

Re-enacting Maryland's First Chautauqua



Mountain Lake Park, MD – July 5-7, 2019

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Photos courtesy **Al Feldstein**



Allegheny House, one of the boarding houses at Mt. Lake Park, MD.

Many of the cottages in Mt. Lake Park, Maryland, can trace their origins back to 1882 and the development of a Chautauqua-style resort in the state's most western county, Garrett. A small number of these homes are still inhabited by

descendants of the original owners who built them in order to become summer residents of this resort. Of historical note, then, is that some of these cottages were newly constructed summer homes when Mountain Lake Park hosted Maryland's first Chautauqua session in August of 1882, a program that would last for nearly sixty years.

To celebrate the upcoming 25th modern day Maryland Chautauqua, Garrett Lakes Arts Festival, with help from a grant from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, will be returning to historic Mountain Lake Park July 5-7, 2019, with a three-day re-creation of Maryland's early Chautauqua events.

This three-day celebration of the original Maryland Chautauqua will include a schedule of daily lectures, historical re-enactments, musical presentations, and more. Re-enactors of notable historical figures from those earlier Chautauqua years will also be on hand to celebrate our return to earlier times. A special addition to this program will be the opportunity for participants to share their own personal stories and connections to the development of Mountain Lake Park and the Chautauqua influence.

While the daytime schedule will focus on re-creating and commemorating some of the earlier Chautauqua programs, the regular program for the 2019 Maryland Humanities Chautauqua presented by GLAF will continue to be

scheduled as evening performances, and those will also be held in Mountain Lake Park.

Chautauqua history dates back to 1872 when the first program took place in the Chautauqua Lake area of New York (70 miles

SW of Buffalo). The purpose was to enrich the background of Methodist Sunday School teachers with presentations about culture and history. This concept of summer enrichment programs spread rapidly, both through home study (the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle) and through travelling Chautauquas, that brought history, art, literature, foreign languages, the classics, and music theory to cities and towns across America.

In 1881, four Methodist ministers from Wheeling, West Virginia, were traveling through western Maryland in search of a place to develop their own Chautauqua-style resort that would combine the Chautauqua concept with spiritual renewal. When they found the 800 acres known as Hoye's Big Pasture, an area located between the nearby town of Oakland and the fashionable resort of Deer Park, they believed that the combination of picturesque scenery, cool mountain air, and train service in nearby Oakland made this an ideal location for their endeavor.

On September 9, 1881, that group of ministers met with a group of interested businessmen in Wheeling, West Virginia, to discuss the purchase of this land. At a second meeting held on September 13, 1881, Rev. C. P. Masden was elected President; J. C. Alderson was elected secretary; and A. S. List was elected Treasurer. Also reported was the purchase of 800 acres of land.

In 1882, the first of many buildings to be constructed in this new resort were the Tabernacle and Assembly Hall and a restaurant. A number of cottages and hotels would follow. In July of 1882, the first camp meeting was held on the grounds of the Mountain Lake Park Hotel. In August the first session of Sunday School Assembly was held. It would later become known as the Mountain Chautauqua, making it the first Chautauqua held in Maryland.

In time, more cottages, hotels, and boarding houses were built, and a lake was constructed, for while the name Mountain Lake Park suggested that a lake already existed, one did not. Streams were dammed in order to form a lake suitable for swimming and boating. In the winter, that lake also served as a source of ice for local residents, and the B & O Railroad became so dependent on the ice for their dining cars that they ran a spur to the icehouses. The association also acquired the services of H. E. Faul, the same landscape architect who was responsible for laying out Druid Hill Park in Baltimore, Maryland, to survey and plat Mountain Lake Park. He was assisted by several local men who were residents of the Park: Mr. Henry Artus, J. Lee Phillips and J. A. Enlow.

Throughout the development of this resort, the founders insisted that the culture of the Park maintain a high moral tone. The charter included restrictions against dancing, card-playing, drinking and gambling. In fact, these restrictions were written into the deeds. Numerous Mountain Lake Park residents still have copies of the deeds containing the language that restricts those activities.



The Amphitheatre, Mountain Lake Park, Maryland – a 1907 postcard published by C. E. Gerkins, Cumberland, Maryland.

Mountain Lake Park residents did not have to travel far away, however, to partake in gambling, drinking, card-playing and dancing, for all of these pastimes were allowed in the nearby town of Loch Lynn. Over the years, a popular saying evolved:

***“If you want to sin, go to Loch Lynn
For Jesus’ sake, go to Mt. Lake”***

Situated between Oakland and Deer Park, both of which held fine hotels, the addition of this new park would create a line of three resorts, all promoting the health benefits of clean mountain air, and all of which were easily accessible by rail. In November of 1881, potential buyers traveled by train from Baltimore to the Park in order to attend a public sale of lots in this newly developed summer resort. Among the first purchasers were Mrs. H. Beacham of Baltimore,



Streams were dammed in order to construct the lake for swimming and boating at Mountain Lake Park. The postcard (above) is postmarked August 11, 1908 and features the Boat House at the lake.

W. T. Graham, George Bullard, C. M. Babb, Rev. W. I. Alexander, A. H. Malone, Rev. J. H. Glanigan, Honorable W. H. Taw, Rev. A. S. Hank, Mrs. Blake, George Atkinson, and S. L. Allen.

Among those who built the first houses were Dr. Logan, A. S. List, J. C. Alderson, J. F. Goucher, J. B. VanMeter, Rev. John Thompson, Messrs. Weaver and Bardall, Rev. T. B. Huges, Rev. Sharp, and C. W. Connor. The cottages built on these lots were to serve as summer residences; however, while the early Park homes were described as cottages, they did not, perhaps, fit the more modern definition of a cottage. Designed to accommodate large families and a number of guests, many of these cottages were three-story houses, some with mansard roofs and turrets.

In order to encourage folks to become part of this summer resort, rental spaces on the grounds of the Assembly Hall were also made available to those who might wish to camp there during the summer program.

In time, ball fields, tennis courts, and a bowling alley were built. In 1900, an umbrella-shaped amphitheatre was constructed across the street from the Tabernacle. The Bashford Amphitheatre, a circular building, was 172 feet in diameter, 75 feet high in the center, and able to seat 5,000 guests. The stage could accommodate 200 people, and beneath the stage were dressing rooms and toilets. Acclaimed as acoustically excellent, due to the lack of any center poles, this theatre also provided an unobstructed view for audience members.

As the resort became popular and the number of visitors grew, hotels such as the Mt. Lake Park Hotel, the Hotel Dennett, the Columbian Hotel, and the Hotel Chautauqua were constructed. Boarding houses also became a popular accommodation for visitors. These included the Braethorn, Mrs. Schrock's, Mrs. Turney's, Allegheny Cottage, Haydenhurst, and more. In spite of the growing number of accommodations, however, there were times when more rooms were needed. In an August 14, 1899 special dispatch to the *Baltimore Sun*, the superintendent of the Chautauqua, Dr. W. L. Davidson, notes that in the first week of the Mountain Chautauqua, the attendance had reached its largest numbers ever. Stating that boarding houses and hotels had run out of rooms and were turning away people, he appealed to residents to "provide the name of every housekeeper who could spare a room."



Hotel Chautauqua at Mountain Lake Park, Maryland.

The Chautauqua summer program, designed to offer classes for all age groups, included courses in liberal arts, fine arts and natural sciences and incorporated a wide variety of featured speakers, artists, musical performances, plays, moving pictures known as vitagraphs, special conferences and camp meetings. True to the founding mission, the first Chautauqua blended religious revivalism with cultural and educational activities.

In the July 1895 "Midsummer Programme Edition" of the quarterly publication known as *The Mountain Chautauqua*, courses of instruction included early and modern periods of English Language and Literature, German Language and Literature, Classic Greek, New Testament Greek,

Classical Latin, French Conversation, French Literature and French Phonetics. College students could take courses of college instruction designed for college entry. School teachers could enroll in pedagogical instruction coursework. Among the many fine arts courses offered were classes in painting, music instruction, elocution, wood carving

and amateur photography. Courses for Sunday school workers were also an important part of the schedule.

A promotion in the July 1895 edition of *The Mountain Chautauqua* described this mountain Chautauqua as a place that "will build you up in hope, faith, and love for your Creator and your fellow-men!"

One notable speaker to visit Mountain Lake Park was President William Howard Taft who spoke at the 1911 Summer Chautauqua. Arriving there by rail, he gave a speech to a sold-out audience in the Bashford Amphitheatre and was given a special tour of the area before returning by train to Washington, D.C.

The Chautauqua program began its gradual decline in 1918. Hotels such as The Loch Lynn Hotel, the Columbia, and the Hotel Dennett either burned down or were torn down within a ten-year time period, and summer programs, now fewer, offered less variety. A wide range of factors led to the eventual downfall. Some of these included the advent of the car, construction of better roads, the introduction of movies and radio, war, the Great Depression and the rise of air conditioning. There were also local factors. In 1902, the B&O Railroad had withdrawn monetary support for the Park and, in time, almost completely stopped having excursion rates.

Economic decline of the park took its toll, and in 1920, the original Association turned over its property to the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions. Through the 1930s and '40s there were efforts to revive the programs, including events such as singing contests, folk festivals, conventions, pageants, choir festivals and performances by the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra. In spite of attempts to rekindle the energy and spirit of the original Chautauquas, however, attendance at the performances was often very low.

On August 28, 1941, the auditorium part of the Tabernacle burned, and in 1942, for the first time since its beginning, there was no summer program in Mt. Lake Park. In 1946, the well-known amphitheatre was torn down after being deemed a fire hazard.

Many of the same factors that influenced the demise of Chautauqua at the local level also affected its success and popularity on the national stage. With the advent of radio and moving pictures, economic decline, and changing cultural attitudes, the Chautauqua movement in America eventually died out.

The Chautauquas were restarted in 1976 in North Dakota as a humanities program, incorporating the now-standard format of a monologue by a scholar/re-creator acting as a historical character, then interacting with the audience while still in-character, and then coming out of character to answer audience questions as a modern scholar. GLAF

(Garrett Lakes Arts Festival), Garrett College and Maryland Humanities worked together in 1995 to restart Maryland Chautauqua. To celebrate the upcoming 25th modern day Maryland Chautauqua, GLAF will be returning to historic Mountain Lake Park July 5-7, 2019, with a three-day recreation of Maryland's early Chautauqua events. Mountain Lake Park is located within the Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area, <https://www.garrettheritage.com>, and GLAF has received grant funds from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, <http://mht.maryland.gov/heritageareas.shtml>, for the upcoming Chautauqua event.

Garrett County has remained a leader of the Chautauqua Movement in Maryland, both in its nineteenth century origins and in its modern resurgence. In July 2019, this small town in Garrett County hopes to recapture the magic and history of those first years.

This Project has been financed in part with State Funds from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, an instrumentality of the State of Maryland. However, the Project contents or opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

We gratefully acknowledge the sources, information, and photos provided to us by the following people: Al Feldstein, Karen Wooddell, Katharine Smith, Mountain Lake Park Clerk Treasurer Lenora Fischetti, and Garrett County Historical Museum volunteers Martha DeBerry, Eleanor Callis, and Terri Shaffer.



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