

August 2020

Rolling Thru Time
Newsletter

The National Museum of Roller Skating



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Lincoln Day Fundraiser Update

With the announcement of matching funds of \$641.52, the total raised through the Lincoln Day Fundraiser this year was \$8,357.07. That is the highest amount in many years. Any person donating \$35 or more received a one-year museum membership if not already a member.

A few donors weren't mentioned in the last newsletter: L.R. Brown, Thomas Panno, Sylvia Haffke, and Judith Hild-Smith.

Special thanks to Caroline Mirelli who donated the refund for the two raffle tickets she bought.

New Museum Display Begins to Take Shape



Amy Richardson, museum archivists, has been busy exploring the archives for World War II era artifacts and information, including WW II era rink stickers highlighting the war effort. Some of these stickers will be used in the Heritage Resource Consultants' first display designed for the museum. Museum staff are working as research assistants to gather information for Heritage Resource Consultants in making each display. The first design is scheduled to be completed by the end of September. Museum staff will assemble the display based on detailed drawings and notes from Heritage Resource Consultants.

The museum's new CatalogIt program is helping museum staff examine the archive's holdings more effectively to discover relevant material for the display. Using Google Drive easily allows Resource Consultants and museum staff to share information. The process of Heritage Resource Consultants working with museum staff continues to develop. Display designs are funded through special donations only, not museum operating funds, on a needs-only basis.

1880s English Skating Revolution Described in Book Reprint

By Alan Bacon

A new Wentworth Press reprint of an 1881 London published book highlights 50 rinks in London, "who numbers are weekly increased." *Rinks and Rollers* described the new craze of roller skating that hit England in the 1880s.

The 121-page book with no illustrations began with the question: "How long will this rage for rinking last?" The author, J.A. Hardwood, answered that "rinking is destined to take a permanent place among the institutions of civilized society."

He said the first English rink in the current boom using Plimpton's new invention opened in 1874. "Hundreds of skaters at once flocked there daily. The mania spread...Every town of any size in the kingdom has its one or two rinks. Brighton has as many as six, and London no less than fifty."

Hardwood emphasized the healthful benefits of skating. "Let the visit to the rink take the place of the purposeless carriage-drive or the objectless walk. It surely is more healthy and invigorating than promenading or being driven limply up and down in Hyde Park. Notice the air of those who rink daily.

Contrast their clear complexions with the pale flabbiness of those who only vary the usually unhealthy conditions of modern existence."

The author believed that skating was better exercise than walking, swimming and horseback riding, and was becoming more popular. "Ask the Brighton livery-stable keepers how many of their horses they have sold off, and what has become of all their customers since rinking came into fashion."

Harwood also touted the social revolution that skating introduced. He discounted the criticism of the social implications of this new activity. Some examples of that criticism: "They meet others whom they may or may not wish to see, and form acquaintances or cement friendships that may or may not be desirable. Parents also object to the facilities afforded by the rink for meeting unauthorized or forbidden friends and lovers." According to Hardwood, parents in his day still hoped to choose their daughter's spouse, and some parents thought rinks threatened that influence. The author's response: "It is better that they who have to live with their husbands should choose them."

He went on to defend the rinks' social atmosphere. "It is evident that there is no more reason for speaking to people you meet on the rink than for speaking to people you meet in the street." He argued further: "Here is the province of chaperons-by tact the watchfulness to avoid unpleasant rencontres, or to neutralize their effect."

Harwood countered the critics, but then acknowledged the developing social revolution. "An opportunity for social intercourse such as was never offered before has been opened up...The chances of meeting those one wished at a dance, or a dinner, at the theatre, or in the Park were very small as compared to those which have been afforded by Mr. Plimpton. Some obtrusive and obnoxious chaperon was in the way. But now it is otherwise, chaperons as a rule can't skate, so they are obliged to look on from a distant seat."

The author also discussed the history of skating (ice and roller). He noted that the northern European sagas mentioned skating, whereas the southern European empires of Greece and Rome did not. He speculated that the Anglo Saxon or Viking invaders may have introduced an early version of skating to England. He credited the Dutch influence in reintroducing skating to England in the 1600s using an iron blade. He noted that both sexes in early Dutch society skated, not just the men. He said the word rink and rinking were new to England, having been more used in Canada.

But he gave the most accolades to an American. "For in 1863 Mr. James Plimpton patented a skate which has effected nothing less than a social revolution." This author made little distinction between ice and roller skating. He said roller skating is "almost a perfect substitute" for ice skating. Both were the great sport of skating to him, but now with rollers, skating could happen year-round, instead of the short (he said one week) outdoor ice-skating season in England. He admonished ice skaters who have "this disdain for running on wheels."

Hardwood had high regard for Plimpton's skates, and mentioned Plimpton's numerous infringements on his patents. "Over a hundred 'inventions' for roller-skates have been registered during the last two years." He mentioned some rinks using Spiller's skates, but usually highlighted the rinks with Plimpton's. "Mr. Plimpton is here in vogue." Another rink description: "(the rink) will have the advantage over its neighbour of a band in the evening. But no Plimpton." But he also mentioned that an enthusiast couldn't purchase the skates for personal use; Plimpton's skates were only available to rink owners for use at the rink as rentals.

One of the most unusual of many skates he described was the "Stanhope Bicycle Skate, with a large central roller underneath the ball of the foot, and a smaller one under the heel."

He predicted that roller skates could be a new form of transportation for the postman, police and ladies shopping in "Regent Street and Westbourne Grove before lunching at Kensington—all on wheels." He added, "We talk of flying some day; this (roller skating) will be the first step towards it."

In the author's single-paragraph descriptions of many of these new rinks, he emphasized whether the floor was concrete, asphalt, wood or slate. He said in one city one has a choice to skate, for sixpence, in "an old concert room with an ordinary wood flooring, (or) an open asphalted rink. The latter seems to be the favourite." For wood floors, he disapproved of the pumice stone powder that was necessary to avoid slickness. "Asphalt is decidedly better than either wood or slate." He preferred rinks that were not completely enclosed, which he implied were many of the rinks.

Hardwood described other attributes of specific rinks, including a few in France. "The place has been very well patronized, and the second rinking ball in England was held here with great success, waltzes and quadrilles having been admirably performed."

Another English rink was described as "the favourite resort of fashionable London." There are few more lively and interesting sights than this place affords in the season, with its numerous aristocratic visitors – the young engaged in skating and flirting, while the elder ones sip tea between the trees underneath large umbrellas. The club, of course, is one of the most exclusive character, its members belonging to the highest classes of society."

He offered many skating tips. Men should not carry sticks. They should not wear a "frockcoat with flying tails." Women should have their hair "done up in a knot" and "hands enclosed in gloves" but should not "hold their hands in muffs."

Another suggestion: "He who keeps his hands and arms still looks much better than he who waves them hither and thither like an octopus."

He was negative about the state of skating proficiency in rinks, even by regular skaters. "The celebrated 'spread eagle' is not worth learning, as it leads to nothing and is very ungraceful...No attempt at figures, no attempt at elegance." Hardwood went on to write pages of pointers about good skating form.

He also advised patrons to "refrain from encouraging the baneful system of 'tipping' " skate boys who assisted women putting on their skates.

No background of the author is given in the book. From his extensive knowledge of existing rinks, skating history, skates, skating floors, and skating techniques, he seems a credible resource for this era in English skating history.

Like the reprint of Henley's 1885 *Manual of Roller Skating* featured in the April 2020 museum newsletter, these recent reprints offer valuable insight into the social revolution connected with roller skating in the second half of the 1800s, both in England and America.

At the end of the book is advertisements for other books of the day. Stay tuned for a possible book review in a future newsletter of the just purchased reprinted book, Mrs. Brown on the Skating Rink.

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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