

*Preservation is Progress
...may we be worthy stewards...*

Chautauqua Historical Society

Volume 4, Issue 1, Number 8

Winter 2006

- The Newsletter is published three times a year: winter, spring, and fall.
- The Newsletter is a membership benefit at the Piasa Bluffs Assembly (PBA), Patron, and Regular levels.
- **PBA and Patron** levels include a membership in the Chautauqua Network
- CHS members are encouraged to submit articles to the editor for inclusion in the Newsletter.

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*We have 10 PBA ,
64 Patron, and
7 Regular members,
and will send this Newsletter
to 125 households.*





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The President's message

Chautauqua's rich history gives us a sense of how we began as a community. People who came for the early Assemblies had several choices for lodging. There were a few cottages; the Piasa Springs Hotel was available, as were some rooming houses, and there were many tents. Imagine renting a tent and furnishing it. We are considering an exhibit of a real tent site around this season's July 4th celebration. Helen Margaret Thatcher has given us three wonderful original photographs of tents at Chautauqua that we will feature. Beyond that, we need lots of help. Does anyone know where we can find a canvas tent?

Our work preserving Chautauqua's photographs, postcards and program books is paying off. It is nice to go to the Ad building to sort thru the collection, have so much cataloged, all in one place. Before we were able to store things in the Ad Building the storage for important documents and records was under two beds - the bed at our house, and the bed at Judy Hurd's house. We have come a long way, and still have a long way to go.

Much of the information about the daily life and programs of the early Assemblies is found in program books. We have run into a major problem in our research for the years up to 1904. We only have two early program books in our collection, 1899 and 1901. We own no program book for at least 14 years of the beginning of Chautauqua. There are some program books in the Jacoby Collection, cared for by the Elsie Museum, and stored at Principia College. These books are all pasted in a big scrap-book, which makes it very difficult to research and copy. If you have any of these early books, we would really appreciate it if we could add them to our collection or perhaps copy them.

Meetings have been held to plan Jersey Door activities for next season. We will emphasize Chautauqua art, and start with an Artist's Stroll on Friday night, June 15th. Several artists will be featured and their work will be on display at the Jersey Door during the season. The Historical Society will work with the LCIA on May 6th to get the Kentucky Home ready for the 2006 season. I think of this building as a grand old lady with a very long history. She fell on hard times, but with the help of the community had a major face-lift. Let's get our grand old lady ready for another exciting season at The Jersey Door, the Indian Giver, the Pink Geranium, and the Library.



Piasa Chautauqua, 1895 The woman at the front left is Betsy Rogers, niece of Dr. Silas Hamilton (the Hamilton School, Otterville). The furniture was probably brought from home

Rose Tomlinson

PRESERVATION IS PROGRESS

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The mission and purpose of the *Chautauqua Historical Society* is the preservation and enhancement of the historic traditions and culture of New Piasa Chautauqua, Chautauqua, Illinois, the encouragement of historical research on the Chautauqua community and nearby historic districts, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and other written material on New Piasa Chautauqua, remaining permanent assemblies and chautauquas in other parts of the United States and the national Chautauqua movement, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the Chautauqua community and the general public of the historical and educational value of New Piasa Chautauqua.

A Chautauqua Biography

From time to time we will introduce today's Chautauquans to those of yesteryear, especially the people who provided leadership in the early days of our community. So, let's meet **Jotham A. Scarritt**. Scarritt was a member of the Joint Conference Committee (Southern Illinois Conference and St. Louis Conference) of the Methodist Church that was charged with the responsibility of founding the *Western Chautauqua* in 1885. He was born in 1827 in Madison County, near present-day Godfrey. His father was an itinerant preacher, and his parent's home was a way station for the Methodist circuit riders of the region. He and his two brothers, Nathan and Isaac, were educated at McKendree College in Lebanon, Illinois. All were Methodist ministers. McKendree, founded as Lebanon Seminary in 1828, is the oldest college in Illinois and the oldest college in the country with a continuous relationship with the Methodist Church.

"Jotham" was named for a younger son of Gideon, an early king of Judah (2 Kings, 16:1). The name means "perfection of the Lord." Jotham's middle name was All.

He was admitted to the ministry in 1849 at the age of 22 and married Rebecca Meldrum the same year. He was accepted in the Illinois Conference two years later. Scarritt was very active at McKendree College during his long life. He served on the Committee of Visitors and the Examining Committee for many years, and was on the Board of Trustees from 1865 to 1882. He was the chairman of a committee responsible for the grounds and buildings of the college, and he made these comments in a report around 1890:

....we may record the best condition of buildings and grounds ever known in the long and eventful life of this institution... The park, with its elegant fence, its neatly trimmed trees, and its carpet of green, has become indeed a 'thing of beauty,' and we may hope it may continue to be a 'joy forever.'... The citizens of Lebanon, the Executive Committee, the Faculty, and the Students, deserve your thanks.... The veterans in the Board will doubtless call to mind some once familiar, but now not conspicuous.... The walls, doors, and ceilings are not covered with hieroglyphics... The background of

the campus is no longer noted for its cast-off stoves, rusty pipe, old boots, and broken crockery... jimson weeds no longer enter into the college bouquet. The ghostly mullein stalk no longer stands sentinel at the corner of chapel or hall.... All hail to the new order! And long live McKendree.

Scarritt was also the Superintendent of Grounds at the Piasa Chautauqua in the early 1890s, a long-ago predecessor of Joe Laffler, Tim Tomlinson, Pat McBride, Bill Hobbs, Paul Hattery, Brad Westre, and others. He more than likely brought to the Chautauqua landscape the same fervor (and eloquence) he brought to the McKendree campus.



The Scarritts owned one of the very early cottages, directly south of the Auditorium, at the corner of St. Louis Avenue and Third Avenue. Our leasehold records show he held Piasa Chautauqua Assembly stock certificate #47. The family lived in Cairo, Illinois at the time of the stock purchase. The cottage was probably built around 1890. The earliest name on file for the cottage is *Pioneer*. The cottage today is owned by Buffy Griesedieck, and is still named *Pioneer*.

The Methodist community honored Jotham A. Scarritt in 1902 when McKendree College conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. Dr. Scarritt retired in 1906. He lived in Alton and Chautauqua for the next ten years. Scarritt died in February 1916. The cottage was sold by his estate in 1920.

A Seaside Chautauqua

If the early chautauquas stressed the family life and recreation aspects of the movement, the community at Ocean Grove, New Jersey was a wonderful example of location, location, location. Only 40 miles from New York and northern New Jersey



cities and around 70 miles from Philadelphia, the beginnings were simple. "...A few familiar friends, after protracted labors in the pastorate, felt that an annual respite of a few weeks from these toils was an absolute necessity. But where...could such rest be found?...The first crude thought was, is there not, somewhere along the sea, a convenient place where families of like mind can pitch their tents, and for a little while in the summer enjoy the sea air, bathing, fishing etc. having such social and religious exercises intermingled as convenience and inclination might suggest?..."

(Dr. Ellwood H. Stokes, *An Historical Sketch*, 1919)

Ocean Grove started in 1869 as a Camp Meeting Association. Today, 137 years later, its mission "rooted in its Methodist heritage, is to provide opportunities for spiritual birth, growth, and renewal through worship and educational, cultural, and recreational programs for persons of all ages in a Christian seaside setting."

Strictly speaking, Ocean Grove is not a "chautauqua." It was founded six years before the first Sunday School Assembly at Chautauqua, New York, an exemplar of the camp meeting religious movement of the 19th century. However, looking at its mission statement, we see quickly the strong relationship in purpose and intent between Ocean Grove and the other "chautauquas," including our own New Piasa Chautauqua.

The Great Auditorium is the dominant structure on the grounds, with seating for 6500 people. Community buildings and residences of

different types are clustered around it. Ocean Grove is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and is a wondrous spot for lovers of Victorian



homes. In addition to these imposing structures that form an *allee* from the Great Auditorium to the sea, there is a marvelous "tent" community, 114 sites that are unique among contemporary chautauquas.



Actually a combination of cottage and tent façade, the buildings are owned privately and the land leased. Leases are often held for generations, passed down in families—sound familiar?

The annual program is also familiar at some level to our own and to other chautauquas. Ocean Grove has a Summer Band, a Classical Music Series, and Saturday Night series that has featured Garrison Kiellor, The Kingston Trio, The Smothers Brothers, and so on. There are special religious programs in the Great Auditorium; preachers have included Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham. The Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association will host the annual **Chautauqua Network meeting**, July 27-30, 2006. Think about a trip to the Jersey Shore! Piasa Bluffs Assembly and Patron members of the Chautauqua Historical Society are members of the Chautauqua Network and are invited to attend.

An Update That's Upbeat

First, the "state of the Society" is very good.

We are pleased with our membership program. Our renewal rate is strong. Earlier this year we sent out a complimentary copy of the Fall 2005 Newsletter to all Chautauquans not members of CHS. We had 12 Chautauquans become new members as a result of our efforts. We now have 10 Piasa Bluffs Assembly level (\$75) members. These members support the costs of printing some pages of the Newsletter in color. So, thank you Paul and Kathy Brammeier, Karen Foss and Jim Whiteley, Dave and Chris Hagin, Bob and Cynthia Hormell, Gerry LaMarsh, David McJonathon-Swarm, Tim and Rose Tomlinson, Phil and Dorothea Polster, Todd and Jenny Rausch, and Jack and Mary Ann Weyforth, We have generous gifts from Chris and Dave Hagin and Todd and Jenny Rausch to help with the Archival Restoration and Conservation project (ARC), and plans are in place for this season. Our *Records and Documentation Book*, *Cumulative Newsletters*, and *IRS 1023 Application* are on file in the community Library.

That said, we have been an Illinois Non Profit Corporation since October 2003. We were told our application to the Internal Revenue Service for *Recognition of Exemption* as a 501 (c) (3) foundation might be an involved and complicated process, with the probability/possibility of having to revise and amend the materials as the review proceeded. Imagine our delight when we were informed (November 25, 2005) that our application was approved, and *exemption* status was granted, retroactive to October 16, 2003. We had incredibly good advice and counsel from Kathy Brammeier and Pat Miller, and we thank these two members (Pat is a director of CHS) for their assistance. As an *exempt organization* your annual dues (at whatever level) are tax-deductible, as are any contributions (special projects and so on), including gifts of articles for resale at the Jersey Door going back to October 16, 2003. As noted above, a complete copy of our application, including the IRS letter of determination, will be on file in the Chautauqua Library.

We've teamed up with the Chautauqua Golf Classic and created the **Chautauqua Scholars Prize**, a cash award of \$150 to eight selected (by lottery) college students. The 2005-06 award criteria were described in email messages to Chautauquans, and we have sent a letter to all leaseholder/cottage owners announcing the second round of the selection process. Four awards have been

made: Andrew Deluca (Southwest Illinois College), grandson of Herb and Norma Milster; Ian Milster (Southwest Illinois College), also the grandson of Herb and Norma; Cody Stevenson (Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville), son of Dave and Carol Stevenson; Carly Weinberg (College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine), granddaughter of Tim and Rose Tomlinson. There were only thirteen names in our original lottery pool. We hope the pool will grow significantly for the next round, scheduled tentatively for April 2006.

We're close to settling the final details on publication of a booklet containing the daily newspapers (*The Daily Chautauquan*) for 1897 and 1898. We expect it will be on sale this season at the Jersey Door. The original newspapers are in the custody of Principia College, and we have permission to reprint 150 sets of the material.

100 years old. Our research indicates that four cottages will celebrate a 100th birthday as a leasehold/cottage in 2006. Nancy Child's cottage, *Glocca Mora*, lot 150, was secured by Piasa Bluffs Assembly stock certificate #207, issued to Mary L. Wykoff. William and Emma Scott originally leased



Gary and George Ann Cooper's place, *Coop's Coop*, lot 104, and held PBA stock certificate #215. Helen Margaret Thatcher's cottage, *Mine N Yours*, was the leasehold of H. A. Tunehorst, a Jerseyville jeweler who also built the Kentucky Home. Lot 161 was secured by PBA certificate #217. This last one stretches the envelope, but it's too good to pass up. A Piasa Bluffs Assembly lease was issued to John Durston of Witt, Illinois, for lot 100, one of the lots that make up the present leasehold of Mark and Vicky Witt. So, there we have it—a short 100 years from Witt, Illinois to *Witt's End*.

The Dinky Revisited

The rail bus Dinky continues to interest folks in the Great River Road area. Last season CHS presented a film about the Dinky's journey from Alton to Grafton in 1941. Recently, Tim Tomlinson presented a version of that CHS program at Farley's Music Hall in Elsah. Tim is a director of the Historic Elsah Foundation, which sponsored the program. Artifacts, photographs, and memorabilia from the Elsah Museum were on display for the program, as was a painting of the rail bus, loaned by Principia College. The guests came "from far and wide," and included Dale Jenkins from the Illinois Traction Society and Bill Getschmann, a volunteer at the St. Louis County Museum of Transport. Jenkins has written a wonderful book on rail transportation in Illinois and an article on the Dinky for the Traction Society (1989). Getschmann was a lead volunteer in the restoration of the Dinky at the County Museum.

Dewey McDow (shown below at the Chautauqua station) was the first conductor/operator of the Dinky when it started its run in 1933, and he

The Dinky had two runs per day, with significant down time between the runs. Dale Jenkins spoke of the importance of the Lockhaven station. The Chicago-Peoria-St. Louis line used Lockhaven as a "transfer" point, with the main line running to and from Jerseyville. The line to Elsah, Chautauqua, and Grafton was a spur line.

We learned the Dinky was one of three rail buses available for the line, and was the smallest of the three—hence its name. Prior to 1933, more conventional trains served the Alton-Grafton line, and the new service reduced the number of employees from four to a single person. The Dinky was basically a financial decision during the Depression years. Only two persons in the audience at Farley's had seen the film before; thirteen people



As rail bus converted to trolis, the Dinky provided transportation between Elsah and Alton



had ridden the Dinky many times. It was, we heard, a favorite method of travel for Principia College students, and some of these folk spoke of the ride as a good way to go on a "date."

The next issue of *Elsah History* will feature the Dinky and CHS has plans to reproduce the film in some form, possibly adding still photographs and oral history interviews with folks who know the Dinky well, such as Nancy McDow, Dewey's daughter. We'll keep you informed.



St. Louis County Museum of Transport

continued in that role until 1939. We learned last summer when we showed the film that many Chautauquans remembered riding the Dinky with McDow at the wheel. Nancy McDow, his daughter, was at the Farley's showing of the film, and told the audience that her father asked for reassignment in 1939 because he didn't like the "double shift."

The Great River,

Frederick Oakes Sylvester's book of poetry about the Mississippi was first published in St. Louis in 1911, but Sylvester had already been painting scenes of the river he loved for many years. Sylvester (1869-1915) was born in Brockton, Massachusetts in 1869, and graduated from the prestigious Massachusetts Art Normal School in 1891. After a year of teaching in New Orleans, he came to St. Louis where he taught art at Central High School in the city and at the Principia, then located at Page and Belt. His early work focused on the city and the river, particularly the Eads Bridge.

After the World's Fair (1904), at which he was a major exhibitor, Sylvester began to shift his attention to the world beyond the city, and especially to the Elsah area. In 1911 eighty-three of his paintings were hung as an exhibition at the St. Louis Art Museum. His output was considerable! More recently, his works were exhibited May 27-September 3, 2005 under the sponsorship of the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, in collaboration with and at the Sheldon Art Galleries.

The 19th and early 20th centuries were great periods in American landscape painting, beginning with the Hudson River School and artists such as Thomas Cole, for whom the landscape evoked powerful ideas and feelings and also a sadness that the frontier was disappearing. Cole thought this to be "a regret rather than a complaint, such is the road society has to travel; it may lead to refinement in the end...." The movement and its focus spread from New England and New York to the Mississippi and beyond. The young Swiss painter Karl Bodmer (1809-1893) was only 23 when he visited the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in 1832 and captured life on the river, the levees, and steamboats of that era. John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872) toured the river valleys in 1854 and

near Hannibal, reminiscent of the river, as Mark Twain might have pictured it. Steamboats were often included in the river scenes of the landscape school, a part of the life of the river, the culture of the river, its music, and its stories.

Whoever the artist, whether it be George Caleb Bingham (1811-1879), John Caspar Wild (1804-1846), or Frederick Oakes Sylvester, the theme and mood romanticized the pastoral setting of the land and the river, idealized the American principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and regretted the settlement of the West as an end to the wilderness.

Sylvester bought a cottage along the Elsah bluffs in 1902, west of the village and close to the *Piasa Bluffs Hotel*, a small resort community located between Elsah and our own Piasa Bluffs Chautauqua. Elsah was a thriving riverfront community, with two industrial activities: a flour-mill and a new plant for the production of paint products. Sylvester painted often, almost exclusively, in Elsah and brought Principia students to the area by rail from St. Louis. His paintings include pastoral scenes from *Notchcliff*, the estate of Lucy Semple Ames, and *Elietown*, the country home of Henry Turner. Both properties are now part of the Principia College campus. Sylvester did not paint Piasa Chautauqua, and we are searching records to determine whether he visited or had any connection with the early history of the Chautauqua. Mostly his painting were of the river, the Great River as he described it in his poetry:

I have come back, my river,
I have returned to you.
In my journeys, far and near,
I have found no stream your peer.
Nor found your equal in the whole world
through.



1868, producing a number of important paintings, including *Low Water*, a view of the Mississippi



Sylvester, *Riverscape* (c1909)

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

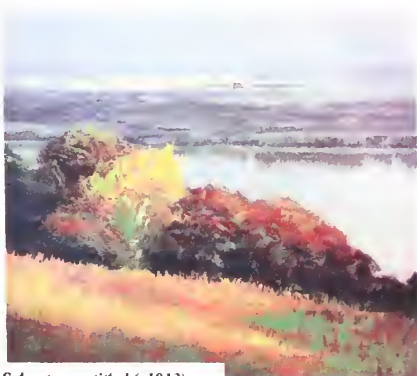
In addition to his Elsayh/River paintings, Sylvester became interested in the mural as an art form, and painted four large murals between 1902-1912. The catalog for the St. Louis Art Museum exhibition of his work (1911) mentioned his interest in murals: *...When several years ago he essayed canvasses of mural dimensions, using his favorite theme, some thought he would be unequal to the task. ...Decorations ... last year for the large dining hall of the Noonday Club were a gratifying evidence that the technical capacity of the artist was growing up with his creative inspiration...*

(Jeanne Colette Collester, *Frederick Oakes Sylvester: The Principia Collection*, p.50)

Two of the murals still exist. *The Great River*, originally created for the Noonday Club, is located in Cox Auditorium, Principia College, Elsayh, Illinois. *As the Sowing, the Reaping* was done for Decatur High School, Decatur, Illinois, and is now on display at the Macon County Museum in Decatur.

Jeanne Colette Collester's study of Sylvester gives us important information and insights into Frederick Oakes Sylvester and the importance of our river area to his work. In her concluding remarks, she says,

As a painter, Sylvester began by challenging the appropriate subject matter of art. His paintings of the St. Louis riverfront were daring in their depiction of what was thought to be an ugly, everyday environment. By the end of his career, Sylvester moved towards abstraction....(he had) an active professional commitment to the newly established art organizations, especially the St. Louis Artists' guilds.



Sylvester, untitled (c1913)

Sylvester's contributions to art in St. Louis, however, were quickly forgotten with the rapid acceleration of art movements in the twentieth century. The last decades of the twentieth century, in turn, have afforded us a slower, second look at the diversity of art produced at the turn of the century. We discover artists who deserve a longer look and firmer place in the history of art. Frederick Oakes Sylvester is one of those artists. (Collester, p.52)

As a gift to *Piasa Bluffs Assembly* and *Patron* members, we have sent out a Historic Elsayh Foundation booklet by Paul O. Williams, *Fredrick Oakes Sylvester: The Artist's Encounter With Elsayh*. Several copies of this booklet will be given to the Chautauqua Library for general circulation and we believe Chautauquans will find it interesting and informative. The *Annual Chautauqua Platform Lecture* for 2006 will be on Frederick Oakes Sylvester. The Spring 2006 issue of the Newsletter (sometime in May) will continue the theme of painting and the river, featuring "contemporary" artists such as Ralph Osborn, Mark Hurd, Rosemary Towey, and Chris Hagin. Finally, we recommend *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880* by Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer (London, 2002), even though the period studied does not include Sylvester.

Why landscape painting and painters? Our mission speaks of preserving and enhancing our cultural traditions, and we believe educating and informing about our communities and the river fits perfectly with the mission. While researching on the internet, we came across a quote that speaks well to this matter:

As a river is born deep inside the earth in springs that gather into streams and join to become a river, so people's lives gather into families and communities and become part of the river of history.

Wilma Dykeman, 2000

Our cover painting, Sylvester's *Gold Crowned* (Oil on canvas, 13½ x 11 inches, 1911) was recently exhibited at the Sheldon Art Galleries in St. Louis (2005). Our cover may be the first time *Gold Crowned* has been used in this manner. *Gold Crowned* and *Riverscape* (Oil on canvas, 15½ x 19½ ft., c1909) on p.7 are used with permission, courtesy of The Principia. A private collector has given permission to use Sylvester's untitled painting of the river, c1913, shown on this page. We appreciate their support of our efforts to illustrate visually our local history.

The Sylvester poetry excerpt is from his book, *The Great River* (1911).

