa. More games

Ten O'Clock George E. Colby
 Cartoonist of Chicago Daily News in useful demonstration
 and study of Modern Art

Admission 25 cents

Half Past Two

The Royal Gwent Welsh Glee Singers
 A man's musical from the land of famous singers

Three O'Clock Hon. Chas. F. Scott
 Ex-Congressman from Kansas who will tell the "Real Truth
 About Mexico"

Admission 35 cents

Half Past Seven

The Royal Gwent Welsh Glee Singers
 Fourteen big male voices presenting the best that musical
 literature affords

Admission 50 cents

WEDNESDAY

Nine O'Clock The Junior Chautauqua
 Fairyland by daylight. Wienie roast

Ten O'Clock Mrs. Nan Sperry
 Assistant Labor Commissioner of Missouri in
 searching address on social problems

Admission 25 cents

Half Past Two

The Philipinos
 A classy quintette from the other side of the world
 Brand new and full of vigor

Three O'Clock Opie Read
 In sublime characterization of "Old Lim Jucklin," the quaint
 character revealing Read at his very best

Admission 35 cents

- Half Past Seven The Philipinos
 With superb musical selections both native and American
- Quarter Past Eight Bishop Homer C. Stuntz
 Resident Bishop of South America in valuable study of that
 remarkable country and people
 Admission 50 cents

THURSDAY

- Nine O'Clock The Junior Chautauqua
 The Real World from the lips of the "Tell Me a Story Lady"
- Ten O'Clock Dr. E. A. Brinton
 Formerly of Paraguay, "The Land of War and Women,"
 which he describes with thrilling interest
 Admission 25 cents
- Half Past Two Bohumir Kryl and His Big Band
 The music of the masses served in delightful fashion and
 thrilling power
 Admission 50 cents
- Half Past Seven Bohumir Kryl and His Big Band
 The tenth anniversary festival of melody setting a new pace
 in musical entertainment. Greatest of all Chautauqua attrac-
 tions
 Admission 50 cents

FRIDAY

- Nine O'Clock The Junior Chautauqua
 Final Rehearsal and Field Meet
- Ten O'Clock Dr. C. C. Mitchell
 "The Story of an Ash Heap" a delightful study of the world's
 most ancient drama
 Admission 25 cents
- Half Past Two Chautauqua Concert Party
 Musicians of quality in program of rich variety and peculiar
 charm
- Three O'Clock Gov. Malcolm R. Patterson
 One of America's ablest orators who discusses "The Mind
 of the Nation"
 Admission 35 cents
- Half Past Seven Laurant and Concert Party
 In a full evening of magic, mystery and music. The crowning
 success of magical achievement
 Admission 50 cents

SATURDAY

- Half Past Two Ada Roach and Company
 Unique and clever musical and literary treat by a sextette
 of platform stars
- Three O'Clock George L. McNutt
 The preacher who became a laborer to study the problems
 of the working man
 Admission 35 cents
- Half Past Seven World Wide Peace
 A spectacular International Pageant by the Children of the
 Junior Chautauqua
- Eight O'Clock Ada Roach and Company
 Introducing in delightful style the specially written musical
 comedy, "The Heart of the Immigrant." They will show you
 the time of your life
- Quarter to Nine W. J. Bryan
 With a characteristic Bryan address
 Admission 35 cents

Note: Each musical company has an appropriate Sunday
 Program

Following the close of World War I the chautauqua movement, with the exception of the great original in New York, entered upon a state of decline. The war years had been a period of great vigor, as chautauqua managers and speakers undertook to sustain the war effort. The issues of the conflict were explained, patriotism promoted, enlistment in the forces encouraged, and purchase of war bonds commended.

"The Chautauquas of the country have heard the call to service," it was announced in 1918. "The Government has recognized the vast and perhaps vital importance" of the great Chautauqua movement. President Wilson urges that 'the people will not fail in the support of a patriotic institution [chautauqua] that may be said to be an integral part of the National defense.'"⁴²

Many of the programs of the fighting years were aimed at assisting "chautauqua to make its full contribution to winning the war."⁴³ On the Waterloo chautauqua program in 1918, lectures were given on "Our Task for the World," "Arming Society's Reserves," "War and the Wages of Women" (Round Table), "Convalescent Hospital Work at Fort Des

⁴² Foreword to the 1918 Program Booklet of the Waterloo, Iowa, Chautauqua.

⁴³ *Idem.*

Moines," "Waterloo Chapter of the Red Cross" (Round Table), "How Shall We Fill the Trenches" (Round Table). A returning observer spoke on "Conditions in the War Zone," and the Overseas Military Quartette — "back from Hell and still singing" — brought a "real trench atmosphere" to the chautauqua tent, with "trench songs and the story of their fights."⁴⁴

The loss of wartime fervor was not the only factor contributing to the decline of chautauqua. New inventions and the social changes that followed them had heavy bearing on the fortunes of this folk movement. Among these were the motion picture which, in many instances, made its first appearance in the local community by way of the chautauqua tent. Waiting until the next season for the return of this marvel was an intolerable delay, and enterprising exhibitors began to install themselves in vacant store buildings, the back end of professional garages, and other enclosures; such temporary arrangements served the public until the coming of the motion picture theaters.

The invention of the radio likewise proved to be a force in the decline of chautauqua's popularity. Out of the crackling and static of the early crystal sets presently emerged a comprehensible pattern of human voices and musical sounds, the ultimate material components of a chautauqua program. In due time the instructional and entertainment content of the air waves was instantly available to the public upon the turning of a dial. With the broadcasting of Calvin Coolidge's inaugural address in March, 1925, radio may be said to have become an established social device.

Both the motion picture and the radio made an enormous breach in the insularity of the people of interior America. As previously indicated, chautauqua was an affair not of the urban centers but of the rural regions. Slow means of transportation and soft roads, often impassable in bad weather, set sharp limits upon the range of movement, thought, and social and cultural experience. But this condition, weakened and ameliorated by movie and radio, was substantially dissolved by the invention of the gasoline engine, the development of the automobile, and the improved road system that inevitably followed. With 7,000,000 passenger cars on the highways in 1919, and more than 23,000,000 in 1929,⁴⁵ Americans were no longer bound to their home communities but, independent of railroad schedules, could travel at will over their continent. In the rural towns and districts

⁴⁴ *Idem.*

⁴⁵ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday* (New York, 1931), 7.

where a high percentage of the motor cars was to be found, summertime became vacation time, and, freed from reliance on chautauqua for relief from monotonous toil and routine, farmers, merchants, and their families set out for the national parks and other pleasant objectives, often at the very time the great tents and the stream of talent were coming to town. Money was not as freely spent on season tickets, but was husbanded for vacation journeys when the crops were gathered in.

In the light of these historic alterations, it is no wonder that chautauqua found itself sorely beset in the years following World War I. It was not that the people were turning from the values the institution afforded, but rather that these had been made accessible through different channels.

Attendance fell off both through season ticket and single admission sales, and platform superintendents found it increasingly difficult to persuade the local committees to sign renewal contracts for the following season. It was the pride of the superintendent to achieve such renewal before a chautauqua completed its program in each individual town on his circuit. To fail in this was to suffer humiliation in the esteem of the bureau management.

But, with the increased opportunities presented by the new inventions, and the consequent change in traditional social patterns, chautauqua was clearly a declining institution. Newspaper editors who had once cheerfully printed the laudatory "copy" lavishly supplied by the managers, now became critical of "outside organizations which took large amounts of money out of town," and ceased to lend their powerful aid to the maintenance of chautauqua sentiment in the rural communities. When it became difficult or impossible to find enough guarantors to risk twenty-five or fifty dollars to assure the minimum cost of the season's activities in the individual towns, the last of the main props supporting the institution had been withdrawn. By the middle twenties, Keith Vawter told the author, "the handwriting was on the wall," and in 1926 he disposed of his circuit holdings.

Chautauqua did not experience a sudden collapse; rather, it faded gradually from the American scene. Valiant efforts to save it by the bureau managers and by many local devotees, who could not be reconciled to its departure, prolonged its existence into the thirties, and some units continued stubbornly into the forties. Here and there, spectacular upsurges of loyalty and vigor were experienced, and hope for the future was revived. But even as in the present time television draws its increasing multitudes away from the motion picture and the radio, so these latter, two decades

ago, contributed powerfully to the decline and disappearance of chautauqua.

But the memory of that vanished wonder lingers on. Countless individuals look back with deepening nostalgia upon the years when it flourished in all its garish glory. Well remembered are the winter months of dreaming of the returning summer days that would bring chautauqua back to town to repeat the sequence of exciting events: the coming of the advance agent to work with the committee in planning the drive for season ticket sales; putting display cards in store windows and tacking them on telephone and electric light poles; hanging an enormous banner across Main Street; checking on the condition of Chautauqua Park where the actual drama would unfold.

With the coming of the big tent, excitement mounted to the sky, and the greater part of the population turned out to see the tent crew (often college boys enjoying this sort of summer-time employment) pound the pegs in place, raise the big top, erect the platform, set up the chairs and benches, and make all ready for the arrival of the superintendent and the talent.

The performers inspired wonder and awe. Overlooked was their weariness and travel-worn appearance. Even their progress to the mean hotel off Main Street or the spectacle of their eating at the counter of the Royal Cafe failed to dispel illusion. To dwellers in the hinterland, they were artists from another world. Presently they would stand upon the platform, authoritative and glamorous, to move and delight the multitude.

While no section of the United States was unaware of this extraordinary social phenomenon, the region of its greatest concentration was the Midwest, and Iowa was the center of circuit activity. Chautauqua was good for the people, and they received it gladly. It kindled a light each summer in rural America, and its afterglow was a wealth of treasured memories that brightened the ensuing winter. Not only did it enrich the social experience of its host of devoted followers, it also broadened their intellectual and aesthetic horizons, for within those enormous tents they heard better speaking, listened to finer music, and saw more notable people than in all their previous existence. Nor can it ever be known how many found in it an influence that changed the very current of their lives. Having seen in some incident of the chautauqua season the lifted veil of beauty, or caught from a vibrant speaker the accent of inspiration, they sensed as never before the world of poetry and action, and were swept from narrow moorings to voyages of discovery and achievement.