

Historical Roller Skating

OVERVIEW

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Roller Polo Team, Providence, R.I., 1897

Curator's Corner

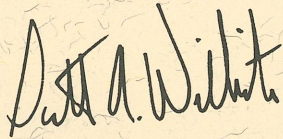
It is with regrets that I am writing this, my last Curator's Corner, and last newsletter for the National Museum of Roller Skating. I have resigned as Director and Curator of the museum to accept the position of Manager of Archives and Programs at the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada. Because my masters degree is in folklore studies, this change will be something of a return to my professional and educational roots.

In the last few years it has been my pleasure to work with you to strengthen an institution of the museum's caliber. I have enjoyed meeting many of you and learning about the fascinating history of roller skating. I will miss the support that the members have given me during my tenure.

Some amazing accomplishments have occurred these last few years. The museum published *The Evolution of the Roller Skate: 1820 - Present*, which documents many of the most important skates from the history of roller skating. The museum has also published over 20 articles a year in various magazines such as *US Roller Skating*, *Roller Skating Business*, *Rinksider*, and *Skating News*. We have seen more and more requests for information from the media and scholars regarding roller skating history. Our fine collection of artifacts has been cataloged onto computer making information all the more available. The number of members has increased from 250 to 600. The museum also received three federal grants to support our work in preserving the museum's fine collection. Truly, it has been an exciting time to be involved with roller skating and with the museum.

During my tenure I have enjoyed and appreciated the support you have given me. Although a successor to my position as Director and Curator has yet to be appointed, I am quite confident that he or she will receive the same support and input that I have. Through your financial support the museum has become a facility that all those involved in roller skating can be proud of. Your assistance will continue to be instrumental in making the National Museum of Roller Skating the quality institution that it is.

Best wishes,



Scott A. Wilhite
Director & Curator



Randall Harbuck receiving award from USAC/RS President Betty Ann Danna for distinguished service to the museum.

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James Turner, trustee emeritus of the National Museum of Roller Skating, and author of the 1975 book The History of Roller Skating, has written a revised edition which the museum will be putting out in the next few months. Having read the manuscript, I can tell you that this may be the most complete history book ever written on roller skating.

Printed here as a teaser for all you history buffs is an excerpt from the book detailing "Early Skating Associations 1890-1938."

EARLY SKATING ASSOCIATIONS 1890 - 1938

James L. Plimpton started the New York Roller Skating Association that was affiliated with his rinks and skate company. It was the NYRSA that opened up the Atlantic House in 1866 and international ties were made with the British and other European countries.

In 1866 the U.S. National Amateur Skating Association was formed by F.P. Goode, J.B. Story, and other ice skaters. The National Skating Association (N.S.A.) of Great Britain was formed in 1879 and it sponsored competitions and tests on ice and later on roller skates. The American skaters followed the N.S.A. lead for many years.

Roller and ice skating were officially organized on a national scope in America through the efforts of Allen T. Blanchard of Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Blanchard was an ice speed and figure champion, a referee, and a judge. He was referred to as "Pop" and was recognized as the father of organized skating in America. He helped to found the International Skating Union of America in 1891 and he represented the Western Skating Association. The I.S.U. divided the United States into three sections: Eastern Association, New England Association, and Western Association. Two additional Canadian sections were also included. This association had rules of entry, rules of amateur status, annual dues, registered rinks, and championship rules for speed and artistic skating on both ice and rollers in America and Canada. Figure and speed skating championships were held annually but the interest was re-

ally in speed until 1914.

The "Western Skating Association" became organized under the leadership of Julian T. Fitzgerald of Chicago in the early 1900's. It was actually a mid-western group, west of the Allegheny Mountains, including skaters from Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and western Pennsylvania. There was not much organized skating west of the Mississippi River. There was a comprehensive program of competitive rules and regulations (1906-1920). The roller speed championships had races for 1/2 mile, 3/4 mile, 1 mile, 2 mile, 3 mile, 5 mile, and 10 mile. Figure skating was based on plain skating and fancy skating movements outlined by Allen T. Blanchard of the I.S.U.

By 1921 there was enough interest in figure skating on ice, for the formation of the United States Figure Skating Association (USFSA). The I.S.U. allowed USFSA to control figure skating. Roller Skating however, was not sufficiently organized at this time to be included. Actually, there were only seven ice clubs in the original USFSA roster.

In 1907 an American roller skater, Chester Park, went to Liverpool, England and built an American Style roller skating rink. The skating boom of the 1880's had died in America and American roller skate companies were looking for markets. Park represented the Samuel Winslow Roller Skate Company. He installed a Maple parquet floor in an old building. He also used good rink management techniques to operate the business. It was very successful and Park started a roller skating boom in England.

Roller skating clubs began forming all over Europe. The British started an Amateur Hockey Association in 1905. Speed and hockey meets were held in Europe from 1906 to 1914. Before WWI there was a movement to organize on an International level, however due to the war most rinks were closed. After the war ended, the Jazz Era caused former rinks to be reopened as dance halls and jazz clubs. The N.S.A. was still active in England but not much skating was being done on the Continent.

Belgium, in 1941, organized the first National Roller Skating Championship in a European country. The RSROA had started a national organization in

1938 in America. After WWII, Italy, Germany, and Belgium held a European Roller Skating Championship (1946). The Federation International de Patinage a Roulette (FIPR) was formed and figure, hockey, and speed events were held during the late 1940's and 1950's.

In 1937, the first National Roller Speed Skating Championship was held at the Arena Gardens in Detroit, Michigan. Seventeen rink owners formed the RSROA (Roller Skating Rink Operators Association) to promote the roller skating business and the sport in America. After the final events of the competition, the operators and managers walked down Woodward Avenue to the Casa Loma Restaurant as guests of Fred Martin, the meet host. He wanted them to discuss their common problems in promoting the roller skating busi-

ness in America, to regulate and protect roller skating contests for amateurs, and to act as a governing body for the sport. These men believed that if skating was to be a successful sport it must also be a successful business. A competitive skater must have the best rink facilities, ample practice time, good quality skates, and good instructors and coaches, in addition to physical talent, to become a champion. During the meeting, Victor J. Brown of Newark, New Jersey was elected the president and Fred Martin the secretary-treasurer. The group each donated one dollar and Fred Martin took the meager funds back to his office to begin the work. A single drawer in Martin's desk became the first RSROA National Office. The Association grew throughout the following years into a world known skating association.

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Julian T. Fitzgerald

CHICAGO, ILL.

President

Western Skating Association

VICE-PRESIDENT

International Skating Union of America

Photos from the *Skater's History on Ice and Roller Skating*, published in 1916.



ALLEN L. BLANCHARD

Former President International Skating Union of America
Chicago, Ill.

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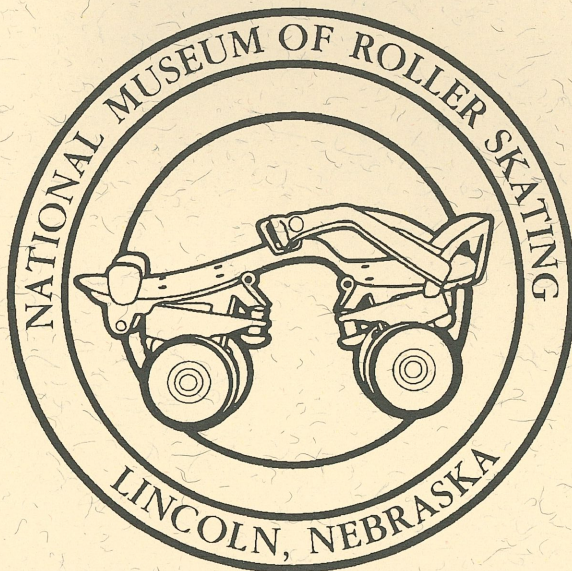
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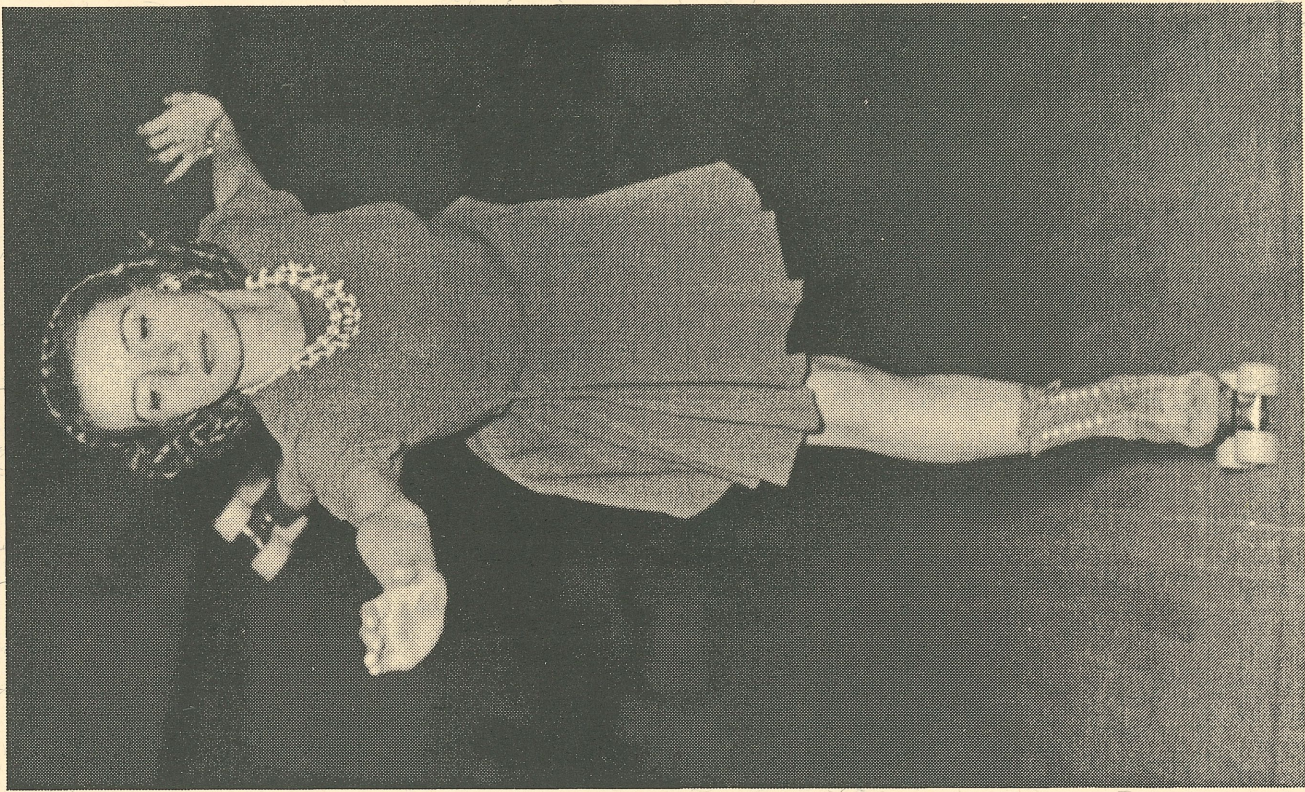
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