



*Nebraska History* posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

## Article Title: Respectable Leisure: The Crete Chautauqua, 1882-1897

Full Citation: James P Eckman, "Respectable Leisure: The Crete Chautauqua, 1882-1897," *Nebraska History* 69 (1988): 19-29

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1988CreteChaut.pdf>

Date: 9/13/2013

Article Summary: The Crete Chautauqua offered moral and spiritual instruction in a resort-like setting. Other Nebraska assemblies that chose to emphasize entertainment lasted decades longer.

See also two more recent articles by Eckman on Nebraska Chautauqua activities. A 1994 article describes the less high-minded Chautauqua assemblies: "Culture as Entertainment: The Circuit Chautauqua in Nebraska, 1904-1924," <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1994Chautauqua.pdf> Eckman's 1992 article describes a home study program that grew out of the original Chautauqua assemblies: "Promoting an Ideology of Culture: The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles in Nebraska, 1878-1900," <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1992Culture.pdf>

### Cataloging Information:

Names: J D Stewart, F I Foss, Frank and William Hunt, John Heyl Vincent, Graham Taylor, Washington Gladden, Lyman Abbott, W E Hardy, William Jennings Bryan

Nebraska Place Names: Crete

Keywords: circuit Chautauquas, Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles (CLSC), Nebraska Sunday School Assembly (later the Crete Chautauqua), Congregational Church, Recognition Day, Children's Day, Social Gospel movement, temperance, Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)

Photographs / Images: boating on the Big Blue River; map of grounds belonging to the Nebraska Sunday School Assembly, Crete; camps erected on the grounds; Blackstone Hall; single-page and double-page views of the Crete Chautauqua grounds; children participating in a Chautauqua program; Mary Leavitt family camping on the grounds



*Boating on the Big Blue River was enjoyed by many participants in the Crete Chautauqua.*

## RESPECTABLE LEISURE: THE CRETE CHAUTAUQUA, 1882-1897

*By James P. Eckman*

On a hot, sultry, July day in 1888, amidst tents and cottages, thousands of people from all over Nebraska gathered along the Big Blue River near the small town of Crete to hear lectures on English history, the intelligence of animals, and the manifestations of God in the course of history. As vacationers prayed, sang hymns, and enjoyed fellowship, an aura of religiosity pervaded the grounds of the Nebraska Sunday School Assembly. Many of them, both adults and children, had been there for over a week listening to

lectures, hearing splendid music, reading books, and taking examinations.<sup>1</sup> One vacationer characterized the Crete Assembly as a “surfeit of such good things . . . that one is tempted to complain because he cannot be in two or three places at the same time”; and, expectantly, “It will be our Jerusalem, and, like the Jews of old, we can all journey up hither annually and keep our midsummer feast.”<sup>2</sup>

From 1882 to 1897, thousands of Nebraskans spent as many as ten days each summer attending similar assembly sessions at Crete. The Crete Chautauqua, through its Protestant emphasis, programs, and featured speakers, reflected a quest for “respectable” leisure in a resort-like

atmosphere; a respectability insured by championing the Victorian values of self-restraint (e.g. temperance) and self-improvement. The Chautauqua movement was part of a larger shift in American thought toward a secularized postmillennialism, i.e. the view that mankind, through self-restraint and self-improvement, could bring about the redemption of American society.

The Chautauqua movement began in 1874 at Lake Chautauqua in western New York when a Methodist minister, John Heyl Vincent, and a Methodist layman, Lewis Miller, initiated an interdenominational program for the improvement of Sunday School teachers. Highly successful, the program expanded to include a school of

---

*James P. Eckman is a history instructor at Grace College of the Bible, Omaha, and a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.*

MAP OF GROUNDS BELONGING TO THE  
**NEBRASKA SUNDAY-SCHOOL ASSEMBLY**  
 AT CRETE, NEBRASKA.

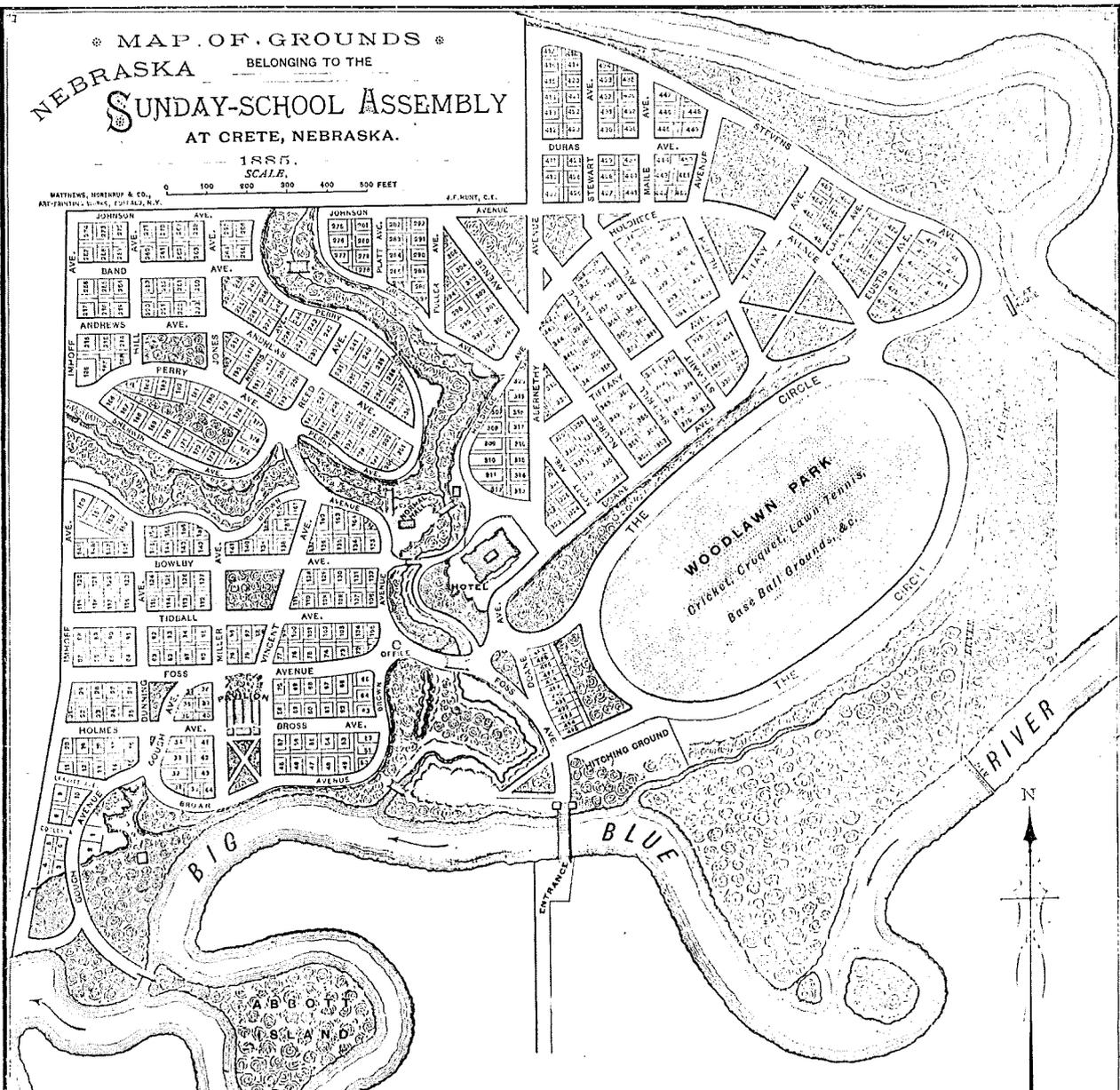
1885.

SCALE.

0 100 200 300 400 500 FEET

MATTHEWS, HORNBRUP & CO.,  
 ART-PRINTERS, 111 W. 42ND ST., N.Y.

J. F. HUNT, C.E.



**NEBRASKA**  
**Sunday-School Assembly**  
 THE CHAUTAUQUA OF NEBRASKA.

CAPITAL STOCK, - - - \$50,000.  
 EXTENSIVE GROUNDS ON THE BLUE RIVER, NEAR CRETE.  
 AMPLE BUILDINGS.  
 Able Lecturers and Teachers in Normal and Musical Courses.  
 DEPARTMENTS OPEN TO ALL DENOMINATIONS.  
 \$2,500 APPROPRIATED FOR PROGRAMME OF 1886.

**TO THOSE INTERESTED IN THE SUNDAY-SCHOOLS OF NEBRASKA.**  
 The unexampled rapidity of material development, the high position attained by our State in educational interests, the many churches and philanthropic institutions arising everywhere within our borders, are sufficient guarantees of the deep interest taken in every worthy enterprise.  
 It is within the present century, and almost in the last decade, that the first provisions were made to mitigate the loss of early opportunities by the establishment of Reading Circles and Assemblies at pleasant summer resorts, where talent comprehending the needs was employed as lecturers and teachers.  
**THE LOCATION OF OUR CHAUTAUQUA.**  
 Chautauqua is loved by thousands of our citizens for the advantages it has given them. Its locality is far from us; very few at this distance can ever enter its choice retreats, but its principles are capable of being made known and taught at the Chautauqua of the West—the Nebraska Sunday-School Assembly grounds, located on the banks of the Big Blue River, near Crete. These grounds contain 109½ acres, especially adapted by Nature for one of the finest summer resorts in all the West.  
 Natural scenery, enhanced by the power of wealth, art and religion, has made the original Chautauqua what it is, and will make ours the favorite retreat for the people of Nebraska.  
**THE PRESENT DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CHAUTAUQUA.**  
 It has already been raised and used in beautifying and improving these grounds and erecting a Pavilion, Normal Hall, Auditorium, Head-quarters, Dormitory and Dining Hall—all connected by plank walks.  
**ITS FUTURE DEVELOPMENT.**  
 The grounds have been surveyed, platted and laid out by one of the most skillful and experienced landscape architects in the country—J. F. Hunt, who has charge of the Chautauqua grounds, and whose skill has so greatly developed and improved

that magnificent place. There are already a number of applicants for lots, who will soon erect cottages thereon.  
**THE ORGANIZATION AND THE MANAGEMENT.**  
 Perfect catholicity of spirit has existed among the different denominations with reference to aid pertaining to these grounds. Several denominations have already decided to erect at an early date *two conventional lot-partitions* on lots set apart for that purpose.  
 The management rests in a board of twenty-one trustees, selected from the different denominations, nominated by the stockholders and confirmed by the board.  
**THE PROGRAMME.**  
 In 1885 \$1,300 was expended on the programme, and \$7,500 has been voted for the year 1886.  
 Rev. A. E. Dimming of Boston, Mass., who has had large experience in connection with eastern assemblies, has been appointed manager. Such talent as John R. Gough, John A. Leggin and other eminent lecturers, teachers and divines, will be employed by him.  
**ITS FINANCIAL PROVISIONS AND NEEDS.**  
 The capital stock is \$50,000, divided into shares of \$10 each. It is the earnest desire of the management to place this stock in the hands of the many and not in the hands of a few. An effort will be made to distribute these shares in every town in the State, and your assistance to this end is solicited. Only ten per cent. of the stock must be paid down, and not more than thirty-five per cent. can be assessed in any one year, though paid-up stock is preferable. Will you kindly act with us in this good work? Money and names for stock can be sent to the Treasurer, A. W. Jones, of Crete, Neb., who will at once forward certificate therefor.  
 F. I. FOSS, President, C. H. AHEARNETHY, Secretary,  
 CRETE, NEB. FAIRMONT, NEB.  
 A. W. JONES, Treasurer, CRETE, NEB.

## Crete Chautauqua

languages, a school of theology, and a summer school for public teachers. In 1878 Vincent added a home study program known as the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC) that featured subjects taken by a typical college student. The program involved a curriculum of books to be read over a four-year period, after which the student would receive a CLSC certificate from Chautauqua. From 1880 through 1914, Vincent published a monthly magazine, *The Chautauquan*, that included study helps for the local CLSCs, articles, and reports on local Chautauquas.<sup>3</sup>

As the Chautauqua idea spread, independent Chautauqua assemblies, patterned after the New York Chautauqua, sprang up throughout America. By 1894 eighty localities featured a Chautauqua assembly, and by 1907 about 100 towns boasted their own assembly. Each local Chautauqua assembly existed as an independent unit and planned its own organizational structure, financing, and annual program. However, by 1920 traveling circuit Chautauquas had replaced most of the local assemblies.<sup>4</sup>

The underlying premise of these early Chautauqua assemblies was that moral and spiritual instruction was more important than entertainment. Over time, however, this balance between education and entertainment shifted in favor of entertainment, an emphasis that constituted the dynamic of the traveling circuit Chautauquas after 1903. Most of the participants in the circuits were professional entertainers or lecturers who worked only within a contract format that involved agents or professional organizers. Therefore, the local communities had no veto over who appeared on the circuit programs. The Crete Chautauqua never became involved in the circuit Chautauqua movement.

As an independent Chautauqua assembly, the Nebraska Sunday School Assembly by 1885 was known as the "Crete Chautauqua" with major ties to the Congregational Church in



*Crete Chautauqua participants were encouraged to camp on the grounds.*

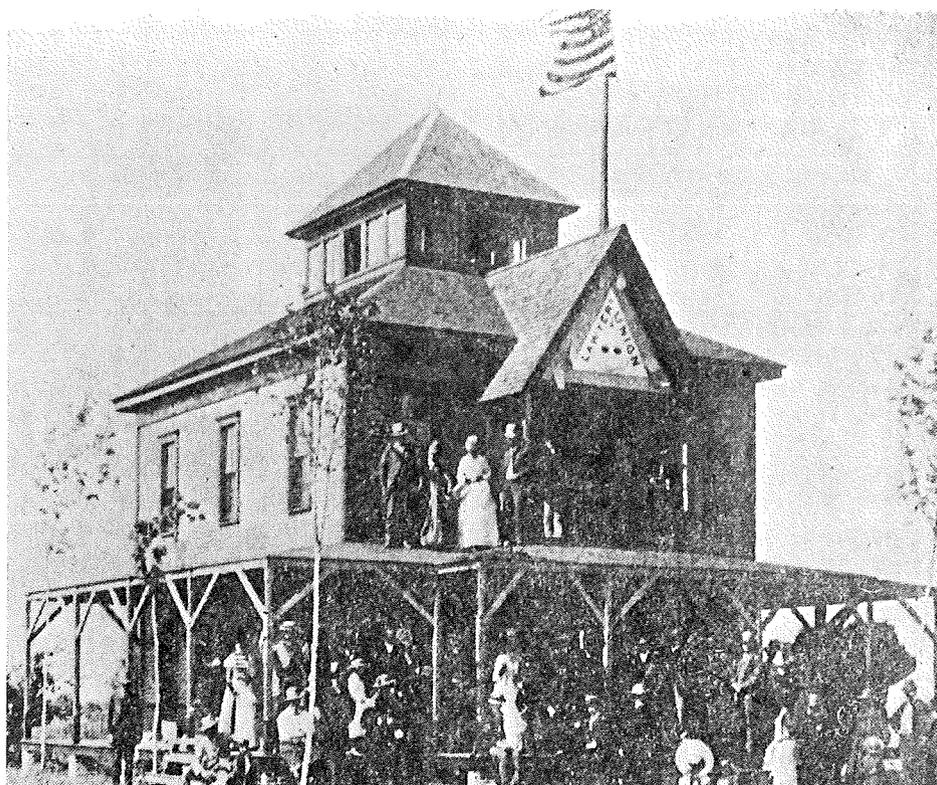
Nebraska. In January 1882 the Crete Congregational Club asked Reverend J.D. Stewart, pastor of the Congregational Church of Hastings, Nebraska, to organize a Sunday School institute at Crete for the coming summer, with Reverend A.E. Dunning of Boston, secretary of the Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, as superintendent of instruction. Because Stewart had graduated from the Chautauqua Normal course and the CLSC at Chautauqua, New York, he patterned the Crete program after the mother Chautauqua. This first assembly was held in the Crete Congregational Church; only "a few dozen" people attended.<sup>5</sup>

To further the work of the institute, in October 1882 the Congregational Sunday School leaders, meeting in Omaha, formally organized the Nebraska Sunday School Association to "promote the best methods of Bible Study and Sunday School by lectures, discussions, lesson drills, and other agencies."<sup>6</sup> Again under the leadership of Reverend Stewart, the association planned another summer assembly for 1883. A total of 2,000 people attended

the sessions between June 26 and July 3, the end of which resulted in the adoption of articles of incorporation. The articles made Crete the permanent location for the summer assembly and called for a board of nine directors, a majority of which "shall be members of Congregational Churches." In 1885 amended articles of incorporation expanded the board to twenty-one.<sup>7</sup>

In 1884 the board of directors met to choose a permanent site in Crete for the summer assembly. Criteria for the site included the presence of a body of water, a grove of trees, and facilities for camping. The directors planned to erect a number of permanent buildings, especially a pavilion for large meetings. They purchased 109 acres just west of Crete along the Blue River that met all their requirements. On August 25, 1884, during the regular Chautauqua assembly, F.I. Foss, a highly successful lawyer and one of the directors of the Crete assembly, offered the association clear title to the grounds on the condition that the association raise \$10,000. The association sold stock, successfully meeting the goal.<sup>8</sup>

With the funds that had been raised,



*Blackstone Hall was built on the Crete Chautauqua grounds with funds from Nebraska lawyers.*

the directors during 1884-85 supervised the erection of a pavilion capable of accommodating 800 to 1,000 people, a normal hall, an open-air auditorium, a dormitory with eight rooms, and a dining hall.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, they commissioned Frank and William Hunt, who had designed the mother Chautauqua grounds in New York, to landscape and re-design the grounds along the Big Blue.<sup>10</sup> *The Chautauquan* of July 1887 characterized the Crete grounds "as the best facilities for training Sunday School teachers in the country."<sup>11</sup> Over the years, other improvements included an expanded dining hall, concrete sidewalks throughout the grounds, and telephones. The city of Crete later provided lights for the assembly grounds. By the mid-1890s twenty permanent buildings dotted the grounds.<sup>12</sup>

Accommodations for assembly participants varied. There were few spaces in the hotel (or dormitory), so most vacationers rented tents or cottages, as well as tent furniture, oil stoves, towels, straw, and stables for horses. In fact, Chautauqua leaders urged participants to camp as the means of getting the fullest benefit from the courses and programs offered each summer: Only in close proximity to nature could the Chautauqua experience be fully realized!<sup>13</sup> The grounds also offered a dining hall, a concession stand, a barber shop, a post office, and a newsstand: In effect, it was a self-contained community. In addition, the Burlington and Missouri Railroad gave special rates for passengers and baggage. Season tickets for the assembly cost two dollars for adults, one dollar for children aged ten to sixteen, with

children under ten free.<sup>14</sup>

The directors of the assembly maintained strict observance of Sundays in order to guarantee "the quiet atmosphere of a Christian home." Therefore, they prohibited the rental of boats, the selling of tickets and newspapers, and the use of excursion trains. They admitted only those who held tickets that had been previously purchased. *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly* commented that "its aims are to advance Christian life and maintain Christian principle. Beyond question it is for the highest good of all interested that Sundays of the Assembly should be kept as holy days."<sup>15</sup>

As the Crete Chautauqua became more successful, local businessmen's involvement increased. "The assembly was good for business," stated one businessman. "It put Crete on the map." Businesses spent hundreds of dollars on advertising through circulars, posters, door hangers, and postcards. In 1885 the *State Vidette* gave \$3,500 to save the assembly from financial difficulty. For the 1886 assembly, businessmen in DeWitt, Wilber, and Crete helped distribute 75,000 brochures that had a map of the Chautauqua grounds on the back. Crete businessmen traveling in northern Nebraska also helped dispense the brochures. Finally, advertising by businessmen in the annual program, *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, and in newspapers aided the Chautauqua cause. One Crete businessman even published a newspaper, called the *Daily Union*, solely for participants during the 1883 assembly. A similar paper, *The Crete Chautauquan*, highlighted the 1897 assembly.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the early years, the primary objective of the Crete assembly centered on Sunday School instruction. Therefore, much of the programming, usually prepared by a committee of Congregationalists chosen by the board, concentrated on Bible study and the improvement of teaching methods. Normal classes and

## Crete Chautauqua

advanced normal classes characterized each assembly program and upon completion of written examinations, the Chautauqua Normal Union granted diplomas. A wide variety of other religious-oriented lectures included church history, theology, missionary work, and background studies in Roman and Greek history.<sup>17</sup>

Equally as important, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, described as "the rock to which the assembly must be anchored," held "round tables" each week during the assembly.<sup>18</sup> Daily lessons and discussions held in the CLSC headquarters on the grounds helped participants prepare for the program of the coming year. Additionally, some of the lecturers frequented the CLSC meetings, often speaking themselves. For example, Chautauqua founder, Bishop Vincent, attended the Crete Chautauqua in 1885 and 1890, serving as a featured speaker at the "round table."<sup>19</sup> The climax of the entire assembly session came with the CLSC Recognition Day ceremony, a replica of the ceremony at the mother Chautauqua. On this occasion, the CLSC graduates of the four-

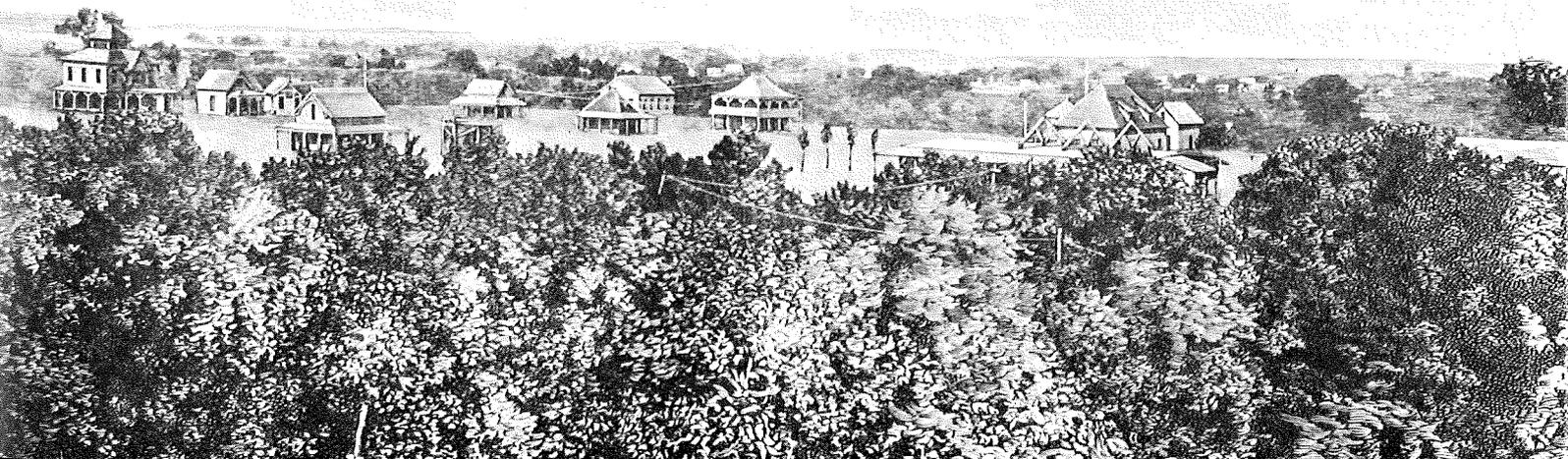
year course walked across the grounds, through arches of grapevine, evergreen and elderberry, and up to the stage where they received their certificates.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to Recognition Day, other special days on the grounds recognized the various groups supporting the Chautauqua idea: Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) Day, Lawyers' Day, Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Day, and Children's Day. Indeed, the lawyers of Nebraska built a permanent building on the grounds and held yearly programs that featured judges and famous lawyers from across the country. The G.A.R. constructed a permanent building, as did the YMCA. Children's Day centered on special recognition of the children and the importance of the Sunday School movement to their training in Protestant Christian values. The day always culminated in a program in which the children, dressed in their finest, would march onto the platform of the pavilion and present a program of Bible stories, recitation of memorized Bible verses, and inspirational readings.<sup>21</sup>

That the larger Protestant religious community supported the Crete Chautauqua was evident from the ecumenical spirit at the grounds. Although founded by Congregationalists, other Protestant denominations encouraged their congregations to attend the Crete assembly. Indeed, the *State Vidette* in 1887 reported that the Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians had raised "handsome sums" to erect headquarters on the grounds. By the next year the churches had completed their projects. Yearly meetings of the various denominations also characterized the Chautauqua gatherings.<sup>22</sup>

Wrapped in these Protestant religious trappings, the Crete Chautauqua functioned as a midwestern, middle class retreat, somewhat like Newport, Rhode Island, functioned for the wealthy, Eastern upper class.<sup>23</sup> The abundant educational opportunities, boating, bathing, croquet, lawn tennis, and supervised games encouraged healthful, respectable recreation.<sup>24</sup> A little steamboat took visitors up and down the Big Blue River, and fireworks frequently filled the night sky. This

*Crete Chautauqua grounds*



*Crete Chautauqua grounds about  
1888.*





powerful combination of education, Protestant religion, and exercise helps explain why thousands made the annual summer pilgrimage to Crete. But it does not give the whole picture.

As an agency of popular culture, the Chautauqua movement in general and the Crete assembly in particular epitomized the ideal of social regeneration through religion and education. Vincent's statement of purpose for Chautauqua said so. He saw Chautauqua as an agency designed to exalt "education, — the mental, social, moral, and religious faculties." Its regenerative objectives involved making people more "affectionate," "sympathetic," "conscientious," "reverent," "intelligent," "and more industrious, economical, just, and generous, as members of society in a work-a-day world."<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in 1888 the *State Vidette* viewed the Crete Chautauqua as the embodiment of this high ideal:

It endeavors to bring about a popular gathering where people can be drawn together to enjoy the bounty of nature and to find relaxation from business cares in physical and mental culture. Its aim is to imbue everyone with lofty ideas, to instill morality, education and thought in the mind, and to make life a more harmonious entity.<sup>26</sup>

And the 1890 Nebraska Chautauqua program called for "the cooperation of our state to make the assembly more and more helpful to those who wish to grow into the power and grace of the noblest type of character, and consecrate their gifts and attainments to the noblest ends of living."<sup>27</sup> Such idealism clothed in the language of Victorian seriousness pervaded every aspect of the Crete Chautauqua.

As a legitimate and respectable form of leisure, the Crete assembly represented a place for a summer vacation that could be enjoyed without guilt, because beneath the fun and relaxation lay a serious purpose — self-improvement.<sup>28</sup> As James Garfield said of the Chautauqua movement, "It has been the struggle of the world to get more leisure time, but it was left for Chautauqua to show how to use it."<sup>29</sup>

The underlying criteria for everything at the Crete Chautauqua centered on respectability and a didactic purpose. Thus entertainment had to be pure and wholesome. Every evening during the assembly, some form of entertainment occurred on the grounds. Chalk artist and cartoonist Frank Beard of Chicago typified the respectable humor at Crete during the 1890s. Choirs, involving vacationers themselves and professional artists like Katherine Fisk and Electa Gifford, both of Chicago, were a standard at every Crete Chautauqua. Professional orchestras, musicians, traveling singing groups like the Slaytons (a singing group of former slaves from Tennessee), or the Doane College Adelpia Quartet frequented the grounds. "World Tours," such as "From New York to Egypt" and "The Passion Play of Oberammergau" via the stereopticon, highlighted the 1892 Chautauqua at Crete.<sup>30</sup>

Victorian considerations of respectability and didacticism not only shaped entertainment choices at the Crete Chautauqua, they molded the central thrust of the national Chautauqua movement with its emphasis on self-improvement. Such a commitment was part of an ongoing shift in American religious thought away from the God-centered determinism of Calvinism, which downplayed man's free will, towards a man-centered theology that stressed man's ability to bring in God's kingdom (i.e. postmillennialism). A triumph in man's ability to control his own destiny marked this age; ignorance and sin could be remedied, given sufficient discipline and will.<sup>31</sup>

This confidence in the redemption of society, albeit secularized by the late Victorian era — especially in the social gospel movement — was central to this age.<sup>32</sup> Chautauqua had significance as a determinative force in an evangelical mindset that centered on self-improvement and self-restraint as the methods by which society would be transformed. As Vincent argued,

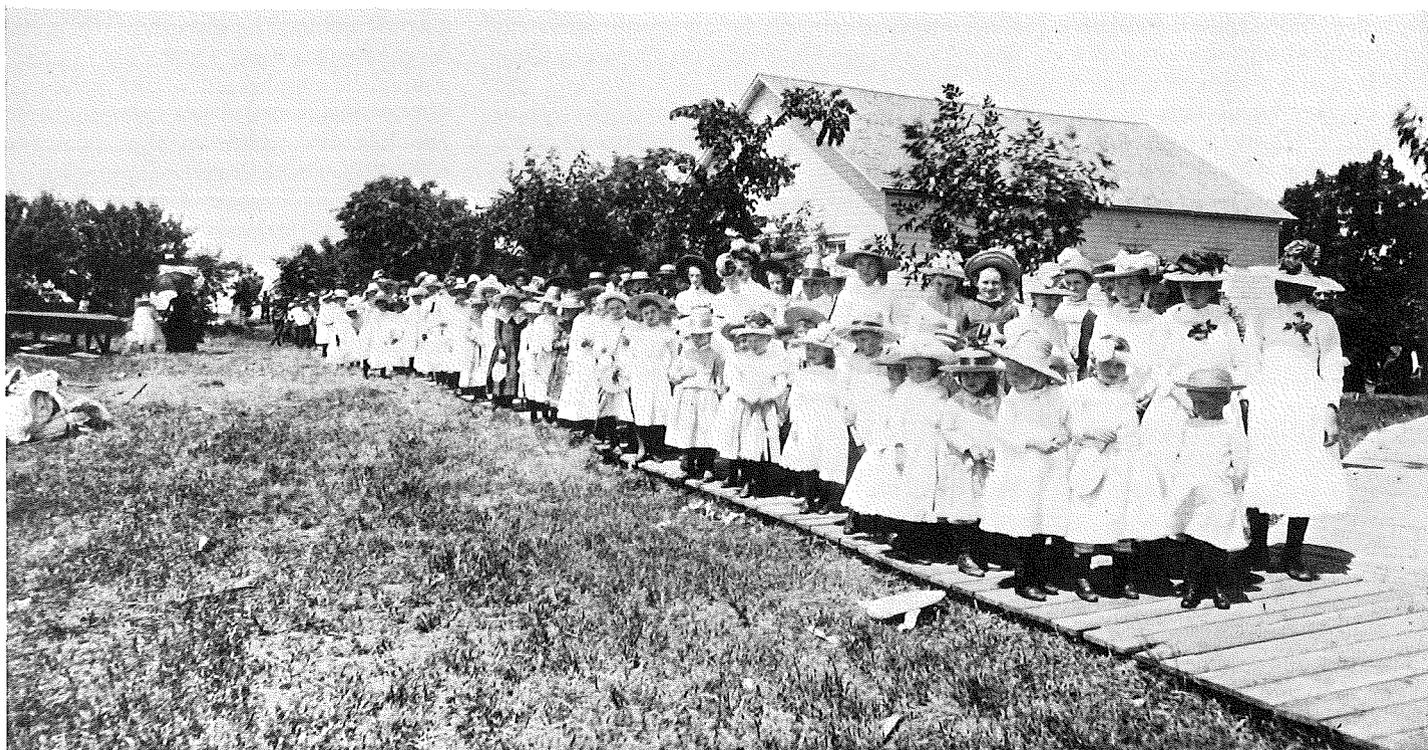
Such popular education must increase the power of the people in politics . . . It must tend to a better understanding between the classes of society . . . It must avoid the struggles between capital and labor, and promote in all possible ways, the glorious brotherhood of honesty, sympathy and culture — a culture that addresses itself to all sides of a man's nature.<sup>33</sup>

This link of the secularized postmillennial conviction that focused on the gradual redemption of society through self-improvement with Chautauqua has gone unnoticed by historians. Chautauqua existed as a transition between the thoroughly religious approach to securing God's kingdom characteristic of the earlier revivals and the more secularized effects of the mature social gospel movement.

Self-improvement through literature remained a primary goal among many of the speakers at the Crete Chautauqua. Dr. Herbert A. Sprague, at the 1889 assembly, lectured on Shakespeare and Milton, stressing practical lessons for youth. In 1893 Professor Lawrence Fossler of the University of Nebraska lectured on Gottwald Lessing, emphasizing his toleration of all religious thought. Similarly, he lectured on Johann Goethe: "Faust . . . is a study of the effort of human life heavenward. It teaches above everything else that duty toward God and man is the supreme obligation." The didactic nature of literature served to teach man his obligations toward others.<sup>34</sup>

That the Crete Chautauqua saw itself as an agency of social redemption was evident in the efforts at the Nebraska penitentiary. During the 1893 assembly, W.E. Hardy, president of the Crete assembly, outlined the work of the Crete "White Ribboners," volunteers who helped lead a CLSC in the penitentiary. In 1889 the Lincoln Chautauqua had started this CLSC, called the "Look Forward Circle," which required inmates, who had voluntarily joined, to pursue the rigorous four-year course. William Jennings Bryan had opened the first session with an oration on the virtues of reading. Two months later, January 20,

## Crete Chautauqua



*Children as well as adults participated in Chautauqua programs.*

1890, he spoke again on Roman history. These meetings took place on Sundays, with a mixture of hymn singing, devotional readings, and lectures.<sup>35</sup> *The Chautauquan* of 1890 reported that among the prisoners,

there were many and earnest expressions of gratitude for the opportunity afforded for reading and intellectual improvement, unmistakable evidence that it was appreciated, and it was plainly evident that it was operating as a stimulant to hope and a purpose for better things.<sup>36</sup>

This religious vision of a renewed society did not exclude the use of secular instruments for hastening the new era.<sup>37</sup> The developing discipline of sociology received much emphasis at the Crete Chautauqua. In 1893 Professor Graham Taylor of the University of Chicago, a leading social gospel advocate, delivered a series of sociological lectures on the relationship between society and the individual: He established a link be-

tween crime and poverty and between the environment and individual behavior. Sociology, he argued, could greatly aid Christianity in fulfilling its destiny of social transformation. He stated:

Churches without such work are very feeble.... It is necessary, besides saving the souls of the people, to save their surroundings. All must be saved body, mind and soul.<sup>38</sup>

This emphasis on self-improvement and the cleansing of society at large constituted a major theme of the Social Gospel movement, which received adequate representation at the Crete Chautauqua. For example, Washington Gladden, a national advocate of the Social Gospel movement, spoke at the last Crete Chautauqua in 1897. His series of lectures focused on present day problems: the corporation, the city, the railroads, the newspapers, and the church. The Golden Age would come only when the Christian laws of love

and brotherhood transformed the industrial society with all its problems. And only the church could transform the organized activities of men into the kingdom of God on earth: "When the church proclaims the universal brotherhood of man and uses all her powers to promote the gospels of Christ, social differentiation will have its proper counterpoise."<sup>39</sup>

Another social gospel advocate, Lyman Abbot, who served on the board of the mother Chautauqua, lectured at the 1886 Crete Chautauqua. He represented a step away from Gladden's position, for he included the schools, the sciences, legislation, and public opinion, as well as the church, as the civilizing institutions that would redeem human society.<sup>40</sup>

Although William Jennings Bryan is not usually regarded as representative of the social gospel movement, Paolo E. Coletta calls him the "lay prophet of the social gospel."<sup>41</sup> And as George

Marsden has argued, "Bryan's basic optimism about the progress of the kingdom in American culture amounted to a very vague sort of postmillennialism."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, it should be no surprise that Bryan would appear in the Chautauqua movement. In fact, he remained one of the most popular Chautauqua speakers nationally until his death. He was no less popular at Crete, for he appeared there numerous times.

In the 1896 Crete assembly, Bryan participated in a three-hour debate with J.P. Irish of California on the resolution "that the U.S. should immediately restore the free and unlimited coinage of silver at the present ratio of 16 to 1." Laced with the language of Christian morality, Bryan argued that the independent destiny of the United States was at stake in the coinage question; at bottom, "free silver men are engaged in a war for families, homes and the right to live."<sup>43</sup>

A final social issue that Chautauquans clothed in redemptive language was temperance — the epitome of Vic-

torian self-restraint; it was no less so at the Crete Chautauqua. The First Congregational Church of Crete and the Grace Methodist Episcopal Church of Crete actively led the local temperance movement,<sup>44</sup> and the local W.C.T.U. maintained a headquarters building on the assembly grounds. Regularly, the W.C.T.U. held classes for training temperance workers during assembly week, and temperance lectures were common on the main program. Also, the W.C.T.U.'s leading champion and president during the 1890s, Frances Willard, frequently spoke at Crete. In fact, she was the first woman to appear on the platform other than as a speaker on Sunday School topics.<sup>45</sup> The Crete Chautauqua then became a center for temperance agitation in Nebraska.

Unlike many other independent Chautauqua assemblies, the Crete Chautauqua never tipped the balance away from instruction and edification and toward entertainment. This fact helps explain its short life. All evidence indicates that financial difficulties plagued the organization at least from 1890 when it mortgaged its property to

pay off debts. The growth of the much larger Beatrice and Epworth (Lincoln) assemblies siphoned off vacationers; Crete simply could not compete.<sup>46</sup> In the last few years of the assembly (1894-97), local businessmen, rather than the Nebraska Sunday School Association, organized and ran the summer programs. However, their efforts at selling popcorn, lemonade, soda water, ice cream and the renting of rowboats failed to insure financial stability. When attendance dropped and the assembly could not pay its bills, the Crete Chautauqua folded; 1897 was its last year. In March 1899 the grounds were part of a foreclosure sale. Businessman Anton Vavra bought the grounds for \$5,000.<sup>47</sup> The glorious sixteen years of Chautauqua at Crete were over.

Although largely ignored by recent historians, the Chautauqua movement exemplified a remarkable attempt at popular culture that was both successful and influential. At the Crete Chautauqua, Nebraskans received their first exposure to this phenomenal institution. With its emphasis on re-

*The Mary Leavitt family camped on the Crete Chautauqua grounds.*



## Crete Chautauqua

spectable leisure and entertainment, on self-restraint, and on self-improvement, it served as the main social event of the year for many Nebraskans. As an institution that stood for instruction in social responsibility to fellow human beings, it constituted a major vehicle for a secularized postmillennialism centered in the social gospel. As Anna Hahn said of her visit to the 1887 Crete Chautauqua, "the practical and the ideal are closely blended here at Chautauqua."<sup>48</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>[Crete, Nebraska] *State Vidette*, July 12, 1888; *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1888.

<sup>2</sup>Anna E. Hahn, *Summer Assembly Days* (Boston: Congregational Press, 1888), 196, 221.

<sup>3</sup>Secondary literature by historians on Chautauqua is rather sparse. Basic introductions are Theodore Morrison, *Chautauqua: A Center for Education, Religion, and the Arts in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), and Joseph E. Gould, *The Chautauqua Movement: An Episode in the Continuing American Revolution* (New York: State University of New York, 1961). In addition, specialized studies are Pauline Fanher, *Chautauqua: Its Architecture and Its People* (Miami: Banyon, 1978) and John S. Noffsinger, *Correspondence Schools, Lyceums, and Chautauquas* (New York: MacMillan, 1926). There are many accounts written by Chautauqua participants: John H. Vincent, *The Chautauqua Movement* (Boston: The Chautauquan Press, 1885); Hugh Orchard, *Fifty Years of Chautauqua* (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1923); Rebecca Richmond, *Chautauqua: An American Place* (New York: Duell, Sloane, and Pearce, 1943); Jesse L. Hurlburt, *The Story of Chautauqua* (New York: Putnam, 1921). On the circuit Chautauquas, see Harry Harrison, *Culture Under Canvas* (New York: Hastings, 1958); Charles Horner, *Strike the Tents, The Story of Chautauqua* (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1954), Victoria and Robert Ormond Case, *We Called It Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), and Gay MacLaren, *Morally We Roll Along* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958). Important journal articles include: R.B. Tozier, "A Short Life-History of the Chautauqua," *American Journal of Sociology* 40 (1934):69-73; Roland Mueller, "The Chautauqua in Winfield, Kansas," *Kansas Quarterly* 15 (1983):13-33; Kristine M. Davis, "The Chautauqua Idea: Building Educational Fellowship Through Symbol and Ceremony," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 47 (1983):396-410; David Mead, "1914: The Chautauqua and American Innocence," *Journal of Popular Culture* 1 (1968):339-56; James Steel Smith,

"America's Magazine Missionaries of Culture," *Journalism Quarterly* 43 (1966):449-58.

<sup>4</sup>Mueller, "The Chautauqua in Winfield," 14.

<sup>5</sup>Annadora Foss Gregory, *Pioneer Days in Crete, Nebraska* (Lincoln: State Journal, 1937), 172-3; *State Vidette*, May 21, 1892; *Nebraska Congregational News*, July 1882; Hahn, *Summer Assembly Days*, vi. In 1882 the Congregational Church began a nationwide campaign of Sunday School missionary work by appointing state Sunday School superintendents throughout the Midwest. Stewart served as Nebraska's first state superintendent. Charles Johnston Kennedy, *A History of Congregationalism in Nebraska* (Chicago: The Midwest Congregational Historical Society, 1937), 44; Motier A. Bullock, *Congregational Nebraska* (Lincoln: Western, 1905), 58-60.

<sup>6</sup>Gregory, *Pioneer Days*, 173.

<sup>7</sup>*Saline County Standard*, July 19, 1883; Kennedy, *A History*, 46; *Nebraska Congregational News*, June 1883; *Saline County Union* May 31, 1883; *Daily Union*, June 25 to July 3, 1883. The *Daily Union* was published solely for assembly participants.

<sup>8</sup>*The Chautauquan* 5 (1884-85):44; *Crete Daily Globe*, April 3, 1884; August 27, 1884; Gregory, 175; Kennedy, *A History*, 45.

<sup>9</sup>"Map of Grounds" in the photographic map collection (M297), Photo Library, Nebraska State Historical Society. *Nebraska Congregational News*, July 1885.

<sup>10</sup>*State Vidette*, October 8, 1885.

<sup>11</sup>*The Chautauquan* 7 (1886-87):625.

<sup>12</sup>*State Vidette*, June 25, 1885; June 14, 21, 1888.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, June 25, 1885; *The Chautauquan* 5 (1884-85):604; *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1889, 3; Cf. Mueller, "Chautauqua in Winfield," 17.

<sup>14</sup>Gregory, *Pioneer Days*, 174, 177; *Crete Vidette*, June 6, 1889.

<sup>15</sup>*The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1888, 25.

<sup>16</sup>*State Vidette*, December 10, 1885; Gregory, 176; *Daily Union*, June 25 to July 3, 1883; *The Crete News*, July 28, 1966.

<sup>17</sup>*State Vidette*, July 12, 1888; July 11, 1889; April 12, 1894; *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1888, 7, 9, 11, 29.

<sup>18</sup>*State Vidette*, July 11, 1889 and many other dates from 1884 to 1897; Mueller, 21.

<sup>19</sup>*The Chautauquan* 5 (1884-85):604; 6 (1885-86):38; *Crete Globe*, February 26, 1885; *Nebraska Congregational News*, July 1885; *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1890, 8.

<sup>20</sup>*State Vidette*, July 12, 1888; July 20, 1893.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, April 5, 1888; June 14, 1888; July 5, 1888; July 11, 1889; *The Chautauquan* 7 (1886-87):45; Gregory, *Pioneer Days*, 177.

<sup>22</sup>*State Vidette*, July 14, 1887.

<sup>23</sup>See Dixon Wecker, *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration, 1607-1937* (New York: Scribners, 1937), 458-84. *The Nebraska Chautauqua* of 1889, 3, characterized Crete as an "attractive summer resort . . . with all the novelties and pleasures of tent life in the woods."

<sup>24</sup>*The Chautauquan* 5 (1884-85):604; *Daily*

*Standard*, June 26, 1883; *Lincoln Journal and Star*, July 28, 1974.

<sup>25</sup>Vincent, *The Chautauqua Movement*, 4.

<sup>26</sup>*State Vidette*, May 31, 1888.

<sup>27</sup>*The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1890, introductory page — "The Outlook."

<sup>28</sup>On Victorian values and its approach to leisure see Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America" in *Victorian America*, ed. Daniel Walker Howe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976); Lary May, *Screening Out the Past* (New York: Oxford, 1980), especially chapter 1; and Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 94-124.

<sup>29</sup>Vincent, *The Chautauqua Movement*, vii.

<sup>30</sup>*State Vidette*, April 12, 1894; July 4, 1893; *History of Doane College, 1872-1912* (Crete: Doane, 1957), 152-54; *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1897, 13-17.

<sup>31</sup>Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale, 1972), 735-824; Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic, 1977), 191-93; Howe, 23.

<sup>32</sup>Jean B. Quandt, "Religion and Social Thought: The Secularization of Postmillennialism," *American Quarterly* 25 (1973):392. See also James H. Moorehead, "The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925," *Church History* 53 (1984):61-77 and his *American Apocalypse* (New Haven: Yale, 1978), 236-44.

<sup>33</sup>Vincent, *The Chautauqua Movement*, 9.

<sup>34</sup>*State Vidette*, July 4, 1889; July 11, 1889; July 13, 1893. *The Nebraska Chautauqua Assembly*, July 1889, 9-11.

<sup>35</sup>*State Vidette*, July 13, 1893; *Nebraska State Journal*, November 25, 1889; January 20, 1890.

<sup>36</sup>*The Chautauquan* 10 (1890):489.

<sup>37</sup>Quandt, "Secularization . . ." 393.

<sup>38</sup>*State Vidette*, July 13, 1893; *The Chautauquan* 18 (1893):118.

<sup>39</sup>*The Chautauquan* 26 (1897):122; *The Crete Chautauqua*, July 3, 7, 8, 9, 1897; *Lincoln Journal and Star*, July 28, 1974; Quandt, "Secularization . . ." 397.

<sup>40</sup>*The Chautauquan* 7 (1886-87):45; Gregory, 176-77; Quandt, 401.

<sup>41</sup>Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan, I. Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 387. Also see Willard H. Smith, "William Jennings Bryan and the Social Gospel," *The Journal of American History* 53 (1966):41-60.

<sup>42</sup>George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 135.

<sup>43</sup>*Crete Vidette*, July 9, 1896.

<sup>44</sup>Gregory, *Pioneer Days*, 157, 160.

<sup>45</sup>*The Chautauquan* 7 (1886-87):625; 8 (1888):626; 11 (1890):496; 21 (1895):520; 24 (1896):124; 26 (1897):122.

<sup>46</sup>*Lincoln Journal and Star*, July 28, 1974; Kennedy, *A History*, 47.

<sup>47</sup>*Crete Vidette*, March 31, 1899; June 1, 1899; *Lincoln Journal and Star*, July 28, 1974.

<sup>48</sup>Hahn, *Summer Assembly Days*, 201.