



## New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Division for Historic Preservation  
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189  
518-237-8643

Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor

Rose Harvey  
Commissioner

December 4, 2014

James A. Pardo  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Chautauqua Institution  
PO Box 28  
Chautauqua, New York 14722

Re: Chautauqua Amphitheater

Dear Mr. Pardo:

I am writing to express my deep concern with the recently announced plan to substantially demolish and reconstruct the Chautauqua Amphitheater. The 1893 building is nationally recognized as the physical, functional, and spiritual heart of the Chautauqua Institution. The century-old amphitheater is especially significant because it was purposely designed to meet the needs of the community for a meeting space and because of the multitude of significant individuals who have taken its stage. Franklin D. Roosevelt's "I HATE WAR"! speech in 1936 is only one example of the momentous discourses that have moved legions of listeners. The building embodies the very idea of a Chautauqua, a community that gathers together, and bears witness to the community's long and inspiring history.


I know that you and the board of directors value this history and take pride in Chautauqua's designation as a National Historic Landmark. I commend your stewardship of this important resource over the years, and I know that you have put considerable time and effort into planning for the amphitheater's future in order to ensure its ability to accommodate the institute's programming for many more generations. This was no doubt a very difficult task. However, I would also like to point out that in c1979-1980, the federal government committed nearly \$300,000 in federal grant money toward the preservation of the amphitheater, a public investment made on the premise that the board of directors was equally committed to its long-term preservation.

As the State Historic Preservation Office, we were involved in the administration of the federal grant program and want to remind you of your commitment in accepting these funds. We are also concerned that the loss of such a pivotal building may have a significant effect on the integrity of the district as a whole and perhaps jeopardize its

landmark designation. And we believe that the decision to demolish a building of such significance should not be made until every other alternative has been considered. For these reasons, we urge you to continue to consult with other preservation architects and specialists to see if another solution can be found. Although this may take additional time, the loss of the auditorium will be irrevocable. I am aware that several other preservation organizations have offered their assistance, and I would like to add the New York State Historic Preservation Office to the list. We will be happy to assist the institution in any way that we can to arrive at a solution that will meet the needs to modernize the auditorium while preserving its historic character.

If you would like to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3269, I would be happy to discuss any of these issues in greater depth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ruth L. Pierpont".

Ruth L. Pierpont  
Deputy Commissioner  
for Historic Preservation