

December 2018

*Rolling Thru Time*  
Newsletter

# The National Museum of Roller Skating



Visit our Website

## Merry Christmas from the National Museum of Roller Skating!

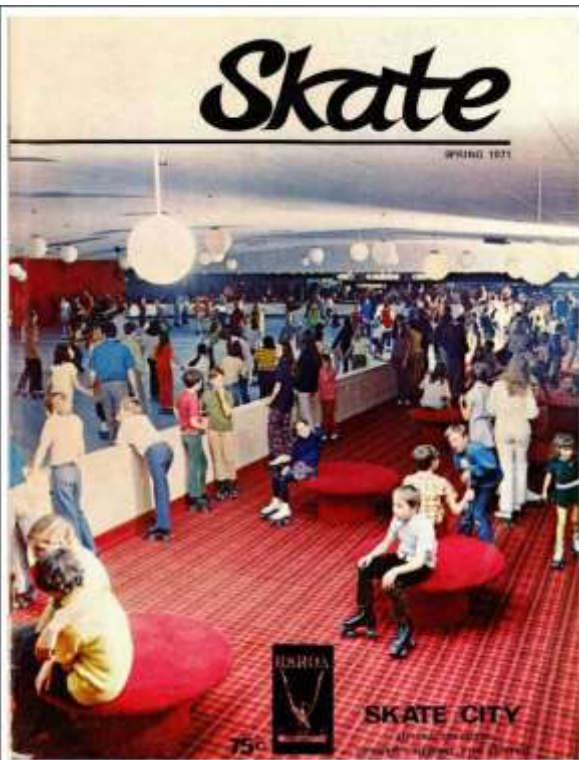
### **Do you need a stocking stuffer for a friend in the sport and industry of roller skating?**

Consider giving a gift of museum membership or a historical book from the NMRS this Christmas. This not only helps the museum financially, gives the museum more credibility, but helps promote the dissemination of roller skating history to a larger audience. How many people in the sport and industry would like to become more supportive or acquainted with roller skating history, but just don't take that step? Who in the sport and industry would you like to acknowledge with a gift, but just can't think of a suitable one? Yes, the support of the museum raffle by many is great, but you as a museum member can make a crucial contribution. If each member gifted a \$35 membership to another, it would double the museum's membership.

You can go [online](#) or send a check to National Museum of Roller Skating, 4730 South St., Lincoln, NE 68506.

---

## Back to the 1970s



Pictured is SKATE CITY in Aurora, Colorado that was on the cover of Skate magazine. (*Spring 1971*) The picture of the Kelly family accompanied the feature about their new rink.

*From left to right: Bill Kelly, Gladys Kelly (who recently passed), Patricia Kelly, daughter Karolyn Mensik, and Dick Mensik.*

The Kellys built seven state-of-the art facilities in the 1970s, an example of the growth and optimism that characterized the '70s. "With the recent opening of beautiful SKATE CITY, Aurora, Colorado can boast of having one of the finest roller skating facilities anywhere in the world." (*Spring 1971*). This very modern rink included a plastic-coated floor, rental skates with precision bearings, carpet on the floor and walls, a huge mural, and large globular lamps, and many other features that rinks were just beginning to adopt in the early 70s.

**A look back at a decade of roller skating through the eyes of Skate magazine, the official quarterly publication of the RSROA. Digital archives of past issues can be found on the members only tab of the National Museum of Roller Skating's website.**

The 1970s was a very optimistic decade for the sport and industry of roller skating. It began with the enthusiasm surrounding the 1970 Artistic Roller Skating World Championships held in the U.S., to the participation of the U.S. delegation in the 1979 Pan American Games in Puerto Rico. The decade included construction of many new

rinks, and the explosion in the sport's popularity that accompanied the disco era. Skaters flocked to events like the Skate-A-Thons for Muscular Dystrophy and the Gold Skate Classic. The first public call for a national museum of roller skating was also made.

The Artistic World Championships ". . . is one of the most exciting ventures ever undertaken by your Federation," said M.M. Shattuck, commissioner of sports. (*Spring 1970*) "1970 will undoubtedly be the biggest year yet for U.S. competitive skaters," said the World Champion Booster Club. (*Winter 1970*)

Articles from the decade's last issue of the magazine highlighted roller skating's participation in the Pan American Games and the U.S. Olympic Committee National Sports Festival. One article titled "1979 National Top Banner Year for Roller Skating" continued the optimism: "From the Pan American Games to the National Sports Festival to an exciting National Championship season, competitive roller skating reached new heights of excellence in 1979." (*Fall 1979*)

The only disappointment expressed about the entire decade came in the previous issue, in a Skate editorial lamenting the omission of roller skating from the 1980 Moscow Olympics. (*Summer 1979*) This contrasts the progress highlighted in that spring's previous issue when "most recently, the January 1979 United States Olympic Committee's decision to include roller skating in this year's National Sports Festival, . . . brings us one step closer to future Olympic participation." (*Spring 1979*) "Why isn't roller skating a participant sport in the Olympic Games?" George Pickard asks in an editorial, from the same issue that included official announcement of his new position as RSROA executive directorship. He added, "Frankly we don't know either." (*Winter 1973*) (George Pickard was also the editorial advisor for Skate magazine for most of the decade). However, roller skating did receive Class A status from the United States Olympic Committee.

Despite the disappointment surrounding the sport's Olympic absence, the decade still brought dramatic change and growth to the industry. An article titled "Happy Anniversary, RSROA 40 Years of Progress" described it this way: "The '70s represented both change and progress for the RSROA. The first major change was the merger of the two skating federations in the United States, the USARSA and the USFARS (the RSROA Associated Federation), in September of 1971. As a result of this merger, roller skating was able to present a united front in its efforts toward Pan American and Olympic participation." (*Spring 1977*)

"Two years later another change occurred which was also to alter roller skating in this country. In August of 1973, the RSROA separated itself from competitive roller skating, and the United States Amateur Confederation of Roller Skating (USAC) was formed." (*Spring 1977*) (For more information on these two events, see George Pickard's book *Titan and Heroes of American Roller Skating* p 11-18, which can be purchased on the NMRS website.)

The majority of articles in Skate magazine focused on competitive skating: artistic, speed and hockey. Profiles of skaters from all three disciplines can be found throughout the issues. These articles would be supplemented by a range of supporting articles about topics from costuming to techniques in jumping. In addition to articles on the National Championships held many years in Lincoln, Nebraska, there were many articles on world competition. Skate magazine was published four times a year throughout the 1970s, with the fall issue heavily devoted to the previous summer's national championship results. Two aspects stood out in all of the profiles of skaters: The tremendous amount of time

and dedication it took to be a roller skating champion, and the admiration and close relationship between teacher and student.

### **Rink Upswing**

Though competitive skating received the majority of space in Skate magazine during the decade, stories also illuminated other aspects of the industry. One common feature was the number of new rinks during these years, even before the disco boom. "People are saying that roller skating is on an upsurge in popularity and nowhere is there a better example than . . .", a sentence that opened the first article featuring a new rink. (*Winter 1970*) Most issues of the magazine highlighted a new rink, many of which were being built by owners who were constructing multiple facilities.

The featured rinks were labeled as new concept rinks. "New, ultra-modern rinks such as these two (John Creten's and Armand Champa's) are becoming more common all around the country as the popularity of competitive and recreational roller skating continues to grow. Gone are the old rinks, often reconstructed from hangers or dance halls, that offered only a skating floor usually surrounded by wooden benches." (*Spring 1974*) "Plush, colorful, luxurious, psychedelic . . . all adjectives that could be used to describe the trend in roller skating rinks now being built all around the country. These modern trends in rink construction are carrying styling and functional design in rinks to new heights." (*Spring 1974*) For example, the owner of "six of the most beautiful rinks in America," J.T. Strickland, designed Skate Centers with "modernistic, nautical, Polynesia, Spanish and Hawaiian themes." (*Winter 1977*)

The number of new rinks grew steadily before exploding. "From a membership of 500 (the RSROA) at the start of the 70s to over 1,300 today." (*Spring 1977*) In 1970, 430 rink operators attended the three-day RSROA convention at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. In 1980, 2,300 people attended the President's dinner at the RSROA convention in Hawaii, and there were 2,300 rinks in the RSRO. (*George Pickard's Oral Interview 2001*)

### **Disco**

The rise of disco culture and music only intensified the industry's boom. "The 'disco craze' sweeping America has plunged its way into our roller skating centers all across the country." (*Winter 1978*) "We have seen, especially in our competitive event, a definite change toward disco music. More and of our skating centers throughout the country now play disco during sessions." According to a book highlighted in Skate magazine called *Keep on Rolling*, "A new roller revolution is rumbling across America. Skate manufacturers have sold more skates in the last five years than they did in the 20 before...and conservative estimates indicate that an impressive 4,000 roller rinks span the country." (*Fall 1978*)

Disco was also impacting competitive skating. "The roller disco craze is sweeping the country, and American Free Dance bronze medalists Linda Gyenese and Gary Fudge give tips on how it is done." (*Winter 1978*) Disco music penetrated the Gold Skate Classic. In the opening line of its 1979 feature, the magazine stated: "The syncopated bass of the disco rhythm line pulsed through the audience, as Donna Summer's plaintive wail enveloped the auditorium." (*Spring 1979*) Later that year, an advertisement claimed "Today's Disco-Styled Winners in Roller Skating Fashions Look to Leo's." (*Winter 1978*) "Due to the fact that very few skating rinks are using skating tempo records, we have decided to liquidate our entire stock," said an ad for Don Simmons 45 R.P.M. skating tempo records. (*Fall 1978*)



### **Beginning of the National Museum of Roller Skating**

Features on roller skating history also appeared in the second half of the decade. James Turner and Dick Young wrote most of the articles. "We would like to announce the formation of a Roller Skating Historical Society to promote more publicity about our sport." (*Spring 1978*) Turner and Young included a plan to "found a museum of Roller Skating with exhibit and archives open to the public" and asked readers to contact them for support. (These two individuals would be founding trustees of the National Museum of Roller Skating, whose creation would be announced two years later in the Summer 1980 edition of Skate magazine.)

"Due to the efforts of SRSTA member, Jim Turner, SKATE magazine now appears in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Turner began this immense project in 1975 when he became aware of the fact that there was no complete collection of SKATE magazines available for public use." (*Winter 1977*) Turner was able to assemble a nearly complete set of magazines, dating from 1944-1977. He would publish the first edition of his book *The History of Roller Skating* in 1975.

### **MDA**

New to the magazine in the 1970s was an annual feature on the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign, culminating in the Jerry Lewis Telethon broadcasted over Labor Day weekend. Roller skating rinks began participating in 1972, and their contributions increased greatly over the next few years. In 1972, "an almost unbelievable \$72,000 was raised." (*Winter 1972*) "RSROA quickly became one of the largest contributors to the MDA Campaign after only two years of participation." (*Spring 1974*) In 1975, donations exploded to \$1,445,000, "more than 1 1/1 times as much money as we had aimed for." (*Fall 1975*)



*"RSROA Rink Operators, Mike and Darcy Fleming, are joined by skaters in one of 10 appearances for roller skaters on the Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon." (Fall 1975)*



*"A Pairs exhibition by Debbie Isenhour and Royce Miller." (Fall 1975)*

On air, "roller skating received 10 network appearances during a 25-hour, nationally aired Jerry Lewis Telethon. This is more than twice as many appearances as had been allotted in the past. Furthermore, MDA expanded the format of skating appearances to

include exhibitions of top- quality skating in the entertainment portion of the show." *(Fall 1975)*

The Spring 1974 issue highlighted the RSROA's rinks variety of fundraising approaches for the MDA campaign, including "skating shows, raffles, bake sales, skating parties, canister collections, etc. By far the most successful fundraising project, and that which was the most popular with the skaters, was the Skate-A-Thon."

One participant in the Skate-A-Thon even broke a Guinness World Record: "At the Springfield Skate World in Springfield, Oregon, Randy Reed, 21, succeeded in breaking the Guinness World Record for continuous roller skating. With a total time of 322 hours and 20 minutes, over 13 days of skating, Reed raised pledges amounting to over \$7,000 for the MDA." *(Fall 1977)*

"It's no wonder that rinks sponsoring Skate-A-Thons were donating up to \$10,000 or more to the MDA" *(Winter 1973)* To highlight the event, skaters from nine Los Angeles rinks skated up to 75 miles throughout the city with police escorts. It perhaps brought the event to the attention of 1 million people, the article said. *(Winter 1973)* "Skaters at Skatelands of the Valley in Harlingen, MacAllen and Brownsville, Texas, raised nearly \$50,000 in their Skate-A-Thon for Muscular Dystrophy Association." *(Fall 1979)*

### **Gold Skate Classic**

One annual multi-page feature highlighted the two-day, six event Gold Skate Classic in Bakersfield, California. ". . . no one dared miss a minute of this unparalleled event. For thirteen years, California skaters have been letting it all hang out at the most flamboyant amateur roller skating contest in the country." *(Spring 1970)*



*"ALL that Glitters . . . The Gold Skate Classic XIII: (Spring 1978)*

"Begun in 1965, Gold Skate has grown from 322 contestants representing 18 California clubs to 1,516 skaters from 63 California clubs...Three men who originated the Classic as an experiment in 1965 and helped it grow into a 'showcase' of roller skating competitions are 'old pros' to the skating industry: Joe Nazzaro, of San Carlos, California, RSROA Board Member, G.B. Van Roekel, Santa Ana, California, and M.M. Shattuck, RSROA Commissioner of Sports from Redwood City, California." *(Spring 1978)*

An earlier feature on the event noted that "Nowhere in the nation can over 850 skaters compete in a showmanship competition where imagination and interpretation mean so much. The themes for the Gold Skate Classic are action, variety, rhythm, color, beauty and projection. Technical skating difficulty is subordinated to these elements of showmanship, and to succeed in the competitions, a performance must be more of an artistic triumph than a display of skating pyrotechnics." *(Summer 1971)*

The magazine explained how the event's 30 judges from the Bakersfield's business community would rate skaters on the basis of music, costume, and interpretation, but "difficulty of performance was of secondary importance." (*Spring 1978*) "Over the years, skaters and teachers have adapted well to the emphasis in the Classic on performance rather than content." (*Spring 1973*) "Of the 1,300 skaters participating in this year's Classic, 40% of them do not enter the Regional Championships." (*Spring 1974*)

A Spring 1976 feature noted the national exposure for the Classic: "Through the efforts of the Gold Skate Classic Directors, Joe Nazzaro and G.B. "Bud" Van Roekel in conjunction with Irwin Rosee, selected segments of the Gold Skate Classic will be presented on the show 'The Champions'." (*Spring 1976*)

Though the Gold Skate Classic dominated coverage, two other skating shows were also mentioned in feature articles, and numerous news articles appeared about others. One Fall 1970 issue featured the Roller Skating Spectacular put on by Tony and Caroline Mirelli of Memphis, Tennessee. Another issue included (Walt) "Graham's Starlight Productions, a non-profit organization, recently sponsored the eight annual skating extravaganza benefit show. "Rollin '79' in Edgewood, Maryland. The 40,000 production featured some of roller skating's outstanding competitive skaters." (*Summer 1979*)

Another interesting performance was the Rollerettes skating in the middle Rockefeller Center. "Joining them were several girls from Levittown Roller Rink, who skate together as the Rollerettes, a precision drill team on skates." (*Winter 1976*)

### **Other Features**

Countless changes occurred in competitive skating in the 1970s. One 1977 controversy surrounding skating technology was the elimination of powder for speed competition. One article mentioned the reaction by some to the change: "An unusual display of poor sportsmanship marred the opening night of the 1977 National Speed Skating Championships." (*Fall 1977*) The change's coverage mirrored that of the introduction of the toe stop in the 1940s: "The controversy came to a head in June, 1947, when Speed Chairman Otto Albrecht warned contestants that toe stops would not be allowed during the year's speed competitions. Enraged pros and skaters protested the action, and several top pros were evicted from the Association for disagreeing with the Board decision." (*Spring 1979 article on the history of the toe stop.*)

With the elimination of powder came the final end of the long dominance of the wooden wheel. Though urethane wheels were advertised in Skate magazine from the beginning of the 1970s, this change would only heighten their increasing prominence in the industry. "The new urethane wheel, borrowed from roller skating from the skate board industry, proved to be the championship-deciding element." (*Fall 1978*)

*"The Rollerettes, a precision drill team, skate in front of Radio City Music Hall, home of the famous Rockettes." Much was written in Skate magazine about the publicity that roller skating was receiving in the 1970s.*



Besides the passing of powder and the wooden wheel was the discontinuance of the roller skating queen contest, which was featured every year through 1976. Also gone was Fours Skating in 1974. "For the first time, National Competition included a Women's Hockey Division" for both puck and ball. (*Fall 1977*) "The most talked about new concept in skating which will make its debut this season is the liberalization of dance policy." (*Spring 1976*) The changes in competitive skating in the 1970s were many and would require their own separate article to cover them adequately. (James Turner's *The History of Roller Skating* is a good source for changes in competitive skating in the 1970s and other decades. It can be purchased on the NMRS's website.)

---

## **Final Farwell to the Elmhurst History Museum Exhibit**

Here are photos of Jack and Rowena Countryman and other remaining shots previously not printed in the museum's newsletter. This exhibit highlighted the Elm Skating Rink, along with roller skating in Chicago during WWII. The exhibit closed Nov. 4. Some parts of these displays will be at the NMRS in the future.









Roller skating emerged as the number one participatory sport in America in 1950. Across the country, 5,000 roller rinks and 18 million skaters defined an era that became roller skating's Golden Age—and Chicago was the center of it all.

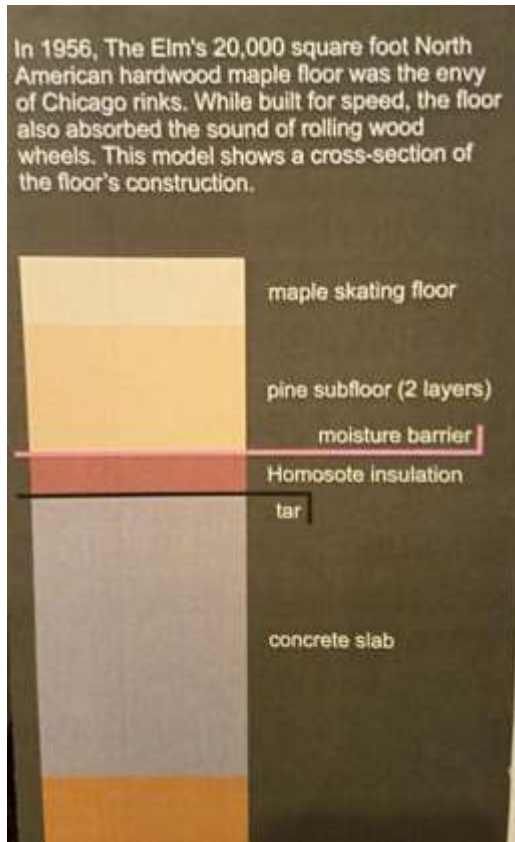


The Golden Age of Roller Skating spanned from the late 1930s to the 1960s. It was a time following the Great Depression and during years of war when the country looked for affordable fun and community connections. Americans found both at neighborhood roller rinks.

What made roller skating so popular? Roller skating was hip, and everyone went to the rink. "Rink rats" were the regulars who filled the floors and were passionate for America's hottest sport. This is the story of the glory days of roller skating, Chicago's rink rats, and the skating rinks they called home.







## STAY CONNECTED

The National Museum of Roller Skating | (402) 483-7551 extension 16 |  
[directorcurator@rollerskatingmuseum.com](mailto:directorcurator@rollerskatingmuseum.com)  
[www.rollerskatingmuseum.com](http://www.rollerskatingmuseum.com)



The National Museum of Roller Skating is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in Lincoln, Nebraska. It is the only dedicated roller skating museum in the world. We are committed to the preservation of the history of roller skating. With over 50 displays cases, the museum educates the public on all aspects of roller skating, which dates back to the first patented skate from 1819.

**Copyright:** *Rolling Thru Time* is published throughout the year by the National Museum of Roller Skating. Copyright 2018 by the NMRS. Written permission from the museum is required for reproduction of any part of this publication. *Rolling Thru Time* welcomes stories, art and photo contributions. These works selected for publication may be edited to conform to size and other requirements. Opinions expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the museum. Correspondence concerning articles is welcomed. Statement of fact and opinion are the responsibility of the authors alone.

**Officers and Trustees:**

President: Kim Wall; Vice President: Nellie Anderson Lillie; Treasurer: Alan Bacon; Secretary: Peggy Young  
Other Trustees: Annelle Anderson, past president; Dianne Braun, Danny Brown, Dominic Cangelosi, Charlene Conway, Howard "Bud" Engle, Bill Hoefler, Ed Hughes, Michael Jacques, Judith Young Link, Jim Link, Linda Miner, and Randy Ray.



Writer/Editor: Alan Bacon; Copy Editor: Joy Bacon; Graphic Designer: Kelsey Bacon

National Museum Rollerskating | 4730 South St, Lincoln, NE 68506 [www.rollerskatingmuseum.com](http://www.rollerskatingmuseum.com)

[Unsubscribe pyoung@usarollersports.org](mailto:pyoung@usarollersports.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [About our service provider](#)

Sent by alan.r.bacon@gmail.com in collaboration with

**Constant Contact**   
Try it free today