



NEWS RELEASE

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1930s Chautauqua Coming to Ottawa in June

Ottawa, KS - Ottawa will host the 2009 debut of the Kansas Humanities Council's *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua June 3-7. 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 Chautauqua tent and evening programs will be at City Park, 5th and Main Street, in Downtown Ottawa. All events are free and open to the public.

Ottawa was a typical small town in the 1930s, according to Deb Barker, director of the Franklin County Historical Society. Barker explains, "It was certainly affected by the Great Depression, but intense heat and job shortages were not as serious as the conditions suffered by western Kansans in the heart of the Dust Bowl. Rural Ottawans asked later about the Depression replied that they didn't know they were poor—everyone else was, too. People worked at the Bennett Creamery and enjoyed their state champion Drum and Bugle Corps. Their new community hospital was a focus of intense community pride. Floods still ravaged the Marais des Cygnes Valley, alternating with bitterly cold winters and stifling summers."

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Barker noted that aid came from both the Federal Government and local citizens, “A Civilian Conservation Corps camp north of town provided work for some young men of the area. Local philanthropist William H. “Dad” Martin, after successful careers as a photographer, an exaggerated postcard designer, and the founder of National Sign, devoted his retirement to experimental agriculture and established a restaurant that served his produce--free for those who needed the food. He created a woodpile on the courthouse lawn, which he hoped to raise to the height of its towers, free for the taking to warm needy householders.”

Ottawa residents did see some bright spots during the tough times, according to Barker. “The railroads ran, the Warner Manufacturing Company cast iron parts for saws and engines, and the high school orchestra won a first place ranking at the National Music Contest at the Chicago World's Fair. A high school track relay team won the Interscholastic Track and Field Meet, also in Chicago, beating a team featuring a young man destined to win four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics--Jesse Owens. Bakers baked all night and drove bread trucks all day delivering their product, so tired that they often fell asleep at the wheel.” Barker added, “It was a typical small town facing challenges and surviving.”

Ottawa’s residents and visitors can learn more about the 1930s at the *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua. The event 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 each evening, June 4-7, 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.

The Chautauqua kicks off on Wednesday, June 3 with a *Media Preview/Meet the Chautauquans* event at 6 PM at the Old Depot Museum, 135 W. Tecumseh. The public is invited to attend.

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“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.”

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, June 5 at the School Room, Old Depot Museum, 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 Friday evening, June 5 at 6 PM under the Chautauqua tent. The camp runs Monday – Friday of Chautauqua week. Pre-registration is required. Contact the Franklin County Historical Society at 785/242-1232 for more information.

The Dust Bowl, a traveling photography exhibition from Humanities Texas will be at the Carnegie Cultural Center from 10 AM – 7 PM, June 4-7. 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. Ottawa was a major Chautauqua center in Kansas and played host to annual Chautauquas from 1883 through 1914. 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, 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 a complete schedule of Chautauqua events, locations, and times, contact the Franklin County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 785/242-1411 or www.visitottawakansas.org, 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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