

CHAUTAUQUA DAYS

By Virginia Jewell

It was a frog-strangling downpour but the Chautauqua tent on the Clinton High School grounds provided welcome protection from the heavy rain.

The tent walls swayed and flapped – the ropes creaked and the rain blew in at every slit and under the edges. The deluge was distracting to the crowd gathered under the big-top but the show went on to its conclusion.

Most everyone had bought a season ticket for the week of programs. The coming of the Redpath Chautauqua was one of the highlights of the summer. Excitement spread through the community when it was learned that the traveling show had once again come to town complete with tent, chairs, stage equipment, staff and set-up and tear-down crews.

On this particular evening the program had gotten underway with some stirring Sousa marches played by Kryl's Band.

Next was a lecture. The speaker, with his unusual style, had gripped the attention of young and old when he predicted that in a few years air-planes would be a common mode of transportation.

The lecturer was followed by a charcoal artist who with a few deft strokes had drawn one cartoon after another – each producing a hushed “oh-h” of appreciation from the audience as a familiar figure emerged on paper.

Next a troupe had put on a short play. The sand artist who appeared between acts was a favorite of the crowd. By throwing colored sand through his thumb and forefinger on to a poster, he had magically created a landscape of breathtaking beauty.

Everyone was looking forward to the simulation of a thunderstorm by Bohumir Kryl's band. And now the time had come. With the lights out,

the drums began a gentle roll as of distant thunder. With growing intensity they brought the thunder and lightning closer and still closer. At the height of the "storm," electrified hammers were struck against anvils, creating electric arcs which lighted up the entire tent and at the same time the drums reached a stormy crescendo. Then in a descending form, it was over.

Intent on the entertainment, the audience was not aware that Mother Nature was preparing her own top-notch performance complete with sound effects and lighting.

Natives recall that cloudburst in 1925 and how the deep waters of the overflowing town branch near the school nearly swept them away as they started home.

The night shows were designed for adults but special morning activities were provided for children on the spacious Emerson lawn next to the school. There was always a "story" lady.

Tents used for the shows were usually khaki-colored, but sometimes a red and white tent accented the school premises.

From 1903-1930 the tent chautauquas moved from town to town during the summer months presenting varied programs – cultural, inspirational, and educational. Some of the troupes were on a 10-day circuit for larger towns and others made the seven-day circuit for smaller communities, such as Clinton.

By 1932, with the advent of talking pictures, the automobile and improved highways, the Chautauqua era was over.

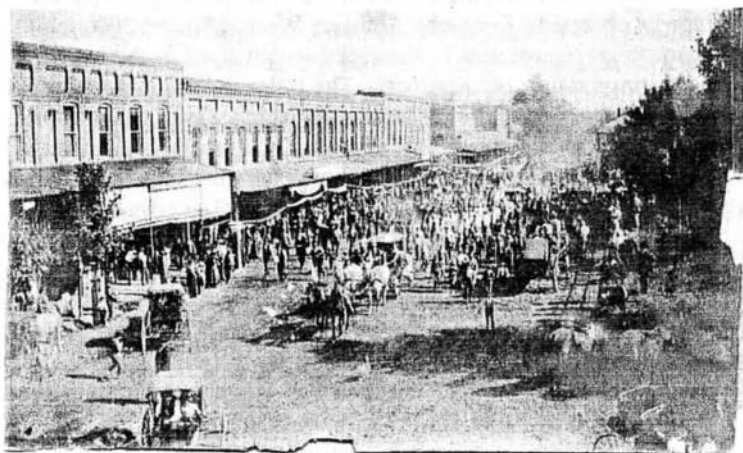
The traveling shows had no connection with the Lake Chautauqua summer cultural and educational center in New York, but merely borrowed the name. They shared similar purposes but the imitators exerted a greater influence.

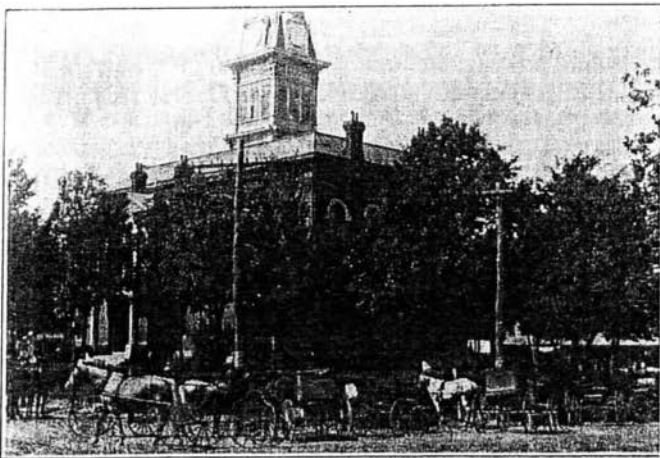
This account is taken from "Lick Skillet and other tales of Hickman County," a collection of sidelights in Hickman County's history. Articles deal with the Civil War, Clinton College, Marvin College, the Mississippi River, industry, amusements, home remedies, and other aspects of life.

Now in its third printing, the book is available from the author at 316 S. Washington St., Clinton KY 42031. Cost is \$12, plus \$2 if mailed. Phone 270) 653-7587.

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The postcards shown below are early views of Clinton. The First Baptist Church pictured was at the southeast corner of the court square, where Community Bank now stands. The street scene is the north side of the court square, probably on a Saturday when "everyone came to town."





This view of the Hickman County Court House, not dated, is owned by the Clinton-Hickman County Museum, as are the pictures of the First Baptist Church and the court square. They are used with permission.

PURCHASE HISTORICAL NEWS

Several news items over the past months are of importance to members of the Jackson Purchase Historical Society.

Last October 5-11, 2003, the Commonwealth of Kentucky celebrated its heritage by observing Kentucky Archives Week. Almost 300 archival and manuscript repositories in Kentucky are involved in this annual event noting the importance of "Kentucky: The Balance Wheel of the Nation." North and South meet in this focal region, which was of course a primary route for the westward movement as well. Dr. Lowell H. Harrison, of Western Kentucky University, was honored with the Thomas D. Clark Kentucky Archives Week Award. The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, is in charge of this annual event.

A Memorial Service and military grave marker dedication was held for Pvt. Richard S. Foy, of Company A, Seventh Kentucky infantry, CSA, on Sunday, Nov. 9, 2003, at Foy Cemetery in southern Graves Co., Ky. Fort Heiman Camp 1834 SCV chaplain Tim Hester conducted the service for Private Foy, who was a POW for much of the war.

A Memorial Service and military grave marker dedication was held for Pvt. Joseph Franklin Richmond, Co. B, Twelfth (Faulkner's) Kentucky Cavalry, CSA, by Ft. Heiman Camp#1834, conducted by Bro. Charles Blair on June 10, 2004. Richmond lies at rest in the Little Obion Cemetery in southwest Graves County, Kentucky

Fort Heiman, which was located in southeastern Calloway County, is on its way to becoming a national park thanks to the joint efforts of several individuals and groups. The JPHS visited the site after a meeting in Murray in 2001. Along with the good work of U. S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, U. S. Sen. Jim Bunning, Ky. state Sen. Bob Jackson, Ky. Rep. Buddy Buckingham, the West Ky. Corporation, and the Calloway Co. Fiscal Court in providing funding and support, special appreciation is due the many individuals who have given of their time and efforts to secure this site.

And Walter and Betty Haden, along with our society, have earned a signal honor from the Kentucky Historical Society. As the certificate on p. 55 will attest, Vol. XXX of the society's Journal was one of those chosen to receive a Kentucky History Award and Certificate of Commendation from the Society and the Historical Confederation of Kentucky. The awards dinner was held in Frankfort on March 6, 2004. Only two publications were noted in the statewide honors: an Award of Merit to the Woodford County Historical Society, and the certificate to the Jackson Purchase Historical Society. Congratulations, Dr. and Mrs. Haden, for a good job well done on the Journal for many years! (A similar award was given to Dr. and Mrs. Glenn Wilcox and the Society for the Journal in 1995.)

And speaking of journals – our 2003-2004 President Gregory Miller has done a yeoman job of sorting and analyzing all the available back issues of the publication. For some years, there are several extra copies on hand which we hope will be purchased to fill gaps in the collections of our members. After discussion among the present and recent officers, it is evidently felt that file copies of as many years as possible should be placed in the various college and university libraries in our region. Feel free to talk to President Miller about purchasing back issues so that the hard work of many editors and contributors will be available as widely as possible. His telephone number is 270) 753-3742. Or you may contact Dr. Marvin Downing, 217) 587-6054. Let's get the words out! – Ed.

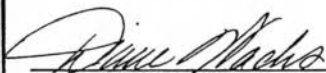
*The Historical Confederation of Kentucky and
the Kentucky Historical Society present this*

Certificate of Commendation
to

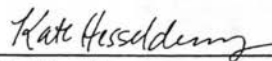
Jackson Purchase Historical Society

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Diane Wachs
Historical Confederation of Kentucky



Kate Hesseldenz
Kentucky Historical Society