



## **A Brief History of the Chautauqua Conferences on U.S.- Soviet Relations**

The arrival of 250 Soviet citizens at the University of Pittsburgh this fall will mark the start of the fifth in a series of exchanges Chautauqua has conducted with the Soviet Union. Chautauqua at Pitt: The Fifth General Chautauqua Conference on U.S.-Soviet Relations, which has been scheduled for Oct. 29-Nov. 3, 1989, will be the first of the series to be held in a major American city.

The conferences have provided a unique opportunity for dialogue between the two countries, covering such issues as arms control, human rights, space exploration, regional tensions, religion and youth. Plenary sessions feature the "Chautauqua Format" of lectures followed by question-and-answer sessions. Previous conferences have featured such U.S. notables as U.S. Senator Bill Bradley (New Jersey), New York Governor Mario Cuomo, and, via satellite, President Ronald Reagan. Performing artists have included Grover Washington Jr., John Denver and Tommy Tune.

The first conference, which took place during the summer of 1985, brought approximately a dozen Soviet academicians, diplomats and artists to the Chautauqua Institution grounds. For the first time in recent memory official Soviet spokesmen debated U.S. policy makers in front of a citizen audience and answered questions submitted by audience members. In the evenings, for the first time since the U.S.-U.S.S.R. cultural exchange agreement had lapsed in 1979, artists from both countries performed together.

In 1986 approximately 270 U.S. citizens, government officials, private experts and artists made up the American delegation to the Chautauqua conference in Jurmala, Latvia. The conference was almost aborted when U.S. News and World Report journalist Nicholas Daniloff was arrested in the Soviet Union. When he was released to the American Embassy, however, the delegation departed from Washington. That conference marked the first time Soviet citizens were able to experience live, televised debates between their leaders and U.S. officials.

The Third General Chautauqua Conference on U.S.-Soviet Relations took place in August 1987. The 258 Soviets who traveled to Chautauqua Institution made up the largest group of Soviet citizens to visit the United States for any purpose other than an athletic event. In an unprecedented move in exchange relations, 222 Soviet delegates were permitted to reside in private homes on the Chautauqua grounds. Approximately 200 members of the print and electronic media traveled to the institution to cover the various sessions and artistic performances.

A delegation of 297 Americans attended the Fourth General Chautauqua Conference on U.S.-Soviet relations in Tbilisi, Georgia in September 1988. U.S. and Soviet citizens once again had the opportunity for uncensored dialogue with each other as well as with officials of both countries. The week featured the mix of political, personal and cultural exchange that has come to distinguish the Chautauqua conferences. The "homestays" were exceptionally rewarding experiences for those 122 Americans who lived with Georgian families during their stay in Tbilisi.

In addition to reflecting the changing state of U.S.-Soviet relations, the Chautauqua Institution has developed a year-by-year direction away from old politics, toward new possibilities. According to Chautauqua President Daniel L. Bratton, "We neither reflect our government's point of view nor exclude it. Chautauqua, instead, offers an integrated, analytical approach to the issues facing humankind."

## CHAUTAUQUA: A Very Brief History

The Chautauqua Institution has provided educational, religious, recreational and cultural opportunities for persons of all ages, from all parts of the United States, for more than a century.

Chautauqua was founded as a training camp for Sunday school teachers by manufacturer Lewis Miller and Bishop John H. Vincent, a Methodist minister. Leading Protestant denominations predominated in the beginning but, today, Chautauqua is ecumenical, presenting distinguished religious leaders of many faiths, both from this country and abroad.

The Chautauqua "movement," originating in 1874, was an influential and characteristically American development in adult education and inspired persons in many communities throughout the country to organize local chautauqua assemblies. In the early part of the century, traveling tent chautauquas (not connected with the Institution) toured the nation in the summer offering cultural stimulation to isolated communities before the days of the automobile, motion picture and radio.

By the 1880s, Chautauqua had established itself as a national forum for the discussion of ideas in politics, economics, international relations, literature and science, as well as religion. Following World War I, the musical program came to rival the lecture offerings and the full season of orchestral music has been a part of the program since 1920. Today, the resident, professional Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra presents approximately twenty-one programs in the 6,000 seat Amphitheater, focal point for Chautauqua events.

Continuing education for adults, classes for young people, correspondence courses and "great books" curricula were all pioneered at Chautauqua. The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, begun in 1878 as the first "book club" in America, has enrolled more than one million members and, at one time, sponsored 10,000 local reading circles in towns throughout the country.

The Chautauqua Opera was begun in 1929 for the regular production of works in English. Today, each Chautauqua season includes several operas as well as the orchestra series, concerts by leading classical and popular musical artists and dynamic lectures. Theater is presented by the Chautauqua Conservatory Theater Company.

Today, the original Chautauqua Institution is a 750 acre complex on the shore of Chautauqua Lake in southwestern New York State, where nearly 10,000 persons are in residence during the summer. During its nine-week season, the public events record a total attendance of more than 300,000. Over 2,000 students enroll annually in the Chautauqua Summer School which offers courses in the arts, music, dance, theater and the humanities.

Throughout the years, Chautauqua Institution has adapted itself to changing social forces and continues to be responsive to major contemporary issues. It is a distinctively American institution which, in its second century, will further exert its influence as a center of learning for young and old.