

Chautauqua Historical Society

Preservation is progress, may we be worthy stewards...

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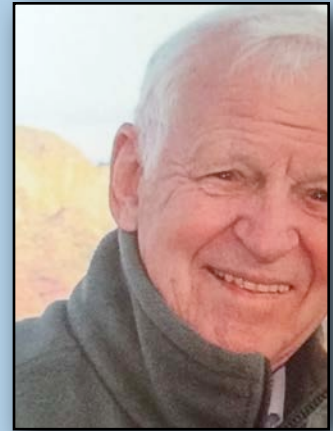
ARC UPDATE



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

My first professional job, very long ago, was at Ladue High School in St. Louis County. I taught freshman and sophomore social studies and English. I was an English Lit major in college, had read a lot of Dickens, but not *The Tale of Two Cities*, part of the sophomore English curriculum. Over a three year period I taught it at least a half dozen times. I can still recite *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...* You get the idea, best and worst, over and over. The summer of 2018, the 35th year of the Chautauqua Historical Society as an Illinois nonprofit corporation, had some Dickensian moments. We lost our IRS 501 (c) (3) status, the power to declare contributions to be tax deductible. How? As best we can tell, the IRS administratively placed our headquarters somewhere in Oklahoma, letters and notices of instruction were not received, and, our bad, we misunderstood some of the changing reporting requirements. That loss was our "worst of times" moment.

Our "best of times" came throughout the season as we worked week by week, fulfilling our mission as the organization that provides historical research on the Chautauqua community and an educational program to inform the Chautauqua community about our collective history.



As we begin the Historical Society's 36th season, the 134th season of our Piasa Chautauqua, we recommit to our mission and its responsibilities. We have received notice that our 501 (c) (3) status has been reinstated, back dated to May 2016--it's as if nothing had ever happened. So, we will reopen our membership programs and solicit contributions for special projects like the Memorial Walkway and other events. You will be hearing from our new membership secretary, Jill Moore. This issue of the newsletter is being sent to ALL Chautauqua leaseholders. We are working with Liz Rathburn to schedule events for the upcoming season. We have established a partnership with the Church Assembly for archival work and a new series on Sunday nights. In other words, the *age of foolishness* is officially over.

Tim Tomlinson

The Chautauqua Historical Society

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. The Society is an Illinois nonprofit corporation. Contributions to the Society are tax deductible under the provisions of Section 501 (c) (3) of the United States Code. Printed at Principia College. Color printing is funded by Piasa Bluffs Assembly members. The newsletter is printed two times a year.

Melissa McCanna, editor, writer

Chautauqua Historical Society 2018 Activity Review

The Chautauqua Historical Society (CHS) sponsored many diverse activities during the 2018 season. The programs and activities were designed to reach out to Chautauqua residents, involving them in and connecting them to the history of our valley.

CHS Children's Cottage Box Workshop. Held Thursday June 21 in the Archival Research Center, the workshop introduced our children to archiving the history of their cottage by using the CHS cottage boxes. Children were given a list of items to collect prior to the workshop to add to their cottage box. Through this activity, they learned some of the history of their cottage and how they may contribute archival items to the cottage boxes. The evening concluded with a walk to the spring to retrieve a watermelon, and a seed spitting contest! The workshop was deemed a success by participants, and there were numerous requests for an adult cottage box workshop.

Sixteenth Annual Platform Lecture. The well-attended June 24, 2018 program was held in Town Hall. Dr. Mark Wagner, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, presented the Chautauqua Historical Society's Sixteenth Annual Platform Lecture. The working title for the lecture was "Written in Stone." Wagner's interests include the prehistory and early history of both Native Americans and Europeans in Illinois and the lower Ohio River Valley, especially culture contact between Native Americans and Euro-Americans and the outcomes that contact had for both groups. The platform lecture is sponsored yearly by the Chautauqua Historical Society. First begun in 2004, these talks are modeled on a lecture program held at the New York Chautauqua.

Coloring Chautauqua Red, White and Blue! Held on Thursday night, June 28th at 7:30, in Town Hall, the program was designed to celebrate Chautauqua's special July 4th at the Historical Society's coloring night. New pages, designed by Rose Tomlinson, featured the lighthouse, balloons and fireworks. All supplies were provided. However, a formidable thunderstorm rolled into the valley resulting in a Chautauqua-wide power outage, which unfortunately caused the cancellation of the event. Copies of the pages were subsequently shared and featured in Play School for their Independence Day activities.

Auditorium Hillside Exhibit at the ARC. In the early days of Chautauqua the hillside in front of the auditorium was a valuable extension for the programs and church services in the auditorium. In more recent times, the hillside was largely neglected. Today, it is again a central focal point on the grounds as we gather regularly after Sunday Chapel services to honor the flag and our veterans on the new Memorial Hillside and flag plaza. Organized by Rose Tomlinson, the special exhibit featured large pictures illustrating the changing hillside organized by intern Bitsy Mullarkey and a slide



show designed by Kathryn Bonzon. The exhibit debuted Saturday, June 30.

Veterans Exhibit. During our July 4th celebration, the Historical Society offered a special exhibit featuring five veterans - Bill Colbert, Billy Clarkson, Bill Meyer, Charlie Schaeffer and Gordon Higgins (Cynthia Hormell's father). Designed to visually tell the story of our own Chautauqua veterans, photographs and memorabilia for each veteran were displayed. ARC volunteers and interns, set up a table at the 4th of July activities to share these veteran displays with the wider community.

Historical articles written for the Channels. This year, Tim Tomlinson, wrote some six articles for the weekly Channels. Under the overall title of "A Modest Lesson..." each article highlighted a story from our long and interesting history. This offered another opportunity every other week for historical educational outreach to our community.

The Summer Lawn Games. CHS again held the summer lawn games party on July 14, back by popular demand after last year's successful inaugural event. Attendees dressed in traditional shades of white, wearing their finest hats, looking much as our Chautauqua counterparts did in the early 1900s. Croquet, shuffleboard, badminton, corn hole and bocci games were played and delightful refreshments were served.

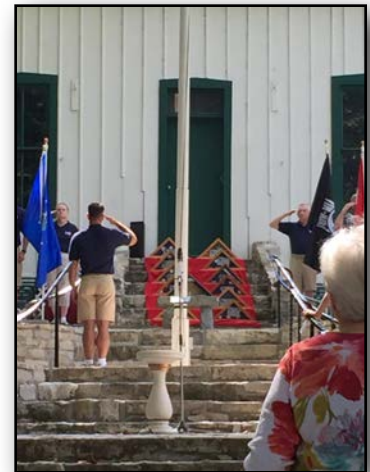
Young Musician's Concert. This year's concert was held Sunday July 29 in the Chapel. Music has been an important part of Chautauqua since its inception. In keeping with that tradition, each year, the historical society brings an accomplished local and classically-trained musician to entertain our residents in the beautiful Kupferle Chapel. For the eleventh anniversary of the Historical Society's Young Musicians Series, we were pleased to present trumpeter Will Schmallebeck and his quartet. Will is an Alton native who graduated from Alton High School in 2015. He played in the AHS Marching 100, Jazz Band, Jazz Combo, among other groups. Will was also a member of the JazzU St. Louis All Star combo, where he had the opportunity to perform with top tier jazz artists such as Wynton Marsalis.

CHS Interns. In 2018 we were fortunate to have two interns, Bitsy Mullarkey and returning intern, Kathryn Bonzon. Throughout the season, they scanned important materials, prepared special exhibits, slide shows and books, and assisted with visitors to the ARC. They were extremely valuable to the continued progress on our mission regarding a wide variety of projects.

Fourth of July Flag Ceremony. This important ceremony is always very well attended by Chautauqua families and guests, and it marks the beginning of the holiday celebration in the valley. Everyone gathers on the memorial hillside for a special patriotic program every July 4th. CHS organizes the ceremony, develops the program and prints the booklet.

Memorial Hillside. CHS oversees the ongoing specialized maintenance of the hillside.

Flag Ceremonies. Since 2004, military service flags have been flown during the season to honor Chautauqua's deceased veterans. Six flags were flown last season, each raised during a noon flag ceremony on Sundays, after chapel service. The flag detail, led by Chuck Bryant, is made up of Chautauqua men and women who served in the military. The Historical Society sponsors these flag ceremonies and also serves as the custodian of the service flags, which have been given to the community on a long-term loan basis by each veteran's family.



The CHS newsletter. The historical society publishes a newsletter twice a year, designed to highlight our activities, share historical research related to aspects of our community and nearby historic districts, and remaining permanent chautauquas in the United States. The newsletter is sent to all Chautauquans, providing a valuable connection to the discovery and preservation of our history.

Coffee and conversation. Every Wednesday during the 2018 season from 10:00 - 12:00 on the south porch of the Kentucky Home, coffee and sweets were offered by the historical society and hosted by Bert Hampton. This provides a great opportunity to gather, chat and enjoy the company of fellow Chatauquans.

The Archival Research Center (ARC). The archival research center is open and staffed by volunteers, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 10:00 - 12:00 throughout the season. The center offers cottages boxes, special exhibitions, archives and personal assistance from dedicated volunteers and interns. It is a regular meeting place for members of the historical society and the community. Mary Ann Weyforth is the director for the center and has developed many interesting and important projects:

- **Chatauqua veteran album.** We continue to collect and preserve veteran information for the album and digitization project. Be sure to pick up a form to fill out regarding your veteran and please include a picture in uniform. The album is growing and is available for review in the center.
- **Chapel Weddings & Baptisms.** We have received many pictures and information regarding weddings and baptisms that took place in the Kupferle Chapel over the years for our collection. Please bring your pictures to the ARC for digitizing or email to maweyforth@gmail.com.
- **Twenty-four years of the Channels** were digitized in 2018 by our interns.
- **Kentucky Home book.** Research is underway to fill an album documenting the long and important history of the Kentucky Home and the many roles it played in our community.
- **Adult play programs, teen play programs, and children's day programs** are being collected, scanned and preserved as we attempt to document the long history of Chatauqua theatre productions.
- **Lynn Bryant and the theatre.** The ARC hosted Lynn Bryant and her daughters on July 21st to reminisce about the plays she directed over the years. Lynn brought an album of theatre memorabilia representing these plays and her experiences. Great memories and stories were shared.
- **Historical sign display and identification project.** Several historic signs have been hung in the ARC - including an important, original Kentucky Home sign. We have also begun an inventory project that includes photographs of existing and missing signs on the grounds. Begun last year, this project has led to success with the polishing and reinstallation of the original brass Niergarth sign dedicating the shuffle board court, and the restoration and reinstallation of the Schwaninger Field sign. The project is ongoing. Please share any information you may have.
- **Memorial album.** Currently underway is a project to document and photograph all memorials donated over the years and located throughout the grounds. This includes items such as trees, benches, swings and more donated for friends and in memory of Chatauquans. Check out our collection and please add to it.
- **Tour of the Grounds.** A new project to write a brief guide or series of guides to explain the various historical buildings and areas of the grounds was begun in 2018 by Rose Tomlinson. Currently in the research and development phase, other community's guides are being studied for format, research is underway and photography is in progress.
- **Map of the grounds.** In 2018, CHS updated the always popular map of our grounds which notes all buildings, and cottages as well as cottage owner names. This was made available for sale in the ARC late in the season and is still available in the 2019.

Annual meeting. We held our annual meeting during the 2018 season and summarized activities, programs, and budget information for members. Every year, this meeting provides the Chatauqua Historical Society and its members an excellent forum for questions, and most importantly, ideas and input.



Chautauqua at the Hayner Genealogy & Local History Library

William Aring Meyer

*Be uncool
Yes, be awkward
And don't look in the obvious place
The soul needs beautiful a soul mate
U2 - "Always"*

Most of the old libraries have archives. Some have old items in storage that are not on exhibit. And that's usually what I want to see. I like to handle and hold the old books and see the forgotten art displayed in hidden places. Two years ago I was researching in the Hayner Genealogy and Local History Library in beautiful downtown Alton. On a whim I asked Lacy S. McDonald, the Genealogy and Local History Manager, "Do you mind if I take a look at the art in the back office?"

She looked at me, paused a moment, and said "Sure" in a way that indicated she wasn't sure at all and didn't know quite what to make of my strange request. I don't even know why I asked. I always wonder what's in the back room. I proceeded to the office, where there was a proliferation of boxes and books waiting for proper disposition. I looked up on the walls and my jaw just dropped.

Displayed were two paintings of the east and west Chautauqua bluffs. The setting of the entrance to New Piasa Chautauqua is a bit odd. On a river that runs north to south it sits on the big bend almost east and west. I inquired about the paintings and gave my contact information to the fabulous Lacy S. McDonald, who got back to me in short order. The paintings were donated by a Mrs. Child of Hardin in the 1890s. She also provided the following information about the paintings from a description by the Burton Art Service. This description was part of an insurance appraisal for the Library.

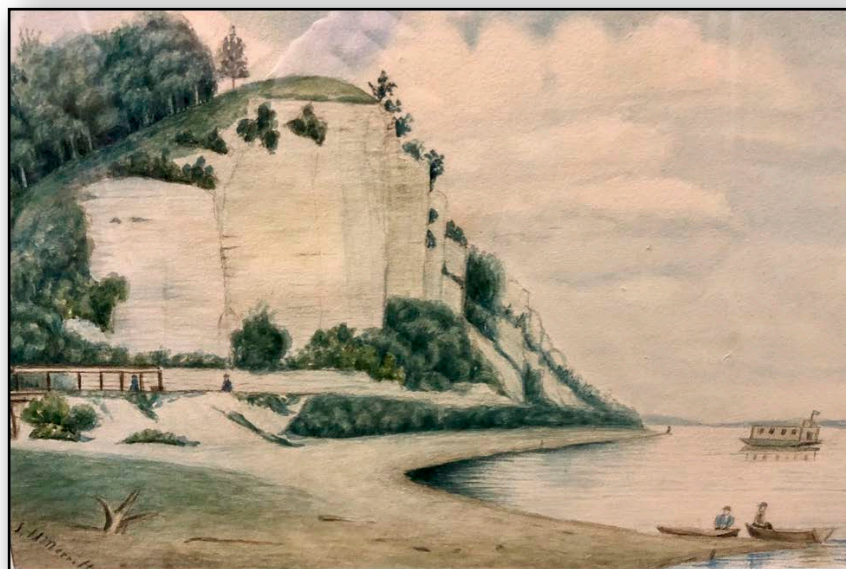
"Watercolor and pencil (?) under glass by J.H. Merritt. A summer river scene in green, tan, and blue colors. Painting shows a beach area along the Mississippi River, possibly an early depiction of Chautauqua, Illinois. Foreground shows a woman holding a parasol sitting with two children at the water's edge on the left side of painting. Rock bluffs with green foliage are sitting to the right side. The background is a view of the hills and bluffs along the river. A brown structure which appears to be part of a bridge sits at the bottom of the bluff in the foreground, on the right side of the

painting. The sky is white with swatches of blue. Matting is a triple edged hunter green mat with an outside edge of gold/green color. Wood frame is dark gold with a brown and green rough textured finish. Painting is signed "J.H. Merritt" in black in lower left corner."

A search for the artist was not fruitful. The internet revealed that there was an artist by the name of Mrs J. H. Merritt who was a resident of Sacramento in 1895. She had an exhibit at the California State Fair in 1895. This information can be found in the book titled "Artists in California 1786-1940" by Edna Hughes.

A couple of observations need to be made at the outset. The person making the appraisal had no knowledge of Chautauqua because there is no question about where the scene is. If the appraiser means that it is possibly before Chautauqua was established, then I would be more comfortable. My second observation, related to the first is that it appears that this painting may represent the time before the train ran along the river, which makes it all the more ancient and remarkable.

The next time you're at the Hayner Genealogy and Local History Library ask if you can go back to the office to see the paintings and while you are there, be sure to see Frederick Kurtz's painting of the piasa bird, possibly painted as early as 1846.





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The Archival Research Center (ARC)

The Archival Research Center will be continuing with the work that was started last summer. We are still collecting information and pictures on our veterans. Also, we are gathering pictures of brides and grooms who have been married at Chautauqua. Please bring or send a picture if you have not done so. An album of pictures of memorials on the grounds has also been started. If you can help in any way by sharing information or a picture of a memorial please bring it in. You can also send pictures or information to maweyforth@gmail.com.



The history of the Kentucky Home will be highlighted this summer. We are looking for input from members in the community who contributed towards its improvement or have photos, stories or memorabilia from any era.

John Colbert is working on a project to give the community access to the Historical Society information that is stored on our computer.

We will need volunteers who can help scan historical pictures. Let us know if you can help.

With your help, we look forward to another productive summer!

Mary Ann Weyforth

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