



Historical Roller Skating

OVERVIEW

Issue No. 23

September 1987

Anne Diffendal,
Museum Curator and Director

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The newsletter of the National Museum of Roller Skating is available only through membership in the museum. Minimum annual contribution is \$15. The newsletter is published 4 times a year to inform the museum's honorary members of happenings at the museum and about aspects of roller history. Although the museum cannot pay for articles, contributions by the readers are welcome. All articles, inquiries or comments should be sent to the Museum Curator.

Curator's Corner

Mid-summer is an exciting, though very hectic, time to have begun as the museum's new director and curator. Both the North Central Regional and the National Artistic and Indoor Speed Championships brought many people to Lincoln and to the museum. Others stopped by after seeing the museum mentioned in one of several national publications, described elsewhere in this newsletter.

I have met a variety of people involved in skating. Many of them are veterans: Hall of Fame members; officers, board members, or committee chairs for one of the associations; teachers; coaches; competitors; manufacturers and suppliers. It was fun to be able to match faces and personalities to names that appear in the museum's files. Many other visitors were new to the sport, to championship competition, to Lincoln, or to the museum.

One visitor remained longer than the others. For several days, Carlos Hernandez of Mexico did research in our book and serials collection as well as viewed videotapes. He has been here before and plans to come again as he works toward his goal of writing a history of roller skating in Spanish.

Among the many tales and reminiscences that were recounted to me, most poignant was one prompted by a lady's sight of a pair of Roll-King street skates. She remembered one winter during the hard times of the 1930s when her family was forced to choose between buying a Christmas tree or a gift for her, the youngest child. They gave her skates like the ones that she saw on exhibit.

With the support of the skating community in general and of the museum board and membership in particular, Mike Brooslin was able to amass an excellent collection and undertake a strong program. The many warm greetings and good wishes that I have received assure me that this support will continue and grow.

This is a time for me to listen and ask questions. I have no grand design to lay out for you now, only some notions to share in the upcoming year as the details become clearer. And to do that I need your help. Tell me what you would like to have the museum continue offering, initiate, or cease. What would you like to see in the newsletter?

The museum serves two rather different constituencies. It helps the skating community preserve and remember its own past, but it also tells the story of roller skating to non-skaters. I welcome your suggestions and your help in fulfilling both responsibilities.

Beginnings of the RSROA

During this, the 50th anniversary year of the founding of the Roller Skating Rink Operators Association (RSROA), it is appropriate to recall the story of its origins. The following article has been adapted from portions of two sources. One is a "History of the Roller Skating Rink Operators Association, 1937-1967," written by former Museum director Michael W. Brooslin in 1985. The other is a 1983 revision of his HISTORY OF ROLLER SKATING (1975) by Museum board member James Turner.

There had been many short-lived associations of roller rink operators before 1937, such as the roller hockey group organized by Bert Randall of Detroit in the early 1930s and Julian Fitzgerald's Western Skating Association, which focused on speed skating in the Great Lakes region. However, the Roller Skating Rink Operators Association was the first permanent organization with a truly national scope.

The skating rink image in the 1930s was very shady. Many tough underworld characters were reputed to hang out at rinks. When looking for a criminal, the police would scout the bars, bowling alleys, boxing gyms, pool halls, and roller rinks. Roller skating was not the upper-class, family sport that it had been before the Great Depression.

Fancy skating was done on Vaudeville stages and in table platform circus acts. Competitive skating was mostly restricted to speed or marathon endurance races. The other branches, artistic and rink hockey, were neither recognized nor organized as competitive disciplines. The roller skating business as a whole had also been neglected for many years.

At the first national speed championships at the Arena Garden Rink in Detroit, Michigan, in April 1937, 17 rink owners formed the RSROA to promote the roller skating business and the sport in America. After the final heat of the competition, the operators and managers present walked down Woodward Avenue to the Casa Loma restaurant for a late lunch. There they were the guests of Fred A. Martin, host manager for the meet, who wanted to gather the men together to discuss their common problems before they returned to their home cities. After dinner, they tried to resolve some of the more pressing problems they faced. They generally felt that a business as large as the roller skating industry needed a cooperative venture, an organization to promote roller skating, much as other groups of businesses had already done. One that would not only give the rink operators a chance to exchange ideas with their colleagues, but also provide for a national governing body to regulate and protect skating competitions, placing the amateur skater on an even basis with other athletes.

All those present agreed to the formation of such an organization, and Victor J. Brown from New Jersey was elected as the first president. Martin, a former world speed champion, was named secretary-treasurer. The group set up a treasury from their own pockets to cover immediate necessities. Each of the 17 men present contributed one dollar. Martin then took the meager funds back to his office at the Arena Gardens and began to work. A single drawer in Martin's desk represented the first RSROA national office.

On October 28, 1937, the association was incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of Michigan. Martin and others continued to solicit interested people, and the officers and committees began the work of framing a constitution. Slowly the organization grew, and by Thanksgiving of 1937 the membership had reached nearly 100 operators, a corresponding number of clubs, and a scattering of managers.

During the first year, three tasks were accomplished. A code of acceptable operation for roller rinks was established to "clean them up," thereby enhancing the image of skating. The RSROA produced its first publication, a general set of competitive rules that defined a national standard for the various branches of the sport.

A third important action was the visit to England of an avid amateur sportsman who was affiliated with the RSROA. Perry B. Rawson was authorized by the association to investigate (at his own expense) the status of roller skating on the other side of the Atlantic. His trips resulted in the beginnings of organized skate dancing in America. The growth of skate dancing, in part spurred by the U.S. tour of the British champions James and Joan Lidstone which had been arranged by Rawson, was very beneficial to the industry, increasing rink patronage by a substantial amount in the next few years.

Also during 1938, many conferences were held to spread the gospel of standardized rules, and the RSROA initiated the popular Proficiency Test program. The association became a member of the Amateur Skating Union and affiliated with the Federation Internationale de Patinage a Roulettes (now the Federation Internationale de Roller-Skating or FIRS). The second national speed skating championships were held at the Sefferino Rollerdom in Cincinnati, Ohio. Because of these many activities undertaken by the RSROA, roller skating rose from 37th on the list of all sports practiced in the United States in 1937 to 7th in 1938 according to a national sports writers' poll.

The highlight of 1939 was the first United States National Amateur Artistic Championships. The figure/free skating competition was held at the Arena Gardens in Detroit, and the dance competition at the Mineola Skating Rink in Mineola, New York.

This promising beginning toward the goal of unifying the various segments of the roller skating community under one national body was interrupted in 1942. In that year roller skaters became involved in a dispute with the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) which resulted in a division into two major national skating organizations. The dispute involved the RSROA, which had been the controlling body for competitive roller skating since its formation in 1937, and the AAU, the national group that controlled amateur sports in conjunction with the Olympic Committee. The issue concerned the fact that the actual decision-makers were professionals and rink owners, not the amateur skaters.

In 1941, several complaints were filed against the RSROA by non-member rinks and by a journalist from a New York newspaper who was interested in sponsoring skating events. These complaints were sent to the American Skating Union (ASU), a national organization that administered all forms of amateur skating in America. The ASU was closely aligned with the AAU; the RSROA was a member of the ASU. A committee was set up to review the charges.

The RSROA asked if the AAU would administer the sport if the RSROA did not. The AAU responded that it could not do this, but nonetheless disliked the structure by which professionals made the decisions regarding an amateur sport. Rather than jeopardize the standing of the ASU, the RSROA resigned from the AAU. Then the RSROA made sweeping changes in the policy regarding amateur skaters and revised the rule books that it had published in 1938. The RSROA made a public statement that it would never do anything to impair the advancement of the sport. At the same time it released a self-assessment that presented the organization's view of its accomplishments since its founding:

1. The RSROA had developed skating from the chaotic disorder of the 1930s and introduced international skating.
2. It had devised and adopted amateur rules and standardized skate dancing, figures, free skating, speed, and hockey. RSROA books were published and available to all skaters as guides to better skating.
3. It devised and adopted gold medal Proficiency Test programs of a quality renowned worldwide.
4. It held annual qualifying and national competitions permitting all amateurs to compete whether or not their rinks were members of the RSROA.
5. It sanctioned exhibitions and protected amateur skaters.
6. RSROA membership was open to all rink operators.

7. The RSROA realized that in order for the sport to survive, the facilities, in the form of rinks and equipment, must be available.
8. In 1942, 90 percent of the amateur skaters in the United States were under the age of 21, and 75 percent were of school age and thus not able to accept the legal and financial responsibilities of a national organization.
9. There was no amateur roller skating group organized in the United States of the dimensions necessary to administer the duties performed by the RSROA up to 1942.
10. Since 1937, the RSROA had sponsored the national championships in various cities, open to all local champions.
11. The RSROA was the recognized governing body in the United States during the years 1937-1942 and had proven its financial responsibility. It would turn over the affairs of the competitive sport of roller skating when a national amateur body capable of administering the sport was organized.
12. The RSROA was exonerated at the national ASU convention by the board of inquiry in October 1941 of all charges of mal-administration.
13. Amateurs in 1941 were more aware of the meaning and value of their amateur status and should have a strong governing body to guard the rights of the amateur.

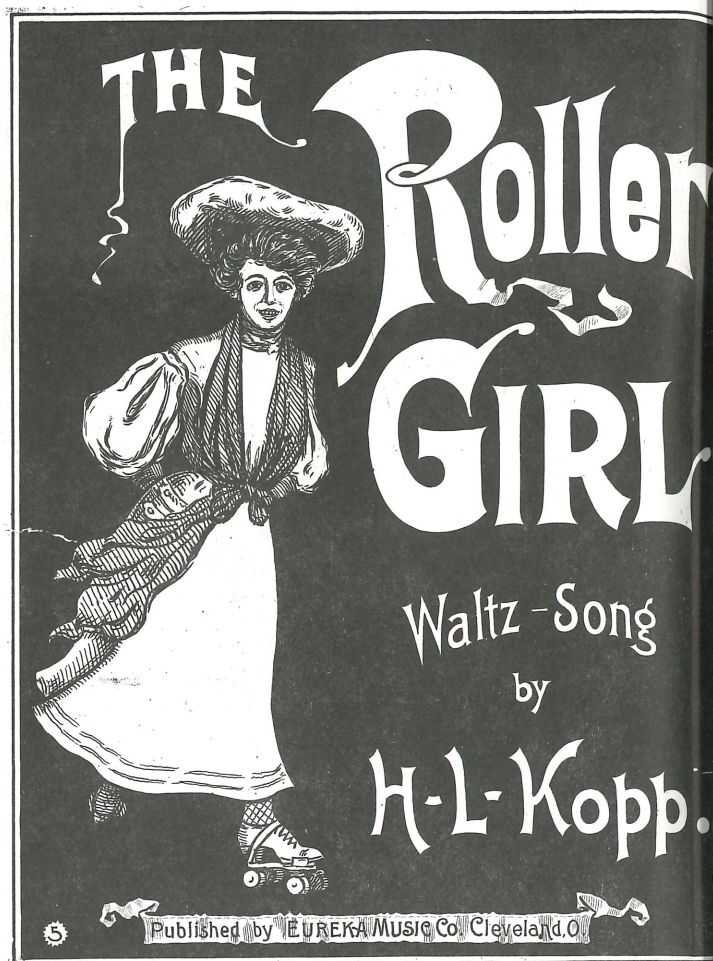
After resigning from the ASU, the RSROA continued to administer the amateur sport and held the National Championships in 1942. However, a group of skaters who believed that amateurs should administer the sport formed a second roller skating association, the United States Amateur Roller Skating Association (USARSA), and many top amateur skaters joined this group to rival the RSROA for control of the sport.

The USARSA, following closely the advice of the ASU, the AAU, and the ice skating association, was affiliated with rinks in the New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and Chicago areas. For the next 30 years these two organizations administered two national championships. Because the two groups did not closely communicate, two styles of skating began to develop in America. Finally, in 1971-72 the USARSA and the United States Federation of Amateur Roller Skaters (USFARS), which represented the RSROA amateurs, negotiated a merger. American skaters were again under one national organization, the United States Amateur Confederation of Roller Skating (USAC/RS).

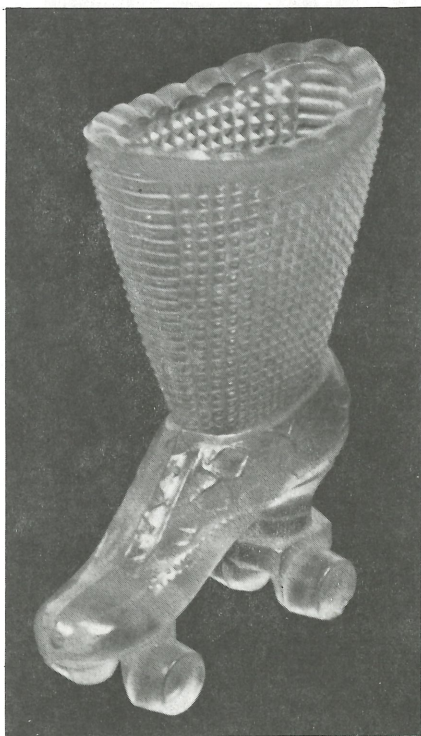
Meanwhile, the RSROA developed as a support organization for its member rinks. It provided information and services that enabled operators to improve their marketing and public relations, for example. These activities are a feature of the RSROA's more recent past, however, and a story that is yet to be fully researched or told.



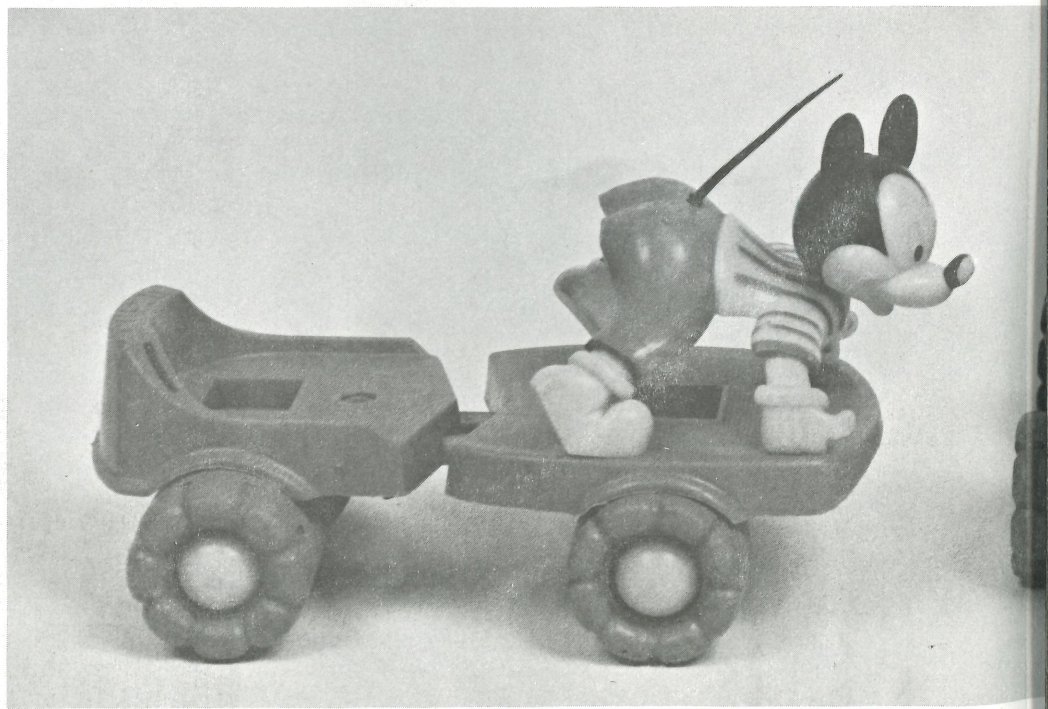
Pennants of amateur sports confederations in Latin American countries from the Tenth Pan American Games in Indianapolis, Ind., August 7-23, 1907 (gift of Olga Soto, Lincoln, Neb.)



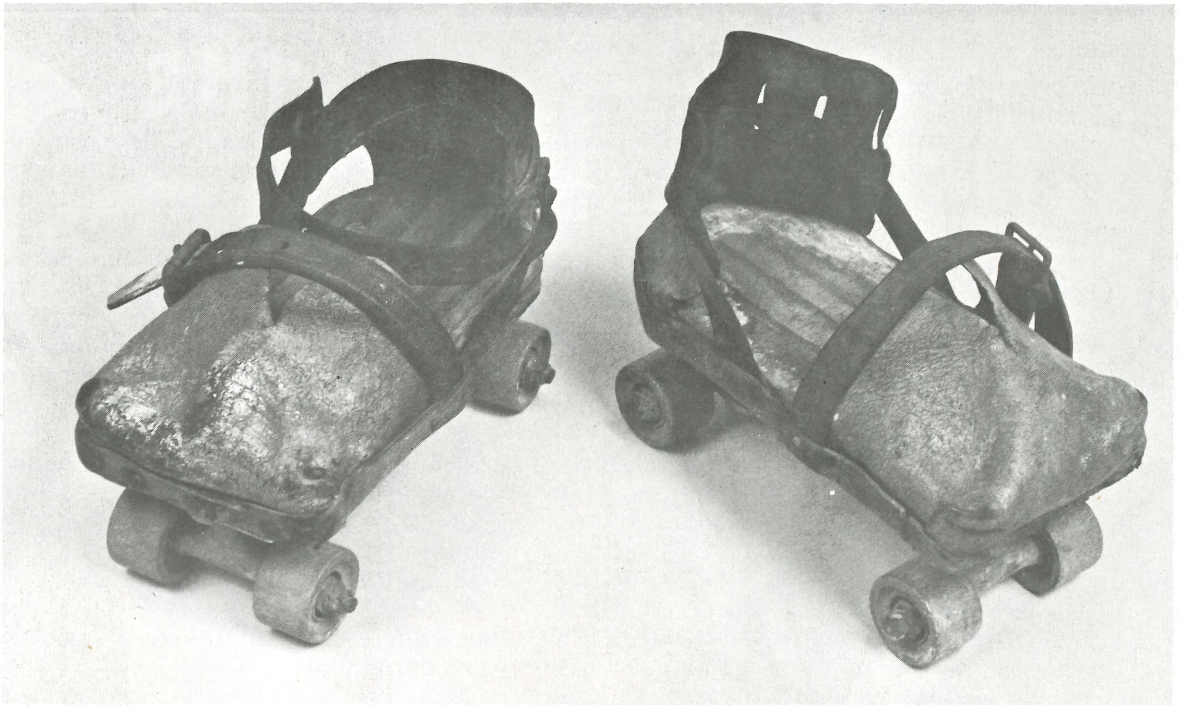
Sheet music for "The Roller Girl Waltz," by H. L. Kopp; published by the Eureka Music School of Cleveland, Ohio, 1905; owned by donor's late grandmother, Minnie Peth (Mrs. Charles) Pulse (gift of Carla M. Klouda, Newtown, Pa.)



Victorian glass shoe on a skate; pale yellow; possible made originally as a toothpick holder or as a collectible ornament (gift of Mack C. and Beverly Harris, Mays Landing, N.J.)

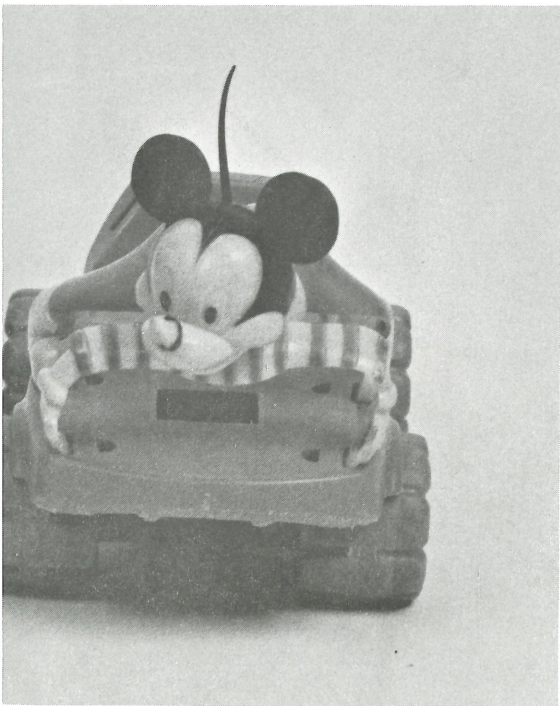


Children's plastic Mickey Mouse skates; red, blue, yellow, and black; made by Kusan, Inc. of Pickard, Lincoln, Neb.)



Skates worn by the Pallenberg Bears in the Barnum and Bailey Circus, 1915-16 (loan from Rex Horton, San Diego, Calif.)

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the
ft of



of Nashville, Tenn. (gift of George



Roller Skating History in the Media

Since the beginning of the year, articles in a wide variety of publications have brought the history of roller skating to the attention of their readers. In COLLECTOR'S NEWS (January 1987), Ralph and Terry Kovel wrote briefly on the popularity of roller skating in the 19th century and observed that "antique ice skates can be found at some antique shows but it is very unusual to be offered old roller skates."

The OMAHA (Neb.) WORLD-HERALD (January 16, 1987) devoted a full page in their WEEKENDER feature section to skating. Local rinks were mentioned along with advice to beginning skaters. The Museum rated a photograph of former director Mike Brooslin holding some of the more unusual skates in the collection along with highlights of roller skating history.

Museum Board member Chester Fried appeared in the NEW JERSEY SENTINEL (June 17, 1987) and in the WOODBRIDGE (N.J.) NEWS-TRIBUNE (July 3, 1987). The former contained a lengthy article on his personal collection of skating memorabilia, while the latter recorded some of his reminiscences from years of skating both for pleasure and in competition.

ARTS AND ANTIQUES (summer 1987) was subtitled "Championship Art: A Special Issue on the Sporting Life." One article focused on significant private collections representing baseball, boating, basketball, football, ice hockey, and roller skating. Museum donor and Honorary Member Miss Elizabeth Plimpton was interviewed about her collection of skates and related material as well as about the role of her grandfather James Plimpton in the development of the modern roller skate.

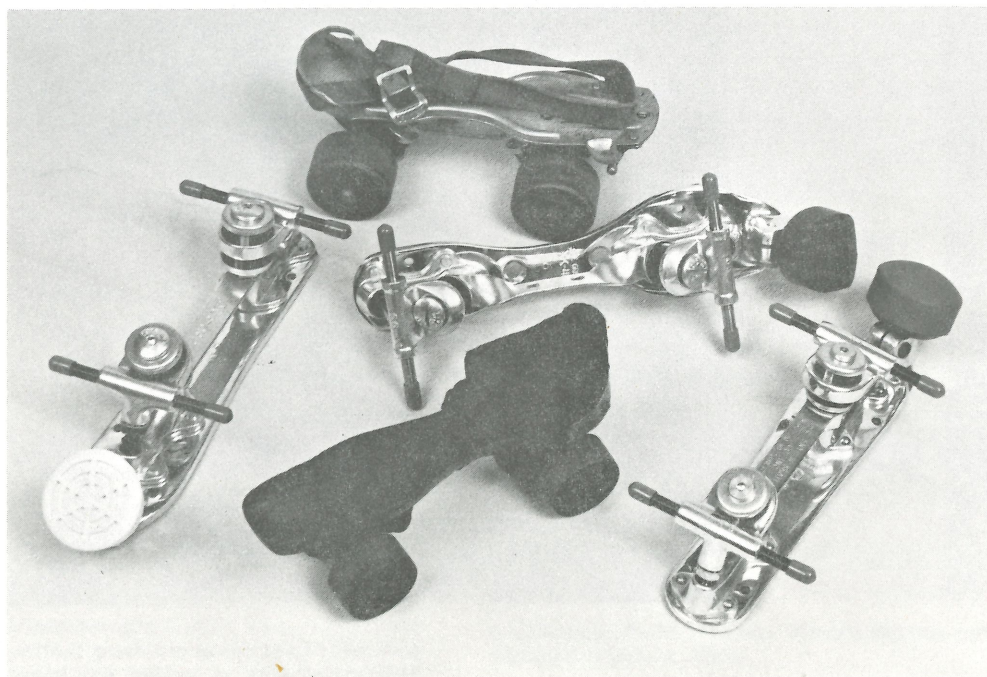
Anita Gold's column "Antiques," which appeared in the CHICAGO TRIBUNE (July 12, 1987) and in syndication throughout the country contained a reader's request for a key to fit "a pair of 30-year-old steel roller skates." The advice that the reader write to the Museum resulted in the receipt of two skate keys and two additional offers of keys, but no word from anyone seeking a key.

The AAA-Chicago Motor Club's publication, HOME AND AWAY (July/August 1987) listed this Museum in a feature on halls of fame in the Midwest. Among others noted were the International College of Surgeons Hall of Fame in Chicago, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, the National Aviation Hall of Fame in Dayton, and sports halls of fame for ice hockey, football (both professional and collegiate), track and field, wrestling, softball, and motor car racing.

FAMILY CIRCLE (July 7, 1987) suggested the Museum as a vacation spot to visit in this region of the country.

An article on "America's Madcap Museums" in THE STAR (July 14, 1987) described this Museum along with the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.; the Museum of Whiskey History in Bardstown, Ky.; the Barbed Wire Museum in LaCrosse, Kan.; and the Macauley Museum of Dental History in Charleston, S.C.

[Editor's Note: We have received some letters from recreational skaters who learned about the Museum through this article. One of them points to it as proof of the value of reading what her husband calls "that scandal sheet." I've also heard from some distant relatives and a long-lost former acquaintance who saw me in a photo with a mannequin dressed in a 1936 speed skating costume, one of the illustrations for the article.]



These skates and some publications are being sent to the Olympic Glory Museum in Moscow, USSR, in response to a request from its director A. Kislov. "XK-4" model speed skate and "Classic" model artistic skate, both made by Sure-Grip International, 1986-87, and "Super Deluxe" model artistic skate made by Snyder Skate, 1986-87 (gift of Harry Ball, South Gate, Calif.). Also, 1880s "Vineyard B" model skate with wooden plate made by Samuel Winslow Skate Company and clamp-on skates made by Chicago Skate Company.



*U.S. Amateur Confederation of Roller Skating
Amateur Athlete Hall of Fame*

Hall of Fame Nominations Sought

Among the highlights of the recent National Championships was the induction of Carolyn Sliger Porter, Johnny Matejec, and John and Debra Coyne LaBriola into the USAC/RS Amateur Athletes Roller Skating Hall of Fame. Next year, other skaters will be selected for this honor by the USAC/RS Board of Directors.

To be eligible for nomination to the Hall of Fame in 1988, the individual or team must have contributed significantly to their sport as an amateur skater (coaching and teaching accomplishments are excluded); these accomplishments must have been innovative or exceptional, and of lasting duration; and the individual or team must have retired from active competition by the end of the 1982-83 season (ending with the 1983 World Championships).

The museum conducts research and assembles information on Hall of Fame candidates for consideration by the USAC/RS Board. If you would like to recommend someone for election, send a letter to the museum explaining why you think this individual or team is worthy of the honor, giving a short summary of their accomplishments and contributions to the sport. Please send your suggestions by December 1, 1987, so they can be included in the 1988 selection process.

Hall of Fame Members

April Allen	Joan LaBriola Thorn and Robert LaBriola
Laurene Anselmi Patton	Joan Lidstone Watson and James Lidstone
Fleurette Arseneault Jeffers and Dan Littel	Gail Locke Walker and Bill Pate
Linda Jo Baker	John Matejec
Pat Bergin	Karen Mejia and Raymond Chappatta
Johnny "Preacher" Black	Rick Mullican
Phyllis Bulleigh Alley and Cecil Davis	J. W. Norcross, Jr.
Patricia Ann Carroll Healy	Evelyn Olson
Linda Mottice Clemons and Adolph Wacker	Jane Pankey Horne and Richard Horne
Jack Courtney	Nancy Lee Parker
Debra Coyne LaBriola and John LaBriola	Edward Perales
Randy Dayney	Jane Puracchio Butera
Natalie Dunn Taylor	Marilyn Roberts and Gary Castro
Bill Ferraro	Gail Robovitsky Sherman and Ron Robovitsky
George Grudza	Carolyn Sliger Porter
Richard Gustafson	Shirley Snyder Weaver
Sylvia Haffke	Walter Stakosa
Michael Jacques	David Tassinari
Bettie Jennings and Cliff Shattenkerk	Dickey Thibodeaux
Arthur "Buzz" Kerwin	Charles Wahlig
Leon Kromis	

Your tax-deductible contribution will enable the Museum to serve the roller skating community. Donors receive a certificate recognizing their contribution. Your help is important; it does make a difference.

Contributors of \$5 receive their choice of the National Museum of Roller Skating

Pin or Patch (please specify)

Contributors of \$15 or more become honorary members of the Museum. Benefits include the Museum pin, a wallet-size membership card, free admission to the Museum, and the quarterly newsletter.

Please enroll me as an honorary member of the National Museum of Roller Skating.

Individual/Family \$15.00

Donor \$50.00

Associate Patron \$100.00

Patron \$250.00

Benefactor \$500.00+

Please make all checks payable to: National Museum of Roller Skating.

Name: _____

Address: _____

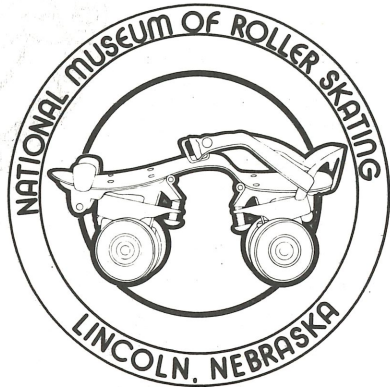
City, State, Zip: _____

And mail to: The National Museum of Roller Skating, PO Box 81846, Lincoln, NE 68501

HELP PRESERVE ROLLER SKATING HISTORY



through
Honorary Membership
in the
National Museum
of
Roller Skating



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