



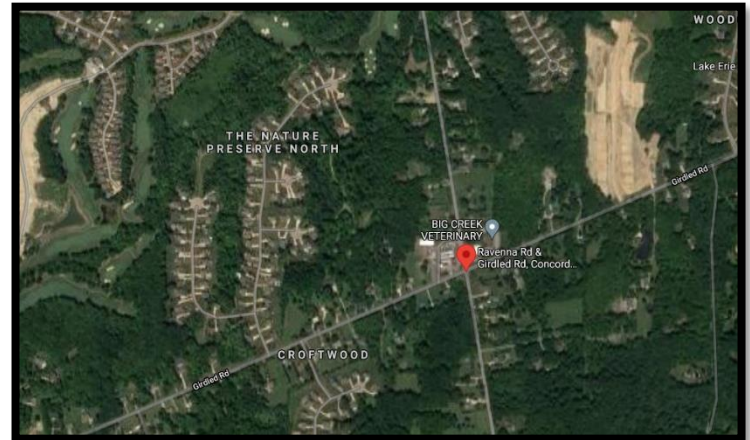
Summer Nights at the Lake County Drive-Ins

Local history can strike a nostalgic note, especially when collecting first-hand accounts and photos from recent eras. Outdoor theaters fall into a special category for colorful reminiscences. Between 1948-1989, there were five drive-ins in the county, including a special overlooked gem from Concord's past, long faded but not forgotten by all locals.

Belvedere Drive-In at Rt. 44 in Concord Township

Few may recall a brief span in time when a rural Concord Township had its own drive-in theater. Known as the **Belvedere**, it was located on the Morrison Farm (Girdled and Ravenna Road). Located south of the tracks, it would be near the current Cornpopper Farm property. It was also across from the Leuty House that many old-timers may remember. Locals recall that the drive-in appeared in the late 1940s and closed prior to the 1954 season. The screen was curiously set on a slant of the uphill slope (currently golf course two for Quail Hollow), halfway between the old B&O railheads and the old gravel pit at the bottom of the hill. Between the resulting wind-tunnel effect it created and driving up the hill to get to the parking area, the complications eventually led to its demise as the screen fell several times.

Three owners appear to be attached to its history. Albert Russo and brother-in-law Fred Falcone of Painesville were one-time owners. Another name bandied about in local lore were the DeSantic brothers. The brothers lived nearby on Stage Avenue. Despite its short rural lifespan, the Belvedere had many anecdotal histories. Doris Morrison recalled that the Catholic Legion of Decency worried about possible lurid movies. St. Mary's nuns warned of pending screen disasters if suggestive movies were



shown. As it could be easily seen from Route 44, some claimed that without a fenced façade, the screen posed a driver's distraction. Others worried about kids sneaking in to watch "risky movies." Perhaps the most colorful anecdote



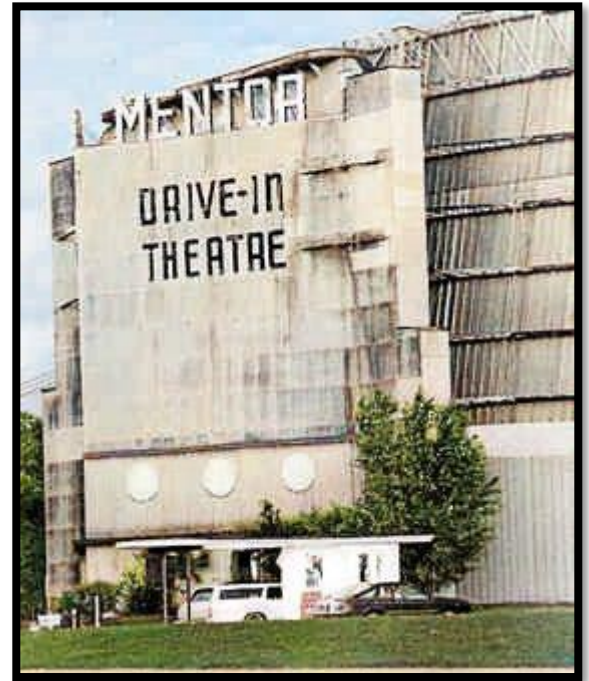


reported by Rose Moore was the time a gangster movie kept Doris Morrison awake all night due to the sounds of auto chases, sirens and gunfire. All-in-all though, rural Concord and the surrounding neighborhood accepted the theater without much fuss. The former site remained popular for many years as a sledding spot, the tattered screen a mere backdrop of a moment in time.

Four More Across the County

The bygone outdoor movie era is generally fondly remembered. It came of age when home television screens were only black & white and miniscule by today's standards. Teenagers loved romantic drive-in date nights, and two features were usually offered for one bargain price. Parents loved drive-ins because a babysitter wasn't needed for their often-large baby boomer broods.

Mentor Twin Drive-In opened in 1949 on the property at 9200 Mentor Ave. 2000 people attended opening night to enjoy "Blondie Knows Best." The theater ended its run in 1986. It was replaced by a K-Mart and then a Meijer Superstore.



The **Euclid Avenue Outdoor Theatre**, located at Bishop Rd. & Rt.20, opened in 1948.





The **Eastlake Drive-In** was located at 34280 Vine St. and opened in the summer of 1950. "A Ticket to Tomahawk" was the premiere feature. The theater closed in 1986 and was replaced by The Vineyards shopping plaza.

The **Madison Skyway** is the only one of the old drive-ins with remnants still standing. The theater site is on Route 20, two miles west of Geneva. It was the last of the Lake County drive-ins to close.



Concession sales, then as now, were key to the theaters' profitability. A few drive-ins still exist in Ohio, but their heyday went the way of rotary dial phones & TV antennas.

The only remaining outdoor theater locally is the **Mayfield Road Drive-In** in Geauga County. The old car-side speakers have been replaced by radio signals played on the car's sound system. The COVID-19 pandemic made watching movies inside your



own car an appealing option that boosted ticket sales in 2020 while traditional theaters were shuttered. Though home entertainment systems have evolved in remarkable ways, the mid-20th century novelty of drive-in movies holds a special nostalgic spot in the history of summer fun in Lake County and across the USA.

Sources: Accounts from Jean Lohisher, Chuck Murch, Doris Morrison, Rose Moore

Submitted by Dan Maxson

Local Lore by Max, 2010-2016 - Community Media Lab, The News-Herald - Volunteer Trustee, Curator - FHHS/ Fairport Harbor Lighthouse & Marine Museum - Volunteer Curator / Docent - Old Stone School, Concord Township With additional research & material from Virginia Jeschelnic.



Eastlake Drive-In