

THE AIMS, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF
CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION.

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Within the span of the lifetime of many of the members of the Chautauqua County Historical Society there has developed in our own County a great Institution. There has grown through an evolutionary process a movement and organization which has been one of the greatest educational forces in the United States. It has broadened the minds, strengthened their moral and spiritual forces, has enriched the lives of thousands and has gained an International reputation.

Such a movement could not have survived three wars and a major depression unless it had been founded on a solid basis by men of great vision and rare ability, and continued by other workers who had caught the inspiration of the original founders.

Two devoted men, Rev. John H. Vincent of Plainfield, N.J., a minister and National Corresponding Sunday School Secretary, and Lewis Miller of Akron, Ohio, an inventor, manufacturer and enthusiastic Sunday School worker, became friends and found a common interest in their desires to improve and extend the methods used by the best Sunday Schools, to teachers of all denominations and to promote a wider use of the Bible as an Educational force.

The Erie Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1871 had secured the use of a plot of land at Fair Point on Chautauqua Lake, as a camp meeting site. In 1873 Mr. Miller persuaded his friend to visit this site. They were so impressed with its possibilities that the following year they secured its release from the camp meeting association and

conducted there a Sunday School Assembly during a two weeks period, employing some of the nation's best known teachers of Sunday School methods. It was intended as a Teacher's Training Institute and was never in any sense a camp meeting. Both founders were opposed to having any of the evangelistic fervor connected with the usual camp meeting, as their aim was religion through the medium of education.

To avoid the picnic crowds the gates were closed on Sunday, insuring a quiet Sabbath. While started by such prominent Methodists, it was from the very beginning non-denominational. At the first Assembly, August 4, 1874, there sat on the platform, each giving a brief address, a Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Congregational and a Methodist pastor.

During the first three years of Chautauqua's history all of its aims were in the line of religious education through the Sunday School, for which there was a definite and carefully prepared program of a distinctly educational character. Other characteristics were that it maintained the sanctity of the Sabbath, charged a gate fee, and blocked every attempt to secularize or commercialize it for personal gain. It was not a money making institution, having no stockholders and no dividends. All profits were to be used either for improvement of grounds and buildings or for the enlargement of the program.

These were the foundation principles on which Chautauqua has stood and from which, with suitable modifications, it has grown to its present greatness. However, it is apparent that the original plans were very narrow in comparison with those of Chautauqua today. However there was never any narrowness in the minds of the two far sighted founders.

Bishop Vincent wrote in his book The Chautauqua Movement "Mr. Miller and I

had in our private conversation anticipated much that followed. In the original suggestion of Mr. Miller concerning the improvement of the camp meeting by the presentation on the platform of scientific as well as theological subjects, the wide relations of biblical and Sunday School work to general culture were recognized; and in the plan which I had made for so many years for the increase of 'week-day power' in connection with Sunday School work one may easily discover the germs from which developed in process of time, the varied departments of Chautauqua."

The founders had the dream of Education for everybody, everywhere and in every department of knowledge inspired by a Christian faith.

Dr. Vincent eloquently expressed the thought and hope in these words - "Education once the peculiar privilege of the few must in our best earthly estate become the valued possession of the many. It is the natural and inalienable right of human souls. The utter neglect of intellectual capacity is criminal, whether it be by menial or millionaire. No man has a right to neglect his personal education whether he be prince or plowboy, broker or hod carrier. Chautauqua has therefore a message and a mission for the times. It exhorts education, the mental, social, moral and religious culture of all who have mental, social moral and religious faculties; of all everywhere, without exception, The Chautauqua Movement is a school for people out of school who can no longer attend school, a college for one's own home, and leads to dedication of every day life to educational purposes."

Such a broad program of thought put into action led inevitably, not only to lecture and class work done at Chautauqua, but to correspondence and reading courses done in homes during the year, with directions and rigid examinations, followed by the awarding of certificates and diplomas.

It is not within the scope of this paper to relate the historical events connected with the development of Chautauqua Institution, and I shall mention only those having a direct bearing on its aims.

The changes which took place during the first twelve years were of tremendous importance and blazed the trail for much of what has happened since to stimulate the growth and development of this great Institution.

By 1886 it had grown from a Normal Institute for teachers to a great educational force for secular as well as religious education. From the first it had brought to its staff and platform many of America's greatest educators and prominent men from other fields. In 1875 Dr. Jesse L. Hurlbut came as a Bible teacher and for many years continued as a superb instructor and invaluable assistant in the work of organization and promotion. This was also the year in which General Ulysses Grant visited Chautauqua, arousing great interest and enthusiasm among the people of the surrounding area.

During this 12 year period two other events of major importance took place, namely the organization of The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle and the entry of Dr. William Rainey Harper as a teacher in the Summer Schools.

Dr. Hurlbut said: "The year 1878 marked a golden milestone in the history of Chautauqua, for then was launched the C.L.S.C. which has brought inspiration and intelligence to multitudes unnumbered."

The conception arose in Dr. Vincent's mind from the consciousness of his own intellectual needs. His school days but not his education ended in the academy. He wished to give to others who had also been deprived of advanced schooling something of the college outlook on life, by a carefully selected four year cycle of books in the fields of general culture, supplemented by prepared questions and examinations required for graduation, the

awarding of diplomas and the granting of seals for extra reading.

It provided a course of study to be carried through four years, with forty minutes as each day's task, for nine or ten months of each year in the various branches of knowledge, analogous to the four years of college study.

This was a radical departure for thus far everything on the Chautauqua program had been along the line of Sunday School training, and this was a forsaking of the well trodden path for a new world of secular education. Dr. Vincent and Mr. Hurlbut were surprised at the eager response for where they had predicted a possible thousand readers, in the first class in 1882, known as the Pioneer Class, 8400 names were enrolled. The zeal for home reading spread like wild fire, and C.L.S.C. Circles were formed in many parts of our own country and several in foreign lands. Falconer has the distinction of having the oldest continuous circle in this county. Many of you are familiar with the pageantry of Recognition Day, with its band, banners, parade, flower girls, and graduates passing through the golden gate to enter the Hall of Philosophy to receive their diplomas. This has meant much in fellowship through the years, as one can see in the happy faces of the old graduates each Recognition Day. A few have earned a hundred or more seals for extra reading and all seem very proud of their membership.

In 1950 there were about a hundred graduates with an estimate of 1500 readers. In all the years there have been over 50,000 graduates, with probably at least 500,000 readers.

The C.L.S.C. has served a splendid educational mission and it is aimed to continue the courses unless public interest wanes.

During this first twelve year period there also had been marked improvements in other lines. The children had not been neglected but were

inspired by the great teacher B.T. Vincent and the famous artist Frank Beard. In 1879 the grounds were lighted by electricity and in 1881 The Hotel Athenacum was opened for guests.

Summer Schools for secular subjects were also begun during this period. By 1879 a Normal School of Language and a Teacher's Retreat were established. The success of the C.L.S.C. suggested to Dr. Vincent correspondence courses in other secular subjects. This led to another innovation and The Chautauqua Correspondence Summer Schools are given credit by educational authorities, for being the first systematic plan for instruction of this nature, to be formally announced in the United States. Correspondence work directed from Chautauqua continued until 1900, when expenses became so great that it was necessary to leave this field to colleges and such special schools as Scranton.

Another development in our national life grew out of the Chautauqua movement, namely the establishment of other so-called Chautauqua Assemblies in many parts of the country, as well as the movable tent Chautauquas. In 1904 there were more than 150 such assemblies and a few still remain. The nearby one across the lake at Point Chautauqua founded by the Baptists seemed apt to become a formidable rival. Dr. Vincent is accused of checkmating this move by bringing to Chautauqua a brilliant young Baptist, Dr. William Rainey Harper, Professor in the Baptist School of Theology at Morgan Park, Illinois, afterwards to be the first President of The University of Chicago. Dr. Harper, who had a passion for languages, in 1886 was appointed principal of the Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts. Two years later he was made President of the College, and his administration introduced a period of great educators including Richard T. Ely, G. Stanley Hall, Richard G. Moulton, John Fiske and other famous men.

Among the subjects taught were Old French, Scandinavian language and literature, Sanskrit, Zend, Gothic, Hebrew, The Semitic languages, philology, physical education, arts and crafts. The School of Physical Education had also been established with Dr. Jay W. Seaver, Dr. W.G. Anderson and Jacob Bolin as leading instructors,

The period from 1886 to the great depression of the 30's was one of rapid expansion in physical properties, Summer Schools, music, and platform activities, together with marked changes in the personnel. In 1888 the Assembly season was extended to 58 days and Alonzo Stagg the famous athlete and coach came as an instructor. In this year Dr. Vincent was elected Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church. As his new duties would take him away more, he needed an assistant to care for his work, so his able son young George E. Vincent was appointed Vice Principal of Instruction and assumed a closer supervision of the program at Chautauqua. He and Dr. Harper made a team never excelled in the field of education and insured the permanence of Summer Schools at Chautauqua. In 1898 Professor George E. Vincent was formally appointed Principal of Instruction. This year the attendance in the Schools increased 25 per cent over the previous year, being distributed quite evenly among the departments. By this time nearly all the universities and many of the colleges were holding summer sessions, yet Chautauqua, first in the field, was still leading in its membership. In 1885, the Institution had received a charter from the Legislature of New York giving it the name Chautauqua University, and the power to grant degrees. In 1898 the trustees voluntarily surrendered the right.

1905 was another red letter year in the history of the Institution.

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In that year Dr. Arthur E. Bestor came to Chautauqua as an assistant. As a result of his unusual ability he became President in 1915, on the retirement of Dr. George E. Vincent. His masterful insight, vigor and personality insured the continuance of strong schools, platform and other activities as well as providing new features to meet changing conditions. Under his administration music and drama were emphasized, the New York Symphony coming in 1923 for a full five weeks and Norton Memorial Hall was ready to offer plays, operas and chamber music.

The aim was then as it is today and probably always will be, to offer in the Summer Schools as many courses, in as many subjects, as will draw students to Chautauqua or will satisfy the desires of those who may be guests, if only for a season. It will also be the policy to drop any subject or department which fails to meet the request of students or which can be given better in winter colleges or special technical schools. At one time courses in physical education, home economics and library training were given, but with the increase of courses offered in teacher's training schools and the increased requirements for certification such courses became impractical at Chautauqua and were dropped from the curriculum.

It was also a great building period before 1933. The Hall of Missions, Smith-Wilkes Library, The Smith Wilkes Hall, Hurlbut Memorial, the Woman's Club House and other buildings were erected.

A rich school program will always be offered. In the summer of 1950 New York University in charge of college work offered over 40 courses under 29 instructors. These courses included 12 professional workshops, the latest style in Education, including, among others, such subjects as

administration, child development, human relations, fund raising, educational guidance, music and art.

There were also non-credit courses in arts and crafts, the Theatre School, the School of Music, the Art Center, the School of Photography and the Writer's Work Shop, in addition to individual instruction and group work, especially in the fields of music, dancing, hobbies, English, piano tuning and business subjects. In the field of Adult education in more than 25 short courses, ranging all the way from Browning through Contemporary trends, and flower arrangement to the 1950 look, culture was offered. 20 high school courses were given at The Chautauqua Central School. The kindergarten, the Elementary School, the Boy's and Girl's Clubs, and the Columbus Boy's Choir made possible something of educational value, available for all youth and children.

From the earlier years of the Institution clubs have been formed for better fellowship among the various groups. Today, the most prominent are, The Woman's Club bringing each year many speakers, The Bird, Tree and Garden Club, a tremendous factor in beautifying the grounds and preserving wild life, The Sports Club in charge of most of the recreational program, The Golf Club, The Boy's Club, The Girl's Club, The High School Club, The College Club and The University Club.

All of the various activities meant an extension of the grounds and the provision of more buildings as well as a more expensive platform and school program. To meet all these demands considerable sums of money had to be borrowed. Under normal conditions administration expenses could be met and the interest paid, but Chautauqua became a victim of the depression. While from 1922 through 1928 income exceeded expenditures, the leveling off came in 1929. In 1930 there was an opening deficit of \$20,000,

followed by five disastrous years, gates being cut in half what they were in 1930. There was no money on hand to pay the interest and the chief creditor was pressing for payment. This led in 1934 to the request for a friendly receivership.

The Chautauqua Reorganization Corporation was formed, designed to save the Institution from destruction. By various ingenious and sentimental appeals, plus the payment by cottage owners of 20 percent of the assessed value of their property, the needed \$785,000 was raised.

The New York Legislature on April 1, 1937 amended the charter, limiting the power of trustees to incur debt or bind the Institution's assets. It forbids the Institution to mortgage its real property or to mortgage or pledge any of its property for capital expenditures without first securing approval of 2/3 of the deed and lease holders.

While the threatened catastrophe was thus avoided, it did not provide sufficiently for future years, so as a further safeguard in 1937 the Chautauqua Foundation was organized to secure a permanent endowment, and set about the task of obtaining a million dollars by The Diamond Jubilee Year. \$50,000 was collected on Old First Night 1937, and called the Hazlett Memorial to honor the man who had done much to free Chautauqua from the debt. Walter Roberts, President of The Foundation, assisted by a loyal corps of workers, completed the task, and there is now \$1,070,000 in the fund. This amount which is wisely invested will grow by other voluntary gifts.

During the depression period the ban was lifted on restrictions, permitting lake sports and golf playing on Sundays. Many have expressed the fear that such a change would lead away from the moral and religious tone that had been so characteristic of Chautauqua. While changes in line

with modern civilization were inevitable, the reverence for the Sabbath has been kept. The grounds are quiet, the gates are open for a free morning church service, services are held at the denominational houses and by separate groups in the early morning, all unite for the 10:45 Amphitheater service, vesper and lakeside services are held in the afternoon, and the day closes with a sacred song service.

The Foundation was requested to allocate \$100,000 of its funds, the interest on which will be used for the Department of Religion. Dr. Alfred E. Randell, head of the Department, in making the request said - "This Department is the key that locks all the other departments together in beauty and stability. This action is one way of saying to all the rest of the world, Chautauqua is one place where the worship of God is at the center of its multitudinous activities. It will constitute an official declaration that the original purpose that led to the founding of Chautauqua will be perpetually safeguarded. Whatever may happen to other departments in times of financial stringency or economic disaster, the Department of Religion will continue to function as long as The Foundation and Chautauqua Institution survive. The latent possibilities for future development are almost without limit, the improvement of the present equipment, the employment of additional teachers from the finest schools, the creation of scholarships for ministers, who would otherwise never be able to avail themselves of this place, are among the many plans under consideration." Dr. Randell's words have proved true, and during the past summer, in my judgment, moral and religious inspiration reached the highest point attained during the 34 years my home has been at Chautauqua, and the same is true of the entire program. Pastor Niemoeller and seven other great chaplains stimulated all who heard them. 17 religious classes were taught by experienced teachers,

there was a Minister's Conference, and the last week of the season was highlighted by the Institute of World Missions. .

The continuous aim from the beginning has been to bring to the platform as many great leaders and platform personalities as possible with conditions suitable and funds available. The amazing list contains seven Presidents of The United States and a host of governors, other political leaders, distinguished preachers, educators, leaders in social reform, poets, authors, musicians, famous women and distinguished foreigners. Edward Everett Hale visited Chautauqua eight times, President Garfield said "that Chautauqua was teaching people how to use leisure time", Theodore Roosevelt spoke of Chautauqua as "the most American place in America." It is the aim to have all public questions discussed freely. No speaker is ever told what he shall or shall not say, though known radicals would not be invited to come, as Chautauqua always seeks light rather than heat.

During last summer The Chautauqua Institution Historical Society was organized, whose aim will be to collect and preserve worthwhile historical material. Since its organization some valuable documents were found stowed away in an old attic.

In preparing this paper I wrote to each of the other trustees, asking each to state what in his or her judgment the future aims should be. While there were some differences of opinions of the relative values of the different probable developments, a digest of their replies and my private conferences with them indicated the following 9 aims in addition to ones already mentioned in this paper:

1. To maintain Chautauqua as a Christian Institution.
2. To be conservatively progressive, changing to meet new conditions without sacrificing the best of the old traditions.

3. To make it a family place, providing for the physical, mental moral and spiritual needs of all age groups from the youngest to the oldest.

4. To maintain its reputation for free discussions on the platform, a spirit of tolerance for individuals and to avoid the peril of conformity.

5. To remain a great American influence encouraging and practicing the true ideal of democracy.

6. To provide a beauty spot where people of various backgrounds may come for a period of creative living together.

7. To continue it as an educational Institution in an all inclusive sense, dependent on the fact that man is a spiritual being.

8. To help all adults who come to have a better understanding of world conditions, and to know the rest of the world as neighbors and not as foreigners.

9. To avoid any future serious financial trouble.

In closing I quote the concluding paragraph of President S.M. Hazlett's reply to my letter, which is a good summary of future aims:

"The Institution has not departed from its ancient "Land Marks", nor does it intend to do so in the future. Neither does it intend to "Stand Still" or "Stand By" in these changing times. Its purposes will be adhered to, but it will take its place in the ranks of those who believe in God, the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution of the United States and the American Way of Life. It will add its efforts to disseminate knowledge and will pioneer in new fields, whether in education, music, arts, science or religious endeavors. It will attempt new things for the advancement of the human body, mind and soul as such things appear to be worthy. It will remain American and Christian in all its endeavors."

This paper was prepared and read by
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County Historical Society on October 7, 1950.