

“America Takes Flight”: Chautauqua tent show in Lewes, Del., June 9–13, 2013

✘ Mankind’s age-old quest to understand the air and space and to travel through them will be brought to life during Delaware’s 15th annual Chautauqua tent show, “America Takes Flight,” that will take place at a variety of downtown Lewes, Del. locations from June 9–13, 2013. Go to the following for a [complete schedule of events](#). Admission is free and open to the public. For additional information, call 302-645-1148 or visit the [Zwaanendael Museum](#) on the Web.

A unique mixture of education and entertainment, Lewes’ Chautauqua will be held under a large tent and will feature re-enactors who take on the personas of celebrated historical figures, educating and entertaining audiences as they bring the past to life. Audience members are encouraged to ask questions and interact with the featured characters who will include Amelia Earhart; the Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei; Bessie Coleman, the first African-American female pilot; and Charles Lindbergh.

Chautauqua takes its name from a series of adult education programs that were first held at a campsite on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in upstate New York during the late 19th century. Chautauquas spread throughout America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries bringing speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and specialists of the day to a wide cross-section of the nation’s rural and small-town population. Circuit Chautauquas (or colloquially, Tent Chautauquas) were an itinerant manifestation of the movement. Programs would be presented in tents pitched in a field near town. After several days, the Chautauqua would fold its tents and move on to the next community. The popularity of

Chautauquas peaked in the mid-1920s, after which radio, movies and automobiles brought about the gradual disappearance of the movement by the 1940s.

Reborn in the 1970s as a vehicle for humanities education, modern Chautauquas are organized around a core program in which re-enactors portray celebrated historical figures, speaking and interacting with audiences, often in the setting of a large outdoor tent. Modern Chautauquas have been presented annually in Delaware since 1999 featuring a wide variety of historical figures including John Philip Sousa, the Lone Ranger, Edgar Allan Poe, Eleanor Roosevelt, Dolley Madison, and Delaware's own Clifford Brown and Caesar Rodney. In 2013, Delaware's Chautauqua tent show is being co-sponsored by the Lewes Historical Society, the Lewes Chamber of Commerce and the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs.

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