

# Chautauquas spotlight social issues

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

No, Chautauque isn't a new Mexican dish. It's an almost forgotten American tradition, which will be revived around the state this year for the 10th anniversary of the Michigan Council for the Humanities.

"Everyone knows about vaudeville, but very few people know about Chautauque and the impact it had on America," said Merrill J. Bates, director of the 10th anniversary celebration.

"It's exciting to have people talking about it again."

A HALF-CENTURY ago, traveling Chautauques made it possible for small-town residents to see famous people, discuss hot issues and enjoy entertainment from other parts of the world.

Gathered under a big tent in the park, families heard such notables as politician William Jennings Bryan, suffragette Jeannette Rankin and lawyer Clarence Darrow talk about their careers and ideas. If those colorful characters didn't intrigue, there was exotic entertainment by Russian dancers or Swiss yodelers.

At the turn of the century, there were as many as 300 independent Chautauques scattered across the country. By the mid-1930s, they were a thing of the past.

Today there are just a few permanent ones, including the original started in 1874 in Chautauque, N.Y.

"It amazed me how few people today even know what they were," said Bates, explaining that in the 1920s one out of three Americans attended the summer events.

"Chautauque was a very pervasive kind of phenomenon and particularly common in the Midwest. But it faded so fast."

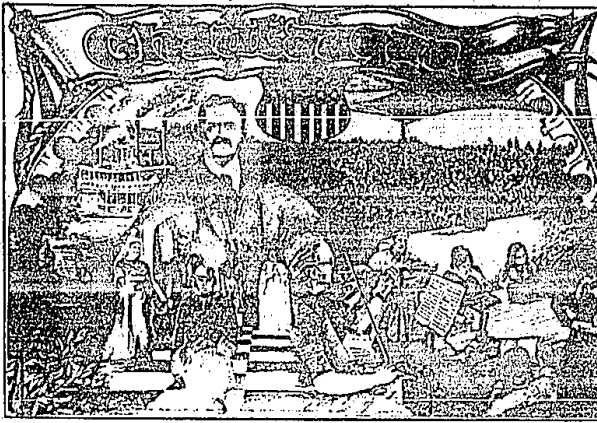
NEXT WEEK the Edison Institute will recreate a grand tent Chautauque of 1913 on its Village Green in Greenfield Village, Dearborn.



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Toddy Roosevelt is one of the great Americans who will be heard for the grand tent Chautauque of 1913 May 5-13 at Greenfield Village.

The May 8-13 event featuring historic characters like Theodore Roosevelt and Jane Addams will kick off the statewide celebration sponsored by the Michigan Council for the Humanities for its 10th anniversary.

So far, the granting agency has funded a dozen state projects built around the Chautauque theme.

Oakland University will present "America in Transition: the Chautauque Precedent" Saturday, June 2, on the Rochester area campus. Actually OU's third annual Chautauque festival, it will combine lectures, exhibits, music and games.

There will be a follow-up session Saturday, June 9, with discussions of the social issues raised during the Saturday event.

More Chautauque projects are expected to be funded in June by the Michigan Council for Humanities.

A Chautauque packet is available by request through the organization's Center for Humanities Services, Nisbet Building, Suite 20, 1407 S. Harrison, East Lansing 48824.

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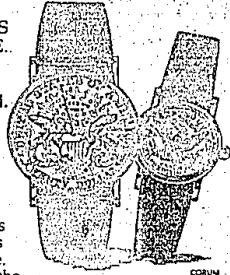
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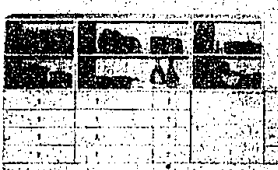
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