

1203 N. Main,

P.O. Box 1121

Wichita, KS 67201

316-264-3611

info@mhgswichita.org

hgswichita.org

Library Hours:

Tuesday & Saturday

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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THE CASE OF THE MISSING GRANDFATHER, OR HOW I LEARNED ABOUT THE CHAUTAUQUAS OF 1900

I never met my maternal grandfather. By the time I was a teenager, he was barely even mentioned in my family, more like a missing piece than an important ancestor. It wasn't until I was nearly 50 and bought a house in Wichita that his name came up in conversation. When I was telling my elderly mother about our house on Chautauqua Street, a memory sparked for her that kicked off a mystery for me. Her face lit up and she smiled. "My father was an interlocutor," she said. "He used to travel all over the mid-west with Chautauquas. That's why he was always away from home." This was the first I'd heard of that. I hate to admit that I heavily discounted her memory of him, suspicious that this was simply an excuse made up to explain a missing father. There is no doubt that he was absent from the family (he was sued by not one but two consecutive wives for divorce on the grounds of abandonment!) and sometimes people make up excuses that become accepted parts of our family history. Well, I abhor unsolved mysteries. It's in my nature. I had to find out if this was the truth!

When we were considering buying that house, I had looked up the meaning of the word Chautauqua and found that it was from an Iroquoian language with no literal translation currently available. My preliminary research led me to Chautauqua Lake in New York state, the birthplace of the movement that came to be known as "circuit Chautauquas" particularly in the mid-west because of the circuit they traveled from small town to small town. The roots of Chautauqua go back as far as 1826 at the American Lyceum in Massachusetts.

Lectures and discussions were well-attended and Ralph Waldo Emerson participated many times! Many independent Chautauqua groups came and went over the next 50 years. Starting in 1874 at a fixed location where it still exists today (near Chautauqua Lake) John Vincent and Lewis Miller began providing educational entertainment programs in the summer. The programs aimed toward exposing rural residents to theater, music, literature, and other activities that they might not ever be exposed to in any other way. The Chautauqua Institute puts on programs every summer.

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JOZEL SMITH ECKELS

The members of the Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society are saddened to report that we have lost a dear friend and board member. Jozel passed away on August 30, 2019. We will miss her friendship and her winning smile very much. We hope to continue her Afro-American special interest group.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS & LIBRARY EVENTS

POWER UP YOUR GENEALOGY. Tuesday, Oct 8 @ 1:30 to 3 pm. Led by Julia Langel. This month we'll be learning about Lineage Societies, familiar and obscure.

PHOTO MYSTERIES, Tuesday, Oct 15 @ 1:30 pm. Led by Rex Riley. Bring your mystery pictures and let our photo detectives go to work finding clues about the dates, places and people.

AFRO-AMERICAN SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP. This group is on hiatus. We are looking for a volunteer to coordinate this group.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Dewitt County Genealogical Quarterly	R-180 228 V43
Pickaway Quarterly	R-380 319 V 56-58
The Tree Tracers	R-390 115 V 42
The Seeker	R-210 CR 06 V 47-48
Ark Valley Crossroads	R-210 SG 095 V 28-29
MCGS Reporter	R-500 020 V 48-49
Footprints	R-440 043 V 60-61
St Louis Genealogical Society Quarterly	R-300 276 V 50-51
Relatively Seeking	R-210 CK 08 V 38-39
Minnesota Genealogist	R-280 009 V 48-49
San Diego Leaves & Saplings	R-050 017 V 44-45
South Bend Area Genealogical Society Newsletter	R-190 213 V 38-39
The Tri-State Packet	R-190 221 V 37
Des Moines County Genealogical Society Quarterly	R-200 091 V 41-46

CONFERENCE OPPORTUNITIES

- South Central Kansas Family History Fair: November 2, 2019, Wellington, KS. For information, see ksschgs.com
- Watch the videos from the My Heritage conference in Amsterdam for free! There's a good list of links at <https://abundantgenealogy.com/free-myheritage-live-2019-videos-now-available-online/>

IN OUR ARCHIVE

Do you have photos or other items that you'd like to share with the world? You can donate the items, or just bring them in for digitizing, and we'll post the items online in our Digital Collections website for other researchers to use and enjoy.

Bring the photos to the library and learn to scan and protect them as well as enjoying the hunt for answers. The scanning is FREE and you can take the photos home with you. We have a great time unravelling the mysteries.

CHAUTAUQUAS CONTINUED

I'd be willing to bet that more than one wife had to bribe and/or threaten her husband to get him to go to a circuit Chautauqua. The Chautauqua movement peaked in the midwest around 1915-1920. Seven United States presidents have participated, starting with President Ulysses S. Grant in only the second year of the Chautauqua's existence. Teddy Roosevelt called the Chautauqua "the most American thing about America" possibly because of the basic tenet of "be all that you can be, learn all that you can learn" and how that accurately describes our struggle to be our own country with our own ideals and direction. During the heyday, many other notable people participated including Amelia Earhart, Eleanor Roosevelt, William Jennings Bryan, J.C. Penney, Victor Borge, Ray Charles, and Amy Grant.

Sadly, circuit Chautauquas fizzled out by the 1930s with the Great Depression. This certainly doesn't help explain my grandfather's absence from the family from the 1930s to his death in the 1980s. I do, however, have reason to believe my mother's memory after finding an article in the Hutchinson News from 05 March 1919 that my grandfather, Walter Dixie Hyatt, a Sergeant with the Machine Gun Company of the 137th Infantry was assigned to be the interlocutor and manager of a minstrel troupe formed of US soldiers in France, ordered to travel around Europe and entertain the American Expeditionary Forces troops that remained overseas. It's easy to imagine that he, having already abandoned one wife, found this lifestyle to his liking and, after returning to Hutchinson after the war and creating four children with my grandmother, found the Chautauqua movement to be his perfect place in the world.

Occasionally, I've been told, one can find at an antique store a poster or pamphlet advertising a Chautauqua from days gone by. How I would love to find one with my grandfather listed as a participant, or even to find one from a local town! How I wish I could go back in time and attend just one Chautauqua, maybe to hear Amelia Earhart talk about her adventures, or maybe my grandfather orate about anything, really.

www.chq.org is the original "Mother Chautauqua" from 1874, still in existence today. There are a few other current productions, like www.lakesideohio.com which puts on a 10-week summer program every year. It might not be the same as attending in a small, dusty Kansas town, surrounded by friends and neighbors, and maybe fireflies, but it sounds absolutely charming.

Sources:

The University of Iowa Library: <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/sc/tc/>

Kansas State Historical Society: <https://www.kshs.org>

Chautauqua Institution: <https://chq.org/index.php>

Brass Chamber Music in Lyceum and Chautauqua by Raymond David Burkhart (via Google Books)

By Theresa Cansell

2018-2019 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Library open Tuesdays and Saturdays, 9 to 4

Call 316-264-3611 for information or to check on library closing.

POWER-UP SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP	PHOTO MYSTERIES
Second Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm Led by Julia Langel	Third Tuesday @ 1:30 Led by Rex Riley
	AFRO-AMERICAN SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP
	Fourth Saturday @ 1 pm On hiatus

Midwest Historical & Genealogical Society

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