

## Eight-millimeter Film in Public Libraries

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FOR THE PAST THIRTY YEARS, and for the foreseeable future, 16mm film has been the format around which all other audiovisual services in public libraries are tangential. One format that has become very popular in recent years as a supplemental service to 16mm is 8mm film. Because it is less expensive to purchase and to maintain, many libraries have added 8mm to their collections. The most prominent type of 8mm film in public libraries is the short, silent, black and white film. Old-time comedy classics of Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Keaton, and so on are definitely the most popular category of 8mm film in libraries. The 15-minute to one-half hour silent comedy classics sell for less than \$20, and many feature-length films are also available at proportionately higher prices.

Most libraries treat films just as books, i.e., they do not inspect them by machine upon return, but simply give them a quick visual inspection, for example, to be sure that the reels match their boxes, and then return them to the library shelves in readiness for the next borrower. The theory behind this method is that people are accustomed to taking good care of their own home movies, and therefore are not likely to damage other films. Unfortunately, this is not always true.

8mm films can be purchased from sources such as Blackhawk, Niles, Cinema Concepts, and many other distributors at prices ranging from 10 percent to 80 percent of the 16mm cost. (A selected list of 8mm distributors follows this article.) The large variance in these prices reflects, for the most part, the different levels of 8mm copyright royalty, as well as differences in the gauge, color, sound cartridge, etc. of these films.

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In addition to the above, 8mm films are available in cartridges. There are super-8mm cartridges that are silent, have magnetic sound, or optical sound. Several years ago, there was a trend in public libraries to purchase 8mm optical sound cartridge films in Technicolor format. Children's stories from ACI, Sterling and Weston Woods were leaders in the field. Mainly because of repeated problems with the Technicolor projectors, this format has lost favor among libraries. Schools use 8mm cartridges called "loops," or "single concept" films for teaching purposes, but even here the 8mm format is losing popularity. A good source listing these materials is the fifth edition of *NICEM Index to 8mm Motion Cartridges*, published by the University of Southern California.

While 8mm distributors are currently enlarging sales efforts in magnetic sound, a survey of public libraries shows very little activity in this area. Marketing statistics indicate that of the approximately 10 million 8mm projectors in use in the United States, less than 900,000 are equipped for magnetic sound. This fact, in addition to the added cost of the film, explains most of the reluctance to acquire yet another format.

Trends in public demand should be watched carefully by public library audiovisual purchasers for the next two or three years especially. The acceptance of film by public libraries seems to be at a point at which demand could increase dramatically in one of several areas: (1) super-8mm magnetic sound; (2) videotape cassettes; or (3) video discs. Should the market not be strongly affected by video products, it may then be wise to increase acquisitions of 8mm silent and magnetic sound films. In the meantime, it appears that most libraries will continue to add small numbers of 8mm silent films to supplement their 16mm collections. A list of some of the principal distributors of 8mm films, which may serve as a reference for information on obtaining films, follows here.

A & V Methods Company, P.O. Box 8593, Rochester, New York 14619  
Blackhawk Films, Eastin-Phelan Corp., 1235 West 5th Street, Davenport,  
Iowa 52808

Cinema Concepts, Inc., 91 Main Street, Chester, Connecticut 06412  
Columbia Pictures 8mm Films, 711 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York  
10022

Griggs-Moviedrome, 263 Harrison Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110  
Fred A. Niles Communications Center, 1058 W. Washington Boulevard,  
Chicago, Illinois 60607

Reel Images, 456 Monroe Turnpike, Monroe, Connecticut 06468  
Select Film Library Inc., 115 W. 31st Street, New York, New York 10001