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Historical Roller Skating **OVERVIEW**

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The American Roller Rink Comes to Cardiff

Beginning in 1907, a roller skating craze swept the United Kingdom following the arrival of C. P. Crawford, an agent for the Samuel Winslow Company of Worcester, Massachusetts, the largest skate manufacturer in the United States. Within two years, the American Roller Rink Company had opened 25 rinks in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Local investors, who joined in raising the sum of 10,000 pounds for each rink, reportedly saw quick profits. After this initial success, the company expanded into major cities on the Continent.

A scrapbook of clippings from local newspapers chronicles part of this story. How and why this volume was compiled is not known. It was presented to the museum by Armand Champa of Louisville, Kentucky, who acquired it from a rare book dealer.

The following excerpts from papers in South Wales suggest the contemporary enthusiasm.

From the *Western Mail*, January 2, 1909:

Arrangements have been practically completed between the Bute Estate and an American syndicate for the lease of a considerable portion of ground at the back of the Cardiff Football Club grandstand on the Cardiff Arms Park for the purposes of a skating rink on a very large scale. It is no secret that it is proposed to put up a building which will cost several thousand pounds, and in this way to provide a recreation which is practically unknown in South Wales.

There is no doubt that this new enterprise in Cardiff is being promoted by Mr. C. P. Crawford, who came over from America in 1907, and has opened a considerable number of public skating rinks. He formed fourteen rinks in a year, including those in Dublin and Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, and other big towns. Now he has started the Olympia Rink Company [in London], with the biggest floor ever laid down—over 100,000 square feet, of American maple, all fitted together inside one week, and now crowded every day. In Worcester, Massachusetts, is a firm which possesses a very popular skate, and that is the impetus behind the new craze. Every new rink is so much grist to this firm's mill.

Mr. Crawford saw the chance of a great unexploited field in Great Britain, promptly made arrangements with the skate company, and arrived to set the ball rolling here. How quickly it has been gathering moss can be guessed from the fact that some of the companies he has

started have paid a return of 40 per cent on the capital in six or eight weeks.

From the *Western Mail*, December 2, 1909:

The American roller skating rink was on Wednesday afternoon given over to the Cardiff Lifeboat Saturday Fund Committee for the purpose of holding a gala on skates for the benefit of the fund. There was a large and fashionable attendance when the Lord Mayor of Cardiff accompanied by the Lady Mayoress arrived. During the afternoon sports were held, including egg and spoon races for ladies and a ladies balloon race. The Lord Mayor presented the prizes to the successful ladies.

(Continued)



Cover of a dance card printed for use in all of the American Roller Rinks. (Gift of Armand Champa)

(Continued)

From the *South Wales Daily News*, January 5, 1910:

Roller skating at the American Rink in Westgate-street, Cardiff, pursues its even course, and is a source of much innocent and healthful enjoyment to the large number of persons of all ages and both sexes who throng the rink at each of the three sessions held daily. The conquest of roller skating, like the conquest of the air, is to be obtained only after practice and perseverance. Novices are quickly put through their "paces" by an expert band of instructors, and are soon able to skate without any assistance. A fancy dress and masked skating carnival will be held shortly, when all the participants will appear in burlesque, topical, historical, or mythical costumes.

From the *South Wales Daily News*, February 1, 1910:

Many pastimes come and go, but only a few remain in popular favour. The enduring recreative pursuits are those which come up to the standard of what the public regard as both pleasurable and healthful. Occupying a pre-eminent position in the world of sports, roller skating has taken such a hold upon the affections of the people as was never dreamed of a few years ago, when it was introduced into this country by Mr. C. P. Crawford, who, along with his partner, Mr. F. A. Wilkins, is the managing director of numerous rinks in many of the principal cities and towns. This venture was at first looked upon with a certain amount of apprehension, not to say scepticism (sic), on the part of those who remembered the short life which roller skating had many years since when our forebearers had to be content with rinking on concrete floors, with skates of a very clumsy description, a strange contrast to conditions at the American Roller Skating Rink in Cardiff.

From the *Western Mail*, February 3, 1910:

Tastefully decorated with bunting and fairy lights, and with some five hundred skaters in fancy costumes gracefully gliding along in rhythm to the strains of a military band, the American Roller Rink presented a most picturesque and animated appearance on Wednesday evening, the occasion being the second masked carnival of the season. "Robinson Crusoe" would flash past arm-in-arm with a dainty lady whose dress blazoned forth the merits of "Tariff Reform"; the "Duchess of Devonshire," made famous by Gainsborough, would glide by with a cavalier of the olden times; while there was a splendid impersonation of an Indian squaw, whose skating was the admiration of 2,000 spectators. A little lady as the "Evening Express" was much admired for her dainty costume. With such a variety of colour and ideas, it was no easy task that the committee of judges had, when it came to awarding but eight prizes. The awards were made as follows:

Ladies — Most handsome costume: Miss Davies, Llandaff (Lady Hussar). Most original: Miss Allen, Cardiff (Indian Squaw). Most burlesque: Miss Goodman, Cardiff ("Carriage-paid Parcel").

Gentlemen — Most handsome costume: Mr. Carter, Swansea (Lieutenant, Hussars). Most original: Mr. H. Govier, Penarth ("Wooden Doll"). Most burlesque: Messrs. Worms and Pinhero (Horse).

Children — Miss H. M'Kee (Norwegian Peasant Girl) and Master H. Finsberg (Little Dutch Boy).

Curator's Corner Roller Skating on 5th Avenue— and Elsewhere

The museum's appearance in a new book has placed it before the public in a number of new arenas. This museum is the featured institution from Nebraska, and as such rates three full pages with three illustrations in the new book *America on Display: A Guide to Unusual Museums and Collections in the United States and Canada* by Joyce Jurnovoy and David Jenness, published by Facts on File, Inc. The book is a detailed collector's and traveler's guide to 225 museums that were selected on the basis of their uniqueness and their ability to represent a typical facet of America. It features collections devoted to potatoes, trolley cars, bowling, Tupperware, fresh-water fishing, Hoover vacuum cleaners, presidential papers, cranberrys, dolls, tattoos, neon art, nuts, and more. Arranged alphabetically by city and state or province within each of five geographical regions, the entries describe the collections and give addresses and telephone numbers, days and hours of opening, admission fees, and information on handicap access.

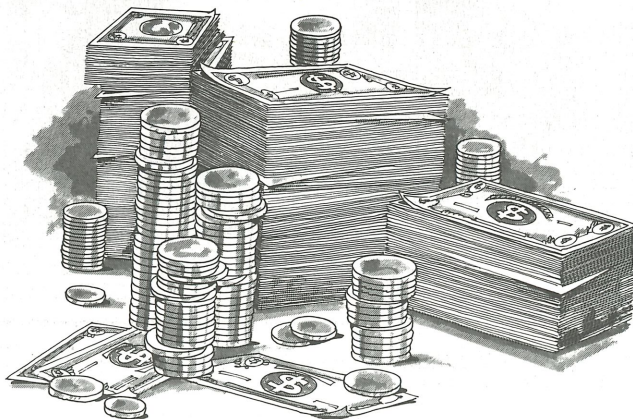
The authors have used us and our collections in a number of promotional activities for the book. As reported in the last newsletter, we were one of four repositories with a photo among seven written up in the July 14, 1987, issue of *The Star*. At the request of Jurnovoy and Jenness, we loaned them an 1880s Vineyard skate, and a 1970s three-wheel skate, as well as some duplicate copies of old publications. The Vineyard skate appeared briefly on one of two segments in which the authors appeared on the *Today* show in October. During November the three-wheel skate and the publications have been on display in the window of B. Dalton's on 5th Avenue in New York City as part of a month-long promotion of the *Guide* by that national chain of bookstores.

The price for the hardcover book is \$24.95. It should be available through any bookstore, or directly from the publisher at 460 Park Avenue South, New York 10016.

1988 Raffle

Members and others have a chance to take a chance on winning cash prizes as they help the museum. Tickets are now available for the 1988 raffle. Get all of the details from the flyer enclosed with this newsletter.

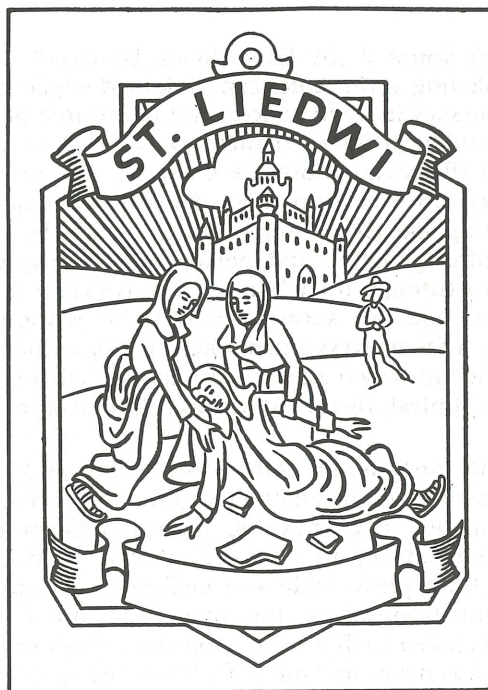
The search for new and different sources of funding is a constant for all cultural organizations. This museum is no exception. Now in its third year, the raffle has shown itself to be a popular means of raising significant funds to support basic operations. Your participation is needed.



Lidwina—Patron Saint of Skaters

When roller skaters need a bit of extra help, they can call upon St. Lidwina, the Patron Saint of all skaters. Born at Schiedam, Holland, on April 18, 1380, of poor but honorable parents, the young girl enjoyed skating as a favorite pastime. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1911), "during the winter of 1395, Lidwina went skating with her friends, one of whom caused her to fall upon some ice with such violence that she broke a rib in her right side. This was the beginning of her martyrdom. No medical skill availed to cure her.... For years she lay in pain which seemed to increase constantly.... God rewarded her with a wonderful gift of prayer and also with visions. Numerous miracles took place at her bedside."

After her death in 1433, the skaters of Schiedam continued to pray to her, and her fame spread throughout Holland and beyond. In 1616 Lidwina was beatified, the first step toward sainthood. In 1890 Pope Leo XIII declared her a Saint of the Church; April 14, the day of her death, was designated as her Feast. Half a century later, Art Goodfellow of New York, a publisher of roller and ice skating guides, re-discovered Lidwina. He had a medal designed in her honor and promoted the celebration of her Feast Day in churches located throughout the country.



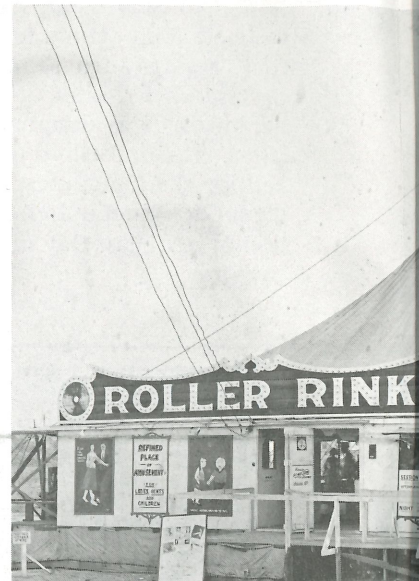
Design for St. Lidwina's medal, which was struck in sterling silver in the mid-1950s. The museum has no example of this medal and would be happy to add one to the collections. (Skating News, Championships Issue, 1957, p. 8)



"St. Lidwina" from a woodcut in S. Baring-Gould, Lives of the Saints. (National Roller Skating Guide, 1957, p. 74)

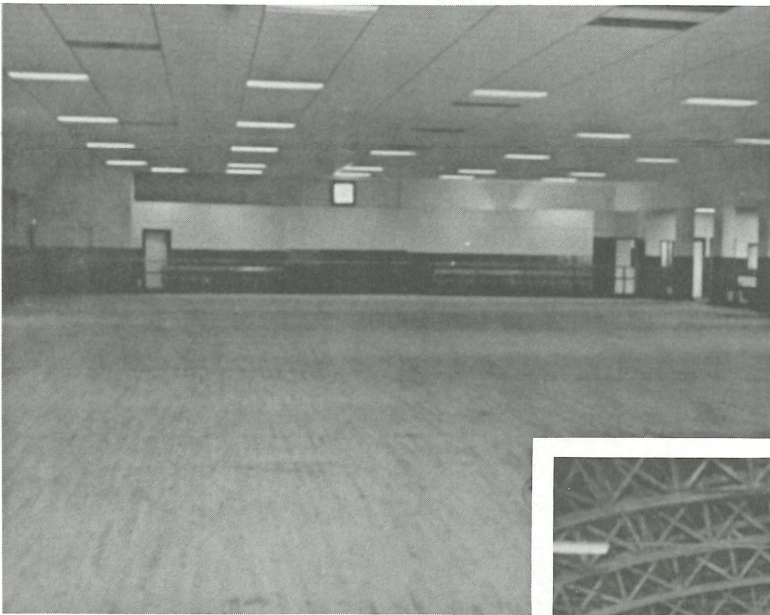


Constructed of wood, this 1880s rink in Washington, D. C. has few lights and windows located high above the floor. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

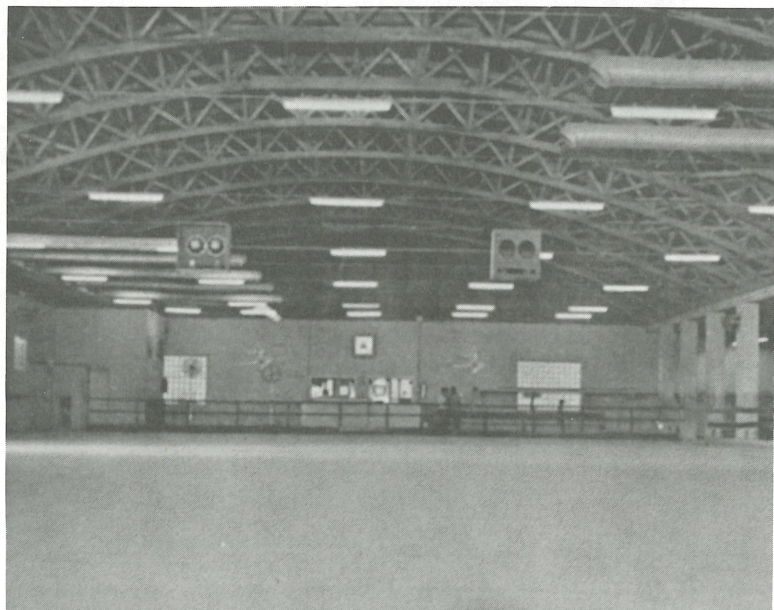


Lowe's Rink, Wichita, Kan., 1924. Portable large canvas tents, were in use throughout this century. (Gift of C. W. Lowe, Jr.)

Rinks Through The Years



The Skate-A-Dium in Adrian, Mich., before and after remodeling in 1971. Beginning in the 1950s, the old-time rink image of four bare walls, exposed roof supports, and pipe railings was gradually replaced with a touch of glamor that included carpeting, dropped ceilings and lights, and paneling. (Contact!, January 15, 1972)



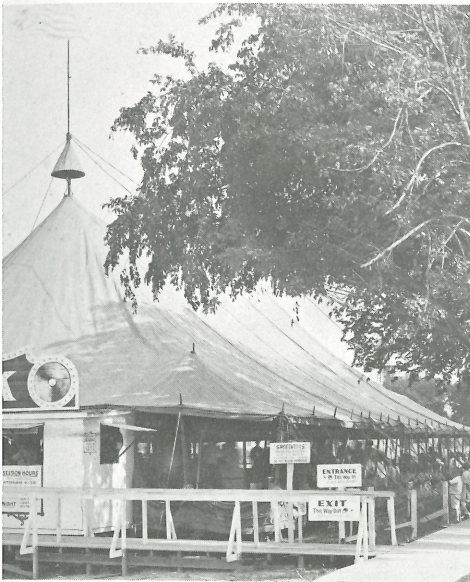
Assembling the floor W. Lowe, Jr.)



This striking photograph of the Dreamland Park Rink, Newark, N.J., about 1933, shows a sophisticated relationship among the horizontal lines of the railings, border design of skaters' silhouettes, and roof beams, which are linked by the vertical supporting columns to ring the floor with rectangles of regular proportions. (Gift of George H. Pickard)



An outdoor rink, Paradies auf dem Main, in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, 1938. (Gift of Elsbeth Muller).



Temporary rinks, consisting of wooden floors covered with canvas, were common at the Midwest and the South during the middle of the 20th century.



An outdoor rink in Shanghai, People's Republic of China, 1984. (Gift of George H. Pickard)



Floor for skating at the Convention Hall, Kansas City, Mo., 1925. (Gift of C. ...)



Barrel vaulting and skylight windows for ventilation characterize this unidentified arena in San Francisco, Calif., 1907. (Gift of Ernie St. Germain)

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*This rink in Kirksville, Mo., shown in 1917, can be compared with others pictured in this issue to reveal changes in rinks through the years.
(Gift of C. W. Lowe, Jr.)*



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