

CASE STUDY

Monteagle
Sunday School Assembly
Monteagle, Tennessee

Historic Precedent Case Study

Monteagle Sunday School Assembly Monteagle, Tennessee

The Introduction

Established in 1882, the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly is one of only four Chautauqua Assemblies to be in continuous operation since the zenith of the Chautauqua Movement. Today it is estimated that seventeen Chautauqua Assemblies meet annually in the United States.

The Monteagle Sunday School Assembly can be used as a case study for Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company's Light Imprint Initiative.

The initiative is designed to provide a framework for the design of sustainable neighborhoods based on New Urbanism planning principles. Much of the Assembly's infrastructure is based on historically low technology techniques for providing green buildings and environmental design.

The History

The first Chautauqua Lake Sunday School Assembly, founded in 1874 on the shores of Chautauqua Lake in southwestern New York, was an educational experiment in out-of-school, vacation learning. The movement was successful and broadened almost immediately beyond courses for Sunday school teachers to include academic subjects such as music, art and physical education.

In 1882, the state of Tennessee approved the charter for Monteagle Sunday School Assembly. The Board selected and laid out the site; then they planned a summer program. Monteagle Sunday School Assembly opened its first session on July 17, 1883.

Although there were only two permanent structures that first summer, the Assembly was great success. The first summer, participants lived in tents. Even the dining hall was a large tent. Soon a building program produced many boarding houses, meeting spaces, and private cottages. Every summer, thousands of people attended the Assembly.

From its beginnings through the early 1900's, the Assembly formed and maintained close ties to the Chautauqua Institution in New York. The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle held annual graduation ceremonies for southern students at Monteagle Sunday School Assembly, the recognized southern headquarters for the Circle.

During the mid-1900's in the post-World War II era, the Assembly faced a downturn in attendance and declining revenues. There was, however, a reawakening of interest in the Assembly in the 1960s and 1970s. An endowment fund financed a rejuvenation of the platform programs and activities. Families began to repair and reopen cottages long vacant.

In 1982, the National Register of Historic Places awarded landmark designation to the Assembly. Built in 1896, the Edgeworth Inn is now the oldest continuously operated inn in the area; it is the only commercial inn on the Assembly grounds.

The many boarding houses, some with fourteen bedrooms, have been converted to use as multigenerational summer cottages. The Monteagle Sunday

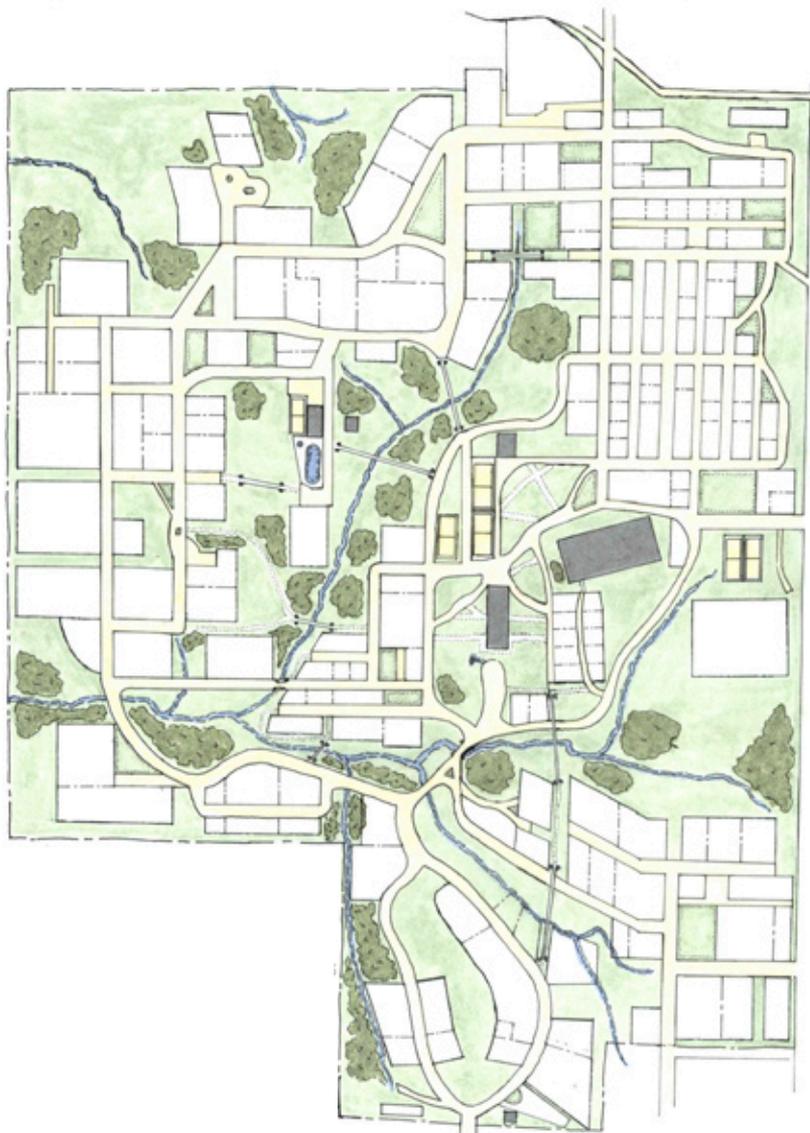
School Assembly held its Centennial Celebration in the summer of 1982.

The Site

The Assembly sits at an altitude of 2,100 feet on the narrowest point of the Cumberland Plateau. The adjacent town of Monteagle serves as a gateway on the southern part of the plateau located about halfway between Nashville and Chattanooga.

As of 2008, there are 165 summer cottages and bungalows, an auditorium, a chapel, a dining hall, a bell tower, a swimming pool, several tennis courts, a gatehouse, and a bandstand, all located on ninety-six acres within the gates of the Assembly. Numerous trestle footbridges connect the walking paths over ravines and streams that cross the Assembly grounds.

The Monteagle Sunday School Assembly owns all ninety-six acres of land. It provides leaseholds to people who own only the structures on the various lots. In other words, people may own structures on lots, but they do not own the land associated with any structures. No structure proposed for or currently on the Assembly grounds can have an encumbrance, i.e., a mortgage. When a structure changes ownership, it is a cash transaction. Since thirty-three of the structures were formerly boarding houses with as many as fourteen bedrooms and baths, the amount of money involved when ownership changes can be significant.



Plan of Monteagle



Postcard of Chautauqua, NY



Typical streetscape with houses and front walls parallel to the street



Rambling house with a generous yard



Cottage in the Cabbage Patch Neighborhood



Community Auditorium



Raised gravel sidewalk with stone edging



Curving gravel sidewalk that accommodates existing trees



Small pocket park at an intersection



Typical stone gutter



Pedestrian street with stone gutters on each side



Typical street section with a raised sidewalk lining a narrow road



Pedestrian bridge over an open stone gutter

Almost all structures have exterior walls that are parallel to both a street and a side property line forming a very orderly streetscape. In the cottage district, nicknamed the Cabbage Patch, houses have very little, if any setback, with the steps coming to the street. This gesture creates a closely-knit walkable streetscape.

The Unique Characteristics

When walking through the Assembly, the plan of the site seems very picturesque because of changes in topography and the terminated vistas of paths and streets. Upon studying the plan, it turns out to be a simple grid system combined with three or four organic radiating roads that connect the grid by meandering through the site based on topography and streambeds. A landscape engineer hired from Rochester, New York, designed the original plan.

Running roughly north to south in the center of the Assembly grounds, there is a stream in a ravine. Called Shady Delle, it provides a greenway and social center to the community since the major civic structures (auditorium, chapel, bell tower, swimming pool, and several tennis courts) are located on the western side of Shady Delle.

The bandstand is located on the Mall, a series of irregularly shaped blocks just east of the geographic center of the site. The dining hall is located on the eastern side of the Mall. The large auditorium, chapel, and

dining hall serve as the main public gathering places. These three structures are within a five-minute walk from most every home. This keeps traffic to a minimum, eliminating the need for large parking areas.

Perhaps the largest parking area is near the auditorium. A low retaining wall surrounds the circular parking plaza; benches are built into the retaining wall. Shaded by large trees, the parking lot easily becomes a pedestrian and play space when not being used by cars. A thick layer of pea gravel absorbs storm water and provides a comfortable walking surface. The auditorium is a wooden structure built in the form of a pole barn.

Stone is used for the construction of civic monuments like the arch, the gazebo, and the entry gatehouse. The wooden pedestrian bridges are constructed much like railroad trestles. A stone grotto marks the location of the spring that originally served as the water supply.

Most of the residential buildings have vernacular architecture reflective of the period of their construction. There are many Victorian style cottages and bungalows; a few log cabins add more variety. A vast array of ages, sizes, and unique features can be seen within the Assembly. For example, one bungalow has column pedestals shaped like milk bottles. Several have branches for porch brackets and railings.

Almost every house has a porch to provide outdoor living space. Rambling houses, which

may have had additions constructed over time, are mixed with small unassuming cottages. The only commercial structures seen within the Assembly are the Edgeworth Inn and the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly office. The Historic District Fund of the Assembly is dedicated to the preservation of the collection of Victorian and early twentieth century architecture located on the grounds.

Most landscaping is largely natural without the carpet lawns and neatly trimmed hedges found in modern suburbia. Since the street setbacks are minimal, most leaseholds have no space for a large lawn with a formal hedgerow.

A local botanist chose indigenous plant material for the Assembly. The Assembly's Rules and Regulations require that HVAC equipment and garbage receptacles be screened with lattice, board fencing, or landscape plants to make them as inconspicuous as possible.

The Stormwater Management Techniques

To a large extent, much of the need for underground stormwater conveyances and storage is kept to a minimum. This is achieved by using pervious street and sidewalk surfacing.

Many of the streets have only narrow travel lanes paved. Some streets have space for on-street side parking on either side. The parking area is gravelled, but left unpaved. Other

lanes are unpaved with travel lanes of gravel. There is a speed limit of fourteen miles per hour throughout the Assembly's grounds except around the Mall where it drops to ten miles per hour. Such low speed limits help mitigate the need for wide paved streets.

Driveways are unpaved and very few of them cross the frontage line of leaseholds. Most structures are alley served further keeping driveways to a minimum. The parking plaza mentioned earlier is another example of avoiding pavement to allow water to be absorbed directly into the ground.

There is a sense of informality to the sidewalks, with many of them being merely implied. Others break away from the road for a distance before becoming adjacent to the road again. Most sidewalks are also unpaved. Raised vertical stone curbs, present on many sidewalks, have at least two uses. First, the curbs clearly define pedestrian space. In that way, they provide some small protection for pedestrians. Second, the raised stone curbs prevent motorists from blocking the sidewalk by parking on it, and they prevent that bane of the suburbs - parking in the front yard.

Maintenance on the many paths and trails is carefully planned. The Assembly receives donations to a Reforestation Fund that is divided into two sub-funds. The Brush Fund is used primarily for beautification of all walks and paths. The Betty Adams

Fund is used to maintain nature study trails.

Since the hillsides and waterways are allowed to have natural (albeit maintained) landscaping and vegetation, there is natural filtration of stormwater flowing into the streams.

Pedestrian trestle bridges connect the many walkways and greens. They provide connectivity between neighborhoods through steep terrain without massive grading or the heavy infrastructure of steps or tunnels.

When stormwater conveyance is necessary, it is usually provided through one of three styles of open stone gutters. One example is constructed of randomly laid stone with a conveyance depression eighteen inches wide. Depending upon the slope, the gutter can have grass filled joints or a mortar bed and joints for steeper slopes.

Other types of gutters may have six to twelve inch curbs on either side of a randomly laid conveyance depression with unusual shapes of rock mortared into the gutter for water flow calming. Some structures that lack gutters installed at the eaves use the same system of stone gutters to direct water away from the foundation.

Open swales and use of natural drainage ways combine with the preservation of mature vegetation to provide stormwater management in many areas that lack structures. Additionally, small pockets of vegetation in medians and street islands serve as rain gardens.

The four categories of Light Imprint Urbanism tools - paving, channel, storage, and filtration - are easily identified on the site. By employing the simple tools described in this commentary, the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly has realized a great saving of money both in the initial cost of infrastructure and in the ongoing maintenance costs over the one hundred and twenty-five years the Assembly has been in existence.

LI Tools used for Monteagle

PAVING

- Compacted Earth
- Wood Planks
- Crushed Stone/Shell
- Asphalt
- Pea Gravel
- Stone Paving Blocks

CHANNELING

- Natural Creek
- Vegetative/Stone Swale
- Shallow Channel Footpath
- Concrete Pipe
- Gutter

STORAGE

- Flowing Park

FILTRATION

- Surface Landscape
- Natural Vegetation
- Green Finger