

Year-by-Year Highlights of
The Waxahachie Chautauqua
1899 to 1930

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Sources:

Waxahachie Enterprise
Waxahachie Daily Light

1899 to 1905

1899

- Texas Synod of the Cumberland Presbyterian (C.P.) Church decided to move their Chautauqua Summer Assembly from Glen Rose for the 1900 Assembly. Waxahachie was one of several cities considered.
- Rev. J.C. Smith, pastor of the Waxahachie C.P. Church, leads the effort to bring the Chautauqua to Waxahachie
- The announcement was made that the 1900 Chautauqua Summer Assembly will be held in Waxahachie, along the creek in West End Park in the newly developed West End Addition.

1900 (First Chautauqua Assembly and Summer Encampment held July 26 to Aug 6)

- A pavilion was constructed in the West End Park with a capacity of around 1200.
- More than 75 tents were erected in the Park.
- Judge O.E. Dunlap of Waxahachie was one of the speakers, discussing his world travels.

1901 (July 24 to Aug 5)

- The pavilion was enlarged to a seating capacity of around 2000.
- More than 135 tents were erected in the Park.
- The decision was made to construct a new, bigger auditorium.

1902 (July 22 to July 31)

- Waxahachie Chautauqua Park Association (WCPA) was organized.
- Land for a new Auditorium was assembled and conveyed to the WCPA through three deeds.
- The new Auditorium was constructed by local contractor and architect E.S. Boze.
- More than 235 tents were erected in the Park.
- It rained nearly every day of the Assembly.
- On the last day of the Assembly, attendees took the streetcar to the dedication of the grounds of Trinity University, which was under construction.

1903 (July 21 to July 31)

- Estimates of around 3000 in and around the Auditorium were given.
- The program was 32 pages in length and 5000 copies were printed.
- A log-cabin replica (12 x 14 ft) of the first C.P. Church in Tennessee was built in the Park to house church exhibits.
- More than 300 tents were erected in the Park.

1904 (July 19 to July 29)

- The Young Men's Chautauqua Association and the Graham Bachelors each set up a tent in the Park to provide comfort and social amusements.
- The Assembly was reported as financially successful. Receipts, tent records and attendance were the largest of any previous year.

1905 (July 18 to July 28)

- A dam was constructed across the creek at West End Park and provisions made for swimming and boating.
- More than 200 tents were erected in the Park.
- Extensive thunderstorms caused campers to leave early, and diminished attendance. Some lectures ended early.
- A commitment was made to gravel walks and drives for the next year.
- Despite the reported success of the Assemblies, expenses were not being covered. The organizers asked the city to purchase the Park grounds and improvements for \$5000.

1906 to 1910

1906 (Chautauqua Assembly and Summer Encampment held July 24 to Aug 3)

- Reduced railroad ticket fares were available for those coming to Waxahachie by train.
- Tents from 9X9 to 16X20 were rented, with cots, flooring, and graveled tent sites available for additional cost.
- Due to the extreme heat, over-flow crowds at the Auditorium encouraged speakers to remove their coats.
- A free exhibition of moving pictures was offered in the pavilion.
- Music was provided in the Young Men's Chautauqua Club's social tent by a Mexican string band.
- Despite the reported success of the Assemblies, the Waxahachie Chautauqua Park Association (WCPA) was still in debt from the 1902 building of the Auditorium. The West-End park property of the Chautauqua was sold by the WCPA to a group of 22 leading citizens, headed by E.P. Hawkins, to pay the debt of \$5,252.53.

1907 (July 16 to Jul 26)

- Advertised as the "only Chautauqua in Texas that was run on the original Chautauqua plan."
- Program included: "lecturers, readers, impersonators, humorists, jugglers, poets, cartoonists, stereopticon and moving pictures, travelers, teachers, orators, statesmen, scientists, and musicians."
- The Young Men's Chautauqua Club's social tent became know as the "Chautauqua Parlor" and was furnished with writing desk, stationary, electric fans, and ice water. The club was described as a "matrimonial agency" since so many young people met at their social tent and married.
- On the last day, it was declared that so far this was the only Chautauqua Assembly without rain.

1908 (July 7 to July 17)

- Mr. R.H. Davis was employed as a travelling agent to promote the Waxahachie Chautauqua by distributing literature around the state.
- A lecture entitled "Shakespeare and His Times" was heard "with great pleasure by many members of the Waxahachie Shakespeare Club."
- The Governor of Colorado was greeted by 30 Waxahachie citizens at the Katy Depot, taken to his lodging at the Rogers Hotel, and escorted to the Chautauqua Auditorium where he gave his lecture.
- The Young Men's Chautauqua Club gave a "watermelon cutting", serving over 100 watermelons.

1909 (July 20 to July 30)

- The Assembly began with rain which "settled the dust and made things cooler."
- The Young Men's Chautauqua Club had a new 60-foot tent, furnished with sofas and rugs.
- The Assembly opened with a lecture by Dr. R.W. Douhat on "Gettysburg", with special seats reserved for "old soldiers."
- In 1900, the Chautauqua grounds were leased for only 10 years, expiring with this 1909 Assembly. Because of its success, it was then decided to continue the Chautauqua at West End Park permanently.
- Dates could not be arranged to secure popular orator William Jennings Bryant for the Chautauqua Assembly, but he did appear to a standing-room-only crowd on September 13, 1909.

1910 (July 19 to July 29)

- During the Assembly, horses and buggies were restricted to Main Street while automobiles were required to drive on Jefferson Street.
- The "Chautauqua Parlor" hosted popular music, including piano and vocal solos, and many games of Forty-Two.
- This Assembly was not as well attended as in the past, which was attributed to "an insufficient program." Pledges were made to provide new features and a stronger program next year.

1911 to 1915

1911 (Waxahachie Chautauqua Summer Assembly and Encampment: July 25 to August 3)

- Heavy rains curtailed attendance on opening night.
- Illinois Congressman Henry T. Rainey lectured on “The Dawn of the World's Peace”, stating that it was now possible to talk peace because of the awful destructiveness of modern wars.
- The tradition of free admission on Sundays continued.
- More than 2000 attended a sacred concert of orchestral numbers, vocal quartettes and duets, and a reading from Ben Hur.
- Miss Bess McDavid, a renowned reader who had performed daily at the Waxahachie Chautauqua, was drowned in a boating accident at Oak Lawn Lake (Dallas) two days after the Chautauqua closed.

1912 (July 4 to July 12)

- The Redpath-Horner Bureau circuit came to Texas and provided part of the Waxahachie Chautauqua program for the first time. (See Tent Circuits, page 2)
- The Waxahachie Pilgrims of Progress organized auto trips around the county to promote the Chautauqua.
- Railroad agent Col. C.W. Crush arranged for a special train to get entertainers from the Denton Chautauqua to the Waxahachie Chautauqua on time.
- A homecoming day (Waxahachie Day) for former citizens was established. All businesses closed at noon.
- Many of the churches cancelled their regular Sunday activities so members could attend the Assembly.
- Hudson motor cars were exhibited on the grounds.
- Charles F. Horner of Kansas City, general manager of the Redpath-Horner Circuit visited the Waxahachie Chautauqua to discuss plans for next year.
- About 4000 people attended the closing concert by the Royal Italian Guards Band.

1913 (July 8 to July 16)

- Widow of Civil War General Pickett appeared on stage of the Chautauqua Auditorium. Over 3000 attended.
- Mrs. Pickett and 35 members of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce were treated to a watermelon feast on the roof garden of the Rogers Hotel.
- Newspaper social columns reported many activities centering on Chautauqua, including breakfasts, luncheons, and picnic dinners held in the tents or on the grounds.
- It was reported that "interest lagged, attendance fell and deficits rose".
- Waxahachie Chautauqua Park Association carried a note for \$1120 and asked for relief from this obligation.
- Texas Synod of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church relinquished control of Waxahachie Chautauqua on 10/10/13 to 54 local citizens who agreed to underwrite its indebtedness.

1914 (June 26 to July 3)

- E.P. Hawkins conveyed the former WCPA park property to R.W. Getzendaner who then conveyed it, as a gift, to the City of Waxahachie for use as a park.
- “It’s hot. Get a Chautauqua ticket and keep cool.” (Waxahachie Enterprise 6/19/14)
- A parade led off the beginning of Chautauqua week, composed of 3 bands and hundreds of decorated vehicles. It formed at the Town Square and traveled to Getzendaner Park.
- Lecturer Thomas Fletcher was reported to keep audiences alive, alert, and awake - even on hot days - with his lectures such as “Tragedies of the Unprepared.”
- Attendance was light. This was attributed to late crops and the early date for the Assembly.
- It was announced that this first citizen-sponsored Chautauqua was “almost self-sustaining”.

1915 (August 9 to August 14)

- The entire format was changed to an “agricultural” or farm Chautauqua as an experiment. The faculty of Texas A&M College presented free lectures on farming and home economics.
- A pageant using local talent entitled “The Melting Pot”, featuring drills and folk dances, was billed as the highlight of the entertainment.
- Harvester Company furnished films on crop rotation, evolution of the reaper, farm machinery and beef cattle.
- Newspapers reported “slim crowds” in attendance at programs and a small crowd of campers.

1916 to 1920

1916 (Waxahachie Chautauqua Summer Assembly and Encampment: May 31 to June 6)

- Tickets to the Chautauqua Assembly were on sale at all drugstores.
- Care was given in selecting this year's program to avoid "muck-raking and sensational agitation". They also avoided politics since it was so prevalent everywhere else this election year. (*WDL 5/30/1916*.)
- Two performances were given each day – one at 3 o'clock and one at 8 o'clock.
- The drama "The Melting Pot" presented by the Redpath-Horner circuit with a cast of 10 actors from New York. There were record crowds with "people present from all the outlying towns of Ellis County" (*WDL 6/6/1916*).
- There were 80 people on the program, 15 more than ever before.

1917 (June 19 to June 25)

- Advertised as "Patriotism, Happiness, Progress - The Watchwords for the 1917 Chautauqua. 100 Folks in Seven Days."
- "...for those not fortunate to spend their summers away from home, it breaks the monotony of the dull summer months." (*WDL 6/29/1917*)
- The play "Little Women" was presented along with Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pinafore" with a large orchestra and cast of 40.
- It was requested that next year's Chautauqua return to the tradition of being free to the public on Sundays.
- At the closing of the season, citizens responded whole-heartedly to appeals to sign up for tickets for 1918 Chautauqua; 400 tickets were subscribed to in a few minutes between acts of the comic opera "Pinafore." Many businesses bought ten and twenty subscriptions.

1918 (June 12 to June 18)

- The Chautauqua Auditorium received a new coat of paint prior to the Assembly.
- New park equipment was installed including 6 brick furnaces, lights, and playground equipment.
- Advertised as "A wonderful week of Happiness, Patriotism, Music, Mirth, and Melody".
- All Sunday performances were free.
- Attractions included Ellis county native Dr. Ira Landrith giving a stage monologue and a performance of the Ladies' Regimental Orchestra.
- Many of the speakers talked about the conflict in Europe and their experiences there. (*See 1918, page 5*)

1919 (June 11 to June 17)

- Admission to the afternoon program was 35 cents, and admission to the evening program was 50 cents.
- The Redpath-Horner circuit brought the original New York cast to perform the comedy-drama "It Pays to Advertise".
- The Victory Players performed on banjo, flute, and a one-string fiddle made from an old cigar box.
- The Italian Band performance included quartets and solos, instrumentals and vocals.
- Lecture topics included "The University of Hard Knocks" and "Grouches: Their Cause and Cure".
- June 12 was designated as Friendship Day at Chautauqua.
- "The citizens of the town are taking advantage of this opportunity which comes annually both as recreation and improvement. Quite a number of people from the city are camping on the grounds." (*WDL 6/13/1919*)

1920 (June 21 to June 27)

- Admission: Season ticket \$2.00 adult, \$1.00 children. War tax had to be added to all ticket prices.
- H.J Leake headed a novelty musical act in which each of the four members played the xylophone and marimbaphone. Leake was said to be the best percussionist in America.
- Dr. Hilton Jones performed science experiments/demonstrations in his presentation "Study in Vibrations" "This amazingly thrilling lecture reduced to A B C." (*WDL 6/2/1920*)
- Musical artists from 1918 and 1919 programs combined in 1920 to create "spectacular interest and unbelievable harmony".
- Dr. Frank L. Loveland gave a patriotic lecture that lays bare Bolshevism, anarchy, and Americanism.

1921 to 1925

1921 (Waxahachie Chautauqua Summer Assembly and Encampment: June 14 to June 20)

- A big thermometer was placed in front of Curlin's Drug Store on the Town Square to monitor ticket sales.
- Tickets were now \$2.50 plus war tax.
- Mr. Gard, the advance man for the Chautauqua, came to town a week before the event to help with ticket sales.
- "Mr. Horner's one aim is to aid in the development of community life. His ambition is to give the town something that will stimulate thought along better lines and add luster and color to life that is too often sordid and dead and unimaginative." (*WDL 6/8/1921*)
- This year's program was called a "university under a tent." (*WDL 6/8/1921*)
- Luther Burbank was on the program, discussing his experiments with fruits and vegetables.
- Agnes Knofleckova, a Bohemian violinist who came from a very poor farming family, played as if "bringing the angels from the sky and raising the mortals to the heavens." (*WDL 6/9/1921*)

1922 (June 15 to June 21)

- A special "rural day" was set up on the second day. Every farmer in the county was invited to hear the lecture free.
- Five season tickets were given away in a ticket hunt at Getzendaner Park.
- Chautauqua talent entertained Rotarians at a noon luncheon at the Hotel Rogers.
- Weather was favorable but hot, with a refreshing breeze. Unusually large crowds attended on the weekend.
- The Philips Sisters performed Scottish music and also danced the Highland Fling.
- Miss Ruth Bryan Owen, daughter of Williams Jennings Bryan, gave a lecture.
- "Daddy" Grosbecker's Yodelers closed their performance by yodeling "Dixie".
- The closing day of the Chautauqua Assembly was designated as Neighborhood Day.

1923 (June 19 to June 26)

- The written programs were redesigned to be easily carried in a pocket without folding.
- Homer C. Bobbitt was to have lectured on "Is Farming a Success?" but changed his topic to "My Experience in Bolshevik Russia" because only a small number of free passes had been issued to farmers.
- One evening was designated as "Boys' Night" with the purpose of attracting men and boys to the programs.
- A lecture/demonstration of electricity and the radio was interrupted for about 25 minutes during a power outage.
- Honorable Pat Harrison, Senator from Mississippi, spoke against President Harding and his plan to establish a world court that would compete with the League of Nations.
- "Fair size" crowds were reported.
- About 400 advance tickets were sold for the 1924 Chautauqua to ensure next year's program.

1924 (June 2 to June 7)

- Waxahachie was mentioned as having the longest running annual Chautauqua meeting in Texas.
- A recreation of the "Kansas City Night Hawk" live radio program performed with the Radio Entertainers.
- Gilbert's All-American Band performed patriotic and classical music, including the William Tell Overture.
- Clemens Marionettes provided an evening program.
- Low attendance this year was attributed to the early date of the Chautauqua. Organizers planned to ask the Horner Company to change to a later date for next year.
- \$1500 was guaranteed by the Chautauqua committee, who expressed doubt that the Chautauqua would continue since it lost money this year. The full 600 subscribers would be required to guarantee the return next year.

1925 (June 8 to June 15)

- Banners were strung up downtown advertising the Chautauqua.
- Entertainment was stressed in this year's program. Lecturers were fewer in number, but were nationally known.
- The program included the Cathedral Choir, the National Marimba Band from Guatemala and two humorists.
- One lecturer was the Honorable Charles W. Bryan, former governor of Nebraska and brother of William Jennings Bryan. He was welcomed at the train station by a committee from the Chamber of Commerce.
- Humorist Herbert Leon "Kill the Blues" Cope was called the "Apostle of Fun and Happy Philosophy." He had also been part of the Waxahachie Chautauqua in 1903.
- The Cohan musical "45 Minutes from Broadway" was presented with New York actors.
- The last day was declared "Father - Son Day" with jugglery, magic, a circus clown and electric and radio wonders.

1926 to 1930

1926 (Waxahachie Chautauqua : May 29 to June 4)

- The Redpath-Horner Premier Chautauqua shortened its program to 6 days with no performances on Sunday.
- Folks who signed pledges for tickets last year were admonished to keep to their pledges.
- The *Daily Light* recommended the Chautauqua to its readers, saying that it brought entertainment and instructive events to Waxahachie that citizens would otherwise travel to larger cities to attend. (*WDL 6/25/1926*)
- The Cubs Club, an organization of business women, held an intensive ticket drive with the goal of each family in the city purchasing two season tickets.
- Large crowds were in attendance.
- No performances were held on Thursday afternoon June 3 because the talent did not arrive in time. This year all talent traveled by automobile. Leaving at 4 am, after their performances in Ardmore, OK, they encountered bad roads on the way.
- Camping at the park had ceased but many elder Waxahachians reminisced about the “good old days” when they camped out under the shade of the beautiful trees, with a miniature tented city and attractive little streets and sidewalks.

1927 (June 15 to June 21)

- The 6-day program presented by the Redpath-Horner Premier Chautauqua was called the “Joy Week Special.”
- Forty businesses signed contracts for tickets and took out ads supporting each of the acts on the Chautauqua program. Sixteen businesses collaborated in a full-page ad.
- Tickets were on sale at the drug stores and at Will Moore Hardware Company.
- The program included various groups performing Scottish, Irish, and Hawaiian music and songs.
- A.B. MacDonald, editor for Curtis publications, spoke on “Is Prohibition a Failure” and “Name your Poison.” He criticized liquor sellers and moonshiners and urged citizens to support prohibition.
- The Chautauqua committee agreed to guarantee the 1928 season for \$1600 if 400 season tickets were pledged in advance.

1928 (June 18 to June 23)

- 56 local citizens underwrote the 1928 Redpath-Horner Premier Chautauqua program for \$1600. Ticket sales came up about \$700 short. The group threatened not to bring the Chautauqua back next year if people did not support it.
- A Chautauqua parade was held with the starting point being the Women’s Building on West Jefferson Street.
- Light crowds were present for the opening performance.
- The Massey Five performed old-time fiddle breakdowns to “storms of applause” and “shouts of joy”. (*WDL 6/18/1928*)
- Lecturer Joshua Lee was hailed as “another William Jennings Bryan.”
- A *Daily Light* reporter criticized the Chautauqua program for being too “high brow” and not entertaining. (*WDL 6/21/1928*)
- Chief Strongheart, a Yakima Indian, urged support of a bill that would aid the 200 Alabama Indians living in a swamp near Livingston, TX. This tribe came at the request of General Sam Houston to aid in the fight for Texas Independence in 1836.
- To encourage attendance at the last 5 performances, a special price of \$1.00 was set for the remaining performances.

1929 (May 4 to May 10)

- “The Chautauqua, which has been coming here for over twenty years, is one of the finest educational attractions possible for us to obtain at a nominal cost.” (*WDL 5/3/1929*)
- The 6-day Redpath-Horner Premier Chautauqua program included Fiecht’s Yodeling Tyroleans, Jack Wood Bell Ringers, and the Vienna Cymbalom Symphony.
- Dr. C.M. Sanford lectured that specialization experts are necessary in the workplace. (*WDL 5/7/1929*)
- 20 citizens guaranteed the Chautauqua program. “Whether the Chautauqua will be brought here again next year has not been determined... but [accepting] pledges for tickets is continuing.” (*WDL 5/10/1929*)
- The performance of the closing play was poor and far below Chautauqua standards. (*WDL 5/11/1929*)

1930 (June 12 to June 17)

- The 5-day program presented by the Associated Chautauqua (no longer Redpath-Horner) was advertised as “a community vacation.” (*WDL 6/6/1930*)
- Small audiences were present for the performances.
- The opening of the Thursday night program was preceded by the Sharkey-Schmeling prizefight being broadcast over a radio.
- Chautauqua lecturer Judge Fred G. Bale also spoke before the Waxahachie Men’s Downtown Bible Class on “Tomorrow’s Citizens Today.”
- No announcement was made whether the Chautauqua would be engaged next year. (*WDL 6/18/1930*)