

Chautauqua Park Historic District

(excerpted from National Register of Historic Places Nomination, written by Bruce Perry)

Chautauqua Park Historical District has served as a gathering place, educational hub, and cultural center for the community and surrounding area since 1908. Members of the Sac City Chautauqua Association purchased the property along the North Raccoon River, next to the county fairgrounds in 1908, at which time the octagonal Chautauqua Auditorium was erected as designed by Proudfoot and Bird. As the years passed, the David Metcalf log cabin, Asa Platt gates, stone shelter house, stone walking bridge, and fish house provided additional attractions to Chautauqua Park.

From 1905 to 1907, Sac City Chautauqua Association partnered with Redpath Vawter Chautauqua circuit to present a fortnight of events filled with entertainment, lectures, and religious celebrations in tents erected on the Sac County Fairgrounds. Thousands of people traveled to Sac City to camp along the riverbank and attend the various events. The success of the first three Chautauqua seasons prompted local organizers to purchase approximately nine acres of land from D. H. Beimer in 1908. This land became the heart of what is now known as Chautauqua Park, fronted by Park Avenue on the north and connecting the Sac County Fairgrounds to the North Raccoon River.

Chautauqua Movement and Chautauqua Park

The Chautauqua movement began in 1874 in Chautauqua, New York, as the Chautauqua Lake Sunday School Assembly. The program was an educational experiment designed to reach Sunday School teachers and students during the summer months, when traditional schools were typically not in session. The program's almost immediate success and a desire to reach a wider audience prompted organizers to expand the scope of offerings. Academic classes, music and art instruction, and physical education opportunities became part of the burgeoning curriculum that spanned the entire year. Leaders began a correspondence study program. To better reach those who could not travel to New York, traveling Chautauquas began to spread throughout the United States. New York leaders did not universally approve of the itinerant programs, as their quality was somewhat uneven. Nevertheless, the movement spread with great success. Having a Chautauqua show was a source of great pride for many communities, and dates were highly sought. The Redpath agency (later Redpath-Vawter) in Cedar Rapids handled bookings for many on the Chautauqua Circuit.

Circuit Chautauqua is among the most significant and most often overlooked influences in early twentieth-century United States history. In the years before radio and television, hundreds of millions of people in thousands of rural communities learned about the great issues of their age and enjoyed entertainment from around the world without traveling further than their own towns' Main Street. (Traveling Culture: Circuit Chautauqua in the Twentieth Century)

To host a Chautauqua program, towns needed a sponsoring organization with financial backing, a good location, and railroad access. In 1904, community leaders in Sac City formed The Sac City Chautauqua Association to sponsor the first local Chautauqua in 1905. 120 shareholders made an initial investment to underwrite the cost of these events. Aside from acquisition of property, the initial investment was never needed to supplement the cost of local programs; ticket sales actually resulted

in handsome profits nearly every year.

Sac City Chautauqua Auditorium

The combination of railroad access, a beautiful tree-filled community, and ample space for camping made the county seat town of Sac City, Iowa, an ideal location for traveling Chautauqua shows. Local organizers began consideration of hosting as early as 1902. Organizational efforts came to fruition when 120 people formed the Sac City Chautauqua Association in December, 1904. July 8-16, 1905 marked the first series of Chautauqua programs in Sac City. The traveling organization set up a large tent on the Sac County Fairgrounds, and people came from miles around to share in the entertainment and educational opportunities the series provided. (See images 24 and 25, page 42). \$2 adult tickets and \$1 children's passes allowed attendees access to the 25 different events. Many rented tents for \$1; some splurged and spent \$2.50 for a tent that was already set up. The successes in 1905, 1906, and 1907 prompted the Sac City Association to purchase land adjacent to the Sac County Fair Grounds in 1908. The purchase price was \$1275. The transaction was recorded April 15, 1908, in the Sac County Recorder's office.

The Association engaged Proudfoot and Bird architects of Des Moines to design a suitable auditorium and hired contractor W. J. Gordon of Sac City to erect the structure. The 98 by 120 feet structure had an octagonal front to make it resemble the familiar Chautauqua tents and to enhance its acoustical properties. The ceiling was 33 feet tall. Pillars and open rafters reminded attendees of sitting in a large tent. The building took 80,000 board feet of lumber, 120 squares of roofing materials, and literally a ton of nails. Some of the material was shipped from Fischer, Louisiana. The walls were finished with tiered wooden weatherboard and the roof was covered with wooden shingles. (Hart, p. 283) Glass windows on the upper tier opened to provide ventilation. The floor was originally dirt and the side walls were open, but covered in canvass to keep "gate crashers" from gaining access to the entertainment. Total cost of the building was \$3,475. Money was raised by selling \$10 certificates which guaranteed the purchasers season tickets to the 1908-1912 Chautauqua programs. Construction progressed rapidly, in spite of significant flooding in the nearby North Raccoon River. The June 18, 1908 issue of *The Sac Sun* stated,

The auditorium of the Sac City Chautauqua Association almost one and one-half blocks east of the courthouse is nearing completion. It is sufficiently advanced that tests may be made of its acoustic advantages, which will be found superb. Get your season ticket this week or next and encourage this great enterprise. (*Sac Sun*, 18 June 1908, p. 1)

The following week, the local newspaper reported:

On June 18, 1908, W. T. Proudfoot, of the firm of Proudfoot and Bird Architects, came from Des Moines and inspected the new auditorium on the Chautauqua grounds. He pronounced the acoustics perfect and was delighted with the success of his plan in this respect. He also approved the workmanship of the contractor, though making a few minor suggestions, which will be speedily carried out...The late high waters of the Coon river (*sic*) will in no way interfere with the Sac City Chautauqua Assembly which begins Friday, June 26, at 2 p.m. Everything will be in prime trim for the rendering of one of the very finest and best balanced programs to be given in Iowa this

year. There is an abundance of camping ground, beautiful in all its appointments, that has at all times been far removed from the flood. The auditorium has at no time been reached by the waters, which are now rapidly receding and entirely out of the way. (*Sac Sun*, 25 June 1908, p. 3)

In spite of the organizers' assurance that everyone would be completely removed from the flood, early photos show campers surrounded by, and in one case standing in water. (See Image 29, page 44.) Weather conditions did not make the 1908 season as financially successful as the preceding seasons; nevertheless, the permanent auditorium and park dedicated to the Chautauqua activities created an important landmark that would contribute to the community into the twenty-first century.

Auditorium Changes

Originally, portions of each wall on the north half of the building were open and filled with bleachers to seat those attending shows. By the late 1930's, after the city became owners of the building, the Pavilion had fallen into disrepair. The Great Depression had diminished the city's ability to meet essential expenses; parks and recreational facilities certainly suffered from neglect. If the auditorium were to be saved, local leaders realized the need to cover the walls with screens to keep birds from nesting inside and also help protect the structure from harsh winter conditions. Improvements included pouring a concrete floor in the building and building partial wooden walls between the posts that supported the tent-like structure. A plaque in the auditorium recounts the first significant changes.

The structure stood for many years and was in general use. In 1939, the dirt floor was very bad, the roof needed repair, and paint was peeling off. There was considerable talk of tearing it down for it had little to offer the public. One day Charles Hacke and A. O. Anderson drove down to the Chautauqua auditorium to look over the structure. Mr. Hacke was editor of the *Sac Sun* and Mr. Anderson was president of the Sac City State Bank. They stood under the roof and surveyed the auditorium. "This is too good a building to tear down," said Mr. Anderson. "If we could just lay a cement floor and enclose the outside with screens," said Mr. Hacke. That was it. Fred Salasek, with help from W. P. A. labor was building the Shelter house and he had a lot of cement left over. Mr. Anderson and Mr. Hacke decided to talk it up, to write articles for publication in the *Sac Sun* and soon the floor was laid and screens enclosed the auditorium. New paint was applied and the roof was reshingled. (quoted from plaque inside Chautauqua Auditorium.)

Mr. Hacke and Mr. Anderson accomplished their goal in stages. In his weekly column for *The Sac Sun*, Mr. Hacke noted:

Now that the work has actually started on laying the cement floor in the old Chautauqua Auditorium it is surprising to find out how many are actually interested in it and who think it is just the right thing to do. Some months ago there was considerable talk of tearing down the building...There was opposition to this step, mostly on the part of older residents who recall with pleasure, many interesting programs and plays presented under that roof.

Others were likewise interested in saving a building that was far too good to be discarded and could be converted into practical use. The result will be a fine shelter house or auditorium where picnics, family gatherings, programs

and even church services may be held in comfort and convenience. (*Sac Sun* 20 July 1939)

Several weeks later, Mr. Hacke used his editorship to push for more improvements.

There has been a lot of approval for the new cement floor recently placed in the old chautauqua (*sic*) building in the city park. The members of the Sac County American Legion and Auxiliary made good use of it last Sunday when they held the county picnic in the city park. The rain which fell earlier in the day made the ground damp and wet. The picnickers moved to the old chautauqua (*sic*) building where said picnic was held and they enjoyed it immensely. No dust or dirt to contend with, no mud or damp grass. A fine cement floor gave under foot and the roof furnished protection from the elements.

There is a growing desire among those who are interested in this landmark that the entire building be enclosed with screens. It has already been whitewashed inside and is in fine shape, but birds are already making nests on the interior and their traces are being left on the seats and tables placed there. An enclosed building would keep out all undesirables and would make picnicking more pleasant and sanitary. (*Sac Sun* 10 August 1939)

Citizens responded to Mr. Hacke's pleas and the entire building was enclosed by the summer of 1940. Kitchen facilities were added in the room west of the stage in the 1940's. In the 105 years since the original construction, there have been numerous coats of paint; new roofs; some electrical upgrades, including new lighting and ceiling fans; improvements in the dressing rooms; and the addition of one restroom in a storage area. In 1995, local residents contributed more than \$25,000 and untold volunteer hours to help return the building to its original glory. In 1996, a county-wide program resulted in a set of nine painted canvas murals, representing each incorporated town in the county, to cover the screened areas. The entire structure was rededicated in 1976 as a part of the country's bicentennial. Nevertheless, there have been no significant structural changes in Mr. Proudfoot's original design. The Auditorium is one of the few extant structures of its kind in Iowa and a living testament to the Chautauqua era that changed not only Sac City but the entire country.

Proudfoot and Bird

For well over forty-years, the Des Moines architectural firm of Proudfoot & Bird, et al. played a significant role in designing Iowa's architectural heritage. During its heyday, the firm designed more than one hundred commercial buildings, including a number of tall office edifices; two hundred single family dwellings; at least thirty apartment buildings; several public libraries; more than fifty public school buildings; approximately 100 collegiate buildings; five county courthouses; and a scattering of other public and semipublic buildings like hotels, theatres, churches, hospitals, and fire stations...

The firm's statewide legacy is broad and deep. Of their approximately 658 Iowa Commissions between 1885 and 1940, about half (an estimated 338) were in Des Moines. The firm penetrated markets throughout the state, however, with commissions in at least 117 communities in 64 counties. Fifteen communities

had more than five commissions. Especially well represented are Ames (18 commissions), Boone (9), Grinnell (27), Jefferson (7), Newton (13) and Oskaloosa (14). The firm did significant work outside Iowa, receiving 88 commissions in eleven states (Georgia, Kansas, Illinois, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming).

Thus, while the firm was not on the cutting edge of architectural experimentation, they provided a solid body of design within the self-imposed limitations of the demands of their clients and accepted architectural styles for the period. The architectural philosophy of the firm can be characterized as conservative, both in design and attention to cost. Their designs reflected those who commissioned them: the local boards of education, the State Board of Education (for collegiate buildings), the Des Moines public schools, county boards of supervisors, successful, old-line households, prosperous businesses. As John Woolson Brooks, who joined the firm in 1912 as a blue print boy and went on to become a partner, described it:

The main objective has been to produce Architecture in the unlimited sense of beauty, utility, and commodity; unlimited in that none of the three properties was allowed to predominate; none was neglected.

Proudfoot & Bird, et al. was considered the foremost architectural firm in the state, especially between 1910 and 1925. However, the firm's years of permanent Iowa residency date from 1896 and illustrate an unusual continuum (the organization of Proudfoot & Bird likely dates from 1882, but much of the intervening years were spent in other Midwestern states). Few firms can trace a similar record of uninterrupted practice, one that also placed them in the forefront of architectural practice in the state. The experience of the firm offers the opportunity to learn about architectural practice in Iowa from the late nineteenth century through the 1930's. (Long, Barbara, p. 2)

Local newspaper references indicate the Mr. Proudfoot was involved with plans for the Chautauqua Auditorium in Sac City. The firm's selection was somewhat predictable, as W. J. Dixon, president of the Sac City Chautauqua Association, lived in Seven Oaks, a home designed by Proudfoot & Bird. (Seven Oaks is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.) (Becker) The structure typifies the company's combination of beauty, utility and commodity. Research has found no other outdoor auditoriums designed by the firm.

Asa Platt Gates

Two stone pillars serve as gate posts for the entrance to Chautauqua Park. There originally were three-foot tall electric lights on top of the pillars, and may have been attached gates that kept horse-drawn and motorized vehicles out of the park. When the path of Highway 20 moved north and further from Chautauqua Park, the entrance changed, leaving the two stone pillars as a monument to Mr. Platt who worked diligently for the community and the Chautauqua organization. Platt, the grandson of a Revolutionary War veteran, built the first frame home in Sac City, enlisted to serve in the Civil War, and was active in both farming and mercantile endeavors while serving as president of the Sac County State Bank. His philanthropic efforts were numerous; the Asa Platt Boys' Home for the Sac City Institute, Platt Street, and the Asa Platt Gates were a testament to the pioneer's contributions to the community. *The Sac Sun* of March 26, 1908, credits Mr. Platt's mediation between the Fair Board and Chautauqua Association as a primary reason Chautauqua Park came into being.

Much of the credit for pointing out the way to harmony and bringing the several parties together belongs to Asa Platt, whose interest in all that looks in the welfare of the city so frequently is manifested. (*Sac Sun*, 26 March, 1908, p. 2)

Although the exact date of the gates' construction has been lost to history, photographic evidence indicates they were built prior to 1931. (See Images 32-33, page 46.)

Stone Bridge and Fish Pond

A fish pond spanned by a small stone walking bridge was a popular attraction on the west side of the Chautauqua Auditorium. It was certainly constructed after the Asa Platt gates, based on photographic evidence. (See Images 34, page 47.) Although many have speculated the bridge and fishpond were part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project, photographic evidence indicates the bridge and fish pond were in place by 1935, the first year WPA projects began. The absence of a metal plaque on the bridge and the early construction date would suggest the structure was built by other means. Large gold fish inhabited the fish pond which was aerated by small fountains. All that remains is the bridge, as city insurance required first the fencing in of the pond, and ultimately its removal in the 1970's. The bridge currently seems an enigma for those who don't know its history. (See Image 35, page 47 and Image 49, page 57.)

Stone Shelter House

The advent of radio and movie theaters, improved transportation, and economic conditions caused Chautauqua programs to wane in popularity after the first decades of the 20th century. By the time of the Great Depression, Chautauqua Park was used as a place for gatherings and recreation, but no longer hosting Chautauqua programs. The park's popularity as a picnic site, coupled with availability of WPA funds and workers, made the construction of a stone shelter house an ideal addition to the area in 1939. The architect of the building is unknown, but Mr. I. Lasensky, area engineer for the WPA, may have been instrumental in the building's design. The style complements the natural wooded setting overlooking the North Raccoon River. The building's unique design, featuring an open shelter fireplace and a separate enclosed area with a fireplace, allowed two large groups to use the facility at the same time. More than 20 WPA workers, under the supervision of sponsor superintendent Fred Salasek, foremen Jack Myers and Leslie Geary, and timekeeper George French had begun work on the stone shelter by mid-April, 1939. After completing a renovation project at the Community Building overlooking the square in Sac City, the men focused their efforts on the Stone Shelter House.

The WPA project brought needed employment into the community and helped provide much-needed economic stimulus. The building was also an early example of eco-friendly construction. At his speech during the July 1, 1939, dedication ceremony for the Community Building and Stone Shelter House, Sac City Mayor J. B. Tourgee extolled the project's virtues. He began his dedication speech with a quote from President Franklin Roosevelt. "When men dedicate a new edifice for a common enterprise, they are at once celebrating an achievement and announcing a purpose."

Tourgee continued to extol the virtues of the shelter house using his own words.

The achievement is apparent to all of us. Out of the surplus materials of our good earth, we have gathered together the elements of which the buildings we dedicate are constructed. From the waste materials of the earth we have gathered the rock and the sand, from the forests the lumber, and from the scrap pile the metals and with the ingenuity, skill and perseverance of a few good workmen we have brought forth a thing of beauty and a joy to this community.

The purpose of all this is to add to the pleasure, health and education of our citizens. It is to make life better and more worth while (*sic*), our homes more desirable and our love for them and for our country more vital and enduring. Most important of all is the fact that our community taste, our love for recreation and right living has been and will be raised and stimulated by these fine achievements. Our community life has been made richer and better and more enduring. (*Sac Sun*, 6 July 1939)

It would appear that many of the materials were acquired locally. Mr. Tourgee's remark about scrap metal leads one to wonder if the fixtures were crafted by the workmen. The Stone Shelter house has been home to countless family gatherings, birthday parties, and even dances. (See Images 36-39, pages 48-51.)

Fish House

Fishing was a popular attraction for Chautauqua Park. The construction of an open facility for anglers to clean and cook their catch is symbolic of the community's desire to accommodate those using the park. The canopy-like wood structure featured a sink with running water, counter area to clean fish, and a wood-burning stove. Conversations with descendants of early park custodians indicate that the building was erected about the same time as the Stone Shelter House to keep the mess of cleaning fish out of the fancier stone building.

Metcalf Log Cabin

Chautauqua Park contains the first log cabin built in the Sac County area. In 1854, one year before Sac City was founded, Mr. David Metcalf built the structure about a mile north of the present town of Sac City. The exact location was on the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter of section 14-88-36. (Freese, p. 320) At that time, the area was part of Woodbury County and there were only six or eight families in the region that eventually became Sac County. Hundreds of travelers spent the night in the cabin as they traveled to more westerly points. The cabin was built of logs hewn from trees felled in the area, had a dirt floor, wood rafters, and a primitive wooden roof.

In 1925, area residents united to move this historic example of pioneer architecture from the S. L. Watt farm to Chautauqua Park. Reports indicate the cabin was moved as a complete structure, making the home a contributing resource moved into the park under Criterion Consideration B. At that time, volunteers renovated and repaired the cabin, which served as a visible reminder of times gone by to all who drove by on Highway 20. The scenic location by the North Raccoon River had its drawbacks, as the river frequently escaped its banks and endangered the cabin. The local Federated Women's Club organized a second restoration in 1957. The entire

cabin was raised above flood level; chimney footings and a concrete floor were run; masons made a new chimney from bricks that had once paved the Main Street hill in Sac City; and the logs were preserved and sealed. At that time, the women began collecting items for the home that would have been typical for pioneer dwellings.

The home became a significant building in Chautauqua Park, reminding visitors of the relatively primitive conditions pioneer settlers endured to eke out a living from the prairie in the midst of Native American settlement. (See image 40, page 52.)

Non-contributing Resources

There are several additional resources in the nominated district. Through the years, the type of playground equipment has changed; there are no longer “monkey bars” or a merry-go-round. At one time, there was an open wading pool between the auditorium and Stone Shelter House. The pool was removed *circa* 1960.

Natural plantings have always been an important feature of Chautauqua Park. It is interesting to note that several trees were planted in memory of Mr. and Mrs. H. R. Elrod in 1973. Mrs. Elrod was the granddaughter of Asa Platt. Another tree commemorates Iowa’s sesquicentennial celebration of 1996. Flowerbeds along the north side of the park have long been a source of community pride and serve as a reminder of the park’s history of welcoming guests and promoting educational and cultural activities.

Chautauqua Park

The location of Chautauqua Park was the result of several compromises. The 1905-1907 assemblies took place in a large tent set on the Sac County Fair Grounds. When leaders of the Sac City Chautauqua Association began to consider building a permanent pavilion, the preferred location was on the Fair Grounds. Negotiations among the Chautauqua Association, Fair Board, and land owner D. H. Beimer appeared to have stalled. In desperation, leaders of the Chautauqua Association obtained an option to purchase land east of the Fair Grounds to build a new auditorium. Local business leaders did not like the proposed locale, as they feared the greater distance from downtown would have a negative impact on business during the Chautauqua assemblies. According to *The Sac Sun*, March 26, 1908,

After weeks of delay, in which it seemed that there was little prospect of an agreement that would enable the Chautauqua Association to obtain a suitable site in time to erect an auditorium this year, a deal was concluded the first of this week that adjusts in a very satisfactory manner the relations of the fair and the Chautauqua assembly and gives assurance of permanent sites for both. The arrangement required mutual concessions on the part of the two associations and D. H. Beimer, owner of the land on which the fair ground is located. Much of the credit for pointing out the way of harmony and bringing the several parties together belongs to Asa Platt...

In brief, Mr. Beimer has contracted to sell 37 1/2 acres of land to the fair association for \$125 per acre. The Chautauqua Association takes nine acres on the west side and pays for it \$1,275. A recent survey made it clear that an auditorium can be built near the first entrance to the fairground practically as safe from high water as on the site where the tent has stood. (*Sac Sun*, 26

March, 1908, p. 5)

The Park itself has undergone some boundary, management, and ownership changes in the past century. After the original purchase from Mr. Beimer, the Sac City Chautauqua Association owned the property. On February 21, 1911, the Sac City Chautauqua Association deeded the property to the Sac County Chautauqua Association. The change of name was an attempt to involve leadership and receive backing from the entire county.

The Articles of Incorporation (Recorder's Office Book 1, p. 69) for the Sac County Chautauqua Association, Sac City, Iowa, were filed on December 5, 1910. "The purpose and object of this corporation shall be to acquire and own the auditorium and grounds of the Sac County Chautauqua Association and such other real personal property as may hereafter be deemed necessary; to hold and manage annual Chautauqua assemblies in Sac City, Iowa, and to employ talent to entertain and instruct the public in science, philosophy, literature, music, art and religion: and in order to employ talent and effect the objects of this organization, it may charge an admission fee to its entertainments." The Capital Stock was \$10,000.00 with shares at \$2,000.00 each. The corporation was to continue for fifty years unless previously dissolved. (Freese, p. 319)

The Sac City Park Board asked for, and was granted, permission to establish a Tourists' Park on the southern part of Chautauqua Park in 1922. At that time, the city park commissioner began to oversee the park activities. Thus began the city's involvement with the area. In 1926, the board of directors for Sac County Chautauqua Association determined it was no longer feasible to host large-scale events. Whether it was finances, leadership burnout, or simply changing times that made the week-long festival impractical to continue is uncertain; the ultimate cause was most certainly a combination of all three. It was only natural for the Sac County Chautauqua Association to seek help from the city to preserve the park. On January 13, 1927, the Park Board of Sac City assumed ownership of Chautauqua Park.

The Sac City Chautauqua Grounds have been formally deeded to the city of Sac City for park purposes. The deed to the city was signed by officers of the Sac County Chautauqua Association on Tuesday evening of this week, pursuant to authority from the stockholders of the association.

The city covenants to maintain the Chautauqua park and also the land recently acquired from the Rowe estate perpetually as a public park and the rights to the Chautauqua ground and buildings for assembly purposes are reserved to the association.

If there should be any violation of that contract on the part of the city, the Chautauqua property would revert to the original stockholders. It is not presumed that there is any likelihood of the city's failing to keep this agreement. The acquirement of this ground gives Sac City a public park that can not be excelled in northwest Iowa. No more beautiful trees can be found in the state than those which are growing in Chautauqua park and on the Rowe estate ground. Fear frequently was expressed that the Rowe property might go into other hands and the trees be cut down before there was a chance to preserve them. (*Sac Sun*, 13 Jan. 1927, p. 1)

The additional property from the Rowe estate enlarged the park and is currently the area used as a campground on the south side of the park. This additional area is not

included as part of the application for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The only other change to the boundaries of the park happened in 1938, when the park acquired the land up to the river and extended north to the road. In addition to the previously-cited legal description, the following was added:

Block "B" and lots five(5), six (6) in block "C" and all that part of lots one (1), two (2) three (3) and four (4) in block "D" lying south of the highway or street running through said block "C" in the original town of Sac City, Iowa. (Public record)

(See Map 1, page 57, for the original area and map 2, page 58, for the additions acquired in 1938.)

The additional property acquired in 1938 is part of the application for inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Places, as the Metcalf log cabin had been placed on this property thirteen years before it was actually part of Chautauqua Park. It would appear that the land west to the North Raccoon River and north to the road were used as part of Chautauqua Park long before either the Chautauqua Association or the City had legal ownership. (see Images 40-41, pages 8-24—8-25) The current legal description of the property on file at the Sac County Court House simply states, "1.53 Acres Outlot A-1 and Outlot A-2 except .77 acres in SW corner. (10.924 acres)."

Since the city acquired the property, it has been known as "Chautauqua Park," "Tourist Park," "Sac City Park," and "Sac City Campground." "Chautauqua Park" is used for the purposes of this application. The Stone Shelter House, Fish House, park custodian house, restrooms, playground equipment, and modern camping accommodations have been added to the property. Since the last Chautauqua in 1926, the park has not had too many weeks with more than 1000 visitors in residence. Nevertheless, it has been used extensively. Family reunions, dances, county-wide country school graduation ceremonies, home shows, cook-out contests, rubber duck races, launching a new fast-food product, city-wide freecycles, countless fundraisers, church services, political rallies, filming a movie, concert series, and annual Chautauqua Days celebrations all utilize the park. P. Buckley Moss created a print featuring the park; senators and presidential candidates have graced the area; busloads of tourists stop to visit. Through it all, Chautauqua Park has remained a center for education, culture, and recreation—a living reminder of a bygone era that continues to use its beauty and nobility to inspire each successive generation.

The nominated district, Chautauqua Park, has served a vital role as a cultural and recreational center for Sac City, Iowa, and the surrounding communities for more than 100 years. As a cultural center, it has hosted politicians and orators (most notably William Jennings Bryan), the famous Sousa Band, Madame Schuman-Heink, and a host of others. Performances by the "Jubilee Singers" were undoubtedly many people's first exposure to African-American music. Lectures were instrumental in encouraging people of all ages to value education, understand the political process, and expand horizons. Chautauqua's influence shaped history in Sac City and the surrounding area. Chautauqua Park proved to be a catalyst for people working together for the common good of the community, which is a characteristic of Sac City that remains today.

As a recreational area, its scenic location and rich amenities have attracted untold thousands of visitors for not only cultural and education events, but family gatherings, dances, reunions, and religious celebrations. The North Raccoon River provided a

welcome area for fishing, boating, and swimming. The campgrounds were and are noted for their beauty, accessibility, and spacious accommodations.

Chautauqua Park Historic District is home to the historically significant Proudfoot and Bird designed auditorium, Asa Platt gates that honor a community founder, Metcalf cabin that is a testament to the early pioneers that settled Northwest Iowa, a fish house that is at best a historical curiosity, small stone bridge that is a fine example of early 20th-century landscape architecture, and shelter house that serves as an example of WPA projects. The auditorium, with its soaring rafters and fine acoustics, was considered one of the finest examples of a cultural pavilion in the area and is the few extant Chautauqua auditoriums in Iowa. The combination of resources in Chautauqua Park represents a wonderful collection of rustic architecture that embodies the union of function, beauty, and harmony within a beautiful natural setting.

Archeological investigation was not a part of this nomination. Additional research may indentify archeological sites that could contribute to the overall historical significance of the property, particularly given the proximity of the park to the North Raccoon River.

Although there have been some changes to the district over the past century, the major resources remain with few structural modifications. Original materials are evident in each structure. Chautauqua Park is significant not only for its historical buildings, but as a symbol of a community working together to better itself by involving groups of citizens to effect positive change on their surroundings. An early report in *The Sac County Bulletin* (December 15, 1909) may best summarize the effect of Chautauqua Park on the community and all who have visited it.

The movement has been the recipient of most cordial public favor, because of its great value to the moral and educational interests of the community, and the self sacrificing and unselfish open manner in which the business has been conducted. This is distinctively an organization of the people and for the people which is destined to endure so long as the people continue to give it the same cordial and substantial support that it has thus far so happily received. (*Sac County Bulletin*, 15 December, 1909, page 1)

Chautauqua Park, an area “of the people and for the people,” is a historically significant area, notable for its architecture; recreational facilities; and significant contributions to the community through education, culture, performing arts, and the preservation of early Iowa pioneer history.