



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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1930s Chautauqua Coming to Hesston in June

Hesston, KS – Hesston will host the Kansas Humanities Council's *Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties* Chautauqua June 10-14. 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 on the Hesston High School grounds, 600 E Randall. All events are free and open to the public.

Hesston was a small community with a population of 526 people in the 1930s, according to *The WPA Guide to Kansas*. Hesston residents met the challenges of the Great Depression through hard work and a modest lifestyle. At a time when many banks across the country failed, Hesston's bank remained strong and closed for only four days in 1933 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a bank holiday.

Hesston was not immune to the dust storms that ravaged most of Kansas in the 1930s. According to John E. Sharp, Hesston College faculty member and author of the forthcoming *A School on the Prairie: A Centennial History of Hesston College, 1909-2009*, Hesston College students awoke on March 16, 1935 to "a heavy blanket of dust 'over all the rooms.' At noon it was so dark lights were required." April 14, 1935, "Black Sunday," brought dust clouds accompanied by sixty-mile-per-hour winds. Sharp notes that Hesston College students, like other Kansans, "complained about how difficult breathing became in the dust storms."

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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.”

Hesston’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 11-14, 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 10 with a *Media Preview/Meet the Chautauquans* event at 6 PM at the Chautauqua tent. The public is invited to attend.

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 12 at the Hesston Middle School, 100 N. Ridge Road, 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 12 at 6 PM under the Chautauqua tent. The camp runs Monday – Friday of Chautauqua week. Pre-registration is required. Contact Susan Lamb at 620/327-2422 for more information.

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The Dust Bowl, a traveling photography exhibition from Humanities Texas will be on display at The Water's Edge June 10-14. 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

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. 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 Hesston Chautauqua Committee, the Hesston Recreation Commission, 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 Hesston Recreation Commission at 620/327-7128 or www.hrce.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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