

WHO ARE WE?

What is Chautauqua?

The Chautauqua Movement originated at Lake Chautauqua, New York in 1874 as a summer retreat for the training of Sunday School teachers. It soon grew into an educational and cultural movement that included academics, music, art, humanities and physical education. Since many people could not travel to New York, numerous independent Chautauqua assemblies were established throughout the country based upon the ideal of the original. Additionally, in an effort to reach those who could not attend these Chautauqua Assemblies, travelling circuits, or “tent Chautauquas”, sprang up around 1907 and continued until the 1930s.

Waxahachie Chautauqua: 1900-1930

Waxahachie was both an independent Chautauqua and part of the travelling circuit Chautauqua. Beginning in 1900, the Waxahachie Chautauqua Summer Encampment and Assembly provided two weeks of education, culture, art, and recreation to the citizens of Waxahachie and to nearby cities, counties, and states. It attracted thousands of participants and hundreds of campers. For two weeks each summer, it became the center of cultural, social, religious, and economic life in Waxahachie. At 31 years, Waxahachie had by far the longest running Chautauqua in Texas.

Waxahachie's Unique

1902 Chautauqua Auditorium

The Waxahachie Chautauqua Auditorium, an unusual octagonal 2500-seat open-air auditorium, was built in 1902 to accommodate the throngs of people attending the annual Chautauqua Assemblies. In the mid-1970s, the decaying and almost demolished auditorium was resurrected and restored through the efforts of local citizens and remains today a monument to the Chautauqua history of Waxahachie. It has been awarded a Texas Historical Marker and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the only known original Chautauqua building surviving in Texas.



Waxahachie Chautauqua Today

Since its revival in 2000, the Waxahachie Chautauqua has come alive again in the form of an annual one-day Assembly held the last Saturday in September. Educational, inspirational and entertaining programs are presented by respected scholars, artists and teachers in the restored Chautauqua Auditorium, in old-fashioned tents, and in the surrounding pastoral shaded setting of Getzendaner Park. Lectures and performances revolve around a particular theme that is viewed through the arts, humanities and sciences. The goal of the revived Chautauqua is to continue the unique spirit and tradition of the historic Chautauqua by offering a place for discovery and renewal.