



Historical Roller Skating

OVERVIEW

SPECIAL ISSUE

FALL 1985

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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.

CHICAGO ROLLER SKATE COMPANY: STILL ROLLING STRONG AFTER 80 YEARS

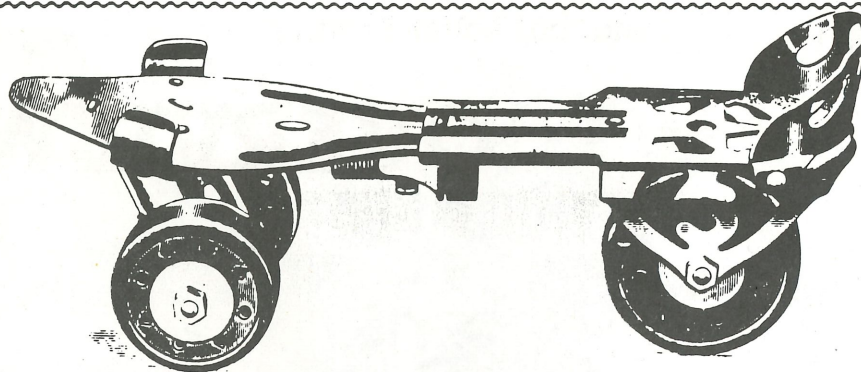
Over 80 years ago, Elisha Clark Ware, first President of the Chicago Roller Skate Company, told his sons, "Boys, it doesn't matter to me what you do, but whatever you make, use good materials, do as good a job as you know how, and sell it for a price you know is fair." The Ware Family followed this advice, and the Chicago Roller Skate Company has grown to become one of the largest, most respected firms in the roller skating industry. During the Company's eight decades of operation, the Chicago Roller Skate Company's support of operators, skaters, and more recently the museum, has been consistently strong. On behalf of all those involved with roller skating, the museum wishes the Chicago Roller Skate Company "Many Happy Returns."

THE HISTORY OF THE CHICAGO ROLLER SKATE COMPANY

When Elisha Clark Ware acquired the Chicago Roller Skate Company in 1905, the firm was a company just on paper; no skates were manufactured. Someone accused Ware of buying a "white elephant" stating "The Roller Skating business? It's just a fad." With the assistance of his sons Ralph, Walter and Robert (who joined the firm later), Elisha set out to prove that roller skating was a legitimate sport and recreation. Business got off to an inauspicious start with a three wheel model made in 1906. Walter Ware, then in charge of the company's sales operation, approached Paddy Harmon, builder and manager of the Chicago Stadium, with the idea of using the Ware Brothers' skate for rink rentals. Harmon showed his dislike of the company's product by literally throwing the skate at Walter and remarking it was no good. Spurred by this "gentle" hint, the Wares went back to the drawing board and redesigned their product. Because Harmon was a large purchaser of skating equipment, and the Ware Brothers desired to be his prime supplier, the entire Chicago factory was overhauled, and the familiar four wheel Chicago clamp-on rink rental skate emerged.

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Strong
Practical**

The easiest and
lightest running
SKATE
on the market.
Unequaled locking
device.



Metal Rollers

Three times more
wearing surface
than any other
roller made.

Ball Bearing.

SIZES:

Gents', 5 to 10
Ladies', 2 to 7

THIS SKATE is provided with a spiral-compression-spring action encased in the barrel carrying the front truck, insuring uniformity of tension and action during the entire life of the skate. The rear roller immediately follows in any direction given the front truck by the skater, like the rear wheel of a bicycle. We solicit rink trade. Write for catalogue and terms. Mention "The Dealer."

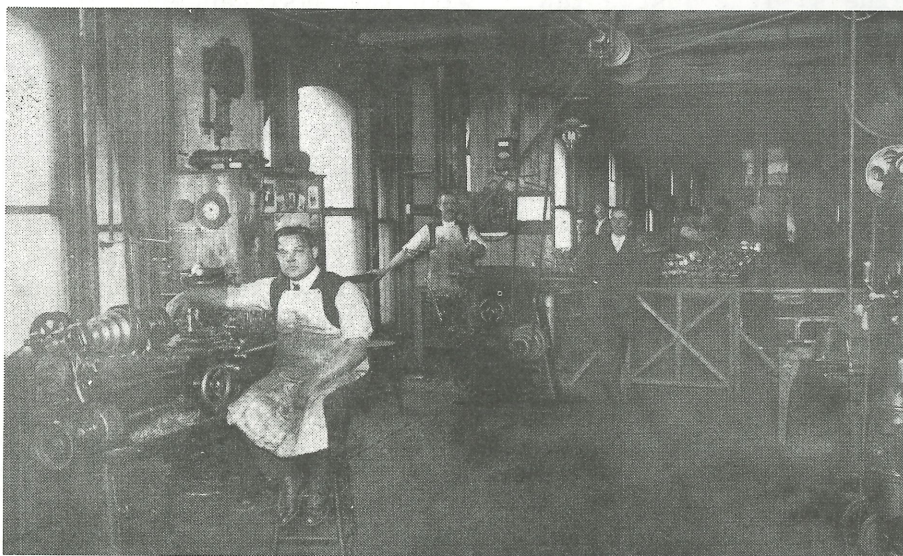
Chicago Roller Skate Co., 65 South Canal Street, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

The Chicago clamp-on rink skate had a one-piece malleable iron hanger and brace, with a choice of wheels; steel, vulcanized fibre, aluminium or boxwood. The boxwood was purchased from Turkish shippers who used it as ballast in their cargo vessels. While it was still wet, it was sawed by hand, and the discs were punched out on a press. It should be noted that new technology was introduced with this four wheel skate; the firm became the first to design and patent the 45-degree action clamp-on skate. The booming sales of this model allowed the Ware Family to explore new ideas, and Chicago soon became known as a company on the leading edge of skating technologies.

When the firm was founded, in a loft of a building at Canal Street and Madison (at the Chicago River), the business was run by Elisha, his sons, and twelve employees. After several intermediate moves, in 1919-20 the company located at its present facility, an entire block on West Lake Street on Chicago's west side.

In 1909, Chicago designed and patented the single rubber adjustable action skate, for both figure and racing models, a design which was copied by almost all other skating manufacturers. In the Twenties, Chicago introduced what is thought to be the first successful rubber tire skate, the "Silent Flash" childrens street skate. In the early 1930's, the company produced a highly successful detachable skate, the "St. Pierre" model first patented by Jack St. Pierre. This skate, with the quick-release heel lever for taking off the skate from the boot, became a standard item for rink floor guards.

ELISHA CLARK WARE



As with other manufacturers, Chicago's progress was interrupted by World War II. The firm did not make skates for the public from 1942 to 1945, instead becoming a defense contractor, making among other things, bomb fuses. Though in an unfamiliar field, the inventiveness of Chicago's design staff was evident, as the firm helped develop a new armour-piercing shell for the U.S. Army. For their contribution to the war effort, Ware Brothers Manufacturing and the Chicago Skate Company were awarded several gold stars by the government for excellence in war production



Shortly after the war ended, the company began to market the "Velvet Tread" model skate, one of the most popular items Chicago ever produced. This skate has a most versatile wheel system, being an aluminium hub with tires of wood or plastic which could be easily changed. In 1949 Chicago patented the "Flex-i-Flote" skate, a model in which the pivot pin was designed with an insert which floated up and down inside the pin, increasing the action and flexibility of the skate. More recently, the Chicago Roller Skate Company produced the "Rollerblades" skate, with four wheels in an in-line arrangement, quite reminiscent of early 1800's roller skates. Along with the Rollerblades in the 1960's, the firm marketed a convertible ice/roller skate, named appropriately, the "Ice 'N Roller Convertiblade" skate. Either a set of standard Chicago trucks with rollers, or an ice blade could be attached to the Chicago plate with the same kingbolt.

Chicago Roller Skate Company continued to pioneer new concepts in skate technology in the 1970's. The "Panther" was the first nylon/fibreglass skate and featured an adjustable pivot pin. Recently they introduced the "Bullet" model, a low cost speed skate for both rink rentals and retail sales. In 1984 Chicago introduced the "Professional" Figure and Free Style skates, hailed by many competitive skaters as the best on the market. In addition, Chicago is continuing to develop and test new concepts in skate manufacturing which will be introduced by the firm during the next few years.

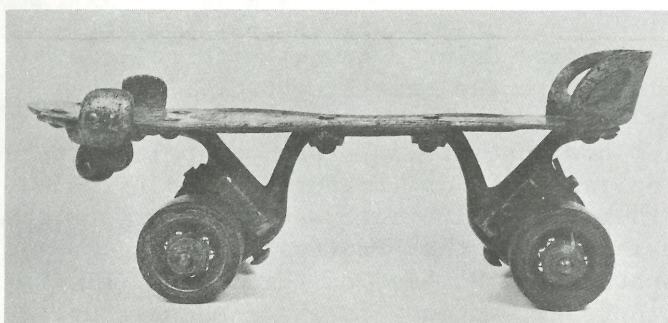
The Chicago Roller Skate Company has always been a family affair. The original three brothers were Ralph, Walter, and Robert Ware, Sr., with their father, Elisha C. serving as the firm's first President. Elisha died in 1909 and was succeeded as President by Walter who served through 1953. Robert Ware, Sr., then assumed the Presidency and served through 1956 when the current President, Gordon Ware, took office.

The Chicago Company has always been known for promotions. In the early years, the firm placed strong emphasis on sponsorship of vaudeville performers and professional racers. Old timers like Howard Fielding & Helen Carlos, H.R. Buck Plain, and speed skaters Jesse & Malcolm Carey, Allie Moore, and USAC/RS Hall of Famer Leon Kimm, all at one time or another received support from Chicago. Promotions by these skaters, although indeed benefiting the firm, were also important in building public recognition and support for roller skating. To assist local rink operators, Chicago sponsored special contests and exhibitions by these professionals at various rinks around the country.

Top: Speed uniform of professional racer Bill Henning, 1931 (84.8.4; gift of Bill Henning). Opposite page - Top: Ad for Chicago's 1st (3 wheel) skate, 1906. Bottom Left: The Chicago factory on Canal Street, 1907. Bottom Right: Elisha Clark Ware.

Chicago has also been involved with big-time show business. A group of girls from the Canadian Club Cafe using Chicago skates appeared at the 1934 Chicago Worlds Fair, as did the girls from the chorus line of Frank Small's "Broadway Brevities of 1942" show on the Great White Way. Perhaps one of the best vehicles for roller skating publicity ever done was the tie-in Chicago managed with Hal Roach's "Our Gang" childrens comedy troupe. Chicago skates were used in many of these films throughout the 1930's, introducing millions of kids to the fun of roller skating. Chicago also equiped United Airlines hostesses with skates at the Chicago Municipal Airport for quick trips between flights. In addition, the Chicago Roller Skate Company made roller skates for many animals, including the "Snyder" bears, "Buddy" the dog, several chimpanzees, and "Jimmy" the skating horse. Their excellent products, coupled with consistantly strong national advertising for roller skating, has been a boost not only for the firm, but for the entire sport and recreational industry.

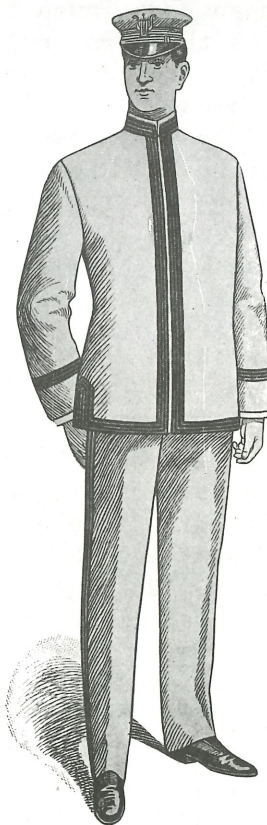
Although best known for manufacturing skates, Chicago has produced toe stops, wheels, boots, and other skating accessories. They have supplied rink operators with their every need, including wheel grinders, music and sound systems, riveting machines, floor brushes, admission tickets, rink organs (mechanical bands), and floor guard uniforms. In the 1930's, the firm supplied Tramill Portable Rinks to traveling rink operators (both the tent and the wood floors). Chicago assisted the local operator with his own promotions, supplying post cards, stickers, skating club pins, and cuts for newspaper and magazine advertisments. In 1929 Chicago published one of the first rink management booklets, and in 1930 followed this up with a book for prospective new rink owners on the construction and operation of model roller rinks. These efforts are indicative of the importance of the Chicago Skate Company to the growth of roller skating, both in terms of numbers of rinks, and in terms of professionalism within the industry.



Above: Chicago's 1st 4 wheel skate, 1906 (L82.19.1; Chicago R.S.C. Collection).
 Right: Ad for Chicago's floor guard uniforms, 1938. Opposite page - Top Left: ad for the Silent Flash skate, 1935. Top Right: Flex-i-Flote skate ad, 1949. Middle Left: The St. Pierre detachable skate, 1939 (81.5.17; gift of Al Kish). Middle Right: The 1960's Rollerblades skate (81.22.2; gift of Walter Turnbull). Bottom Left: The "Panther," the first plastic skate. Bottom Right: The "Professional" 6000 model skates presently made by Chicago.

"CHICAGO" TRADE MARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

Caps and Uniforms



Yachting Style



Military Style

Manager, Instructor and Doorkeeper caps of the finest quality black silk. We also carry in stock bands with the above lettering in gold block letters. In ordering be sure to give size of caps and inscription you desire on bands.

Skate Boys' Caps, Red or Navy Blue, Gold letters printed on black band.

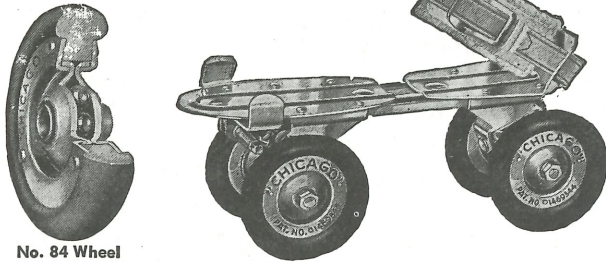


Caps may be furnished to match suits in any color selected.

REGULAR CLOTH UNIFORMS FOR INSTRUCTORS

Full lined and trimmed, with shape-sustaining fronts. Coat trimmed with black military braid 1 1/4 inches wide, standing collar, gold block letters, in grey, blue or olive green, as shown by illustration above. Closing with invisible buttons, pants with stripes.

CHICAGO FLASH
SILENT Roller Skates

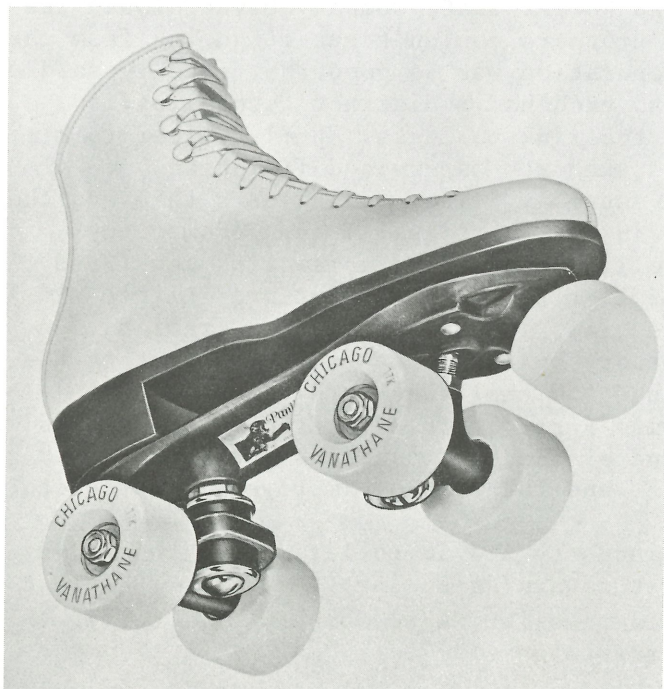
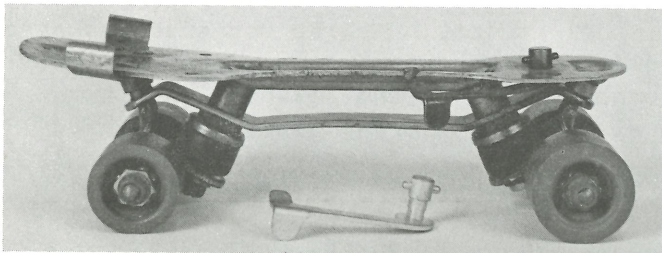


No. 84 Wheel

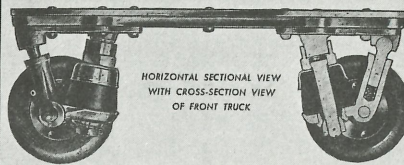
No. 181 High Speed—Noiseless Rubber Tires

The First and only Successful rubber tire Skate on the market. Special Composition rubber.

The Silent Flash is a Super-Skate with reinforced corrugations at toe and heel. Tires that will not chip or pull off and will outwear steel wheels. Self contained 1/2" "A" Grade Ball Bearings; Rubber Cushioned Shock Absorbers; Non-Bendable Channel Arch; Oscillating Trucks; Genuine Cowhide Straps. Bright nickel finish. Extends 8" to 11" long. Weight per pair 4 1/2 lbs.



Another FIRST... New! Sensational!



HORIZONTAL SECTIONAL VIEW WITH CROSS-SECTION VIEW OF FRONT TRUCK

"CHICAGO"
TRADE MARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.
FLEX-I-FLOATE
PATENT APPLIED FOR
Free Floating—Double Action
Roller Skates

Now you can have NEW and EFFORTLESS skating pleasure on "CHICAGO" FLEX-I-FLOATE, the easiest rolling and smoothest skate ever offered.

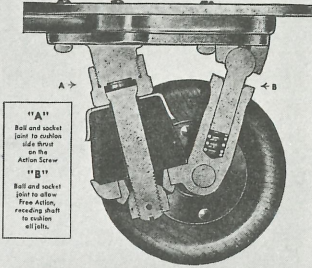
FLEX-I-FLOATE allows FOUR WHEEL TRACTION on sharp edges and you don't have to fight the action.

FLEX-I-FLOATE trucks are cushioned to provide FREE FLOATING flexibility. Their vertical action is adjustable for light weight or heavy weight persons. The telescope insert affords proper "SOCKET-ACTION" at all times. "CHICAGO" now has the most complete line—the regular rink skates—the 1949 Velvet Tread—and now the FLEX-I-FLOATE with 100% action giving you the choice of any action you desire.

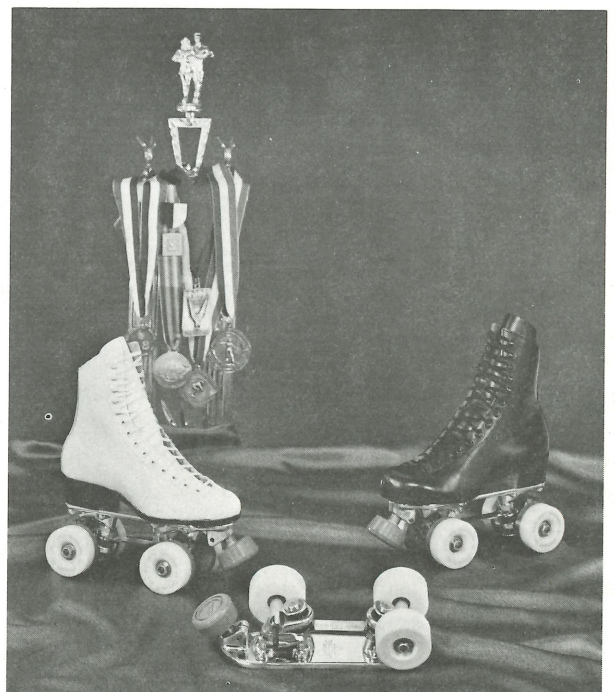
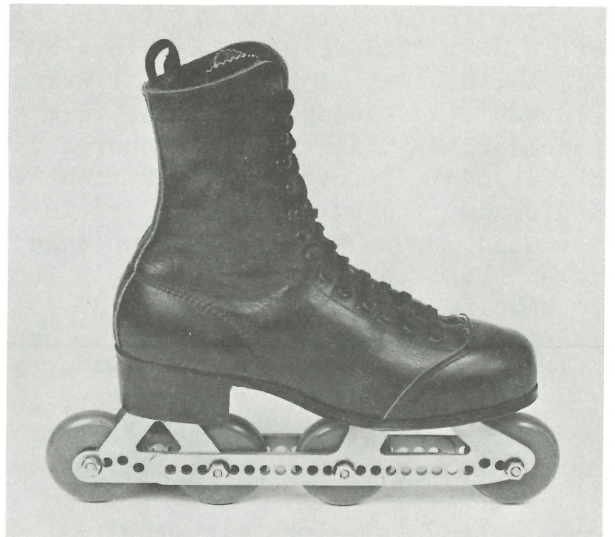
Write or wire for full information, prices, etc.

CHICAGO ROLLER SKATE CO.
4427 WEST LAKE STREET CHICAGO 24, ILLINOIS

"A"
Ball and socket joint in rubber side thru the Action Screw
"B"
Ball and socket joint to allow Free Action, receding thru to cushion all falls.



Reprinted From *The Billboard*, January 1, 1949



In 1905 my uncles Ralph and Walter Ware were young men working with their father, Elisha Ware, in his real estate business in Chicago. At the turn of the century, there was a big boom in roller skating so the Ware Brothers invested in a small firm called Chicago Roller Skate Company. Unfortunately they discovered the company was not producing any skates. However, they were convinced skate manufacturing could be a profitable business. So they invested more money, gained control of the company, and produced a three-wheel skate which they tried to sell to the local roller rinks. One of the top rink men so disliked the skate he threw it at Walter, who dodged and fled. The next day Walter designed a new four-wheel skate, and made wood patterns of it. He slipped a few dollars to a local foundry foreman who put them in sand and poured metal castings during his lunch break. From these parts, sample skates were produced, nickel-plated and finished. This gave the Ware Brothers a very competitive skate to offer to the rink operators.

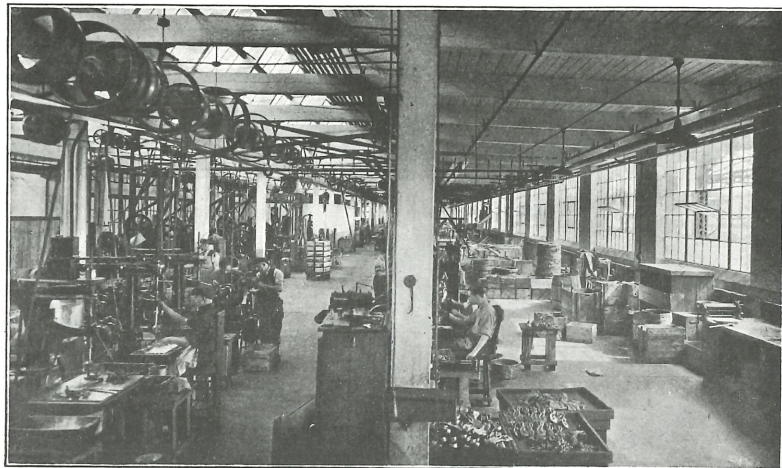
In 1909 Elisha Ware asked my father, Robert Ware, Sr., to join his brothers at the firm. Dad's experience with several companies, including his current job in Idaho, in marketing and shipping would be helpful to the company. So my father joined Chicago Roller Skate Company. Business expanded as the rink business grew. They started in a loft on Canal Street, then moved to a small factory on the site of the present Northwestern Railroad Station. In 1918 they moved into a brick building they built at Fulton and Ada Streets (this building still stands). It was at this location I first visited "The Factory." World War I was going on and the firm had a contract to make propeller bolts for the War Department. My father was in charge of seeing that the bolts were properly case-hardened and finished. He often bragged they never had a single reject. As the war ended, skates again became the main product. Fibre wheels (made from reprocessed newspapers) were introduced and to some extent replaced the more expensive maple and boxwood, and the dirtier steel and aluminum wheels. The fibre wheel was long wearing, inexpensive, and left skating rink floors clean. In 1919-20, a modern one-story factory was built at the present location on Lake Street. I can remember, as a kid it was a great place to play, hooking up huge packing crate lids with the overhead trolleys which connected the different departments. I had great fun with my own thrill ride during non-working hours. Also I liked to play with the giant tubs of ball bearings, and played hide and seek around the huge cartons of roller skates.

In the late 20's, along with the rest of the country the Ware Brothers faced hard times. When the big depression struck a portion of the building was boarded up, and the firm trimmed its sails and rode out the storm. Chicago Roller Skate Company never closed its doors and never missed a payroll. When the Ware Brothers couldn't get financing from the bank, they issued their own gold bonds. Their reputation was so good they readily sold them. The three brothers organized the company so each had a distinct responsibility. Ralph, the oldest, was in charge of finances and the rink business. Uncle Walter took care of the production of machined parts. My dad, Robert, supervised finishing operations such as plating, heat treat and final assembly. They worked as a team and the company prospered as roller skating boomed again in the Thirties. I can remember my uncle Ralph returning from Detroit in 1937 and telling how he and a few rink men (Fred Martin, Vic Brown, Fred Freeman, etc.) formed a roller skating association. Little did I imagine this was the beginning of a large, influential, international organization. In 1939 the firm again ran out of room, so a three-story building was built adjacent to the original factory. During World War II the firm had 450 employees working on defense contracts. The only skates made were for the Armed Forces, including those for sailors' recreational use on aircraft carriers. At the end of the war, business was better than ever, roller rinks were built at a breakneck pace, and the company improved its products.

Looking back over the years, the changes in the industry and in roller skates themselves have been amazing. Roller Skating has been a most rewarding business, and I'm sure that it will grow and prosper for years to come. Chicago Roller Skate Company will continue to play a major role in the industry for many years to come.

Right: Inside of the Chicago Roller Skate Company factory, 1929.

The Ware Family and "Chicago" have contributed greatly to the development of organized roller skating, in 1937 giving their support to the formation of the Roller Skating Rink Operators Association. "Chicago" materially aided the growth of the RSROA, both as a trade organization and as a sports body. "Chicago," with the RSROA, helped further the sport by providing scholarships for skaters to attend the American Skating Institute in the 1950's.



When the roller skating industry Hall of Fame was established in 1955 by the RSROA and its affiliated groups, Ralph Ware of the Chicago Roller Skate Company became the first person inducted into the Hall of Fame. In 1959, "Chicago" founded the Roller Skating Foundation of America to promote the sport of roller skating. The "Rinksider" newspaper was established by "Chicago." For many years the company held Roller Skating Queen contests (produced and directed by Joseph F. Shevelson, Vice President of Marketing of "Chicago" and Irwin N. Rosee, publisher of the Rinksider) to further promote roller skating. The Ware Family continues to give of itself for the betterment of roller skating, through their involvement with the RSROA's Roller Skating Manufacturers affiliate, with USAC/RS's Foundation for Amateur Roller Skating, and as Benefactors of the National Museum of Roller Skating, which houses the Chicago Roller Skate Company Collection.

The current management of the Chicago Roller Skate Company, President Gordon Ware, Vice President Joe Shevelson, and fourth generation members Keith Ware and Jim Peters make sure the firm's products maintain a high level of quality at a fair price. The true test of any product is how well and how long it has performed. The Chicago Roller Skate Company has performed well since 1905, a claim no other skate manufacturer can make. Chicago believes roller skating will be around for at least another 80 years, and plans to be there for all of it.

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.

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- Patron \$250.00
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This special issue of the museum's newsletter, "Historical Roller Skating Overview" was made possible in part by a grant from the Chicago Roller Skate Company, which invites you to join with them in contributing to the support of the National Museum of Roller Skating.



Left: Hal Roach's "Our Gang" childrens comedy troupe promoted roller skating using Chicago skates during the 1930's. Right: Three generations of speed champions on Chicago skates; grandfather Jesse Carey, son Malcolm, and grandson Malcolm, Jr.

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