

October 2018

Rolling Thru Time
Newsletter

The National Museum of Roller Skating



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Picture from left to right: Suzanne Pickard, Renee Pickard Osterhoudt, Sheri Pickard Johnson, and Peggy Young, museum secretary, standing in front of George Pickard Memorial Plaque.

George Pickard's family recently visited the museum. Renee, who is living in Scottsdale, Arizona, was visiting her mom Suzanne and sister Sheri in Omaha. They came to see the museum and say hello to Peggy. Peggy said they enjoyed looking at the artifacts and recognized many things that their family had donated to the museum, including some custom-built skates made by Alan Richardson for Suzanne, 1958 Senior Ladies National Speed Champion. Peggy added that the gift shop was a hit, with each of them adding several new items to the t-shirt wardrobe.

George Pickard was the executive director of Roller Rink Operators Association from 1972-1988. He was the executive Director of USA Roller Sports from 1988-2001. He also was a founding trustee of the NMRS and its secretary/treasurer from 1980-2005.

Museum News

Kim Wall, museum president, recently returned from a trip to the Elmhurst History Museum. The purpose of the trip was to clarify and accept the items the Elmhurst Museum was donating to NMRS. The Elmhurst Museum was very generous with its donations. Some of the items are coming from Sandra Levin and the recently closed Orbit Skate Center near Chicago. She loaned the items to the museum with the understanding that they would eventually go to NMRS (More on this in a future issue). Kim will send a person to pick up the items when the exhibit ends on November 4. He will store them in his facility in Fort Wayne, Indiana, until a time is convenient to transport them to Lincoln.

Kim Wall signed a contract with TrustWorkz, a marketing company, to update the museum's website. TrustWorkz is a member of the Roller Skating Suppliers and Manufacturers. It gave the museum a special rate. Bill Hoefler, museum trustee, is heading up the project. Contact Bill if you have any suggestions or comments about the website.

Thank You Shout Outs!



To Annelle Anderson, past museum president and current museum trustee, Peggy Young, museum secretary, and Rhonda Cann, museum employee, for helping to make these newsletters possible. For example, it was Peggy and Rhonda that captured the Pickard family's story. It was Annelle who sent the link to the Caroline Mirelli story and Peggy sent additional photos. Both Annelle and Peggy are invaluable with their decades of contacts throughout the skating community. During newsletter production, they are receiving numerous emails asking for clarity about names and events.

To Joe Nazzaro who did an extensive mailing to every rink in order to boost museum membership. He and Nellie Anderson Lillie, museum vice president, are working on a system to better maintain the list of museum members.

To Bud, museum trustee, and Shirley Engle for last summer, and many summers excursions to the NMRS during Nationals to help with the extra influx of people during this time. NMRS would also like to thank them for their generous support for the museum's new computer.

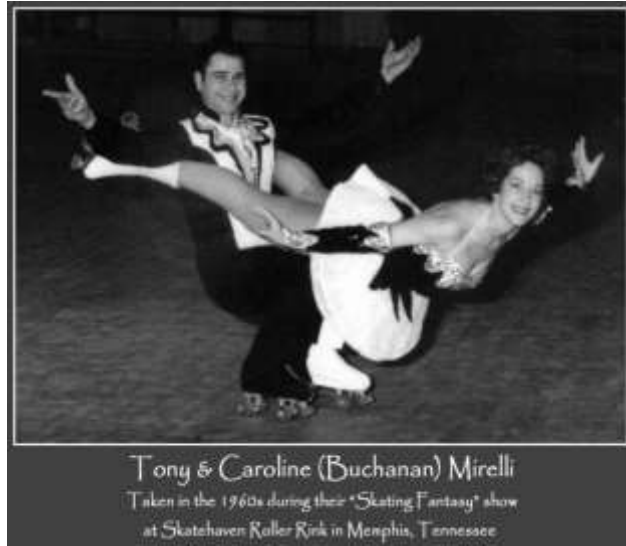
To TrustWorkz in making the update of the NMRS website possible. This will expand the exposure of NMRS outside of its walls and better tell the history of roller skating to the skating community and the general public.

To Sandra Levin for remembering NMRS. NMRS pledges to be a good steward of your memorable items.

To Tom Rusoo and James Turner, for their information on the Elmhurst Museum's exhibit and Chicago skating.

To Dave Oberg, executive director, and the entire staff of the Elmhurst History Museum, for the first-rate exhibit, the welcoming hospitality, and magnanimous gifts to NMRS. May your exhibit be a template for other museums around the country.

Caroline Mirelli, Vanities Star



See a recent story about Caroline Mirelli by Caroline Sposto: ["Rolling Along: After 79 Years of Skating, Caroline Mirelli Has No Plans to Retire"](#) or go to www.memphishealthandfitness.com

Caroline Mirelli was a star of the Skating Vanities, the only professional roller skating touring show. After the Skating Vanities closed in 1959, she successfully turned to competitive teaching. During the 1960s Mirelli assisted Lynn Anselmi with the National Queen Contest and the National Championship show. She was elected, with her husband Tony, to the USA Roller Sports Hall of Fame for Distinguished Service in 1995. She became a SRSTA Life Member in 2001 by the RSA. She was elected to the USA Roller Sports Competitive Coaches Roller Skating Hall of Fame in 2004. She is one of the few surviving members of the Skating Vanities.

You can also find a story she wrote in the [Spring 2004 part 2](#) edition of Skate magazine. It can be easily found on the museum members only page of the NMRS website. She gives vivid detail of the experiences traveling worldwide with the Skating Vanities.

A Trip to Elmhurst/Chicago

Roller Skating On Display

By Alan Bacon

This was the year for a trip to Chicago. Reading *Chicago Rink Rats: The Roller Capital in Its Heyday* by Tom Russo piqued my interest in Chicago skating. With the exhibit at the Elmhurst History Museum about the Elm rink and roller skating in Chicago in the 1940s, it finalized my decision to go. Whether it was a Cubs game, a river architectural tour, or Chase Records, Chicago was amazing.

As we took a commuter train to Elmhurst, about a half an hour west of Chicago, I noticed the Elmhurst Museum's skating poster as soon as I entered the small but clean and tidy metra station. Then, walking the couple of blocks to the museum, you couldn't help to notice the same Elmhurst Museum's skating image hanging from many of the city's light poles. This town knows how to celebrate roller skating. I have never seen (outside the wall of the NMRS) a better display of roller skating. The entire staff of the museum took time out of their day to welcome me. They seemed so pleased with the theme of the exhibit and the response it has received from the public. Dave Oberg, executive director, gave much thanks to the NMRS for lending one of Gloria Nord's dresses. She was the star of the *Skating Vanities* in the 1940s, and was based in Chicago during her time with them.



From the Metra Station to light poles, the Elmhurst History Museum and the city of Elmhurst put out their welcome mats to roller skating



Even the museum retail shop followed the skating theme with this mug, jewelry and other items

Dan Bartlett, curator of exhibits, showed me the technology behind the video displays. It was interesting to push a button and see a clip from a 1950s era rink with skate dancing accompanied by organ music in the background. Push another button, and a clip from the 1970s disco era plays. One video highlighted Gloria Nord and the Skating Vanities, something that costs only \$75 a year for rights to use. Another visual highlight was the large wall map of Chicago and the location of the Chicago rinks of the 1940s and 1950s.



An example of the exhibit's display and recurring design theme, along with the simple but effective use of video

The Elmhurst History Museum's staff and myself in front of the giant map of Chicago and its rinks of the 1940s and 1950s. From left to right: Alan Bacon, Patrice Roche, marketing and communications specialist, Dave Oberg, executive director, Dan Bartlett, curator of exhibits, and Daniel Lund, curator of collections. It's amazing that a town, where Carl Sandburg lived and wrote, of less than 50,000 supports a museum and staff of this caliber

As enjoyable as it was to see roller skating displayed at the Elmhurst Museum, I was disappointed to not see in some of the other great Chicago museums. The Chicago History Museum had a display of recreational items manufactured in the past in Chicago: bicycles, Brunswick bowling balls – but no mention of the Chicago Roller Skate Company (1905) or the Richardson Ball Bearing and Skate Company (1898). As the museum rightly mentions, 80% of all bicycles in America were made in Chicago at one time. Would that same high percentage have been true for roller skates? For example, Levant Richardson was in the bicycle business before turning to roller skating manufacturing in Chicago. He was the first to introduce steel ball bearings into roller skates in the late 1800s, a tremendous innovation in roller skating. This innovation was a major contributor to the second major boom in roller skating in the early 1900s, that most likely started in Chicago. His ball bearing skates provided real speed to famous speed skaters of the early 1900s, like Fred Martin.

The museum of Science and Industry featured the best exhibit I've ever seen on the history of bicycles – but no sign of a roller skate. The display could mention, under the caption of the historic Safety Bike of the 1880s, (the first bike that ordinary people were comfortable using), that its introduction may have contributed to the end of the first roller skating boom of the 1880s, but that roller skating was the first recreational phenomena on wheels. (The Safety Bike of the 1880s did for the sport of bicycling what the Plimpton skate of 1863 did for sport of roller skating.) At the DuSable Museum of African American History—again— no mention of roller skating. Much could be said about the historic Chicago skating venue the Savoy Ballroom, for example. Our industry needs to do much more to tell the history of roller skating and its impact on American culture.

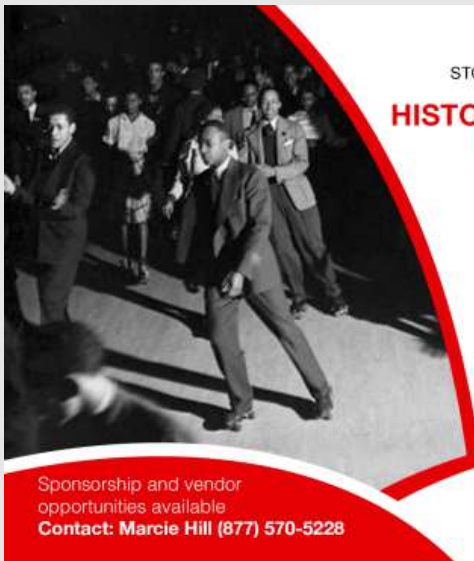
But roller skating is still alive and well in Chicago. I saw skating displayed during adult-only sessions at some great Chicago rinks: The Lombard, Glenwood, and The Rink. I was especially amazed at the JB (James Brown) skating style I saw at Glenwood and The Rink in south Chicago. Never before have I seen so many skaters during a public sessions skate with such agility, style and speed rolling together. In both rinks, full on a late August night, I saw no spills or falls despite the complexity of maneuvers. My only disappointment was that there were so many other rinks I didn't have time to see, including the live organ-accompanied dance session at the Aurora Skate Center, and the

Lynwood Sport center where the 2005 *Roll Bounce* movie was filmed. In greater Chicago, there are multiple adult-only sessions throughout the week to choose from.

The Elmhurst History Museum's exhibit closes Sunday November 4th.



*On the left is Darius "D-Breez" Stroud and on the right, Calvin Smith at the Glenwood Roller Rink. I talked with them about the history of JB skating. Stroud wrote the forward to "Chicago Rink Rats" by Tom Russo and said "Roller skating is about the music." Smith said he was one of the first skaters to do JB moves when it began in the 1970s. You can see them demonstrate JB style via YouTube: [D breeze@skate for life 2012](#); and [Calvin Smith, Dance in Chicago: Skating with James Brown's Style](#). For some great traditional organ-accompanied dance skating in Chicago see [Monday Nights @Aurora Skate Center](#). [R&B Mondays at the Lombard Rink](#) is another example of the diversity of Chicago skating. Glenwood is a rink where James Turner teaches, founding NMRS trustee and the author of the book *The History of Roller Skating*.*



REAL SKATE
STORIES PRESENT

**HOW WE
ROLL**
HISTORY OF BLACK SKATING IN CHICAGO

**HISTORY OF BLACK SKATING
in Chicago (1938-2018)**

Saturday, December 8, 2018
 5 pm to 8 pm

Glenwood Roller Skating Rink
 656 Holbrook Road, Glenwood, Illinois

- Presentation of black roller skating history
- Intergenerational skate
- Appetizers, raffles and more

Sponsorship and vendor opportunities available
Contact: Marcie Hill (877) 570-5228

\$15 for Adults | \$10 for Children Under 12
 Get tickets from Marcie Hill or Eventbrite
<https://howwerollchicago.eventbrite.com>

Pictured is a poster for an event at the Glenwood Rink about the "History of Black Skating in Chicago".

Marcie Hill is writing a book about the history of African American roller skating in Chicago.

Elmhurst Skating Exhibit Brings Back Memories From Rowena Countryman

The exhibit was very nice, and brought back a lot of great skating memories. As some may or may not know, Jack and I met at Swank Roller Rink when we were just kids. In 1965, we skated speed and Jack singles, and we were dance partners in 1967 at Fleetwood Roller Rink in Summit, Illinois, where we are currently carded Coaches along with our son Jason Countryman of the Fleetwood Speed Team. Fleetwood also has an artistic team coached by Kathy Vanderbeek, who is the Manager of the rink, and the other coach is Larry Dorset. Upon talking to the staff at the Museum (in fact they took a photo of Jack and I), they expressed a desire for more time to put together information and to have been able to reach out to others and of course current roller rinks that are still going strong in the Chicago area.

I especially liked the map showing all the roller rinks and their locations. I was also a rink rat at Oak Lawn Roller Rink before and after the tornado hit in 1967, and I skated singles there around 1972. Speaking of rink rat, we were so pleasantly surprised seeing Jack in the Chicago Rink Rat book on page 75. We would have for sure been there when this exhibit opened if we would have been aware of it. The exhibit clearly reflects that the many hours put into

the displays. The items that are displayed are in great condition. It's so important not only in roller skating, but for all sports to preserve the memories of the past. As it has been said, history repeats itself, and we would love to see skating become a household word again. You can get some great exercise and you meet the best of people, as we have some that became life- long friends.

Thanks for allowing me to share,
Rowena Countryman



Jack Countryman recently in front of the Elmhurst History Museum



Jack Countryman and Rowena (Rozema) Countryman in 1967 at the Fleetwood Roller Rink just outside of Chicago

STAY CONNECTED

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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.

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