

The Chautauqua Society of History and Natural Science, was one of the first of its kind to be organized in the State of New York, in a County not having a large city within its limits. It has now had an existence and held its annual meetings regularly for more than a quarter of a century. It has always had a liberal and often a large attendance at its meetings; evidence that the people of the County have taken more than a common interest in its purposes. Although the Society has been favored in this important respect, it has not been so fortunate in other ways. The County was one of the last to be settled, and one of the poorest during the pioneer period, and consequently was not encouraged to collect and preserve its history as older and richer counties have been able to do, and has not been provided with a building or rooms for the safe keeping of books and documents, and ancient relics. Moreover, the story of the Indian tribes that formerly occupied it is not very closely connected with that of the Iroquois nations, who dwelt for several centuries in Central New York, and who have chiefly occupied the attention of historians. The pioneers of Chautauqua, were also for many years isolated from the settlers of the rest of the State, and had somewhat different experiences, and have consequently failed to attract the attention of chronicles, as have the older parts of the state.

In fact, Chautauqua County and the regions along the head waters of the Allegheny, have been in the past, more intimately associated with events occurring in the Valley of the Mississippi than with the happenings of Northern and Eastern New York. The earliest settlement of the County was made at Westfield by people from Pennsylvania. In the south part of the County the first pioneers came from the Valley of the Allegheny. For many years the settlers in the North Western part of Chautauqua obtained supplies from Presque Isle, and all the Southern part of the County boated hardware and other necessities up the Allegheny from Pittsburg, and in turn rafted their lumber (nearly their only export) down that river to Cincinnati. Even the ancient Eries, who long had dwelt in Chautauqua County, originally came from Ohio; and it is quite likely that the races who preceded them came from the Southwest also. The portage between Lake Erie and Chautauqua Lake, was the chief gateway for the Indian tribes of Canada and New York to the Mississippi Valley, long before white men knew

the continent, and since the Eries were destroyed, exploring parties and military expeditions of the greatest importance, French and English, have passed over this ancient portage. Since the settlement of the County, salt in considerable quantities was transported from Onondaga over it, and down the Allegheny, to supply the early Southern market. It thus appears that Chautauqua County has an ancient history peculiarly its own, closely connected with the Mississippi Valley and quite as interesting as that of the rest of the State.

Even to this day, the material interests of Chautauqua County, and in a measure its political interests, and history also are isolated from that of the rest of the State, owing to its extreme Western situation, and to the circumstances of its early settlement. Its pioneers belonged to the poorest class of frontiersmen. A large proportion of those who migrated West, through Central New York, soon after the Revolution, when land titles had become established, and journied along the southern shore of Lake Erie, to settle upon the Connecticut Reserve in Ohio, or journeyed still onward to become the first settlers upon the grand praries of the West, were generally possessed of sufficient means to make a complete payment for their lands; while the woodsman, who staked his fortunes in the dense forests that everywhere covered Chautauqua, were the poorest of bordermen. They generally arrived without a dollar to pay for their land, or, even to purchase the necessaries of life, but had to rely upon the sale of black salts made from the ~~the~~ lye of ashes gathered from the burned timbers as they cleared their land. Because of their inability to pay at once, the further burden of a relatively higher price was exacted per acre for lands, less available for immediate use, because of the unusually dense forests that covered them, consequently none were invited to make a home in this wilderness, but stalwart and hardy young men, skilled in the use of the axe and the rifle. So there came a race of picked bordermen, who for powers of endurance have been scarcely equalled. There came along with the young frontiersmen his trusty wife, with a heart full of hope, to make a home in this ^{lovely} wilderness, - where he went, she went; - healthy, strong and beautiful young women, - wives who became mothers, - mothers who taught their daughters to weave and spin, and habits of industry; and taught their sons to speak the truth - that prime virtue, that is the mother of all the virtues.

It is the duty of this Society to do its part in rescuing from oblivion this ancient history, and to preserve the interesting story of these old pioneers, who settled in this then obscure and isolated part of the State.

The subsequent history of Chautauqua County, is much in contrast with its early beginnings, and is well worth preserving. It has been a record of progress in the building of railroads and cities and villages, and of the development of its Agricultural resources, and manufacturing industries.

In its later years an Educational institution has grown up, that has a fame that is world wide; that has not only done very much to promote the material prosperity of the County, but has carried its name abroad, and has given it great distinction. It will not be long before the people of this County, may claim with the same pride that Massachusetts does for Harvard and Connecticut for Yale, that the Chautauqua Institution and its unique and original educational system, originated within its borders, and in turn, the friends and supporters of that Institution, will remember with pleasure that it was established among its green hills, on the shore of our pleasant lake. All the facts relating to the founding of this Institution, that are connected with the County, and its people, should be preserved by this Society, as it is a part of its history.

The amazing progress that the world is making, warns us that a century hence there will be no uncivilized people, or unbroken forests, on the face of the earth; that what now remains of the great wilderness that once covered Chautauqua, will then be transformed into parks and lawns. To the man of the future, accustomed to the subtleties of an intricate civilization of a hundred years hence, the civilization of to-day, will probably seem to be but the simple methods of primitive men; and we of to-day, regarded as quaint, old fashioned people. Still more strange and crude, will seem to him the simple life of the borderman, who lived a hundred years before us. Time will then invest that frontier period with the air of romance, that we always give to the past, and inspire the future man to trace his lineage back to some ancestor, who may ~~have~~ have reared the first cabin in the shadow of the woods, by some well known forest stream; or to the founder of some log village, that at length grew into a city and thus to verify that he has blue blood.

in his veins more truly than he would trace his line back to some robber king, with blood stains on his escutcheon; or to some brutal, unkempt lord of England, who has McCauley tells us shared his banquet table with his dogs, and fed them where they lay in the straw, on the floor of his banquet hall.

Our Society has a further duty of large importance, that is not merely of a sentimental, but of a decidedly practical nature:- the preservation of the unofficial records of the County, which often aid in the construction of wills, and the just disposition of estates;- ancient documents, of which the evidence of their authenticity, is their antiquity - that sometimes throw light upon important public questions;- the genealogist's record of births, marriages and deaths, and which often settle questions of heirship and explain family history;- old books, and especially letters that aid materially in determining controversies, and in settling questions affecting substantial rights.

In the Middle Ages, before the revival of letters, the learning of the Ancient World, and all the treasures of Classical lore, were preserved in the monasteries of Europe, by the Monks, who thus rendered an invaluable service to mankind. Formerly in England, local history and the care of the estates of deceased persons, was intrusted to the Churches and Churchmen. A similar service is being rendered by the Historical Societies and libraries of Europe and America.