

# THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE AT CHAUTAUQUA 1874-1899

## THE EARLY YEARS AT FAIRPOINT

During the first twenty-five years of Chautauqua's history, African American students, educators, orators, entertainers, ministers, and employees came to the Assembly Grounds on Chautauqua Lake to learn and live among individuals from around the world.



*Crowds Waiting by the Pier, undated. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

In telling this part of the Chautauqua story, the quotes, articles and announcements are presented exactly as found in the Chautauqua Institution Archives, preserving historical accuracy.

The images and accompanying quoted descriptions are reflective of the sentiments of the times, reminding us of our historical heritage.

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## GENERAL ADMISSION



*"...here we are really and truly at Chautauqua.... We imagine that we are unknown among these many thousands, but friendly faces greet us at every turn... and we begin to feel quite at home."  
—Hallie Quinn Brown, 1886*

*Hall of Philosophy on S.S. Assembly Grounds, 1879. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

With the purchase of a gate pass, African Americans who came to Chautauqua during its first twenty-five years of history could gain equal access to public areas on the Assembly Grounds without restriction.

While personal interactions with individuals on the Grounds were subject to societal biases just as they were beyond the Gate, public communal settings and Assembly-sponsored activities at Chautauqua were non-discriminatory in terms of variables of diversity and all were welcome to utilize the public amenities offered on the Assembly Grounds.

Along with access to public facilities, African Americans had access to public transportation and were welcome at Assembly-operated dining and lodging establishments.

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## EMPLOYMENT AT THE PALACE HOTEL

From 1877 through 1880, Alling's Palace Hotel stood on the ground where the Athenaeum Hotel is located today, serving as "first-rate lodging" to guests and a place of employment to "the Finest Cooks and Waiters to be had" from the St. James, Gibson, and Grant Hotels in Cincinnati, Ohio.

A number of African American men were chosen to work as waiters and cooks in the Palace Hotel's tented dining room, located outside apart from the main hotel.



*Palace Hotel, 1878 (Above); Dining Room of Palace Hotel—at Fairpoint, 1879 (Below). Chautauqua Institution Archives.*



*"The dining room which was separate from the rest of the Hotel, was a long rough building, boarded only part of the way up and covered with canvas. The colored waiters and bill of fare were quite in contrast to the steel forks, iron spoons and oil-cloth table covers, but the supper was good and our appetites still better."*

*—Alice A. Bell, August 1878*

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## ATHENAEUM HOTEL EMPLOYMENT



*Veranda on Hotel Athenaeum, ca. 1882. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

Like the Palace Hotel before it, the Athenaeum Hotel extended employment opportunities to African Americans when it opened for business in 1881. Men worked as cooks, porters, barbers, bootblacks, watchmen, and waiters, while women found employment as housekeepers, laundresses, and maids. African Americans came from across New York State, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and some as far south as Georgia to work at the new hotel during Chautauqua's short summer season.



*Hotel Athenaeum and Waiters, 1882. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

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## PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT



*Tents, ca. 1878. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

While some African Americans found employment in the public sphere of Chautauqua's hotels and dining rooms, others came to the Assembly Grounds to work for private employers.



*Boarding House, undated. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

Among this private workforce at Chautauqua, African Americans and their white counterparts worked as cooks, maids, and laundresses during the early years of Chautauqua, when it was common for domestic servants to accompany individuals, couples, or families during their summer stay in tents, cottages, and boarding houses on the Assembly Grounds.

*"There are friends everywhere. Some in the Palace Hotel, some renting cottages and bringing their furniture, servants, and household goods, and making a home in the wilderness of maples..."*

*—Chautauqua Assembly Daily Herald, 1878*

# THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE AT CHAUTAUQUA 1874-1899

## LECTURERS



*“What would an audience of twenty years ago have said to the presentation to them, of a Southerner, a woman, and a negro as lecturers. Strange, but the sympathy that was astir among the people was ample proof of the thankfulness in their hearts that such a thing was possible and they were seeing it.”*  
—Chautauquan Assembly Herald, 1885

As early as 1885, African American lecturers spoke from the Chautauqua platform, attracting audiences and admirers from across the Assembly Grounds.

Zion Wesley Institute president **Joseph C. Price** “made a wonderful impression” on Chautauqua audiences when he lectured as one of three featured speakers at Temperance Day in August 1885:

*“Hit of the day. [Joseph C.] Price on temperance for the negro. Big voice, big audience, big applause. Sympathetic listeners. General belief that the millennium is on the way. Splendid delivery, real eloquence, keen wit.”* —Chautauqua Assembly Herald on Joseph C. Price’s lecture, 1885

*“He [Joseph C. Price] held them from the beginning to the end, and before the address was half through it was heralded all over the grounds that there was a big lecture at the Amphitheater.”*  
—Chautauqua Assembly Herald on Joseph C. Price’s lecture, 1885

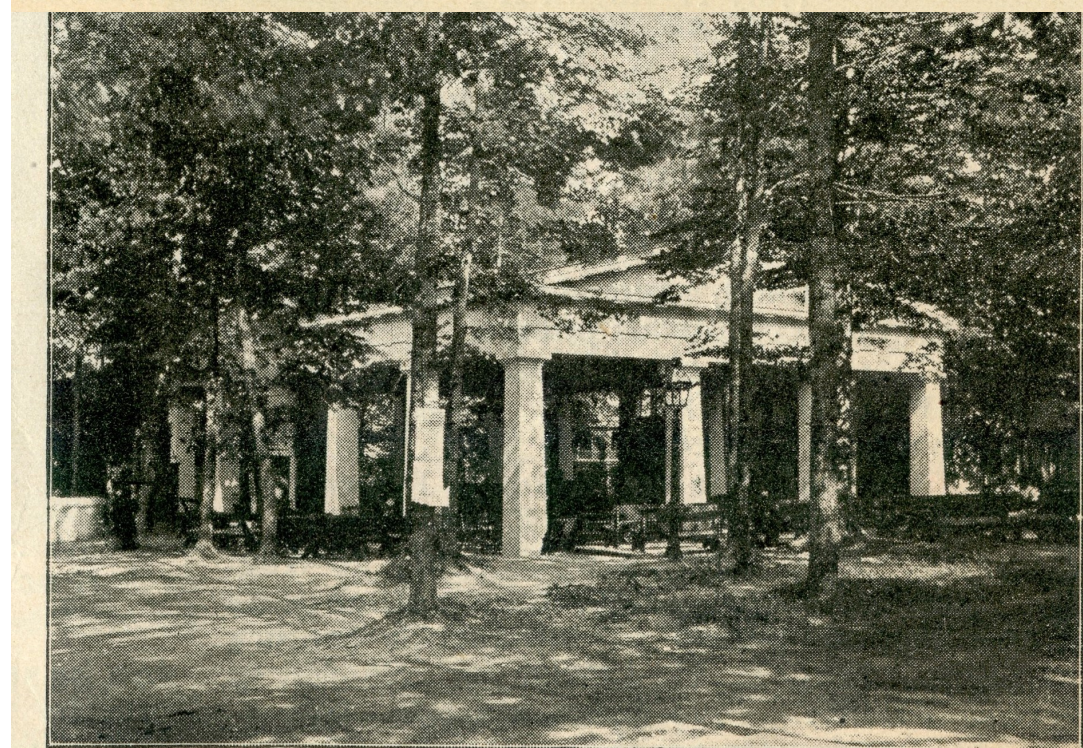
The week following Joseph C. Price’s Chautauqua appearance, Clark University professor **William Henry Croghan** delivered his lecture “The African Problem” as the first address following the 8 AM morning chimes on Friday, August 28, and ten years later, fellow Clark University graduates **Lucy Craft Laney** and **Mary C. Jackson** delivered the 10 AM morning lecture in the Amphitheater on August 17, 1895.

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## LECTURERS



"STANDING ROOM ONLY." AMPHITHEATER, CHAUTAUQUA, N. Y.



THE HALL IN THE GROVE.

### THE NEGRO PROBLEM IN THE BLACK BELT OF THE SOUTH.

An Address Delivered in the Amphitheater,  
August 1, 1896, by Rev. Booker T. Wash-  
ington, Principal of the Normal and Tuskee-  
gee Industrial School, Tuskegee, Ala.

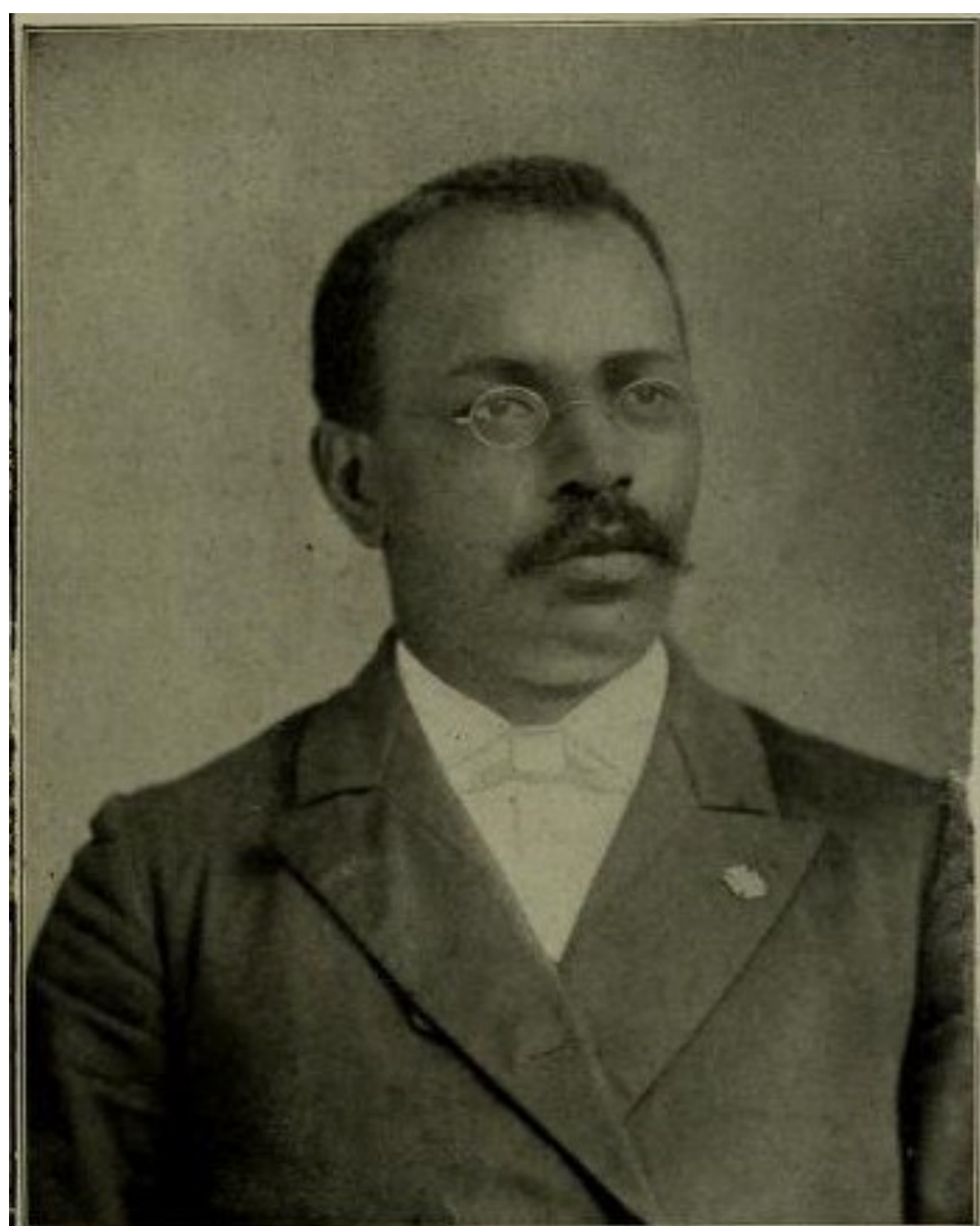
A Lecture by Dr. J. W. E. Bowen  
of Gammon Theological Semi-  
nary, Atlanta, July 7.

ON THE RACE PROBLEM AT  
THE SOUTH.



Booker T. Washington

In 1896, **Booker T. Washington** of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute took command of the Amphitheater with “a splendid oration as convincing as it was brilliant” while fellow educator **John W.E. Bowen** delivered an address in the Hall of Philosophy.



John W. E. Bowen

Bowen returned in 1899 to lecture “On the Race Problem at the South” and his wife, Woman’s Christian Temperance Union representative and 1892 C.L.S.C. graduate **Ariel S. Bowen**, spoke during an evening lecture about the “Work of the W.C.T.U. No. 2 of Georgia.”



Ariel S. Bowen

# THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE AT CHAUTAUQUA 1874-1899

## PERFORMERS

During the first twenty-five years of the Chautauqua Assembly, African American singing troupes like **The North Carolinians**, **The Fisk Jubilee Singers**, **Donavin's Famous Tennesseans**, and the **Arkansas Plantation Singers** captivated audiences on the Grounds, as did various ensembles from Africa like **The South African Choir** and **The South African Boys Choir**.



*Tennessee Singers, 1884. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*



*The South African Choir, 1894. Courtesy Martin Plaut Collection.*

***“The Tennesseans [sic] have many admirers at Chautauqua.”***

—Chautauqua Assembly Herald, August 1884

***“...the Jubilee Singers we welcome... [Applause.]***

***We welcome them not only as gifted voices who came here to entertain us with their charming melodies, but as brother men, and as sisters in Christ Jesus, who occupy with us a common platform, and who here shall enjoy the rights, privileges, and fellowships which the constitution guarantees to them. [Applause.]”***

***—John Heyl Vincent, August 1881***

The Chautauqua platform featured concerts of what were then known as “slave songs” and “negro spirituals” from its earliest days until well into the twentieth century, making jubilee singers some of the most popular entertainers to ever perform on the Assembly Grounds.

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## ACCOMMODATIONS



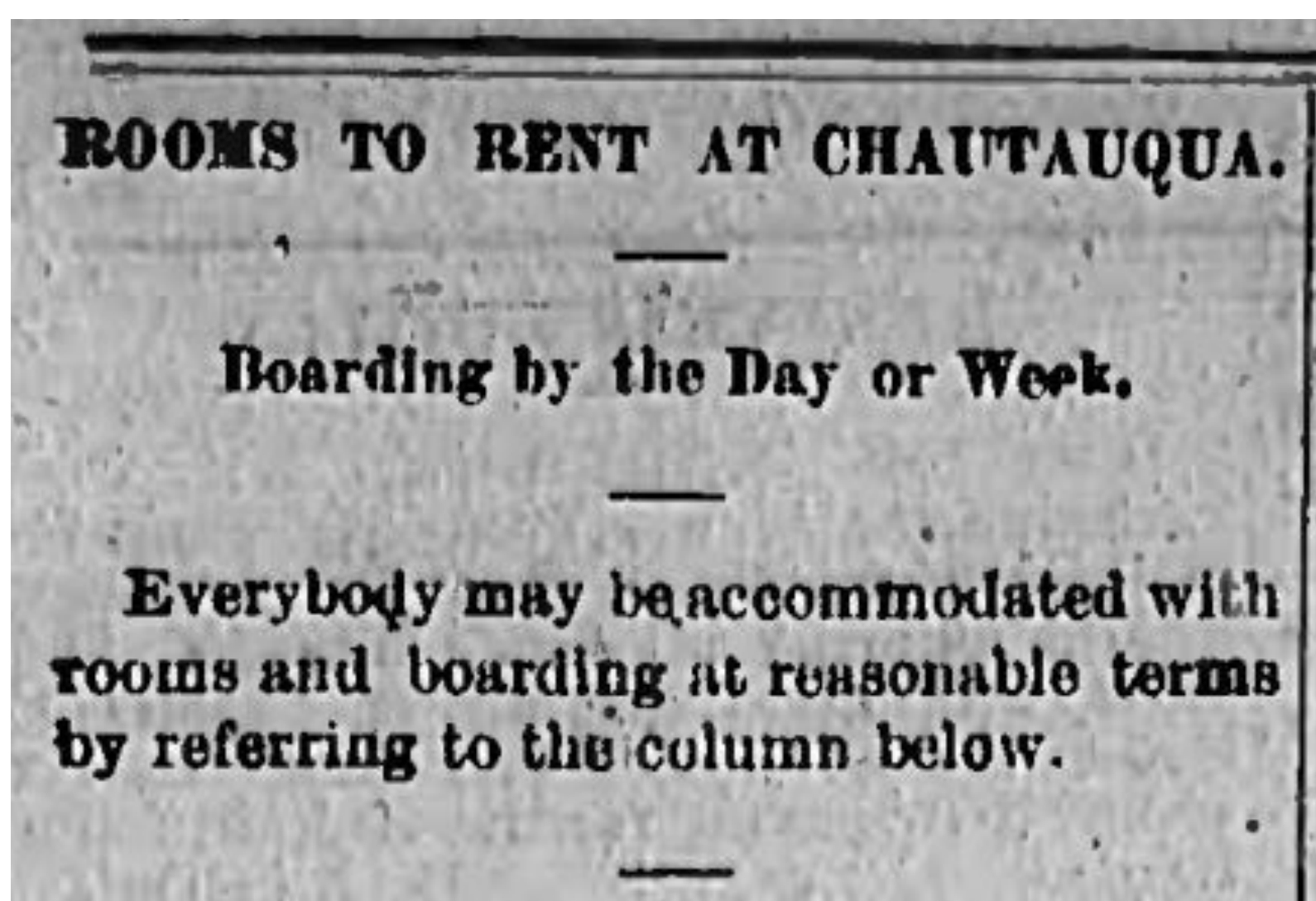
View on Simpson Ave, Chautauqua, N.Y., ca. 1884.

Accommodations for African Americans during the early years of Chautauqua ranged from tents and cottages to boarding houses like The Spencer, where Hallie Quinn Brown stayed on the eve of her graduation from the C.L.S.C. in 1886.

That same year a hotelkeeper in Troy, New York refused the Fisk Jubilee Singers accommodations, leading to the following condemnation by the editor of *The Chautauquan*:

*“The boasted broad-mindedness of the North displays some pitiable weak spots now and then. It has been some time since one more shocking has come to view than the refusal of Troy, N.Y. hotel-keepers to give accommodations to the Fisk Jubilee Singers. These people are ladies and gentlemen of refinement. They deserve courtesy from everyone. There ought to be a public way of making it “too hot” for the narrowness of those people who refuse this courtesy.”*

*—Editor’s Notebook, The Chautauquan, 1886.*



While visiting Chautauqua in 1881, the Fisk Jubilee Singers stayed in a cottage on Simpson Avenue, where they gave “parlor concerts” which were “much enjoyed by residents in that locality.”

# THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE AT CHAUTAUQUA 1874-1899

## ADULT EDUCATION

*“In no place do you find a larger territory represented than at Chautauqua. The question ‘Who is my neighbor’ finds a very broad answer here. You touch elbows with the whole world. All continents and almost all nationalities are represented.”*

—Chautauqua Assembly Herald, 1891



*College of Liberal Arts, ca.1886. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

Classes at Chautauqua during the first twenty-five years of its existence were then, as they are now, open to men and women of various experiences and backgrounds. African Americans were given an equal opportunity to receive an education from Chautauqua’s adult education programs in the Chautauqua Summer School and Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts, with **Henry Pearson** and **Richard B. Hudson** as just two examples of black students.

Others remain unidentified or unnamed, like a young man described as “a colored boy” who participated in Reverend B.T. Vincent’s intermediate class at Chautauqua in 1887 and proved himself “a good student” who was expected to “stand among the successful ones at the close of the examination.”

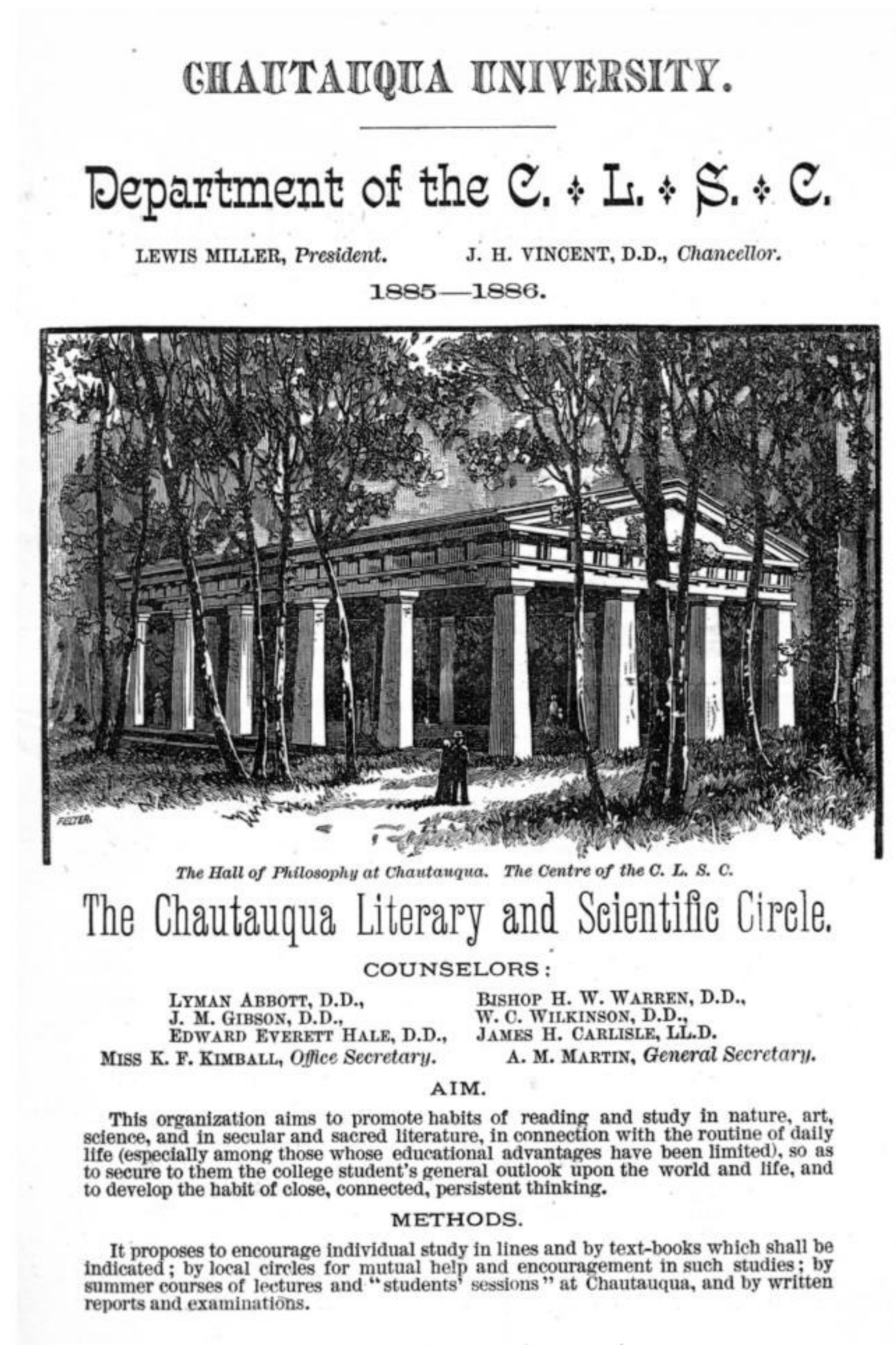
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## GRADUATES OF THE C.L.S.C.

Since its inception in 1878, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (C.L.S.C.) has welcomed African Americans to its membership, with several individuals such as **Theodore F.H. Blackman**, **Joseph Courtney**, and **George A. Maston** graduating with “The Pioneers” in the inaugural class of 1882.

*“I am so well pleased with the system and its proposed object that I desire to be a partaker of the benefit and blessings to be derived from it.”*

*—African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop, applying for C.L.S.C. membership, 1880.*



View on S.S.A. Grounds—Chautauqua, ca. 1882.  
Chautauqua Institution Archives.

While hundreds of individuals graduated from the C.L.S.C. during the early years of Chautauqua, only a portion came to the grounds to attend Recognition Day graduation services, among them African American graduates **Hallie Quinn Brown** and **Louisa White**.

*“’Tis Recognition Day, the crowning time of all.... Four years of patient toil and study in the past. Hours of ease have been turned into hours of severe work. Today the goal is reached, the result of self conquest and self sacrifice. Now comes the triumphal procession thro' Golden Gate and Rustic Arch.”*

*—Hallie Quinn Brown at Chautauqua for Recognition Day,*

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## CHILDREN

Though minorities in a dominantly white residential population, African American children were generally embraced by teachers and students as joint members of the Chautauqua community.

*Group Portrait, undated. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*



Children learned and played together despite their differences and were not, as a rule, separated based on the color of their skin.

*Doll Dressmaking Class, 1899. Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

Never segregated, Chautauqua's Summer School programs offered African American children integrated educational opportunities on the Assembly Grounds.

*Children's Temple and Group—At Fairpoint, ca. 1878.  
Chautauqua Institution Archives.*

