



Rolling Through Time

By James Vannurden, Director

Official Newsletter of:

National Museum of Roller Skating

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Who We Are

The National Museum of Roller Skating is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in Lincoln, Nebraska and the only dedicated roller skating museum in the world. We are committed to the preservation of the history of roller skating. With over 50 display cases, the museum educates the public on all aspects of roller skating, which dates back to the first patented skate from 1819.

Curator's Corner

Skate Donation



There seems to be new and different skates appearing in the marketplace every year. Our museum continues to add these new variables to our collection. Each idea has a different take on the classic roller skate design and pushes the envelope to try and create a demand for their new product.

Our newest acquisition is a pair of Freeline skates. Donated by our museum director, the skates provide another look into the roller skating industry and how it expands into new markets. Advertised as an outdoor product for extreme skating, Freeline enters the conversation as an alternative choice.

These Freeline skates are made with single-piece construction from aluminum to provide maximum durability. Ridden like a snowboard or skateboard, the reinforced swing-arms and ABEC 5 bearings of these skates are able to hold up to 3,000 pounds of downward force. Construction details include grind plates, stamped and bent steel trucks, and 70mm wheels.

Donation

Richard Hawkins recently donated a pair of roller skating prints previously made available through the national office. Each hand printed serigraph sold for \$11.95 each with frame in 1978.



New and Renewing Members

Cynthia Gates
Jose Bordas

Featured Story

Chicago Roller Skating Company: By Robert Ware Jr



This is the plant that manufactures and stands behind the "Chicago" Roller Skate. The following pictures and letters explain why "Chicago" skates are the most popular and the best. "There is a Reason."

The following is a 1985 interview with Robert Ware Jr of the Chicago Skate Company as reported by the museum newsletter in the fall of 1985.

In 1905 my uncles Ralph and Walter Ware were young men working with their father, Elisha Ware, in his real estate business in Chicago. At the turn of the century, there was a big boom in roller skating so the Ware Brothers invested in a small firm called Chicago Roller Skate Company. Unfortunately they discovered the company was not producing any skates. However, they were convinced skate manufacturing could be a profitable business. So they invested more money, gained control of the company, and produced a three-wheel skate which they tried to sell to the local roller rinks. One of the top rink men so disliked the skate he threw it at Walter, who dodged and fled.

The next day Walter designed a new four-wheel skate, and made wood patterns of it. He slipped a few dollars to a local foundry foreman who put them in sand and poured metal castings during his lunch break. From these parts, sample skates were produced, nickel-plated and finished. This gave the Ware Brothers a very competitive skate to offer to the rink operators.

In 1909 Elisha Ware asked my father, Robert Ware Sr., to join his brothers at the firm. Dad's experience with several companies, including his current job in Idaho, in marketing and shipping would be helpful to the company. So my father joined Chicago Roller Skate Company.

Business expanded as the rink business grew. They started in a loft on Canal Street, then moved to a small factory on the site of the present Northwestern Railroad Station. In 1918 they moved into a brick building they built at Fulton and Ada Streets. It was at this location I first visited "the factory."

World War I was going on and the firm had to contract to make propeller bolts for the War Department. My father was in charge of seeing that the bolts were properly

case-hardened and finished. He often bragged they never had a single reject. As the war ended, skates again became the main product.

Fibre wheels (made from reprocessed newspapers) were introduced and to some extent replaced the more expensive maple and boxwood, and the dirtier steel and aluminum wheels. The fibre wheel was long wearing, inexpensive, and left skating rink floors clean.

In 1919-20, a modern one-story factory was built at the present location of Lake Street. I can remember, as a kid it was a great place to play, hooking up huge packing crate lids with the overhead trolleys which connected the different departments. I had great fun with my own thrill ride during non-working hours. Also I liked to play with the giant tubs of ball bearings, and played hide and seek around the huge cartons of roller skates.

In the late 1920s, along with the rest of the country the Ware Brothers faced hard times. When the big depression struck a portion of the building was boarded up, and the firm trimmed its sails and rode out the storm. Chicago Roller Skate Company never closed its doors and never missed a payroll. When the Ware Brothers couldn't get financing from the bank, they issued their own gold bonds. Their reputation was so good they readily sold them.

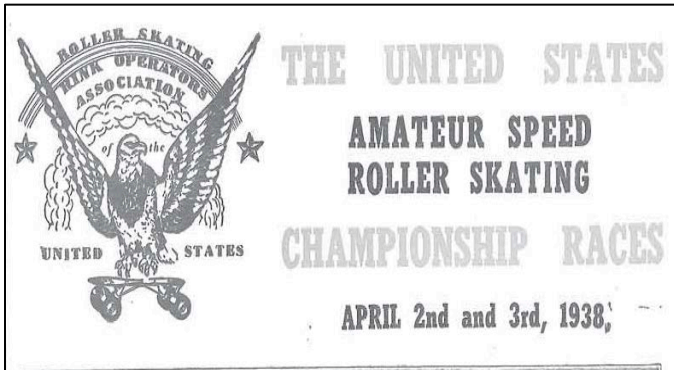
The three brothers organized the company so each had a distinct responsibility. Ralph, the oldest, was in charge of finances and the rink business. Uncle Walter took care of the production of machined parts. My dad, Robert, supervised finishing operations such as plating, heat treat, and final assembly. They worked as a team and the company prospered as roller skating boomed again in the Thirties.

I can remember my uncle Ralph returned from Detroit in 1937 and telling how he and a few rink men (Fred Martin, Vic Brown, Fred Freeman, etc.) formed a roller skating association. Little did I imagine this was the beginning of a large, influential, international organization.

In 1939 the firm again ran out of room, so a three-story building was built adjacent to the original factory. During World War II the firm had 450 employees working on defense contracts. The only skates made were for the Armed Forces, included those for sailors' recreational use on aircraft carriers. At the end of the war, business was better than ever, roller rinks were built at a breakneck pace, and the company improved its products.

Looking back over the years, the changes in the industry and in roller skates themselves have been amazing. Roller skating has been a most rewarding business, and I'm sure that it will grow and prosper for years to come. Chicago Roller Skate Company will continue to play a major role in the industry for many years to come.

Track Rules during the Speed Races of the 1938 National Championships



- 1) Starter will fire gun on start and may recall skaters by again firing gun before they have rounded first corner.
- 2) Gun will again be fired at "one lap to go" and once more at the finish. In case distance to be skated is more than one mile, gun will be fired at conclusion of each mile.
- 3) False starts will be penalized as follows: first, one yard penalty; second, three yard additional penalty; third, disqualification.
- 4) Unnecessary roughness or unsportsmanlike skating will result in disqualification.
- 5) Right of Way: in open competition on the track, skaters may pass competitors on either side except within the "foul area".
- 6) Foul Area: the distance on track at each corner which is marked clearly with a white line and is further indicated at its beginning by a red flag and its end by a checkered flag.
- 7) Penalty of failing to fall back to original position (before attempting to pass) when you reach the boundary of the foul area and find that you cannot pass the skater who is your objective, will be disqualified in said race.
- 8) Point System: applied to championship of meet. Points are awarded only for position in final events, first, 30 points; second, 20 points; third 10 points.
- 9) Track Size: 12 laps to the mile; 1 lap 440 feet.

Approved by: Clifford Storcks, track engineer, Michigan Skating Association.

Rink Sticker Collection

The museum has an extensive collection of roller skating rink stickers. Many skating rinks used to produce stickers as both an advertisement and fun way to for skaters to interact with one another, comparing the different location in which they skated. These were even traded as collectibles both informally and formally, under the Universal Roller Skating Sticker Exchange founded in 1948. Each newsletter, we will feature different rink stickers. Here are a few examples of the numerous stickers in the collection and on display at the National Museum of Roller Skating.



Thanks for supporting the museum!

