

The First Chautauquas

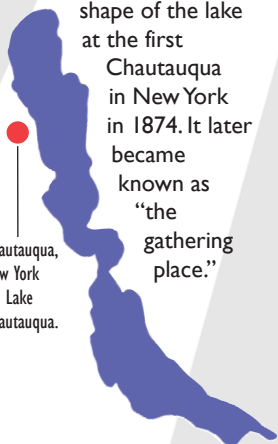


The first Chautauqua was a summer training program for Methodist Sunday school teachers in Chautauqua, New York in 1874. It eventually became a nationwide adult education movement that encompassed literature, music, economics, science, religion and public affairs.

The Chautauqua movement took root in the small towns that vaudeville missed, bringing culture to people who otherwise would have gone without it. Chautauquas died out in the 1920s with the rapid growth of radio.

The name Chautauqua (sha-ta-qwa) is derived from the Seneca Indian word meaning "two moccasins tied together by a string," which describes the shape of the lake at the first Chautauqua in New York in 1874. It later became known as "the gathering place."

Chautauqua,
New York
on Lake
Chautauqua.



It started on a ski hill in 1986....

"Culture under the tent" enjoys a rich tradition in the Midwest. In 1874 the Chautauqua Assembly of Lake Chautauqua, New York, offered adult education in the sciences and the humanities. Soon after the turn of the century, traveling Chautauquas took the form of tent shows moving from town to town during the summer offering lectures and entertainment. The town of Bayfield hosted several Chautauquas during the years preceding World War I.

A permanent Chautauqua landed in Bayfield in the summer of 1986 after the talents of **Warren Nelson, Betty Ferris, Sally Kessler** and the **Lost Nation String Band** (made up of Nelson, **Don Pavel, Bruce Burnside, Jack Gunderson** and **Bruce Bowers**) attracted the attention of community leaders in Bayfield, Ashland and Washburn. The group had received rave reviews for their original musical histories produced and performed for three specific occasions: *Souvenir Views* for the Washburn centennial celebration; *Whistle Comin' In* for the Ashland centennial; and *Riding the Wind* for the Bayfield all-class reunion.

Audience response to *Riding the Wind* - presented in the Bayfield High School gym - was so

overwhelming that the group was asked to add an extra performance. Bayfield resident, **Mary Rice** along with the MAHADH Foundation (established by Mary Andersen Hulings and A.D. Hulings) offered to build a permanent theater that would showcase the myriad talents of these creative artists. But Nelson had a love for canvas after spending summers with his dad traveling to county fairs across southern Minnesota. He proposed a Chautauqua-style entertainment venue that would draw visitors from across the Upper Midwest to enjoy a variety of original productions, regional artists, and national headliners.



The cast of *Riding the Wind* in 1986.

The first tent and the first season in the summer of 1986, offered 42 shows with 5,218 tickets sold. The first original show commissioned specifically for the new venue was the musical revue "Take it to the Lake" featuring songs, stories, poetry and even mime centered around the theme of Lady Lake Superior.



THE FIRST BIG TOP..

It was pretty impressive: big and blue and filled with familiar faces all trying to make a go of bringing quality entertainment to Mt. Ashwabay. AWESOME. I remember picking wild strawberries up and down the hill that first July.

Nori L Hadley

Past Performers

Abigail Washburn
 Adaawe
 African Children's Choir
 America
 American Brass Revue
 American Indian Dance Theatre
 Andy Dee
 Andy Noyes
 Ann Reed
 Annie Humphrey
 Arlo Guthrie
 Arrogant Worms
 Asleep at the Wheel
 Austin Lounge Lizards
 Avett Brothers
 B.B. King



Barra MacNeils
 BeauSoleil Avec Michael Doucet
 Becky Schlegel Band
 Bela Fleck & The Flecktones
 Big Bad Voodoo Daddy
 Big John Dickerson
 Big Wu
 Bill Hinkley
 Bill Holm
 Bill & Kate Isles
 Bill Lutes
 Bill Miller
 Bill Monroe
 Bill Staines
 Blind Boys of Alabama
Blue Canvas Orchestra
 Bobby Vee
 Bobs
 BoDeans
 Brandi Carlile
 Brian Torff
 Brooke Melek
 Bruce Bowers
 Bruce Burnside
 Bruce Cockburn
 Bryan Bowers
 Bucky Halker
 Buddy Mondlock
 Butch Thompson
 Byrd & Hauser
 C. Willi Myles
 Café Accordion Orchestra

Lake Superior Big Top Chautauqua continues to advance its mission of **PROVIDING YEAR-ROUND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES THAT CELEBRATE EXCELLENCE IN ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATION, HISTORY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP.**

We stay true to the ideals of the original Chautauqua movement all year long by touring during the off-season, delivering a mix of rich musicals to schools and community theatres throughout the region. Tent Show Radio is beamed into the homes of families on some 50 public radio stations across the country.

While we have lost our beloved Lost Nation String Band with the 2008 death of our friend and bandleader Don Pavel, our Blue Canvas Orchestra is still performing and creating new material. Our revered Executive Director **Carolyn Sneed** has retired – but still supports and attends the shows on the hill, and while our Founder and long-time Artistic Director Warren Nelson has stepped down from his post, we still perform his celebrated works and look forward to welcoming him back for a special

Warren Nelson & Friends performance this summer. Co-Founder and Visuals Director, Betty Ferris, is still our curator and historian – although digital images have replaced thousands of slides used to illustrate songs and stories of the past.

At the turn of a new century, the magic of Big Top Chautauqua nestles comfortably next to its competitive cousins – radio, television, movies, the Internet – to tell stories of those who walked the land and paddled the rivers and stared at the stars dreaming of what the next day would bring. Thanks for being part of our journey which to date has taken us through 25 exciting years. Together, may we ensure that there be at least 25 more!



Holes in the roof of the tent looked like a constellation of stars. The entire front row filled with kids from local families.

Cookie Holm-Falconer



Ballyhoo!

25 SUMMERS OF BIG TOP CHAUTAUQUA HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

Birth of the Big Top!
July 11
Mt. Ashwabay



1986

Attendance 5,200
Shows 42

Whistle Comin' In
Ashland Centennial Show,
July 8-12



1987

Wild River
Show about St. Croix
River designation



1988

Keeper of the Light
Show about Great Lakes
lighthouses & keepers



1989

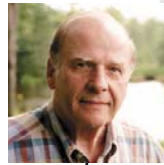
Earth to Wendell
Environmental
show



1990

Attendance 16,390
Shows 56

**Earth Day Founder
Senator Gaylord Nelson
speaks at Big Top**



1991

On the Velvet
Show about the Golden
age of U.S. railroads



1992

First Big Top
state-wide tour

**10th Anniversary
of Souvenir Views**
June



1993

S.V. debuted at
Washburn High
School in 1983

**The Birth of
Tent Show Radio**
January



1994

**New Big Top
Canvas Tent**
10th summer season



1995

**Garrison Keillor
Visits The Big Top**
July 7



1996

Attendance 22,750
Shows 73

**Johnny Cash &
June Carter Cash**
June 24 & 25



1997

30th Star
New show about
Wisconsin statehood



1998

Sesquicentennial tour
to 14 communities &
nearly 40K people

Past Performers *Continued*

Cal Aultman
Call for Peace Dance and Drum
Capitol Steps
Carmel Quinn
Carrie Newcomer
Catfish Keith
Chad Mitchell Trio
Chance
Chapell & Kleiman
Charlie Byrd
Charlie Maguire
Charlie Waller & the Country
Gentlemen
Cheney & Mills

Cherryholmes
Cheryl Leah
Cheryl Wheeler
Chic Gamine
Chick Sheridan
Chris Montez
Chris Thile
Circo Comedia
Claire Lynch
Claudia Schmidt
Cliff Eberhardt
Colder by the Lake
Colm O'Brien
Conga Se Menne

Corey Carlson
Corky Siegel's Chamber Blues
Cowboy Junkies
Cubanismo
Dailey and Vincent
Dan Kleiman
Dan Sebranski
Dan Urbanski
Dar Williams
Dave Cieslewicz
Dave Mason
Dave McCormick
David Bromberg & Angel Band
David Genzler

David Gidmark
David Grisman Quintet
David Holt
David Siegler
David Wilcox
Dean Magraw
Dean Premo
Dean's List Orchestra
Debbie Davies
Debbie Duncan
Dee Carstensen
Del McCoury
Denise Sweet
Dennis Olson Critterman

100th Performance of *Riding the Wind*
July 10



1999

Attendance 28,960
Shows 78

Tent Burns Down From Electrical Fire
June 14



2000

Show goes on!

New Big Top Tent Goes Up For The Summer Season



2001

New Restrooms At The Tent Grounds
June



2002

Riverpants Premieres
June 18
Big Top Chautauqua



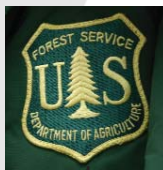
2003

Old MN: *Song of the North Star* Debuts
May 7, Fairmont, MN



2004

Centennial Green Plays Washington, DC
September 23



2005

Attendance 28,653
Shows 69

Nickel Creek sets new box office record
1,070 tickets sold



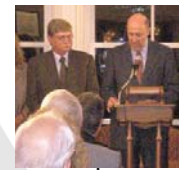
2006

New Canvas Tent is Raised
May



2007

BTC receives WI Governor's Award in Support of the Arts



2007

Minnesota State Fair Chautauqua
August-Sept.



2008

Lincoln's Living Legacy Debuts
200th Anniversary of Lincoln's birth



2009

Betty Ferris named Minera Laureate by WI Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters



2009

Bally Hoo Haw comedy show featuring Michael Perry debuts



2010

Attendance 23,608
Shows 56

Big Top Celebrates 25th Anniversary



2011

Past Performers Continued

Dennis Spears
Different Drums of Ireland
Dirty Dozen Brass Band
Doc Watson
Don Albrecht
Don McLean
Don Pavel
Drexler, Sidran, Eckels World Music Ensemble
Druha Trava
Duluth-Superior Chamber Orchestra
Duquesne University Tamburitans
Earl Scruggs
Eau Claire Symphony Orchestra

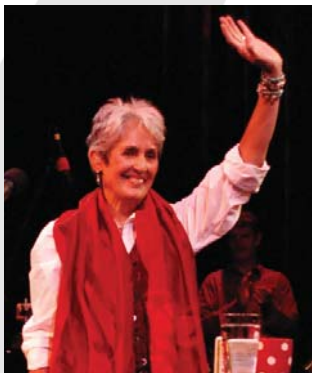
Ed Willett
Edgewater Eight
Elephant Revival
Eliza Gilkyson
Emmy Lou Harris & The Nash Ramblers
Fabian
Fire & Ice
Ferron
Fish Heads
Floydian Slip
Four Bitchin Babes
Four Shillings Short
Frank Montano
Freddy Fender

Free Hot Lunch
G. Love & Special Sauce
Gaelic Storm
Gale LaJoye
Garnet Rogers
Garrison Keillor
Geno Delafosse & French Rockin' Boogie
Germany Brass Band
Gerry DePerry
Gilleland & Stauffer
Glenn Yarbrough
Golden Dragon Acrobats
Gordon Hayward
Gordon Lightfoot

Gov't Mule
Great Lakes Boys
Great Lakes Seafaring
Greg Brown
Guy's All-Star Shoe Band
Hans Mayer
Harmonious Wail
Heidi Howes
Heather Atherton Tucker
Hired Hands Bluegrass
Hope McLeod
Hornheads
Hot Club of Cowtown
Hot Dish Band
Hot Jazz/ Radio Days

Past Performers
Continued

- Howard Levy
- Howard Sivertson
- Hull & Larson
- Indigena
- Indigo Girls
- Inner Visions Reggae
- Interact Theatre
- Iris DeMent
- Iztapapaloti
- Jack Gunderson
- Jack Norton's Wizard Oil
Vaudeville
- Jamie Hartford
- Jan Lee
- Janis Hardy
- Japanese Dance
- Jay Whitney
- Jean Ferraca
- Jeff Barnhart
- Jeff Daniels
- Jeff Eckels
- Jeff White & The Front Porch
- Jeffrey Foucault
- Jellyeye
- Jesse Cook
- Jim & Bitsy Olm
- Jim and Jesse
& The Virginia Boys
- Jim Post
- Jimmie Dale Gilmore
- Jimmy Martin & Friends
- Joan Baez



- Joe Carr
- Joe Ely
- Joe Weed
- John Altenburgh
- John Gorka
- John Hartford
- John Hiatt
- John McCutcheon
- John McEuen
- John Munson
- John Sebastian
- John Stewart
- Johnny Cash
- Johnsmith

In their own words...



My whole family really enjoyed Riding the Wind last night! We took all 5 of our children, ages 2-10, and it meant the world to them! My husband and I went last year on our Anniversary and bought the CD. The children all knew the CD by heart. We even wore the old one out and had to buy another! Thank you to all of the performers who made their day by signing posters for them! What a fantastic show! Fabulous performance! We will all be back next year! Thank you for helping to make beautiful memories!

The Berger Family, 7/4/10



I love the Big Top. This is an awesome place to play.
Bela Fleck,
7/10/08



It's a musicians dream to be a part of something unique in all the world, please, please, don't ever wake me..
Ed Willett



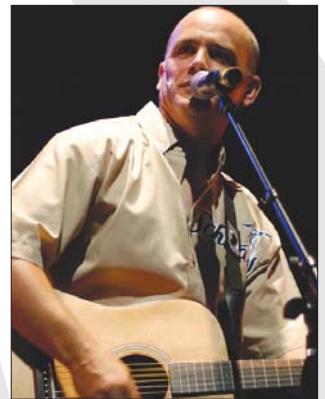
We have had such an amazing time here. This is an amazing gig. What a great idea, who would have thought of it, way up there in Wisconsin - a circus tent. And it's genius.
Abigail Washburn, 7/10/08



The bear was memorable. I think it was stalking the tent. Beautiful country, excellent tent, lonely bear.
Leo Kottke



In a long line of outstanding Big Top Tent Raisers, including "Riding the Wind", I think Elephant Revival and Avett Brothers tore out the roof and went way beyond our highest expectations - and they ARE HIGH. Elephant Revival would intimidate some great bands but the Avetts just took off from where they left us - thrilled, standing & applauding. They deserve a whole show of their own, but whoever put these two bands together found a combo as perfect as peanut butter & chocolate. Please bring them both back. I've seen a lot of concerts and this ranks way up there on the thrill meter. Thanks for such a great show, Avetts. We & Love & You!



As both a performer and an audience member, I have always marveled at how the Big Top can make 900 strangers feel as if they are a cozy dozen...that thin canvas skin holding us warmly beneath the universe.
Michael Perry, 11/12/10



1986

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

2011

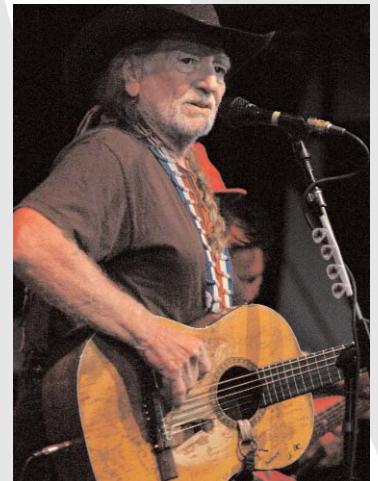
Past Performers
Continued

Jonathan Edwards
Jones & Leva
JT & the Clouds
Judy Collins
Julian Hagen
June Carter-Cash
Justin Isherwood
Justin Roth
Karen Mal
Karen Savoca & Pete Heitzman
Kate & Anna McGarrigle
Kate McKenzie Trio
Kathy Mattea
Keb' Mo'
Keith Charters
Keith Secola
Kelly DeHaven
Kevin Kling
Kevin Locke
Kingston Trio
Koerner, Glover & Ray
L J Booth
Larry Long
Leahy
Lee Murdock
Leftover Salmon
Leo Kottke
Leon Redbone
Leon Russell
Les Barker
Les Fils du Voyageur
Les Sampou
Lettermen
Lew Orsoni
Lisa McGinley
Little Feat
Liz Woodworth
Lonesome Timber
Loretta Lynn
Lorie Line
Los Lonely Boys
Lost Nation String Band
Loudon Wainwright III
Lucinda Williams
Lucy Kaplansky
Lura
Luther Allison
Lynn Morris Band
Marcie Gephart
Marshall Tucker Band
Martin Sexton
Mary Bondeson
Mary Lou Williams
Mary Louise Knutson Trio
Mason Jennings
Mason Williams
Maura O'Connell
McGuffins
Merle Haggard
Michael Cooney

Michael Cooper
Michael Dukin
Michael Feldman
Michael Johnson
Michael Martin Murphey
Michael Perry
Michael Smith
Michael Stanwood
Mike Dowling
Mike Mercury
Mike Weber
Mimi Blais
Minneapolis Gospel
Minnesota Brass Ensemble
Modern Times Dixieland
Molly & The Haymakers
Molly Culligan
Monica Maye
Monroe Crossing
Moon Gypsies
Mountain Heart
Myron Floren
Nanci Griffith
Natalie MacMaster
National Shakespeare Co.
Neal & Leandra
Neo
New Christy Minstrels
New International Trio
Nickel Creek
Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
Nnenna Freelon
Noah Siegler
Norbert Blei
Norwegian Song Trio
Nothin' To It
Oak Ridge Boys
Otis & the Alligators
Pam Tillis
Pat Donahue
Pat Labadie
Patty Larkin
Paul Asaro
Paul Cebar & The Milwaukeeans
Paul Schurke
Peaceful Women
Peking Acrobats
Perla Batalla
Peter & Lou Berryman
Peter Ostroushko
& The Mando Boys
Peter Rowan
Philip Hamilton
Phillip Anich
Phillip Brunelle
Phoebe Legere
Phyllis Chapell
Pinery Boys
Pipers Crow
Pop Wagner
Prudence Johnson
R. Carlos Nakai

Radoslov Lorkovic
Ramblin' Jack Elliot
Randy Lee Orchestra
Randy Sabien
& The Fiddlehead Band
Renegade Radio Hour
Rhonda Vincent & the Rage
Rich Little
Richard Bangs
Richard Watson
Richie Havens
Ricky Skaggs
& Kentucky Thunder
Riders In the Sky
Rio Nido
Robert Bly
Robert Cray Band
Robert Mirabal
Robin & Linda Williams
Rory Block
Rowan Nelson Ferris
Roy Clark
Roy Mack
Ruth McKenzie
Saffire the Uppity Blues Women
Sally Kessler
Sally Rogers
Sam Bush
Sam Cook
Samana
Santa Cruz River Band
Sara Watkins
Scandinavian Sunday
& Luren Singers
Scott Kuester
Scott Mitchen & Tony Kopp
Second City National Touring
Company
Severin Behnen
Shawn Colvin
Shirley Witherspoon
Shooter Jennings
Siegel Schwall Band
Slide Jam
Small Potatoes
Small World
Smothers Brothers
Sons of Bunyan
Sons of Never Wrong
South Shore Mountain Boys
Sparrow Quartet
Spider John Koerner
Spirit of Tibet
Stephen Matier
Steppin' In It
Steve Earle
Steven Eckels
Stoney Lonesome
Straighten Up and Fly Right
Sue Keller
Susan Werner
Sutter Brothers
Sutton/Brunelle/Hardy

Suzanne Vega
Sweet Lips Theater Company
Taj Mahal
Tanglefoot
The Chiffons
The Crickets
The Machine
The Mammals
The Mills Brothers
The Teddy Bear Band
The Whites
Three Dog Night
Three Redneck Tenors
Tish Hinojosa
Tom Larson
Tom Mitchell
Tom Paxton
Tomás Kubinek
Tommy Emmanuel
Tommy Sands
Tony Hauser
Tony Rice
Tony Truschka Band
Trampled By Turtles
Travis LeDoyt
Trova
Truly Remarkable Loon
Tuck & Patti
Ulali
Vassar Clements
Verne Sutton
Vicky Mountain
Wailin' Jennys
Warren Nelson
Whad' Ya Know? Trio
Wild Oats String Band
Williams & Ree



Willie Nelson
Willowgreen
Willy Porter
Yázmín Bowers
Yonder Mountain String Band
Zorayne

And many more!

LAKE SUPERIOR BIG TOP CHAUTAUQUA