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In Their Own Words

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**Eagle Goes to the Movies**, by Jerry Johnson,  
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*As the summer of 2025 comes to a close, we present Jerry's memories of the simple pleasure of gathering up the family to watch an outdoor movie in the town square.*

Francis the Talking Mule frequently stopped by. So did Harvey the Rabbit, King Kong, and Tarantula. They all shared Wednesday nights at the movies in downtown Eagle in the village square.



Long before the days when television was common in every home, Eagle area citizens crowded the tiny park on Main Street and watched Hollywood films under the stars. Mike Sasso says the films began running in 1937, 1938, or 1939. He recalls that at the age of 12, he would hurry home from his job as a golf caddy to watch the movies.

My first-hand memories began in the early 1950s. In March 1951, my parents moved a mile south of Eagle to a 40-acre farm they had bought. My twin brother, Jim, and I would have been eight years old that summer. Those Wednesday nights were really something to which we looked forward, especially since the nearest movie theaters were a mile away in Palmyra (Myers), Mukwonago (Vista), and East Troy (Troy). The Pix, Park, and Avon in Waukesha and Sprague in Elkhorn were even more distant.

The films in Eagle started at dusk, around 7:30 or 8:00 p.m. (prior to the introduction of Daylight-Saving Time). An older man who had considerable trouble walking always arrived with another person, possibly his daughter, and began setting up the theater. No one seems to have any idea who he was or where he came from. It is known that he had a circuit and played a different area village each night of the week.

Mike Sasso remembers that there was a different exhibitor for the first five years; then this man took over and continued until the films ended in the late 1950s. It should be noted that traveling film exhibitors were quite common prior to television. This tradition can be traced back to at least 1898. Two huge poles--perhaps discarded electric or telephone poles--had been set in the ground next to Brittingham and Hixon's lumberyard storage shed (now demolished).

Ropes held the movie screen (a white bedsheet). The projector was set up on the round cement bandstand (also demolished). Cars parked around the square, in the lumberyard parking lot, and on Main Street.

Jim and I and our two younger sisters would stake out space in the center of the square in front of the bandstand. Dad gave us one of his World War II olive drab Army blankets to sit on. If the film was slow in starting, car horns would be heard until the film got under way. If talking in the audience got too bad (this was a problem at times), an announcement urging quiet was made on the speaker system.

Eagle businesses paid for the showings; at first, the charge was \$2 per business. In exchange, color slides were made up for each sponsor. Many of the slides were generic, with the name of the business below artwork. The woman always showed these slides during the intermission while the man changed the 16mm reels on the projector. Intermission ran at least 15 minutes, which allowed everyone to dash across the street to buy refreshments at the stores-Sherman's Grocery, Benson's Drugstore, and Krestan's IGA.

Mike reports that in the earlier years a serial was always shown prior to the feature. Since the film series ran from about June through August and serials usually consisted of 12 or 13 episodes, this worked out well. Mike remembers watching the Green Hornet one summer. Announcements advertised the coming attractions.

A variety of films made up the schedule: the Ma and Pa Kettle and Francis the talking mule series, Jimmy Stewart films (Strategic Air Command, Harvey, The Glenn Miller Story), war movies (To Hell and Back), and science fiction (King Kong, Tarantula). Some of the films were repeated in later years. Rain was a problem. Since there were no makeup dates, the film for a rainy date would not be shown after the date was skipped.

None of us remembers exactly when the movie showings ended; Jim thinks it was 1957 or 1958. In any case, as long as our memories exist, spiders, rabbits, gorillas, mules, and assorted kin will continue to lurk among the shadows of the Eagle village square every Wednesday night of the summer.