



## **NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 19, 2009

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT  
Tracy Quillin, Director of Communications  
Kansas Humanities Council  
785 / 357-0359; [tracy@kansashumanities.org](mailto:tracy@kansashumanities.org)

### **Chautauqua Audiences to Grill “FDR” About Current Woes**

**Topeka, KS** - Kansans will have the opportunity to ask Franklin Delano Roosevelt what President Obama should do to revitalize the American economy when Chautauqua comes to Ottawa June 3-7 and Hesston June 10-14. The Kansas Humanities Council’s *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua offers first-person presentations of five important historical characters from the 1930s and daily workshops for adults and youth.

In comparing the Great Depression with today’s sharp economic downturn, Patrick McGinnis, the historian who portrays Roosevelt on the 2009 Chautauqua circuit, said, “Even a cursory examination reveals both similarities and differences. Rising unemployment defines both eras. So do mounting bank failures, home foreclosures, business and personal bankruptcies, a sharp decline in foreign trade and increasing signs of political instability.”

However, McGinnis went on to note that the current recession hardly comes close to the severity of the Great Depression. “This spring, unemployment figures approached 8.5 percent. In 1933, the figure was nearly 33 percent. Proportionately, home foreclosures and bankruptcies are not reaching the elevated levels that marked the economic collapse of the period from 1929 to 1933.”

McGinnis, author of a book about Depression-era radicals in Oklahoma, whose research includes United States political history and the history of the American West, observed that two questions dominate public and private discussion when focusing on any economic crisis. “When will it end? And what should be done about it? Those questions provoked an intense debate that began with the Depression itself and has continued ever since, both among scholars and in the media. The current crisis has sharply intensified this debate.”

--MORE--

McGinnis portrays Franklin D. Roosevelt at 7:30 PM on the Thursday evening of Chautauqua week. He also leads two daytime workshops for adults. *Agriculture Then and Now* looks at New Deal farming practices. *What Do Historians Say?* examines historians’ interpretations of Roosevelt’s New Deal legacy.

McGinnis’s Roosevelt will be joined by scholars portraying humorist Will Rogers, radio evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, WPA folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, and Louisiana senator Huey Long for five days of history and entertainment in Ottawa and in Hesston.

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 is made possible by We the People, a grant initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

For more information about *Bright Dreams, Hard Times* Chautauqua events for 2009, visit [www.knchautauqua.org](http://www.knchautauqua.org) for community schedules or contact the Kansas Humanities Council at 785/357-0359 or visit [www.kansashumanities.org](http://www.kansashumanities.org).

###