



*Clarinda Seeks
“the Thrills
of Human Imitation”*

The Development of Theater
in an Iowa Chautauqua

by Landis K. Magnuson



SHSI (DES MOINES)

*The Chautauqua
Opens to day,
Down by the flowing river.*

*It's a big thing;
Hear'm talk and sing,
Regret it? Never! Never!*

Clarinda's open-air Chautauqua auditorium is packed on August 22, 1912, to hear orator William Jennings Bryan. Theatrical performances would also draw large audiences. Local attorney William Orr (white-bearded man in the front row, lower right) helped establish Chautauqua in Clarinda. (Photograph by J. Christensen of Clarinda.)

Citizens of Clarinda, Iowa, were greeted with this enthusiastic message on opening day, June 15, 1897, of its first Chautauqua. Beginning that year, Chautauqua assemblies in Clarinda would attract crowds for thirty-five years, making it one of the longest existing Chautauquas in Iowa. As elsewhere, the Clarinda Chautauqua clung to its original moral and educational tone. Yet a close look at the yearly programs and local newspaper cover-

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What exactly was "Chautauqua"?

According to a 1913 Chautauqua brochure in Iowa City, "The Chautauqua is not a circus, although it is usually held in God's great auditorium, the open air. It is not a theatre, although it presents clean amusement features and elevating entertainment. It is not a summer lecture course, although men and women of national fame appear on its platform and deliver the highest type of inspiring addresses. It is not a camp-meeting, although its ethical, moral, and religious nature is everywhere evident. It is not a musical festival, yet it engages the best musical attractions at its sessions. It combines in the finest blending the attractions of the circus, the wit and wisdom of the stage, the religious zeal of the pulpit and the outdoor benediction of health, rest, and fellowship."

Chautauqua Lake, New York, the first Chautauqua was a gathering or assembly designed as a two-week educational encampment for the training of church school teachers. Although the founders first based "The Chautauqua Sunday-School Assembly" on devotional meetings, sermons, and illustrative exercises, eventually inspirational lectures and informational seminars on secular topics were added. Still, the name Chautauqua became steadfastly connected with morally correct and uplifting presentations of a cultural and informative nature.

Local promoters apparently felt it necessary to emphasize Chautauqua's lofty purposes to the townspeople in 1897. "The Chautauqua," they explained, "is for busy people who left school years ago and desire to pursue some systematic course of reading and study in History, Literature, Science, Art and Music." The article in the local *Clarinda Herald* continued, "It is the People's University. It leads to a broader culture and a higher

Wednesday, August 9. Grand Opening Day

- 1:30 p. m.—Form on the square.
- 1:45 p. m.—Parade starts for grounds, led by the 55th Infantry Band. Boys' Farm Camp and Girls' Home Camp, followed by citizens.
- 2:00 p. m.—Music, 55th Infantry Band.
- 2:30 p. m.—Opening of Assembly.
- 2:35 p. m.—Address of Welcome.
- 2:45 p. m.—Address, G. W. Bain.
- 7:30 p. m.—Music, 55th Infantry Band.
- 8:15 p. m.—D. W. Robertson, finest moving pictures ever shown in Clarinda.

Thursday, August 10. Children's Day.

- 9:30 a. m.—Music, Hruby Concert Co.
- 9:45 a. m.—Literary Hour, Leon H. Vincent. "Hawthorne." This is the same subject that he used for the first lecture ever delivered at our Chautauqua.
- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Hour, T. H. McMichael, D. D.
- 1:45 p. m.—Concert, Hruby Brothers' Concert Co.
- 2:30 p. m.—Entertainment, Edmond Vance Cooke. "The Poet of Childhood."

- 4:30 p. m.—Round Table.
- 7:30 p. m.—Music, Hruby Concert Co.
- 8:15 p. m.—Entertainment, Robertson Projectoscope Co. par excellence.

Friday, August 11—Sunday Day

- 9:30 a. m.—Music, Hruby Concert Co.
- 9:45 a. m.—Literary Hour, Leon H. Vincent. "Lowell, the Critic and Letter Writer."
- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Hour, T. H. McMichael, D. D.
- 1:45 p. m.—Music, Hruby Concert Co. and Miss Lynn.
- 2:30 p. m.—Address, W. A. Sunday, the world's greatest evangelist and cleanser of city civic life.
- 4:30 p. m.—Round Table.
- 7:30 p. m.—Concert, Hruby Concert Co.
- 8:30 p. m.—Grand closing entertainment D. W. Robertson and his great company "spectacular."

Saturday, August 12. Old Soldiers' Day.

- 9:30 a. m.—Music, Hrubys.
- 9:45 a. m.—Literary Hour, Leon H. Vincent. "Emerson, a Personal Study."
- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Hour, T. H. McMichael, D. D.

standard of character. Non-sectarian—promoting fraternity and elevating the Home, the Church and the State.”

Whether the explanation was needed is uncertain, for Chautauquas had begun their phenomenal spread across the nation. The first to imitate the New York assemblies for Sunday School teachers were individual local assemblies that, in an attempt to claim separation from the original but also associate with its good name, came to be known as “independent” Chautauquas (also called permanent or community Chautauquas). Later, “circuit” Chautauquas, with packaged programming and coordinated scheduling for communities on an established circuit, would arise through booking agencies such as Redpath, Vawter, and others.

Since Clarinda represented an agricultural, economic, and population center in southwest Iowa, and could also provide the requisite pastoral—and therefore inspirational—setting, it was a logical site. J. L.

McBrien, reportedly a representative of the national movement, had first suggested that the town begin a Chautauqua. Correspondence between McBrien, local attorney William Orr, and county superintendent of schools H. W. Deater led to a meeting of civic leaders to discuss the idea. Although a \$3,000 guarantee was required up front, a committee of local ministers, eager to see this morally sound program offered to their community, raised the money before noon the following day. Such a quick and generous response (typical across the nation) obviously speaks highly of the reputation of the Chautauqua movement, and of the desire by community and business leaders to promote the

Programming in 1911 ranged from literary and Bible hours, to bands and motion pictures, to Billy Sunday (“world’s greatest evangelist and cleanser of city civic life”) and the Hiawatha Indian Company.

Tuesday, August 15.

American Day.

- 9:30 a. m.—Music, Lyric Glee Club.
- 9:45 a. m.—Bible Hour, Dr. McMichael
- 10:45 a. m.—Literary Hour, Paul M. Pearson, Lecture Recital, “Riley.”
- 1:45 p. m.—Conc’t, Lyrics & Miss Lynn.
- 2:30 p. m.—Entertainment, Hiawatha Indian Co. This will teach you more about Indian life than you can learn in a year.
- 4:30 p. m.—Round Table.
- 7:30 p. m.—Concert, 55th Reg. Band.
- 8:15 p. m.—Hiawatha Play by the Ojibway Indians. Greatest spectacular production ever given.

Wednesday, August 16.

Women’s Day.

- 9:30 a. m.—Music, Lyrics.
- 9:45 a. m.—Bible Hour, Dr. McMichael
- 10:45 a. m.—Literary Hour, Paul M. Pearson, “Edgar Allan Poe.”
- 1:45 p. m.—Concert, Lyrics.
- 2:30 p. m.—Isabel Garghill Beecher, America’s greatest woman.
- 4:30 p. m.—Round Table.
- 7:30 p. m.—Concert, Lyrics and Victoria Lynn.
- 8:15 p. m.—Illustrated Lecture, Frank R. Roberson, the peerless lecturer and traveler.

Thursday, Aug. 17—Stuart’s Day

- 9:30 a. m.—Reading, Victoria Lynn.
- 9:45 a. m.—Bible Hour, Dr. McMichael
- 10:45 a. m.—Literary Hour, Paul M. Pearson, “Chantecler.”
- 1:45 p. m.—Concert, Williams’ Jubilee Singers, America’s greatest colored concert company.
- 2:30 p. m.—Address, George R. Stuart. If you miss this address you will regret it all your life.
- 4:30 p. m.—Round Table.
- 7:30 p. m.—Music, 55th Infantry Band.
- 8:00 p. m.—Music, Williams’ Jub. Sing.
- 8:15 p. m.—Ill. Lecture, F. R. Roberson with the finest pictures ever shown by any lecturer.

Friday, Aug. 18—Labor Day

- 9:30 a. m.—Reading, Miss Lynn.
- 9:45 a. m.—Bible Hour, Dr. M’Michael
- 10:45 a. m.—Literary Hour, Paul M. Pearson, “The Piper.”
- 1:45 p. m.—Williams’ Jubilee Singers.
- 2:30 p. m.—Address, Hon. John Mitchell, Vice-Pres. of the American Federation of Labor.
- 4:30 p. m.—Round Table.
- 7:30 p. m.—Concert, 55th Ia. Reg. Band
- 9:15 p. m.—Grand closing concert, Williams’ Jubilee Singers, Miss Lynn and others.

civic good and boost the local economy.

Once a community had agreed to develop a Chautauqua assembly, the next step was to find the speakers and performers—the “talent”—to fill the daytime and evening programs. Various booking agencies would send talent to the numerous assemblies, often arranging it so that an individual or group would perform a day or two in one town, then travel to the next town staging an assembly, and so on.

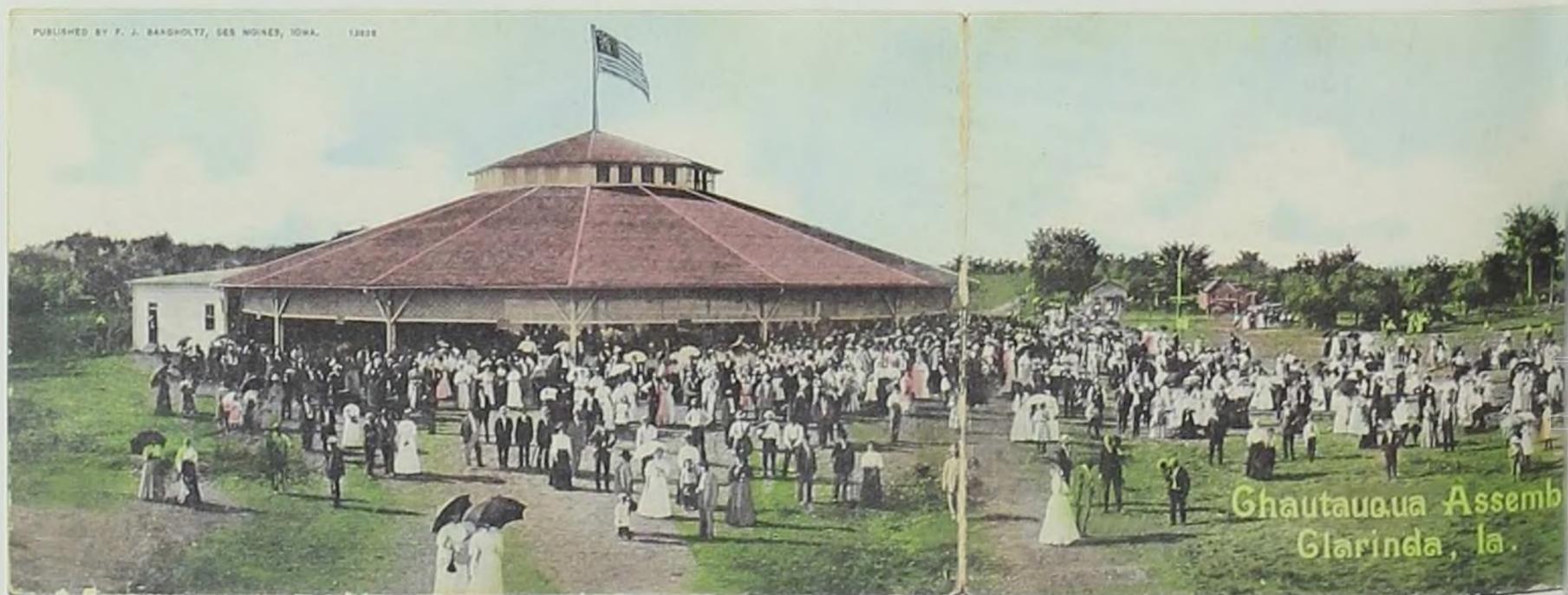
This routing of talent and the convenience of “packaging” certain acts for assemblies brought about the development of circuit Chautauqua, beginning in 1904 and largely perfected by 1910. At the height of circuit Chautauqua, this system of education and entertainment traveled to an estimated ten thousand small towns across this nation and reached as many as twelve million individuals each year. A community had only to be on the circuit to have all of its talent chosen and scheduled for its one- or two-week assembly.

Some communities, such as Clarinda, chose not to be on a circuit but to be independent Chautauquas, selecting their own talent and booking it through a variety of large and small booking agencies. By 1908, according to industry publications, as many as six hundred independent Chautauquas existed in America.

With the advent of independent and circuit Chautauquas, the movement truly thrived. Chautauqua concentrated and flourished in the Midwest, maintaining a long ex-

istence, especially in Iowa. In many instances the Chautauqua movement either introduced or fortified theater in rural America. Even though the traditional Puritan and midwestern work ethics had labeled theater evil, or at best, unnecessary, sponsorship by the socially and morally correct Chautauqua made theater more acceptable. As theater historian William Slout argues, “It is reasonable to assume that the acceptance of drama by the small-town Chautauqua audiences had a dampening effect on the formerly bristling antagonisms toward actors and everything theatrical.” Accordingly, Chautauqua must be understood as an important chapter not only in American intellectual and social history but in theater history as well.

Whereas current historians have focused largely on theatrical developments in metropolitan centers on either coast, they have neglected the theater of the great heartland of America. Standard theater history texts make little, if any, mention of theatrical events within the Chautauqua movement, and when they do they often disparage Chautauqua’s theater quality and value, in effect questioning the importance of the movement in the development of American popular entertainment. Because of Chautauqua’s long, independent existence in the midwestern county seat of Clarinda, we can trace the introduction of theatrical performances into local programming year by year as a way of gauging local acceptance of theater in an Iowa community. Furthermore, because Clarinda



always maintained an independent status throughout its history, this insured, in large part, that the annual assembly reflected and reinforced the moral, cultural, and artistic standards of the community, since the ultimate choice of talent always remained in the control of local committees. In the case of Clarinda, Iowa, theatrical entertainment was slowly and sporadically introduced until it held sway—in both content and financial concerns—over the Clarinda assembly.

Yet in the first twelve years of the Clarinda Chautauqua, there was little to suggest that one day the program would be dominated by theater—defined here as the performance of roles in play or operas (excerpts or full-length) using the traditional elements of costumes and make-up with selective scenery and lighting. Only occasional appearances by play readers or impersonators took place amidst the inspirational lectures, educational presentations, and musical concerts that filled the many days of a local assembly.

In 1906, for example, statesman and educator Booker T. Washington headlined the season, yet in a far less serious vein, the Boston Carnival and Concert Company also appeared. Labeling the Boston company's program "different" and "unique," the *Clarinda Herald* observed: "It held the large outdoor audience in close and interested attention from the beginning to the end." In its program of "music, pantomime, classic posing, butterfly dancing, and illustrated songs," the review continued, "Mrs. Dunne in her classic

posing won the enthusiastic admiration of all and the effects produced by the colored lights thrown from the lantern upon the butterfly dance were at once remarkably beautiful and quite novel. Every feature of the program showed a purity of art, refreshing and delightful. Sound, color and motion were brought into perfect harmony by the highest artistic skill."

Lecturers began to appear less frequently and less successfully. In 1907, for instance, Frederick Warde, "America's Greatest Tragedian turned Lecturer," drew only a small crowd, and local planners sought suggestions for insuring larger audiences for such worthwhile presentations. Mirroring a national trend, a varied fare of entertainment increasingly filled the talent schedules of the Clarinda Chautauqua.

Nearly all local news coverage of the 1908 Chautauqua focused on the building of a new auditorium. Local authorities boasted that "nothing to equal it of its kind [exists] west of the Mississippi." It replaced the tents or semi-permanent wooden structures that had served the Clarinda assembly to this date. The round, steel-framed structure measured 140 feet in diameter, with an added stage annex of roughly 60 by 40 feet. Although the auditorium was designed to comfortably seat 4,000 (about the entire population of Clarinda at that time), an additional 2,000 to 3,000 reportedly could stand under the eaves and still hear and see the performers. With scenery, footlights, dressing rooms, and an



Three-panel color "mail card" folds out to reveal Clarinda's new steel-framed Chautauqua auditorium, constructed in 1908 and here photographed by F. J. Bandholtz.

COURTESY NODAWAY VALLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM COLLECTION (CLARINDA)

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TENTS may be rented on the Assembly grounds as follows:
 10x12 wall tent, by the day, 75 cents; by the week, \$2.50; by the season, \$3.50; with floor, by the season, \$4.50; 12x14 wall tent, by the day, \$1.00; by the week, \$3.00; by the season, \$4.50; with floor by the season, \$5.75. 14x16 wall tent, by the day, \$1.25; by the week, \$3.50; by the season \$5.50; with floor, by the season, \$7.00. Bed springs, cots and chairs will be rented at low rate. Bedding should in all cases be brought from home or purchased on the grounds; it can not be rented. Large family compartment tents can be secured if desired. Write to C. S. McKee, superintendent of tents, remitting to him \$1.00 for each tent, and space will be reserved and tent ready for you on the first day. Be sure to state whether or not you wish a floor in your tent.

BOARD Meals and Lunches will be served on the grounds in the dining hall built especially for our assembly. Every arrangement will be made for the comfort and happiness of the campers and visitors generally.

Boys' Farm Camp. Girls' Home Camp

150 boys, 150 girls. Practical instruction in farming and home making for 10 days by best instructors in State. Expense \$7.00 including instruction, board and tent. Address REN LEE, Char.

COURTESY THE AUTHOR

Families often rented tents to camp on the Chautauqua grounds so they could take maximum advantage of day and evening programming. To ease housekeeping burdens, one could rent beds and bedding and eat in the dining hall. Mail service was even provided. Above, Clarinda Chautauqua "campers." Left: Panel from 1911 program describes variety of rental tents.

attractive proscenium opening, certainly Clarinda's Chautauqua stage was set for increased theatrical activity.

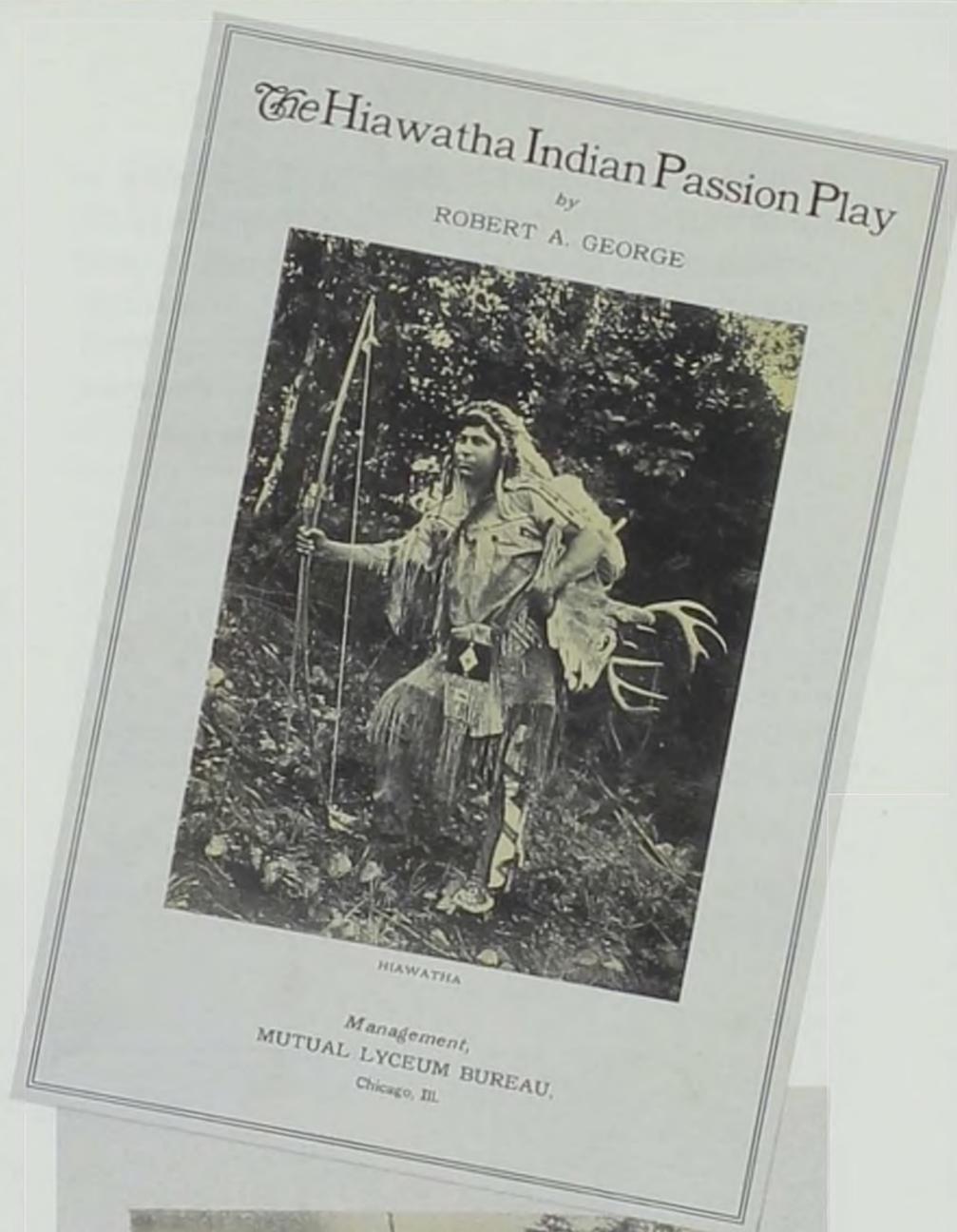
Clarinda attorney William Orr, the driving force behind the local movement, dedicated the building to "all that is true, beautiful, and noble." Calling it a "splendid Temple," Orr turned the facility over to the Chautauqua Board, emphasizing that the event foretold of "better things for Clarinda." For the youth of the community, here was an "opportunity for clean healthy pleasure and amusement," thus "shielding them from temptation." Clarinda's new structure did not set it apart from other assemblies; independent Chautauquas tended to eventually erect permanent auditoriums. (In circuit Chautauqua, the tent, stage, and seating were transported from town to town by an advance crew.) Clarinda's impressive structure, however, did

much to further the Chautauqua movement locally by embodying it in a very tangible manner.

The growth of Chautauqua in Clarinda no doubt also relied on the editorial support of the local newspapers, which consistently spoke out in favor of the assemblies. An August 1903 editorial in the *Clarinda Herald* crystallizes the prevailing attitudes: "There may be some who would really like to see the Chautauqua fail this year, but their numbers are very few in this locality and they are the ones who are always against the churches and every moral influence in the community. They want saloons and beer gardens and brothels and all kinds of immoral and disreputable resorts opened. We believe that the Chautauqua this year will be patronized to such an extent as to give these emissaries of evil a very serious backset in their desires to see our town in the hands of their crowd."

In light of such editorial support, one must recognize the obvious promotional interest that local newspapers would have in the continuation of annual assemblies. For example, even though the 1905 assembly netted less than \$50, a local editor reminded readers that half the gross income was "expended in Clarinda on advertising, printing, labor, lumber, light, water, etc." In addition, one should consider the expenditures by talent and patrons for hotel accommodations, food, transportation, and assorted merchandise. A healthy local economy (and Chautauqua) always bodes well for the community's newspaper. Even so, the same editor argued: "The value of the Chautauqua to Clarinda is not to be measured in dollars. It is a minister to the higher life of the community as are the church and the public school. It is education in a large, rich way." Such consistent praise for the Chautauqua movement continually characterized local coverage; nary a negative word is to be found.

Right: The Hiawatha Indian Passion Play was billed as "especially suited for churches and Chautauquas for it describes reverently this beautiful Messiah legend. . . . No one can hear it without receiving an impulse for a better life." A glass-lantern show or motion pictures often preceded the play performed by Ojibway actors.



Wickiup

LANTERN PAINTINGS

Mr. George is an artist in handling his camera and the views are pronounced by all to be the finest they have ever seen. We are indebted to Mrs. George, the gifted wife, for the artistic coloring which gives them the effect of beautiful paintings. She accompanies her husband part of the time and sings the songs of the Ojibways.

By 1909, we start to see the beginning of theatrical performances at the Clarinda Chautauqua. That year, the Hinshaw Opera Singers presented costumed opera "cuttings" (or excerpts). The *Clarinda Herald* reported: "In the evening the Hinshaw Opera Singers, who had made a favorable impression in

their short program in the afternoon, gave a full evening program, part of it in opera costume. Three acts of *Martha*, and some request numbers were given, the only objection to the program being that it was too short. The singing was highly artistic, and enjoyable to the large audience in attendance. The singers had to catch a train about 10 o'clock, or the program would have been longer."

Below: The Catha Woodland Players brought Shakespeare to Clarinda in 1912. The back of this flyer asserts, "Two years of successful Chautauqua work has proven that the Chautauqua is ready for high class entertainment. Wherever this Company went it proved the greatest drawing card of the program."

In 1911 the *Hiawatha Indian Passion Play* came to Clarinda. Publicity boasted that this small company of "trained and finished actors" from Canada carried its own "scenery and over a ton of outfits . . . converting the stage into a veritable Indian camp." The ten



Ojibway actors, according to a local newspaper, "are camped just North of the auto stand, next to the Washington Street fence. They do their own cooking and live their own home life as nearly as it is possible to do under present surroundings." (Generally, talent booked for more than one day stayed in local hotels or boardinghouses.)

As a thirty-minute prelude to the *Hiawatha Indian Passion Play*, "moving picture film" or hand-colored glass lantern slides were projected for the audience's enjoyment and education. Then, the twenty-nine scenes of the passion play unfolded as a narrator interpreted the action.

The passion play met with a mixed review. "It is altogether likely that the entertainment given by the Ojibways changed more notions in regard to Indians than would a month's reading or listening to lectures given by a white man," commented the *Clarinda Journal*. "Seeing is believing,' and with the object before one, preconceived notions and idealizations must give way to the prosaic actualities. The Indians delighted the young." This positive response, however, was tempered by the conclusion that "with the older members of the audience the sensations ranged all the way from a keen and studious interest to a bored indifference, a half disappointed curi-

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osity probably being the prevailing one."

The year 1912 heralded the only full-scale production of Shakespeare ever to appear on Clarinda's Chautauqua stage. The Catha Woodland Players presented an afternoon program built around the playlet *A Proposal Under Difficulties* and an evening performance of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. As a rule, extra excursion trains to transport large crowds were arranged for only major Chautauqua attractions, such as William Jennings Bryan. Yet on this specially declared "Shakespeare Day," added trains of the Iowa and Southwestern Railroad brought audiences to see the Woodland Players and the Chicago Operatic Company.

Among the audience for *As You Like It* was a *Clarinda Herald* representative, "anticipating it as one of the greatest treats of the season." "It undoubtedly was," the reporter recounted, "but we in common with about 2500 of the vast audience of probably 5000 people, heard not a word of it. People who heard said that the entertainment was splendid. We believe it was. The stage was beautifully decorated with trees and plants to make the forest scenes and they were certainly beautiful. The players were dressed in costumes of the time, and the lights, the scenery and the perfect acting of the players made the scene not soon to be forgotten.

"It was a great opportunity for people of Clarinda and this part of Iowa," the *Herald* continued, "and because half of them, a great many our guests, who came from a distance, heard nothing and were simply disgusted with the order, we must utter indignant protest. Why does not the Assembly get busy and enforce order? Why not a few policemen on the grounds who will arrest people if they won't keep still?"

The *Clarinda Journal* also blamed "the incessant gabble, gabble, gabble that was going on all around, inside the auditorium and out." "Can't people who go to places of public entertainment understand that listeners have rights—paramount rights—in such a place?" the *Journal* asked. "Not so with the gabblers. Tennyson's 'Brook' which goes on forever, is a proper simile for them." To the dismay of many, a fully mounted Shake-

spearean production never again took stage at the Clarinda Chautauqua.

Three years passed before theater returned to the Clarinda Chautauqua. In 1916 the Hinshaw Light Opera's two-hour afternoon performance included piano solos, solo and group singing, the last act of *Faust*, and a sketch from *Madame Butterfly*. In the evening the company presented Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*. Large audiences nearly filled the auditorium for this "very pleasing entertainment," the *Journal* reported. "A number of local hits inserted into the opera caused much laughter. Most of the parts were very well rendered and in doing the chorus work these trained singers made more music than the ordinary large chorus."

Local headlines in 1920 proclaimed that, despite possible negative reaction to the choice, the Clarinda Chautauqua would offer "grand opera," specifically Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*, a short opera performed by the nine-member Van Grove Opera Company. The *Clarinda Journal* reported: "The bringing of grand opera to Clarinda was a tentative venture on the part of the Chautauqua management and [booking agent] James L. Loar . . . [but] a company of which Mr. Van Grove is the leader would of course stand high in [the] eyes of the musical world, and those who know and appreciate the best in music found the opera Friday evening something that they can look back upon as having enjoyed to the uttermost."

Although no theatrical performances appeared in the next two years (1921 and 1922), one can view 1909, when the Hinshaw company had first performed opera cuttings, to 1922 as a period in which the Clarinda Chautauqua increasingly experienced the financial and aesthetic impact of theatrical performances. Various cautious moves by the

Right: In 1923, opera came to Clarinda, courtesy of Harry Davies (see front cover) and his company. His company performed *Pinafore* and *Said Pasha*. In 1925, the company performed again in the community. From the Hotel Linderman in Clarinda, Davies wrote booking agent Harry Harrison in August 1925 that "I have a good company and first class operas, fine costumes and very reasonable."



G O O D S I N G E R S

	<p>DAVIES OPERA COMPANY in "PINAFORE"</p>	
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local talent selection committee had proven to be prudent, and the foundation was laid for theatrical performances to dominate the Clarinda Chautauqua in its remaining years.

After 1922, even though the demands of touring limited cast size and scenery, Clarinda audiences received play companies extremely well. Ticket sales, increasingly dependent on plays, enhanced the good fortunes of the local assembly. Beginning in 1923 a pattern developed: two companies each performed twice during the assembly. As a result, theatrical presentations became an essential and significant part of the Clarinda Chautauqua program. Whereas in the fourteen years before 1923, fewer than ten theater performances appeared (most were full-length operas and cuttings), in the following nine years over thirty productions took stage.

Since each year Clarinda's Chautauqua organizers selected the talent from that offered by various buying cooperatives, did this shift to theater represent a change in the organizers' attitudes and choices, or in the availability of theatrical talent? The evidence suggests that organizers and the public had overcome any reservations and now desired theater, and that theatrical performances, in fact, generated needed income for the assembly. Similar tendencies appear throughout the Chautauqua movement nationally, independent and circuit alike.

In 1923, the Harry Davies Opera Company presented the comic operas *Said Pasha* and *Pinafore*. Unlike earlier groups that had performed only cuttings, the Davies company presented complete productions of light operas without the chorus but with elaborate costumes and stage settings. *Lyceum Magazine* of November 1919 noted: "Harry [Davies] says Caruso sings better than he, but he don't dress his part any better." [See Davies as Don José in *Carmen* on the front cover.]

Along with careful attention to technical elements, the Davies company went to lengths to "localize" their performances, typical of touring Chautauqua performers. "Evidently they were on the job all day," the *Journal* noted, "and the Farm Camp, and the Chautauqua board, Billie Ward's bus, and *The Herald* and *The Journal* were all in line for

good natured banter which fitted into their play. Every one seemed musically and dramatically an artist and it was good. We are only sorry for those who missed them."

The second company in 1923 was headed by actor, director, and playwright L. Verne Slout, who boasted, "Each play is built around some message that we wish to bring to the people. They don't realize we are preaching to them, tho, till they reach home and start thinking of the plot." The *Page County Democrat* thought the company "was of the highest order of merit and many have requested more of the same kind next year."

Although little is known about the Metropolitan Players who appeared in 1924, they presented two of the "classics" of the Chautauqua stage: *The Bubble* and *Cappy Ricks*. Edward Locke's *The Bubble* had run for 176 performances on Broadway (an average length for Broadway imports presented in Clarinda). While this run is certainly a respectable one, the play was clearly being puffed for Chautauqua audiences when claiming "an unusually long run in New York City," and that the play "convulsed New Yorkers for a solid year."

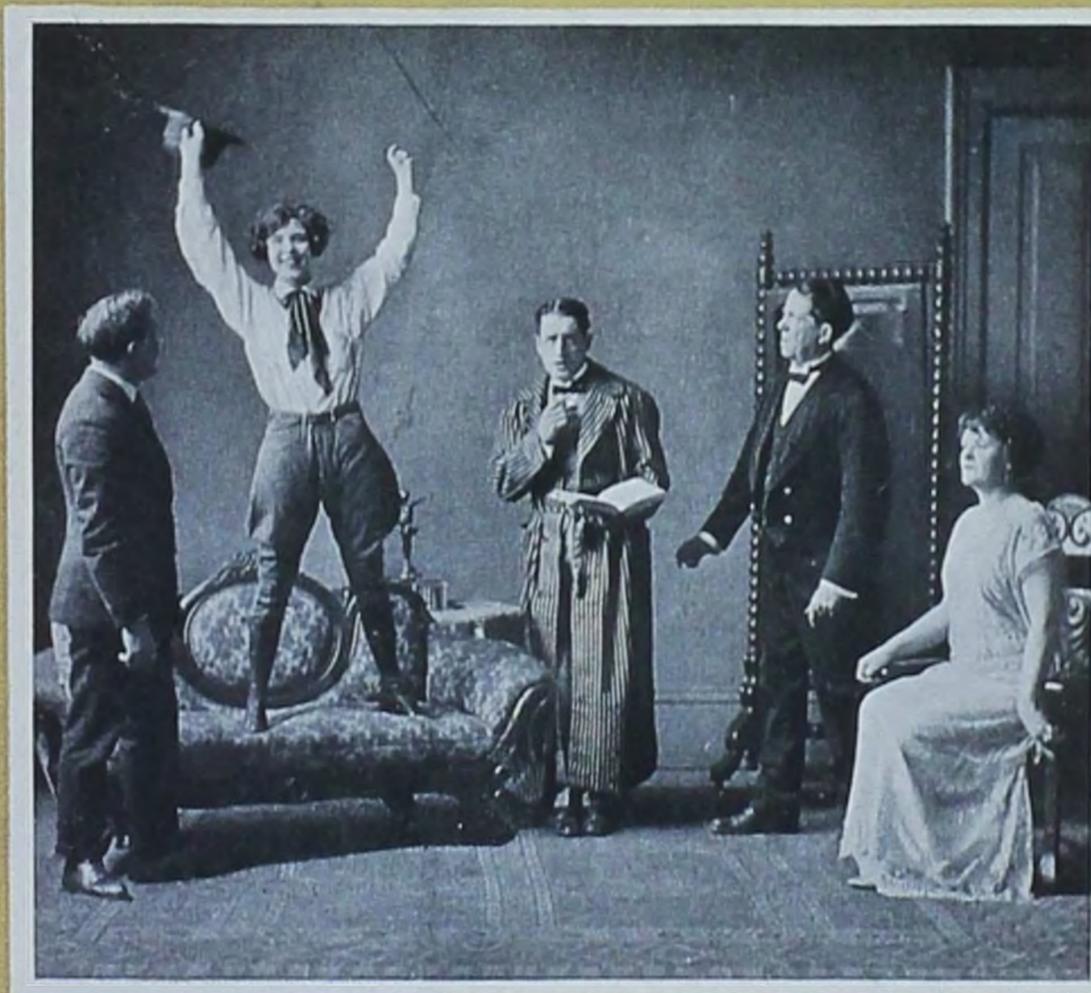
The second play presented by the Metropolitan Players—*Cappy Ricks*—had enjoyed a Broadway run during 1919 before many years on the Chautauqua circuit. After its presentation, the *Clarinda Herald* editorialized: "'Are we coming back to plays again?' is a question some were asking last week, following the success of two plays given at Clarinda Chautauqua, when crowds turned out both afternoon and evening. The Play was a good one, as good as could be expected under Chautauqua conditions and given by five people. . . . We make the guess that the stage will remain, and gain in importance from now on, rather than become less popular and influential. Acting has not died out, and it will not die out, so long as human nature enjoys the thrills of human imitation."

In 1925 the Harry Davies Opera Company

Right: The L. Verne Slout Players performed in Clarinda in 1923. Their publicity materials promised versatility: "Classic Dramas, Biblical Plays, Modern Comedies."

THE L. VERNE SLOUT PLAYERS

"Lyceum's Foremost Dramatic Company"



MR. Slout and Miss Whitworth might be termed the 'Sothorn and Marlow' of the lyceum world. They are doing for the lyceum and chautauqua what the above mentioned stars did for the legitimate theatre." The play used in their present tour is a Modern Comedy from the pen of Mr. Slout, who is the author of four other successful plays and many sketches.

Those who are interested in and desire the Better Art of the Theatre will find any production, whether Modern or Classical, made by Mr. Slout and Miss Whitworth, carefully mounted with special scenery, correctly costumed, acted with spirit, and finished to the minutest detail.

Our publicity service comes free to committees.

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The Tooley Opera Company



COMPLETE
SCENERY &

GORGEIOUS
& COSTUMES

THE COMPANY DE LUXE
Presenting OPERA in English

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again received enthusiastic support in Clarinda. Minutes of the Chautauqua Board of Directors reveal the unanimous request that the Davies Opera Company be the opening night attraction in order to attract large crowds. The *Page County Democrat* energetically proclaimed, "The men who plan the program could date them here for five years to come without any fear of disapproval." Yet, with the reduction of the assembly from ten to eight days beginning in 1925, it is evident that decreasing attendance and revenue were forcing organizers to curtail the annual event. Despite efforts to bolster support, Chautauqua's slow yet inevitable decline had quietly begun.

The 1926 Chautauqua Board quadrupled its advertising in area newspapers, reminding readers of "the happy plays" given in previous years and detailing the upcoming productions. Previews of one show emphasized the wholesome quality of plays that "come right out of the soil of this country where your potatoes and wheat for your bread come from." John L. Golden, producer of several successful productions, championed his own down-to-earth style as the "formula followed in all [of my] comedies." "My comedies," he continued, "are clean like the people and earth they come from. It's a rotten civilization that has to be filthy to be amused. . . . The American people want cleanliness."

Certainly the qualities espoused by Golden were those expected by the Chautauqua audiences, and which in turn strengthened support for theatrical companies such as the Elwyn Dramatic Company in 1926. Their opening afternoon performance in Clarinda was enthusiastically received, and later in the day, "people vied with each other in getting the seats close up . . . for fear that they would

miss something in the play of the evening."

Also appearing in 1926 was the Tooley Comic Opera Company, presenting Robert Planquette's *The Chimes of Normandy*. According to a company brochure, "It is the aim of the company to give every community a chance to have an 'opera season.' This company will not only sing the standard classics of Grand Opera but will also give revivals of the Comic Operas that are dear to the hearts of all laymen of music. The Company has for its purpose Opera 'for and of the people'; therefore all performances will be given in English and it will delight the reader to know that the Company is so well trained in diction and enunciation that almost every word will be understood with a remarkable clearness." For Chautauqua, Tooley adapted operas "to keep them within a two-hour time limit" and often rearranged the dialogue to "meet present-day conditions, so the audience will better understand the story."

Tooley typically used considerable scenery, pleasing audiences and impressing *Lyceum Magazine*, which remarked on Tooley's "780 pounds of scenery" as not "quite as much as the Chicago Civic Opera Company has in the Auditorium, but it's a lot to lug on the road, and they do wonders with it. They get to the [performance site] at 6 and get it set up by 7:30, then get into their costumes and warpaint by 8. Two hours of artistry, and then the teardown. Tooley says he has caught a 10:30 train, but Little Buttercup wiped off cold cream when the conductor punched her ticket."

Although scenic and lighting effects are seldom mentioned in local coverage, one reviewer commented about the Inskeep Players in 1927 and how their "thunder and lightning of [*The Mender*] seemed very realistic and as it had rained earlier in the evening, one could scarcely tell it from the real article." Yet while effective technical support undoubtedly was appreciated, the story and its ability to win and maintain an audience reigned supreme. A Chautauqua brochure for *The Mender* noted, "The plot runs smoothly and is not so complicated that events cannot be foreseen. It finishes with a great climax. . . . Two beautiful love stories

Opposite: Audiences loved the Tooley Opera Company's elaborate scenery and costumes. Tooley's *Chimes of Normandy*, performed in Clarinda in 1926, was billed by Tooley as "the most tuneful of all comic operas. An opera that has tunes that everybody can and does whistle." Tooley advertised that his company "has for its purpose Opera 'for and of the people.'"

The CLARINDA CHAUTAUQUAN

Published By The Chautauqua

AUGUST 7-14--1929



WHERE CLARINDA EXTENDS A CORDIAL WELCOME
Artists, Musicians, Teachers, Orators, Entertainers
Bible Class Each Day

A PROGRAM OF EDUCATION AND ENTERTAINMENT

Monday, August 7

- 7:30 p. m.—Prelude by Chief Red Fox.
- 8:00 p. m.—Bessie Larcher Trio with Frances Sellers, the Indiana Mockingbird.

Thursday, August 8

- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Lecture by Rev. Franklin R. Beery: "Pilate's Inscription Over the Cross: 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'."
- 2:30 p. m.—Bergman Players present comedy: "New Brooms."
- 7:30 p. m.—Bergman Players present "Smilin' Thru."

Friday, August 9

- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Lecture by Rev. Beery: "The Beneficent Malefactor, Who Saw the Dying Christ, the King."
- 2:30 p. m.—Carolina Jubilee Singers Concert.
- 7:30 p. m.—Prelude by Carolina Jubilee Singers.
- 8:30 p. m.—Lecture by Agnes Campbell Macphail, Canadian Woman in Parliament.

Saturday, August 10

- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Lecture by Rev. Beery: "The Reed in His Hand."—The soldiers in mockery, stumbled onto the fact of the Kingship of Christ.
- 2:30 p. m.—Concert by Philharmonic Ensemble.
- 7:30 p. m.—Prelude by Philharmonic Ensemble.
- 8:00 p. m.—John B. Ratto with Ensemble.
- 8:30 p. m.—Ratto on "Leading Characters in History."

Cover from 1929 program of Clarinda Chautauqua overlays eight-day schedule. The Bergmann Players performed on Thursday; the Salisbury Players, the following Tuesday and Wednesday.

REDPATH CHAUTAUQUA COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA

a Assembly

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unday Program Free

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Sunday, August 11

No Admission Charge

- 2:30 p. m.—Prelude: Rhythm Music by pupils of Helen Hall-Hoskinson; Singing and Whistling by Alice and Agness Scroggs of Indianola; Reading by Alice Cline, Clarinda.
- 3:00 p. m.—Lecture-Sermon: Dr. I. B. Schreckengast, Chancellor Nebraska Wesleyan College, Lincoln, Nebr.
- 7:00 p. m.—Rhythm Band; Scroggs Twins of Indianola; Alice Cline.
- 8:00 p. m.—Lecture-Sermon, Dr. John L. Hillman, President of Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa.

Monday, August 12

- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Lecture by Rev. Beery: "Joseph of Arimathaea"—who was given official permission to remove the body of Christ.
- 2:30 p. m.—Concert by Maude Buschlen's Music Party.
- 7:30 p. m.—Concert by Maude Buschlen's Music Party.
- 8:30 p. m.—Lecture by Judge Fred G. Bale.

Tuesday, August 13

- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Lecture by Rev. Beery: "Barabbas"—whom the people preferred to Jesus—released in the place of Christ.
- 2:30 p. m.—"Great Moments from Well-Known Plays" by Salisbury Players.
- 7:30 p. m.—"Adventurous Ann" presented by Salisbury Players.

Wednesday, August 14

- 10:45 a. m.—Bible Lecture by Rev. Beery: "Pilate's Question: 'What Then Shall I Do With Jesus?'"
- 2:30 p. m.—Program by Salisbury Players.
- 3:30 p. m.—Lecture by Ruth Bryan-Owen, Florida Congresswoman.
- 7:30 p. m.—"The Fool" presented by the Salisbury Players.

are woven into the plot of the play. It is funnier than most plays and a good health tonic."

The 1927 assembly cleared a profit of approximately \$200. "Monday, August 8 was the high mark, the front gate receipts amounting to \$215.00 while on the following Wednesday, the closing day of the assembly, the receipts were \$138.50," the secretary reported. "Plays and [motion] pictures were shown on both Monday and Wednesday, indicating that the average person likes that kind of a combination." These popular combinations would continue in following years.

In 1928, theatrical presentations again drew large audiences, generating significant income. And as should be expected, play companies accounted for a major part of the total expenditures for talent. At \$225 the Elwyn Dramatic Company represented the single greatest talent expense for that year, closely followed by the National Opera and Dramatic Company and "Motion Pictures," both of which cost \$200.

The number of theatrical presentations at the Clarinda Chautauqua peaked in 1929 with the Bergmann Players presenting two Broadway successes, *New Brooms* and *Smilin' Through*. Additionally, the Salisbury Players presented the Broadway product *The Fool*, the play *Adventurous Ann*, a variety program, and a program of scenes titled "Great Moments from Well-Known Plays."

"Great Moments" entailed "crowding into a two-hour program the high spots and thrilling episodes from . . . well-known and popular plays. The names of the plays from which these episodes are taken are purposely withheld. One of the features of the program is the surprise the selections of the plays brings to the audience. Each play is well-known and a favorite. Every play has its dull moments and its great moments. By selecting the latter only, the audience gets the gist of the entire play, with the thrills and excitement of complete production." Obviously, the success of such a program relied upon a knowledgeable audience familiar with numerous plays. By this time, such an audience was to be found in Clarinda and countless other Chautauqua communities.

Despite the increasing dominance of motion pictures in the community, a 1930 *Clarinda Journal* editorial pleads for local support of live dramatic presentations, especially "traditional" theater pieces: "We have heard many persons recently remark that they longed to hear the real people in drama once more, and that it would be a pleasure to hear again even *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *East Lynne*, or some other old timer, just anything so that they could see and hear the actors, themselves." The *Journal* continued, "At last year's session, the largest crowds were present when the program consisted of dramas, and this year will be no exception."

By now, across the nation and locally, Chautauqua organizers were struggling to control costs and appeal to increasingly diverse tastes. In response, booking agencies offered more varied fare, such as the Randall Entertainers, who took stage in Clarinda in 1930. This company of five used vocal and instrumental music, dramatic sketches, and readings for their three concerts (two sacred and one operatic) and standard two plays.

Acknowledging the rise of such versatile groups, a 1930 editorial recognized that these changes were necessary for Chautauqua to survive: "Certainly the program is desirable, for varied entertainment. Of course we must have some 'whoopie.' But along with this came lectures, musical programs and the popular player companies. We do not know that brother [and local Chautauqua organizer] Wm. Orr would approve of every number, if he could be with us as of yore. But it's the kind of program which sells the tickets and causes people to come again."

Even though the assembly was shortened in 1931—this time from eight to five days—two theater companies each performed twice that year. While the Bergmann Players and the Bennett Players received considerable advance newspaper coverage, so did Chautauqua in general. "You will be glad to know, I am sure, that with all of the hard times and depression, the people are now turning more to the serious forms of entertainment," Harry Harrison, secretary of the Redpath-Loar Independent Chautauquas, assured local organizer Francis J. Rogers in a letter



Booking agent James Loar was a driving force behind independent Chautauquas such as Clarinda's.

quoted in the *Clarinda Journal*. "Chautauqua seems to be staging a real comeback."

The *Clarinda Daily Herald* agreed: "There are indications of Chautauquas staging a comeback this season, after having been more or less affected by the multiplicity of entertainment vying with each other for a share of the family purse."

Such sentiment remained, however, only wishful thinking as community support continued to wane. In response to the performance of *The Big Pond* in 1931, a "combination of laughter and absolute stillness spoke the interest of a crowd of about 750 persons." Such attendance is telling, for during the first years of play performances (1909 to 1912), audiences of 2,000 to 5,000 might well have been expected for an event, especially a play performance.

The day after the 1931 assembly ended, the *Herald*, while optimistic that Chautauqua would continue, perhaps unwittingly wrote an appropriate eulogy: "Since the days when profits from Chautauqua purchased the present property and erected a fine auditorium, competition in the amusement business has increased many fold. Staying at home, the radio brings excellent programs of music, many of them 'canned,' but affording a selection to suit the hearer's taste, all the way from classical selection to the Hay Mow Five.

"Motion pictures came," the editorial continued, "added to them being the talkies. The highest grade of pictures are shown at the Armory theatre, combining the plot of a story, the acting of the greatest living tragedy actors, and comedians with the spoken word. Women take their fashions from what the movie actors wear, even the fashion magazines having grown old fashioned. News reels bring the latest features—greater than magazines, for there you have the action as well as the story.

"But most important of all, perhaps, the family car and improved roads are taking us places we never could go before. It forms habits of going that are hard to break. Sitting through ten or a dozen Chautauqua sessions is different."

In April 1932, the Clarinda Chautauqua contracted with Redpath-Loar for a five-day assembly featuring the Freeman-Hammond players. But advance ticket sales were weak, and the package price of \$1,200 posed too great a risk for local organizers in such difficult financial times. After an outstanding unbroken record of thirty-five years, the Clarinda Chautauqua fell silent.

To what can we attribute the Clarinda Chautauqua's long existence? Of considerable importance, certainly, is the alliance begun in 1920 with James L. Loar, owner and manager of then-named "Independent Co-operative Chautauquas" of Bloomington, Illinois. By the height of his career, Loar had built up his Chautauqua service to include three hundred towns, thus dominating the independent Chautauqua business. (Later, due to the general collapse of the industry,

energetic competitors joined forces to survive, as seen in the creation of the Redpath-Loar agency.)

Until 1927, when he died at age sixty-three, James Loar maintained a keen business interest in independent Chautauquas and a sensitivity to community morals. His contracts with talent include three items (as quoted by *Lyceum Magazine*) that demonstrate his principles: "The first requires Sunday programs to be definitely suitable for the day. The second requires that personal conduct of the talent both on and off the platform must be above public or private criticism. The third prohibits cheap jazz music in any form."

While known for his kind manner, buoyant spirits, and undying enthusiasm, Loar fought tenaciously for what he thought was fair and just. Priding himself on not merely "selling" Chautauqua, but "building" it as well, he sometimes helped protect assemblies against deficit in their early years—and he protected his turf. For instance, in July 1926 he wrote then-competitor Harry Harrison of the Redpath-Chicago office, vehement over Harrison's Redpath agents soliciting in one of his "towns": "The platform superintendent at the Delaware Chautauqua writes me that one of your men was in Delaware trying to break down my hold on that town. I took Delaware when it was a dead and defeated Chautauqua town. I have underwritten them against loss, and lost money there year after year until now it is in the best shape it has ever been. . . . You surely can not expect me to remain passive and smiling, and gentle and sweet, and have your men go to my towns and try to hit me in the face and bloody my nose. Any man that has any red blood in him at all can not possibly be expected to stand for such unethical matters long without trying to do something to protect himself, and even doing things that he wished he did not have to do."

This characteristic pride and fervor helped Loar build his business, and it also helped communities such as Clarinda maintain their status as independent Chautauquas. In the twelve years (1908-1919) before Clarinda contracted with Loar's buying coop-

eratives, the local assembly's deficits totaled nearly \$5,800, primarily due to costly and uncoordinated routing problems and travel expenses of talent. For example, film projectionist D. W. Robertson once performed in a town only twenty miles from Clarinda, then traveled across the state to Illinois for his next engagement, then back to Clarinda in western Iowa.

Loar's system simplified schedules and passed the savings onto local assemblies. "I am independent in the respect that all the attractions are selected by the local committee," Loar explained. "I am a circuit only in the sense that they waive any personal choice that they might have that these attractions they select will appear on their program [on a certain date]. In other words, they may need to take the Davies Opera Company on Friday instead of Monday, for if I got them to them on Monday they might have to go two or three hundred miles extra railroading, while by Friday I could take them right through the towns without additional jumps." Thus Loar provided local control plus the power of a buying cooperative.

The system paid off for Clarinda, as noted by Loar's successor, Oscar Hall: "Clarinda is to be congratulated on sustaining such a successful Chautauqua in these days of financial depression and when everything in a similar line has slumped heavily. There are a few towns like Meadville and Plattsburg, Missouri; Lincoln, Nebraska; Washington, Fairfield, and Mediapolis, Iowa that, like Clarinda, are making a success of their Chautauquas these days and they are all to be congratulated." While under the guidance of Loar and Hall (from 1920 to 1932), the Clarinda Chautauqua posted a loss only once—amounting to less than sixty dollars—a pittance compared to the \$5,800 deficit before the town worked with Loar.

Undeniably, Loar secured the financial stability of the Clarinda Chautauqua. Yet the part that theater played in prolonging the assembly's existence must not be overlooked. Consider that as "Play Night" became the Clarinda Chautauqua's major cultural attraction by the mid-1920s, it also became its major financial support. Records show that at-



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On the back of this 1908 postcard of Clarinda's Chautauqua, one "Bertha" wrote to her friend "Alma" this message: "On the other side is the crowd I saw today. Can you tell which one is me? I wish you could have been here today. I am sure having a swell time." By 1932, Clarinda's Chautauqua no longer meant a swell time. Americans were now amused by motion pictures, automobiles, and radio—and beleaguered by the Great Depression.

tendance and profits on the days of play performances were rivaled only by the appearance of a personage of the stature of William Jennings Bryan. But even though all of these factors kept the Clarinda Chautauqua on solid financial ground for many years beyond the demise of neighboring Chautauquas in Iowa and throughout the nation, they could not stem the inevitable.

Numerous reasons have been proffered concerning the collapse of Chautauqua. Based upon years in the business, Harry Harrison poetically concluded: "It died . . . under the hit-and-run wheels of a Model-A Ford on its way to the movies on a new paved road. Radio swept it into the ditch, and the Wall Street crash and the subsequent depression gave it the *coup de grace*." Chautauqua historian Joseph Gould was more critical: "Chautauqua began to die when the great issues disappeared. Aside from the serious political speakers and the dedicated reformers,

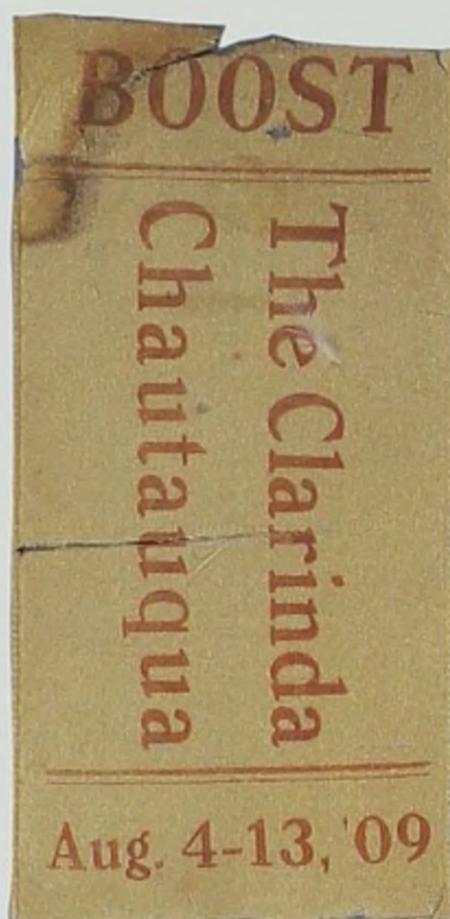
the circuits had relatively little of lasting value to offer. Dramatic offerings, although frequently presented by skilled performers, were innocuous bits of sunshine or foreshortened versions of Shakespeare."

Locally, the *Clarinda Herald* remarked: "Many people regret that no session of Clarinda Chautauqua is to be held this year, after an unbroken record of 35 sessions, this summer's session to have been the 36th. But of course it could not be helped. The time to decide yes or no as to the session came right in the middle of our recent 'bank holiday.' The important job of selling tickets, to insure financial success to the undertaking had not been accomplished. The Loar Redpath association, furnishing the program, could not be expected to take all financial responsibility. Hence Clarinda folks who have been accustomed these many years to have ten days of entertainment in Chautauqua auditorium will have to forgo that privilege one year.

"Now that the present generation have let Chautauqua drop," the *Herald* continued, "the question is pertinent—whose fault is it that the sessions continue no longer? Looking elsewhere, we see that the 'independent' Chautauquas have all been dropped. The days of the Booker T. Washington and Carrie Nation crowds have gone. People demand things differently now. Political orators have to 'cut it short.' Even the picture shows must simply hint at a truth, then jump to the next scene. The best that Chautauqua lovers can do is to wait, and hope for return of Chautauqua next year."

But hope as one might, the Clarinda Chautauqua had run its full course, as had most in the state. Whereas as many as forty-seven independents operated in Iowa in 1906, only a handful of Iowa community assemblies, independent and circuit alike, continued as long as Clarinda's. (Mediapolis, which maintained an assembly into the mid-1940s, claims to have been the last Chautauqua west of the Mississippi.) Nationally, the decline was similar. In 1920, approximately twenty-five Chautauqua bureaus managed nearly one hundred circuits; in 1932, only four bureaus managed five circuits.

For all real purposes, the national Chautauqua movement was dead and buried the year the Clarinda assembly folded. The deepening economic depression made any attempt to resurrect the Clarinda Chautauqua



COURTESY NODAWAY VALLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM COLLECTION (CLARINDA)

Booster ribbon from Clarinda's 1909 Chautauqua

a futile one. Never again would the massive auditorium fill with expectant audiences seeking culture, entertainment, and education. Never again would "Play Night" bring laughter and excitement to the Clarinda assembly. Yet the Clarinda Chautauqua left us the proud heritage of theatrical presentations from the Chautauqua platform, helping pave the way for the acceptance and support theater receives today in the great heartland of America.□

NOTE ON SOURCES

The *Clarinda Herald*, *Clarinda Journal*, and *Page County Democrat* provided a wealth of information. Local Chautauqua materials (such as board minutes and correspondence) were found in the Clarinda Public Library. Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa, holds the enormous Redpath Chautauqua Collection and bound volumes of *Lyceum Magazine* and *Platform World*. Other sources include the Chautauqua Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City), and the collections of the Museum of Repertoire Americana in Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Major secondary sources include: Victoria Case and Robert Ormond Case, *We Called it Culture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948); Joseph E. Gould, *The Chautauqua Movement; An Episode in the Continuing American Revolution* (New York: State University of New York, 1961); Harry P. Harrison, as told to Karl Detzer, *Culture Under Canvas: The*

Story of Tent Chautauqua (New York: Hastings House, 1958); R. Alan Hedges, *Actors Under Canvas: A Study of the Theatre of the Circuit Chautauqua, 1910-1933* (diss., Ohio State University, 1976); Charles F. Horner, *Strike the Tents: The Story of the Chautauqua* (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1954); Jesse L. Hurlbut, *The Story of Chautauqua* (New York: Putnam, 1921); Gay MacLaren, *Morally We Roll Along* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1938); Hugh A. Orchard, *Fifty Years of Chautauqua* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1923); William L. Slout, *Theatre in a Tent: The Development of a Provincial Entertainment* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972); and James S. Smoot, *Platform Theatre: Theatrical Elements of the Lyceum and Chautauqua* (diss., University of Michigan, 1954).

I would like to thank Pat Cassat and Bill West in Clarinda for assistance with visuals and Jane Daly of Saint Anselm College for secretarial assistance.

An annotated version of this manuscript is held in the *Palimpsest* files, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).

