



Historical Roller Skating

OVERVIEW

Issue No. 12

December 1984

Curator's Corner

The museum is pleased to announce that, as of November, Mr. W. C. Ludascher of Eddington, Pennsylvania, joined the museum as a member of the Board of Trustees. Bill is a noted antique collector as well as being a life-long enthusiast of roller skating. Among Ludascher's collections are toy banks, many roller skates and other skating memorabilia. He is also the proud owner of a 1910 Hupp automobile. Collecting is just part of Bill's passion for roller skating. His real joy is travelling around the rinks to skate and visit. We are most happy to have Bill on the Board, and welcome his expertise in the antique field. Also at the recent RSROA Board of Directors Meeting, Bert Anselmi, Robert Bollinger, Marvin Facher, George Pickard and Richard Young were re-elected to the museum's Board of Trustees.

Due to research difficulties, and because of the length of the origins of skate dances article, we have had to postpone to a later date the feature on the old RSROA Challenge Trophies. Also in this issue are printed answers to some questions received in the past few months. This may become a regular feature, so if you have any interesting questions, please send them in.

As in previous years, the museum will be doing research on candidates for the USAC/RS Amateur Athletes Hall of Fame. Requirements for consideration are: the individual or team must have contributed significantly to the advancement of the sport as an amateur skater; these accomplishments must have been innovative or of an exceptional nature, and must be of lasting importance; and the individual or team must have retired from active amateur skating by the end of the 1979-80 competitive season (ending with the 1980 Worlds). Should you have any recommendations or information on skaters you think should be considered, please drop me a note. All data received prior to 15 January 1985 will be included in the files maintained on the candidates. Though the museum does not determine who is elected to the Hall of Fame, the more information we have, the more informed and enlightened will be the decision made by the USAC/RS Hall of Fame Committee and Board.

**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.

Continued on page 6

THE ORIGINS OF SKATE DANCES - The Tango, Fox Trots, Blues & Others

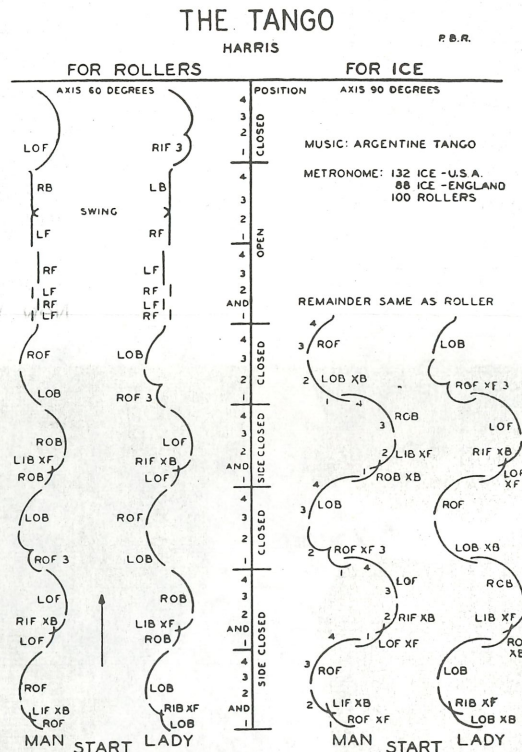
The following article was taken from "Origins of Skate Dances" by James Turner. Mr. Turner is the author of "History of Roller Skating in America," a book available from the R.S.R.O.A., P.O. Box 81846, Lincoln NE 68501, at a cost of \$4.00 postpaid. This article concludes a three-part series on skate dances started in Issue No. 8 (December 1983) of this newsletter. Part I (Issue 8) outlined the origins of marches while Part II (Issue 11) concerned the waltz.

By the 1930's, the only dances for skating known in America were the waltz and the Scholler Marches. These dances were done both on rollers and on ice skates. In 1932, an American, Mr. G.E.B. Hill, went to visit England to study skating. Being a skater of some insight, Mr. Hill noticed the proficiency of the British skaters in the waltz, the Fourteen Step, and in figure skating. He also saw a new dance done, which was then unknown in the United States - The Tango (Harris Tango). Hill returned to America after learning the dance, and wrote an article on it in *Skating*, the official magazine of the United States Figure Skating Association. American roller and ice skaters quickly learned this dance, created by Mrs. Trudy Harris and Mr. Paul Krechow. The dance was diagrammed as a border dance, and the timing was quite different from the modern dance version.

After 1932, the British skate dancing trend was set for the next decade. The German skaters practiced (and perfected) mostly figures, while the American skaters tended to follow the British more closely. The ice and roller dance skating teams in England were demanding more and better quality dances. Dance specials were included at every rink and in almost every club skate, however there were only the three standard dances to do at that time: the Waltz, Fourteen Step, and Tango.

The National Skating Association of Great Britain, which governed both ice and roller skating tests and competitions in that nation, decided to hold a "new" dance competition in 1933. This contest was open to both professional and amateur skaters. The teams entering the contest would make up new dances and present them before a panel of judges (similar to the modern "Original Set Pattern" portion of the World Class Dance Competitions). The best dances would win the competition, and would be included in future National Skating Association tests and competitions.

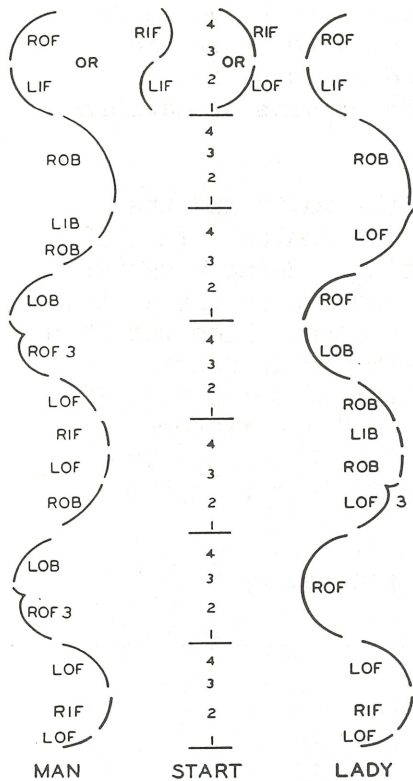
The winner of the 1933 new dance contest was a fox trot by Eva Keats and Eric Van Der Weyden, both English professional skaters. Today the Keats Fox Trot is still a popular dance in its original form. Keats and Van Der Weyden were leaders in skate dance composition throughout the thirties. Another great dance writing team, who finished second in the 1933 competition, were Reginald J. Wilkie and Daphne Willis. Wilkie and Willis were amateur skating champions in Great Britain. These two English composing teams wrote the following dances: Keats and Van Der Weyden - Keats Fox Trot (1933), Rocker Fox Trot (1934), Viennese Waltz (1934) and the 58 Waltz/Westminster (1938); Wilkie and Willis - Argentine Tango (1934), Quickstep (1938), and the Paso Doble (1938). All of these dances written during the thirties are still used in modern skate dancing tests and competitions.



THE FOX TROT

KEATS

P.B.R.



Another important dance writing duo was the brother and sister team of Elsbeth and Georg Muller, German Waltz Champions who moved to the United States in the 1920's to teach skating (both ice and rollers). Many of their dances are still done today, either in the original or in slightly altered form. The Siesta Tango is a variation of the Fiesta Tango written by Georg Muller. Mr. Muller was also responsible for the Pacifica Fox Trot, Fascination Fox Trot, and the Highland Schottische, originally known as the University Swing. Elsbeth wrote the Mirror Waltz, the Carnival Dance, as well as numerous articles on other dances, contributing to the history of the origins in *Skate* magazine, then known as *Skating Review*. The Mullers collaborated on a book of skate dances titled *Original Skate Dances*, which was published in 1952. Elsbeth combined her talents for composition with the gift of teaching, serving for many years on the professional staff of the Arena Gardens in Detroit. The photo below at the left pictures Elsbeth Muller at the Arena Gardens club in 1941.

The Blues was invented by Robert Dench and his partner, Lesley Turner, in 1934. In addition to composing the Blues, Dench wrote a book on dance and pairs skating with his wife Rosemarie Stewart. Dench and Stewart were two of the stars in the original 1940 tour of the Ice Capades, and remained with the show as choreographers and production coordinators.

Joseph Carroll, an outstanding professional teacher in New York City during the 1930's, wrote the Carroll Swing, Fox Trot and the Carroll Tango dances for American skaters. Another professional from New York, Katie Schmidt, was teaching at the same rink as World Champion ice figure skater Willie Boeckl. She wrote the Iceland Tango, and collaborated with the ice champion on the Schmidt-Boeckl dance which was popular during the 1940's.

A last note as to the origins of skate dances. The Chase Waltz was not written by Kenneth Chase, the 1942 RSROA Senior Mens Figure and Free Skating Champion. Chase was the only National Senior Champion of the RSROA killed in World War Two. The dance was written by Fred Bergin, Melvin Umbach and Betty Jane Yarrington, and dedicated to the memory of Kenny Chase.

So the next time you dance skaters feel a little bored with having to do the same patterns, just think back to the time when there were only three dances; the Waltz, Fourteen Step and Scholler March.





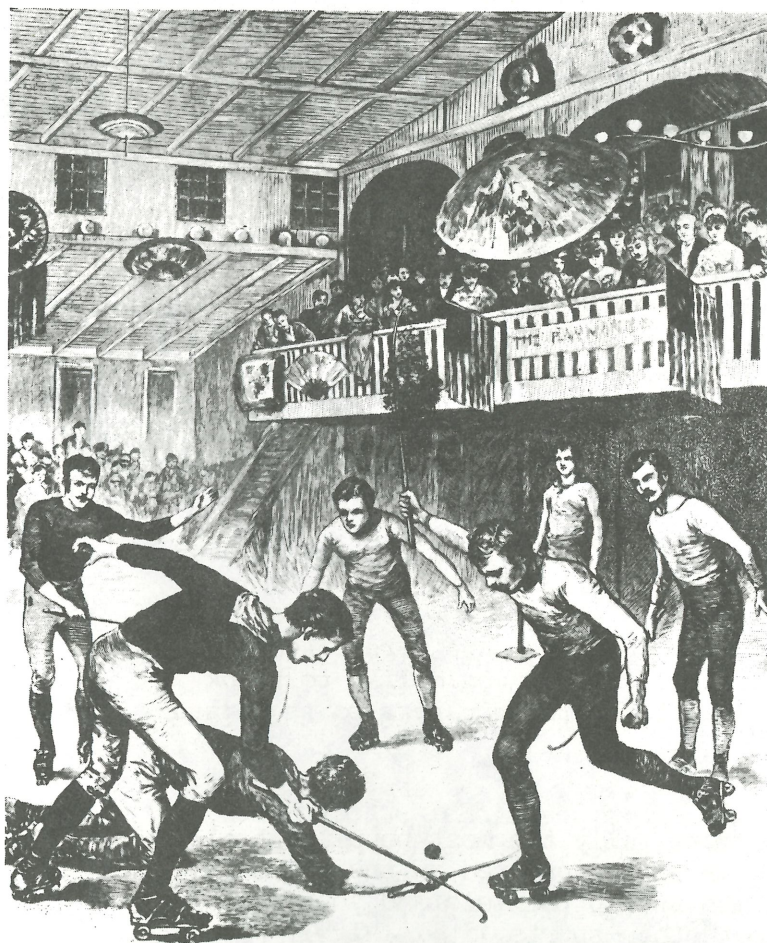
The picture above and the story below were taken from "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper" of 31 January 1885. The account of the opening of the Olympian rink is typical of the articles from New York during the skating craze of 1882-88. The picture and story on roller polo in Newport on the opposite page were taken from "Harper's Weekly" newspaper, issue of 8 September 1883. We would like to thank Honorary Member Dorothy Tiffin for contributing both of these papers to the museum.

THE OLYMPIAN ROLLER-SKATING RINK

We present, this week, in order to illustrate more fully the most popular of all sports, a sketch of the new Olympian Roller-skating Rink as it appeared on the opening night last week. Roller-skating seems to have become a mania with both old and young. Its fascinations are indescribable, and unlike most other sports, it is highly recommended by both physicians and clergymen. It has proved seriously detrimental to liquor and billiard saloons; the youth of today instead of spending his evenings in playing "pool for the drinks," can now be seen wheeling around the skating-floor with some lady companion, and instead of coming from his sport with callow and whitened complexion,

he emerges with the glow of health in every feature. The olympian Club was the first to inaugurate roller-skating in this city,* their coming here last Winter being regarded by many as a reckless waste of money. The managers, however, unheeding the many sayings of as many wisecracks, opened their doors, and the result speaks for itself. From here the bound was "Westward Ho," and to-day more than \$20,000,000 are invested in skating rinks. The very careful and strict management of the Olympian Club eliminating any evils that might, if permitted, have tarnished their good name, at once commanded the support of the higher elements who patronize this sport. In order to more fully satisfy the wealthy portion of their patrons, the erection of this rink has been necessary. Situated on Broadway, between Fifty-second and Fifty-third Streets, and running through to Seventh Avenue, it takes a lot of land some 75 by 200 feet in dimensions. The building had been erected and is owned by Messrs. W. L. Wainwright, A. J. Robinson, W. L. Noble, E. N. Sweet, and F. R. Fortmeyer, the latter gentleman being manager. The opening night was a surprise to those attending. Instead of entering in the old-fashion way, and gazing on bare walls, the visitor was ushered through drawn curtains, and gazed upon what might be termed a drawing-room with a skating-floor. Care and taste is everywhere displayed, and patrons realize at once the ample provision made for their comfort. The uniformed attendants constantly look out for the wants of all. On the opening night an attractive program, consisting of fancy skating by Miss Jennie Houghton and Mr. Raymond Mayer, and bicycle-riding by Harry W. Tufts, elicited great applause. This rink most certainly ranks among the finest, and it will become more and more the Mecca of beauty and fashion, ambitious to glide on rollers throughout the hours.

**Editor's note: This is incorrect. James L. Plimpton erected the first skating rink in New York, the Plimpton Building (Headquarters of the N.Y. Skating Association) in 1863. However, Plimpton's was a private club. The Olympian may have been the first public facility, but more likely was the first rink in New York City for many years.*



POLO ON SKATES

Polo on roller skates, instead of ponies, has become a favorite past-time in Boston, Newport and other cities where commodious rinks afford facilities for the game. It is played subject to the usual rules, and offers the same opportunities for excitement and the display of pluck and skill.

The game shown in our picture was played in the Olympian Club rink at Newport, Rhode Island, and resulted in the victory of the Alphas. Their play was throughout steady and fine, though now and then inferior to the Newports. This is the first defeat which the Newports have experienced at home.

In 1884, a "mustachioed" enthusiast of roller skating named Donovan skated 1,091 miles to win a six-day speed skating endurance race.

SKATING AT THE TWO-OH-TWO

In the last museum newsletter, we outlined the story of Bill Henning and the 202nd Armory Rink of Chicago, a facility Bill and Joe Laurey managed for many years. In response to that story, we received a letter from Honorary Member Larry Lavieri, concerning his experiences at the old 202. To add a little more information and color to our previous article, we have reprinted portions of Larry's letter below.

In 1936, I first set foot in a roller rink, the Two-Oh-Two, which was actually the drill floor of the 202nd Artillery Armory in Chicago, located at Broadway and Thorndale. The Armory was rented as a roller rink to a man whose name I believe was Fred Leisner, and managed by Bill Henning and Joe Laurey. Saying it was the biggest rink in the country doesn't tell the half of it. It was common practice for the Illinois National Guard (who owned the building) to park trucks and gun carriages along the South and West walls on the drill floor. However, the floor was so large that the skaters had more than enough room, and then some.

The story in your newsletter mentioned that as many as 2,000 skaters were on the floor at one time. This must have referred to the time the Immaculata (girls) High School held their skating party at the Two-Oh-Two. I was told the girls sold about 1,500 tickets, and then just to be sure they had nice boys to skate with, they sold another 1,500 tickets at Saint George's (boys) High School. If there were only 2,000 skaters there that night, including the regular patrons, somebody counted the crowd with the idea of tricking the tax collectors. (Note: until the late 1950's, roller skating rinks were liable for Federal Excise Tax on all admissions, a penalty eliminated by the work of the RSROA's Legislative Affairs Committee - Ed.) The figure I heard for the evening was nearer to 4,000 skaters, and must have been close to the truth.

I was also present at a wedding that took place at the Two-Oh-Two. This was during the dark days of the Depression, and the couple that married (I think their name was Kallas) needed a cut of the box office receipts to get a start in life. Of course the entire wedding party, as well as the spectators, were on skates. This I believe was in 1938.

I originally began skating a few months prior to the organization of the RSROA. I was fortunate to meet Bob Irwin and other serious skaters at the Two-Oh-Two at this time, with the result that I was encouraged to really learn to skate properly, rather than going with the "goof off" skating style then prevalent in most rinks. In 1939 the RSROA emblem was hung over the door of the Two-Oh-Two although there was really no attempt to teach the international style of skating or the "new" dances. It was probably a least a year and a half or more later that the Two-Oh-Two was forced to close as a roller rink because the Selective Service Act made the drill floor a necessity for the 202nd Artillery Battalion of the Illinois National Guard. During the time this rink was open, it was a most enjoyable place to skate, being patronized by very considerate skaters. The Two-Oh-Two had the best behaved skaters of the hundreds of rinks I've visited in my lifetime.

Curator's Corner (continued)

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the museum has been cooperating with CBS News on their "An American Portrait" series. The one-minute segment on James L. Plimpton and the invention of the modern roller skate is now tentatively scheduled to be televised on CBS on 1 March 1985, as approximately 8:57 P.M. (Eastern time).

I would like to thank those of you who have sent me suggestions as to stories in the newsletter. The newsletter is after all, for the museum's Honorary Members. The only way we can improve our service to you is if I know what you want to see more of. Should you have a story, suggestions or questions, please be sure to drop me a note. Lastly, if you are moving, please notify the museum of your change of address, so that we may continue uninterrupted service to you. Best wishes for the Holiday Season.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FIELD:

Q: How did banked-track roller racing originate?

A: Speed skating competitions on banked tracks grew out of the bicycle craze which swept the country in the 1890's. Many of the professional speed skaters were also bicycle racers, and vice-versa, and began to use bicycle velodromes for skating races.

Q: What is the oldest roller skating rink still in operation?

A: According to our sources, this would be the Oaks Skating Rink at the Oaks Amusement Park in Portland, Oregon, operated by Mr. Robert Bollinger. The rink was first opened by Mr. Bollinger's father 78 years ago in 1906.

Q: When did the United States first compete in World Championships?

A: USA teams of artistic and speed skaters competed in the first World Roller Skating Congress Championships in 1947, at Oakland. These were RSROA/USFARS skaters. USARSA skaters represented the U.S. at the 1947 FIPR (later FIRS) World Artistic Championship in Washington, DC. The first meet at which a joint USFARS/USARSA team represented America was the 1965 World Artistic Championships in Madrid, Spain. The Rink Hockey World title was first competed for by the United States in 1966. The U.S.A. first sent a mens speed skating team to the FIRS World Speed Championships in 1969 in Mar Del Plata, Argentina. Lastly, the United States first sent a womens speed team to the FIRS World Championships in 1978, also in Mar Del Plata.

Q: What was the first public skating rink, as opposed to a private club?

A: The first recorded public rinks opened in 1857 in London, England. They were located at the Strand and at Covent Garden. The first public rink in America was the Atlantic House in Newport, Rhode Island, opened by James L. Plimpton in 1866.

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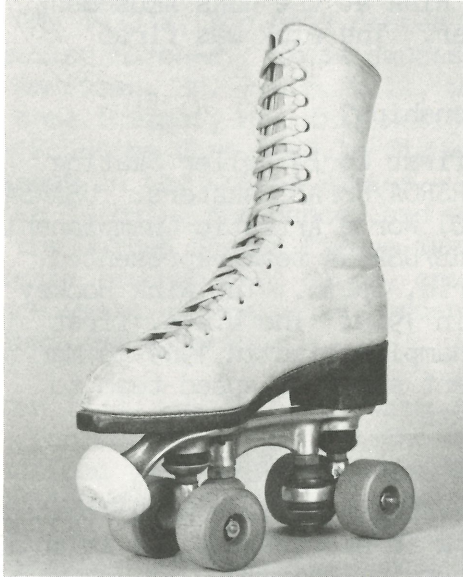
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Coming in March 1985:

The Skating Franks vaudville
troup, 1908-1921

Skate manufacturing in Kokomo,
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1985 USAC/RS Amateur Athletes Roller
Skating Hall of Fame selections

*Left: An O'Brien skate, recently
acquired by the museum, with the
"snorkel" type toe stop, manufactured
by Larry E. O'Brien in 1949. This
skate with the Gil-Ash boot was used
by USAC/RS Hall of Famer Nancy Kromis
of Detroit. (L84.124) Fried Collection*

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