



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2878

IN REPLY REFER TO:

I.A.2. (RS-PA)

August 25, 2015

Thomas M. Becker
President, Chautauqua Institution
P.O. Box 28
One Ames Ave
Chautauqua, NY 14722

Dear Mr. Becker:

Thank you for providing another opportunity for the National Park Service (NPS) to visit the Chautauqua National Historic Landmark (NHL) District on August 6-7, 2015. It was extremely useful to observe the functions of the Amphitheater while in use during the summer season and to meet with you, your Board members, and your consultants to discuss the latest information about the proposed project. Although the NPS does not have any formal review authority regarding this project, we are pleased that you continue to seek our technical advice.

We want to acknowledge the actions taken by the Chautauqua Institution over the past four months to implement the recommendations we made in our April 14, 2015, letter to you, as follows:

As we noted in April, the NHL District is significant as a collection of structures and for its continuum of use. We also noted that although the District has retained a high level of integrity, you should consider developing a master plan for the District to help guide you into the future: We appreciate that we had time during this site visit to discuss how a plan could help serve as a framework for the Institution, and we would be pleased to provide guidance on such a planning process.

One of the most serious issues we observed during our site visit in March was the potential for significant structural problems at the Amphitheater. Soon after our visit, you acted on our recommendation to consult with a professional structural engineer with expertise in similar historic structures. The report and narrative produced by the engineer provides critical information about the existing condition of the structure, as well as options for short- and long-term structural work.

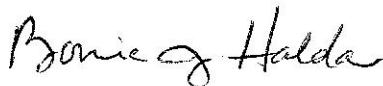
During our March visit, we discussed the importance of identifying the character-defining features of the Amphitheater so that you could gain a better understanding of how these historic features could be retained, repaired, and preserved consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation." We also talked about further engaging the public in the project. To address these recommendations, you held a series of community forums throughout the summer season for Chautauquans and visitors to learn more about and comment on the project. Posting the recordings of the sessions and project information on your website was also a good way to inform the broader public. We especially want to commend you on convening an historic preservation panel to produce an independent report. We are impressed with the level of effort and thoughtful deliberation that went into developing the report, and we believe the panel's recommendations will help guide your decisions.

We encourage you to carefully use all of the information you have available—from the studies and reports you conducted during the early phases of the project, to the more recent structural analysis and the preservation panel's report—in analyzing your alternatives and making a decision about the future of the Amphitheater. The Amphitheater is one of the most important structures within the NHL District, and, as such, preservation should always be considered the preferred treatment whenever possible when considering alternatives. We also recognize that the Institution has a need to meet programming goals and a mission to maintain a sustainable and on-going community into the future.

As I stated when we met onsite, and as the preservation panel concluded, there are sometimes no easy answers to the questions about whether to preserve, to rehabilitate, or to build anew. We wish to continue to offer our assistance for this project, and for any future projects within the NHL District.

Thank you again for arranging the site visit for Kathryn Schlegel, Historical Landscape Architect, and me. If you wish to further discuss any aspect of the project, please contact me at bonnie_halda@nps.gov or 215-597-5028.

Sincerely,



Bonnie J. Halda
Chief, Preservation Assistance