

# HISTORICAL ROLLER SKATING OVERVIEW

December/January 1998  
Issue No. 61

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*April "Moonlight" Parker and Myze, who were childhood roller skating partners in Houston, Texas, find themselves paired again in "SKATEWAY," a roller disco arrangement from Rastar for Columbia Pictures, Inc. © 1988/89*



Dear members,

Happy Holidays! Thank you to all the new members who have recently joined the museum. I hope you have enjoyed your new book, *The History of Roller Skating*. As the holiday season approaches, a museum membership would make a great gift to any roller skater. And why not also try some museum store items such as T-shirts and mugs which are available on page 7.

Each year the museum recognizes its members for their continued support of the museum. Beginning on page 5 is a list of our members. Thank you for your generosity over the past year! I hope you will continue to support us in the future.

Over the past year, the museum has accomplished many things. Most notably was the release of *The History of Roller Skating*. The museum was also involved with several exhibitions which included the Herbert Hoover Library and Museum, Kansas State Historical Society, USA Roller Skating's National Championships, NHL Florida Panthers, and the current exhibition with the San Francisco Airport Commission which can be seen at the San Francisco International Airport's South Terminal Lobby B through May 1998.

The upcoming year promises to be exciting as well with new exhibits--The Transcontinental Roller Derby, The Arena Gardens, 1935-53, What Women Wore in the Rink, 1890-1950, Roller Music, Roller Skating in the Movies--and many revised exhibits on Artistic and Speed Skating and Roller Hockey. I hope you will have the opportunity to visit the museum soon and learn about the history that you have helped create.

The feature article in this issue was written by Assistant Curator Sarah Webber. As the winter movie release is upon us, the article reflects past roller skating movies that may be available at your local video store. If you remember another roller skating movie, please let us know and don't forget the popcorn!

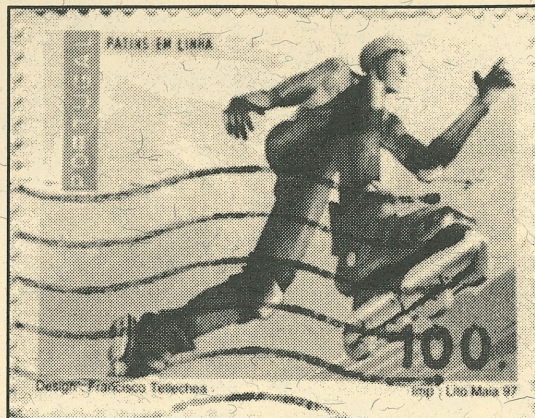
The museum sends its condolences to the family of Hamilton Wilcox, who recently passed away. Hamm was the original operator of Rollerama Skating Rink in Levittown, PA. He was one of the first operators to introduce rock and roll to roller skating.



The museum recently received a letter from Portugal that was mailed with a stamp highlighting an in-line roller skater. The image above showcases the stamp that was designed by Francisco Tellechea from this year.

Thanks again for your support. Enjoy the newsletter and best wishes for a Cool Yule and a Fabulous First!

Michael Zaidman  
Director & Curator



*In-line skater postage stamp sent to the museum from Portugal, 1997.*

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**Museum Hours**

9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday  
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## Skating Across the Silver Screen, A Century of Roller Skating Movies

Incredibly popular for nearly a century, American cinema continuously incorporates ideas from other areas in American culture, including roller skating. Films have included specific aspects of roller skating such as the Skating Vanities in "Pin Up Girl," and the roller derby in both the 1950 film "The Fireball" and the 1972 film "Kansas City Bomber." During the popular disco era, several movies worked roller disco into the plot of the film, including "Skatetown, U.S.A." Other film makers have used roller skating in their movies, from Charlie Chaplin's use of rink skating as comedy in his film, "The Rink," to recent science-fiction movies like "Prayer of the Rollerboys." Over the course of the 20th century, roller skating has appeared in numerous contexts in many films.

### 1916 *The Rink*

Often referred to as the film in which Chaplin performs at his most inventively graceful, "The Rink" came out two years after he moved to Los Angeles at the age of 25. Chaplin plays an inept and clumsy waiter by day, an elegant and graceful roller skater by night at a nearby rink. There he meets a young woman while skating one night, and she invites him to her birthday skating party, where Chaplin faces off with another interested man. A row ensues, with the police appearing and Chaplin making his exit by hooking his cane to the back of an automobile. Though Chaplin's skating ability came as a surprise to many of his fans, before Hollywood he once played in a skating act where he learned the fiendish skill of falling.

### 1937 *Shall We Dance?*

This romantic comedy stars Fred Astaire as a ballet dancer who would rather be a hooper and Ginger Rogers as a musical comedy actress. The two unite efforts in order to compete in a dance contest, pretending to be married. Liking the act so much, the couple does tie the knot by the end of the film. The seventh film pairing between Astair and Rogers, the movie received an Oscar nomination for best song, the George and Ira Gershwin tune, "They Can't Take That Away From Me."

### 1944 *Pin Up Girl*

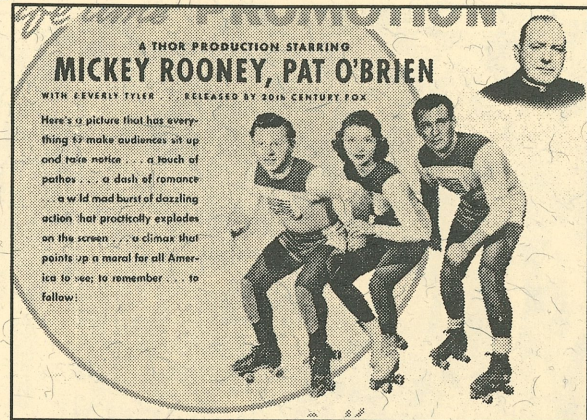
Pin-up queen Betty Grable stars in this musical comedy which featured the popular roller skating act, The Skating Vanities. Grable plays a secretary with a tendency to stretch the truth who falls in love with a war hero, played by John Harvey, who believes her to be an actress. While Grable's character struggles to unravel the complicated situation, the audience is treated to numerous dazzling production numbers.



A scene from the 20th Century-Fox Production, "PIN-UP GIRL" © (94.11.16).

### 1950 *Fireball*

Mickey Rooney plays a rebellious, antisocial orphan who becomes a skating champion in the roller derby. Pat O'Brien co-stars as a



This advertisement by the Chicago Roller Skate Company promotes "The Fireball" movie release.

priest and loyal friend to Rooney in his quest for fame and acclamation. The Chicago Skate Company launched an aggressive promotional campaign alongside the film's opening in the fall of 1950, encouraging rinks across the country to prominently display Chicago skates alongside movie ads.

### 1955 *It's Always Fair Weather*

Three friends who served together in World War II reunite ten years later and find their friendship is no longer strong, so they take to the Big Apple. The film included a roller skating routine by Gene Kelly, which critics hailed as a stand-out performance. Kelly also co-directed the film, which received two Oscar nominations and became one of the most popular films of 1955.

### 1971 *Derby*

Director Robert Kayner and crew moved in with derby skater Mike Snell and his family, recording aspects of their often quite personal lives for a film commissioned by roller derby sponsor Jerry Seltzer, son of the founder. *New York Times* movie reviewer Vincent Canby was "amazed that a film which was designed to be self-serving should be such an accurate report on a time and place." The film, he noted, mixed "fantasy and fact skillfully." The movie also includes interviews with roller derby stars like Charles O'Connor and scenes from derby events.

### 1972 *Kansas City Bomber*

With plenty of rough action comparable to the live event, Raquel Welch plays a rugged roller derby skater manipulated by her teams' owner, with whom she is having an affair. The film follows Welch's character as she attempts to salvage her career while raising two children on her own. The climax of the film occurs when Welch, tired of being used, refuses team owner Kevin McCarthy's order to throw a grudge match. Welch did much of her own skating in this movie, holding up production once for six weeks after breaking her wrist from a fall. The movie also features a young Jodie Foster.



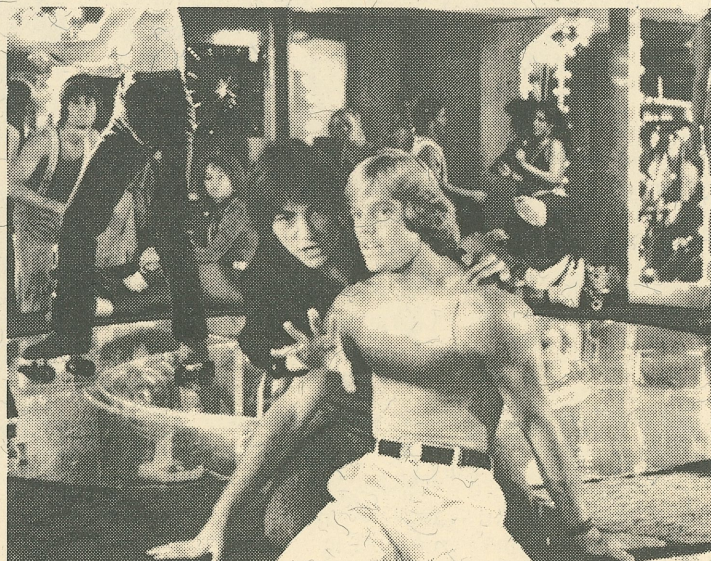
This picture was taken from the *Roller Boogie* record cover featuring songs from Cher, Johnnie Coolrock, Mavis Vegas Davis, and Earth, Wind & Fire (81.1.210).

### 1975 *Rollerball*

A futuristic drama set in 2018 about a world of corporate states with no free-will, God, or violence, the venting of human nature's animal violence is through the popular game of rollerball--a mixture of roller skating, motorcycle racing, and basketball where death is part of the entertainment. James Caan stars as a long-standing hero of the gruesome sport, who becomes dangerously popular and ordered to retire, only he refuses.

### 1978 *Roller Boogie*

A rich young woman, played by Linda Blair, runs away from her shallow parents in order to roller skate on Venice Beach. She ends up helping an expert roller skater foil a crooked businessman's attempts at taking



Street skater Greg Bradford (right) and manager/friend Scott Baio prepare for a big skating contest in "SKATETOWN U.S.A.," from Columbia Pictures © (97.0.51-6).

over the local roller disco.

### 1979 *Skatetown, U.S.A.*

Advertised as a mix between "West Side Story" "American Graffiti," and "Saturday Night Fever" on wheels, the movie centers on an annual roller disco dance contest at Skatetown, a spectacular roller rink located on the Santa Monica Pier. Patrick Swayze stars as Ace, a tough Venice Beach gang leader at the rink, competing against the valley boys at the disco contest. Scott Baio and Maureen McCormick from "The Brady Bunch" also star, and Flip Wilson makes a guest appearance.

### 1980 *Xanadu*

Olivia Newton-John stars as Terpsichore, a singing, roller skating muse who comes to earth to assist musician and roller-disco owner Michael



An MGM release, *Solarbabies*, with Jami Gertz (middle) in this sci-fi adventure © (88.1.200).

Beck. In addition to acting in the film, Newton-John also sang on the soundtrack, with "Magic" becoming the most famous song. Though a disco cultural icon, with a Top 10 hit every year throughout the 1970s, "Xanadu" only one of four movies she appeared in over her long career. Gene Kelly makes a star appearance in the film.

### 1986 *Solarbabies*

A sci-fi film about a band of roller skating kids who are refugees in a far-away land with little water who use magic to help them fight the system.

### 1990 *Prayer of the Rollerboys*

This sci-fi film's plot focuses on a bankrupt America where racist-fascist roller skating teenagers rule. Corey Haim stars as a young man who infiltrates one vicious drug-dealing gang in order to save his brother. --

SARAH WEBBER



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the museum since last year. Thank you for supporting and educating others about roller skating's history.

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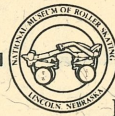
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### Did You Know?

#### MEMBERSHIP QUIZ RESULTS

When was the first public skating rink opened as opposed to a private club?

Answer: 1857 in London, England.

Winners: No Winners for this question.

### Do You Know?

#### NEXT MEMBERSHIP QUIZ

Besides winning two Elementary Pairs National Championships in 1971 and 1972 with Robin Miller, who is this man and what movie did he star in?

The first two correct answers will win a postcard set from the museum store. Please mail your answers to the museum.

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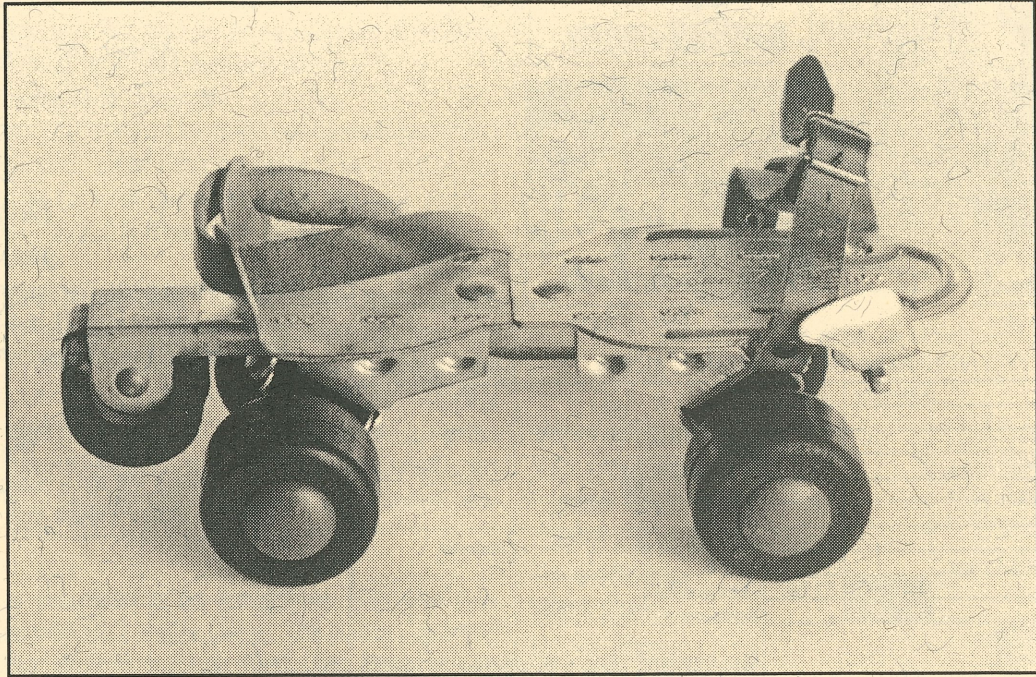
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QUIZ & STORE ITEMS

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This skate was made in Haifa, Israel in 1983. Note the star of David engraved on the metal plate and the unusual heel stop.



ANOTHER MUSEUM ARTIFACT

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