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An Early Use of Badging by The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC)

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Abstract

The history of educational badging is incomplete without mentioning the visionary work of the founders and distance learning administrators of the Chautauqua Institution in 1874 and, more specifically, the Chautauqua Literary Scientific Circle (CLSC) in 1878. The CLSC is one of the oldest continuous distance learning programs in the United States and has, from its founding to the present, incorporated a number of badges—known by its founders as “features” and “devices”— to acknowledge progress and completion of its participants as a cohort or community of distant learners, of which many would never meet in person. The following badges (known as “features” and “devices”) used by CLSC administrators are identified and

described: badge, class name, motto, Memorial Days, flower, button or pin, song, yell, banner, banner pole, certificate, diploma, mosaic, seal, guild, and stole.

Introduction

The interest in badging and micro-credentialing has reached an almost fever pitch among corporate, nonprofit, and educational institutions of all kinds in recent years. While contemporary literature about badging makes quick mention that badging is not new, it quickly passes over the history and focuses on the current interest in badging, especially digital badging. Almost every publication implies that there really isn't much about the history of badging that is relevant to any current interest in the practice. The paucity of early examples of badging is troubling—even though they exist—and the authors have yet to find even one mention of the pioneering work of the Chautauqua Movement, particularly with its Chautauqua Literary Scientific Circle (CLSC), in the literature. George Orwell observed that "each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it" (1945). Carl Sagan, the great cosmologist, declared, "You have to know the past to understand the present" (1980). We will describe what the founder of the CLSC called "features" and "devices," his naming conventions for badging or credentialing (Vincent, 1886, p.79) and thereby acknowledge their existence, importance, and contribution to the current discussion about badging and micro credentialing. Though the terminology was different, the functions of these "features" and "devices" place them squarely among the ancestors of modern badges and credentials.

Literature Review

As suggested in the introduction, the authors have yet to find any literature mentioning the badging strategies used by the administrators of the CLSC from 1878, which has perpetuated to the present cohort of CLSC members some 150 years later—a remarkable feat in and of itself. The authors offer the following example from one storied and long-lasting academic journal that could have—should have—published articles about the CLSC and its use of badging to substantiate their claim that there is a stunning paucity of literature on the subject.

The *Adult Education Quarterly* (*AEQ*) made its entry into academia in 1950 and remains a flagship journal in the field of adult and distance learning. Surprisingly, it has only published

three articles about Chautauqua, or the CLSC, in the past 72 years of its history. In 1955, one article on the history of adult education in the United States included a single paragraph describing the CLSC (Knowles, p. 69). Another article, some 20 years later, focused on how William Rainey Harper, a former administrator at Chautauqua and later the first president of the University of Chicago, created a university extension program (Dunkel & Fay, 1978). Finally, the most in-depth exploration of Chautauqua in the *AEQ* is a 1981 article on Vincent's approaches to lifelong learning in various Chautauquan programs (Stubblefield, 1981).

The pioneering educational use of badging by the CLSC in nineteenth century rural and small-town America is *not* found in articles and books, which is typical. For example, the first article (of very few) identified in a Google Scholar search using the terms "badging history," and sorting by relevance rather than date, is a book chapter entitled "A History and Frameworks of Digital Badges in Education." Disappointingly, this quote from the article does not illustrate the CLSC's use of badging, but instead shows the cursory coverage of badging history:

The origins of the physical badge stem from the Middle Ages where they were worn as jewelry, or to denote the completion of a pilgrimage, or as a mark of political allegiance. In modern times the physical badge has become known as a manner in which to denote military rank and achievements or for advertising, branding or means of visual identification.

As military badges of rank or merit, badges have been physical items composed of cloth or metal intended to be affixed to the wearer. Earliest Boy Scout badges were also embroidered patches of cloth representing an accomplishment or to recognize proficiency in a scouting skill. The scout badges were developed to encourage scouts to pursue areas of interest and develop skills that might lead to careers or lifelong hobbies. (Ostashewski & Reid, 2015, p. 189)

Unfortunately, when badging is mentioned in the literature, it almost always focuses on its use by the military and scouting, as evidenced by this previous quote, and seldom, if ever, on distance education.

Background Information on Chautauqua and its Literary and Scientific Circle — John Heyl Vincent's vision for learning integrated into the everyday

The first seed of Chautauqua was planted in 1874 when two men, Lewis Miller and John Heyl Vincent, set out to improve Sunday school in the Protestant churches by organizing a 15-day training course for Sunday school teachers in western New York. Miller, a businessman, was

able to provide the financial resources to make this 15-day meeting possible. Vincent, a Methodist minister who became a bishop in 1888, was named superintendent of instruction and was responsible for overseeing the curriculum and organizing the faculty. The Chautauqua Sunday School Assembly, as it was called, commenced during a time when religious camps and revival meetings were prevalent. Both leaders wanted their Sunday school assembly to be decidedly different from these activities. One way in which they made their program different was by utilizing "the general demand for summer rest by uniting daily study with healthful recreation, and thus render[ing] the occasion one of pleasure and instruction combined" (Vincent, 1886, p. 24).

The success of the first summer, 1874, indicated an obvious demand for this type of instruction when between 10,000 and 15,000 people from 25 states and 4 countries attended the assembly. The assembly was pan-Protestant from the beginning. Over the next several years, the assembly underwent a transformation, both in length and program. During the third summer, the duration of the assembly was lengthened—participants attended for 24 days instead of 15. In 1899, the program was lengthened to 60 days; some time since then, the season was again changed to 66 days long from the end of June to the end of August (Irwin, 1987, p. 13).

Miller and Vincent recognized that the demand for education was not limited to Sunday school teachers. Chautauqua's Christian origins only served to expand the range of topics that were taught. Vincent believed that all of God's creations "in nature, in history, in mind" were worthy of exploration. Of the adults who participated in the program, Vincent (1925) remarked, "One had to watch them only a few minutes to discover that they heartily enjoyed going to school at an age when school was supposed to be over and done with" (p. 122). Miller and Vincent realized that their institution should extend its reach even further. Vincent's theory of adult and distance education has been summarized as follows: "Between the ages of twenty and eighty lie a person's best intellectual and educational opportunities; and he needs direction, encouragement, and assistance, in order to use them most effectively" (Vincent, 1886, pp. 13-14).

The CLSC Badging System

Miller and Vincent changed their assembly to meet the needs of students in every walk of life. In 1878, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC) began as a correspondence

course to help provide college at home to those who were unable to travel to the location. If measured by enrollments, name recognition, and popularity, the CLSC can certainly be recognized as the most significant distance learning and correspondence school of its time in the United States. It has been estimated that between 1878 and 1900, 500,000 people enrolled and 49,000 graduated (Talbot, 2017, p. 69). According to Vincent's assistant Jesse Hurlbut (1921), the purpose of the CLSC was to reach "the rich, the middle class, and the poor—all in one class in their condition and their needs" (p. 126). The creation of the CLSC was the first major step in secularizing Chautauqua, moving the focus from providing religious instruction for Sunday school teachers to providing a much broader education for all those who sought it.

From the inception of CLSC, Bishop Vincent wondered if badges and other symbols of participation and accomplishment would be a driving force for participation. He wrote that members of the CLSC are "apparently bound together by some secret association which has a mystic power. They wear badges on certain days,--badges [*sic*] of different styles and colors and legends. In all this there is something singular and beautiful" (Vincent, 1886, p. 73). He was inspired by the way that colleges and lodges created community spirit and fond associations. He called it the "esprit du corps of the college" and imagined that these "features" and "devices" would "excite in them mutual sympathy and affection, notwithstanding diversities in age, temporal circumstances, and social conditions" (Vincent, 1886, p. 79). For Vincent, the class community would bring social warmth to the practicality of the CLSC.

Both now and in the past, the CLSC has used two kinds of badges, which we will call community badges and achievement badges. Community badges help participants identify with their CLSC cohort and sometimes their local circle. These badges include a motto, banner, mosaic, flower, and button, among a few other symbols. Anyone who participated at any level could receive these badges. Achievement badges, on the other hand, are given to individuals who complete certain reading requirements. They include certificates (historically but not currently), diplomas, seals, and stoles with merit badges.

Community badges help to fulfill Vincent's vision of "esprit du corps." Each CLSC class chooses several symbols to use throughout their experience with the program. All learners who register to start the CLSC in a particular year form a class, and much like high school or university classes, they are identified by the year they will finish the four-year program (e.g., a registrant in 1900 would be in the 1904 class). The class symbols were selected and designed

by members of the class. They chose a class name that often represented an important figure or idea in history. For instance, the class of 1883 called themselves “the Vincents'' after Bishop Vincent, and the class of 1901 called themselves “the twentieth century'' class. Along similar lines, each class chose a theme, which usually reflected the lofty ambitions of their educational pursuits. It often took the form of a famous motto, verse of scripture, or intellectual aphorism, like *veni, vidi, vici*. The class members would then weave this name and theme throughout their class symbols: a banner that was eventually displayed in the CLSC Alumni Hall, a badge to pin to their clothes, a song, and a flower to wear to events. Classes from 1882 to the 1920s placed mosaics in the Hall of Philosophy (sometimes called the “Hall in the Grove”) using their class themes.

Each symbol had individual purposes, but each symbol worked together to represent participation in the learning community of a particular class in the CLSC. For instance, the banner sometimes had an image corresponding to the theme hand-embroidered by a class member. The class motto was also represented on the banner (see Figure 1). The tile mosaic, designed by members, also portrayed images related to the class theme (see Figure 2). On the yearly Recognition Day, when members who have completed the course travel to Chautauqua to walk through the golden gate in celebration, attendees carry their class flower. The flowers, badges, songs, yells and the class banner make it easy for classmates who have never met in person to identify those who read the same materials as they did.

The CLSC also distributes achievement badges for various purposes. Originally, anyone who completed a year of readings would receive an achievement certificate to encourage them to keep up with the remaining years in the 4-year program. That practice ended around 1914, but the CLSC continues to hand out diplomas at the end of the 4 years of readings. From 1882 to around 1900, for those graduates who continued to read, “graduate courses” were created to specialize in one subject, and the CLSC awarded them a representative seal that could be added to the diploma. Figure 3 shows one such diploma decorated with seals. These graduates could earn seals as they went beyond the initial CLSC curriculum, and their pursuit of learning often led to membership in the guilds that represented the levels of graduate course accomplishment. The “guild of seven seals,” for instance, admits those graduates who read an additional 14 CLSC books after they graduated. For some time, there was a “league of the round table” and “the order of the white seal,” but these reading levels were reorganized into the guild of the seven seals. Currently, the orders of the guild of the seven seals are the

following: seals (14 additional books); Parnassian (21 more, for a total of 47); Olympian (28 more, for a total of 75); centurion (35 more, for a total of 110); the Miller echelon of the Chautauqua founders (42 more, for a total of 152) and the Vincent echelon of the Chautauqua founders (49 more, for a total of 201).

As classes formed in their first year of reading, they would write to the editors of the monthly *The Chautauquan* magazine to inform fellow classmates of their class officers, members names, symbols, and mottoes for the class to use for the four years before graduation. Other members offered to design the badge that class members would wear to meetings or make the banner that would be triumphantly marched in the Recognition Day parade (see Figure 4). Class members could collaborate across the country to create their badges and symbols.

CLSC members valued their badges so much that they developed strong opinions about the symbols that would represent their work. For example, the class of 1888, when it organized in 1884, chose the name “Plymouth Rock,” and their badges and symbols correspond to the mythical landing place of the first American pilgrims. However, some class members objected passionately to this name. For years, they wrote letters to the class secretary with their thoughts on what a class name should represent, eventually culminating in a class-wide vote between keeping the original “Plymouth Rock'' nomenclature or changing to “pilgrims.” Month after month, the votes rolled in and were tallied in the monthly *The Chautauquan* magazine. At last, the magazine reported that the new name “pilgrims'' had won the majority of votes. Despite the vote, the class of ‘88 officers and Bishop Vincent himself decided not to change the name after all (CLSC Class of 1888, 1886). But the extensive discourse over the symbolism of the class of 1888 suggests that the badges were not taken lightly by their users.

A recent onsite search through the Chautauqua Institution Archives by one of the authors revealed the extent of the emotional significance of these badges and symbols. One reader reported that the pursuit of graduate course seals connected her to her recently deceased teenage daughter, who loved the CLSC and desired to pursue the seals before her death. For this reader, the badges honored a deceased loved one (“CLSC Testimonials,” 1883). Badges also brought living loved ones together. An early trend in the CLSC involved members organizing a “Chautauqua corner” in their homes. In this corner, they kept their CLSC books, their copies of *The Chautauquan* monthly magazine, and their badges, certificates, seals, and diplomas. This corner became a sort of retreat for the family, and it also served to recruit more members as friends and family visiting the home noticed the comfort and high culture of the

Chautauqua corner (Vincent, 1885). These badges were items of pride and began to represent the social mobility offered through education.

At the same time, other readers valued the badges and certificates of completion less than they valued the learning itself. In a conversation with Charlotte Crittenden, chair of the Banner Committee of the Alumni Association, one author discovered that some diplomas, once received, were merely folded and tucked into drawers. Letters to the CLSC secretary Kate Kimball also revealed that some participants chose not to report their reading or receive the diploma, claiming that their motivation was not for physical reward but for intellectual reward (Woodruff, 1904). Occasionally, these self-driven participants already owned diplomas from colleges and universities. However, even when the diplomas were less motivating, these participants still cherished their class badges and regalia. They desired these reminders of their peers who were taking the educational journey with them and of their association with the noble cause of the CLSC.

CLSC members continue to value their badges and symbols to this day. The Chautauqua Institution runs and maintains a beautiful building in Chautauqua, New York, called the Alumni Hall, which remains the home of the class banner collection. In the hall, visitors walk through hallways filled with carefully preserved banners and replicas of damaged banners, marking the various eras of CLSC history. The Alumni Association also cares for banners that can no longer be displayed; they are kept in a storage facility in the Oliver Archives building of Chautauqua Institution. The storage for the delicate banners is climate-controlled and meticulously managed. It's clear that the alumni, having received their badges and diplomas, have invested abundant funds into preserving their own class symbols, the symbols of the readers who came before them, and those who will follow them.

Table 1 displays a thorough list of the “features” and “devices” that members of the CLSC have used, both historically and currently. The table also delineates what each symbol represented and what its overall purpose was.

Table 1.

Features and Devices	**Meaning**	**Purpose**
Badge	Represented the class of CLSC	To be classified and identified

	to which you belonged (while in a larger group)	as belonging to the CLSC and to a certain class
Class Name	Represented a beloved topic, honored person, or characteristic of the class members.	To organize together under one name and feel unified
Motto	Represented the devout, high-minded aspiration for education	To foster group identity and loyalty; to encourage and set the tone
Memorial Days	Commemorating distinguished characters in literature and history	To familiarize readers with significant literary events and people
Flower	Represented a class theme such as their class name, motto, etc. Most flowers were common flowers that represented uncommon ambitions.	To remember the class theme and to be identified with the class
Button or pin	Represented the class year or theme	Often sold by outside vendors for profit
Song	Represented the united voice of the class	To celebrate class unity at Recognition Day
Yell	A reflection of class identity and reading themes	To create class unity and identity in the Recognition Day parade
Banner	Represented a graduating class of CLSC (four-year program)	To remember the associations, friendships, and enthusiasms of the Circle

Banner Pole	Carried the banner and was sometimes carved or decorated to reflect the class motto	To represent the class theme
Certificate	Represented completion of a year's coursework	To recognize completed readings
Diploma	Represented completion of the full four-year course work	To recognize completion of four years of readings and corresponding exams
Mosaic	Represented class theme, motto, and/or flower	To remember a class of alumni in The Hall of Philosophy
Seal (on diploma)	Represented additional coursework/study	To recognize completed special courses
Guild	Represented a group of graduates	To keep graduates reading, getting seals, and encouraging the interest of their friends and family in the CLSC
Stole	Initiated in 2000	To wear on Recognition Day and other times; to support continued reading

Although some of these symbols are still being used in the current form of the CLSC, their uses and meanings have evolved over time, including the more recent addition of the “stole,” or scarf, as a “feature” or “device” to promote lifelong reading and learning.

Conclusion

The CLSC celebrated the 140th anniversary of its founding in 2018, and it will celebrate the 140th anniversary of its first graduating class in 2022. It has evolved from a correspondence or distance learning course offering “graduate courses” into a guided reading program with a variety of badges that still appeal to participants, including those with formal degrees. As

educators acknowledge and learn about the use of badging in the CLSC, it will provide context for, and even help inform, the discussion about badging and micro-credentialing.

The badging system of the CLSC was extensive and truly ahead of its time, especially as it served to not only celebrate the achievement and completion of its participants, but also to serve the even more important purpose to creating a sense of belonging in the community of learners. Badging served to acknowledge and celebrate the love for learning among a close circle of other distant learners, which was just as important (or more so) to these CLSC participants as finishing readings, or even graduating four years later from the CLSC.

Figures:

Figure 1. This banner is a reproduction of the original Edison class banner. Thomas Edison and his wife, Mina Miller Edison, were members of the class. Mrs. Edison's father, Lewis Miller, was

the co-founder of Chautauqua. Pictured are Miller's granddaughter, Nancy Miller Arnn, her son Theodore Arnn, and his wife Mary Boyle.

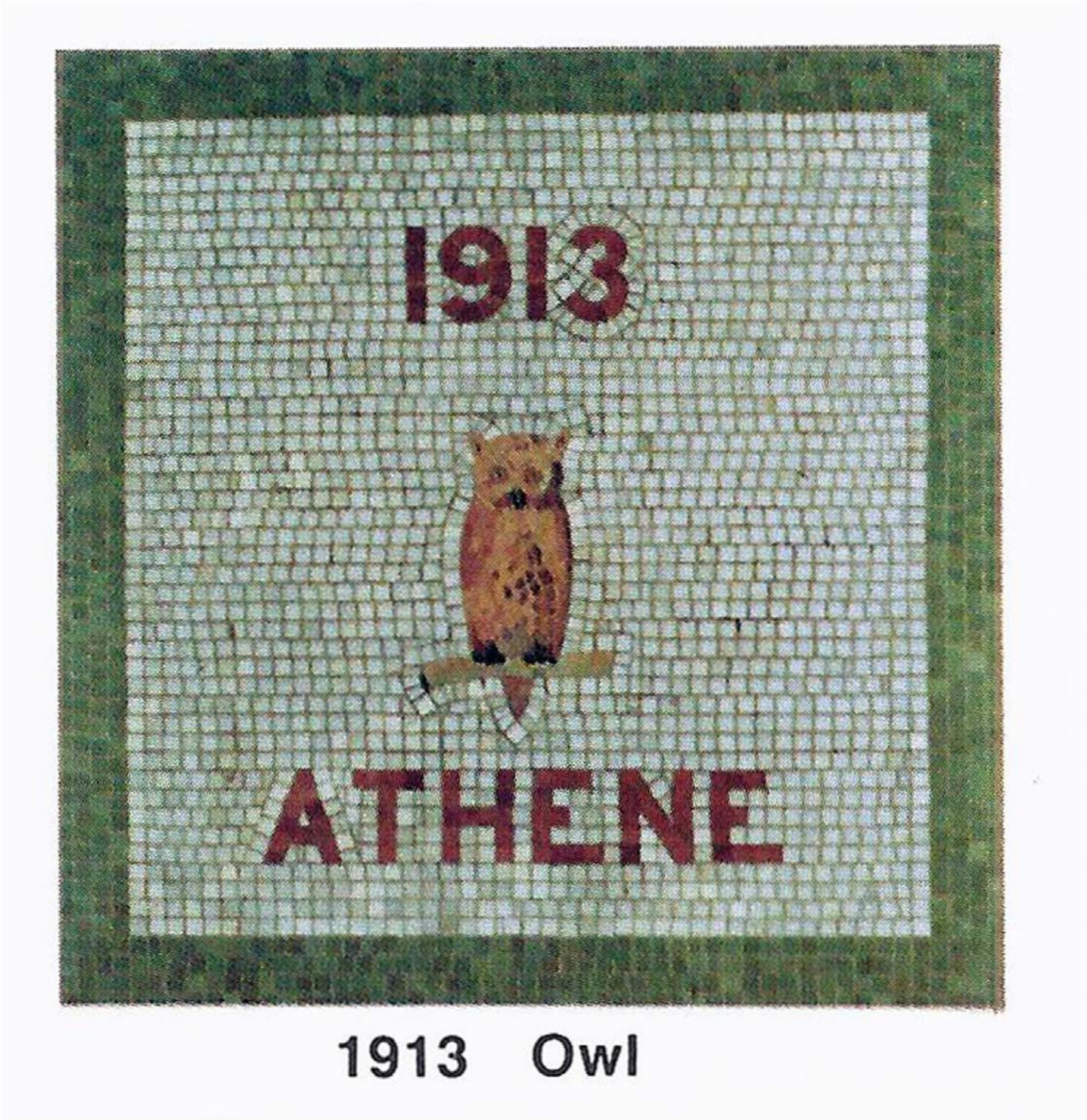

Figure 2. This tile is typical of the ones put into the Hall of Philosophy by the classes of the CLSC. The class of 1913 was the Athene class. Its motto was "Self reverence, self knowledge, self control; these three alone lead life to sovereign power." Its class plant was the hemlock and its class symbol was the owl. Its class yell was "Away with superstition, thirteen afrights us not, Athene stands for wisdom, the owl is our mascot, tu whit, tu whit, tu whoo!"

Figure 3. This is the diploma of Sarah Elizabeth Ford, and is displayed in the Literary Arts Center at Alumni Hall at Chautauqua Institution. These seals represent all the additional courses she read through the CLSC.

Figure 4. The banner parade occurs on Recognition Day. Classes pay for young people from the Chautauqua Boys and Girls Club to carry their banner while class members walk behind their banner and give their class yell to those watching the parade. The parade goes along the brick walk from Bestor Plaza to the Hall of Philosophy.

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