

*A century ago in Mt. Pleasant; an account and picture of visit by a well known American---*

*By Hudson Keenan*

July 16, 1909, **Carrie Nation**, hatchet-wielding temperance leader, visits Mt. Pleasant Chautauqua. 2,000 persons hear her lecture.



Today the word Chautauqua (sha Taw kwa) is known to a few, but a century ago it was a term known to all. It refers to a movement that spread across the country, from its beginnings in the 1870s at Chautauqua Lake in New York State, to a nationwide movement in the early 1900s.

Communities would organize summer programs for citizens of an area. The programs included musical groups, bands, orchestras and coral groups. Speakers of various cultural, religious and political expressions of all sorts were on the program. Examples included writers, ministers, politicians and professors. As one might expect, they were all noted as good public speakers. In addition, entertainment might include a magic show, a dog and pony act or maybe a ventriloquist. One writer referred to it as a “summer adult education program.”

Mt. Pleasant’s 1909 Chautauqua was the largest ever held in the city. The event took place at “Fancher Flats,” in the area now occupied by Island Park. The city would vote to purchase the land where Island Park now stands a little later that summer, in an election on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1909.

At \$2.00 for each adult, and \$1.00 per child, one could purchase a ticket for admittance to all 15 programs, which were scheduled over two weekends. Single admission to each program was 25 cents. *The Central Michigan Times* later said the programs were worth every bit of the price of admission. Moreover, the paper stated, “The weather has been delightful.”

One lecture attracted more attention than any other on the program. Carrie Nation was one of the most well known personalities in the United States at the time, and here was a chance to hear her in person in Mt. Pleasant. In 1909, she was in her early sixties, and for years had toured the country as a leader in the temperance movement.

Arrested and jailed 33 times for breaking up saloons, she was on a country wide crusade against tobacco and alcohol. As she moved from place to place delivering her message, she also sold her books. Oh- and yes, she had a bonus for you. If you purchased a book, you got a souvenir hatchet.

*The Central Michigan Times*, in a front page article, reported on her address to the 2,000 in attendance in the big tent erected on the flats adjacent to the Chippewa River. Interestingly, Mrs. Nation stated she would smash the tobacco evil first. She said, “I have received the most abuse in my experience from the rank smelling, stinking tobacco users.” She admonished the girls never to marry a man who is so dirty he will defile his mouth with the weed, and so senseless he will spend his money for it. She also had little use for the politicians who supported

saloons. “If you men of political parties don’t turn your backs on the saloons and become prohibitionists, you will go to hell as sure as there is a hell.” The paper described her voice as strong and her enunciation distinct, saying, “years of experience in public speaking has given her a facility of expression.” At points in her talk, she made gestures with clenched fists.

Mrs. Nation made a remark to the effect that in her Michigan travels she considered Owosso a bad town, but Mt. Pleasant had a good reputation. One might well wonder what she said while in Owosso.

Just this year, in 2009, in an album collection from the Saginaw area, a post card was found of an image taken in the big tent on that Sunday July 16<sup>th</sup>, one hundred years ago. It shows Carrie Nation on the platform dressed as the newspaper had described, wearing plain black, relieved only by a white lace collar, and a white ribbon W.C.T.U. badge (Women’s Christian Temperance Union).

In the postcard, Carrie nation can be seen on the left, with the large audience of both men and women in attendance in front of her.