

Historical Roller Skating

OVERVIEW

National Museum of Roller Skating
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Douglas Breniser and Gloria Nord. Photo courtesy of Rose Martin.

Curator's Corner

October already! I hope that you have all had a good couple of months since I last spoke to you. The museum has been a very busy place. Currently we are in the process of cataloging the entire collection onto computer. This is a monumental task but the rewards will be extensive. No longer will it take hours (if not days) to hunt down specific items from our holdings. We will be able to quickly search and find any number of magazines, photos, skates, etc. This will be an invaluable tool for research when we get requests for information from individuals, the media, and others. Also in the works at the museum is an exhibit on the history of in-line skates. It will feature skates from the early 1800s through to today's popular versions.

One of the museum members, Sam Nieswizski of Paris, France, has taken me up on my request for suggestions for the newsletter. He has proposed a question and answer section and has sent in a couple of questions to get things started. If any of you have questions regarding the history of roller skating or a related topic please feel free to send them in. I will post them in the newsletter and give the other members a chance to respond. I hope this will bring the community of museum members and roller skating enthusiasts a little closer together. I will also try to provide answers to any queries submitted.

It may seem a little too early to bring this up but the holiday season is just around the corner. Perhaps you would consider giving a membership to the museum as a gift to a friend or a loved one. The museum has also received a new batch of mugs with the museum logo emblazoned on them. Just another gift idea from the museum.

Finally, as promised, this issue features the Skating Vanities. Rather than having me do all of the talking I have persuaded Caroline (Buchanan) Mirelli, who was with the show for several years and who married another "vanity," Tony Mirelli (see photo page 5), to share some of her experiences and insights

into the show. A special thank you is in order for her contributions to the museum and to roller skating history. Included are many photos spanning the history of the Skating Vanities taken from programs and news articles. I would like to make a special request of the members of the museum. If you have any programs or other memorabilia from the Skating Vanities please consider donating these items to the museum. Our holdings are far from complete and anything you donate would help to insure that this important part of roller skating history would be preserved. As always, any other donations are welcomed and encouraged.

Scott Wilhite,
Director and Curator

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Historical Roller Skating Overview is the newsletter of the National Museum of Roller Skating. It is available only through honorary membership in the museum. Minimum annual contribution is \$15.00. All inquiries, comments should be sent to the Museum Director, P. O. Box 6579, Lincoln, NE 68506.

SKATING VANITIES *by Caroline Mirelli*

Skating Vanities was the only roller skating show of its kind in the world. The show ran from 1942-1956. The star of the show was Gloria Nord who was featured as the Sonja Henie of the rollers. Gloria starred in the 1944 Betty Grable film, "Pin Up Girl," which featured Martha Raye, John Harvey, and the Skating Vanities. In the early years of the show Gloria's mother Daisy travelled with her and also made many of Gloria's costumes.

Harold Steinman of New York was the producer of Skating Vanities. Russell Market of Radio City Music Hall staged many shows but Gae Foster of the Roxy Theatre did the majority.

There were anywhere from 80-140 cast members including the stage manager, bookkeeper, orchestra leader, drummer, piano player, trumpet and sax players, and the wardrobe mistress and dressers. When Skating Vanities arrived in town they had to hire union musicians, and extra stagehands and dressers. Auditions were held for skaters in nearly every town the show played in.

The show travelled all over the country and to Europe. During one European tour the cast had a private audience with the Pope and skated in England before the Queen of England. In Paris

they met the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre.

In 1953 the Skating Vanities combined the show with the comedy team of Olsen and Johnson. Unfortunately during this engagement Mr. Johnson had a bad automobile accident, and the show had to close early. The following year the show was renamed the "Hippodrome of 1954." The show was patterned after the Hippodrome Theatre of New York. For a short time Louis Armstrong played in the show.

Originally, the equipment the skaters used was very poor. Wooden wheels, loose ball bearings, and rubber toe stops were used. Over the years the skates improved and the show was equipped with Cleveland precision skates, Hyde boots, Roll away wheels, and later, Raybesto wheels.

The skating floor was 80 feet wide and 180 feet long and made of 4' by 8' sheets of tempered masonite which were blocked in by small squares of masonite glued to the floor. The masonite helped deaden the sound of the wooden wheels, but powder had to be used for traction. The floor had to be turned over after each performance due to warping. In some buildings it was laid over concrete with pipes for ice skating, and when the ice was turned on, the masonite would be wet.



GLORIA NORD

Lovely Gloria Nord, 21-year-old ballerina of "Skating Vanities," has a double claim to fame. Not only is she acknowledged as the outstanding dance-skater in America, but she is also one of the country's most beautiful girls. Her face and figure have adorned such national publications as The Saturday Evening Post, Look, Pic, the New York Sunday News, and others. She has won acclaim for her solo skating in the aptly-titled movie, "Pin-Up Girl." And her photographs have been requested by American servicemen all over the world.

Like many another beauty of our day, Gloria was born in California. Even as a child, she showed marked dancing ability—and the ballet, as a matter of fact, was her original ambition. As a hobby, Gloria went in for ice-skating, and was so good at adapting dance routines to ice that many urged her to become a professional ice-dancer. But Gloria wasn't interested—dancing, she maintained, should be done on terra firma.

But fate had other ideas. One day Gloria went to the Hollywood roller rink with friends and, for the first time, donned roller skates. With no trouble at all, she began to dance on them. Soon she was giving exhibitions. Then Harold Steinman saw her, conceived the idea for "Skating Vanities," and persuaded Gloria to change her mind about being a straight ballet dancer. This was not too difficult for roller-skating held for Gloria an irresistible appeal which ice-skating had never had.



GAE FOSTER

SKATING



Douglas Breniser
AND
Billy Martin

FOUR BUNNIES



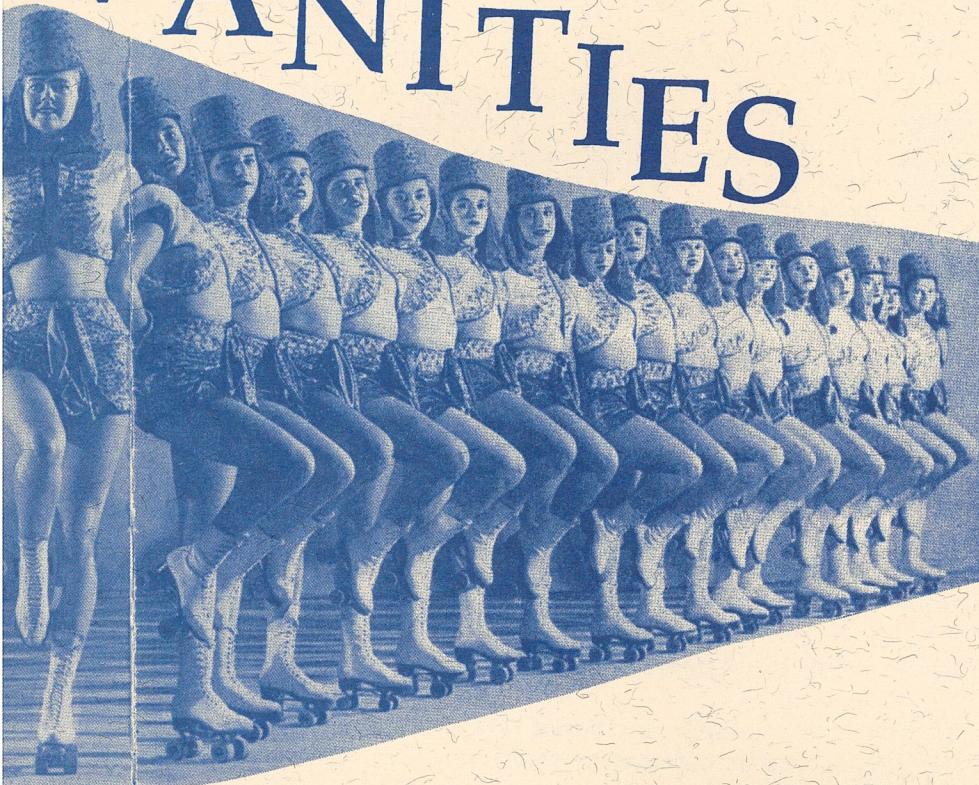
GLORI



Eileen McDonnell



VANITIES



HAROLD STEINMAN



Peggy Wallace



*Rose Piccola
& Tony Mirrelli*



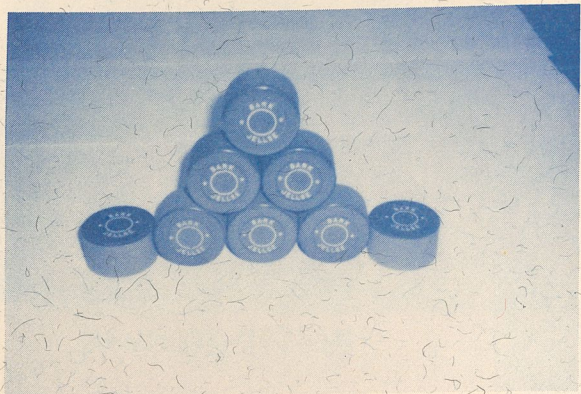
**OLSEN &
JOHNSON**
stars of
STAGE • SCREEN
& TELEVISION

NORD



MUSEUM NOTES

As usual I want to highlight some of the recent donations to the museum and acknowledge the people who have contributed to the museum's collections in the last few months.



(Left) These Bark-Jellse wheels were donated by Betty Ann Danna and Ron Jellse. They donated a full set which had never been used. These wheels were

very popular in the 1960s and were the forerunners of many of the figure wheels of today. The museum did not previously have any Bark-Jellse wheels in its collection.



(Above, right) Chester Fried donated this pair of German Hudora Street Skates.

(Below, left) Carol Hickey Driscoll donated a number of photos, including this one, from her days competing in the diaper division in Ohio from the late 1950s. Also included were photos and articles featuring Edward J. Kempf.



(Below, right) John Chrien donated over 30 magazines to the museum dating from the early to late 1940s. Roller skating magazines are some of the most important items to be housed in our archives because they help to document the history of the sport and give the museum greater resources for research.

Other donors include Cynthia Smith Galletly, John J. Millazzo, Rudolph Merbler, Gary Greeneen c/o Bonnie Greeneen, Sam Nieswizski, Don and Martha Schaefer, Steve and Gloria Poulson, and Tammy Kettunen. The museum gratefully acknowledges their contributions which help to preserve the history of roller skating.



PATRON MEMORIAL PLAQUE

The museum is pleased to announce that there have been several names added to the Patron Memorial Plaque including Tony Mirelli, Ben Hodges, and Ed Hodges. To place someone's name on the plaque friends and family can donate a one-time fee of \$250 to the museum. The plaque will be permanently displayed and include their name, life span, city, and state. If you wish to have someone included on the Patron Memorial Plaque contact the museum director.

BENEFACTORS, PATRONS, AND ASSOCIATE PATRONS OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ROLLER SKATING:

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Susan Maiolo	Southwest Pacific Sectional Chapter

A special thank you goes out to all the members who renewed their memberships in the last three months. The new museum director appreciates the show of support:

Sharon Roberts	Barbara Kimmich
John Chrien	Arlene Rowland
Frances Mary Cooley	Les and Joan Diener
Wanda Young	Jack Walker
Skate Island	Chester Fried
Lawrence Lavieri	Virginia Turnbull
Robert and Sharon Behrendt	Robert Purcell
Jim Groark	Robert Gormley
Skate World of Troy, MI	Reginald A. Street
James Thomas	Lois C. Beheim
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Florence Schuneman	Floyd W. Allen
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David and Marian Sutherland	William Kelly
Mary Hotchkiss	

Be a Part of History

The history of roller skating is fragile. Once it is lost, it may never be regained. Help the National Museum of Roller Skating preserve the rich history of our sport by joining one of our special membership categories listed below. Future roller skaters will thank you.

Contributors of \$15 or more become Honorary Members of the Museum and receive a Museum membership pin, official identification card, the newsletter, and free admission whenever they visit the Museum.

- Check or money order enclosed payable to the National Museum of Roller Skating.
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- Paid by Master-Card.
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- PATCH
- Individual - \$15
- Family - \$15
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- Patron - \$100
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Contributions are tax-deductible up to the amount permitted by law.

Q and A

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Sam Nieswizski wants to know:

"Is the unknown Dutchman in the 18th century real or a legend?"

For those of you unfamiliar with the story, supposedly an avid Dutch ice skater could not bear the idea of not being able to skate when the weather got too warm so he built a skate with rollers to simulate ice skating during the summer months. Although this story is often mentioned in historical accounts of the origin of roller skating I have yet to see any documentation. Perhaps, as most legends, it contains at least a kernel of truth. What do you think readers?

Mr. Nieswizski also asks:

"Did the inventor Woodward take a patent in 1859?"

The museum has quite a few patents and copies of patents on file but no record of Woodward in 1859. How about it?

Send questions and answers to the museum director.