



Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

Chautauqua Comes to Mount Clemens

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TICKETS NOW ON SALE FOR THE
Big Mt. Clemens Chautauqua
BEGINNING JULY 15th
The Event of this Season.....**7 BIG DAYS 7**.....The Event of this Season
Morning, Afternoon, and Evening Programmes
The season tickets purchased by the local committee, and now for sale, may be had while they last at \$2.00. All season tickets thereafter will be \$3.50. Attendance by single admission on each entertainment would exceed \$5.00.
SEE PROGRAM FOR LIST OF BIG ATTRACTIONS.

During the early years of the twentieth century, traveling Chautauqua programs exposed thousands of small-town and rural residents to culture and intellectual thought. The Chautauqua show was usually a week-long "tent university" that came to town with lecturers, performers and classical musicians. It was modeled after the summer programs of the [Chautauqua Institution](#) in New York, which had been founded in 1874 to provide higher education opportunities in a short course format.

Traveling Chautauqua shows were managed and promoted by circuit bureaus that usually covered a specific region of the country. The most prominent in the midwestern United States was the **Redpath Bureau**, based in Chicago and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Many of the Chautauqua courses that traveled across Michigan during the summer months were booked by the Redpath Bureau.

Mount Clemens hosted its first Chautauqua course in the summer of 1912. The week-long program featured daily lectures, concerts and entertainment. Admission to any individual event ranged from 25 cents for lectures to 35 or 50 cents for concerts and evening entertainment. The main event of the Mount Clemens Chautauqua in 1912 was held on Friday, July 19, when orator and thrice-defeated presidential candidate [William Jennings Bryan](#) presented a lecture entitled "The Signs of the Times." A writer for the *Mount Clemens Monitor* reported that there was some disappointment expressed by members of the audience at the lack of thunder in Bryan's address, but noted that the distinguished lecturer had given three speeches in three different cities on that day and ought to be forgiven for any weariness he exhibited.

The *Monitor* reported that subscription sales for season tickets to Chautauqua had been low, given that this was Mount Clemens' first-ever event, but remarked that audiences grew by the day and that another event the following year would undoubtedly draw a greater crowd. Indeed, the second Chautauqua, which opened its tent-flaps on July 31, 1913, boasted a large attendance from the start. About 800 subscriptions were sold, enough, the *Monitor* noted, to insure that the culture festival would be back the following year.

The third year of the Mount Clemens Chautauqua proved to be a difficult one. Ticket sales

were lackluster, and the newspaper blamed this on the failure to appear of several headliners originally on the advertised schedule. Further, the *Monitor* roundly criticized the Redpath Circuit for allowing additional Chautauqua programs in nearby Romeo and Richmond, opining that these were drawing some audience members away from Mount Clemens, and that Macomb County was not big enough for three courses. The program managed to break even, however, and returned in 1915 for a fourth year.

The newspaper announced that the 1915 program easily made up for any deficiencies of the previous season. The headline event was a recital by **Alice Nielson**, billed as "one of the world's most noted prima donnas." Nielson was paid \$700 for her appearance in Mount Clemens, and ticket prices for the single event were \$1, a princely sum for the times.

The 1916 program suffered from a heat wave during its run and ticket sales were dismal. The *Monitor* reproached the townspeople for their lack of support and their complaints about ticket prices, remarking that the grouches "would grunt if Gabriel came down with a heavenly choir and sold a concert for 25 cents."

In 1917, the Chautauqua course was secured through the **Coit-Alber Chautauqua Bureau**, rather than the Redpath Bureau. The program featured the San Carlo Opera Company with the Spanish tenor **Manuel Salazar**, the Royal Hawaiian Singers, and a lecture by **Mrs. George Pickett**, widow of the late Civil War general of Gettysburg fame. Despite the headliners, the course was a financial flop and was the last for Mount Clemens. The newspaper reported the death of Chautauqua in Mount Clemens with a lament on the loss of "our annual week of uplift."

For further information about Chautauqua, we recommend:

- Harrison, Harry P. *Culture Under Canvas: The Story of Tent Chautauqua*. New York : Hastings House, 1958.
- Case, Victoria. *We Called It Culture : The Story of Chautauqua*. Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday, 1948.
- "Our Chautauqua : Truly Splendid," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, July 28, 1916, p.4, col.2.
- "The Fourth Mount Clemens Chautauqua Proves A Wonderful Success," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, August 6, 1915, p.4, col.2.
- "Chautauqua Echoes: Some Hustling Necessary," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, August 7, 1914, p.4, col.2.
- "Chautauqua Echoes," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, August 8, 1913, p.4, col.1.
- "A Fine Success: Mt. Clemens's First Chautauqua - Great Attractions, Great Popular Audiences," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, July 19, 1912, p.4, col.2.