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**FORMER LISLE WOMAN  
TO CLIMB MOUNTAIN**

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## BEHIND THE BAN

Lisle Station Museum exhibit to explore film censorship

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2014 | \$1.50 | MYSUBURBANLIFE.COM/LISLE

### **BANNED IN CHICAGO: Eight Decades of Film Censorship in the Windy City**

Join Us For An Opening Reception For Our Newest Exhibit

**SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2014 from 4:00-6:00pm**

Exhibit Runs Through Saturday, August 16, 2014

**FREE ADMISSION!**



**PRESENTED BY:**  
The Museums at Lisle Station Park - A Facility of the Lisle Park District

**CO-SPONSORED BY:**  
The Urban & Suburban Studies Program at North Central College

921 School Street  
Lisle, IL 60532  
630-968-0499  
LisleParkDistrict.org

Banned in Chicago examines the history behind film censorship in Chicago and provides a glimpse into the types of films that were being censored and a broader look at the implications of censorship throughout America.



# Lisle museum explores film censorship in Chicago

By LEE V. GAINES

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LISLE – A Lisle native, museum curator and 22-year-old college student has joined forces with his North Central College professor to create an exhibit exploring the history of Chicago film censorship.

Brian Failing, a senior at North Central, co-wrote an upcoming exhibit at the Lisle Station Museum with associate professor of speech communication and coordinator for the college's urban and suburban studies program, Steve Macek, called, "Banned in Chicago: Eight Decades of Film Censorship in the Windy City."

The exhibit is the result of research the two conducted for a book Macek is working on. Failing was Macek's research assistant over the course of two summers.

"He was very excited about the research we were doing on the history of film censorship in Chicago," Macek said. "He thought it would make a compelling exhibit."

Failing has worked at the museum since he was 15 years old, and took over as curator his senior year of high school.

"I thought (film censorship) was a topic that's really important and really interesting that I think a lot of people will like, because everyone likes stuff that has to do with films, movies and Hollywood," Failing said.

In 1907, Chicago became the first city in the country to create a local film censorship authority, Macek said. The city also had the longest-lasting such authority in the country – it was dissolved in 1984 after funding for the agency stopped.



Erica Benson - ebenson@shawmedia.com

Museum Curator Brian Failing prepares for the upcoming "Banned In Chicago" exhibit Saturday at the Lisle Station Museum.

"When it was first created, the police chief – the head of Chicago police – was responsible for reviewing and licensing films," Macek said. "Any films that were amoral or obscene could be banned."

About a decade after the agency was created, Macek said the authority was delegated to a civilian board, which usually was chaired by a police officer. The other members of the board were often women.

"The thinking was that women had a stronger moral sense than men and were better able to determine what was suitable," Macek said.

Over the years, the board banned hundreds of films and ordered cuts to thousands more, he said.

A film could be banned if the board believed it would endanger the safety of the community, cause a riot, target a racial or religious group or was just plain obscene, Macek said.

Licensing fees were collected from film distributors, and the funds were used to pay for board members' salaries and a screening room at Chicago police headquarters.

The agency was particularly sensitive about films that associated Chicago with organized crime.

The 1932 film, "Scarface," starring Paul Muni was "never shown in Chicago because it was so transparently based on the criminal career of Al Capone," Macek said.

At least one film slipped

through the cracks, Failing said.

"Around the World in 80 Minutes," a 1931 film starring Douglas Fairbanks, included a scene in which Fairbanks flies over a city, hears gunshots, and immediately identifies it as Chicago, Failing said.

The city's mayor at the time, Anton Cermak, ordered the film be pulled from theaters and censors cut out the offending line.

The 1952 Supreme Court Case, Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson – commonly referred to as the "Miracle Decision" – determined film to be a medium worthy of First Amendment protection.

After the ruling, the censorship board was mostly limited to banning obscene films,

## If you go

- **WHAT:** Opening reception for "Banned in Chicago: Eight Decades of Film Censorship in the Windy City"
- **WHEN:** 4 to 6 p.m. Saturday
- **WHERE:** Lisle Station Museum, 921 School St.
- **INFORMATION:** [lisleparkdistrict.org/museumevents.htm](http://lisleparkdistrict.org/museumevents.htm)

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**Brian Failing**  
Exhibit co-writer

Macek said.

"The reason why (the board) survived in the 1970s was largely because it was a patronage job, a way to funnel money to widows, police officers and alderman," he said.

Failing and Macek agree one of the most remarkable aspects of this story is how few people today know the board ever existed.

The exhibit begins Saturday with a reception at the Lisle Station Museum, 921 School St., and runs through August 16. It is free and open to the public.

## ▶▶ YOUR WEEKEND FORECAST

Source: National Weather Service



Thurs.  
**H: 58**  
**L: 41**

Chance of showers and thunderstorms



Fri.  
**H: 55**  
**L: 40**

40 percent chance of showers



Sat.  
**H: 60**  
**L: 43**

Partly sunny and warmer



Sun.  
**H: 65**  
**L: 47**

Sunny and warmer with high near 65

## ▶▶ ON THE COVER

Museum Curator Brian Failing prepares for the upcoming "Banned In Chicago" exhibit Saturday at the Lisle Station Museum.

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