

FORUM ON THE BAY

Factors in the Survival of Bay View Association

By Robert M. Carter

Bay View, Michigan, about 45 miles southwest of the Mackinaw Bridge, is one of the earliest summer speaking platforms or Chautauquas to be established in America. The institution has "refused to die," though almost all other supposedly permanent "Little Chautauquas," modeled after the original Chautauqua in New York State, stopped operating years ago.¹ Apparently Bay View has held interest in terms of its purpose, its general background, and its principal speakers over the years.

Bay View began in 1875 as the site of "The Campground Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church." A Methodist layman, Samuel O. Knapp, and two Methodist preachers, Joseph McCarty and Seth Reed, were influential in the establishment of the assembly. Since Knapp's wife had lung trouble, he was interested in finding a summer place that would benefit her health. Apparently he discovered the Bay View location with its natural terraces and the setting overlooking Little Traverse Bay. McCarty, as Knapp's pastor at Jackson, Michigan, presented a proposal to the two Methodist annual conferences in Michigan that a state camp meeting ground be established. This resulted in the appointment of a committee of leading preachers from both conferences to look into the matter, an indication that the conferences favored such a project.

The joint committee met in Jackson in November, 1875, elected temporary officers, and drew up articles of incorporation. The committee emphasized the desire of the conferences to have a campground with "summer residences" where religious services would be conducted and where Christian standards of conduct would be upheld. In January, 1876, the committee met again, considered several possible sites, and voted in favor of accepting 300 acres of land offered by the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railway just north of Petoskey, Michigan. The railroad agreed to run its tracks one mile north of Petoskey to the site, build a station there, and assist in clearing the land. The committee, representing the conferences, accepted a warranty deed in which it promised to spend \$10,000 in five years improving the grounds and to conduct a camp meeting there annually for at least 15 years. In 1890 the church received a quitclaim deed to the property. In 1895 the streets were named and numbered. Seth Reed, who was elected secretary of the commission at its first meeting and who served the Association in that capacity for 13 years, suggested the name of Bay View for the campground,

¹ Kenneth G. Hance, "The Contemporary Lecture Platform," *QJS*, XXX (1944), 42.

and he did most of the work involved in platting the site for residential lots.

Some 20 tents were erected for the first camp meeting at Bay View in 1876, and 500 to 600 people attended. There were two to four sermons each day with prayer meetings at dawn and dusk, as in most other camp meetings of the period. The preaching emphasized conversion and Christian perfection or holiness.

The first annual meeting of "The Michigan Campground Association" was held during the 1876 camp meeting to elect trustees. The Association was made up of persons who had leased lots and intended to build cottages. At the time leases cost two to ten dollars per year. The first cottages, five in number, were erected in 1877. Summer residents still lease their cottages from the Association for 99 years. The corporate name of the institution today is the "Bay View Association."²

Though Bay View was established primarily as a Methodist camp meeting ground, it soon began to cater to the increased appetite for culture which was evident in America at the time and which continues today. This article will therefore consider the activities of the assembly as they were related to public speaking and discussion and as they involved adult participation. It is believed that these factors explain in part the reason for the continued existence of the Bay View Assembly.

In the printed programs³ of the Association one can identify some 1,500 speakers and note the subjects of their addresses and sermons. The subject matter of the messages varies sharply over the ninety-year period. At first (1876-85), "holiness," was the main topic of sermons in the camp meetings. This gave way in 1886-96 to "intellectuality" when the assembly platform featured many leading educational figures of America, a number of them from The Johns Hopkins University. From 1897 to 1906, the scholarly emphasis was temporarily subordinated to entertainment as Bay View was forced to compete with the new tent Chautauquas. In 1907-15 there was a brief but unsuccessful return to "holiness," followed by a resurgence of speaking on broad themes encompassing liberal Christianity and secular topics. From 1916 to 1925, the blend of religious and sec-

² Emma Lamb Baker, *Stories of Bay View* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Press, 1925); Hugh Kennedy and Clement Smith, *Fifty Years of Bay View*, (Bay View, Michigan: Bay View Camp Ground Association, 1925); Floy I. Graham, *Petoskey and Bay View in Ye Olden Days* (Petoskey, Michigan: C. E. Garvin Co., 1938); William R. Prescott, *The Fathers Still Speak* (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Printing Service, 1941); Clark S. Wheeler, *Bay View, Michigan, 1875-1950* (Bay View: Bay View Association of the Methodist Church, 1950); and Margaret B. Macmillan, *The Methodist Church in Michigan: 19th Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Michigan Area Historical Society, 1967).

³ The writer found printed programs for every season from 1885 forward. Information from these programs is used in this article without specific footnotes. The Programs are available at the Bay View Library, Bay View, Michigan.

ular speaking continued, with the clergy taking over the management. Bay View survived the depression decade of 1926-35, and while war came in the 1936-45 period, there was no pause in the assembly's activity. In the twenty-year period 1946-65, there was renewed growth at Bay View. These six periods merit more detailed consideration.

1876-85—Camp Meeting Holiness

As indicated above, a land grant from the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railway gave Michigan Methodists a place to hold camp meetings in the summer. In the early years, most people who attended the one-week camp meeting sought a fair climate far from "allurements to vice and folly." Though at the beginning tents were the only accommodations, by the end of the first decade there were "dozens" of cottages on the grounds.⁴

During that first decade, preaching services were held in a natural amphitheatre with the congregation sitting on benches of rough boards. Innovations took the form of Sunday School Congresses (for church school teachers), and Ministerial Roundtables (for preachers to confer on questions of theology and pastoral practices). Even in this first ten-year period, an unmistakable liberalizing trend was apparent. By the end of the decade, a secular assembly became a goal, and it was introduced in 1886.

1886-90—Cosmopolitan Trend

The year 1886 saw the first actual assembly at Bay View; it was directed by Manager John M. Hall, a man of remarkable ability. Hall was an attorney and entrepreneur who had gained invaluable experience in lecture-concert work at Flint, Michigan, where he managed Chautauqua speakers and entertainers appearing at Flint's Opera House.⁵ This change in programming brought an emphasis on secular culture, and it permanently transformed Bay View. The assembly was to be no longer a mere campground; it was to be a significant cultural oasis. By 1886, Bay View was one of thirty-one "other chautauquas" operating throughout America with ties to Chautauqua, New York.

The half-decade from 1886 to 1890 saw the crowds at the assembly grow from hundreds to thousands. Five large buildings were erected, including a 1,000-seat auditorium. On that "campus," in the late 1880's, the first summer school in Michigan was established. There were addresses by leaders in missions, temperance, and suffrage re-

⁴ Elijah H. Pilcher, *Protestantism in Michigan* (Detroit: R. D. S. Tyler and Co., 1878), 432, 437. The Bay Viewites date their establishment to 1875 (their year of incorporation), rather than to 1876 (their first camp meeting year).

⁵ *Ninety Years of History of Court Street Church* (Flint, Michigan, 1926), 14, 26.

form.⁶ Furthermore, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Reading Circles ran for three-week periods annually, with daily schedules from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Speakers of national prominence up to 1890 included Russell H. Conwell (famous for his address on "Acres of Diamonds"), Frances Willard, Mary Livermore, and George Washington Cable.

1891-96—Intellectual Zenith

With the steady increase in the summer population at Bay View came an extension of a second railroad line (The Chicago and West Michigan) to the grounds, as well as the lengthening of the assembly season from three to four weeks. The growth which these events suggest was more than a quantitative enlargement, for this was indeed Bay View's period of magnificence. Even though that institution continues to this day to present an excellent program of summer education and cultural activity, it shares this responsibility with many other schools throughout the state. In the early and mid-1890's, however, Bay View, under John M. Hall,⁷ was unique in the cultural program it offered to the people. Impressed by Bay View's intellectual foundation, one woman, Helen Stuart Campbell, a writer from Wisconsin who had lectured and taught at both Chautauqua and Bay View, declared that Bay View was intellectually superior to the parent institution.⁸

University Extension (or Assembly) Courses were available for the first time at Bay View in 1892 under Richard T. Ely, the noted economist. They continued through 1896. These courses (especially those under Ely in 1892) gave the assembly and summer school the character of a German university. The independent direction was underlined when John Hall changed the most popular reading group from the "Chautauqua Circle" to the "Bay View Circle." (The Chautauqua Circle continued for a time as a secondary organization.) The conservative missionary addresses and the Sunday School Normal Training were "phased out." While addresses on temperance reform continued uninterrupted, Bible study moved definitely into the realm

⁶ Jerome A. Fallon, "Influence of the Summer School Movement," (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1959).

⁷ 1961 interview with Charles H. Swift, M.D., Ph.D., Bay View summer resident from 1900. Regarding Hall's work, it may be said that throughout his activities of the 1890's, there were critics who feared he was being too ambitious in undertaking a role comparable to that of the famed founder of Chautauqua, New York, John Vincent. Others were anxious lest the assembly would dilute the spiritual atmosphere of Bay View, and still a different contingent was fearful of paralyzing debt. Hall rose above these adverse criticisms as he attended personally to great and minor matters alike to keep the large assembly operation running successfully.

⁸ *Bay View Magazine*, II (1894), 35; W. J. Burke and Will D. Howe, *American Authors and Books, 1640 to the Present Day* (New York: Crown 1962), 114; and "Helen Stuart Campbell," *Encyclopedia Americana*, V (1952). Mrs. Campbell, who spoke in the 1894 assembly, wrote widely on problems of poverty, probation, and household management, and she was known for her fiction writing, as well.

of the "higher criticism" and continued there until 1895. Even the camp meeting, which was held each year, was said to be temporarily influenced by the intellectual air pervading the institution.⁹

In addition to Ely, other prominent figures who appeared at the assembly through 1896 were Jacob Riis, reformer and journalist; John Merle Coulter, botanist and educator; Graham Taylor, clergyman and sociologist; Booker T. Washington, educator; Moses Coit Tyler, historian and educator; and Jane Addams, founder of Hull House.

1897-1906—Entertainment

In the decade, 1897-1906, a number of factors were at work to change Bay View in certain ways from a cultural center to one given over mostly to entertainment. Three of these influences are identifiable: (1) the great lumbering industry which appeared on the upper peninsula of Michigan and reduced the number of itinerant assembly patrons; (2) the remarkable increase in the number of high schools throughout the nation which created a demand for trained teachers, and which understandably resulted in the adaptation of the assembly and summer school programs more to the teachers and less to liberal arts students; (3) the advent of the "tent Chautauqua," a unique lecture-concert road show which brought to American communities the popular side of permanent assemblies, thus forcing Bay View to compete.

Specifically, the decade of 1897-1906 saw the termination of the extension courses, the Chautauqua Reading Circle, and the oral communication aspects of the Bay View Reading Clubs. Addresses on temperance reform ceased. Only the camp meeting continued unchanged through this decade in which the assembly was altered in character in order to compete with tent Chautauquas.

This era featured the first two Bay View appearances of William Jennings Bryan, who would return twice more. Others on the program were Maude Ballington Booth, prison reformer and humanitarian; S. Parkes Cadman, author and (later) radio preacher; and Lorado Taft, sculptor.¹⁰

In this decade the assembly management changed hands three times. Hall was followed by Horace Hitchcock, F. Gillum Cromer,

⁹ Robert M. Carter, "Forum on the Bay, Oral Communication Aspects of the Bay View Association: 1875-1965," (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1966), 155-156; "T'was a Very Big Sunday," *Daily Resorter*, (July 15, 1895), 1, 4. Three who preached at the 1895 camp meeting were the most scholarly group ever to appear at that activity. They were L. P. Davis (Albion College Trustee), J. P. D. John (former President of De Pauw), and Samuel Steele (Boston University faculty member).

¹⁰ Others who appeared on the platform (1897-1906) were Samuel P. (Sam) Jones, preacher and lecturer; Thomas DeWitt Talmage, clergyman and editor; and Fitzhugh Lee, son of Robert E. Lee.

and Thomas Gordon. None of Hall's successors kept the job longer than three seasons. Hall left the post of manager of the assembly to spend more time with his family (he moved from Flint to Detroit) and to devote greater effort to his publication, the *Bay View Magazine*.

1907-15—An Ending and A New Beginning

Under the pressures which forced many other permanent Chautauquas out of existence, the Bay View Assembly ceased operating its cultural features for two years (1907 and 1908),¹¹ With only a camp meeting being held. Then the camp meeting itself died after 1908.

Through the efforts of many persons, especially those of John Hall,¹² Bay View managed to reestablish its assembly features following the two-year hiatus of 1907-08. In fact, in 1909 the assembly regained much of the vigor it had demonstrated in the early 1890's. Once resumed under the competent management of Hall, who donated the funds for three large buildings (including a steel and concrete auditorium still in use), the assembly added new conferences which gave Bay View patrons opportunities to discuss with national figures such significant problems of the day as social welfare, temperance reform, and suffrage for women. In spite of Hall's tragic death in 1914, his leadership and service proved sufficient to set the assembly on a successful path for the future.

Featured platform personalities appearing for the first time between 1907 and 1915 included Helen Keller; Thomas Riley Marshall, U. S. Vice-President; Ida Tarbell, historian and journalist; and Henry Wallace, grandfather of Henry Agard Wallace.

1916-25—Clergy Takes Control

Assembly managers who followed Hall were Gordon, White, Benson, Greene, and Hugh Kennedy. The first four were laymen and Kennedy was a clergyman. Kennedy, the first minister ever to serve as manager of the assembly, held the post from 1923 to 1944. He was so successful that the job has never reverted to a layman.

¹¹ All of the "histories" published by Bay View through 1950 stated that the hiatus in assemblies extended from 1905 through 1908. This was found to be impossible for 1905 and 1906 not only because of existing printed assembly programs for these years, but in one case an article appearing after the season, describing speaking events (the most discussed being a speech by W. J. Bryan). Emma Lamb Barnes, "Bay View Notes," Michigan Christian Advocate, August 19, 1905), 4-5.

¹² John M. Hall, "Bay View Educational Committee's Report," a report prepared for the Bay View Trustee Board at Detroit, January 8, 1908; also statement of Charles Swift. To raise the funds necessary to reopen the assembly, Hall attempted prior to the 1908 season to solicit ten-dollar contributions from each Bay View cottage holder. His efforts proved unsuccessful in 1908 but successful in time for 1909's assembly.

In 1919 Albion College took over Bay View's summer school, which by that time had dropped to the high-school level.

In 1918, the assembly began to present motion pictures, with the result that the season in the ensuing years was lengthened to as much as ten weeks. But it may be observed that while the season became longer, the number of daily activities decreased. It is believed that the addition of motion pictures to the program was an important factor in the survival of Bay View.

The practice of holding conferences was continued into the post World War I era, the format changing slightly. It became the custom, still in effect, for the person who is invited to speak on Sunday to remain and deliver a lecture each morning for five days. These addresses are followed by questions and discussion involving the audience and the speaker. At first called "Bible Study and Devotional Hours," they are now referred to as "Religion and Life Hours."

The 1916-25 era saw two noteworthy figures on the platform for the first time: John Kendrick Bangs, humorist and educator; and Mark Sullivan, journalist.

1926-35—Through Roaring Twenties and Depressed Thirties

The assembly survived not only the depths of America's great depression but also the rise of radio and motion pictures, even though the combination had devastated the tent Chautauqua business by 1929.

How could Bay View survive this competition? Certainly one factor in its survival was its location on a beautiful bay in one of America's ideal summer climate areas. Another was the cohesive sense of "belonging together" which may be called "The Bay View Attitude" of the lifetime summer residents, who, to use a cliché from the 1950's, "stayed together because they prayed together."

On the platform were leading churchmen, their appeal being decidedly liberal and intellectual. Among them were Edgar DeWitt Jones, preacher and author; Ralph W. Sockman,¹³ author and radio minister; and George A. Buttrick,¹⁴ author, and in later years, chief editor of *The Interpreter's Bible*.¹⁵

1936-45—Exceptional

Bay View's assembly continued in spite of everything; even global war did not interrupt it. This fact was so unusual that it prompted Kenneth G. Hance, writing on the contemporary lecture platform

¹³ Sockman has spoken at assemblies in 1934, 1942, and 1962-1966.

¹⁴ Buttrick has spoken every season from 1935 onward except 1939's.

¹⁵ *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols., ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954).

in 1944, to say, "Whereas . . . there had been several lakeside "assemblies" where thousands of people gathered each season, the 1930's saw these . . . assemblies reduced to the vanishing point. (It should be noted, of course, that such organizations as Bay View, Michigan, . . . and Winona Lake, Indiana, survived; but they were exceptions to the trend.)" ¹⁶

In this decade, this "exceptional" institution featured the speaking of the well-known columnist Drew Pearson, poet Carl Sandburg, philosopher Will Durant, and munitions scandal investigator Gerald P. Nye. Although the assembly passed from the leadership of Hugh Kennedy to that of Bishop Raymond J. Wade (in 1945 when Bay View celebrated its seventieth birthday), there was no significant change in the program, as compared with the early 1920's.

1946-65—Renewed Growth

In the score of years ending in 1965, S. S. Kresge dedicated a new auditorium for Bay View; College Presidents' Week was established (five different college presidents addressed the assembly, Monday through Friday); there was an experiment with speeches on a modern version of temperance reform—the narcotics problem; renowned Civil War author Bruce Catton spoke; and the assembly management passed first to Lester A. Kilpatrick in 1960, and, then, just after the 1965 season, to Russell King.

Conclusions

The examination of this ninety-year period of speech history at Bay View has shown that it has been effective as a platform in both religious and secular contexts.

In the religious context, the messages have ranged from fundamentalist to ultra-liberal.¹⁷

Secular addresses have touched on virtually everything worth talking about; it would be difficult to find a subject never discussed at Bay View.¹⁸

Therefore, there is not a single answer to the question, "Why has Bay View remained alive?" The answers might include these factors: "climate" (summer temperatures seldom drop below sixty and they do not rise above eighty degrees); "affluence" (Bay View residents are well-to-do); "tradition" (few institutions in this country have as impressive a tradition as Bay View); "able leadership" (Bay View fortunately has had devoted and capable leaders); and

¹⁶ Hance, *op. cit.*, 42.

¹⁷ Carter, *op. cit.*, 79, 199, 322, 323, 383, 385, 388, 390. Nearly all leading Protestant denominations have been heard from, and so have the Roman Catholics and Jews; and there has developed a definite interest in ecumenical movements.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 393-400.

“timely” (even though the population is aging, sermons and lectures deal with immediate pressing problems and concepts). More such answers might be suggested and there would be an element of truth in each. But it seems fair to say that “timeliness” has set Bay View apart from those assemblies which did not survive. The platform at Bay View has been keenly attuned to the times; it has been and continues to be a cosmopolitan forum—a forum supported by an unusual audience comprised of well-educated people who demand excellence in their programs and who want their speaking (and musicales) “live.” Bay View is a social institution which has been meeting such demands for nearly a century, and the summer residents are planning to observe the centennial of Bay View in 1975.