

Historical Roller Skating Overview

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ROLLER SKATING
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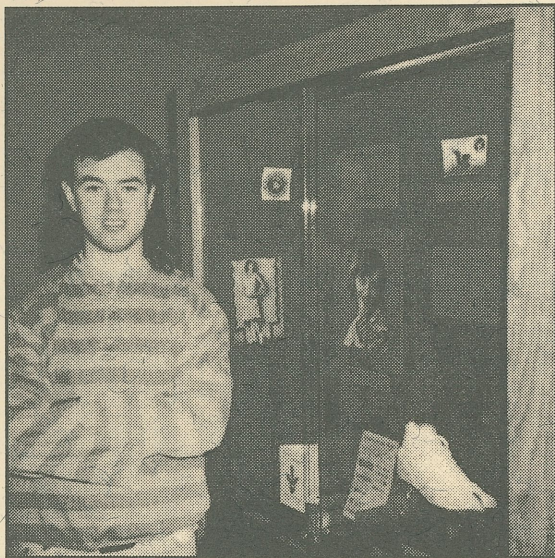
**Lon Little, standing in front of the entrance to the
Lowe's roller skating rink in Waco, Texas, 1924.**

Gift of C. W. Lowe, Jr. (83.101.54)

Curator's Column

Dear Member,

I would like to introduce Jim McGowan to the members of the museum because he was the museum's intern from last semester. Jim cataloged photographs, helped preserve the collection, and recently finished the Inez Van Horn exhibit. He is currently studying history at the University of Nebraska and plans to graduate in May. Jim is featured in front of the exhibit case he designed.



The 1997 annual museum raffle is here! This fund raising event for the museum guarantees the museum operating expenses for the upcoming year and gives you an opportunity to win too! To purchase your raffle ticket, please turn to page 7.

After searching the museum's collection over the past year as curator, I have noticed that the collection is lacking in certain areas. On page 7 is a wish list for the museum's collection. If you have any other artifacts that you wish to donate besides the items listed, please contact me to discuss matters further.

The Museum Store is now on the internet and America OnLine. There are pictures of all the items available online. If you don't have access to either one of these, check the Museum Store insert for all the items available for sale.

In the upcoming *INLINE Buyer's Guide for 1997* (available in February), ten photographs from the museum's collection will be featured. This magazine has

an annual publication base of approximately 80,000 readers, giving the museum extra publicity and exposure.

The feature article in this month's newsletter is about the Lowe family operation of portable roller skating rinks. The museum received a wonderful donation of scrapbooks from C. W. Lowe, Jr. describing the many adventures his family experienced while promoting roller skating across the United States. The scrapbooks also have some great photographs which are shown on the following pages. The Lowe family certainly helped the promotion of roller skating in this century.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter. Thanks again for your support!

Michael Zaidman
Director & Curator

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Historical Roller Skating Overview is published bimonthly for members of the National Museum of Roller Skating. It is available only through honorary membership in the museum. Minimum annual contribution is \$25.00. Send correspondence to: Museum Director, 4730 South Street, P.O. Box 6579, Lincoln, NE 68506

The Lowe Family Operation

From the early 1910s to the late 1920s, C. M. Lowe and his family ran the family business of portable roller skating rinks. Mr. Lowe, as the sole owner of the rink, personally looked after the main floor while Mrs. Lowe attended to the sale of tickets, his son managed the door, and his nephew was in charge of the skate room. The family also had the help of ten uniformed skate attendants at all times to make sure the patrons had a pleasant evening whether spent as skater or spectator. These uniformed employees worked as traffic men and instructors to help the more timid or more venturesome.

The Lowes earned a distinguished reputation by operating a very respectable roller rink. As one Nebraska City, NE, patron stated, "credit is due to Mr. Lowe for his firmness in dealing with any roughness of boisterous conduct that has made the rink a place where the most refined could go with perfect safety. The ladies of the city have been largely in attendance at the rink because the policy of Mr. Lowe in conducting the rink has given them the great pleasure to attend." By promoting proper dress (no denims or overalls permitted), skaters tended to behave more politely, and boisterous conduct was rare. Mr. Lowe promoted the rink as a clean, healthful, and invigorating exercise. He quickly "weeded out" any undesirables as they were told they were not welcome. Not long after the rink opened, the elite of the city were found enjoying the evening on skates.

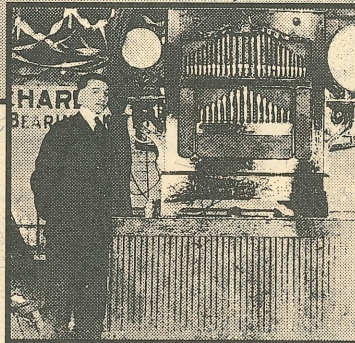
Lowe was against settling in one city because he thought roller skating had a short life profitably, and a rink must do a tremendous amount of business to maintain a staff of competent people. Lowe believed the reason for many failures in stationary rinks was because managers invested in three or four months to make a profit and then the decline of patronage the rest of the year would result in closure of the rink. The advantage of a traveling rink was that it always provided patrons with something

new to do.

Lowe believed the reason for the low patronage at stationary rinks might be blamed on James L. Plimpton, the inventor of the modern roller skate, because when Plimpton opened his rink in 1866, skates were leased instead of sold. Plimpton thought skate repair was so complicated that if the skates were in the hands of any others besides experienced mechanics, roller skating would lose its popularity. Lowe thought this was largely the fault of roller skating's popularity now in some

communities because the idea of fixing skates seemed so difficult. It was not until 1902 that the Richardson Skate Company invented a ball bearing skate suitable for rink use, finally inventing a low-maintenance roller skate.

Top: Lowe's grand opening in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1927. 83.101.69
Lower: Lowe's employee next to the Wurlitzer organ. 83.101.119



The Rink

The Lowe operation traveled from town to town putting up the portable tent system. They usually stayed in most towns for about four months. The 60' x 120' square foot maple skating surface could accommodate almost 500 skaters, and depending where the rink was placed, 300 spectators. The floor design and construction are all patents of Mr. Lowe. It was the only portable floor in existence having the mitered ends and banked track, thereby giving the patrons a smooth, even surface at all times. In the colder travel months, a heavy three-ply canvas covered the entire rink, and stoves were provided to warm those who rested between their trips to the floor. The rink was also well lighted with a large electric sign displaying "Lowe's Skating Rink." A large electric duplex Wurlitzer band organ played tunes for the skaters to coast, skip, circle, and waltz the floor. The Lowes used approximately 400 Richardson fibre skates in assorted sizes and designs to fit any style shoe.



Floor staff of Lowe's Rink, Lincoln, Nebraska. 83.101.72

The Lowes worked in Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and throughout the Southern states, choosing to set up in smaller towns which they thought were less expensive than larger cities.

Entertainers

At the rink, Mr. Lowe brought in fancy skaters to entertain the other skaters and spectators. An exhibition usually occurred on Saturday

evenings. Acrobatic skaters, such as The Skating Macks, exhibited trick and fancy skating. LaRue Mack would please the large crowds by performing her swivel neck twist while Mr. Mack, champion long distance roller skating jumper, hurdled 12 chairs one time in Kirksville, MO, after concluding a thrilling dash down an inclined section of an iron gas two-inch pipe (photo above right). Other exhibition skaters included The Vernons in 1927 and The Whirlers in 1928.

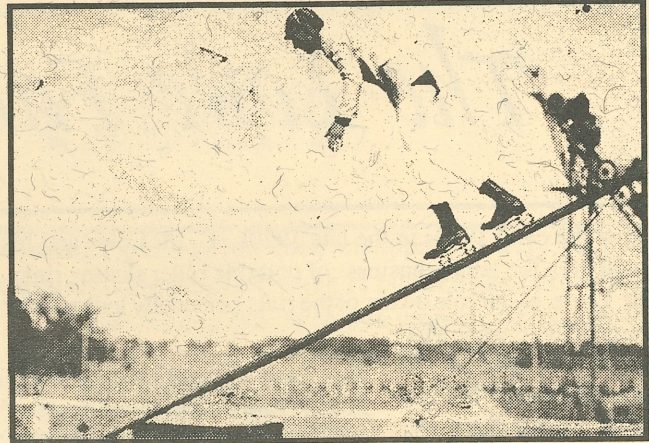
In Sabetha, Kansas, the attractive Miss Adelaide D'Vorak (lower, right photo [83.101.104]), made a special visit on behalf of Mr.



The Four Skating Macks vaudeville circa 1925-30. 83.101.116

Lowe's request to showcase some of her talents. During each performance, all ladies were admitted free to see her exhibition of fancy skating. Miss D'Vorak was known for her performance in front of Queen Mary in England.

Not only did Mr. Lowe bring in fancy skaters but also the best speed skating champions. Roland Cioni, speed champion, appeared several times racing against C. W. Lowe in Nevada, MO. Other notable



speed skaters included Stuart Hellman, "Cap" Sefferino of Cincinnati, Al Nebes of Boston, Billy Griffith of Beaumont, TX, and Malcolm Carey of Reading, PA.

C. W. Lowe (photo, page 5 middle [83.77.4]) not only raced other speed skaters, but he also raced A. H. "Monk" Robertson on his Harley Davidson motorcycle in the half mile race. Robertson won the race at the fast time of 1:43 by a distance of five feet. The race was close until the sixth of the eight laps when Lowe weakened, and Robertson jumped to a speed of 43 miles per hour putting twenty feet between himself and Lowe which proved to be too much.

In Greenville, South Carolina, in 1930, a record skating marathon for young boys occurred. Each boy was fed by the different cafes in town that were willing to promote the endurance test. The winning time of 104 hours and 25 minutes was won by an exhausted Fred Mathis who finally fell after tripping over some paraphernalia on the track.

On other Saturday nights, there often was a Midnight skate with Japanese lanterns which gave the desired effect of a Masquerade party when only masked skaters would be allowed to skate. Mr. Lowe was an entertainer, and he awarded prize money for the best costume at each Masquerade party in each town.

In Winfield, Missouri, around 1923, roller basketball games were played occasionally in Lowe's rink. Backstops were placed upon the tent poles, and real basketball games were played with a few necessary variations of the rules. The advancing rule was amended from three steps to ten feet on skates, and the outside line was extended to the bars of the court. A number of teams were organized and a tournament was staged. It was stated, "the sport is equalized by the fact that while some players can shoot baskets well they cannot skate so easily and



some who are not such basketball sharks can skate rings around their opponents."

Not only was roller basketball played, but roller tennis was tried in Miami Beach, FL in 1928. In Ponca City, Oklahoma, and Waco, Texas, roller polo was the new game that received all the raves. Once in Texas, Mr. Lowe convinced Big Sam Coates, an All-Conference football star to try another sport. Coates led a college team from Baylor University to a roller polo championship at Lowe's rink. Women also got into the spirit of playing roller polo with the curved polo sticks. While at Baylor, roller skating became so popular that if a woman skated, it counted toward receiving a sports letter from the school.

News Critics

As the family business traveled from town to town, there were many skeptics in the news world who did not think roller skating would last. One writer from Pittsburg, Kansas, tried the new sport. He reported, "the skaters would glide over the hardwood floor mostly alone, and only a few fortunate ones had partners. Conversation in the rink is tough since the sound of the skates are loud and the musical tones from the Wurlitzer roars. However, the important thing to remember is to circle the center poles without running into mishap or over a fallen skater or even more without knocking your own rollers from underneath you."

Another newsman wrote about "the kids from Hiawatha, Kansas who are so crazy over the rollers that they drive, motor, or even walk to the Lowe Skating tent to participate in such party theme ideas as the Hobo Skate, Tacky Party or Country Jinx. There hasn't been this much fun scheduled on Sundays in Sabetha in months." The writer continued to tell the importance of this rink, "a skating rink where the young folks can get together in a wholesome good time is worthwhile. It will keep the young folks at home, promote matrimonial alliances and make the outside world less alluring. The skating rink, now carefully managed and properly chaperoned, is at last giving Sabetha young folks something beside the dangerous hammock on which to expend their youthful, gay spirits."

Conclusion

The Lowes traveled from city to city and always pleased the audience with charity and showmanship. One day while in Hamilton, Missouri, the Lowes announced that they would gladly admit free of charge any child in town who parents could not afford to send them.

While touring the states, Mr. Lowe noticed that the sport of roller skating needed an organization to help the sport of roller

skating. While on tour, Mr. Lowe and Glenn L. Mack, general manager of the Mack Amusement Company, from Eugene, Oregon, urged for the betterment of roller skating. They both wanted to see an organization of rink managers and an annual convention of delegates from each state succeed in the rinking business.

The importance of roller skating continues today, by the fact that it has assumed such proportions as to require organizations of skaters and managers, the exclusive purpose of which is to control and promote this one sport in an intelligent, proficient, and business-like manner.

The Lowe family created a portable rink operation that has changed the face of roller skating with the teachings of many different roller sports across the country. For example, we can trace the beginnings of roller hockey to Lowe rinks in Texas, which perhaps explains why Texas teams have won the hardball roller hockey championships 22 times in the last 35 years.

Not only has the sport industry benefited from the Lowe family business, but today, portable rinks are making a comeback. The portable rink systems of today are different: there is no tent, the skating surface is already paved and there certainly aren't many Wurlitzer organs playing, but the idea of the portable rink system isn't new.

This is yet another story demonstrating how exhilarating the sport of roller skating is and how it has been greatly enjoyed by many people including the Lowe Family.



SCULPTURE DONORS

The following donors have helped support the museum with funds toward the purchase of a sculpture made by Prince Monyo-Mihailescu-Nasturel entitled, To The Skating Rink.

Gordon "Budd" & Maurice Van Roekel \$3000

Charles & Connie Wahlig \$2000

Dot & Jim Steigner \$2000

Bert Anselmi \$2000

Leita Couey \$200

Marvin Facher \$200

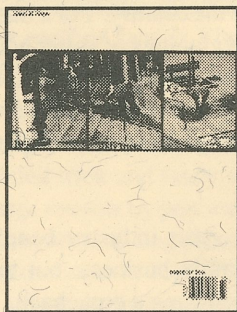
Dorothy McDonald \$100

Please help the museum with additional funding. For your contribution, the museum will place your name on a plaque next to the sculpture. Mail your tax-deductible donation to the museum.

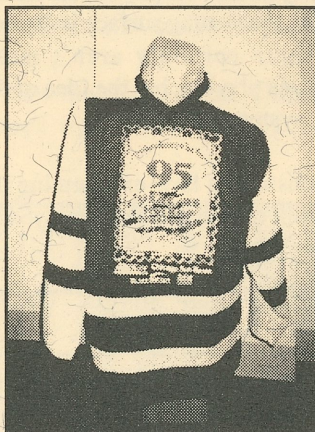


Donations

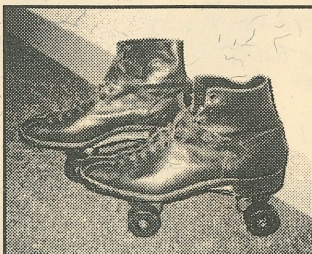
The remaining donors for 1996 are listed below. Thank you for helping the museum strengthen the collection. Pictured below are several of the items the museum has received. Other donors include: Bob Campbell, Scarlett Ford (MDA), Ike Hoig, Frank & Sophie Magrino, John J. Milazzo, Sondra Wendell (USAC), Rainbow Roller Rink (IL), Diane Maybury, George Pickard (USAC), Margot Hager, Bob Bollinger, Nadine Pokorny-Meis, Fantasy Skate (FL), Chester Fried, Personal Edge Fitness, Richard Koenig, Phillip & Terri Doblosky, Julie Kellman, Montie Malone, Marilyn Turner, and Marvin & Irma Hoffman.



Amy Jepson from *INLINE Magazine*, donated a copy of *Sixty Tricks*, a special issue of the magazine on aggressive skating.



Jay Sorensen from USA Roller Skating donated this hockey jersey from the 1995 championships in Chicago.



Phillip Oliver donated this pair of Chicago Roller Skates with brown leather boots.

Members

The National Museum of Roller Skating would like to thank these members who have recently contributed to the ongoing success of the museum through their continued support.

- Associate Patrons:** Robert Labriola & Joan Labriola Thorn
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CONTRIBUTIONS

A contribution has been made by Ann Davis and Robert Swords in memory of:
Tony Patera, Satsuma, Alabama

Bert Anselmi donated many photographs and stickers from Janet & Jack Tilli's scrapbook including this one from the Arena Gardens Skating show in 1945.



Raffle

The 1997 Museum Raffle is here! Help the museum by purchasing a tax-deductible \$50 donation to the museum. This raffle provides vital unrestricted operating support to the museum. It ensures the fiscal vitality of the National Museum of Roller Skating, thereby increasing roller skating's visibility, legitimacy, and recognition for the benefit of all involved in the roller skating industry and roller sports.

Tickets are sold for \$50 each and \$10,000 in cash prizes will be given out. 15 winners of \$100 each (\$1500); 4 winners of \$250 each (\$1000); 3 winners of \$500 each (\$1500); 1 winner of \$1000; and 1 Grand Prize winner of \$5000. The drawing will take place on May 14, 1997, at the RSA convention in Las Vegas. **Ticket holders need not be present to win. Buy a ticket today!!!**

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ROLLER SKATING 1997 Raffle Ticket



Purchaser _____

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Mail in this copy/photocopy along with \$50 (check or VISA/MC with card # and exp. date) to:
Museum, P. O. Box 6579, Lincoln, NE 68506.

Tax deductible up to the amount permitted by law.

Wish List

After searching the museum's archives, the museum is lacking in some areas of the collection. To improve the museum's collection, the following are wishes:



- Speed skating photographs, from 1960 to current
- Champion speed skating and artistic skating outfits
- Artistic skating photographs, circa 1960s to 1980s
- Aggressive skating photographs, circa 1970s-current
- Interior and exterior photographs of roller skating rinks
- Roller Disco photographs
- Lovell roller skates
- Information regarding the Interstate Amateur Roller Skating League of America

If you have any of these items, please mail them to the museum with as much information as possible about each, such as: where, when, who, what and be sure to include your name and address. Or if you have other artifacts that you are interested in donating, please contact the director.

Membership

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New Renew

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- Associate Patron \$100
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Thank you for joining!

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Questions, or to order by phone, call **(402) 483-7551**.

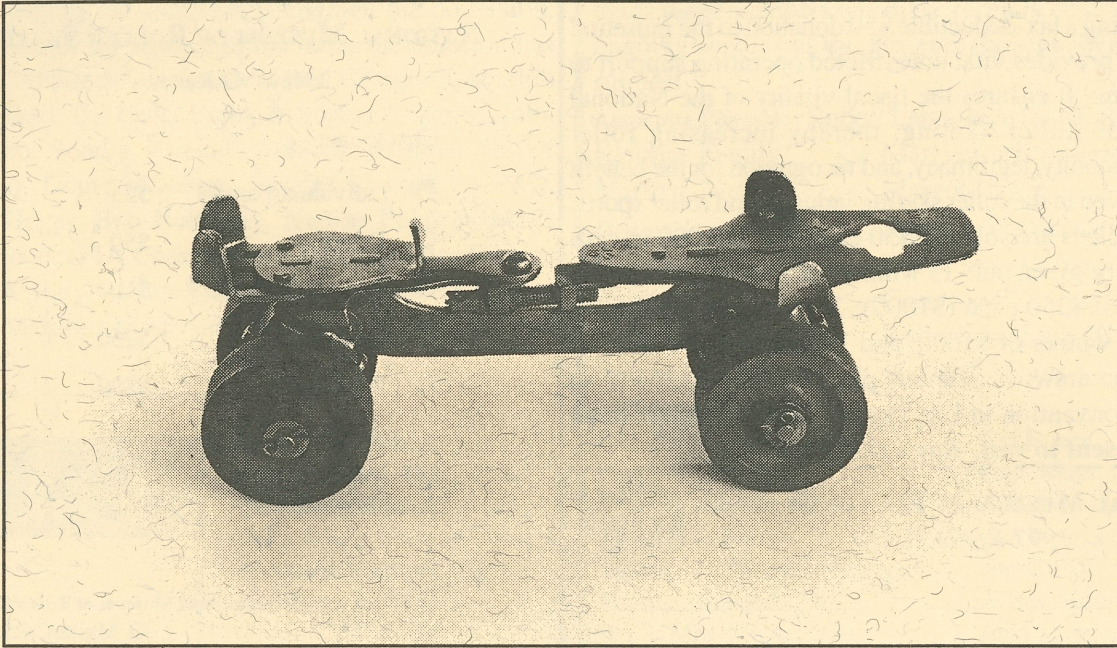
Benefits extend one year from join date. Allow 2 weeks for processing.

Membership includes a subscription to the museum's newsletter, *Historical Roller Skating OVERVIEW*, 10% off in the Museum Store, and a museum membership card.

Another Museum Artifact

Peck & Snyder's "American Club" roller skate. First patented in 1868, this model was reissued in 1878. The heel and toe clamps adjust by a single screw located on the quick release lever. Notice the unique four leaf clover at the front of the plate!

On Loan from Chester Fried



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here and return to address above.

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