

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

Chautauqua Historical Society

Volume 5, Issue 1, Number 11

Winter 2007

- The Newsletter is published three times a year: winter, spring, and fall.
- The Newsletter is a membership benefit at the Piassa Bluffs Assembly (PBA), Patron, and Regular levels.
- **PBA** members have 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 Piassa Bluffs Assembly, 54 Patron, and 7 Regular members. This Newsletter is being sent to all non-member Chautauqua leaseholders. Complimentary members who are part of our Chautauqua network will also receive the Newsletter.



*Tents at Chautauqua, story begins on page 7.
Cover by Mark Hurd, a digital painting created especially
for the Chautauqua Historical Society, December 2006.*



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The President's Message

We want to thank everyone who is currently a member of the Historical Society, especially all who have been with us since our incorporation in 2003, for continuing

to support our objectives and our efforts.

The Society board voted unanimously to send the Winter 2007 issue to all Chautauqua leaseholders. This is the second time we've done this. We have two reasons. First, as a membership development strategy it provides those Chautauquans who are not members an opportunity to look over one of our major products, the publication of the Newsletter three times each year. Second, this "package" contains our first formal *Annual Report*, and we want to share it with everyone. No organization aspires to 100 percent membership—it's not realistic, but in a community such as New Piasa Chautauqua it would seem appropriate for people to want to support and encourage the preservation of its history. If you're not a member, think about joining.

Two administrative items: we welcome Katie Schaeffer to the Society's board of directors. Katie has served on the NPC board, and was the Program Chair for the last several years. She is eager to help us with the programming we provide every season. Katie replaces Rick Ross, who resigned to serve on the NPC board. Thanks for your efforts, Rick. Second, Mark Hurd created the Newsletter

cover for us. Mark has been generous with his talents, allowing us to use his images for various publications. *Tenting at Chautauqua* is a new image. Piasa Bluffs Assembly and Patron members of the Society will find a set of *Tenting* note cards with this mailing. **Thanks, Mark.**

Ever since Chautauqua's early days there has been some form of communication/publication. We have copies of the *Piasa Daily Chautauquan*, 1897-98, printed in Jerseyville and sold daily during the "season." We have a single sheet of a 1903 publication that is a forerunner of the current *Channels* edited by Donna Minard, announcing news and coming events. We are certain that other publications exist, but our Archives collection begins with the *Channels* of 1973. We have catalogued and filed this material by year, through 2006. It's a start.

It's different today from the early days of buying a daily newspaper published in Jerseyville. Every winter and spring we receive a community newsletter in the mail, the *Channels* is delivered to our door each week in the summer, and there is our email link managed by Barb Westre.

Our archival collection is growing, and that's a good thing. We are, however, starting to worry about where to store archival material. So, we are beginning to develop plans for an archival center. I spoke about this briefly at the shareholder's meeting in August 2006. We will be talking/working with the NPC board and other organizations to further this idea. More later.

Rose Tomlinson

Piasa Bluffs Assembly, 1885-97

Piasa Chautauqua, 1897-1907

New Piasa Chautauqua, 1907 to the present

PRESERVATION IS PROGRESS

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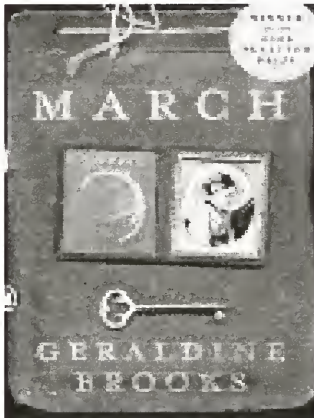
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The mission and purpose of the Chautauqua Historical Society is the preservation and enhancement of the historic traditions and culture of New Piasa Chautauqua, Chautauqua, Illinois, the encouragement of historical research on the Chautauqua community 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.

CLSC

Our *Benjamin St. James Fry Circle* of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle will sponsor a book review this coming season, in cooperation with the NPC Program Committee.

The CLSC was organized in 1878 at the New York Chautauqua and is often described as the country's oldest book club. A *Circle* was active in our Chautauqua almost from the beginning, with formal courses of study and graduation/recognition ceremonies reported in the 1890's. Our *St. James Fry Circle* is open to all Chautauquans. A few members of the Historical Society also pay dues as national CLSC members, an option open to all.



The historical novel, *March*, by Geraldine Brooks, has been chosen as the CLSC book for review in the 2007 season. *March* was a national CLSC selection in 2005 and Brooks was on site at New York to discuss her writing of the novel. We have an audiotape of that meeting, and expect the tape to be part of the

program to be presented at NPC. Brooks won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for the novel.

Bob Hormell will lead this CLSC meeting, with help from the Program Committee. Bob found this on Geraldine Brooks' website:

As the North reels under a series of unexpected defeats during the dark first year of the American Civil War, one man leaves behind his family to aid the Union cause. His experiences will utterly change his marriage and challenge his most ardently held beliefs. Riveting and elegant as it is meticulously researched, *March* is an extraordinary novel woven out of the lore of American history.

From Louisa May Alcott's beloved classic *Little Women*, Geraldine Brooks has taken the character of the absent father, March, who has gone off

to war leaving his wife and daughters to make do in mean times. To evoke him, Brooks turned to the journals and letters of Bronson Alcott, Louisa May's father, a friend and confidant of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

In Brooks' telling, March emerges as an idealistic chaplain in the little known backwaters of a war that will test his faith in himself and in the Union cause as he learns that his side, too, is capable of acts of barbarism and racism. As he recovers from a near mortal illness, he must reassemble his shattered mind and body, and find a way to reconnect with a wife and daughters who have no idea of the ordeals he has been through.

Spanning the vibrant intellectual world of Concord and the sensuous antebellum South, *March* adds adult resonance to Alcott's optimistic children's tale and portrays the moral complexity of war, a marriage tested by the demands of extreme idealism, and by the temptations of a powerful forbidden attraction.

The CLSC meeting will be publicized in the Program Book and the weekly Channels. Look for it.

Not A Very Good Year

1907.... not a very good year. The value of an archival system is that it provides a wealth of interesting information not generally available. This is from a report sent to the New York Chautauqua as a summary of the 1907 season:

"Piasa Chautauqua, Illinois

The 24th annual program of the Piasa Chautauqua Assembly was held for six weeks this year—an extension of two weeks over previous years. The program was the best ever put on but on account of poor transportation conditions and very bad weather the attendance of day visitors was not up to the annual number. The season ticket sales were larger than before. H. L. Herbert spoke on Recognition Day.* The best drawing days were those when the speakers were **W(illiam) J(ennings) Bryan**, Senator W. E. Mason, Senator R. I. Taylor, and **Senator R(ober) M. LaFollette**."*

*Recognition Day was "graduation" day for Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle members in the community. Senator LaFollette, from Wisconsin, was the founder of the Progressive Party in the U.S.

Archival Anecdotes

Rose said recently "I wish I could go back in time, perhaps to the 1890s, in costume and with a box camera, and walk through the grounds, snapping pictures and talking to folks I met." Metaphorically, that's what happens on Tuesday morning during the season, when Rose and her small but loyal group of volunteers "walk through" the archival records of our community's history.

Here's some of what they have found:

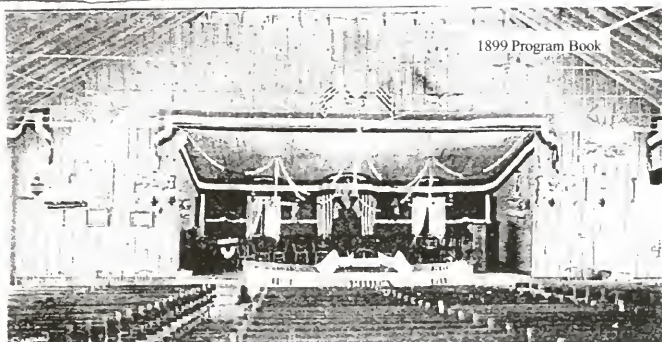
The Auditorium has always dominated life at Chautauqua. The application submitted for historic district status listed it as a public building, *circa 1904*. Based on this, we celebrated its centennial with a specially written musical (Gordon Grundmann) in 2004. Yet—Ralph Osborn's book has a photograph of the Auditorium interior, taken from the program book for 1899, five years earlier than the 1904 date. Our Piasa Bluffs Assembly forbears sent a report to the Mother Chautauqua after the 1890 season, announcing the completion of the auditorium building. More, our archival team placed the following article in an archival sleeve:

"Piasa Bluffs' Assembly Notes
Piasa Camp Grounds, July 22, '90—One must necessarily pay a visit to the Piasa Bluffs Assembly grounds in order to realize the marked improvement that have been made since last year....The new amphitheater now undergoing erection will, when finished, occupy a space covering 6000 square feet of ground independent of the awnings that will project ten feet from either side....in all 9, 200 square feet, which allowing 3 square feet to each individual, will seat 3,000 people. The material used in its construction is Arkansas pine, which is entirely free from knots and takes a very handsome finish; it will be completed before the assembly convenes....Quite a number of Elshahites are doing the hammer and saw set on the amphitheater."

Excerpted from *Correspondence to the Jersey County Democrat*, August 1890.

The first community project for almost every Chautauqua was the building of a central structure—auditorium, tabernacle, amphitheater—for worship and "edifying" programs. A news article in the *Republican Examiner* for March 26, 1886 (we don't have the actual article, but a typed—blue ink—replication) stated:

"...We hope to report by May 1st the entire stock taken and the first ten percent paid up. Then turn to, all hands, and build a large pavilion and otherwise prepare for a glorious camp meeting this coming August..."



(Then for August 27, 1886, after the meeting had concluded) "...Dr. Fry, president, congratulated the Assembly on the progress made and the success of the present camp meeting. Dr. Fry and J. A. Scarritt were appointed a committee to visit Lake Chautauqua (NY) and report their observations of that institution..."

Auditorium programs implemented the community's objectives, particularly the religious goals. One of the 1886 speakers, Dr. Kendrick, president of Shurtleff College, "gave a masterful Calvinistic sermon, listened to by a large and appreciative audience." The program for 1887 was to embrace "science, literature, art, temperance, Sunday schools, religion, etc." Dr. Vincent (John Heyl Vincent, co-founder of the Chautauqua movement), Bishop Talmage, and Reverend Sam Jones were to be invited. The Piasa Bluffs Assembly leadership worked hard to merit the label of "The Western Chautauqua."

Chautauqua Scholar's Prize

On a mild and sunny December afternoon Tim and Rose Tomlinson visited with Helen Margaret Thatcher and her daughter-in-law, Judy Thatcher. The occasion was afternoon tea and the selection of the 2006-07 fall semester Chautauqua Scholar's Prize awards. Helen Margaret had agreed to make the selections.

Helen Margaret was familiar with the annual Golf Classic and was interested in learning how the Scholar's Prize became part of that event. The funds for the awards come from a part of individual entry fees and from additional "advertising" revenue. She was interested to learn that eight prizes had been awarded in the previous year, and that every recipient had written a warm "thank you" letter, expressing appreciation for the award.

So, imagine this, at a small card table in her living room, next to the blazing gas fire in her fireplace, Helen Margaret shuffles twenty-three small cards on which are the names of the eligible students. She chooses four names:

Melissa Young. Her parents, Jerry and Frances Young, nominated Melissa. She is a December graduate of the University of Missouri-St. Louis. This was Melissa's last semester of eligibility for the Scholar's Prize. She plans to attend graduate school. Best wishes, Melissa.

James W. Fehlig. J.W. is a freshman at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, and a graduate of Westminster Academy in suburban St. Louis. His parents, Jim and Debbie Fehlig, nominated him. J. W. follows his sister, Molly, as a student at Missouri State.

Jonathon Prehn. Jonathon is a freshman at Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, Illinois. He is a graduate Westminster Christian Academy in Alton. He participated in the 2006 Chautauqua Golf Classic. Jonathon is interested in marketing and advertising. His parents, Ted and Julie Prehn, nominated him for the Scholar's Prize.

Matthew Grundmann. Matthew is a freshman at Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, Illinois. He is a graduate of Jersey Community High School, and has a baseball scholarship at Lewis and Clark. He is interested in an engineering career. His grandfather, Bill Grundmann, nominated Matthew for the Scholar's Prize. Bill was part of a first place team in the Golf Classic a few years ago.

awards will be made in February 2007, from a pool that presently contains nineteen nominees. If you know of a young person who is eligible but not on the present list, let us know so we can add his/her name to the pool.

All award recipients have been given a complimentary membership in the Chautauqua Historical Society. And, thank you, Helen Margaret. You did the selection honors graciously. Thank you also for your kind words about the program.

Medal of Freedom Award

Author and historian David McCullough was one of ten Americans awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, December 15, 2006. He told *The Martha's Vineyard Times* by telephone he was surprised and honored by his selection. President Harry Truman made the first awards in 1945; McCullough won a Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Truman, and a second Pulitzer for a biography of John Adams.

The Presidential citation says "The United States honors David McCullough for his lifelong efforts to document the people, places, and events that have shaped America." President George W. Bush said this at the White House ceremony: "...David likes to quote Harry Truman, who said, 'The only thing new in the world is the history you do not know.'" David McCullough reminds us that "The laws we live by, the freedoms we enjoy, the institutions we take for granted, are all the work of other people who went before us."...

David McCullough is an avid Chautauquan. He said, "There is no place like it. No resort. No spa. Not anywhere else in the country, or anywhere in the world—it is at once a summer encampment and a small town, a college campus, an arts colony, a music festival, a religious retreat and the village square—and there's no place—no place—with anything like its history."

He was speaking of the New York Chautauqua, the Mother Chautauqua, where he was the inaugural Platform Lecturer in 1993. He could as well have been speaking of New Piasa Chautauqua. David McCullough will give an address on *American democracy and values* at Principia College, March 2, 2007.

We believe this program is open to the public. For more information, contact Tim Tomlinson, 618-520-0101, a cell phone, so keep trying. Or, call Principia College for details.

So far, the Historical Society has distributed \$1800 in awards to twelve young students. An additional four

The Spring Hotel

The hotel, originally the *Piasa Springs Hotel*, was completed and ready for use in 1891. It provided meals and lodging at "reasonable rates." The hotel was located directly across from the Auditorium, on the main street of the community, near the celebrated *Piasa Spring*, and bordered by the creek that ran along the west bluff down to the river.



The rates for room/board at the hotel in 1899 didn't compete with a tent rental (\$10 for a 16 x 24 tent), but they were very reasonable: a hotel room with double bed, occupied by one person, 50 cents per night, 75 cents if occupied by two persons. Breakfast or supper cost 25 cents per meal, dinner (served at mid-day) was 35 cents. You could buy a ticket for three consecutive meals for 80 cents, saving a nickel. By 1907, a hundred years ago, the room rates had climbed to \$1.50 per day, but the meal rates had only increased slightly: breakfast and supper were now 35 cents, and dinner could be enjoyed for 40 cents. The community post office was located in the hotel, so it was a center for persons other than those interested in a room and meals.

A St. Louis newspaper article, September 12, 1920, describes how and why the management of the hotel came under the auspices of the Ladies Civic Improvement Association.

"The story began last year (1919) when the Inn at Chautauqua burned. After that there was no hotel at the place, and the women

who own cottages there and spend their vacations there thought there should be one. Mrs. G. V. R. Mechin#, 5088 Raymond

Avenue (St. Louis), was elected president (LCIA), and with \$1400 borrowed from the management at Chautauqua the women took hold of an old residence which trans-

formed into the Springs Hotel.##

Each woman took one of the rooms and furnished it. That's the reason for the names over the doors of the rooms, where ordinary hotels have numbers. One of the rooms downstairs was given over to a place where story telling and fancy work classes were held. With the common interest all felt in the place it became a community center for the whole Chautauqua.

.....Despite the fact that the women made enough money to pay back the \$1400 loan, paid the rent, amounting to about \$400, and cleared \$700 besides, \$200 of which accrued from an auction sale of produce at the end, the meals were reasonably priced and the cost of a day's food totaled only about \$1.50."

Not much inflation at work here—the average daily food cost in 1907 was \$1.10.

The structure was torn down in 1969. Getting to know more about the Piasa Springs Hotel is a CHS research goal over the next eighteen months. We expect to interview a number of Chautauquans who have fond memories of the hotel. Some of the people we hope to interview worked as season staff at the hotel.

Mrs. Mechin was a long-time president of the LCIA, and was very active in the building of Kupferle Chapel, helping raise the funds for the project.

Tenting at Piasa Chautauqua

Our community was organized in 1885, and late that summer, a brief "assembly" was held, not on our present grounds, but in Fern Glen valley. The area was known locally as Babbs Hollow. The Hollow included our present holdings and Fern Glen. The organizers, Methodist ministers and laymen, named the community *Piasa Bluffs Assembly*. It was modeled specifically after the New York Chautauqua, founded eleven years earlier, and was, in the minds of the founders, the *Western Chautauqua*.

In 1886, and for several years following, the annual meetings of the Piasa Bluffs Assembly were "camp meetings," probably held in the area of our auditorium. The season was brief, first one week, and then a little longer. By 1889, a two-week program was in place. The first program book was published that year.

There were no cottages in those early years. The first cottage, *Pioneer*, was probably built in 1890. Buffy Griesedieck and her family now own *Pioneer*. The auditorium was built the same year, we believe, as were several other cottages around what is now "St. Louis Circle."

Most visitors lived in tents. In 1895, for example, there were approximately 250 tents scattered around the Chautauqua grounds. The Auditorium and playground areas were popular sites for tents. In fact, the west side of the creek along Alton Avenue was lined with tents.



The early program books describe how tents and related items, including furniture, could be rented on a daily and weekly basis. Most had a simple "floor" of straw purchased from local farmers. Some tents had a platform floor, which made it a little less miserable



The river was an important form of transportation in our early days, conveying people, furniture, and daily supplies for summer visitors to the *Piasa Bluffs Assembly*.

during summer rains. A fly for a tent cost an extra fee, sometimes one-half of the tent rental prices. The fly provided protection from the rain. Tent living must have been hard, with the daily prospect of dust, heat, humidity, flies, and perhaps, a snake or two. Still, most photographs show impeccably dressed men and women enjoying their vacations at this special summer resort.

Tents played a prominent role in most of America's chautauqua communities. The tent was the visitor's home-away-from-home, and often the community's auditorium or tabernacle, eating place, and store.



Contemporary "tents" at Ocean Park Camp Meeting Association, Ocean Park, New Jersey.

Continued from page 7

Last season the Chautauqua Historical Society sponsored an exhibition on *Tenting at Piasa Chautauqua*. The exhibition was produced by Rose and Tim Tomlinson, with a great deal of help from Scott and Lori Adams who provided the tent and its furnishings for the exhibition. The exhibition's objective was simple and related directly to the Society's mission to promote an



The exhibition opened on July 2, following regular Sunday services at the Chapel. A large number of Chautauquans visited the site.



CHS founder and current vice president Judy Hurd and President Rose Tomlinson, in period attire, are ready to provide refreshment to exhibition visitors

interest in and greater understanding of the history of our community. We are indebted and grateful to the many people who helped make the exhibition a success. Thank you, Judy Hurd and Norma Milster for helping with the refreshments on opening day, and again, Judy, for helping with the children. Our final thought: it was a major effort and worth it!



The Historical Society's educational program consists of the publication of the Newsletter three times each year, and also the sponsorship of special programs, our *Piasa Bluffs Assembly* series. The *Tenting at Chautauqua* exhibition was our first major effort at this type of special programming. The exhibition was open on three days for all to enjoy.

We wanted particularly to reach out to Chautauqua's children. The Play School children enjoyed a special opening of the tent, with Rose and Judy, again in period costume, using the exhibit boards to talk about life in the earliest days of our historic community. It was wonderful to listen to these young people ask questions about the "olden days," when life was very different in the Chautauqua valley.

