



EAGLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CELEBRATE 250 YEARS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Join us as we honor **250 years of American freedom**—a story that began with a bold desire for independence expanded liberty to millions. From revolutionary figures to the heroes who safeguard our freedoms today, America has carried forward a vision of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that continues to inspire the world.

Our celebration in Eagle begins with three engaging, family events:

2026 Passport - Travel to nine participating Historical Societies, collecting stamps in your official Passport as you discover each community's unique stories, artifacts, and museum treasures. Complete your Passport and you'll be entered into a drawing for prizes. The program runs January through December 2026.



Letterboxing Adventure – The Quest for Ensign Tom's Legacy - Meet Ensign Tom, a WWII hero whose story launches a community-wide quest. Follow a set of clues on a short driving tour through Eagle to uncover the hidden Letterbox, stamp your journal, and enjoy the thrill of discovery. The



adventure began March 1, 2026, and continues all year. Visit our website for details. [The Quest For Ensign Tom – Eagle Historical Society](#)

American Songbook: 250 Years, A Good Start! - Join us Thursday, April 16 at 6:30 p.m. at the Eagle Municipal Building for an evening of American music. Music historian **Ed Pierce** and the musicians of **Kettle Moraine Blues** will guide us through melodies from 1776 to modern times in a lighthearted, entertaining program for all ages.



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From Eagle to Shanghai

The John Earl Baker Story

by Mike Rice

Many today see Eagle as just another small town—quiet, modest, and increasingly overshadowed by the sprawl of larger communities. But beneath its humble surface lies a legacy of grit, generosity, and brilliance. Eagle has nurtured teachers who shaped minds, ministers who guided souls, doctors and lawyers who served with integrity, soldiers who defended freedom, and farmers who helped feed a nation. Yet among these hometown heroes, one man's journey reached across oceans and transformed a nation.

His name: **John Earl Baker.**

Born and raised in Eagle, Wisconsin, Baker walked the halls of Ward School and Whitewater Normal School before earning his master's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1908. He was a quiet force, methodical and committed to solving complex problems. By 1910, his talent for logistics earned him a position with the Southern Pacific Railroad, where he quickly became a recognized expert in transportation systems.

Then came a call from halfway around the world. In 1916, the Chinese government, desperate to modernize its fractured and inefficient rail network, hired Baker to lead a national overhaul. China's railways were a patchwork of privately owned lines, each controlled by foreign investors focused on profit rather than national development. Track gauges differed from one company to the next, and no system connected them. Baker was hired not just as an engineer, but as a negotiator, tasked with confronting powerful railroad executives and coercing them into a unified national system. Though soft spoken, Baker was forceful in his demands at meeting the reorganization schedule and the railroad system in China became successful beyond anyone's imagination. Under his leadership, China's railroads were transformed from chaos into a model of reliability and efficiency. Trains ran on time, goods moved quickly, and communities once isolated were now connected.

But Baker's impact went far beyond steel tracks and timetables. In 1920, when a devastating drought threatened to starve tens of thousands, Baker used relief funds not just to buy food—but to double the shipments to the hardest-hit drought areas, leveraging the very rail system he had rebuilt. His foresight saved thousands from dying of hunger.

Then came the Yangtze River flood in 1931 which left tens of thousands dead, and hundreds of



thousands homeless and starving. Baker brokered a deal with the U.S. government to purchase surplus crops; wheat, rice, and corn from Depression-era farms and ship

30 MILLION HOMELESS IN FLOOD
Ten Million Utterly Destitute On Yangtse River In China.

them to China. He then put two million starving young men to work building dykes to direct the flow of the floodwaters and control future flooding from the Yangtze and paid them with American wheat. It was a masterstroke of compassion and logistics, turning American abundance into global relief.

After his success with the railroads, Baker was appointed head of the American Red Cross in China. He built roads into impoverished regions, bringing aid, infrastructure, and hope to places long forgotten. His work laid the foundation for modern transportation and humanitarian outreach across the country.

The Sino-Japanese War of the 1930s uprooted more than twenty million people across China, leaving families homeless, starving, and cut off from the most basic necessities. Roads were destroyed, supply lines collapsed, and entire regions were plunged into crisis. Again and again, Baker stepped into the devastation, repairing roads, reopening access to



Dr. John Earl Baker

food, and restoring the lifelines communities needed to survive. His tireless work earned him a name spoken with gratitude across the region: the “**Samaritan of Shanghai.**”

After decades of service in China, Baker returned to the United States in 1953 and settled into retirement at his home in California. He passed away quietly in 1958 and was laid to rest in the family cemetery at Little Prairie, Wisconsin, just outside Eagle—returning, in the end, to the place that shaped him.

John Earl Baker never sought fame. He sought solutions. And though his name may not appear in textbooks or monuments, his legacy lives in every life he touched—from the farmers of Eagle to the millions of families across China who survived because he refused to look away. He

Artifact Donations

Thanks to the following donors:

Steve Gulgowski
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Mystery Artifact

Can you identify this item?

(See page 5 for answer)



Evolution of a Historic Landmark: The Eagle Opera House

Eagle, WI
by Dana Houk



Eagle Opera House. Photo circa 1900.

Photo (circa 1900) credit: Heritage Bank - Mukwonago Area Historical Calendar; December 1994



Author's photo: January 2026

The former **Eagle Opera House** was sold and renovated, yet again, in 2025. Its life and purpose have evolved over the years. Once a lively stage for entertainment in the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, its doors opened into a decorated hall where area residents and visitors enjoyed the sights and sounds of local dances, musicians, and film. (“Eagle Opera House Movies”, October 4, 2023, EHS website) These performance art styles changed nearly as quickly as fashion trends due to rapid technological advancements in cinematography, lighting, amplification, and production. Modes of transportation to the venue also transformed from horse and buggy to gas powered automobiles. From 1852-1900, railroad passage to the village was also an option via the Milwaukee-Eagle line on tracks laid south of what is now known as Hwy. 67. Watch the short video, “Rails Through Time” on the EHS website, facebook.com/reel, November 25, 2025.

Let us revisit the building’s heyday, and its prominent role in the culture and history of the Village of Eagle. Past articles and ads published

in the EHS newsletters and the 4-page local newspaper, *The Eagle Quill*, distributed weekly from 1880 – 1959, paint the portrait. Issues of both publications are available on the museum’s website: www.eaglehistoricalsociety.org

Act One:

“Concert!” *The Eagle Quill* Sept. 4, 1908 ad announces the Triangle Quartet will perform on Sept. 8th at 8 p.m.; admission for adults 25¢, children 15¢, reserved seats 35¢.

May 2, 1919, the *Eagle Quill* advertises a Grand Ball at the Eagle Opera Hall on May 19, 1919; music by the Gerber Orchestra of Milwaukee to benefit the “Eagle Base Ball Club”; tickets \$1.00, with “light refreshments served in the banquet room.” The hall was likely festively adorned with a red, white, and blue theme as enthusiastic patriotism was displayed throughout the nation in the aftermath of World War I (1914-1918). Touted as “the war to end all wars”, many American families were grieving, war weary, and while celebrating victory, citizens were eager to return to a sense of peaceful normalcy and

renewed prosperity. The war veterans and people born between 1883-1900 were named, "The Lost Generation". (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aftermath_of_WWI)

The March 19, 1920 *Eagle Quill* advertised the Western film, "When A Man Rides Alone", starring William Russell.

An *Eagle Quill's* ad: Will Rogers in "Almost a Husband" film on Sept. 11, 1921; 10¢ & 20¢ tickets.

Eagle resident, Frederick A. Rockteacher (1871-1924) was the Opera House manager. ([www.ancestry.com/Frederick A. Rockteacher](http://www.ancestry.com/Frederick_A_Rockteacher))

Act Two:

Respected local veterinarian, John "Jack" "Doc" Crawley (1929-2010) reminisced that The Eagle Opera House was the only building in town with a gym or theatre. His father, Earl W. Crawley, was the principal and coach at the Eagle State Graded School which held tenth grade graduation ceremonies there. Janet Kruse Radabaugh added that the Eagle State eighth-grade was the last class to graduate in the hall in 1957. She described the room with dark wood walls and chairs, heated by a pot belly stove, where the class performed the annual Christmas play. ("Memories of the Eagle Opera House", EHS newsletter, Winter 2001)



EHS archive photo "Eagle Fair 1907"

In 1999, Elaine Jones Cook, wrote that Palestine School commencements were also held in the Opera House. "The Masonic Hall was located in

the upstairs portion of the opera house, where it remained for many years." (Excerpt from "[The Eagle Opera House](#)", [Eagle Historical Society newsletter, Summer 1999 issue.](#))

Final Curtain:

By 1989, per James Bovee (1895-1992), the Masonic Hall had become an apartment complex. The dance era described in the *Eagle Quill* newspaper, October 14, 1921, ad "COMING" for a series of ten dances every other Friday night by the Eagle "Club Orchestra" has faded into a distant memory. This former gathering place has quietly aged into a passive retirement.

(www.ancestry.com /James Francis Bovee)

(Joliffe, Irma. "Oral History Committee Records Memories" EHS newsletter, Winter 1991)

Upcoming Events

2026

Apr 16	General Meeting & 250th Program Ed Pierce & KM Blues Food – coffee and desserts
May 7, 8, 9	Brat Sale 10 am – 3 pm
Jun 13-14	Flag Day Weekend 2026 Open House: 10 am – 3 pm
Jul 12	Ice Cream Social PECB Concert
Oct 31	Pumpkin Party

(Mystery Artifact Answer- from page 1)

A vintage-style, hand-painted heavy cast iron locomotive train doorstep.

Website Updates

We've made several improvements to help you find information more quickly and navigate our website collections with ease.

Updated Root Folders - Our top-level folders have been reorganized to group related materials in a more logical way. **Eagle Quill**, **Newsletters**, and **Obituaries** now appear under **Collections-Archives** → **News Publications**.

Take a moment to explore the new structure - everything is easier to locate.

Improved Obituaries Section - This area has received major upgrades.

- A new **Search Box** lets you enter a last name, first name, or both.
- Press **Enter** and you'll see all matching individuals—excellent for confirming spellings or exploring family lines.

You can also choose to view **10, 25, 50, or 100 entries per page**, making browsing much more flexible.

Enhanced Newsletter Index - The index now links directly to the exact newsletter page where an article appears, so you can jump right to what you want to read. The index is also fully searchable: Press **Ctrl + F** (Windows) or **Command + F** (Mac) to open a search box. Type a name or keyword to show every occurrence within the index.

Our website is being used around the world by researchers and genealogists. We're proud of that—and we hope you enjoy the improvements just as much.

Visit our Website



Erikson Building Progress

Work continues to make steady progress on the interior of the Erikson building. The project is being carried out under the supervision of **Jeff Nowicki**, with the help of **Art Peavey**, **Jim Neist**, and **Scott Bovee**, whose time and effort have been invaluable.

Several important milestones have already been



reached. The concrete floor has been painted, electrical power has been installed, and the building has been fully insulated. The ceiling has also been finished with beautiful tongue-and-groove wood, generously

donated by **Nate Cobb**, which has added both warmth and character to the space.

Work in the coming weeks will focus on finishing the walls and painting the interior, installing a gas heater, and constructing a loft at the rear of the building. Once completed, the building will provide much-needed space for larger exhibits as well as additional storage for the Society's growing collection.

The final phase of the project will involve landscaping the surrounding area. We hope to install a brick patio and **would greatly appreciate the help of volunteers** willing to lend a hand with the work. The Society will supply the bricks — your help with the labor would mean a great deal and help bring this project across the finish line.

Meet EHS Board Member Dick Moeller

Meet **Dick Moeller**, a longtime member of the Eagle Historical Society and a dedicated board member since 2009. Born in Milwaukee, Dick attended Milwaukee Lutheran High School before studying business at Whitewater College where he met his future wife, **Nada Zurich**, in a shorthand class.



Dick began his career teaching at Hustisford High School in 1965 and later became Vice-Principal at Franklin High School, where he helped launch a successful program for at-risk students. He and Nada—also a teacher at Custer High School—married in 1963.

Summers were spent helping Nada's father at **Remy Battery** in West Allis where he drove truck, worked the front desk, and helped place orders. When her father fell ill in the early 1970s, Dick and Nada purchased the business, planning for Dick to return to teaching, if needed. Instead, they ran Remy Battery from 1974 into the 1990s, eventually passing leadership to their sons, Mike and Matt.

Alongside their two biological sons, Dick and Nada opened their home to five adopted children. Dick counts his proudest achievements as his 62-year marriage to Nada, the successful lives of their children, and the impact he made on at-risk students through mentorship and co-op programs.

The Eagle Historical Society is grateful for **Dick Moeller's many years of service and dedication to our community.**

Eagle Centre Bed & Breakfast

W370S9590 Hwy. 67
Eagle, WI 53119



Imagine you are traveling via stagecoach through the scenic Southern Kettle Moraine in the mid-1800s. You arrive at a three-story Greek Revival Stagecoach Inn for an overnight stay. Today, you can enjoy period appropriate accommodations in the Eagle Centre House in Eagle, near the Old World Wisconsin outdoor museum. This replica of "The Hawk's Inn" in Delafield, WI was built in 1990 by owners Dean Herriges & Riene Wells. Eagle Centre was the original plat name of the Village of Eagle and "House" was synonymous with "Inn". **The name is historic.** The shape and design of the inn and sign are of historic design.

Enter through one of three front doors to the "Tap Room" (the Gentlemen's' tavern) on the right, the middle door leading to the dining room, or the left door to the "Ladies' Parlor". Luggage was offloaded from the stagecoach roof rack through the traditional upper porch door to the bedchambers on the 2nd and 3rd floors which now offer modern bathroom amenities, vintage rope beds, and antique furnishings. Breakfast is served on Tea Leaf pattern ironstone dishes. **The décor is historic.**

The 16 acres of an Oak Savannah, rare in the Midwest, are in a protective conservancy. **The grounds are historic.**



**For further information and reservations:
262-363-4700; info@eagle-house.com**

Obituary



Gordon C. Erikson, 87, of Eagle, Wisconsin passed away peacefully on Tuesday, March 17, 2026 at Lake Country Health Services.

Gordon was born on September 7, 1938 in Eagle the son of Leo and Mary (Parsons) Erikson. He grew up on the family farm and was a 1956 graduate of Palmyra High School. On July 25, 1964, Gordon was united in marriage to M. Karen Stockholm at the United Methodist Church in Whitewater and the couple would go on to enjoy 60 years of marriage together until Karen's passing in 2025.

Gordon farmed for the majority of his working career and was very proud of his farming heritage. He and Karen also owned and operated the Gift Hutch of Whitewater for quite a few years and enjoyed that work. For leisure, Gordon enjoyed traveling, mostly to Florida, South Dakota, Branson, MO, and Alaska. He and Karen made many wonderful memories together. He will be remembered for his dry sense of humor, his love of the Green Bay Packers, and his generosity. Gordon will be missed by those he leaves behind.

He is preceded in death by his parents, his dear wife, M. Karen Erikson, and his brother, Raymond L. Erikson. Memorials in Gordon's honor may be made to the Eagle Historical Society in lieu of flowers. A Memorial Service will be held at 11 :00AM on Thursday, March 26, 2026 at The Gibson Family Funeral Home in Eagle, WI (499 Elkhorn Road, Eagle, WI 53119). The Rev. Duane Goetsch will officiate the service. Visitation will be held from 1 0:00AM until the time of service at the funeral home. Gordon will be laid to rest in Oak Ridge Cemetery immediately following the service. Gibson Family Funeral Homes of Eagle and Palmyra, WI is serving the family. To place an online condolence please visit gibsonfuneral.com

(Full obituary is available online at our website.)



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Open Hours

Wednesdays,

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