

Historical Roller Skating

OVERVIEW

Issue No. 11

September 1984

Curator's Corner

For those of you who were expecting this newsletter during the first part of September, please accept my apologies for the delay. I had intended to mail this issue in the middle of August, but the attention your museum received during the National Championships (which surpassed even my expectations) delayed publication. In the period between July 25th and August 10th, over 2200 people visited the museum, all of whom were pleased with what your contributions have made possible. The museum was also host to the USAC/RS Hall of Famers, who were presented with awards during the last Friday of the artistic meet. I would also like to mention that the museum's videotape collection was one of the star attractions, with many visitors staying more than an hour to view old time skating. We plan to transfer more of our film collection to tape during the next year, so if any of you have old films, I would appreciate it if you could let me know. I plan to list which competitive events we currently have on tape in the next newsletter.

A most significant addition to the museum's collection was made in July. For the past several months, a group of 14 patent model roller skates was on loan to us from a Massachusetts art gallery. This loan was due to expire in August. As a result of a generous donation by Budd Van Roekel of Temecula, CA, these unique skates have become part of the museum's collection, and will be on permanent display for all to see. The entire group has been renamed the "Van Roekel Collection" to honor the man who made this acquisition possible. Skates included in the collection are the 1863 original and 1866 improved models by James Plimpton. The following inventors are also represented by their skates: R. Shaler (1860); A. Gibson (1869); J. Lemman (1870); H. Robbins (1870); J. Boone (1871); C. Saladee (1876); L. Gano, W. Leggo and R. Hutton (all 1877); E. Robinson (1878) and T. Neely (1882). Also part of the collection are a pair of "Kempster" skates (1885) and several color and black and white prints from the 1880's. Pictures of most of this collection are included in the museum's catalogue "The First Fifty Years" (copies still available). We have however, taken the opportunity to show four of the patent model roller skates on page 6 of this issue.

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**Michael W. Brooslin,
Director & Curator**

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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.

SPEED SKATING PROFILE: BILL HENNING

Last January, the museum was privileged to accept several old time speed skating uniforms, photographs and other materials of William "Bill" Henning of Chicago. Mr. Henning has graciously donated his collection which documents his skating and managerial career, so that others can learn about and study the history of skating during the 1920's and 1930's.

Bill Henning was born on March 15, 1890 in Chicago, Illinois. At the age of 18 in 1908 he began his career as a skate boy at the Riverview Rink in Chicago. For those readers too young to remember, a skate boy was one who, with his skate key or spinner wrench, fastened clamp-on rink skates to the shoes of the customers. There were no rental shoe skates back in 1908 as it was thought renting shoe skates was unsanitary. In fact, shoe skates did not come into general usage until the 1930's, being mostly used by professional skaters prior to that time.

It was at the Riverview Rink that Henning caught roller skating fever. The Riverview was known as one of the best speed skating facilities of that era, with records being set there by such notable champions as Fred Martin, Harley Davidson and Jesse Carey. In 1910, Henning began to enter amateur races. Between that year and 1914, Bill busied himself racing until he obtained his "Class A" rating. In 1915 Bill turned professional and went to work at the old Coliseum Rink in Pittsburgh. At that time, the amateur speed skating circuit served as the training ground for the professionals, much as in the way the minor leagues or farm systems serve baseball today. After a short time in Pittsburgh, Henning traveled to Erie, Pennsylvania, to work at the Market Rink there. Towards the end of 1915, Bill joined the Navy and remained in the service until 1922. During his naval career, he managed to stay on land long enough to establish himself as the roller skating champion of the South Atlantic Fleet (then based in Philadelphia) in 1919.

After his discharge from the Navy in 1922, Henning went to Baltimore as the assistant manager of Carlin's Roller Rink. In 1923 Bill won a 21 day World Championship meet for professionals held in Baltimore. He then advanced to capture the roller racing championship of the state of Maryland in 1928. From 1928 through 1931, Henning managed both Carlin's Rink and the Mt. Royal Rink in Baltimore. In 1929 Bill entered an endurance

Below: Uniform worn by Bill Henning during his 69-day cross-country trip in 1931.



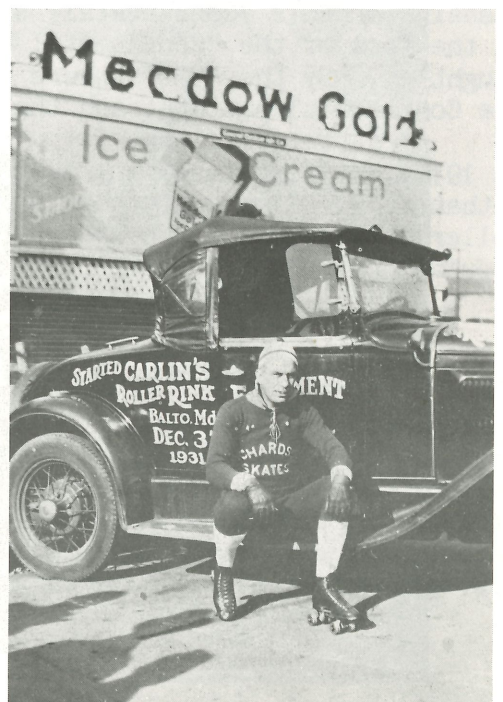


Above: Speed skating champions of 1914, taken at the start of a 50 mile race at the Riverview Rink, Chicago in 1914. Joe Laurey (at right center) won the race with a time of 2 hours 30 minutes. Bill Henning, then an amateur, is identified in the center.

Right: Bill Henning and his support car, taken during his 1931 cross-country trip from Baltimore to San Diego.

race from Washington, DC, to Baltimore which took place on the highway. Out of the 76 entrees, of which he was the oldest, Henning finished third with an elapsed time of 5 hours and 15 minutes for the distance of 51 miles.

Later that same year he entered the Worlds Championship Chicago Stadium race. The event lasted 21 days, but Bill was forced to withdraw after the first few days on account of injuries.



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THE ORIGIN OF SKATE DANCES - THE WALTZ

Note: The following article was excerpted from "Origins of Skate Dances" by James Turner. Mr. Turner, an SRSTA member, has written many articles on roller skating history, is one of the founders of the National Museum of Roller Skating, and currently serves on the museum's Board of Trustees. He is the author of "History of Roller Skating in America" a book available from the R.S.R.O.A., P.O. Box 81846, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501, for \$4.00 postpaid. In issue 8 (December 1983) of this newsletter, the origin of skate dance marches was presented. The next issue of the newsletter will feature the conclusion of this series with the origin of the third type of skate dance, the tango.

Dancing to music on skates can be traced back with certainty to the American ballet teacher, figure skater, and inventor of free style skating, Jackson Haines. While visiting Vienna, Austria, in 1865, Haines taught the city's population the joy of dancing the waltz on ice skates. A band was assembled and the skaters waltzed for hours on the ice. If Haines did not invent the waltz on skates, he certainly made it the popular thing to do in Europe during the late 1860's.

The first waltz steps were merely imitations of the actual ballroom techniques. This was a very awkward movement to do on skates, being more like walking than gliding. Some members of the British aristocracy, who did their winter skating in the Swiss resort towns, were the first to develop the three turn waltz step in the 1880's. The three turn waltz was also done in Canada, in Nova Scotia, as early as 1885.

The first official performance of the three turn waltz step was in Paris during 1894. A French professional skater named Monsieur Richard, did a skate dance exhibition at the "Palais de Glace" ice rink. Several English skaters were in attendance, saw this step, and took it back with them to Britain. Evidently the English skaters from the 1880's had not shared the three turn step they found in Switzerland with their countrymen, as this step was not being done on a regular basis in England until 1895.

The British figure skaters were very stiff and technical skaters, as opposed to the free flowing Viennese style taught by Jackson Haines. Members of the National Skating Association of Great Britain, the British skating establishment founded in 1879-1880, felt that this European "dancing craze" was not good for serious figure skating. It was "too social" and not a serious sport, and should be discouraged. In British rinks, if a team was waltzing nearby on the floor, often a figure skater would purposely get in their way to show his disdain for this "Continental" style of skating waltzes. The term has come down to this day in the form of the "Continental Waltz." However, by the turn of the century, waltzing had caught on. By the 1920's there were two ways of doing the basic waltz steps on skates; the Continental pattern, and the three lobed eight pattern.

In 1914, the first national skate waltzing competition was held. Theresa W. Blanchard and Nathaniel W. Niles were the winners. At this time, many ice skaters switched over to roller skates, and by the "Roaring Twenties" waltzing on roller skates was extremely popular, both in European and American roller rinks.

Next issue: The Tango

Photograph opposite: A women's roller hockey team, taken in New Orleans during 1927 (83.101, Lowe Family Collection). The museum recently acquired a large number of photographs of various roller hockey teams from the Southern part of the United States, from the period of 1925 through 1938. Although we have pictures of teams and games in progress, and two sets of rules dated 1928 and 1932, we need additional information on roller hockey in the U.S. prior to the formation of the RSRQA in 1937. Please let us know if you can help out.

Curator's Corner (continued from page 1)

While the crowds were visiting the museum during the Nationals, quite a few important donations of artifacts were received. We would especially like to acknowledge the gift of the old Hinchliffe Brothers Challenge Trophy by Miss Sylvia Haffke. This trophy, the first of the old RSROA "challenge" trophies received by the museum, was awarded to the RSROA Senior Ladies Figure Skating Champion from 1939 through 1965. It was named after the Hinchliffe brothers, Milton and Bert, original operators of the Wal-Cliffe rink in Elmont, NY, who provided the trophy for the National Championships. After some repair and cleaning, the trophy will be placed on display in the museum. I plan to have an article in the next museum newsletter (December) on the old challenge trophies. If any of you have information on this subject, I would be grateful for your input and assistance.

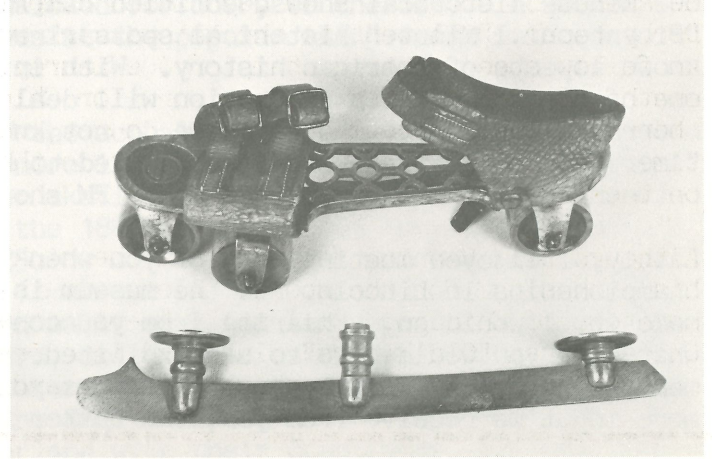
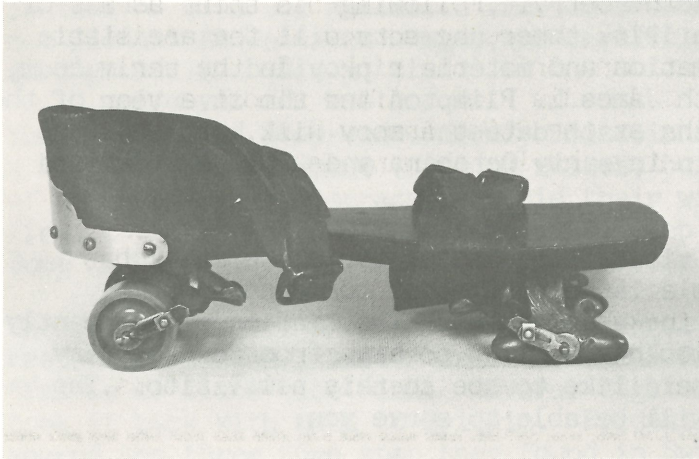
The museum is also working on other projects. This fall CBS News will debut a series of one minute historical shows, entitled "An American Portrait." Similar to their series of "Bicentennial Minute" historical spots aired in 1976, these segments will feature little known aspects of American history. With information and materials provided by the museum, one of the segments in production will deal with James L. Plimpton and the invention of the modern roller skate. Although we do not know the exact date the show will be aired, the "American Portrait" series is scheduled to begin in early October, and will be televised between the CBS Network's 8 PM and 9 PM shows.

Lastly, I enjoyed meeting many of you when you visited the museum during the recent Championships in Lincoln. As the museum is, to a large part, what our contributors make it, I would enjoy hearing from you concerning what you did like, and more importantly what else you would like to see exhibited. I would also like to hear from our honorary members regarding what types of articles you would like to see in this newsletter. The more input we receive from you, the better we will be able to serve you.



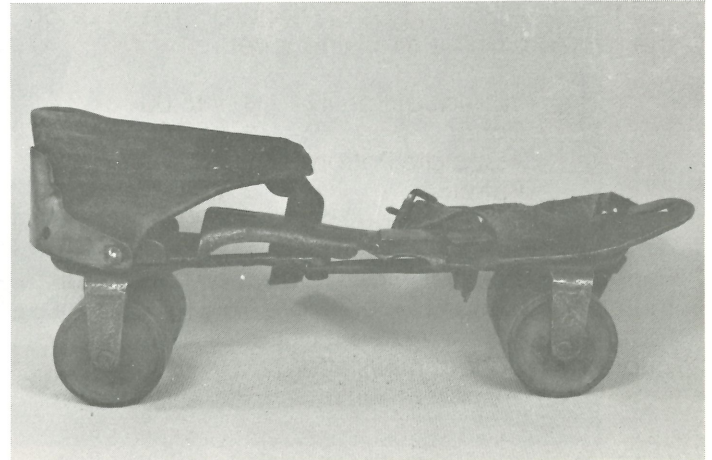
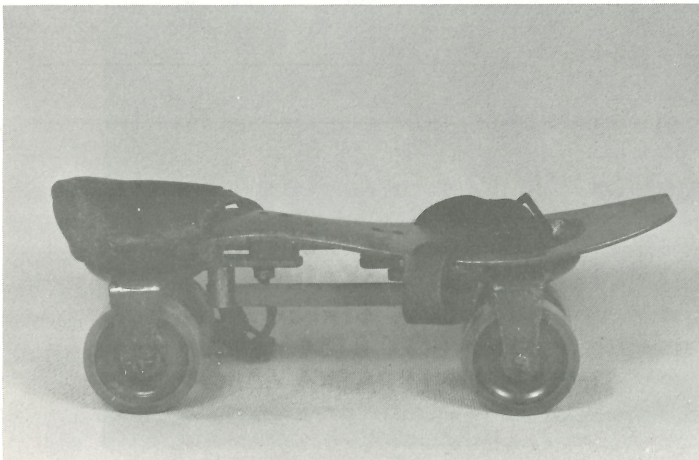
THE VAN ROEKEL PATENT MODEL ROLLER SKATE COLLECTION

Through the generosity of Mr. Gordon B. Van Roekel, the museum recently acquired a collection of 14 patent model roller skates and related materials dating from the 1860's through 1885. These skates are now on permanent display in the museum. In addition to the four models pictured below, the following inventors are represented in the collection: James L. Plimpton (the original rocking-action skate of 1863); Reuben Shaler (1860); Hiram Robbins (1870); John Boone (1871); Cyrus W. Saladee (1876); William Leggo, and Robert Hutton (both 1877); Edward Robinson (1878) and Thaddeus Neely (1882). Also part of the collection are a pair of "Kempster" skates (1885) along with several black and white prints, and color trade cards from the 1880's. Full descriptions and pictures of the skates in the Van Roekel Collection, with the exception of the 1870 Lemman and 1877 Gano models pictured below, can be found in the museum's catalogue "The First Fifty Years."



Top row - Left: James Plimpton's 1866 improved roller skate, featuring wheels on the rear and ice runners in the shape of a swan attached to the front truck. Right: A.J. Gibson's convertible ice or roller skate of 1869. The wheels could be removed and a blade attached.

Bottom row - Left: A skate with ball and socket joints, patented by John Lemman on May 24, 1870. The rollers adjust to turn curves by "the natural inclination of the body." The wheels turned by means of a ball and socket joint which attached the truck to the plate, and by pivoted levers attached to the sockets. Right: Patented by Louis H. Gano on March 13, 1877, the wheels act like casters on this skate. The wheels at the end of the skate are set in curved posts which turn freely around, so the wheels can follow the motion of the body, like casters follow the motion of a piece of furniture. The center rollers are set in a bracket which is free to rock slightly from side to side, enhancing turning ability.



Bill Henning (continued from page 3)

At the age of 40 in 1931 Bill Henning began a cross-country skating trip from Baltimore to San Diego. In this effort he was followed by a "support" car carrying skate parts, 12 pairs of skating boots, and over 200 sets of both rubber and metal skate wheels. The trip took him to New Orleans and along the Old Spanish Trail through Louisiana, Texas, and New Mexico to the west coast. Bill reached San Diego in 69 days, having gone through only 5 pairs of boots and 127 sets of skate wheels.

After his cross-country journey, Bill Henning traveled to Chicago to work in several rinks. Although a devoted speed skater, he also promoted the sport of rink hockey, being named as Chief Referee of the Illinois Roller Hockey League in 1931. In 1935 he entered Leo Selzer's Transcontinental Roller Derby. Bill was one of the first professional speed skaters to race in the event, which finished in August of that year. He skated 31 out of the 49 days which comprised the Derby. Following his stint as a Derby racer, Bill went to the Natoma Park roller rink, where he served as the assistant to fellow speed skating champion Joe Laurey, then manager of the rink. In the early months of 1936 Henning left to work for Chicago's Arcadia Rink. After almost a year there, Bill again teamed with Joe Laurey, working at the 202nd Armory Rink. At that time, the Armory rink was the largest in the country, having as many as 2000 skaters on the floor at one time.

Although Bill Henning retired from the rink business in the late 1940's, he still has his enthusiasm for the sport. Along with his wife Ethel, he still resides in his hometown of Chicago. Bill still keeps active in skating through association with the Chicago area "Old Timers" club, and is currently the oldest honorary member of the museum, where his costumes, photographs and other items can be seen by all visitors.

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Benefits of membership include the museum pin, membership card, certificate of recognition, reduced rates on museum publications, and the quarterly historical newsletter.

Please make all checks payable to
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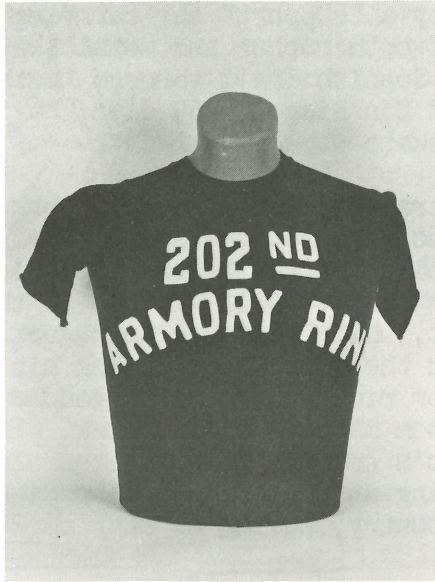
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OF ROLLER SKATING
7700 'A' STREET
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Coming in December:

The RSROA Challenge Trophies

Skating in the 1880's

Skate Dance Origins - The Tango

Left: Roller hockey uniform jersey of Chicago's 202nd Armory Rink team, circa 1936. (84.8.2, Bill Henning Collection)

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