

The Chautauqua Trail

Links Chautauquas Across U.S.

The Chautauqua Trail, established in 1975, is an organization that brings together Chautauquas around North America for mutual support and sharing of ideas and problems. ("Chautauqua Trail" was originally named and was known as "Chautauqua Network".)

When the Chautauqua Institution was founded in 1874, the name "Chautauqua" was never copyrighted, nor were franchises created. Many groups across the country established Chautauquas, called independents, loosely modeled after the "mother" in New York. By the late 1890's there were around 200 independents, with about 25 continuously operating up to the present day.

In 1975 Alfreda Irwin, historian of the Chautauqua Institution, saw a need to "reconnect" the surviving Chautauquas around the country with the "mother" and with each other. Thus, the Chautauqua Trail Network was born.

The mission of the Chautauqua Network (July 1999)

The Chautauqua Network is a group of organizations and individuals committed to the communication and implementation of the chautauqua concept of building community by supporting all persons in the development of their full potential intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. The Chautauqua Network facilitates interaction and communication among its members to further their preservation, growth and development.



Chautauqua Trail meetings are held annually at the Chautauqua Institution and at various Chautauquas around the country. Usually they are held in July but it may vary. To see a schedule of the meetings, visit their website at www.chautauquatrail.com/

Some Chautauqua representatives to the 3-day trail meetings come from organizations that have a long and colorful Chautauqua history. Others come from newly revived or even newly formed Chautauquas. These meetings provide an opportunity for fellowship, learning about Chautauqua history, and developing ideas to take home.

Waxahachie Chautauqua's connection to the Chautauqua Trail:

In 1900, the founding of the Waxahachie Chautauqua was inspired by visits to the New York Chautauqua by the Rev. J.C. Smith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Then, in the mid-1970s, organizers of the restoration of the Waxahachie Chautauqua Auditorium, including Waxahachie restoration advocate Josephine Ruskin, visited the Chautauqua Institution in NY to learn about the larger Chautauqua movement and to receive support and recognition for their efforts in Waxahachie. Additionally, Institution historian Alfreda Irwin came to Waxahachie to greet Ms. Ruskin and her group, observe the restoration efforts and offered great support for the Chautauqua Auditorium preservation.

Now the revived Waxahachie Chautauqua continues to be inspired by the New York and other Chautauquas around the country. Thanks to the Chautauqua Trail, there is a network of Chautauquas that gather annually for mutual support and sharing of ideas and problems. The Waxahachie Chautauqua has been part of the Chautauqua Trail since 1999 and has been represented at the annual conferences for most of the following years up until the present.

For more information about the Chautauqua Trail members and annual meetings, visit the website at www.chautauquatrail.com/

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