

Chautauqua Historic District

Designated in 1978



Chautauquans exiting the Auditorium, c. 1906.



View of tents at Chautauqua, 1898.



Burros for rent, c. 1899.



Chautauqua Orchestra, c. 1899.

One of the most distinctive areas of Boulder is the Colorado Chautauqua, located on a southwestern mesa overlooking the Boulder Valley. Since 1898 it has served as a rural enclave to urban Boulder and has provided a variety of programs, such as concerts, debates, and recreational activities. The Chautauqua historic district is located south of Baseline Road from Bluebell Road east to 12th Street and is bordered by City of Boulder Open Space to the south and to the west. The district's period of significance is 1898 to 1930, reflecting the major period of growth in the area. Over one hundred structures within the district retain a high degree of architectural integrity.

In the 1890s, there were over 300 Chautauquas nationwide, but today, it is the only one remaining west of the Mississippi river. The Chautauqua movement began in upstate New York in 1876 as a center for political, educational, and recreational programs. By 1924, nearly 40 million people were annually attending events at Chautauquas across the country. In the late 1890s a group of Texans, including University of Texas president G.F. Winston, wanted to open up their own Chautauqua and looked to the Rocky Mountains as a location. Boulder was chosen for the site of Chautauqua and Boulder citizens, thrilled to have a Chautauqua nearby, raised \$20,000 towards construction costs. The city of Boulder purchased 171 acres from the Bachelder Ranch, the Austin-Russell tract, and the Texans contributed expenses in order to run Chautauqua programs.

As a result of the Great Depression and changing trends in recreations in the U.S., many of the Chautauquas ceased operation so that by 1955, Boulder's Chautauqua was one of only six remaining in the country. The programs and activities continued at the Colorado Chautauqua as they had from the beginning, but many of the buildings began to deteriorate. By 1975, the City considered tearing the buildings down, but concern about the future of the park inspired the citizens of Boulder and the Colorado-Chautauqua Association to implement a program to preserve the park and its historic buildings, structures, and landscape. In 1978, Chautauqua was designated as a local historic district and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2006, it was designated as a National Historic Landmark District, one of only 24 in Colorado.



A 1903 performance in the Chautauqua Auditorium.

Historic District Highlights



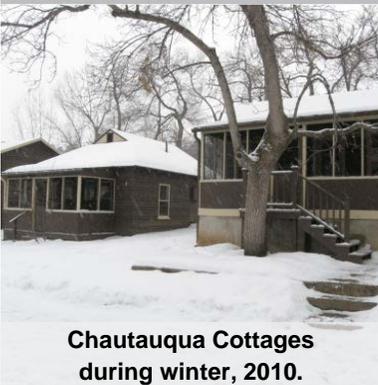
The Auditorium, 2014.



The Dining Hall, 2014.

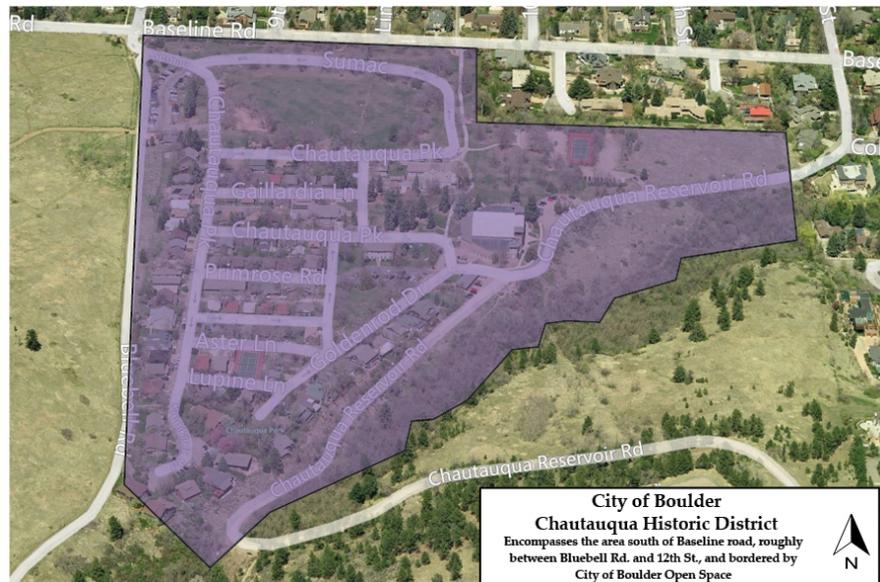


The Community House, 2014.



Chautauqua Cottages during winter, 2010.

- For the first ten years, the summer residents of Chautauqua pitched six-foot high tents during their stay. Slowly Chautauquans shifted towards constructing permanent facilities and by 1909 tents were replaced with frame cottages. The small frame cottages are now one of the defining characteristics of the park. They were constructed to have from one to six rooms and cost \$50-\$300 to build.
- The Chautauqua Climbers Club was organized in 1906 to conduct hikes and camping trips into the Rocky Mountains. Hiking and outdoor recreation were so popular at Chautauqua that Boulder's Flatirons along the city's western skyline were originally referred to as the "Chautauqua Slabs" because most of the trails were paved by Chautauquans.
- From 1903-1906, a small zoo operated on the grounds. It housed deer, elk, a wolf, two pheasants, two bears, squirrels, and guinea pigs.
- The Auditorium was constructed in less than eight weeks. It was completed by Chautauqua's opening day, July 4th, 1898.
- Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., a well-known landscape designer and urban planner of the early 1900s, praised how well Chautauqua's geometric design and layout was situated against the foothills and mountain scenery. He recommended that Chautauquans maintain a formal landscape within the park in order to heighten the aesthetic contrast of the park's setting in "wild" lands.



Changes to designated properties including individual landmarks and those located within a historic district require review and approval through a Landmark Alteration Certificate. The alterations must meet the City of Boulder's *General Design Guidelines* and district-specific guidelines, if applicable. For more information please visit our website at www.bouldercolorado.gov/historic-preservation, or contact:

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Information provided by the 2006 National Historic Landmark Nomination, *Grand Assembly* by Mary Gale, the 1989 Chautauqua Design Guidelines, and by the Boulder Carnegie Library for Public History.