

NARRATOR'S Notes: Chautauqua On My Mind

Introduction:

In the beginning there was a pleasant tranquil scene in the Southwest corner of New York State.

For the Hautesaunee, or "Longhouse People", this was a Hunting Ground, Sacred Place and passage-way to the West and South.

Travelers including French-Canadian voyageurs would wend their way through the St. Lawrence Valley from Quebec, follow the shoreline of Lake Erie then portage their way to the Allegheny River to reach the fertile Valley of the Ohio. Part of this odyssey included a Lake which the Natives called "Chautauqua".

In later years a Methodist Camp-Meeting planted its tents and cabins on the south-side of this Lake AT A PLACE CALLED "Fair Point".

Eventually two men - an Industrialist from Ohio and a Methodist clergyman - had an Idea.

Together they envisioned this as an excellent site for training Sunday-school Teachers as a means of creating a uniform curriculum for their lessons.

Hence was spawned in 1874, what has ever since been a universal symbol for all that represents the epitome of Human Endeavor. Mere mention of the word "Chautauqua" conjures up images of Mind, Body and Spirit.

It is the manifestation of the Greek Ideal of "sound mind in sound body".

It is the phenomenon which United States President Theodore Roosevelt - himself a stalwart representative of the aforementioned Ideal - declared to be "the most American Thing about America".

So "in the beginning" Chautauqua was "a place" and "an idea" and eventually "a phenomenon".

Soon thereafter it became "a movement".

First there were Daughter Chautauquas.

Camp-meetings throughout the Country began evolving along the same pattern as the original site in New York State.

Soon there were clones at places like Ocean Grove, New Jersey; Mount Gretna, Pennsylvania; Lakeside, Ohio; Monteagle, Tennessee and Bayfield, Michigan . These were Lyceum-like in orientation.

Then someone had another idea.

Rather than fixed locations which required transportation for participation, why not take Culture to communities where access to Daughter Chautauquas was not feasible.

Hence began the Tent- or Traveling- Chautauquas. Very much in the tradition of Circuses these organizations were transported throughout Rural America via Highway, Rail and Waterway.

In much the same way that Lyceums after the Civil

War became the province of Bureaus so too did Chautauqua become Business. Organizers prepared and planned these Shows just as Circus Promoters marketed their Products. The "playing-field" expanded from the U.S. into Canada and even briefly to Australia and New Zealand.

By the Twentieth Century, other than for Traditionalists, Chautauqua had taken on the aura of Entertainment.

This development heralded the demise of Tent Chautauqua as Technology opened the door for alternative means of delivering Information directly to homes.

As a precursor to Television, Radio widened the horizon for Chautauqua-speakers to broadcast to the multitudes.

The Grand Old Opry of Nashville, Tennessee, which had redefined the version of Chautauqua manifested by Traveling Shows bridged the gap between Stage-performance and Ether.

Today the original Chautauqua in New York carries on its Traditions while some Daughter Chautauquas likewise do business as usual.

Historical Societies revive features of Traveling Chautauqua with Re-enactors representing Famous People who have impacted American culture.

From Nashville the Grand Old Opry still performs Live while traveling to homes throughout the Nation via Radio and Television.

when all is said-and-done, CHAUTAUQUA is still
"the most American thing about America" in the
Twenty-first Century!

PRELUDE:

ALEXIS De TOCQUEVILLE (1805-1859) was a French Political Thinker and Historian. As a representative of the French Court System he was sent to the United States to study American Penitentiaries. Upon returning to Europe he wrote a book entitled DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA(1835) in which he offered a number of observations pertaining to the social conditions in the young Nation. Charles Dickens sought to replicate this study with an 1842 tour of North America.

GUSTAVE De BEAUMONT(1802-1865) was A French Magistrate and advocate of Prison Reform. Most likely it was his suggestion that resulted in a tour of the U.S. with his friend De Tocqueville and subsequent publication of a book which earned for his companion an enduring place in the annals of Western Civilization. Much like Dickens he was severely critical of Slavery. Such may be the reason De Tocqueville received the Lion's Share of credit for the book. The American Agrarian Aristocracy a/k/a southern plantation owners would have blocked its importation insofar as they were the power-brokers of early-Nineteenth Century