

Mineral Wells Chautauqua Remains A Footnote To The Famous Health Resort's History

"Don't fail to attend the Texas Chautauqua at Mineral Wells, July 1 to 9...to be held in Texas Chautauqua Assembly Hall, a commodious convention auditorium, with a seating capacity of 3,500 and having every modern convenience." Finding this old article in the Waxahachie Enterprise of June 23, 1905 sent us to Mineral Wells last November to discover the story of the Chautauqua there.

As we entered this town of 17,000 about 50 miles west of Fort Worth, the vacant 14-story 1929 Baker Hotel towered over the downtown district at the foot of one of the two mountains. This hotel is a vestige of the once prosperous and bustling health resort, which was once known as the place "Where America Drinks Its Way To Health." From the 1880s through the 1930s, visitors came to Mineral Wells to enjoy its famous mineral waters, which was reported to have medicinal powers that would neutralize excess stomach acid, treat rheumatism, stimulate the gall bladder and cure mental disorders. By 1906, this town of 5,000 had eight magnificently equipped pavilions for water drinking privileges, recreation, and amusement. It also had four up-to-date bathhouses, two first-class amusement parks, 70 hotels and boarding houses, four theaters, and 150,000 health and pleasure visitors annually.

In 1905, a beautiful Chautauqua Assembly Hall was built halfway up East Mountain, costing \$20,000 and having 3,500 opera seats. It overlooked the city, only three blocks from the well district and within easy walking distance of all hotels. Yet the Waxahachie Enterprise of July 14, 1905 reported that the attendance at the Chautauqua at Mineral Wells was only

about 400 and lower than expected due to the other entertainments in town. On the back of a postcard of the Chautauqua Hall dated July 1907, the writer says "the Chautauqua is over for the season but the crowds are immense and there is something interesting going on all the time."

When and why this Chautauqua ended and its magnificent Assembly Hall disappeared are questions that remain unanswered for us at this time. The only Chautauqua Assemblies at Mineral Wells that we can currently document took place in the summers of 1905, 1906, and 1907. Historical Sanborn maps show the Hall was in existence in 1905 and 1912 but missing by 1921. Mineral Wells historian A.F. (Art) Weaver states in Time Was In Mineral Wells that the Auditorium was destroyed by some unknown means around 1912.

In a recent phone conversation with Mr. Weaver, he told us that the current Mineral Wells Jaycee's hall now stands on the foundation footings of the old Chautauqua auditorium. Mineral Wells natives still point with pride and nostalgia to this site of the former Chautauqua Hall and Assembly on the side of East Mountain.

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Sources:

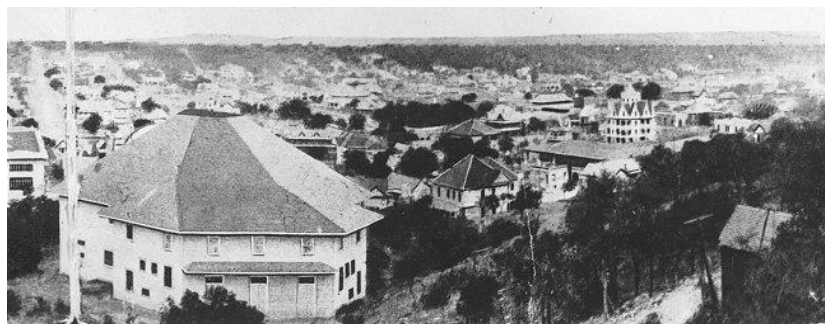
- Time Was In Mineral Wells, A. F. Weaver (Mineral Wells, TX, Heritage Society, 1975).
- Fowler, Gene, "Old Time Spas in Texas: Mineral Wells," www.texas-ec.org
- 1906 program booklet for The Texas Chautauqua



Postcard of Chautauqua Assembly Hall at Mineral Wells ca. 1907



Chautauqua Assembly Hall ca. 1906 Photo Courtesy of A.F. Weaver



View from Behind Chautauqua Assembly Hall Photo Courtesy of A.F. Weaver