



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 7, 2009

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1930s Chautauqua In Ottawa and Hesston

Topeka, KS – Ottawa and Hesston are the two Kansas hosts of the Kansas Humanities Council's *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua. The event will be in Ottawa June 3-7 and Hesston June 10-14. This five-day festival of learning features tent programs, history workshops, a traveling exhibition, and local history events that explore the hopes, dreams, and fears of Americans during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years of the 1930s. The Ottawa location for the Chautauqua tent and evening programs is City Park at 5th and Main Streets in Downtown Ottawa. The tent and evening programs in Hesston will be on the Hesston High School grounds, 600 E Randall. All events are free and open to the public.

Americans faced economic hardships and uncertainty during the 1930s. Unemployment skyrocketed. Banks failed. Families lost their homes. Dust storms ravaged Kansas and the rest of the "Dust Bowl" region of the central United States. In their despair, Americans looked to the government for solutions, to religion for solace, and to arts and entertainment for an escape.

"In 1933, the headlines looked similar to those of today: Americans had a new president charged with solving the economic crisis, banks and businesses were failing, and families were struggling," said Julie Mulvihill, executive director of the Kansas Humanities Council. "The *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua tent programs and workshops allow Kansans to explore and discuss contemporary issues through the lens of the 1930s and the Great Depression."

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The *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua features first-person portrayals of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Louisiana Senator Huey Long, Pentecostal leader Aimee Semple McPherson, Harlem Renaissance writer and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, and humorist Will Rogers Thursday – Sunday at 7:30 PM under the Chautauqua tent. Following each presentation, the audience has an opportunity to ask questions of the famous historical figures, as well as the scholar who created the portrayal.

In addition to evening tent programs, the Chautauqua features a variety of daytime programs for all ages. Daily adult workshops offer an in-depth look at issues from the 1930s, such as agricultural relief, the impact of the radio, and the role of political satire in the Great Depression.

Youth can engage in the history of the 1930s and their community through a variety of workshops. *Dear Eleanor, Dear Michelle*, offered at 10:00 AM Friday morning of Chautauqua week, introduces children ages eight and up to Eleanor Roosevelt and the 1930s. At the workshop's end, participants will write a letter to First Lady Michelle Obama. At the five-day *Youth Chautauqua Day Camp*, presented by Ride Into History, young people (grades 4-8) will be historians, researchers, and scriptwriters as they prepare to present their own historical characters on the Friday evening of Chautauqua. The camp runs Monday – Friday of Chautauqua week. For a full list of youth programs, locations, times, and registration information, visit www.kansashumanities.org.

The Dust Bowl, a traveling photography exhibition from Humanities Texas, will be on display in each community. In the 1930s, Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers captured the people and landscape of the Dust Bowl region. Forty years later, photographer Bill Ganzel located and re-photographed the survivors, combining his work with the FSA photographs for a book and exhibition.

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Chautauqua began in 1874 as a summer school for Sunday school teachers in Chautauqua, New York. By the late 1800s Chautauqua had developed into a nationwide traveling educational and entertainment program, bringing the world to rural communities across the nation. Programs of political oratory and lectures about health, science, and the humanities combined with entertainment such as opera singers and stage performances of Shakespeare. National politicians William McKinley, Rutherford B. Hayes, and William Jennings Bryan toured the Chautauqua circuit, allowing audiences to discuss national issues with their neighbors. The modern-day Chautauqua differs from the original by featuring history professionals portraying famous figures from the past, rather than contemporary speakers.

The *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua is a partnership between the Kansas Humanities Council, the Franklin County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Hesston Chautauqua Committee, the Hesston Recreation Commission, and the Nebraska Humanities Council. The Chautauqua will also visit Broken Bow and Plattsmouth, Nebraska as part of the 2009 tour. The Chautauqua is made possible by We the People, a grant initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

For a complete schedule of Chautauqua events, locations, and times, contact the Kansas Humanities Council at 785/357-0359 or www.kansashumanities.org, or visit the Kansas-Nebraska Chautauqua website at www.knchautauqua.org.

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