

When Eagle Wasn't Sleepy

By Alice Baker

On every occasion when the press of larger cities has reason to write about Eagle, the feature starts with "The sleepy little town. . ."

True, Eagle is the dormitory for men and women working in a dozen surrounding towns, but the writer can assure her reader that the village is anything but sleepy except for the six to seven hours that honest, law-abiding, industrious citizens require to maintain those very desirable characteristics.

And Eagle was ever so. But even more so in the spring of 1903. Then the hamlet was really bustling with activity. The railroad served the public with twelve passenger trains a day, employed three men to superintend its business and provided a large, pleasant (if mostly dirty) depot for people who utilized that one method of public conveyance.

Early spring of 1903, however, was the time of lively activity. The dairy farmers round about were not satisfied with the prices they received for their milk. After much discussion and legal advice, they decided to form a Co-operative Association and sell their own product. Accordingly, Francis Baker was elected president of the organization, Eugene Watrous, treasurer; Ed De Witt, John Thiele, and I. L. Grosse completed the co-operative's board of directors.

The building of the factory was also a cooperative affair. Some ten teams and wagons brought large hard-heads of basalt and granite to the site on Sherman street designed for the factory. In a few months the rocks were in place and the factory a going concern with Jack Enright as butter maker.

But Eagle was alive in other ways. It was in its co-operative histrionic and frolicking merriment that the town was at its jovial best.

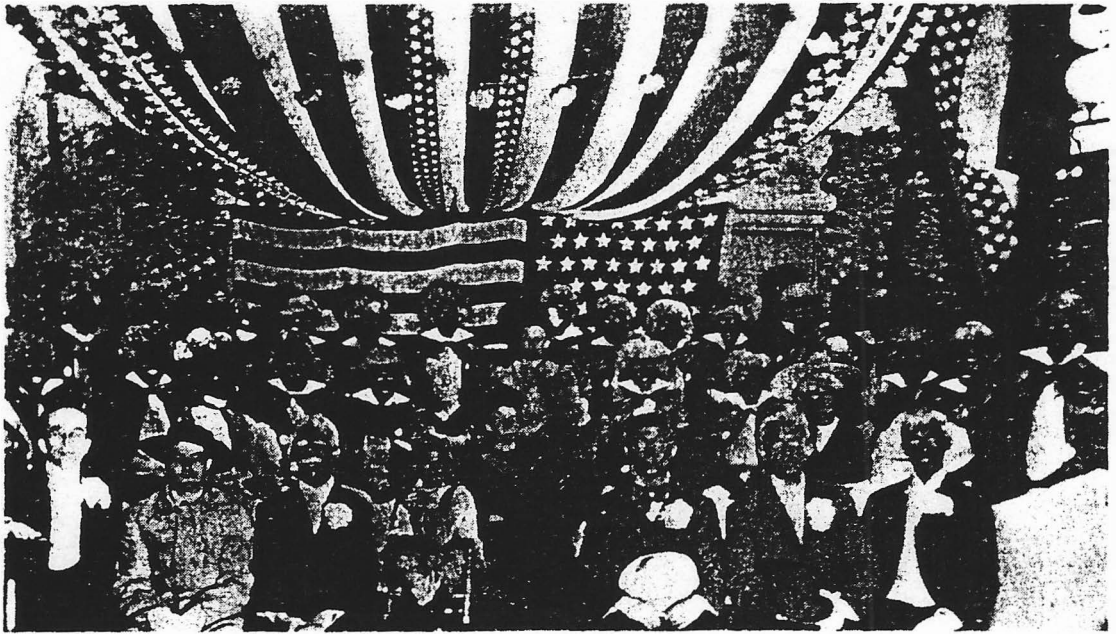
HAULING MALT DAY AT DON PARDEE'S ELEVATOR. EAGLE. 1912. PHOTOS LOANED BY MRS. FLOSSIE PARDEE.

From 1893 until 1957 the Masonic Temple furnished the one auditorium stage equipped and large enough to seat the throngs that any home talent program attracts.

In 1906 when there was no taboo against anything colored, a minstrel show was staged under the direction of Charlie Lurvey. Much more of a clown than Liberace, and with equal musical ability, he was able to take the talent of a very small town and make a successful program. Lurvey was a musical genius. He had little tutoring in music yet he could play anything and memorize it after few practices. The fact that he was the accompanist of the world's great singers George Hamlin, Maggie Teyte, Madam Gadski, and Claudia Musio, was ample evidence of his musical ability. He didn't have the help of Liberace's sequins but he may have had that of his London tailor.

About 1936 with the push of Rev. Wm. B. Petherick, the towns-people presented a three-night WLS show. The program changed nightly and many people were able to do their various little stunts. One of the best was performed by John Skidmore Jr. as Uncle Ezra. While jiggging at his very best, his right leg locked from cramp. The high pitched voice of an old man panicked by so great a misfortune and his attempt to straighten it made the audience delirious in their laughter.

The last program involving home talent was the Womanless Wedding, when the Rev. Sam Beers was pastor. The contracting parties were John Wilton as groom and Dick Gibson as bride, Levi Baker as parson. As usual the bride was much more prominent than the groom. His Mae West accoutrements, especially the plumed black velvet picture hat furnished by Mrs. Lila Burton, and his florid make-up completed a person of female pulchritude rivaling all the Miss Americas of today. After the best man



MINSTREL SHOW AT EAGLE. 1906. HELD AT MASONIC HALL. UNDER DIRECTION OF CHARLES LURVEY.

presented a doughnut to the groom who dropped it but finally placed in on the appropriate finger, the parson plied the groom with much marital advice and made him promise he would take his bride to North Prairie for their honeymoon.

The Masonic auditorium would seat 200 people, but when home talent affairs were scheduled, many times standing room at the rear and in the outer entry was filled to capacity. The over flowing crowd gave proof of the jollity people felt on attendance and on recall in years to come.



EAGLE'S DEPOT. WINDMILL. WATERTOWER AND STORES. 1908.