

RINKING REMIXED: THE CULTURAL CREATION, TYPOLOGY, AND
PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC ROLLER SKATING RINKS

by

Olivia Lane Tillner

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Doctoral Committee:

Carroll Van West, Ph.D., Chair

Joey Gray, Ph.D.

C. Brenden Martin, Ph.D.

Susan Myers-Shirk, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Roller skating emerged in the nineteenth century and matured, reaching extreme popularity, in the twentieth century. Nearly everyone has roller skated, but no one usually takes the time to consider the places in which they skate. Roller rinks are likely dismissed because they are often associated with childhood and youth and are therefore deemed to have little historical significance. However, roller rinks were sites where young people formed identities, cultural tastes, and communities. The roller rink saw the dissemination of Rock and Roll and Disco. It saw discrimination, desegregation efforts, and the attempts of owners and patrons to thwart those efforts. Much like other recreation and leisure sites, patrons who frequented the roller rink did so out of their own free choice regarding the use of their time. Yet, because the historical and cultural significance of roller rinks is little known, they are easily demolished, and with them goes their significance.

This dissertation explores the areas of significance attached to roller rinks, with an emphasis of youth culture and music, to reveal that this building type is worthy of, but also requires, preservation. Built on a fieldwork survey of roller rinks across the Southeast, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic regions, this dissertation develops a typology of roller rinks as well as integral elements of the buildings that reflect its their cultural and historical significance. With roller rinks seemingly fixed at a crossroads of the need to remain updated and relevant for audiences and the desire to maintain its historic integrity, this dissertation develops recommendations for preservation.

The roller rink, however, does not exist on a landscape alone. It exists alongside other sites of leisure and recreation, sites that are equally deserving of preservation yet face similar crossroads. This dissertation serves as a guide for those seeking to preserve other recreational sites.

The sites where we play are just as significant as those where we learn, worship, work, and live. As a site of play, the roller rink deserves the same inquiry and preservation afforded to others.

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CHAPTER I: THE HISTORY OF ROLLER SKATING, THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROLLER SKATING RINKS, AND THE NOSTALGIA QUANDARY

The precise appearance in the eighteenth century of the roller skate and roller skating into the world remains unclear. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to argue that roller skating is partially rooted in the older tradition of ice skating and the development of ice rinks. By the 18th century, ice skating was a recreational activity. Both forms of skating began from practical needs and morphed into recreational and amusement pastimes. While in the early- and mid-twentieth century, enthusiasts of each discipline sought to highlight the differences between the two activities, to disconnect their histories entirely segments the history of each. However, such segmentation creates the image that roller skating began by happenstance or out of some burst of grand genius, when that is not entirely the case. To understand the history of roller skating is to understand the history of skating in general.

Ice skating began in a similar cloud of ambiguity. The roots of ice skating are unknown. James R. Hines writes, in his discussion of the history of figure skating, that ice skating developed from the mid-thirteenth century, likely originating in myths from the Scandinavian countries surrounding the goddess, Skadi.¹ Further cementing ice skating in Scandinavia, Hines describes how what became known as ice skating first began, in the fourteenth century, as a practical means of transportation over the frozen landscapes of the Scandinavian countries, over time morphing into recreational ice

¹ James R. Hines, *Figure Skating in the Formative Years: Singles, Pairs, and the Expanding Role of Women* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015): 1.

skating.² Ice skating, as a recreation, was imported to England from Holland following the Restoration in the 1660s.³ As political and trade networks opened between European nations, ice skating continued to grow as a favored recreation, primarily among social elites, through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this time, skating was place-based in terms of general, national location in an outdoors environment.

It was not until the nineteenth century that skating entered new spaces, away from the frozen lakes and ponds that graced the winter landscapes of Europe. By the mid-twentieth century, skating enthusiasts had turned to enclosed skating spaces—the advent of the rink. Enthusiasts in varied regions turned to this new concept as weather proved fickle. For some, winters proved too mild for skating, and for others, winters proved too frigid.⁴ The development of an enclosed skating surface created a space “to preserve the pleasant exercise” regardless of external conditions.⁵ The idea of enclosing such space, and indeed the word ‘rink’ itself, appears to stem from the Scottish practice of enclosing space for the performance of curling, and therefore is not an entirely novel in concept but rather in the expansion of the concept.⁶ It appears that enclosed ice rinks first opened in the mid-twentieth century. As a result, skating became increasingly place-based even more so than before—the performance of skating moved from generally unrestricted in

² Ibid., 1-2.

³ Ibid., 5.

⁴ Charles Dickens, Jr., “Skating and Rinking,” in *All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal Conducted by Charles Dickens with Which is Incorporated Household Words*, New Series, 16, no. 381 (March 18, 1876): 14.

⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶ Ibid., 14.; “Rink,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed October 10, 2018, https://www.etymonline.com/word/rink#etymonline_v_15087.; “Rink,” Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, accessed October 10, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rink>. Both the Online Etymology Dictionary and Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online confirm that the word ‘rink’ takes its origin primarily from the Scottish language in relation to the sport of curling.

an outdoors environment to restricted in enclosed rinks. Following its emergence, roller skating too mirrored this pattern of place-based activity.

Despite the consensus that ice rinks first appeared in the eighteenth century, there is disagreement on the precise location of the first ice rink to open. Some suggest that a rink opened in Montreal in the 1850s.⁷ Charles Dickens, Jr., son of novelist Charles Dickens, corroborated a similar viewpoint of Montreal as the site of the first enclosed ice rink, though providing no exact date.⁸ However, a brief article appears in the *Times* (London), in 1843, about the Glaciarium, in Baker Street of London, England, which was constructed of artificial ice, about 3,000 square feet, for the purpose of year-round skating [referred to as “scating” in the article].⁹ Despite such murkiness in the record, the existence of the latter highlights the continued evolution of sites of skating and skating itself. The Glaciarium served as a prototype of ice skating rinks to come, particularly as an artificial ice skating rink, in which skating devotees not only enjoyed the recreation year-round, regardless of weather, but also as a rink in which the ice could be manipulated to create an ideal skating surface that could be easily resurfaced as needed. Such ease of use and manipulation of materials partially led to the sophistication of the art of figure skating, as James R. Hines discusses in further depth in *Figure Skating in the Formative Years: Singles, Pairs, and the Expanding Role of Women* (2015).

Concurrently with the refinement of ice skating as an enjoyable pastime, the first inkling of the roller skate appeared. Some authors write that John Joseph Merlin, a

⁷ Mariana Gosnell, *Ice: The Nature, The History, and The Uses of an Astonishing Substance*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005): 349.

⁸ Dickens, “Skating and Rinking,” 14.

⁹ “Glaciarium and Frozen Lake,” *Times* [London, England] April 15, 1843: 4. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. April 2, 2018.

musical instrument inventor, developed the first prototype of a roller skate in the 1760s.¹⁰

As such, the story goes that Merlin invented the roller skate (also at that time referred to as a parlor skate) and debuted it at a party in London, during which he found himself unable to control his direction of movement and crashed into a large mirror.¹¹ In *Concert Room and Orchestra Anecdotes of Music and Musicians, Ancient and Modern* (1825),

Thomas Busby wrote of Merlin's mishap:

One of his ingenious novelties was *a pair of skaites* [emphasis original] contrived to run on small metallic wheels. Supplied with a pair of these and a violin, he mixed in the motley group of one of the celebrated Mrs. Corneily's masquerades at Carlisle-house, Soho-square; when, not having provided the means of retarding his velocity, or commanding its direction, he impelle himself against a mirror, of more than five hundred pounds' value, dashed it to atoms, broke his instrument to pieces, and wounded himself most severely.¹²

Following Merlin's disastrous attempt at showcasing the skates, it was some years before another tried their hand at an adaptation of the roller skate, and perhaps for good reason.

The first recorded patent of a roller skate dates to 1819, developed by a Frenchman, Petitbled.¹³ In 1823, a British fruiterer invented a skate, mimicking Petitbled's single line of wheels attached to a foot-plate, but extensively improving the

¹⁰ James Turner and Michael Zaidman, *The History of Roller Skating*, (Lincoln, NE: National Museum of Roller Skating, 1997). The National Museum of Roller Skating briefly refers to a roller skate being developed in the 1760s, on their website exhibit labelled "Inline Skating," but does not specifically make note of Merlin.

¹¹ Turner and Zaidman, *The History of Roller Skating*.

¹² Thomas Busby, "Merlin," *Concert Room and Orchestra Anecdotes of Music and Musicians, Ancient and Modern*, Volume II, (London, Clement and Company, Cheapside; and Knight and Lacey Paternoster Row, 1825): 137.

¹³ Petitbled, "Nouveaux patins destinés à executer dans les appartements tout ce que les patineurs peuvent faire sur la glace avec des patins ordinaires," French Patent 1BA1336, issued November 12, 1819, Institut National De La Propriété Industrielle (INPI), bases-brevets19e.inpi.fr/index.asp?page=rechercheAvancee. Using Google Translate, this title roughly becomes "New skates designed to perform in the apartments everything skaters can do on the ice with ordinary skates."

ability to turn.¹⁴ Seemingly, roller skating had yet to enter into a full recreational activity, with updated versions of the roller skate used primarily to simulate ice skating for theatrical performances, such as the opening performance of the opera, *Le Prophète*.¹⁵ In this case, initially people engaged roller skates for practical reasons as opposed to fully recreational pursuits.

Just as it is unclear as to the exact first creation of the roller skate, it is also unclear as to the exact time the roller skate and roller skating was imported to the United States, though evidence suggests in the mid-nineteenth century. The decade of the 1860s produced innovation in roller skates and roller skating that eventually pushed the activity into a recreational pastime, particularly in the United States. In 1860, Rueben Shaler received a patent protection for a “Wheel-Skate” or “Parlor Skate.”¹⁶ James Leonard Plimpton, an American inventor developed a patent entitled, “Improvements in [Parlor] Skates,” which led to today’s modern roller skate.¹⁷ Previous versions of the skate featured a flat foot-bed with wheels attached in a linear pattern. Plimpton’s skate featured the flat foot-bed with a set of two wheels, one in the front and one in the back. Plimpton’s skate design influenced all subsequent designs and patents. Charles Dickens, Jr., described the flooring types available for roller skating as well as that developed by Plimpton, suggesting that asphalt was the best choice for skating floors, but also

¹⁴ Dickens, “Skating and Rinking,” 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶ Rueben Shaler, “Wheel-Skate (Parlor Skate),” US Patent 28509, Issued May 29, 1860, US00028509, <http://pdfpiw.uspto.gov/.piw?PageNum=0&docid=00028509&IDKey=BD485EB56C47%0D%0A&HomeUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fpatft.uspto.gov%2Fnetathtml%2FPTO%2Fpatimg.htm>.

¹⁷ James Leonard Plimpton, “Improvements in Skates,” US Patent 37305, Issued January 6, 1863, <http://pdfpiw.uspto.gov/.piw?PageNum=0&docid=00037305&IDKey=BAA7030E15FC%0D%0A&HomeUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fpatft.uspto.gov%2Fnetathtml%2FPTO%2Fpatimg.htm>.

speculated that the adaptability of the wooden floor might prevail over time.¹⁸ Dickens' description of appropriate rink surfaces will prove more useful in later chapters.

Authors credit James Leonard Plimpton with the creation of the earliest roller skating rink and roller skating organization developed in the United States.¹⁹ Plimpton opened an elite roller skating rink for the upper echelons of society in the Atlantic House in Newport, Rhode Island in the mid-1860s.²⁰ The Atlantic House Hotel previously served as the site of the United States Naval Academy during the Civil War. Plimpton's duration at the Atlantic House Hotel is unknown, but it served as one of the earliest introductions of roller skating to American society. Following the creation of Plimpton's rink, other roller skating rinks opened throughout the United States. One of the earliest rinks, not just in the South but also the nation as a whole, opened in Atlanta, Georgia in 1869, and the following year a rink opened in Nashville, Tennessee.²¹ It is interesting to note that these two rinks opened in southern states during the difficult years of Reconstruction, when political, economic, and social relations were in flux. In 1883, mere months after the town's founding, construction began on a roller skating rink in

¹⁸ Dickens, "Skating and Rinking," 17.

¹⁹ Dickens, "Skating and Rinking," 17.; Turner and Zaidman, *The History of Roller Skating*, 13-14. Turner and Zaidman mistakenly credit Charles Dickens, not Charles Dickens, Jr., with the mention of Plimpton and the development of the roller skating floor. Charles Dickens died prior to the publication of the no. 381 issue of *All the Year Round*.

²⁰ Turner and Zaidman, *The History of Roller Skating*, 13.; "Roller Skating in Newport," Newport Historical Society, History Bytes Blog, April 29, 2011, Accessed June 25, 2018, is <http://newporthistory.org/2011/history-bytes-roller-skating-in-newport/>. The Atlantic House is no longer extant. Sitting in its location is the current Elks Lodge and a sign stating it was the site of the United States Naval Academy during the Civil War, as seen in Google Maps. The building is no longer extant.

²¹ "A Skating Rink in Atlanta," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), December 5, 1869, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution.; "The Nashville Skating Rink," *Republican Banner* (Nashville, TN), May 25, 1870.

Livingston, Montana Territory, revealing that the interest in roller skating spread swiftly across the nation in a short period of time.

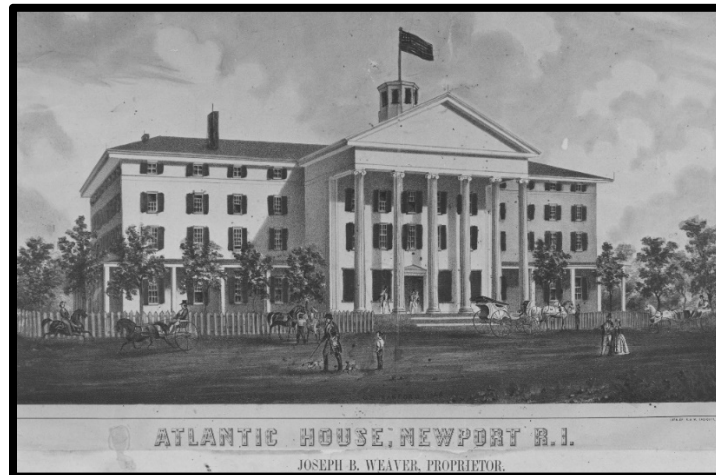


Figure 1.1: “Atlantic House Hotel.” P1640, Print, Photograph. Photograph of a lithograph depicting the Atlantic House, a hotel located on Bellevue Avenue. Caption below reads: "ATLANTIC HOUSE NEWPORT, R.I./Joseph B. Weaver, Proprietor." Original lithograph by G.A.W. Endicott, New York. Newport Historical Society. Reproduced with Permission.

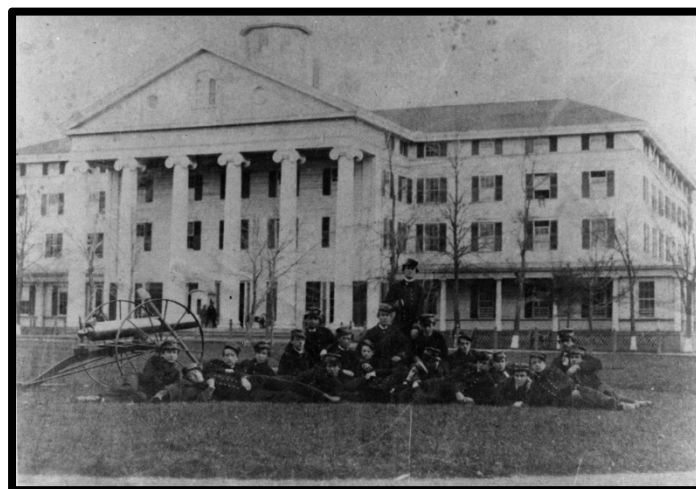


Figure 1.2: “Atlantic House Hotel.” P1697, Print, Photograph. Black and white photo of Civil War soldiers outside the Atlantic House Hotel on Bellevue and Pelham Street. Image shows the Atlantic House Hotel in the background (which served as the Naval Academy during the Civil War) and a group of men posed laying and sitting on the grass in front with a cannon. Newport Historical Society. Reproduced with Permission.

Plimpton's rink in the Atlantic House Hotel further served as the initial impetus that marked roller skating as a "society" pastime.²² Moving through the following decades just before the turn of the century, that association of society with roller skating and roller skating rinks and the act of roller skating began to take on a negative connotation.

As roller skating gained popularity, it also gained critics. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, "not everyone embraced roller skating. Protesters claimed that roller skating was immoral, caused physical harm, and led to the neglect of religion and religious practices."²³ Morality and propriety featured prominently in arguments against roller skating rinks and the act of roller skating itself, particularly in relation to young, white women and girls. In 1885, *The New York Times* unleashed a campaign against the dangers of skating and skating rinks. On March 21, 1885, "The Morality of Skating Rinks," adding fuel to the argument that roller skating was immoral by highlighting the availability of afternoon lessons for women taught by "good-looking and glib-tongued scamps called 'leaders' who are allowed to place their arms about them and their hands upon them with a freedom that is usually reserved by modest women for relations and lovers."²⁴ The writer shared a widely held opinion that such behavior could lead to the "ruin" of otherwise proper women. "Ruined by Roller Skating," which appeared in *The New York Times* on July 18, 1885, detailed the tragic tale of seventeen-year-old Ida Quinn, who fell victim to the "roller skating mania" and began to keep "bad company"

²² "Roller Skating in Newport," Newport Historical Society, History Bytes Blog, April 29, 2011, Accessed June 25, 2018, <http://newporthistory.org/2011/history-bytes-roller-skating-in-newport/>.

²³ (Olivia) Lane Tillner, "Wheels of Evil: Roller Skating's Perceived Attack on Society," *Southern Rambles With the Center for Historic Preservation* (blog), MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, April 4, 2018, <https://chpblog.org/2018/04/04/wheels-of-evil-roller-skatings-perceived-attack-on-society/?fbclid=IwAR0LxyjbAeabrcfsmTtPVmW96UgyV8-wPhWrmBn9sQIee3cYVuC1cKNXP8>.

²⁴ "The Morality of Skating Rinks," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1885, 8.

with several professional skaters.²⁵ Police found her, with several other young women, at a hotel in West Brighton. Despite her pleas to return home with her father, the judge in Quinn's case sentenced her to six months at the "House of the Good Shepherd."^{26 27} On May 9, 1885, "A Noble Enterprise," described a fictional Men's Christian Temperance Union, for satirical purposes, and its efforts to combat roller skating. The article claimed the MTCU was wholly "designed to oppose that terrible evil, roller skating."²⁸ The article described a bored housewife who took up roller skating as a simple pastime and was bewitched to such a degree that she neglected her household and wifely duties in an effort to roller skate as often as possible. "The M.T.C.U.," the unknown author proclaimed,

will leave no means untried to reclaim women skaters. They will visit the rinks and hold prayer meetings in the midst of the skaters. They will talk with the wretched victims of the habit, and they will urge the rink proprietor to abandon his awful trade and become an honest and decent man. When these measures fail the devoted members of the M.T.C.U. will make raids upon rinks, breaking up the skating floor with axes and burning the skates in bonfires. The good wishes of all virtuous people will go with them, and it is to be hoped that the day will come when the anti-skating cause will be triumphant in our politics and skating will be forever suppressed by a prohibitory law.²⁹³⁰

The New York Times continued as a sounding board for similar concerns related to roller rinks. "The Evils of Theatres: Colored Clergymen Who See Nothing That is Good in Them" echoed similar sentiments about roller rinks (and other entertainment venues) from the viewpoint of African American clergy.³¹ Some businessmen, particularly theater

²⁵ "Ruined by Roller Skating," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1885, 8.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tillner, "Wheels of Evil," *Southern Rambles*.

²⁸ "A Noble Enterprise," *The New York Times*, May 9, 1885, 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tillner, "Wheels of Evil," *Southern Rambles*.

³¹ "The Evils of Theatres: Colored Clergymen Who See Nothing That is Good in Them," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1885, 5.

operators, likewise protested roller skating because the pastime pulled profits from theaters. “Those Terrible Rinks,” which appeared on March 11, 1885, stated that roller skating “demoralized the theatrical business” in the area and reduced profits significantly.³²³³

Minnesota was another center for skating critics. A state legislator in St. Paul, Minnesota, even introduced a bill that sought to prohibit men and women from using the roller skating rink at the same time. This measure was defeated as soon as it was introduced, but it goes to show the lengths taken to “protect” [white] womanhood, femininity, and morality from the ‘dangers’ of roller skating.³⁴³⁵ In Minneapolis, a clergyman delivered a sermon calling roller skating rinks “immoral resorts” and strongly cautioned his parishioners from attending such locations.³⁶

³² “Those Terrible Rinks: Roller Skating Ruins the Hudson River Theatrical Business,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 1885, 2.

³³ Tillner, “Wheels of Evil,” *Southern Rambles*.

³⁴ “A Blow at Roller Skating,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1885, 4.; “The Closing Session: The Minnesota Legislature Holds its Last Session for the Transaction of Business, and Adjournment Finds some Meritorious Bills and Many Woodchucks Among the Dead,” *The Saint Paul Globe* (Saint Paul, MN), March 6, 1885: 5.

³⁵ Tillner, “Wheels of Evil,” *Southern Rambles*.

³⁶ “Skating Rinks Denounced,” *The New York Times*, March, 17, 1885, 4.

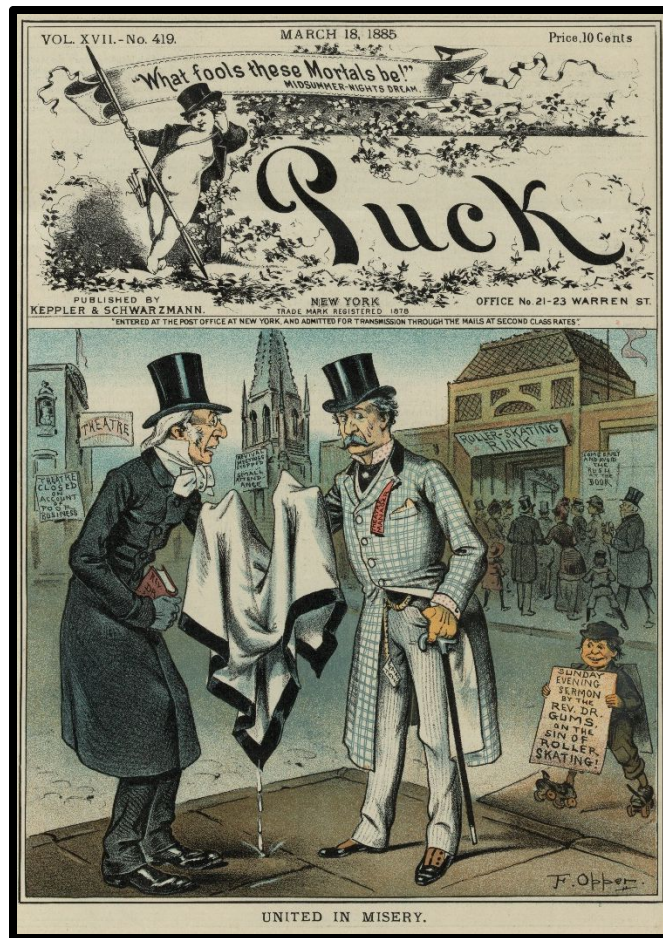


Figure 1.3: "United in Misery." Frederick Burr Opper, *Puck*, March 18, 1885, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. The image shows a theatre owner or operator "uniting" with a preacher over the lack of patronage at their respective sites caused by the popularity of the roller skating rink.

Rink owners and operators did not sit idly back as the pastime was attacked. In Chicago during the 1880s, a group of managers organized an association to address moralists' concerns and institute regulations to endow rinks with a sense of propriety,

including prohibiting alcohol and prohibiting contact between the sexes unless a woman fell or was injured.^{37 38}

The effectiveness of protests against roller skating and roller rinks is debatable. As with everything, there is an ebb and flow. Roller skating did see a slight decline in the immediate years following these assertions. However, by the early 1900s, roller skating was back in favor. The pastime continued to gain in popularity, with rinks once again appearing across the American landscape.^{39 40}

With the advent of the twentieth century, roller skating and roller rinks in the United States began to expand but still remained close to the roots established by Plimpton and early inventors. Following on the coattails of Plimpton's success, inventors continued attempts to innovate in the hopes of creating the perfect roller skate as well as the perfect environment for the recreation, with around five hundred patents, related to roller skates, registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office between Plimpton's in 1863 and 1979.⁴¹ Relatedly, Plimpton's 'rink,' or perhaps better described as a skating floor, serves to show how early roller rinks were housed in buildings with alternative primary purposes. Some rinks appeared in dance halls (the use of the same

³⁷ "Moral Skating Rinks: Chicago Rink Managers a Board of Censors of Moral Conduct," *The New York Times*, March 22, 1885, 7.

³⁸ Tillner, "Wheels of Evil," *Southern Rambles*.

³⁹ The preceding nine paragraphs were all written by the author and previously used on a blog post for *Southern Rambles With the Center for Historic Preservation*. (Olivia) Lane Tillner, "Wheels of Evil: Roller Skating's Perceived Attack on Society," *Southern Rambles With the Center for Historic Preservation* (blog), *MTSU Center for Historic Preservation*, April 4, 2018, <https://chpblog.org/2018/04/04/wheels-of-evil-roller-skatings-perceived-attack-on-society/?fbclid=IwAR0LxyjbAeabrcfsrnTtPvmW96UgyV8-wPhWrmBn9sQlee3cYVvUC1cKNXP8>.

⁴⁰ Tillner, "Wheels of Evil," *Southern Rambles*.

⁴¹ This is an estimated, not exact, number of patents related to roller skates determined by the author, based on a search through the United States Patent and Trademark Office's online "Search for Patents" and "Searching PDF Image Patents (Since 1790)."

flooring types made this an easy transition) or perhaps on the floor of an unused level of a multi-story building. It was not until the twentieth century that large numbers of rinks emerged as single-use buildings, with some being purpose-built and others being adaptively reused as roller rinks. Purpose-built rinks increased in number as the century progressed.

As with ice skating, roller skating took a turn towards the artistic and figure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With this turn towards the artistic style, skating enthusiasts and groups attempted to create governing bodies over roller skating to develop consistency among the style and practices. The United States National Amateur Skating Association formed in 1866 and was followed by the International Skating Union of America in 1891, which featured smaller governing bodies—the Eastern Association, the New England Association, and the Western Association.⁴² At the time, the Western Skating Association comprised most of what is now considered the Midwest.⁴³ As these organizations grew and subdivided, each held championships to display artistic skating abilities. Championships and competitions continued to be held and roller skating, both artistic and traditional, grew in popularity. However, with such growth and many organizations attempting to maintain control, tensions increased.

Roller skating did not take on a formalized and professionalized nature until April 3, 1937, when, at the National Roller Speed Skating Championships at the Arena Gardens Roller Skating Rink in Detroit, several rink owners and operators formed the Roller

⁴² Turner and Zaidman, *The History of Roller Skating*, 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 33.

Skating Rink Operators Association.⁴⁴ In the organization's "Articles of Association," the founding members wrote: "the above Association. . . is to be the body and soul of a world wide known recreation and healthful sport, allowing nothing to impair the progress of roller skating, which, in the many years past, has been rolling along aimlessly, like a ship without a rudder," with the aim of controlling both professional and amateur roller skating events in order to boost the image of roller skating in the nation.⁴⁵ The "Articles" further stated that the Association sought to potentially create standardization among roller rinks and rink practices, though the founders included a clause to state that rink standardization could be considered a secondary concern of the organization should agreement not exist.⁴⁶ For a brief period, the association reigned over roller skating free of conflict.

The 1940s saw rink owners and operators divided, more so than the actual skaters they sought to govern. The RSROA initially operated in conjunction with the American Skating Union (ASU), an arm of the American Athletic Union (AAU). However, as the power of the Roller Skating Rink Operators' Association over roller rinks and skaters increased, the AAU believed that the RSROA professionalized too much for the group to continue to administer amateur skaters.⁴⁷ The American Athletic Union argued that the United States Amateur Roller Skating Association (ARSA) should govern amateur

⁴⁴ Ibid., 34.; "Roller Skating Rink Operators' Association Articles of Association," Roller Skating Rink Operators' Association, (1937), Box: Arena Gardens, National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁴⁵ "Roller Skating Rink Operators' Association Articles of Association," National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Edward. W. Smith, "Skaters Will Determine Their Government," *Skating Review* II, no. 7, (April 1942), 2, National Museum of Roller Skating.

skating competitions and skaters.⁴⁸ In response, the RSROA promoted the creation of the Amateur Athletic Guild (AAG) to replace the “dictatorial manner” of the American Athletic Union for the national governing body of amateur sports.⁴⁹ Skaters and rink operators held amateur status in high esteem with the hopes that roller skating would be made a future Olympic sport. In his work, *Roller Skating for Gold*, David H. Lewis conjectures, with an often flippant attitude, on the varied reasons why roller skating had yet to be included in the Olympics.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, such competition between the organizations continued through the following decades, though many preferred the Roller Skating Rink Operators’ Association. In the early 1970s, these associations finally laid their disputes to rest and formed the United States Confederation of Roller Skating (USAC/RS).⁵¹ Today, however, it appears that USA Roller Sports focuses primarily on the skaters and competitions where the Roller Skating Association International focuses on the business of roller skating, with both claiming the creation of the RSROA in 1937 as their origins.⁵² Generally, these organizations concentrated chiefly on roller skating as a sport rather than roller skating as recreation.

This period of organization for roller skating and rinks served as what many individuals in and outside of the sport called the “Golden Age,” the period typically from

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Edward W. Smith, “RSROA Favors Formation of AAG,” *Skating Review* III, no. 2, (November 1942), 10, National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁵⁰ David H. Lewis, *Roller Skating for Gold*, American Sports History Series, no. 5, (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997).

⁵¹ Turner and Zaidman, *The History of Roller Skating*, 37.

⁵² “About USA Roller Sports,” USA Roller Sports, Team USA, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.teamusa.org/usa-roller-sports/about-us>; “About Us,” Roller Skating Association International, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.rollerskating.com/pages/about/2>.

1940 to 1965.⁵³ It likewise created a community of comradery among skaters and rink operators. In the 1940s, skating rinks initiated a new form of advertisement, that simultaneously functioned as a sort of rink passport for skaters. Rinks developed stickers, also called ‘pasters,’ to provide to skaters to represent their home rink as well as trade and collect with other skaters.⁵⁴ Hardcore collectors of rink stickers formed the Universal Roller Skating Sticker Exchange (URSSE), which held annual meetings from 1948 to 1989.⁵⁵ This exchange of rink stickers created a sense of community among skaters throughout the nation.

This “Golden Age,” however, was not golden for all. As with other forms of public entertainment, recreation, and amusement, roller skating rinks were not immune to the disease of racial segregation.⁵⁶ Roller rinks, like many other amusement locations, became sites of civil rights protest. Interestingly enough, protests at recreation sites often occurred before the period traditionally deemed to be the “Civil Rights era.”

Segregation in roller skating rinks came in several forms: outright segregation using the ‘separate but equal’ clause of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, having a specified day and time that African Americans were allowed to skate (as an attempt to claim that rinks did not discriminate), and imposing disproportionate fees on African American skaters. In 1938, a *Chicago Defender* article described an incident at the Brooklyn Roller Skating

⁵³ Lou Brooks, *Skate Crazy: Amazing Graphics from the Golden Age of Roller Skating*, (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2003).

⁵⁴ Brooks, *Skate Crazy*, 23. For more about the different classifications of rink stickers, Brooks provides sub-genres with descriptions and examples of each style.

⁵⁵ Brooks, *Skate Crazy*, 23—24.

⁵⁶ See Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

Rink in New York in which two African American couples gained admittance after it was revealed that the manager attempted to extort additional money from the couples.^{57 58}

A common practice used to exclude African Americans from admittance to roller rinks was the claim of the ‘club’ system. Using this claim, rink owners and managers argued that African Americans were not denied admittance because of race but rather because they were not members of the skating club. Rarely were African Americans approved for club status. The response to such claims came in a variety of forms.⁵⁹

James Farmer was a founding member of the Committee of Racial Equality (CORE), and with other members, sought to shift the methods undertaken to challenge segregation in the early 1940s. In Howell Raines’ *My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered*, Farmer discussed the first attempts of CORE to practice nonviolent methods of protest, with the White City Roller Rink in Chicago as one of the earliest sites.⁶⁰

Our first project then was a sit-in, or stand-in, I guess you’d call it, at a roller skating rink that was appropriately named White City Roller Skating Rink [laughs], which was at the corner of Sixty-third Street and South Park Avenue in southside Chicago. . . This was in the ghetto, really, several blocks within the ghetto, but all whites. Black were not admitted.

At White City we first investigated in order to confirm what we already knew existed by having blacks go in and try to skate and they were stopped, of course, and told, ‘I’m sorry, we can’t sell you tickets. You can’t come in.’ This was done several times to be sure that there was no

⁵⁷ “Skaters Break Up Jim Crow Policy of New York Rink,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, December 24, 1938.

⁵⁸ (Olivia) Lane Tillner, “The Political Pastime: Roller Skating for Equality and Recognition,” *Southern Rambles With the Center for Historic Preservation* (blog), MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, April 4, 2018, https://chpblog.org/2018/04/11/the-political-pastime-roller-skating-for-equality-and-recognition/?fbclid=IwAR3Ga2Rlqo1I4QB_L3oFzv5UhB5-oi8mgzgF-06UM0mP9fbdExIGcWxJMas.

⁵⁹ Tillner, “The Political Pastime,” *Southern Rambles*.

⁶⁰ “Prelude: James Farmer—On Cracking White City,” in Howell Raines, *My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 27—34.

mistake about the policy. . .Then we had whites, several whites, try to go in, with no apparent connection with the black group, and they were promptly admitted and skated around. Then we had an interracial group go in and seek admission, and this threw White City person into confusion. Obviously they were part of one group, so what were they going to say?

So finally they had to use the club-night line and they said, 'I'm sorry, it's club night, and you can't come in unless you have a club card.' And our group said, 'Are there no exceptions?' 'Absolutely no exceptions, nobody gets in without club card.' 'You know, that's strange. Some of our friends are not members of a club.' 'Well, are you sure of that?' 'Yes, we are sure of that. We see them skating right through the door there, and one of them waved at us.' So they have consulted with the manager and everything else, and said 'I'm just sorry, you can't come in.'

We stood in line for a while. . .then went back every night to do the same thing, and finally tied up the line so that nobody else could get to the gate, and it became pretty rough. A little violence when some of the young tough whites wanted to skate badly. . .This campaign against White City went on for several months before there was a conclusion, and finally we were victorious. White City admitted everybody after [our] picket lines and standing lines and cutting back on their profit, virtually bringing things to a halt. They began admitting blacks.⁶¹

Farmer noted that previous attempts to desegregate various public accommodations involved legal suits with older civil rights legislation, but that they did not seek this method because "it would not tell [them] whether nonviolence would work here, direct-action techniques."⁶² While continuing to battle for admission to White City, the CORE members "sat in at restaurants."⁶³

Similar efforts took place against rinks in other cities including Empire Roller Skating Rink, Brooklyn, New York; Concord Roller Skating Club, Philadelphia,

⁶¹ Ibid., 29.

⁶² Ibid., 29.

⁶³ Ibid., 29.

Pennsylvania; Skateland, Bay City, Michigan; Montclair Roller Skating Club, Irvington, New Jersey; and Tifton Roller Drome, Tifton, Georgia.⁶⁴ ⁶⁵

The efforts of CORE at the White City Roller Rink came in the form of ‘stand-ins’—blocking ticket windows or rink entrances. These tactics were emulated at other rink demonstrations. Rinks’ claims of club status rarely held up under further scrutiny, particularly when brought before a court. *The New York Times*, *Chicago Defender*, *The Billboard*, and the *New York Amsterdam News*, all reported on instances in which courts failed to substantiate such claims. Following a legal suit by CORE in 1946, White City Roller Rink ended the club system and became Park City Roller Rink.⁶⁶ Though roller rinks were one of the first areas to see desegregation efforts take place, the battle for civil rights and access at the rink continued through the following decades.

Societal shifts seem most often to take the blame for the demise of the so-called “Golden Age.” In *Chicago Rink Rats: The Roller Capital in Its Heyday*, Tom Russo argues that protests for desegregation and inclusivity at roller rinks were a significant reason for the decline in the prominence of roller skating and rinks.⁶⁷ Russo writes “its [desegregation efforts] climax was the 1968 Chicago riots along Madison Avenue, which destroyed the oldest, best-known roller rink in their wake. The Golden Age of Roller

⁶⁴ Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).; “Stage ‘Sit-in’ at Mich. Rink,” *Chicago Defender (Daily Edition)*, January 11, 1961.; “Suit hits skating rink bias,” *Chicago Defender (Daily Edition)*, November 19, 1975.

⁶⁵ Tillner, “The Political Pastime,” *Southern Rambles*.

⁶⁶ “Chicago Skating Rink Offers to Drop Color Ban Policy,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), March 16, 1946, 3.; Tillner, “The Political Pastime,” *Southern Rambles*.

⁶⁷ Tom Russo, *Chicago Rink Rats: The Roller Capital in Its Heyday*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2017).

Skating in Chicago came to an end.”⁶⁸ When discussing the history of the Sefferino Rollerdrome (1937—1956), Russo states:

The end of the Sefferino Rollerdrome is probably not unlike the closing chapter of many roller rinks during the golden age. Numerous recreational facilities simply disappeared from the landscape in response to recreational desegregation. The clashes of hostile protestors who sought equal rights to public accommodations created an environment where attending a roller skating rink became a dangerous adventure. Roller rinks had established reputation for being family-centered, safe and moral, places for social recreation and decorum. The clash between races undermined that reputation. Contested recreational spaces became dangerous for both youth and adults. In the end rinks were abandoned by white skaters, and in the 1960s, urban rebellion closed many parks, pools and rinks.⁶⁹

Russo goes on further to write that often owners of smaller rinks simply allowed their patrons to police who was allowed admission to the rink, thereby avoiding any need to hire outside individuals or agencies to do so.⁷⁰ However, Russo does not appear to attribute any blame to the discriminatory policies or racist practices of the rink owners or the patrons who benefitted from such policies. Instead, he recycles similar claims used by authors of amusement site history to address the demise of these ventures. Victoria Wolcott highlights this idea:

On websites and in popular documentaries and books that celebrate traditional urban amusement parks it is the late 1960s and ‘racial tensions’ that end the golden age of the parks. The blame here is clearly laid upon urban blacks who, upon gaining entry to amusement parks, also laid waste to them... Their closure was not a harbinger of a larger declension story but a reflection of a century of segregation and exclusion. Above all the disinvestment in urban recreation is evidence of racialized space’s power in twentieth-century American cities.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 91—92.

⁷¹ Wilcott, *Race, Riots and Roller Coasters*, 229.

To place the blame of rink closures and related distress on desegregation and integration efforts is a means of simple misdirection in order to maintain an image of moral character and innocence—to not destroy the nostalgic image people maintain of the roller rink. Rather than cause rink owners to acknowledge their own racialized policies, this method served as a means to undermine the Civil Rights Movement and the push for equal access to and equality in public spaces.

In the face of racial segregation, African American communities created their own recreational and skating spaces. In Chicago, the Savoy Roller Rink was not a purpose-built rink, but used the space of the original ballroom, with a square footage of 12,500 feet. The Savoy first opened its doors as a roller rink, with a special night once a week dedicated to Chicago's black skaters, in 1938. The Savoy Roller Rink existed for about a decade before the rink moved to other locations throughout Chicago. While the Savoy was white-owned, it functioned as a black cultural and community space. It further saw the incorporation of Jazz music into skating, a divergence from the overwhelming use of organ music in white rinks (See Figure 1.4 and 1.5).⁷² However, the ability to create place and community in a space of exclusion in no way excuses the discriminatory policies of rink owners and patrons that inherently kept minority groups from the premises.

⁷² Russo, *Chicago Rink Rats*, 72.



Figure 1.4: “Couple talking at roller skating rink of Savoy Ballroom. Chicago, Illinois,” Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



FIGURE 1.5 :“Roller skating at the Savoy Ballroom on Saturday night. Chicago, Illinois,” Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

A more convincing reason for the decline of the ‘Golden Age’ lies with a changing youth culture and the rise of rock-n-roll music. In *Skate Crazy: Amazing Graphics from the Golden Age of Roller Skating*, Lou Brooks defined the ‘Golden Age’ as 1937—1959, beginning with the formation of the RSROA and ending “after they stopped putting tail fins on cars but before the Beatles arrived.”⁷³ Indeed, the probability exists that rink owners and the roller skating industry were so overwhelmed by significant political, cultural, and social shifts that occurred in the decade of the long-60s.⁷⁴ This period with demands for equality from minority groups, personal freedoms from youth groups, and significant cultural change, created anxiety among white populations whose dominance and privilege had not been challenged. While adolescents had roller rinks in the 1950s, 1960s youth had new places to gather and dance in rock-n-roll clubs and similar venues. Just as some forms of popular culture responded with wholesome, family-centered content as a means of defense against what appeared as rapid social change for the majority class, roller rink operators and rinks likewise adjusted to this flux as it manifested itself in the rink setting. From promoting family-centric events to creating greater teenage admissions to shifting music from the stoic organ to popular radio tunes, rink operators sought to maintain their normal practices while also maintaining relevancy to an evolving audience. Perhaps because of the turmoil and fluidity of the decade, few authors have attempted a study of roller rinks in the

⁷³ Brooks, *Skate*, 9.

⁷⁴ I define the “long-60s” as 1955—1969. This is two years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. It begins just as Elvis Presley grows in popularity and fame. It sees the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, along with other cultural and social movements.

period. As a result, the 1960s in rink history is often glossed over between the 'Golden Age' and the Disco Era.

The 1970s, particularly the latter-half of the decade created a new image for roller rinks: the home of roller disco. As with the cultural appropriation of black rhythm and blues styles to create rock and roll, black music and skating styles were appropriated and formed the basis of the disco movement that spread across the 1970s into the 1980s. The marriage of disco music and roller skating shifted the perception of the roller rink for an entire generation. Chapter II will explore the relationship between disco and roller rinks further.

Just as the roller rink became a site of protest for desegregation and civil rights beginning in the 1940s, it also took on new meaning for marginalized groups in the 1970s and into the 1980s. "Roller skating parties became a method of showing solidarity for a cause or protesting against an injustice, and by association, the roller rink became a site and extension of that solidarity and protest. For example, in 1977 the Dallas Gay Political Caucus held a roller skating party at Josey Skateland to benefit the Miami Gay Community (See Figure 1.6).⁷⁵

⁷⁵ "Dallas Gay Political Caucus Flyer," May 18, 1977, Digital Public Library of America, The Portal to Texas History.

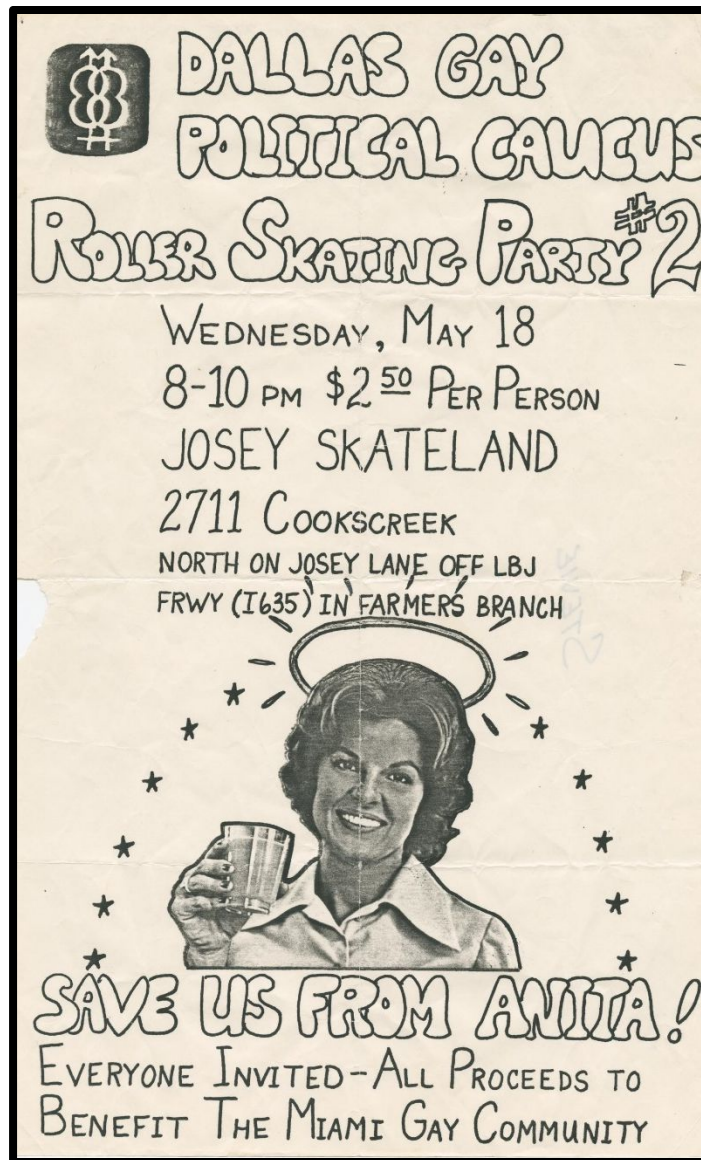


Figure 1.6: "Dallas Gay Political Caucus Flyer," May 18, 1977, The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries.

Likewise, in 1978 the Seattle Committee Against Thirteen (SCAT) held a "Skate for SCAT" event at the Lake Hills Roller Rink in Bellevue, Washington, which promised

“disco roller skating for the extended family” (See Figure 1.7).⁷⁶ “The proposed initiative [Initiative 13] sought to amend the Seattle Open Housing and Fair Employment Ordinances to no longer protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation. The citizens of Seattle eventually rejected Initiative 13.”⁷⁷



Figure 1.7: “Skate for SCAT” Poster, October 15, 1978, Digital Public Library of America, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Pacific Northwest Historical Documents Collection.

⁷⁶ “Skate for SCAT” Poster, October 15, 1978, Digital Public Library of America, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Pacific Northwest Historical Documents Collection.

⁷⁷ Tillner, “The Political Pastime,” *Southern Rambles*.

Moving into the 1980s, the rink remained a site of awareness and humanitarianism. In the mid-80s, the San Diego LGBT community routinely hosted skate nights and contests at the Starlite Roller Rink with the intention “to raise funds for a 24-hour crisis hotline,” as well to benefit area “homeless and displaced youth.”⁷⁸ In this period, roller rinks across the nation became safe spaces for minority groups to gather and experience community togetherness.

The early 1980s were a tumultuous period in American popular culture. John Lennon was murdered in 1980. “Video Killed the Radio Star” in 1981 with the premiere of MTV. The creation of the rollerblade, with production beginning in the 1970s and mass popularity in the 1980s, shifted the entire nature of skating. Rollerblade® incorporated as a company, and the manufacture of the rollerblade began to shift how future generations chose to skate.⁷⁹ The performance of skating moved from place-based in roller rinks on quad skates to flexibility of place on inline skates. Skating communities altered in nature and saw a return to sport. However, to this day, there are still roller rinks that forbid the use of rollerblades for fear they will damage the skating floor more quickly.

The Battle of Nostalgia and History

Roller skating rinks exist at the intersection of three interrelated concepts that involve how individuals look at the past: history, memory, and nostalgia. History is more

⁷⁸ “News Brief,” *Update* (San Diego), Issue 89, August 13, 1982, pg. 7, *Archive of Sexuality & Gender*, accessed December 2, 2018, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8skzs6>; Paul Nash, ed., “Roller Rink Contest to Aid Young, Homeless,” *Update* (San Diego), Issue 123, November 30, 1983, pg. 4, *Archive of Sexuality & Gender*, accessed December 2, 2018, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/8sfop5>.

⁷⁹ “About Us--Rollerblade History,” Rollerblade, accessed January 16, 2019, <https://www.rollerblade.com/usa/about-us/>.

so the study of the present through understanding of the patterns, events, and ideas of the past. Each person has an individual memory of the past; a process in which we understand the past in relation to our own lives and circumstances. Nostalgia involves a subjective view of the past. It involves selective memory, in which the negative, unpleasant pieces of the past are selectively ignored in favor of the positive, pleasant pieces.⁸⁰

As such, nostalgia belongs to the privileged. Nostalgia is a privilege to those group and individuals who hardly, if ever, faced discrimination and adversity. It is an opportunity for this privileged group to escape what appear as hardships in the present for the ‘easier’ or ‘simpler’ times of the past. Stephanie Coontz, a historian with an emphasis on nostalgia studies, describes nostalgia in two terms: “past-sickness” and “collective nostalgia.”⁸¹ She argues that through collective nostalgia, people take on a group-centric identity in which

They start to identify more intensely with their own group and to judge members of other groups more negatively. They become less optimistic about their ability to forge new connections—and more hostile to people perceived as outsiders. When such nostalgia gets politicized, it can lead to delusions about a mythical, magical Golden Age of the homeland, supposedly ruined by interlopers.⁸²

Victoria Wolcott makes an argument that accentuates this argument with particular regard to nostalgia for amusements of years past. She writes, “there was never

⁸⁰ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 531—536.

⁸¹ Stephanie Coontz, “The Nostalgia Trap,” *The Harvard Business Review*, (April 10, 2018), The Harvard Business Review Digital Archive, 3. See also: Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

a ‘golden age’ of amusements that was more democratic or more ‘authentic’ than today’s themed environments. Instead, racial exclusion defined amusement parks, roller-skating rinks, and swimming pools as safe places for white consumers. The historical amnesia that surrounds this reality is fueled by nostalgia for urban amusements generally.”⁸³

Nostalgia can be used as an entry point to the understanding of a fuller narrative outside of one’s own, individual historical perspective. Historic organizations and sites can use nostalgia as a means to introduce a group or individual to the larger historical context of the so-called golden age they seek to return to. It only becomes detrimental if the individual believes nostalgia to be history. Michael Kammen similarly writes about the effects of heritage, a phenomenon he equates to nostalgia. Kammen writes, “an upbeat emphasis upon heritage can serve as a stimulus to prudent public policy and to enhanced concern for a more meaningful relationship between past and present.”⁸⁴

There is likely a stronger sense of nostalgia when discussing amusement history because it is often tied to youth, family, and togetherness more so than other subgenres of history. However, it is vital to separate this nostalgia and the historical facts when discussing amusements of the past. In doing so, audiences as consumers of the past better understand the patterns that led to constructions and images of current amusements and recreation. In this context, the memories held by individuals, though often shrouded in nostalgia, are not deemed illegitimate or wrong. Rather history is used to speak to the larger context surrounding these memories. Just because an individual might not have witnessed or experienced discrimination at the roller rink, for example, that does not

⁸³ Wolcott, *Race, Riots and Roller Coasters*, 227.

⁸⁴ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 626.

mean that it did not exist. With the nostalgia associated with memories of the roller rink, particularly of the golden age and later, the general history written about roller skating and roller rinks is often white-washed. However, using nostalgia as a means to discuss the larger context of the roller rink, the fuller history of the roller rink can be explored, revealing both the enjoyment and community of the site as well as the discrimination and struggle for desegregation experienced at the rink.

Building on this historical foundation is the symbiotic relationship that develops between the roller rink and larger cultural practices. This relationship is one in which the former influences the latter and vice versa. The roller rink is a site for cultural production and experimentation. The roller rink existed as a site of musical experimentation and production. Likewise, it existed as a site where the musical tastes of the youth audiences greatly impacted the choices made by rink operators. In this sense, the roller rink acted as an outlet for community and recreation by music. In this period, classical music primarily dominated the concert. At the roller rink, Rock and Roll predominated. The roller rink also existed as a symbol of togetherness and exclusion. For some it represented community. For others it meant discrimination, until desegregation efforts end this practice. Nevertheless, the roller rink is ultimately a site of community. It is with an understanding of that relationship that creates the significance and need for preservation of the historic roller rink.

CHAPTER II: ROLLER RINK IDENTITY AND MUSIC CULTURE

“O my girl is trim and tall. And I met her in the fall, In a mother Hubbard dress of blue and pink. And my heart was dead away, on that warm September day. As I tumbled around the Roller Skating Rink.

[Chorus]: O its nice to slip and slide. And its fun to roll and glide. And its boss to understand each whirl and kink. As you make a graceful roll and going sailing past the goal. Arm in arm around the roller rink.

If you’d see her in the ring as she cuts a Pidgeon wing, you’d declare the little dear was on the brink of collision with some lout. But she quickly whirl-about. And go sailing own the Roller Skating Rink.

[Chorus]

Every evening we repair where electric candles glare, causing lookers on the scene to wink and blink at our antics in alarm. Keeping step arm in arm, as we whirl around the Roller Skating Rink.”¹

From the inception of the roller skating rink in the United States, music has been a constant companion. The above song “The Roller Skating Rink,” dating to 1884, highlights the early connections between music and roller rinks, in this case as subject matter. Music also figures prominently into the operation of the roller rink. The two just fit harmoniously together. In fact, the relationship between music and roller skating has existed since the earliest inventions of the roller skate. Joseph Merlin, who created the first known roller skate prototype, was also an accomplished instrument maker.² Similarly, roller skating became a prominent feature in operas such as “The Artist of

¹ H.T. Eckert, “The Roller Skating Rink,” Sunbury, PA, 1884, Library of Congress, Electric Resource. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1884.20702/>. The Library of Congress holds other, early roller skating-related sheet music including “On the Roller Skates,” “The Roller Skates Galop,” “The Pretty Roller Skater,” “The Roller Skating Craze,” “Roller Skate Waltz,” “The Roller Skaters,” “Fun on Roller Skates,” “The Yanks All Travel on Roller Skates,” and “Skating on the Rollers.” Some of these pieces were produced multiple times by different composers.

² James Turner and Michael Zaidman, *The History of Roller Skating*, (Lincoln, NE: National Museum of Roller Skating, 1997): 7.

Winter Pleasures” (1818), “The Alpine Dairy Maid” (1825), “Robert le Diable” (1831), “Les Huguenots” (1836), and “Grand Opera” (1849).³ Roller skating and music cannot easily be separated.

In its early years, roller skating existed as a primarily elite activity. Within twenty years, rinks continued to open in the United States and with them the development of the music-rink relationship, bringing the recreational activity and music to a broader, mass audience.

The nature of the relationship between rinks and music is far from static, but rather a multi-dimensional process involving evolutionary technology, relationships with production companies and record labels, and the physical performance of music in the rink. Furthermore, this relationship involved the shifting use of music from a general accompaniment to dance skating back to a general accompaniment for free skating. Even further still, roller rinks and music culture comprised live music and performances, shifting technologies creating new rink experiences, dance skating music, the roller disco movement, and rink promotional imagery understand the relationship between the roller rink and the field of music.

Music exists across cultural boundaries, shifting and restyling itself, as artists influence each other, as technologies of production and dissemination change, and as ‘tastes’ (however determined) alter. Individuals and entities, likewise, incorporate music into the performance of their identities. For example, in *Blue-Collar Pop Culture: From NASCAR to Jersey Shore* (2012), several contributors address music in relationship to the

³ Ibid., 7-9.

formation and performance of blue-collar or working-class identity.⁴ Class is seemingly a taboo, unspoken topic in the American consciousness.⁵ Working-class connections to music exist across genres and production methods, thereby showing music to be a fundamental component of identity formation. For example, Terrence T. Tucker, in “Workingman’s Song: The Blues as Working-Class Music,” postulates that the Blues are not only symbolic of African American identity and culture but also that of white, working-class individuals, particularly in the sense of the lyrical rejection of middle-class ideals and attitudes.⁶ Blues began as a predominantly African American musical form, but soon working-class whites appropriated it through the thematic concepts they felt to be representative of their own lives, propelling Blues in such a way that it became an acceptable form of white music because it appeared to related to the lives of the working-class white populations.

Roller skating rinks incorporated music into their identities to a degree such that the two cannot be divorced. Rinks used and were influenced by music that spoke to their identity or the identity they sought to portray. Yet, rinks were also forced to play music that spoke to the identities of the patrons they had and those they sought to attract to the rink. Music is inherently a component of the identity of the rink.

⁴ Keith M. Booker, ed., *Blue-Collar Pop Culture: From NASCAR to Jersey Shore*, 2 vols., (Denver: Praeger, 2012).

⁵ Ibid. In the set introduction, Booker discusses America’s class unconsciousness and the lack of critical dialogue about the class stratification evident in the United States outside of American literature and American Studies programs, thus arguing for other areas of academic study to expand into this debate. Booker refers to E.P. Thompson’s well-known study, *The Making of the English Working Class*, in order to contrast the explicit discussion of the English working-class with the silence on the subject of the American working-class.

⁶ Terrence T. Tucker, “Workingman’s Song: The Blues as Working-Class Music,” in Keith M. Booker, ed., *Blue-Collar Pop Culture: From NASCAR to Jersey Shore*, 2 vols., (Denver: Praeger, 2012), 217—231.

A 1911 article in *The Billboard* declared for “rinks to be successful they must have good music. The failure to properly provide for it is responsible for the non-success of many rinks.”⁷ This sentiment reflected through the existence of rinks. Likewise, in 1955, rink operator William Schmitz echoed a similar sentiment. “. . .They [rink operators and owners] only have two things to sell the skater—a good floor and good music—since more and more people are bringing their own shoe skates.”⁸ Operators evidently viewed music as vital to the functionality of the rink. Rink operators, Fred and Mary Bergin, discussed the importance of good rink music through their own experience, working in the late 1930s and early 1940s, in attempts to developing a successful rink. They wrote, “on taking inventory of what you have to sell to the public and what you have to interest and keep them interested in skating, don’t overlook the importance of good rink music.”⁹ Music was essential to the core functionality of the roller rink and the development of a skating experience. Throughout their vast periods of operation, roller rinks have defined and redefined their identities, with music factoring into each new conception of the roller rink.

The Wholesome Rink and the Cultivation of International Skating

From the introduction of roller skating, rink operators attempted to create an identity of wholesomeness and cleanliness. Whether in attempts to attract patrons from particular social classes or attempts to appeal to the general public, operators wanted their rinks to be a place of clean, safe entertainment and recreation. Because much of the roller

⁷ “Music at Skating Rinks,” *The Billboard*, November 4, 1911: 23.

⁸ William Schmitz, “Blasts Old Theories, Foresees Rosy Future,” *The Billboard*, July 30, 1955: 73.

⁹ Fred and Mary Bergin, “Importance of Good Rink Music,” *The Billboard*. March 28, 1942.

rink industry's early history occurred prior to civil rights movements and integration efforts of the mid-twentieth century, this identity encompassed literal and figurative meanings of 'clean,' 'safe,' and 'wholesome,' in order to cater most broadly to a white audience. In the early- to mid-twentieth century, rink managers sought to

keep the sport clean, and have rinks which resemble places where the preacher, the deacon and the public can go for an afternoon or evening of amusement and exercise without being forced to mingle in the same company with some Coxy [sic] army professional, who has inflicted his presence upon the manager through a purchased prestige.¹⁰

For over 10 years, roller rink operators attempted to curate a distinct image of their business and roller skating, and music factored significantly within this task. Music proved vital in providing a variety of skating experiences. Within the roller skating industry, there were two distinct types of roller skaters: one, the generalist, who skated for general recreation, simply skating around the rink; and two, the amateur or internationalist, who skated more than just for recreational purposes, who usually owned their own skates, and who participated in dance skating or the International style of skating.¹¹

Music for each style differed. Music complemented the very nature of the roller rink itself. It had to go beyond the surface and truly mesh with the needs of the rink and skater. Dance skating became a popular aspect of roller skating and took over the rinks across the nation, particularly in the middle of the twentieth century, through the Roller Skating Rink Operators Association, which promoted the development and expansion of

¹⁰ "Skating Rink Notes," *The Billboard*, vol. 20, 38 (September 19, 1908), 38.

¹¹ Edward W. Smith, ed., "G-R-A-N-D," *Skating Review* (May 1941), 3.

dance skating classes and competitions. Much like ice figure skating, dance skating incorporates ballroom dances into the routine, as well as twists, turns, jumps, and figures. Yet, the music associated with such performance differs from both ice figure skating and ballroom dancing and even general roller skating, with the point frequently reiterated that ballroom music was not rink music because it failed to have an appropriate tempo for the roller skater.¹² The 1940s served as a period when accompaniment music developed the sophistication required of it for the performance of International skating. Fred and Mary Bergin declared, “In most cases it would have been better not to have had the music, for the skaters were led into habits which were often difficult to overcome and this condition was directly attributable to the operator. . .”¹³ The Bergins stated that establishing a standardization of dancing music required input on the part of the record companies, which some were unwilling to do at the time owing to the fact that regional skate dances were common and diverse.¹⁴ “[They] spent considerable time working out tempii and rhythms that would allow the skater to stroke naturally and gracefully to the music without having to accent a lot of miscellaneous beats with body gyrations and found a basic rule which has guided the entire dance set-up of the of the RSROA since: Accent only the beats that the skater strokes.”¹⁵

In her 1943 article, “No Short Cut to Dance Skating,” Claire Miller, one of the few women to discuss roller skating and be featured in *The Billboard*, discussed the path

¹² Bill Love, “Ruhlmann Lists 10 Rules for Lexington’s Success,” *The Billboard*, November 13, 1948: 80, 93.

¹³ Bergin, “Importance,” 1942.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

to proper skate dancing.¹⁶ Among her call for patience and memorization of terms and steps, Miller discussed the appropriateness of music in accordance with dance skating.

Miller wrote,

some of the records used are by big name bands and contain no skating tempo whatever. In fact, they might even have a change of time. Skaters must be able to hear that downbeat which can be produced only by an organ thru use of the 'swell' pedal. Ballroom music is different and cannot be used to dance on skates. Thru past experience the organ and Novachord prove the most popular in better rinks in the country.¹⁷

Miller further discussed the importance of tempo to the dance skater. She implied that the organ can only produce so much, that an expert organist must be employed in order to maintain the appropriate tempo and downbeat for dance skating music. Based on her experience as a skater, Miller argued that the appropriate tempos varied from dance to dance, from 92-168 beats, to match the movement of the skater.¹⁸ The Two-Step, Two-Step Promenade, Collegiate, Keats Fox Trot, and Dench Blues measure at a tempo of 92 beats. At a measure of 100 beats is the Polka, Killian, Quickstep, Tango Barn Dance, Iceland Tango, Harris Tango, and the Fourteen-Step. The Straight Waltz, Style B Circle Waltz, Mohawk Waltz, and Flirtation Waltz measure at a tempo of 108. Three other waltzes measure at 138, with the Drop-Three Continental at 120 and the Continental Waltz at 168.¹⁹

Skate dancing proved a critical factor in the production of music for the roller skating rink. For example, due to the extreme level of competition and the need for new

¹⁶ Claire Miller, "No Short Cut to Dance Skating," *The Billboard*, April 10, 1943: 55, 58.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

and updated music, in the late 1940s Dance-Tone Record Company began developing music for skate dancing competitions.²⁰ The company produced records with near perfect beat and tempo measured by a metronome with music ranging for the bronze, silver, and gold level dance skating tests.²¹ Skate dancing did not hold a monopoly on this style of music. The company developed the music in such a manner as to provide adaptability for other roller skating occasions. “The firm points out that the records are adaptable for public sessions, classes, private lessons and practice and will be valuable for local, State, and regional competitions.”²² Dance skating music could easily be adapted for general roller skating sessions, but the opposite did not hold true. Music for general skating sessions was often viewed as inappropriate for skate dancing.

The 1940s and 1950s saw the proliferation of advertisements by record companies directed towards rinks owners and operators and began marketing skating-specific music, often in the style of dance skating music tempos. An advertisement for Skating Rhythms Recording Company, which claimed “over 1,200 skating rinks [were] today using Skating Rhythms’ Records,” boasted of employing the best rink organist in the nation as well as having the top and largest selection of tunes.²³ The advertisement listed a series of available roller skating music included Fox Trots, Collegiate, Two-Steps, Waltzes, Marches, and All-Skates.²⁴ Again, dance skating music was easily swapped for general skating music, but “All-Skates” music was not easily switched for dance skating.

²⁰ “Dance Test Albums, Specialty Records Prepped by Diskery,” *The Billboard*, October 18, 1947: 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²² *Ibid.*, 76.

²³ Advertisement, *The Billboard*, September 20, 1947: 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

Compelled by the desire for appropriate and specialized roller skating and dance skating music, some rink operators entered the music industry in the 1940s. Fred Freeman, operator of Bal-A-Roue Rollerway in Massachusetts developed a partnership with the Dance-Tone Record Company.²⁵ Freeman developed his affiliation with Dance-Tone Record Company due to the “need of accurate tempos in organ roller skating records as well as proper rhythm to assist in the teaching of roller dance classes.”²⁶ Operator E.W. Kunzel, of the Santa Ana Rollercade, also coordinated Skating Rhythms record label.²⁷ Likewise, operators Cap Sefferino and Fred Bergin developed record labels specifically for the production of roller skating and dance skating music: The Double D Record Co. and ABC Records, respectively.²⁸ Where Sefferino’s music was more general with flexibility for recreational or sport skating, Bergin promoted folk records, featuring “Cotton Eyed Joe,” for fun, recreational skating.²⁹ With improvements in the variety of roller skating music, came shifts in the technology used to produce and disseminate music for roller rinks.

Technological Sophistication

Music technology has progressed throughout the relationship between the roller rink and the field of music, transitioning from larger, manual organs to smaller, electric organs. In the 1930s, the Wurlitzer Organ and Calliaphone, a form of Calliope, served as the more popular forms of music machinery.

²⁵ “Fred Freeman Into Record Music Field,” *The Billboard*, June 28, 1947: 82.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷ “Kunzel Preps Plans for Combo Building,” *The Billboard*, July 5, 1947: 88.

²⁸ Advertisement, *The Billboard*, December 9, 1957: 63.; Advertisement, *The Billboard*, January 7, 1950: 58.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

In the early existence of roller rinks, organ music was king, and the Wurlitzer organ reigned supreme over others. Rudolph Wurlitzer founded the Wurlitzer Company in the 1850s in Cincinnati as a wholesaler of musical instruments.³⁰ Recognizing the military's need for musical instruments such as drums and bugles, during the Civil War, Wurlitzer expanded his business, and the practice continued with his son. The Wurlitzer Company produced a variety of musical instruments including music boxes, the Tonophone, barrel and band organs, pianos, harps, photoplayers, and eventually jukeboxes.³¹ The "Mighty Wurlitzer" organ came to dominate theaters and was known for its massive size.³² Due to its success in and popularity among entertainment and amusement sites, roller rink operators strove to include a Wurlitzer in their operations.

The Wurlitzer product used most often in the roller rink was the band organ.³³ The band organ was marketed for entertainment and sites of amusement.³⁴ "They had to be loud to be heard over the din of hundreds of wooden roller skate wheels on a wooden rink floor," and the frequently consisted of "brass horns, drums, and cymbals."³⁵ World War II became a turning point for the popularity of the Wurlitzer band organ, with the last one sold in 1943.³⁶ Perhaps this reflects a desire for more compact musical instruments for the entertainment industry, and more specifically roller skating rinks, and

³⁰ Mark Palkovic, *Wurlitzer and Cincinnati: The Name That Means Music to Millions*, (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015): 13-19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 125-138.

³² *Ibid.*, 139-150.

³³ *Ibid.*, 128.; See also the advertisement in "Rinks and Skaters," *The Billboard*, January 4, 1930: 64-65.

³⁴ Wurlitzer Catalogue cited in Mark Palkovic, *Wurlitzer and Cincinnati*, 128.

³⁵ Palkovic, *Wurlitzer and Cincinnati*, 128.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

reflected the rise of recorded music. Nevertheless, the Wurlitzer band organ proved a vital role in the musical development of the roller skating rink.

In the 1930s, the Calliope gained popularity and use in roller skating rinks, as an alternative to the much larger Wurlitzer organs. The Calliope was a unique instrument comprised of a series of whistles in which steam, at its earliest conception, and pressurized air passed through the whistles to develop a loud, imposing sound, perfect to overtake the sound of wooden wheels on the rink floor.³⁷ In 1855, the United States Patent and Trademark Office granted Joseph C. Stoddard a patent for a musical instrument, an early form of the Calliope, “a new musical instrument to be played by the agency of steam or highly-compressed air.”³⁸ Stoddard is credited with the creation of the early Calliope.³⁹ Following Stoddard’s instrument came the “Glass Tube Organ” of 1872 by William Standing, Sr., which consists of a series of tubes using pressurized air.⁴⁰ These were followed by the “Whistle-Organ” of 1906, the “Pneumatic Calliope” of 1909, the “Pneumatic Calliope” of 1916, the “Whistling Musical Instrument” of 1916, the “Automatic Calliope” of 1923—1927, and the “Calliope” of 1929.⁴¹ An advertisement for the Tangley Calliaphone, a type of Calliope, appeared in almost every section of “Rinks and Skaters” of *The Billboard* in 1930, promising to “increase your receipts” for rink owners.⁴² The advertisement stated

³⁷ Ron Bopp, “Whistling by the Numbers: A Survey of the Calliope in the U.S. Patents,” *Carousel Organ* no. 19 (April 2004): 19-20.

³⁸ J.C. Stoddard, Musical Instrument. US Patent 13668. Published October 9, 1855.

³⁹ Bopp, “Whistling by the Numbers,”: A Survey of the Calliope in the U.S. Patents,” 20-22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴¹ Bopp, 21-27.

⁴² For example, see “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, January 4, 1930: 64-65.

Skaters, like dancers, want good music. If your business is bad no doubt the skaters are tired of the old-style music. The beautiful Calliophone music resembles a massive pipe organ, with volumes that carries over all noises. Plays automatically without attention, using 10-tune rolls, costing on \$2.50 per roll. Low music expense—better music—larger crowds.⁴³

The Tangley Calliophone, a specific variety of the Calliope, was a trademarked product of the Miner Company.⁴⁴ The Calliope clearly improved upon the larger organs of the preceding decades in a more compact yet equally forceful and melodious manner, perfect for roller skating rinks.

Overwhelmingly, the Hammond organ, created in 1935, dominated the post-World War II music scene at the roller skating rink. Developed by Laurens Hammond, the Hammond organ “married music and electricity in a way that would forever expand the art form.”⁴⁵ In his patent application, Hammond wrote, “it is thus the primary object of [his] invention to provide an electrical instrument for the production of musical tones upon which any desired musical composition may be played.”⁴⁶ Likely, the Hammond organ served as the next step in rink music because of the increasing use of electric instruments and music in the amusement and entertainment fields in general, reflecting the increasing electrification of musical instruments.

Laurens Hammond, along with other collaborators, was likewise responsible for the creation of the Novachord and the Solovox, both of which worked as accompanying equipment to the Hammond organ. Developed in 1939, the Novachord resembled both a

⁴³ “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, January 4, 1930: 64-65.

⁴⁴ “Calliopes,” The Miner Company, LLC, Accessed April 3, 2017. <http://www.calliopes.com/>.

⁴⁵ “The Hammond Organ... The First Electric Instrument,” *Music Trades* (November 2015): 122.

⁴⁶ Laurens Hammond, Electrical musical instrument. US Patent 1956350A. Filed January 19, 1934. Issued April 24, 1934.

piano and organ, but differed to a great degree.⁴⁷ The Novachord is a “polyphonic synthesizer” in which “the different sounds could be ‘programmed’ using a series of front panel Bakelite controls. . . [which] allowed the user to manipulate” the mechanical aspects of the Novachord.⁴⁸ The Novachord was often primarily marketed as a home entertainment piece, and thus was used less as a synthesizer, but it also became a mainstay in many rink spots sporting the Hammond organ itself, perhaps because of the unique soundscape created by the combination of the Novachord and the organ.⁴⁹

Similarly, the Hammond Organ Co. designed the Solovox as a complementary musical instrument to the Hammond organ. Created in 1940-1948, it “was a monophonic keyboard attachment instrument intended to accompany the piano with organ type lead voices.”⁵⁰

The Hammond organ came to dominate the roller skating rink of the 1940s and 1950s. Yet, with all organ music, there must also be a musician, one capable of maintaining a good tempo. “Good music is popularly considered the Hammond organ. . . One word about music. Buying a Hammond organ does not solve the music problem. It is necessary to employ top-flight musicians who can adapt themselves to the tempo of roller rhythms.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, in the postwar decades, the Hammond organ became so synonymous with roller rinks that record labels developed music specific to the Hammond Organ and Novachord. For example, *Skatin’ Toons* and *Roller Glide*

⁴⁷ “Novachord History,” Novachord, Accessed April 4, 2017, <http://novachord.co.uk/history.htm>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “The Hammond Solovox (1940),” The Hammond Zone, Accessed April 3, 2017, <http://www.hammond-organ.com/Museum/solovox.htm>.

⁵¹ Earl Van Horn, “Personal Contact in Rink Management,” *The Billboard*, August 30, 1941: 67.

Records, Inc. produced skating records for the Hammond Organ and Novachord, with possible scores including “Somebody’s Thinking of You Tonight,” “Underneath the Old Sierra Moon,” and “This is Worth Fighting For.”⁵²

Beyond the musical instruments, sound equipment also factored greatly into the development of music in the roller skating rink. For example, in 1941, the Roller Bowl in Chicago, Illinois installed a Western Electric sound system enclosed in a ball suspended over the middle of the rink, covered in 2500 mirrors to reflect the light as the ball revolved, an image which became iconic, playing music from a Novachord.⁵³ Rink operator, George F. Maier, provided adept advice for properly using sound systems and sound equipment. He wrote, “a surplus of power in sound equipment for a roller rink is important, for unlike the ice rink, the noise of the roller skate makes extra power necessary.”⁵⁴ Maier advocated for extended watts usage, spacious placement of the speakers in order to develop the best and highest frequency, and the use of multiple amplifiers in the event one fails to function properly.⁵⁵ “A sound system in a roller rink must have good frequency response because the frequencies actually heard by the skater, due to the masking effect of the skate noise, is much less than the actual frequency response of the system.”⁵⁶ Similarly, in an 1948 article titled, “25 Factors Govern Biz Volume in Today’s Tussle for Dollar,” rink owner Carl C. Johnson highlighted what he considered to be the twenty-five most profound factors affecting roller skating rink

⁵² See “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, July 25, 1942: 54.

⁵³ Claude R. Ellis, “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, November 8, 1941: 45.

⁵⁴ George F. Maier, “Common-Sense Hints to Ops on Use of Sound Equipment,” *The Billboard*, May 17, 1947: 83.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

business. Of Johnson's twenty-five factors, the speaking, or sound, system was the eighth item on his list.⁵⁷ Johnson posited that a clear, functioning sound system is necessary for the safety and effectiveness of the rink.⁵⁸ If announcements and music cannot be heard, the rink does not function properly.

The 1950s saw the development and increased use of the plastic skating surface for rinks and rink operators, in response to the forced use of Masonite during periods of rationing of World War II.⁵⁹ The plastic skating surface served as a technological improvement to eliminate noise produced from the wheels against the floor surface.⁶⁰ This improvement in skating surfaces inevitably produced an environment in which music was able to expand and fill the space.

Rink Identity Imagery

Music factored into the imagery developed to promote the roller rink, most specifically through the roller skating sticker. In his work, *Skate Crazy: Amazing Graphics from the Golden Age of Roller Skating*, Lou Brooks provides an array of exemplar roller skating stickers, which provide a range of the imagery used on rink stickers.⁶¹ Brooks observed: "Called 'pasters' by collectors, stickers varied in value, depending upon such distinctions as number of colors, unusual die-cuts, and the location of the rink itself."⁶² Brooks added that these stickers were "fervently circulated, collected,

⁵⁷ Carl C. Johnson, "25 Factors Govern Biz Volume in Today's Tussle for Dollar," *The Billboard*, April 10, 1948: 82-83.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁵⁹ "Plastic Surfacing Used for Skating," *The Billboard*, July 28, 1958: 61, 71.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61, 71.

⁶¹ Brooks, *Skate Crazy*."

⁶² *Ibid.*, 23.

and traded by skaters across America.”⁶³ These stickers became more than a means of self-promotion. They became a network.

Many rinks incorporated music or musical elements into their rink stickers. Some rinks incorporated the music imagery into their names, such as “Melody Bowl Roller Rink” (See Figure 2.1). In doing so, this further highlighted the roller rink as a multi-entertainment site, one not just for roller skating but also for the enjoyment of music.



Figure 2.1: Melody Bowl Roller Rink Sticker, Private Collection.

⁶³ Ibid., 23.

Others added musical elements to their rink stickers. For instance, Fairway Roller Rink in Sandwich, IL features a man playing an organ (See Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2: Fairway Roller Rink Sticker, Private Collection.

Another, for the Lockport Roller Skating Club of Lockport, IL, featured a woman and man skating on a record (See 2.3).



Figure 2.3: Lockport Roller Skating Club Sticker, Private Collection.

Other rink stickers highlighted information about the music. For instance, Fairway Skating Palace in Sandwich, IL mentioned “WMRO Radio Organist Plays for You” (See Figure 2.4). This showed the strong influence of the roller rink in the community through its creation of such connections.



Figure 2.4: Fairway Skating Palace Sticker, Private Collection.

Another rink sticker notes “Radio Organist Broadcasting, WCMY” (See Figure 2.5). Thus, music became intertwined in every aspect of the roller rink industry.



Figure 2.5: Roystson Roller Skating Rink Sticker, Private Collection.

The Roller Rink as Performance Venue

The experience of music in the roller skating rink has shifted over time. Live roller rink music was popular in the early years of roller skating through the 1930s. For example, “Bob” Tamm’s Band performed in the band shell at the roller rink at the Arcadia Ballroom of the Antlers Hotel in Janesville, Wisconsin.⁶⁴ Other times, live music highlighted special events or opening, such as the case as when the Patiner Pavilion opened in Los Angeles and Ed Rutledge’s Skating Band performed, though they sadly did not skate as they performed.⁶⁵

Despite shifts in music technology, recording, and production, live music at roller skating rinks continued as a significant practice throughout the post-World War II years. For example, as reported in Martinsville, Virginia, in 1950, “Fred’s Skateland here launched its new policy of presenting traveling hillbilly name attractions, with Little Jimmy Dickens opening September 8. It is reported that the show pulled the heaviest hillbilly audience of any venture in that territory in a number of years. Hank Williams has been inked for an October 2 appearance.”⁶⁶ There is no explanation for why these rinks attempted to lure in the “hillbilly” demographic through their own music, yet it appears that it worked. Likewise, artists across various genres performed at roller rink events and parties. For example, in 1964, Louis Armstrong performed at Redman’s Roller Rink in Fairfield, California, during which he performed several of his hit songs including, “Birth of the Blues,” “When the Saints Go Marching In,” and closing out his performance with

⁶⁴ “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, January 4, 1930: 64.

⁶⁵ “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, April 5, 1930: 71.

⁶⁶ “Martinsville Skateland Goes to Hillbilly Shows,” *The Billboard (Archive 1894-1960)* 62, no. 39 (Sep 30, 1950): 76..

“Hello Dolly,” followed by three consecutive encores.⁶⁷ The Teddy Bears, one of Phil Spector’s early music forays, often played at rink parties.⁶⁸ Rapper Ice Cube even performed at some roller rinks, while shifting the nature of rap music, in the 1980s.⁶⁹ Yet, live music was only one aspect of the relationship between the roller rink and music.

Roller Rink Identity in Flux

There is no year to use as a definite turning point for determining the shift in the relationship between roller rinks and music because there was not one exact point when this shift occurred.⁷⁰ It was a gradual process which saw the relationship between rinks and music shift from rinks influencing music to rinks being influenced by music. It was a shift that caught rink operators by surprise, and it created an atmosphere of uncertainty and flux as those in the industry attempted to respond to it. Rock and Roll brought on this first great wave of uncertainty for roller rink owners and operators.

In *The Emergence of Rock and Roll: Music and the Rise of American Youth Culture* (2014), Michael K. Hall studies how youth culture supports the rise of Rock and Roll as well as the influence of rock and roll on youth cultural practices.⁷¹ Hall argues that Baby Boomers adopted early forms of Rock and Roll, promoted its dissemination across American culture, and witnessed as the genre splintered. As the Boomer

⁶⁷ Tony Wade, “Louis Armstrong Plays Redman’s Roller Rink in 1964,” *The Daily Republic* (Fairfield-Suisun City, California), June 15, 2014, <https://www.dailyrepublic.com/solano-news/local-features/local-lifestyle-columns/louis-armstrong-plays-redmans-roller-rink-in-1964/>.

⁶⁸ Richard Williams, *Phil Spector: Out of His Head*, (New York: Omnibus Press, 2003): 28.

⁶⁹ Marcus Reeves, *Somebody Scream! Rap Music’s Rise to Prominence in the Aftershock of Black Power*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2008).

⁷⁰ David Yaffe, *Bob Dylan: Like Complete Unknown*, Icons of America Series, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁷¹ Michael K. Hall, *The Emergence of Rock and Roll: Music and the Rise of American Youth Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2014).

generation matured, so too did Rock and Roll, evolving and consuming new influences as it did so.

During the 1940s and a portion of the 1950s, like with most other aspects of life, adults defined ‘tastes,’ a representation of consumptive power, in music. Their notable favorites included, Glenn Miller, Bing Crosby, Perry Como, and Frank Sinatra.⁷² The tastes of music were basically by adults, for adults. However, with the end of World War II, the category of youth—adolescents and teenagers—became more visible than ever before as a recognizable social configuration, showing clear boundaries between childhood and adulthood. This segment of youth emerged as a consumptive force with increased levels of leisure time and enough social and economic power to rival that of adult consumers. Furthermore, it developed into a group of shared interests as a subculture apart from the mainstream culture of parents and adults. It became clear that subcultures, particularly a youth subculture, could drive market practices and trends. Underscoring this period was the Cold War fear of ‘otherness,’ non-conformity, and subversiveness, as highlighted in the HUAC hearings. As such the rise of Rock and Roll can be considered a subversive act, driven by the economic power of teens, to the established social order. The attractiveness of Rock and Roll to teenagers prompted a sort-of moral panic among those in power about the moral security of the youth population because it indicated a blurring of racial and social boundaries, as Rock and Roll drew heavily on, and appropriated elements of, Rhythm and Blues musicality and lyrical styling that developed out of African American music culture.⁷³

⁷² Ibid., 3-4.

⁷³ Ibid., 3-7.

Due to these related fears about teenagers and Rock and Roll and the tides of change they encompassed, roller rink operators were unsure of how to approach these shifts and how they affected the identity of the roller rink. The roller rink industry spent decades cultivating an image of wholesome and clean recreation, devoid of all unsavory elements. How would this new genre of music, that created fanatic responses in teenagers, change the rink identity? Would it end rink culture as it existed?

In seeking to highlight the differences between white and black rinks, industry men reported on the elements of ‘otherness’ that they saw as characteristic of black rinks. Such was the case with the Duke Roller Rink, an African American roller rink in Detroit. According to a 1959 article in *The Billboard*, “there is little interest in typical skate dancing and a revamped policy of skate events and music is necessary, tailored to the tastes of the customers.”⁷⁴ Thus, it is likely that dance skating was a sport of privilege not offered to people of color, and the music that went with it was treated likewise.

Furthermore, the author wrote,

Musical tastes [were] different. Organ music, usually a favorite, simply [did] not go over is only used as a fill-in for intermissions. Familiar special skating recordings likewise [found] little favor. The preference [was] mostly for modern music with a bit of variety. The typical formula [was] to have three ballads, which [were] tops in popularity, interspersed with a rock and roll number, a balance that would surprise the typical operator.⁷⁵

The characterization of the music played in the African American rink was clearly meant to show differences between the mainstream dance skating music and culture and what white operators likely viewed as ‘otherness.’

⁷⁴ “Detroit’s Negro-Only Rollery Hits Jackpot,” *The Billboard*, March 2, 1959: 55..

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

This concern about Rock and Roll created an environment of uncertainty among rink operators. This uncertainty continued through the 1950s and into the 1960s and 1970s and culminated in the realization that music shaped roller rink identity far more than the other way around. Operators held constant inquiries amongst themselves about the most appropriate type of music to be used in the rink environment.⁷⁶ Longtime rink operators tended to favor organ music over recorded music, because they thought it created a better impact on admissions. Others used a mixture of organ music and pop or Rock and Roll music, either in defined sessions, such as a ‘pop records session,’ or simply shuffled within a single session, as some noticed that younger patrons quickly “tired” of the constant organ music.⁷⁷ Similarly, some operators hated Rock and Roll music outright, but realized it was the key to maintaining youth populations in the rink.⁷⁸ In general, roller rink operators discovered that Rock and Roll mean individualized dance as opposed to the previous roller skate dancing.

Other efforts were made to mollify skaters who preferred the traditional organ music and identity of the roller rink. As early as 1954, rink operators developed programs to appeal to that audience group. George Ideman, of Ide’s Drome in Ithaca, New York, called “Oldtimers and Oldstyers.”⁷⁹ In the production of his promotion, Ideman discovered that the targeted demographic did not prefer the Rock and Roll music

⁷⁶ “What’s Answer to Our Music?,” *Rinksider*, 14, no. 12 (April/May 1971), 5. Rinksiders Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ “Likes Tune,” *Rinksider*, 14, no. 11 (February/March 1971), 3. Rinksiders Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁷⁹ “Slow Music—Old Timers Will Return,” *Rinksider*, 3, no. 9 (October 1959), 6. Rinksider Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

increasingly played in roller rinks at the time.⁸⁰ Instead he found that if they played “the Blue Danube,” at a low tempo, they would then “watch the older folks flock on to the floor.”⁸¹ In 1961, production company Roller Records introduced the instruments of Rock and Roll—the guitar and the drums—to rink music, thereby shifting the nature of music in the roller rink.⁸² Eddie Jacobs and Alan Holmes, of Roller Records, created a sound that sought to appeal to both the pro-Rock and Roll and anti-Rock and Roll factions in the rink. The included instruments were meant to “provide a modified [sic] rock ‘n’ roll style” on top of the Hammond Organ as the predominant base in the track, yet it was also “modified so as not to antagonize those opposed to rock ‘n’ roll.”⁸³

In the 1960s, the roller rink took on an identity that fluctuated between a place of nostalgic recreation for older generations and a place of cultural change in terms of music and audiences. Similarly, later in the mid-1970s as Disco began to take shape, nostalgia for the rink past continued on an upward trend and was promoted as an excellent programming opportunity for rink operators.

And don’t overlook [nostalgia] for your rink, either. The whole world is on a nostalgia kick, maybe trying to prove that things used to be better than they are now [1977]. And whether you go back just a few years, or a decade or two, or to the real golden oldies, you can build a profitable promotion with an ‘Old Timer Night.’⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Nostalgia Brings Back Old-Timers,” *Rinksider*, 22, no. 1 (Fall 1976), 10. Rinksider Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

The promotion of nostalgia as a marketable experience in the roller rink continued through the end of the 1970s.⁸⁵

On the other hand, rink operators attempted to drop the “stuffy” characteristic and sought to discover what music appealed to their patrons, particularly the teen element.⁸⁶ In a period of transition in the roller rink, where one generation started aging out of the rink experience and another began to enter the experience, music provided a buffer zone in which to appeal to both groups. As Michael Hall wrote, “music was the heartbeat of the new youth culture, and more than most forms of popular entertainment, rock and roll depended on this culture for its growth.”⁸⁷ As a result, marketers responded to these new trends by developing and marketing products for teens, a trend rinks took up over time.

The affinity for Rock and Roll by teenagers slowly moved into the rink environment. Rinks throughout the nation developed a variety of promotions and programs to incorporate more Rock and Roll music in a means to appeal to teenagers. For example, in Lakeland, New York, the Committee of Recreation began the creation of co-curated programs in the 1950s in which the skaters themselves determined the music for each skating session. In this scheme, “the skaters, most of them high school students, [were] encouraged to bring their own records. On a sheet of paper attached to the record are the names of the youngsters. The more signatures, the better chance the group has for its records to be played.”⁸⁸ Likewise, in 1962 in Neosho, Missouri, at the Gayway Roller

⁸⁵ “Nostalgia—It’s Saleable,” *Rinksider*, 22, no. 2 (Winter 1977), 19. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁸⁶ Bob Phillips, “Improve Your Rinks—Attract More Patrons,” *Rinksider*, 3, no. 11 (December 1959), 11. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁸⁷ Hall, *The Emergence of Rock and Roll*, 4.

⁸⁸ “Skate to Own Music,” *Rinksider*, 2, no. 10 (September 1958), 3. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

Rink, the operator “use[d] records with a heavy accent on popular music for teen-agers” typically played toward the end of the skate sessions, with organ music interspersed throughout the session in general, particularly as a means to slow down skaters if they skated too fast in response to the music.⁸⁹

Modernity factored into this new rink identity that developed from the inclusion of Rock and Roll and the growing youth attendees. To be modern was to be relevant in the growing field of amusement and entertainment. During the “Music and Sound Seminar” at the 1961 Convention, George Wardlow’s catchphrase was: “Go Modern or Go Broke.”⁹⁰ Wardlow wrote that music created an atmosphere that is comfortable for skating and socializing and argued that in order to develop atmospheres alluring to patrons, rinks needed to “[include] the sounds that are used in modern music.”⁹¹ Wardlow likewise addressed the real origins of Rock and Roll, a task few, if any, rink operators or insiders actually undertook. He argued against its perception of being “savage” and stated that “It’s based on Afro-Cuban and American jazz mixed together with the addition of the sound of the guitar.”⁹²

If modern music was used in roller rinks, then the roller rink took on the identity of being a modern site of entertainment, and therefore relevant and popular among the teenage population. George Wardlow, an industry man from Sarasota, Florida, argued “modern music is the kind kids will ask you what the name of the song is and where they

⁸⁹ “R & R Tunes Bring Them In,” *Rinksider*, 6, no. 3 (April 1962), 6. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁹⁰ ““Go Modern or Go Broke’ His Advice,” *Rinksider*, 6, no. 1 (January 1962), 7. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

can buy a record with it. This music is something skating needs.”⁹³ Likewise, with this modernity came the realization that Rock and Roll as a genre would not leave the rink space, but would need to be incorporated as a significant component of a rink’s identity in order to remain pertinent to the targeted audiences. Eddie Jacobs, a partner in Roller Rinks, which produced the monthly “Music to Skate By” selections, stated that in 1962 “we may have different opinions about Rock ‘n Roll but we must all realize that it is here—and here to stay. . . We’ve got to give it to our customers in a palatable way. The idea is to give ‘em the sound but to give it to ‘em in a dignified way.”⁹⁴ In acknowledging this modern trend towards Rock and Roll, the Roller Records company created a form of music that referenced Rock and Roll, while also upholding the more traditional musical stylings of roller rink music, as he said, “It’s Rock ‘n Roll but it is not wild.”⁹⁵ This musical concoction of the Roller Records company speaks to the fluctuating nature and identity of roller rinks in the period—going modern but maintaining traditional practices.

Contributing to this flux of identity, sound and sound technology mattered too. With the efforts of roller rinks to develop and maintain this modern identity, rinks also adapted to technological advances in the field of music dissemination and production. Eddie Jacobs, a music specialist, at the 1961 Convention, argued that “a roller rink operator’s music is only as good as his sound system.”⁹⁶ At that same convention, Mack Emmerman, a recording engineer, made similar arguments about updated stereo technology. Emmerman argued that two pieces of technology proved useful to the

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “Play to Skaters’ Taste in Music,” *Rinksider*, 6, no. 1 (January 1962), 7. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

successful dissemination of music throughout the rink: the speakers and the phonograph cartridge (what is now consider the turntable need).⁹⁷ He stated that, at the time, two main types of speakers proved useful in the rink environment: the brute force system and the small cone-type speaker.⁹⁸ The brute force system, as the name suggests, created a brute force of sound across the rink from a large single speaker that “floods the arena with sound.”⁹⁹ The system of small cone-type speakers were smaller in size and mounted across the length of the rink from the ceiling. Emmerman stated that though these systems existed in quite different states, they each provided an equitable degree of sound, with amplification, throughout the roller rink.¹⁰⁰ He described the phonograph cartridge as “one of the most disregarded elements of the system and one of the most important.”¹⁰¹ Emmerman suggested three possible types of phonograph cartridges that would work best in the rink atmosphere: the ceramic, the crystal, and the magnetic, suggesting that the magnetic was likely the best choice for any rink because it produced a dynamic range while the others created poor sound quality in relation.¹⁰² Where previous music was recorded in mono, newer music—Rock and Roll and Disco—were recorded with stereo technology. Record companies produced records for stereo, and this required roller rinks to update to create the best sound quality and experience possible for patrons. The introduction and use of stereo changed the impact of sound, and rink operators eventually adjusted accordingly.

⁹⁷ “A Sound Approach to Sound,” *Rinksider*, 6, no. 1 (January 1962), 7. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Similarly, Lewis Quintin echoes Jacobs and Emmerman's claims about the sound system as one of the three most significant experiences offered by the roller rink (the other two being rental shoes and the floor itself).¹⁰³ Quintin writes, "the youth and young adults of today (they comprise about 80% of your market) are much more sophisticated when it comes to sound reproduction. They are no longer satisfied with the 'tinny' sounding speakers of the past but instead, expert music that they can hear, even over the inherent noise of a crowded roller rink."¹⁰⁴ He also spoke to the importance of speakers, amplifiers, and turntables as the three most significant aspects of a quality sound system that will appeal to younger populations.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, though operators still faced uncertainty on about the genres of music to showcase, they all generally agreed that a quality sound system to complement both organ music and Rock and Roll was vital to the maintenance of the rink identity and environment.¹⁰⁶

Rock and Roll finally appeared to gain the upper hand in roller rinks, as evidenced in the later years of the 1970s, through the life and death of the one that started it all—Elvis Presley. Tributes to Elvis appeared in several issues of the *Rinksider*, an industry publication received by members of the Roller Skating Rink Operators Association.¹⁰⁷ "The spirit of Elvis Presley will live on and on. Elvis was the *NOW* person of the *NOW* generation. The king of rock and roll. And today the *NOW* rinks are

¹⁰³ Lewis Quintin, "Sound of Music—That's Business," *Rinksider*, 22, no. 1 (Fall 1976), 11. Rinksider Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ "What's Answer to Our Music?," *Rinksider*, 14, no. 12 (April/May 1971), 5. Rinksider Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

¹⁰⁷ "Presley A Name To Remember," *Rinksider Yearbook—Buying Guide*, (1977—1978), 23. Rinksiders Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.; Irwin N. Rosee, "Elvis More Box-Office Than Ever," *Rinksider*, (Winter 1978), 14, Rinksiders Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

rock and roll rinks.”¹⁰⁸ Industry literature proposed that rinks host Elvis Presley Tribute nights on January 8th, his birthday, as a celebration of his life and his musical legacy. It was proposed that there was “a need to make this an occasion to remember and the beginning of an annual event by the way that it is put together at your rink.”¹⁰⁹ The literature even provided Elvis’ “Top 45” songs, each one of which sold at least one million copies.¹¹⁰ Elvis Presley was one of the first to set the teenage set on fire with his smooth lyrics and gyrating hips, so it seems appropriate that a tribute to Elvis sealed the relationship between roller rinks and Rock and Roll.

This period of identity crisis, perhaps concern for a better word, was not strictly defined between Year X and Year Y. Rather this phase of uncertainty for roller rinks crossed boundaries of periods when roller rinks exhibited more concrete identities. Roller rink identities began to blur in the 1950s when organ music dominated the speakers and wholesomeness was an attituded. They continued blurring through the 1960s and 1970s as a new phase set it that completely changed the notion of the roller rink.

The decades of the 50s, 60s, and 70s saw a period of transformation in the music roller rinks played and the methods used to produce such music. Recorded music began to replace the organist. The Top 40 became a staple of rinks. Disco, to be discussed in greater depth later, took over the roller skating rink. Yet, all hope for organ music was not lost. In 1958, Detroit’s Arcadia Roller Rink installed a Wurlitzer Organ, procured

¹⁰⁸ “Presley A Name To Remember,” *Rinksider Yearbook—Buying Guide*, (1977—1978), 23. Rinksiders Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

¹⁰⁹ Irwin N. Rosee, “Elvis More Box-Office Than Ever,” *Rinksider*, (Winter 1978), 14, Rinksiders Collection. National Museum of Roller Skating.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

from a theater, much to the delight of the younger skaters unfamiliar with such music.¹¹¹ The organ did not fully replace recorded music, rather it was installed to work in tandem with recorded music in order to produce a unique variety of music offerings.¹¹² The owners even sought to develop and market recordings from the organ music.¹¹³ Likewise, as late as 1980, rink operators re-installed organs as a means of marketing nostalgia. The operators of High Roller in New York sought to experiment with the re-installation of a pipe organ.¹¹⁴ The operators reported that “emphasizing that ‘the smooth rolling sound of an organ, with contemporary tunes, is the most ideal music for skating.’”¹¹⁵ Thus, the presence of the organ in post-organ music decades reveals that the organ never fully lost its roots in the roller skating rink.

This period of flux in the roller rink identity revealed the shift in the relationship between rinks and music—from the former influencing the latter, to the latter completely influencing the former.

Roller Disco

The physical survey of historic roller rinks studied roller rinks opened, and currently operating, between 1900 and 1979. As a result it highlighted rinks that were opening during, or opened just as the Disco phase hit roller rinks and roller skating. This survey briefly touched on rinks that experienced Disco influences, but did not fully study the fuller spectrum of the Disco movement in roller rinks. As such, Disco is mentioned in

¹¹¹ “Detroit Arcadia Goes to Pipe Organ Music,” *The Billboard*, February 10, 1958: 56.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹⁴ “Pipe Organ for New Yorkers,” *The Billboard*, October 25, 1980: 31.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

this chapter as a means of introduction to that new phase as rink culture. It is also mentioned to illustrate the patterns of extreme change music created in rink culture. Just as Rock and Roll became a mainstream feature of roller rinks, Disco moved in and completely altered the nature of the roller rink.

In his work, *The Wonderful World of Roller Skating* (1980), David Roggensack described roller skating as existing through ‘boom’ periods, with fluctuations in popularity. Roggensack argued that, for a boom to occur, a society needed, among other things, industry which supplied mass-produced goods at the same time as a population existed with enough money and time to use these goods. If the product is one for leisure time—as with roller skates—the society’s industry has to have existed for some time.”¹¹⁶ If roller disco was anything, it was most assuredly a boom period. In 1978, Merriam-Webster officially added the word “disco” to its most recent release of the Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary.¹¹⁷ “Disco is a blend of proper atmosphere, a high quality music reproduction system and good disco recordings.”¹¹⁸

Yet, as opposed to organ music and Rock and Roll of earlier periods, Disco in the roller rink created something entirely new. Disco created a new identity for the roller rink. Like the period of identity fluctuation prior, the Disco era saw the roller rink defined by the music rather than the music by the rink. However, this period went beyond simply an identity that encompassed more than just divergent music tastes. It simply was not just a style of music, instead it was an entire experience and turned the roller rink into an

¹¹⁶ David Roggensack, *The Wonderful World of Roller Skating*, (New York: Everest House, 1980): 142.

¹¹⁷ “Webster Recognizes ‘Disco,’” *Rinksider*, (Winter 1978), 2, Rinksider Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

¹¹⁸ David Ripp, “Explosive Market—Disco Skate,” *Rinksider Yearbook*, (1977—1978), 47, Rinksider Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

environment different than any it had been previously. The second half of the 1970s saw of this new rink identity that not only responded to musical shifts but also becomes an entire experience. Disco not only altered the nature and culture of the roller rink, it also transformed the interiors of rinks. The starburst lighting system and mirror, also called Disco because of its popularity in the period, balls became iconic pieces of the roller rink in this period, with most rinks retaining these elements to today.

Instead of fighting dance clubs, roller rinks transformed into dance clubs—the roller disco. “Disco-nights are gaining in popularity in rinks. Discos, a way of life these days, is accented by sophisticated and mod music.”¹¹⁹ Yet, as with other musical forms to enter the roller rink, there was also early pushback about Disco as an acceptable addition to the rink environment—either it disrupts the traditional perspective of the roller rink, particularly because it disrupted the relationship between the rink and the organ, or that it was meant for “sleazy clubs.”¹²⁰ However, rink operators eventually embraced Disco in increasing numbers.

While some may characteristically date the disco period to the 1970s and early 1980s, those at the time saw disco beginning much earlier. Nelson George, a contributor for *Billboard*, wrote

Roller-Disco scholars trace its origins back to Detroit’s Arcadia Rink where black patrons skated to the music of Louie Jordan and other r&b artist of the period. But it wasn’t until Brooklyn’s Empire Rollerdrome owner Hank Abrami agreed to play a record called ‘Night Train’ in 1957 that the seeds for the present interest were planted. Bill Butler, who as a youngster skated at the Arcadia, became an advocate for roller skating to

¹¹⁹ “Double Disco,” *Rinksider*, 22, no. 2 (Winter 1977), 11. Rinksider Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

¹²⁰ Martin Lader, “Will Disco Change Face of Industry?” *Rinksider*, (Winter 1978), 1-2, Rinksider Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

popular dance music at the Empire. Butler's fine skating earned both the Empire and himself enough respect so that by the mid-1960s Abrami's Rollerdrome [an African American rink] had been firmly identified with what is now called roller-disco.¹²¹

Following the pattern of Rock and Roll, Disco, as it was viewed in popular memory, likewise resulted from the appropriation of African American cultural practices that were then 'repackaged' in a manner that was considered appropriate for white audiences. The movie, *Roll Bounce* (2005), illustrates the development of Disco skating in predominantly Black roller rinks.¹²²

The roller Disco era existed as a period of significant transition for the roller skating rink. The period saw the reimagination of the sport and the roller rink. It also witnessed the rise of the roller disco, which created a new boom in roller skating rinks, music, and the space where the two converged.

[In 1977] Most disco industry observers see the rinks as a trend in the future for their business. They state that the success of the roller disco concept is assured through several built-in factors working in their favor. These factors include the attraction rinks hold for entire families, instead of certain segmented groups.¹²³

The roller disco served as an image of change, yet some aspects of the roller rinks of the 1940s and 1950s remained evident into the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Where traditional discotheques served alcohol and generally catered to an older crowd, roller rinks acting as roller discos attempted to maintain the family-friendly image of the roller skating rink developed and promoted during the 1940s and 1950s. To continue this trend,

¹²¹ Nelson George, "Going Back to the 1870s: Skating to Music," *The Billboard*, March 3, 1979: 59. ProQuest. Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive.

¹²² "Roll Bounce," *IMDb.com*, (2005), accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0403455/>.

¹²³ Joe Radcliffe, "Skating Rinks: Problem Arise for Sound and Lighting Manufacturers," *The Billboard*, December 24, 1977: 112.

roller rinks transformed into dance clubs suitable for teenagers. Howard Rheiner, of Litelab firm, argued that the roller disco was “for the kids who [weren’t] old enough for the Studio 54s of the world,” calling it “good family entertainment.”¹²⁴ Nick Schiazza, an operator of Elmwood Roller Skating Rink in Philadelphia likewise reported a rise in the “under 30” crowd, simultaneous to the crowd fond of the organ music fading.¹²⁵ Thus, the roller disco while seemingly new and flashy maintained characteristics of its former heyday. Likewise, due to this maintenance of patron characteristics, WKTU-FM radio station in New York supported roller disco because the WKTU audience and roller rink audience were much of the same demographics, attracting the “12 to 34 audience.”¹²⁶ The Disco era in the roller rink served as a shift period with a still greater emphasis on youth culture.

The Disco era also saw a transformation in the sound and music technology used in the roller skating rink. Similar to the manner in which ballroom music was not appropriate for dance skating, the lighting and sound equipment of traditional roller rink settings no longer complemented the new identity created by Disco in the rink, primarily heavy bass. As a result, manufacturing companies took notice and adapted the equipment for the needs of the roller rink. “. . .The technical challenge is to modify existing sound equipment so that music can be heard above the thundering roar of hundreds of skaters doing their hair-raising versions of the latest disco dances.”¹²⁷ Technology featured significantly in the development of the roller disco. Sound manufacturers quickly

¹²⁴ “Dancing on Skates a Novel New Experience; Litelab Shows How,” *The Billboard*, June 17, 1978.

¹²⁵ “Skating To a Beat in Philadelphia,” *The Billboard*, December 2, 1978: 69.

¹²⁶ “A Rosy Picture for Roller Rinks,” *The Billboard*, August 11, 1979: 56.

¹²⁷ Joe Radcliffe, “Skating Rinks: Problem Arise for Sound and Lighting Manufacturers,” *The Billboard*, December 24, 1977: 112.

adjusted their products to meet the needs of the roller disco. For example, “Geranium Labs which was one of the first disco sound companies to get in on the roller disco revolution, has found that at the roller skating rinks the emphasis on bass is not as essential as it is in conventional discos.”¹²⁸ For Disco to be successfully in roller rinks, a specific sound system was necessary for the best experience. Sound made Disco. In this new era of music, bass became fuller and more prominent. Where the electric guitar personified Rock and Roll, the bass did so for Disco. “The ultimate aim of a sound system is the delivery of clean, clear, undistorted, sound at proper volume. In the skating rink this music must be delivered at very high volume levels, and still be pleasing to the skaters.”¹²⁹ Within the necessary components of the sound system for Disco in the roller rink were dispersion of sound and the efficiency of the speakers, as well as the use of mixers and amplifiers to completely enhance the experience in the rink.¹³⁰ In addition to the importance of sound to the Disco experience, “a light show is balance, orchestration of light.”¹³¹ Thus, the companies adapted to the needs of the roller disco by analyzing the manners in which the rinks used sound and music.

The roller Disco era witnessed a shift in the function of the roller skating rink. Not only did roller rinks become roller discos, they transformed into sites of music promotion. The Roller Skating Rink Operators Association sought to develop a program

¹²⁸ Ibid., 112.

¹²⁹ Hans Neuert, “Disco Sounds—The Equipment,” *Roller Skating Business*, (February/March 1978), 17, Roller Skating Business Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “Disco Lights,” *Roller Skating Business*, (February/March 1978), 22, Roller Skating Business Collection, National Museum of Roller Skating.

in which rinks became promotional sites for music distribution.¹³² “With music traditionally an ingredient of rink atmosphere, backers of the promo/sales ploy hope to prove their contention that coordinated promotion can elevate rinks to equivalent breakout status with discos, and to a large extent with radio. . .[and] to establish closer ties between labels and rinks.”¹³³ Lasting “at least a month,” the program funneled music into to the rinks through record distribution and was ““designed to measure the influence rinks can exert on building record popularity.””¹³⁴ As mentioned previously, the roller rink and roller disco catered to a young, teenage and pre-teen crowd, the largest demographic to purchase single records.¹³⁵ Thus, logically the roller rink was the best site to promote new music records.

In an act of promotion, Epic Records “hosted an ‘Old Fashioned Roller Skating Party’ sponsored by KCKN-AM in Kansas City. Tied in with the title of Charly McClain’s current single, “Take Me Back,” the party was offered as a prize to the winner of the “Take Me Back” drawing and 50 of their closest friends.”¹³⁶ The roller skating party, the result of a radio contest, clearly served to promote music and its connection to roller skating. Likewise, a group of musicians developed roller skating-specific songs such as “Roller Rock” and “Shake and Skate” to market at roller rinks.¹³⁷

¹³² I.S. Horowitz, “Roller Rinks to Try Breaking New Disks,” *The Billboard*, July 22, 1978: 1, 93. ProQuest. Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive. As a note, this article appeared on the cover of *Billboard* magazine.

¹³³ I.S. Horowitz, “1,500 Skating Rinks Await 1st 45s Batch,” *Billboard*, October 21, 1978: 95. ProQuest. Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive.

¹³⁴ RSROA Executive Director George Pickard quoted in Is Horowitz, “Roller Rinks to Try Breaking New Disks,” 93.

¹³⁵ Horowitz, “1,500 Skating Rinks Await 1st 45s Batch,” 95.

¹³⁶ “Epic Hosts Roller Skating Party,” *Billboard*, March 31, 1979: 143.

¹³⁷ “LP Slanted to Skaters,” *Billboard*, July 7, 1979: 48.

A California roller skating rink, Skate Junction, developed a “roller disco” policy in which the operators played music with the support of major record labels.¹³⁸ The policy developed special event nights in which the roller rink featured selected artists, often distributing albums and singles to the skating patrons. Skate Junction completed a successful promotional night for Electric Light Orchestra and planned to feature other musical groups such as the Beach Boys, Diana Ross, Chic, KC & The Sunshine Band, Abba, and Junet.¹³⁹ Likewise, in a *Billboard* article analyzing the rise of roller disco from New York to California and the influence of music on roller skating and vice versa, Nelson George wrote, “the bottom line is that roller skating as a vehicle to promote and sell contemporary music is an area of much potential growth.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, promotion at the roller rink came in a variety of forms.

The promotion of music at the roller rinks in the disco age was not limited to disco music alone. Rather, the roller disco became a site where skaters experienced all genres of music. Rink operators sought to measure skater preference in music. “...Eclectic programming [was] emerging as a key drawing power, as disco is being liberated from its predictable, 130 beats per minute entrapment.”¹⁴¹ Rink operators urged gauging skaters’ interests and used what the skater and larger community desired to hear. One rink manager advocated for the “capitaliz[ation] on every kind of music and aim at different markets. But you’ve got to know the psychology of your town.”¹⁴² Liaison

¹³⁸ “Calif. Skating Rink Links Disco Policy with Labels,” *Billboard*, June 30, 1979: 53, 56.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 53, 56..

¹⁴⁰ Nelson George, “Roller Craze: From N.Y. to Calif. Disco and Skating are Traveling Together,” *Billboard*, July 14, 1979: 66.

¹⁴¹ “‘Gauge Skaters’ Tastes,’ Rink Operators Urge,” *Billboard*, March 22, 1980: 57.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

between the RSROA and the recording industry, Ed Chalpin, urged that “rink owners should look to playing more rock, r&b, and new wave music, as have programmers of formerly all-disco radio stations; and by so doing expand the concept of dance music.”¹⁴³ Chalpin further claimed that remaining strictly disco would cause the end of the roller rink and that the roller rink has the largest audience of record buyers and should therefore expand the musical stylings of the rink as much as possible.¹⁴⁴ Disco allowed for the roller rink to take on an identity that promoted musical freedom. The introduction of Disco into the roller rink created an opportunity for the identity of the roller rink to expand beyond a single genre to encompass music representative of various demographics and subcultures.¹⁴⁵

Rink organist Doug Heind stated, “the music provides the background. It propels the skater, supports him, picks him up, and carries him around the floor. If the music is good, everybody flies. You can see the energy on the floor. You can hear the roar of the skates coming around and actually feel that the skate steps are in time with the music...”¹⁴⁶ Music in the roller skating rink existed as more than simply a supplemental form of entertainment to roller skating. Music was fundamentally incorporated into every facet of the roller rink from technology to dancing to promotion. The roller rink and

¹⁴³ Ed Chalpin quoted in Paul Grein, “Varied Fare Key to Rink Survival,” *Billboard*, July 19, 1980: 50.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁴⁵ The *United Skates* documentary released in February 2019 highlights relationship between the roller rink and the development and dissemination of hip hop when it was not visible in mainstream culture. The film documents Black skating culture within the United States, and how it is generally keeping roller skating alive.

¹⁴⁶ Doug Heind quoted in Carol Ann Waugh and Judith LaBelle Larsen, *Roller Skating: The Sport of a Lifetime*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1979): 7.

music have a dynamic, multi-faceted relationship in which one grows and expands with and as the other does.

Music in the roller rink has transitioned from the mighty Wurlitzer organ to recorded music, but along the way experienced significant periods of transformation and growth, with live music intertwined as necessary and available. Overall, the pattern between music and roller rinks has remained constant for the majority of roller rinks. If anything, it reveals the true nature of the roller rink as a site of entertainment and expansion. First, the identity of the rink followed on the pattern of the rink influencing music. Second, the identity of the rink followed on the pattern that music instead influenced the nature of the roller rink. During the twentieth century, the identity of the roller rink shifted in how it responded to and incorporated music and music technologies.

CHAPTER III: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF ROLLER RINK PROPERTY TYPES

[Lane Tillner]: “My research focuses on the types and preservation of historic roller skating rinks.”

[Other Individuals in Various Conversations]: “No way! Roller rinks? That’s so fun!”

-“Roller rinks, really? I didn’t think about that, but I guess it makes sense.”

-“I never would have thought about researching the architecture of roller rinks.”

The above are all similar comments received in response to questions about the topics of this research. It is precisely because of the content of comments like these, and the lack of related research, that several historic roller skating rinks, of great size and spectacle, have silently closed without any historians or preservationists bothering to document their history.

Historic Rink Practices

Historic preservationists have largely ignored roller skating rinks as a property type. In 1986, James H. Charleton of the National Park Service developed a theme study titled *Recreation in the United States*.¹ Charleton identified the following property types: baseball parks; stadiums and bowls; college athletic facilities; racetracks and speedways; public parks and gardens; World’s Fair and Exposition sites; amusement parks, carousels and roller coasters; circus sites; zoos; nautical recreation and sports; resort hotels, spas, casinos, and camps; science as recreation; and pageantry and festivals.² This list omitted roller skating rinks.

¹ James H. Charleton, “Recreation in the United States: National Historic Landmark Theme Study,” National Park Service, 1986.

² Ibid.

Early roller skating spaces used existing buildings. James Leonard Plimpton opened the first rink in a disused parlor room of the Atlantic House Hotel (Newport, Rhode Island) in the mid-1860s. Plimpton was not the only one. In 1869 investors placed a skating rink in the second story of Messrs. Glenn and Wright's warehouse in Atlanta.³ They took the warehouse, outfitted with a new space and floor, spectator seating, and designated "gentlemen's" and "ladies'" rooms, along with space for the accompanying band.⁴ This rink, by all appearances called The Skating Rink, was fitted up in what was hoped to be dubbed "the best in the country."⁵

Early rinks such as those in Newport and Atlanta reflected a trend that was soon found across the country. If the space in one building proved unavailable for whatever reason, the management simply moved the rink to an available space in another building. Such was the case for the roller skating rink in New Orleans, Louisiana that moved from the Mechanics' Institute to Union Hall in early 1870.⁶

Purpose-built, standalone rinks, though not as numerous as rinks within buildings, existed in varied regions of the nation, within the first decade of roller skating. In 1870 investors constructed a building in Nashville, Tennessee primarily for roller skating purposes, in addition to secondary business concerns.⁷ The building housing this "mammoth skating rink" was constructed at a size of 60x190 feet (11,400 square feet), at an expense of \$50,000, with the intent to house the skating rink on the second floor and

³ "A Skating Rink in Atlanta," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), December 5, 1869.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Untitled News Segment, *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana), January 5, 1870.

⁷ "A Laudable Enterprise: Proposed Erection of a Mammoth Skating Rink," *The Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), July 2, 1870.

other businesses on the first.⁸ With an exterior stairway entrance to the rink, “the floors [were] so deadened with plaster or cement, that the rattle of skates or tramping of feet, [would not] be of the least annoyance to the business houses below.”⁹ This mammoth rink in Nashville highlighted another characteristic of early rinks. These early skating sites included an element of multifunctionality. For example, developers advertised the Nashville rink building as a suitable site for a concert hall or exercise hall.¹⁰

The trends of rinks as secondary spaces in buildings or of rinks as purpose-constructed buildings intertwined throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century. There appears to be no significant justification provided for one over the other option, other than the assumption of lower expenses associated with the former as opposed to the later.

The size of late nineteenth century roller skating rinks reflected the size of their potential audience. Compare the 1870 Nashville rink to one built in Livingston, Montana. Six years prior to Montana gaining statehood, a rink opened in Livingston in 1883.¹¹ Proprietor F.L. Mintie planned to construct a building, based on plans of a skating rink already located in Bozeman, at a size of 50x100 feet (5,000 square feet) on either B Street or C Street.¹² Mintie, likewise, installed a maple floor for skating.¹³ Where in 1890 Tennessee was a state, and Nashville its urban capitol, at a population of over 1.5 million, Montana was still a territory, and Livingston a city within, at a population of just under

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “A Roller Skating Rink,” *The Daily Enterprise* (Livingston, MT), September 18, 1883.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

40,000.¹⁴ Rink operators adapted roller rinks of the late nineteenth century to meet the needs and population sizes of their surrounding areas.

Investors soon formed regional associations that attempted to standardize some roller rink characteristics and practices. I.S. Moulthrop developed a guidebook that likely served many rink owners and managers through the early twentieth century. In 1885, Moulthrop, a man claimed to have fifteen years of experience in eastern, southern, and western states, published *The Rink Manager's Guide and Rink Directory*.¹⁵ Moulthrop offered detailed advice on issues and concerns potentially faced by rink managers in the period. Chief among these concerns was how and where to build a rink. Moulthrop provided ten key points for building a roller skating rink:

1. Do not try to build a cheap rink.
2. Do not waste any money on the outside of the building, with the exception of the front, if it faces a main street.
3. Do not build a low building, nor allow the builder to tie the sides with large tie-beams, which makes a building look low. Iron bars are just as safe and cost but little more, making the rink look larger and higher on the inside.
4. If you are building a rink of over 100 feet long, make an arch roof, with iron tie-bars.
5. Do not take over fifty square feet for each of your ante-rooms. The skate and cloak-rooms should be larger and governed by the size of the rink.
6. Too much pains cannot be taken in laying the skating surface.

¹⁴ “Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1889,” No. 12 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), 222—223.

¹⁵ I.S. Moulthrop, *The Rink Manager's Guide and Rink Directory* (Newark, NJ: I.S. Moulthrop, 1885).

7. If the building lot will permit, have the skating surface three times as long as it is wide, and have no posts on the surface to obstruct the passage of the skaters.
8. Do not build a gallery in a rink, unless in one end over the ante-rooms; two rows of seats on either side of the rink on a level with the heads of the skaters while sitting down. The second row should be higher than the first. This method will give better satisfaction than a gallery and will accommodate all of the spectators that visit the rink.
9. Have the rink well lighted and ventilated night and day. Have plenty of good exits in case of fire. The heating apparatus, whether steam or stoves, near the spectators and as far from the skaters as possible.
10. Have all of the boards, rafters, braces, etc., on the inside of the building, planed and stained or painted.¹⁶

Moulthrop established rink design patterns and practices that continued to adapt and evolve through the next century.

Moulthrop proposed moderation in many rink practices. He suggested not building a “cheap rink,” but also set price ceilings for what the rink developer should spend—no more than \$15,000 in large cities and no more than \$8,000 in small cities or towns.¹⁷ Moderation extended to the size of the rink surface itself. Moulthrop considered a rink of 50x150 feet (7,500 square feet) to be an ideal size for any setting.¹⁸ His figures for both the ideal costs and size of roller rinks were dwarfed in comparison to later rinks. For example, preliminary design plans for the second Arena Gardens, built in 1953 in Detroit, Michigan, indicated a total building size of 56,608 square feet (including two

¹⁶ Ibid., 15—16.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

levels) and a skating floor space of 14,800 square feet at an estimated expense of \$631,500.¹⁹

Likewise, the location of the building proved critical to the success. Moulthrop considered a location well-suited for a rink if the population was above 5,000 residents, but also one that was not located too near a large city, likely out of the belief that a roller rink in a larger city might eclipse that of one in a nearby town or suburban area.²⁰ “It is not good policy to build a rink on a main street of a city, for the reason that land is always higher priced in that part of the city.”²¹ He emphasized, “people will not stay at home because they are obliged to walk one or two blocks from the main street. Always seek the best locality to build a rink, even if it is not the most thickly settled part of the city.”²²

Investors, for the most part, located rinks outside of the main business sectors. For example, Figure 3.1 shows the 1908 location of a roller rink in Nashville, Tennessee, the current location of the Tennessee Titans’ Nissan Stadium, where the building stood across the Cumberland River from the downtown business district. Yet it also stood on Bridge Avenue, providing for easy access for customers.

¹⁹ Lyle Zisler and Associates, *Preliminary Description for the New Arena Gardens, Shaefer Highway, Detroit*, ca. 1950, 6, Box: “Arena Gardens, Detroit, MI, 1935—1953,” National Museum of Roller Skating.

²⁰ Moulthrop, *Rink Manager’s Guide*, 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²² *Ibid.*, 18.



Figure 3.1: Sheet 14L, Atlas of the City of Nashville, Tennessee, 1908, Fire Insurance Maps Online (FIMO). The red circle indicates the location of the roller skating rink.

Mentor Skateland provides a similar example. Situated in Mentor, Ohio, and opened in 1910, this roller rink sits outside of the main business area, less than a mile from the edge of Lake Erie and in a suburban area (See Figure 3.2). Operators built rinks outside of main business areas of cities to access cheaper real estate, and because they needed a large amount of space for the building. This pattern intensified in the automobile era when investors needed space for both the rink and parking.



Figure 3.2: Mentor Skateland Location, Mentor, Ohio, Image Captured July 6, 2018, Google Earth, 2019.

Moulthrop's early emphasis on function over form in overall rink design also proved influential. He emphasized the need for creating, and improving, a fashionable interior as opposed to a fashionable exterior. He believed rinks required at least eight ante-rooms—skate room, storage room, dressing rooms, lounges, and offices among others. The dressing rooms were required to have all necessary furnishings, in addition to decorative ones. Of the ladies' parlor, he wrote in particularly, "the ladies' parlor should be the pride of the rink, furnished with Brussels carpet and a full parlor suit of

furniture.”²³ Emphasis was likely placed on the nature of the ladies’ parlor to identify rinks as a safe public space for ladies, as a means to attract more of the desired class of people: the elite and non-“objectionable characters.”²⁴ Notice in Figure 3.3 the relative lack of decoration at the exterior of the 1885 Washington Roller Skating Rink in Minneapolis. Aside from the balcony-covered entryway and the name on the building, the rink has little other external decoration, and takes the form of many industrial buildings of the era.

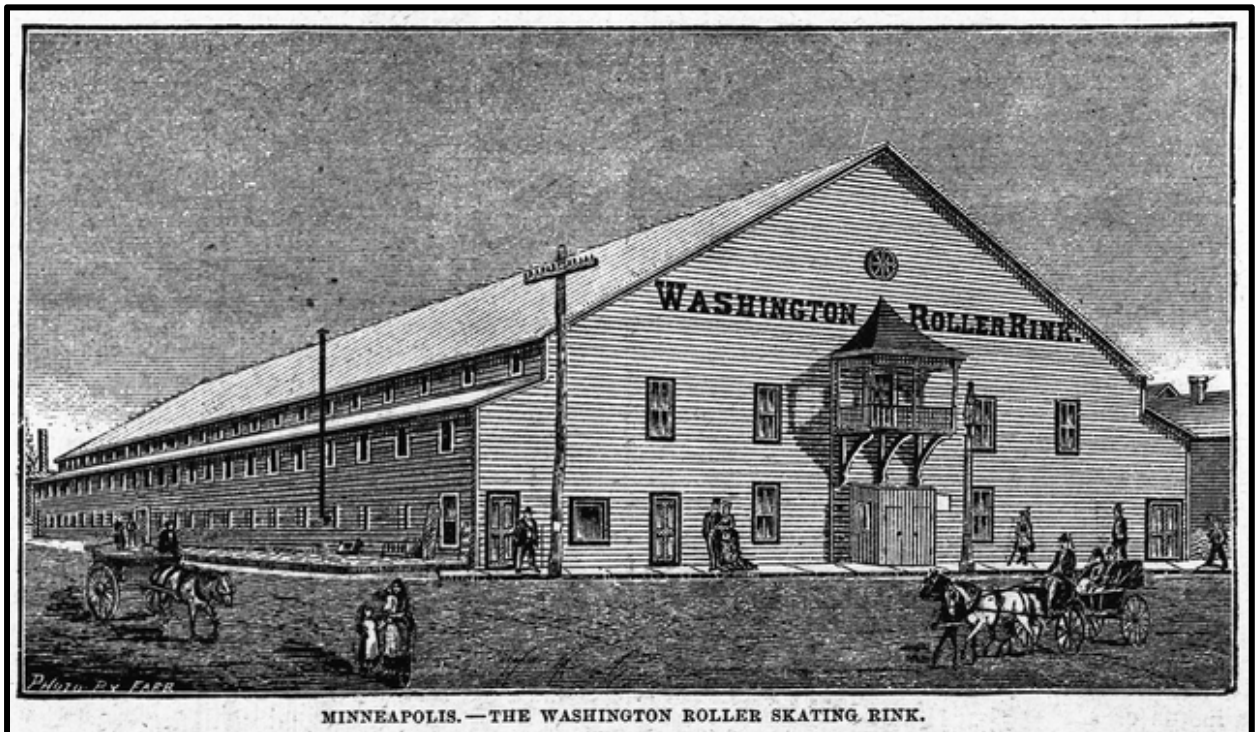


Figure 3.3: “Minneapolis—The Washington Roller Skating Rink,” Approx. 1885, *The Northwest Magazine*, Vol. III, No. 11, Minnesota Historical Society.

²³ Ibid., 17.

²⁴ Ibid., 21, 23.

The 1885 Woodland Rink, in Cleveland, Ohio, depicted in Figure 3.4, shows an elaborate interior. There is spectator seating on the sides of the skating floor and the musical space at the far end of the floor. Likewise, this image also depicts the tie-bars in the ceiling space as Moulthrop suggested.

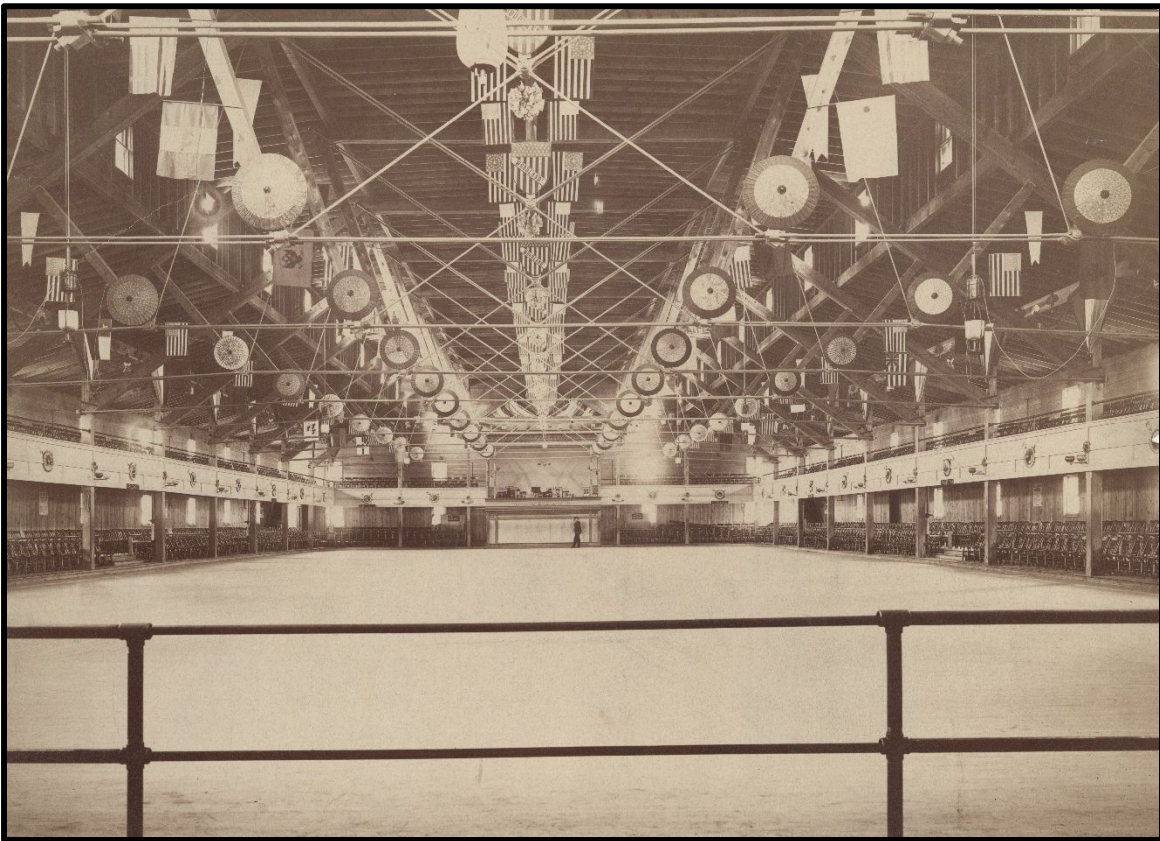


Figure 3.4: “Woodland Rink 1885 CP07267,” Cleveland Public Library, Photograph Collection.

Most, if not all, of the pre-1900 roller rinks have disappeared from the landscape, but the general look they created remained influential in the next century. Roller rinks that followed incorporated the styles and designs of these early rinks, adapting them to the updated needs of skaters.

Many primary sources related to the development and construction of roller rinks have been lost. One important surviving publication is Eugene C. Cooper's *Erection and Operation of a Roller Skating Rink* (1948).²⁵ Though Cooper's work extends is more comprehensive, addressing suppliers and population-to-rink considerations, Cooper's work surprisingly followed Moulthrop's same suggestions provided over sixty years prior.

For Cooper, locating the rink building is of great significance. He had four considerations: (1) distance from other buildings and businesses because of the amount of sound pollution developed in and around rinks; (2) distance from public transportation for teenagers and children who were unable to drive themselves; (3) proximity to "respectable" sections of the town or city; and (4) distance from the business district.²⁶ Arena Gardens, of Detroit, Michigan, was one rink where investors followed Cooper's suggestions, located in a semi-suburban location.²⁷ Arena Gardens sat near several public transportation options for younger patrons and was visible from three main roads.²⁸

Yet for all of the similarities between Moulthrop and Cooper, over sixty years of technological innovations separated the two. Rinks of Cooper's time faced new challenges rinks, especially the need for parking. Cooper suggested a 100 feet by 150 feet (15,000 square feet) parking lot as ideal.²⁹

²⁵ Eugene C. Cooper, *Erection and Operation of a Roller Skating Rink*, (Oxford, Alabama: Eugene C. Cooper, 1948).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷ Lyle Zisler, *Preliminary Description*, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁹ Cooper, *Erection and Operation*, 9.

In terms, of rink size Cooper wrote that, on average, rinks across the United States had interior dimensions of 60 feet by 118 feet (7,080 square feet).³⁰ He also advocated for post-less skating floors and high ceilings, with 16 feet as a minimum. In the intervening years, however, roller rinks gained new identities and developed new priorities. For example, as increasing numbers of young people attended rinks, additions such as snack bars and stages took on more significance over ladies' and gentlemen's parlors. Likewise, Cooper argued for roller rinks to be built of either brick or metal frame, with an emphasis on "a standard type steel building."³¹ These buildings were considered flexible and easily adapted to the needs of the skaters.

The Field Survey

To understand variations in roller skating rink property types, I conducted a field study on historic roller rinks. I looked at rinks built between 1900 and 1979. The former date was selected because the majority of my research was twentieth-century focused, and the latter date marks the time when Disco-dominated, resulting in the rise of roller disco, and because the rollerblade was invented in 1980, shifting the practice and nature of skating.

I first undertook research to develop an understanding of the number and locations of historic roller rinks.³² This research yielded 374 "historic" rinks in the United States, excluding seven examples of historic buildings that were adapted for roller rink purposes (See Figure 3.5). Since beginning this project in 2016, however, nearly twenty

³⁰ Ibid., 11.

³¹ Ibid., 11.

rinks that would have been considered historic closed, all ones that were included on initial lists. A comprehensive list of all roller rinks in the United States does not, and likely will not, exist. Different totals are provided by various sources. Roller Skating Association International, the governing body of general, non-competitive roller skating, has a membership of 487.³³ Skate provider company, Southeastern Skate Supply, notes rinks in the nation at 826.³⁴ Sure-Grip Skate Company, another skate supply firm, lists 603 rinks.³⁵ The self-titled “Skate Critic,” Ginger Dawn Matthews states there are 1,162 rinks currently operating in the United States.³⁶ Nevertheless, there are at least 374—some cross-listed by the other sources, others not.

³³ “Locator—Skating Center,” Roller Skating Association International, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://web.rollerskating.com/search>. The number referenced above was determined by adding all of the numbers for each of the states listed. The international rinks were left out of the count.

³⁴ “Find a Rink,” Southeastern Skate Supply, accessed February 22, 2019, <http://seskate.com/rinks/>.

³⁵ “Locate a Local Dealer,” Sure-Grip Skate Company, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://www.suregrip.com/category-s/172.htm>.

³⁶ Ginger Dawn Matthews, “1,162 is all we have left in the US as of today.” March 18, 2019, comment on Tiffany Peek Caston, “After watching the awesome United Skates Documentary tonight,” in “Skate Critic” Facebook Group, March 18, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1413076258930329/permalink/2221831038054843/>. Ginger Dawn Matthews keep a list of rinks across the United States, and she calls each rink to ask about its status.

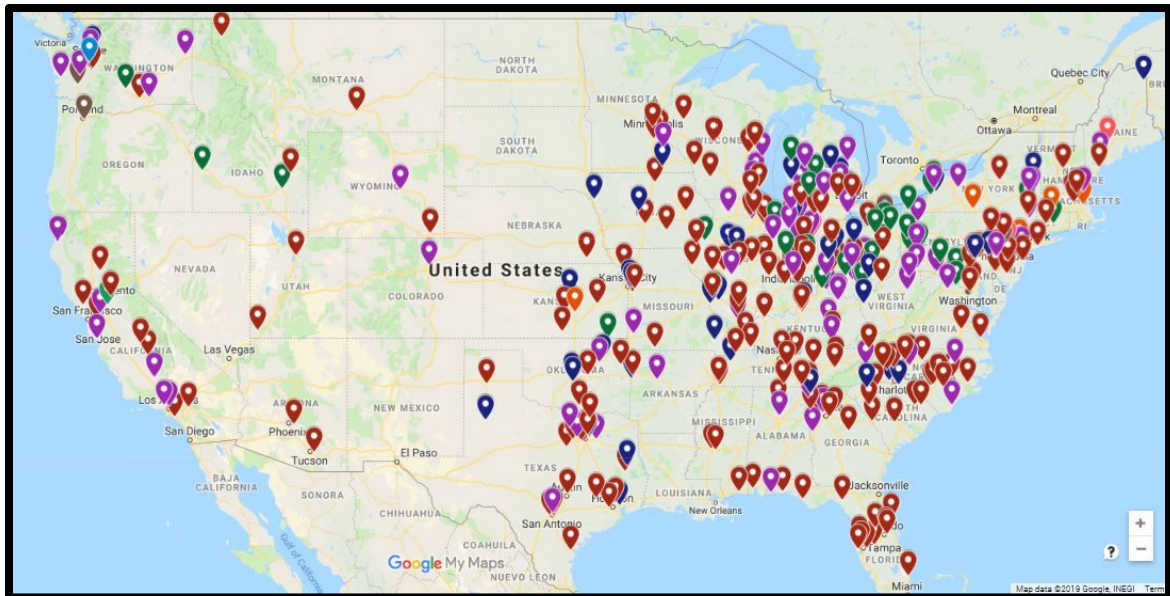


Figure 3.5: Map of Historic Roller Rinks in the United States, Developed by Author using Google Maps. Key: 1970s (Red), 1960s (Blue), 1950s (Purple), 1940s (Green), 1930s (Orange), 1920s (Pink), 1900s & 1910s (Brown)

Unfortunately, within the limits of this project, not all of the historic rinks could be visited in person. However, several in the Southeast, Midwest, and Middle Atlantic regions were visited. From the study, I learned there is not a single, standard architectural style, but there were shared property type characteristics, such as rectangular shape, gabled front entrances, and high roofs.

Indeed, the roof type proved to be an effective way to discuss the property types associated with historic roller skating rinks. The conducted fieldwork and research yielded four major property types of roller rinks: the **arched aesthetic**, the **gabled**, the **flat**, and the **composite**.

The Arched Aesthetic

The arched aesthetic falls within the decorated façades of roller rinks. The arched aesthetic features an extended barrel vaulted ceiling. Though the Quonset Huts produced in the 1940s have a similar appearance, they differ from arched roller rinks in that the barrel vaulted roof style of these roller rinks do not constitute the entirety of the building. Additionally, Quonset Huts were not developed until after this style of rink architecture was already well-established.

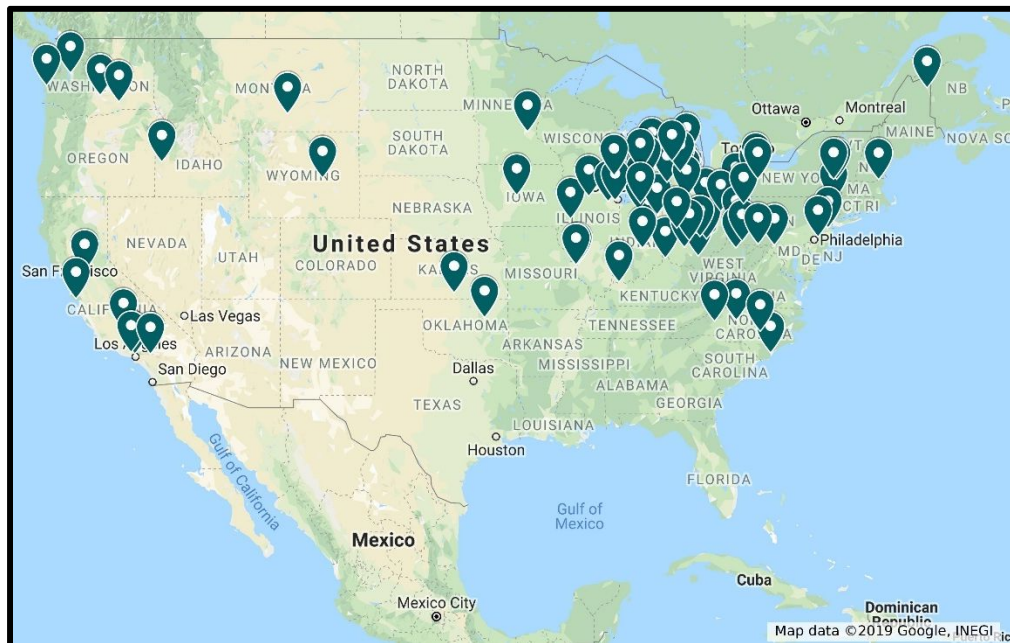


Figure 3.6: Map of Historic Arched Roller Rinks in the United States, Developed by the Author using Google Maps.

There is no specific date on the establishment of this arched aesthetic of roller rink design, but it does harken back to I.S. Moulthrop's insistence on arched roofs for the size and appearance of the rink. One of the earliest examples of the arched aesthetic for

roller rinks is the Majestic Roller Skating Rink, built in 1906, in Long Beach, California. The Majestic Roller Skating Rink was part of an amusement conglomerate, The Pike in the Long Beach area.³⁷ There is also no pattern to the spread of this type of roller rink building, but it gained its greatest popularity in the mid-twentieth century. Rinks opened in this period constitute about 34.5% of those surveyed, though not all of these were designed in the arched aesthetic.

The mix of materials between roof and building appears as a consistent characteristic. In Figure 3.7 Franklin Skate Club in Franklin, Indiana, opened in 1959, shows the varied materials used: ribbed, standing seam metal for the roof and stone, partially covered by the ribbed metal, for the building itself. The picture also reveals a ghost mark of a large window filled with concrete, cinder blocks. The Indian Lake Rollarena (See Figure 3.8) built in 1965, in Russells Point, Ohio is a later example of the arched style, showing the deep, extended barrel vault over the broad, one-story building. Indian Lake Rollarena differs from the Franklin Skate Club in that it features an anteroom on the front of the building, likely used for the ticket booth, offices, and other storage.

³⁷ *Majestic Roller Skating Rink*, 1907, Photograph, Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Digital Collections of the Los Angeles Public Library, <http://tessa.lapl.org/cdm/ref/collection/photos/id/115902>.



Figure 3.7: Franklin Skate Club, Franklin, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018. The addition to the left of the rink entrance was added in later years.



Figure 3.8: Indian Lake Rollarena, Russells Point, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Roller rinks in the arched aesthetic often have anterooms built onto or jutting from the primary space of the building, as a means of maximizing the skating floor space within the rink. The Route 66 Rollerdrome (1951) in Sapulpa, Oklahoma (See Figure 3.9), has an anteroom that is comprised of the ticket office, snack bar, administrative offices, and entrance into the skating area (See Figure 3.10 and Figure 3.11).



Figure 3.9: Route 66 Rollerdrome, Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.10: Route 66 Rollerdrome Ticket Window, Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.11: Route 66 Rollerdrome Entryway, Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Photograph by Author, 2018.

In some cases, the anterooms of arched roller rinks went beyond simply adding space for administrative or non-skating purposes. Some rinks have residential dwellings built onto them. Elhurst Roller Rink (1947) in New Castle, Pennsylvania is one such rink (See Figure 3.12). Originally built as a dance hall in the 1920s, the building was transformed into a roller rink by a World War II veteran and his family. The private residence was a means to avoid constant travel between the rink and home.



Figure 3.12: Elhurst Roller Rink, New Castle, Pennsylvania, Photograph by Author, 2018. The arch of the building peaks just out from behind the anteroom at the front of the rink.

Medina Skateland (1940) in Medina, Ohio likely also featured the same residential attachment to the roller rink. In Figure 3.13, a second story is visible and likely served as living quarters for the rink owner. Figure 3.14, while illustrating the physical alterations roller rinks experienced over time, still features the second story, though its function today is unknown.



Figure 3.13: “Medina Skateland, Rt. 43, Medina, Ohio” Postcard, Date Unknown, Private Collection.



Figure 3.14: Medina Skateland, Medina, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Idyl Wyld Roller Rink, built in 1937, in Marion, Indiana primarily arched in nature but includes additions that partially alter the general structure of the rink. (See Figure 3.15). The arch peaks over the top of a wrap-around anteroom. The entire rink design features a modernist style with curvilinear corners and rectangular windows of

glass bricks. An aerial image of Idyl Wyld shows the distinct blending of different construction periods (See Figure 3.16).



Figure 3.15: Idyl Wyld Roller Rink, Marion, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.16: Aerial Image of Idyl Wyld Roller Rink, Marion, Indiana, Image Captured June 6, 2016, Google Earth, 2019.

Other rinks have a hidden arched aesthetic. For example, Lind Arena (1948) in Zanesville, Ohio is an arched building, visible from an aerial view (See Figure 3.17). Yet at street level, the arched aesthetic is hidden behind a modernist façade of a sleek, curved

corner, a recessed entry, glass brick windows, and a stepped parapet on the façade (See Figure 3.18).

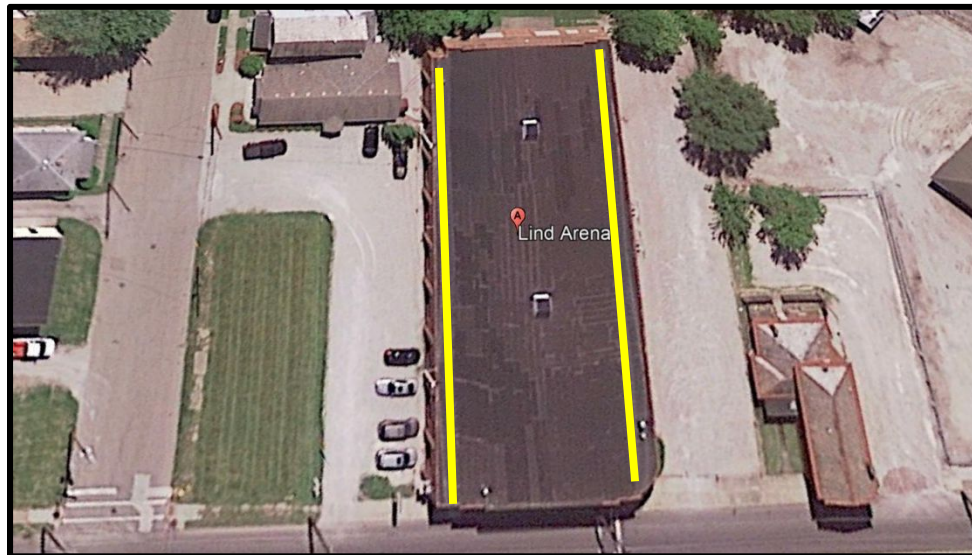


Figure 3.17: Aerial Image of Lind Arena, Zanesville, Ohio, Image Captured May 14, 2017, Google Earth, 2019. The yellow lines were added to highlight the contour of the arched roof.



Figure 3.18: Lind Arena, Zanesville, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.

An outstanding example of the arched aesthetic is the Roller Dome North (1955) in Fort Wayne, Indiana. A street level view, directly in front of the entrance to the roller rink, presents a view of Roller Dome North almost reminiscent of pop culture interpretations of alien flying saucers (See Figure 3.19). This portion of the roller rink presents modernist influences, particularly with its shape suggesting the influence of unique roadside architectural practices. This singular view of Roller Dome North also suggests that entirety of the rink in this circular building, when in reality the great extent of the rink is hidden behind this unique façade. A side view and back view of the rink does provide a fuller illustration of the size and structure of this rink (See Figure 3.20 and Figure 3.21). Yet to fully appreciate the arched style of Roller Dome North an aerial view is required (See Figure 3.22).



Figure 3.19: Roller Dome North Façade, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.20: Roller Dome North, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.21: Roller Dome North, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018.

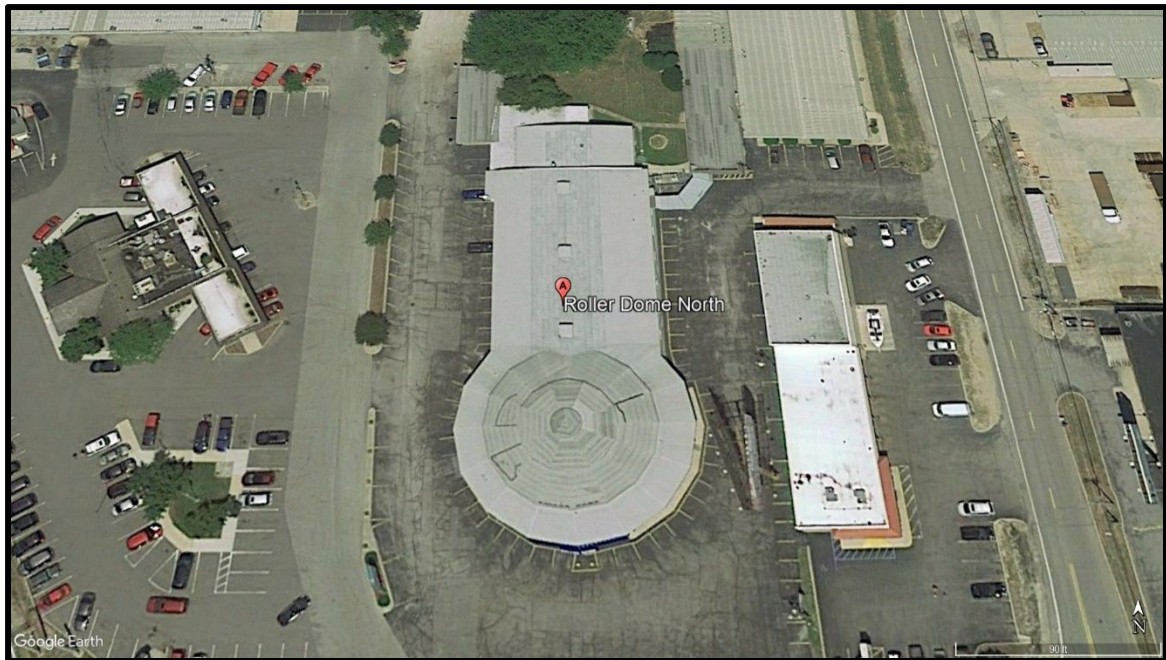


Figure 3.22: Aerial Image of Roller Dome North, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Image Captured July 12, 2018, Google Earth, 2019.

There is no pattern as to whether or not the structural elements of the arched aesthetic are present within the rink. Some rinks have the ceiling opened, exposing the skater to the beams and structural supports. Others have completely enclosed the ceiling. Others still have only partially enclosed the ceiling. The justifications for any of these options are vast. For example, utility bills for heating or cooling such a space factor greatly. Yet, it could likely be cost effective to leave it open in order to not accrue expensive construction costs. Figure 3.23 shows the Route 66 Rollerdrome, which features an open ceiling, with exposed beams, wood paneling, and the ventilation units. In the case of Elhurst Roller Rink (See Figure 3.24), the barrel vault ceiling was enclosed and lower to reduce volumes and noise pollution, as improvements in music projection technology eliminated the need for buildings to amplify the music. In this photograph of

Elhurst Roller Rink, the wooden support beams are seen projecting through the ceiling tiles.



Figure 3.23: Route 66 Rollerdrome Interior, Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.24: Elhurst Roller Rink Interior, New Castle, Pennsylvania, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Of the 374 historic roller rinks identified in my survey, 80 of them fall within the property type of the arched aesthetic, with the majority of dating from the 1940s and 1950s and standing in the Midwest and Northeast. The arched aesthetic rinks are largely absent in the Southeast, with North Carolina as the only exception (Refer to Figure 3.6). This iconic property type harkens to the modernist architectural influences of the periods in which they were built.

The Gabled Aesthetic

The most common roller rink property type is the gabled aesthetic. Of the 374 historic roller rinks in the survey, about 60% of them would be classified as gabled (See

Figure 3.25). As with the arched aesthetic, those rinks classified as gabled also feature a variety of materials and decorations. Similar to the arched roof and barrel vaulted ceiling, the vaulted ceiling produced by the gabled aesthetic also provided an environment for music amplification throughout the rink.



Figure 3.25: Map of Gabled Roller Rinks in the United States. Created by Author using Google Maps, 2019.

One of the longest operating rinks in the United States, The Oaks Roller Rink (1905), in Portland, Oregon, is designed in the gable aesthetic (See Figure 3.26). For The Oaks, this rink design created the perfect environment to create a deck to place its Wurlitzer Organ, which is still used today, in the center of the rink suspended from the vaulted supports.



Figure 3.26: The Oaks Rink, Portland, Oregon, Photograph by Ginger Dawn Matthews, Skate Critic Facebook Group, August 7, 2017, Used with Permission.

It is entirely logical that permanent, gabled roller rinks developed from the styles of portable, traveling roller rinks in the early twentieth century. One of the earliest and widest-reaching companies was Lowe's Portable Roller Rink. Despite obvious differences, the rinks used by the Lowe family featured a steep pitched gable roof, creating plenty of space for roller skating below (See Figure 3.27).



Figure 3.27: “Lowe’s Portable Roller Rink, Interior, Wichita, Kansas,” 1920s, 82.103.14, National Museum of Roller Skating.

Manufacturing companies took this basic structure and expanded and reinforced it with steel trusses and supports.³⁸ The George L. Mesker Steel Corporation of Evansville, Indiana was such a company.³⁹ Operating through the 1930s to 1950s, the Mesker Corporation produced portable roller rinks, ranging in size from 40x80 feet to 60x200

³⁸ “Mesker Portable All Steel Skating Rinks and Fair Association Buildings,” George L. Mesker Steel Corporation, Flyer, Evansville, Indiana, Darius Bryjka Collection, <https://meskerbrothers.wordpress.com/catalogs/>.

³⁹ Hallie Anne Fieser, “Mastering the American Metal Storefront: Mesker Brothers Ironworks and George L. Mesker & Co. 1880-1920” (Master’s Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2011).

feet.⁴⁰ The Mesker skating rinks were designed as structural steel frame buildings. For the structure,

roof trusses supported on structural steel columns spanning the entire width of the structure [were] used, providing a clear unobstructed floor space. Supporting steel columns [were] 9'0" high. Trusses and columns are well braced laterally to resist wind pressure. Roof purlins to which roofing material is attached [were] channel type sections spaced about 4'0" apart. All steel framework [was] accurately prefabricated in jig assemblies. All members [were] interchangeable, so that the entire framework [could] be easily bolted together at the job site.⁴¹

Sheets of galvanized steel formed the exterior covering of the Mesker rinks.⁴²

The development of gabled roller rinks soared in the 1950s and continued through the following two decades, with the majority of those surviving today built in the 1970s. The majority have low to moderate roof pitches. Because of the massive length of roller rinks, if a steep pitch were desired, the width of the building would have to be equally massive.

Just beyond the small Artisan Village in Berea, Kentucky, Club Arena (1958) features a gabled building style. This roller rink is in a front-gabled style (See Figure 3.28), positioned on a concrete slab foundation with a brick façade, vinyl over the remainder of the building, a ribbed, metal roof, and a recessed, bricked entry. The gabled structure on Club Arena has a moderate roof pitch.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.



Figure 3.28: Club Arena, Berea, Kentucky, Photograph by Author, 2018.

The Red Wing Rollerway (1974) in Augusta, Georgia is an example of a rink designed in an almost “saltbox” manner. This gabled rink features a low roof pitch, with the longer end of the saltbox gable on the façade (See Figure 3.29). This roller rink features an awning around the centrally-located entryway that mirrors the gabled nature of the building (See Figure 3.30). Red Wing Rollerway is a large building situated off a main road through Augusta, behind a car dealership, and in between a bowling alley and shooting range.



Figure 3.29: Red Wing Rollerway Sideview, Augusta, Georgia, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.30: Red Wing Rollerway, Augusta, Georgia, Photograph by Author, 2018.

From a distance, the Gibson Arena (1940) in Muncie, Indiana has the appearance of an arched building, upon closer inspection, the building structure is actually gabled, with a slight gambrel roof line (See Figure 3.31 and Figure 3.32). The Gibson Arena features a small anteroom to enter the rink and appears eclectic in terms of the materials used. For example, this roller rink is composed of cinderblocks, ribbed metal sheets for side elements and roofing, and plain, wooded shingles, covering what were formerly windows on the front addition.



Figure 3.31: Gibson Arena, Muncie, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.32: Gibson Arena, Muncie, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Occasionally the façade of a roller rink is decorated, and not the three other sides of the building, because the primary function for roller rinks is centered around the interior of the building. Some gabled rinks, based on their size and external materials, have what can be described as a warehouse aesthetic. This mostly means that if these buildings were stripped of their function, decorated facades, and related internal

components, these buildings could easily be mistaken or used as warehouses. For example, SkateCenter West (1976) in Murfreesboro, Tennessee could easily be described as comprising the warehouse aesthetic. SkateCenter West is primarily made of ribbed metal sheets, with a small front cinderblock wing with a bricked façade. From the front, this rink provides some decoration for the patron (See Figure 3.33). However, the sides of the building reveal the truer details of the rink (See Figure 3.34) showing the ribbed metal sheets. Hooiserland Roller Rink (1949) in Frankfort, Indiana shows a similar pattern, with a decorative façade and a slightly recessed entrance, but shows no decoration on the sides of the building (See Figure 3.35).



Figure 3.33: SkateCenter West Façade, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Photograph by Author, 2017.



Figure 3.34: SkateCenter West, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Photograph by Author, 2017.



Figure 3.35: Hoosierland Roller Rink, Frankfort, Indiana, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Historic roller rinks in the gabled style are by far the most prevalent throughout the nation. This is likely due to the ease with which this style of roller rinks was designed and built as opposed to arched rinks.

The Flat Aesthetic

Less significant in numbers, than arched and gabled roller rinks, are rinks that are built with flat roofs. The majority of these roller rinks were built in the 1970s. This is likely due to the fact that music technology advanced to the point that the building was

not a necessary component in the dissemination of music for skating. In early roller rinks, operators designed buildings to serve as an amplification of the band or organ music produced, so that the melody was audible over the sound of wooden wheels. As music production and projection improved over time, a building that naturally enhanced that sound was longer necessary, particularly with the rise of stereo. As such, operators saved costs in building development using flat roofs.

As with the arched roller rinks, the locations of flat roller rinks follow the general pattern of historic rink distribution throughout the United States. Unlike arched rinks, flat roller rinks are found in more geographic regions, including the Southeast.

B&D Roller Rink in Independence, Missouri, opened in 1965, illustrates the flat roller rink style, aside from a small, shed-like addition on the front (See Figure 3.36 and Figure 3.37).



Figure 3.36: B&D South Skate Center, Independence, Missouri, Photograph by Author, 2018.

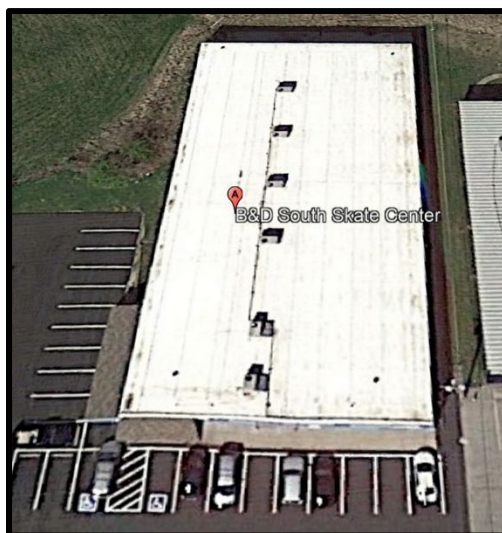


Figure 3.37: Aerial Image of B&D South Skate Center, Independence, Missouri, Image Captured April 27, 2018, Google Earth, 2019.

As with the previous two property types, the flat roller rink also featured an amalgamation of building materials. The B&D South Skate Center illustrates this characteristic. In Figure 3.37 there is a mix of corrugated metal for the majority of the building. However, the entrance area features concrete blocks and wood paneling.

Kingsway Skateland built in 1973 and located in Paducah, Kentucky, is also a flat roller rink (See Figure 3.38). It features large, sloped eaves on each side of the building. Kingsway Skateland can potentially be considered a decked roof—one that has a flat roof and hipped eaves—but the view in Figure 3.39 suggests that the eaves are more decorative rather than for support as might be found in a decked roof, as there appear to slightly overlap the roof, where the eaves on a decked roof would be flush with the roof line.



Figure 3.38: Kingsway Skateland, Paducah, Kentucky, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.39: Aerial Image of Kingsway Skateland, Paducah, Kentucky, Image Captured March 15, 2015, Google Earth, 2019.

The Composite Aesthetic

Here, composite is used as a sort-of catch-all for a variety of roller skating rinks that either do not fit within arched, gabled, or flat, or are composed of several elements of each type that it becomes difficult to assign the building to one of the three dominant property types.

One unique example of the composite aesthetic is the Chagrin Valley Roller Rink (1947) in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. This roller rink is primarily composed of three completely curved structures that were connected to form a larger central portion. It also features a front hipped anteroom and flat addition on the side with large, sloped eaves (See Figure 3.40).



Figure 3.40: Chagrin Valley Roller Rink, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.

The central corridor of this roller rink is built from repurposed Quonset huts (see the rear of the building in Figure 3.41). At Quonset, Rhode Island, the Quonset hut was developed during World War II, for portable, light, and easy-to-assemble housing and storage facilities at various United States' bases and areas of occupation.⁴³ These structures came in two sizes: the basic at 20x40 feet and the larger at 40x100 feet.⁴⁴ Chagrin Valley Roller Rink is composed of the latter. “The Quonset skeleton was a row of semi-circular steel ribs covered with corrugated sheet metal. The ribs sat on a low

⁴³ John H. Lienhard, “No. 1278: Quonset Huts,” *Engines of Our Ingenuity*, University of Houston (Texas), 1997, <https://www.uh.edu/engines/epi1278.htm>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

steel-frame foundation with a plywood floor.”⁴⁵ Initially meant as temporary buildings, the Quonset hut was eventually adapted as permanent sites for a variety of purposes.



Figure 3.41: Chagrin Valley Roller Rink, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.42: “Facility 1506, East End and South Side of Quonset Hut, View Facing West-Northwest. – Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Quonset Hut Type 1 – 40’x 100’, between John F. Kennedy & Harrison Streets, South of Bismarck Sea Road, Ewa, Honolulu County, HI,” Historic American Buildings Survey Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵ Ibid.



Figure 3.43: Chagrin Valley Roller Rink, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.44: Chagrin Valley Roller Rink Interior, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, Photograph by Ginger Dawn Matthews, Skate Critic Facebook Group, August 17, 2014, Used with Permission.



Figure 3.45: “Facility 1520, Interior of Quonset Hut, View Facing West. -Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Quonset Hut Type 1 – 40’x 100’, Between John F. Kennedy & Harrison Streets, South of Bismarck Sea Road, Ewa, Honolulu County, HI,” Historic American Buildings Survey Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Other examples of composite roller rinks exist, but none as impressive as Chagrin Valley Roller Rink. Those that do exist within the composite aesthetic are occasionally the result of multiple styles of buildings being cobbled together to make a larger, singular building. Such is the case with the Tarena Roller Rink (1950) in Tarentum, Pennsylvania (See Figure 3.46). The Tarena Roller Rink is compiled of two major building segments. The first comprises the ticket window and entrance (See Figure 3.47) and the second comprises the main skating area and is connected to the back half of the first building (See Figure 3.48).



Figure 3.46: Aerial Image of Tarena Roller Rink, Tarentum, Pennsylvania, Image Captured April 17, 2016, Google Earth, 2019.



Figure 3.47: Tarena Roller Rink, Tarentum, Pennsylvania, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.48: Tarena Roller Rink, Tarentum, Pennsylvania, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Rinks within the composite aesthetic add to the unique nature of architectural stylings among historic roller rinks in the United States. They can also serve as distinct examples of adaptive reuse, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The interior of historic roller skating rinks also have several distinguishing characteristics. First, and foremost, is the skating floor. The floor is the most vital component for any rink.⁴⁶ Even in the early years, skaters, operators, and critics alike knew the importance of the roller skating floor. Charles Dickens, Jr., in 1876, described the flooring types available for roller skating as well as that developed by James Leonard Plimpton:

The rink being established, and covered with a flooring with of asphalte [sic], wood, or concrete, there is no difficulty in persuading the public to come and skate. Of the three kinds of flooring just mentioned, asphalte would be the best, if it were not for its aggravating habit of getting soft and sticky in hot weather—in fact, just when it is wanted. When perfectly hard, as it is in cold weather, no surface can be more agreeable; but its weakness in summer has led to the very general adoption of concrete as a medium. It is possible, however, that both of these will, in time, be superseded by the wooden flooring invented by Mr. Plimpton, and constructed of narrow strips of wood, so sawn from the timber, and placed on the floor, that the grain of wood in none of the strips is parallel to the surface of the floor; as it is well known that floors, with the grain of the wood laid flat, are not as durable as, and are more liable to splinter up and warp than those made of wood cut across the grain. Strengthened with appropriate backing, these wooden floors stand weather surprisingly well, keeping a good level surface in spite of rain or sunshine.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ William Schmitz, “Blasts Old Theories, Foresees Rosy Future,” *The Billboard*, July 30, 1955: 73. ProQuest Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive.

⁴⁷ Charles Dickens, Jr., “Skating and Rinking,” in *All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal Conducted by Charles Dickens with Which is Incorporated Household Words*, New Series, 16, no. 381 (March 18, 1876): 17.

As Dickens, Jr. predicted, wood overwhelmingly became a popular choice for skate floors, with hard maple as the best option.

Within the category of wood floors, there are three general types: rotunda, fan, and log cabin.⁴⁸ Rotunda is considered the best because the wood planks curve to allow the skater to make turns more naturally. Yet, due to the unique nature of this style of floor, it is probable that this floor is the most expensive to install. Winwood Roller Rink (1967) in Kansas City, Missouri features such a floor (See Figure 3.49).



Figure 3.49: Winnwood Roller Rink, Kansas City, Missouri, Photograph by Author, 2018.

The fan style wood floor, which features the planks of wood meeting at right angles, also attempts to make the turn easier for the skater. Cavalier Skating Rink (1950) in Chillicothe, Ohio features this style of floor (See Figure 3.50).

⁴⁸ Ginger Dawn Matthews, "I have been requested to Explain and Post the different types of Skate Floors.," Facebook, Skate Critic Facebook Group, May 12, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1413076258930329/permalink/2036897739881508/>.



Figure 3.50: Cavalier Skating Rink, Chillicothe, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Elhurst Roller Rink (1947) in New Castle, Pennsylvania has a wood floor laid in the log cabin, or straight, style (See Figure 3.51), similar to a basketball court floor. This is likely the least costly of all floors. As opposed to the two examples above, the Elhurst floor is the original 1947 floor as well.



Figure 3.51: Elhurst Roller Rink Floor, New Castle, Pennsylvania, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Wood is not the only material used for skating floors. There are several others including: game court, polyurethane (plastic), rubber, asphalt, concrete, asphalt combo, parquet, marble, and commercial tile.⁴⁹ With skating floors, there appears to be no geographic or temporal pattern as to the style of floor in each rink. Rather, it mostly appears to be a preference matter on the part of the owner. Nevertheless, wood floors are the most prevalent.

The Rollercade (1955) in Detroit, Michigan features a terrazzo marble skating floor, which is original to the building (See Figure 3.52).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

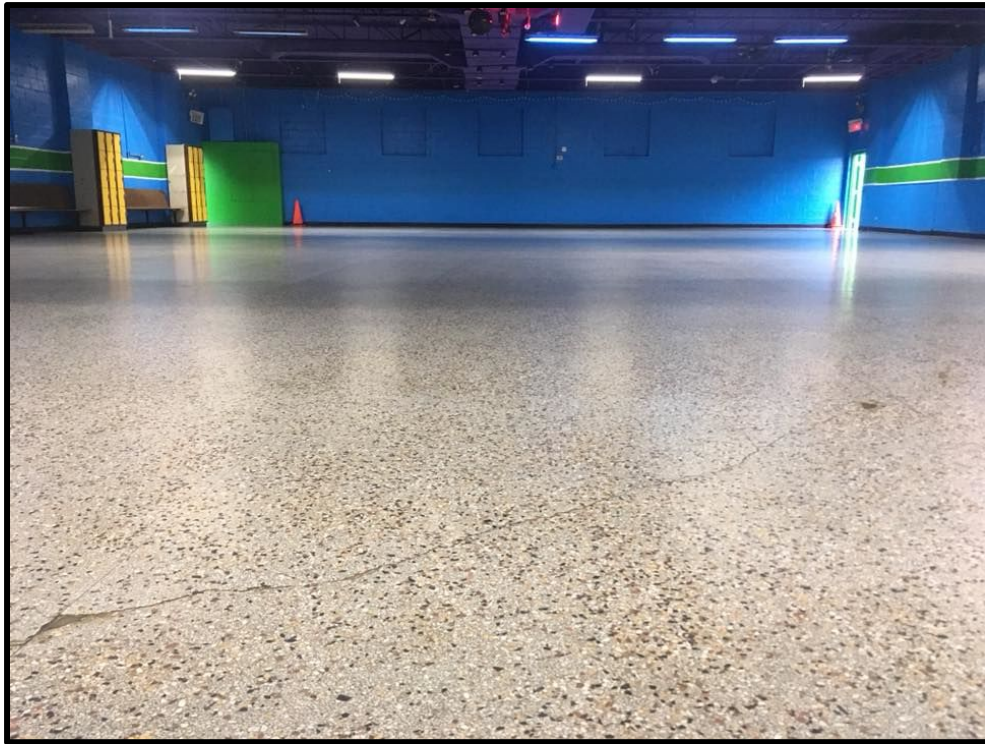


Figure 3.52: Rollercade Terrazzo Marble Floor, Detroit, Michigan, Photograph by Ginger Dawn Matthews, Skate Critic Facebook Group, May 24, 2018, Used with Permission.

The Route 66 Rollerdrome (1951) in Sapulpa, Oklahoma features game court, laid over the original wood floor (See Figure 3.53). Game court is a type of floor made of plastic tiles, either 3x3 feet or 4x4 feet, and durable for repeated use. It is highly versatile as it is used for a variety of sports and activities.

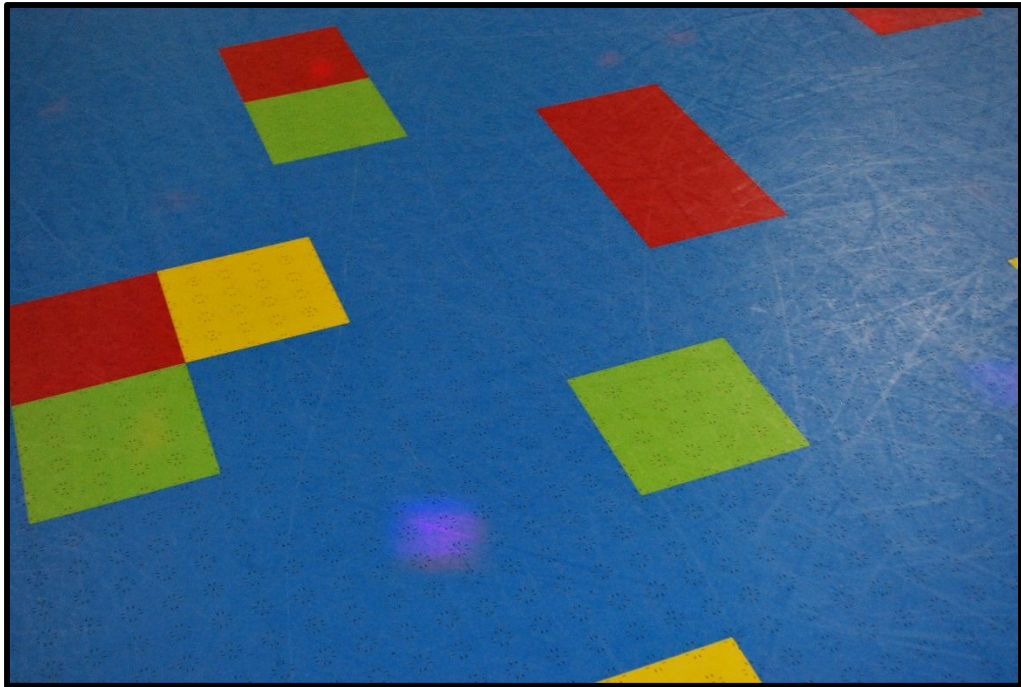


Figure 3.53: Route 66 Rollerdrome Floor, Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Photograph by Author, 2018.

Mentor Skateland (1910) in Mentor, Ohio is one of the oldest roller rinks in the country but features a polyurethane floor, likely as replacement for a previous, original wood floor (See Figure 3.54 and Figure 3.55).



Figure 3.54: Mentor Skateland Floor, Mentor, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 3.55: Mentor Skateland, Mentor, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018. The carpet hides what was likely the original hardwood floor running throughout the rink.

Despite the historicity of the roller rink building, the floor itself is not always original. Many are replaced as they are worn down or warped due to various factors. This

raises a question to be discussed in the following chapter. Due to the historic function of the roller rink and skate floor, can the skate floor (if it has been replaced between the opening of the rink and current time) be considered a contributing factor to the overall historicity of the roller rink?

In addition to the skating floor, there are three additional defining interior elements of the roller rink: the box office, the stage or DJ booth, and the snack bars. Each of these elements contributes to the overall design of the roller rink but also served as components of the rich cultural and social history that permeates roller rinks.

The first of these, the box office, has been a staple in the roller rink since its earliest period. Not only does it serve as the gateway to the roller rink, but it also acts as a means of maintaining the consistent ‘type’ of patron that rink operators so often sought to entice to the rink. It was a social gateway. At the ticket office, operators denied access to those they deemed ‘undesirable.’ It was also at the ticket office, that racial discrimination occurred, and the subsequent dismantling of discriminatory practices following protests and sit-ins. Whether inside or outside of the roller rink, the box office served as a social court, a place for judging the social suitability of individuals seeking to enter the roller rink.

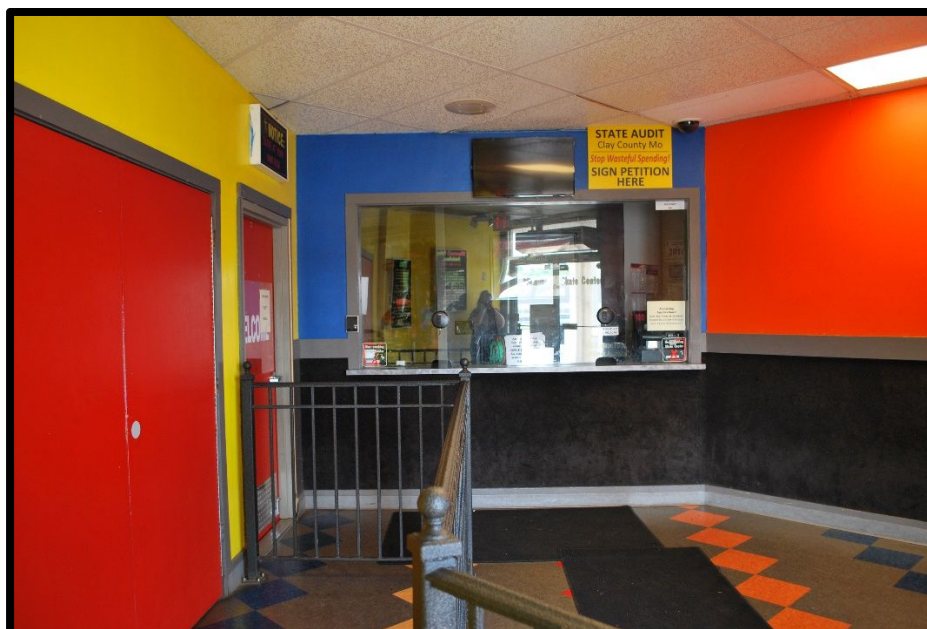


Figure 3.56: Winnwood Skating Center Box Office, Kansas City, Missouri. Photograph by Author, 2018.

Music in the roller rink defined the entire experience. Whether it was organ music of the early twentieth century or Rock and Roll, music in the roller rink created an atmosphere that could not be mirrored elsewhere. The connection between music and roller rinks allowed for the formation of distinct subcultures. With the use of recorded music and the rise of Rock and Roll in the 1950s and 1960s, the roller rink saw the development of a youth culture and identity not previously visible in the rink. The places of music production within the roller rink distinguish this property type from others. As such, the music space in a rink, whether a stage, DJ booth, or organ location, proved vital to the identity of historic roller rinks.



Figure 3.57: 36 Skate Club DJ Booth, Piqua, Ohio. Photograph by Author, 2018.

The snack bar, beginning in the 1940s, served as a place of social interaction within the roller rink. It was a place for skaters to rest and converse with other skaters in a casual environment. The food and beverages carried by snack bars in roller rinks varied, but the concept of the snack bar and accompanying seating area remained consistent from rink to rink. As such, the snack bar is one of the distinguishing characteristics within historic roller rinks.



Figure 3.58: Elhurst Roller Rink Snack Bar, New Castle, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Author, 2018.

This chapter has attempted to refine and define an architectural understanding of historic roller skating rinks throughout the United States. It has identified four property types common among historic roller rinks (arched, gabled, flat, and composite) and four critical interior features (floor, ticket office, snack bar, and stage) which highlight the cultural significance of these buildings.

CHAPTER IV: PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC ROLLER SKATING RINKS

Roller skating rinks are imbued with both architectural and cultural significance within the larger American narrative, but they are often overlooked in historic preservation efforts. This chapter seeks to provide an understanding of historic preservation in general, for the public or roller rink operators, and possible preservation practices in regards to historic roller rinks.

Historic preservation serves as a means to protect valuable cultural resources. Through historic preservation, a society illustrates what it believes to be of significant historical value. Historic preservation varies from state and local historic preservation efforts, but again the practice is an effort to preserve buildings or sites that are inherently valuable to the identity and narrative of stakeholder groups, whether as a nation or as a small-town community.¹

Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The Act established guiding principles of historic preservation theory and practice and, most significantly, established the National Register of Historic Places. Preservation practices might not have been codified into law until the mid-twentieth century, but the concept of preserving buildings and sites for future posterity existed more than a century before.

¹ Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, and Ilene R. Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*, 2nd edition. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).; Andrew Hurly, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).; J. Myrick Howard, *Buying Time for Heritage: How to Save an Endangered Historic Property*, (Raleigh, NC: Preservation North Carolina, 2007).; Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).; Donovan D. Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*, (Washington D.C., PlaceEconomics, 2014).; Thomas F. King, *Cultural Resource Laws and Practices*, 4th ed., (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2013).; Richard Longstreth, ed., *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).; Michael E. Crutcher, Jr., *Tremé: Race and Place in a New Orleans Neighborhood*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

Early practices of historic preservation included the purchase of Independence Hall by the city of Philadelphia in 1816 and the establishment of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in the 1850s to preserve George Washington's Mount Vernon.² The federal government moved towards preservation practices with the passage of the Antiquities Act of 1906, bestowing upon the president the authority to designate protect for historic and prehistoric landscapes, sites, and structures. The establishment of the National Park Service followed shortly in 1916.³ These practices of preservation were followed in the 1920s by John D. Rockefeller's work with Colonial Williamsburg and Henry Ford's Greenfield Village. Nevertheless, these early preservation practices sought to protect sites of "national significance"—typically those related to the 'great, white men' of the United States. Often this focus only addressed sites associated with political or military significance.

A set of "Criteria for Evaluation" guides the nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. These include a general measure of significance: "the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association."⁴ Furthermore, the nomination must also include one of the four sub-criteria, Criteria A-D. For evaluation, in addition to the above requirement, the nomination must also provide justification for one or more of the following criteria:

² Tyler et. al., *Historic Preservation*, 29-30.

³ *Ibid.*, 30-32.

⁴ "National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Accessed July 21, 2018, https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_2.htm.

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.⁵

As with any potential preservation undertaking, using the above criteria, we can establish legitimate justifications for the preservation of and inclusion of historic roller rinks on the National Register of Historic Places. Historic roller skating rinks are most likely eligible for the National Register for under Criteria A, with some also eligible under Criteria C.

Within Criteria A, historic roller skating rinks are eligible for their contribution to Entertainment and Recreation history. Leisure, providing time for entertainment and recreation, was a nineteenth century creation that expanded largely in the twentieth century. Leisure “affect[ed] not only *when* we relax but also *how* we relax.”⁶ Time for leisure initially occurred among the social and economic elite, but as labor laws shifted, the number of people who experienced leisure increased until leisure time and activity became a recurring aspect of life. As an option for entertainment and recreation, roller skating rinks boomed. Particularly in the twentieth century, historic roller rinks expanded from simply spaces to roller skate into a community space for entertainment and

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend*, (New York: Viking Press, 1991), 13.

recreation. It became a space for musicians on the rise to perform. For example, a young Aretha Franklin performed at the Arcadia Roller Skating Rink in Detroit.⁷ Likewise, roller rinks maintained their identity as sites of recreation, serving as the space for the development of amateur skating styles and competitions. Locations for these competitions frequently changed and offered skaters the opportunity to explore new rinks, new cities, and new community groups. Roller rinks continued as entertainment and recreation venues when other sites were unable to or did so at a decreased rate. For example, even World War II did not keep people from skating. W.J. Bettles stated that, in 1942, skating business in the Pacific Northwest actually increased due to “lady patronage,” by women “who [could] *skate* by themselves when they [couldn’t] dance alone.”⁸ The roller rink of the twentieth century became a community space for those seeking both entertainment and healthy recreation.

The nature of both the entertainment aspect and the recreation aspect often changed over time, as documented in earlier chapters, and those changes might be reflected in the building itself. The entertainment aspect shifted from spectator in nature, particularly as music technologies matured and musical performances moved out of roller rinks into larger venues. The addition of climbing castles, arcades, and laser tag facilities to the roller rink shifted the nature of entertainment in the rink over time. Some later rinks even rebranded themselves as ‘family entertainment centers’ to encompass the wider variety of options available in the space. Likewise, the addition of birthday rooms

⁷ Matt Dobkin, *I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You: Aretha Franklin, Respect, and the Making of a Soul Music Masterpiece*, (New York: Macmillan, 2004): 51. Google Books.

⁸ W.J. Bettles, “Wartime Skating in Pacific Northwest,” *Skating Review* III, no. 1 (September—October 1942), 7.

and redemption spaces altered the nature of the roller rink as well. Rink operators found that birthday and private parties often generated substantial revenue and community involvement. Despite the changes in how the identity as an entertainment and recreation site influenced the building, the historic roller rink remained constant in this identity and reflected how it shifted in American culture over time.

Likewise, within Criteria A, historic roller skating rinks are also eligible for inclusion under Ethnic Heritage. Growing out of class discrimination in early roller rinks, racial segregation and discrimination thrived in these sites, highlighting the power dynamics and struggles of the twentieth century. Rink operators determined those individuals they thought most ‘acceptable’ for entrance to the roller rink and excluded those they did not, often on their claims of individuals being socially, morally, or physically unfit. Such racialized admission practices occurred in the form of explicit exclusion of minority groups, ‘Black Nights,’ or the club policy. Roller rink operators used the club policy—the concept that individuals were allowed to skate if they were members of the rink club, which also saw the exclusion of Black skaters—most often. They claimed that Black skaters were not admitted to the rink because it was deemed a ‘club night’ and they were not club members, as a means to shield their discriminatory policies. In 1946, CORE began protesting at the White City Roller Rink in Chicago. Following a heated encounters and court rulings, the White City Roller Rink discarded its discriminatory policies, and changed its name to Park City Roller Rink. Protesters held

sit-ins at roller rinks across the United States to demand equal access to and use of roller rinks for people of color.⁹

Other properties were developed to serve the communities barred from white-controlled recreational spaces. The Savoy Ballroom in Chicago and the Pla-Mor Roller Rink in Cleveland were both spaces that served African American communities. These were often the only places black skaters in these cities were able to skate more than one night a week. Where the Savoy was in a white-owned hotel, Pla-Mor was entirely black-owned.¹⁰ Desegregation at roller rinks followed general, national patterns as overt pushback and discrimination continued through the 1970s and 1980s. Historic roller rinks maintained an image of wholesome, family entertainment and recreation, but failed to reckon with their discriminatory past. Even the general history of roller skating is white-washed and the periods of desegregation are ignored. Preserving historic roller rinks under the Ethnic Heritage theme is a means of revealing the fuller history of this building type.

Finally, under Criteria A, historic roller rinks are excellent candidates for eligibility under Social History, combining themes of adolescent culture and music history. The roller rink existed as a site for the almost-exclusive development of twentieth century youth culture. The roller rink saw the rise of the teenage culture. Youth is a generally

⁹ “Prelude: James Farmer—On Cracking White City,” in Howell Raines, *My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 27—34.

¹⁰ Tom Russo, *Chicago Rink Rats: The Roller Capital in Its Heyday*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2017), 72.; J. Mark Souther and Timothy Klypchak, “Pla-Mor,” *Cleveland Historical*, <https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/621>.

universal concept. However, the teenager is a complete social construction. Thomas Hines wrote,

Standard references cite a 1941 article in *Popular Science* magazine as the first published use of the word 'teenager.' The term came into use during World War II and first turned up in a book title in 1945. It seems to have leaked into the language from the world of advertising and marketing, where demographic information was becoming an increasingly important part of predicting which sales approaches are most effective with particular buyers... With the rise of the persuasion industries during the twentieth century, large groups of people were increasingly identified by single characteristics.¹¹

By the Golden Age of roller skating, the teenager emerged on the social and cultural scene as a force to be reckoned with. As a result of their increased leisure time, buying power, and influence, teenagers became the sought after demographic. Attracting teenagers to the roller rink meant placing organ music in the background and operators began incorporating popular recorded music, using the Top 40 lists, and ultimately using the newest genre that teenagers loved, Rock and Roll. Because of this desire to maintain teenage audiences, rink operators created opportunities for youth culture to blossom and grow in the roller rink from broadcasting popular music to special event nights to incentives based on school performance. The development of youth culture only expanded in the following decades as Disco began to take hold, and roller rink operators shifted the rink from simply a place to skate to a place to engage in the entire Disco experience. Through these efforts, roller rinks became safe spaces for youth that were both teenager- and parent-approved. In this sense, historic roller rinks contributed significantly to the social and cultural understanding of youth in America. Adolescent

¹¹ Thomas Hines, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, (New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1999), 8-9.

and youth history are typically little-studied, but the preservation and study of historic roller skating rinks can lend to the wider understanding of the development of youth in the country. Interconnectedly, historic roller rinks contribute to the history and culture of music production and dissemination. As audiences shifted over time, so too did their tastes in music. This required roller rinks to mirror such shifts moving from bands to organ music to the recorded music of Rock and Roll and Disco, as well as the accompanying technological shifts. As such, the roller rink became a site of music consumption and experience. In this sense, historic roller rinks were dynamic, shifting places of social interaction and connection.

Though most roller rinks fall under Criteria A, only a select group would be eligible under Criteria C. The arched and composite types of roller rinks are those most likely to be eligible under this requirement. The arched aesthetic is the most stylistically unique. This type of rink features the large, barrel vault roof typically made of iron or steel beams. Historic roller rinks appear to be the only recreational activity housed in this style of building, making it significant in design type. Over time, as music technology shifted and matured, this style of building no longer remained necessary to amplify the accompanying music, and the building type likely fell out of popularity as a result.

Despite the social, cultural, stylistic, and historical significance of roller rinks, this resource type is simply not preserved. Why? Perhaps historic roller rinks cannot be preserved because they have to maintain current cultural and technological significance to remain relevant and up-to-date for their target audiences. As James Charleton writes, “tastes in sports and amusement change and there may be little immediate use or reason

to save their decaying remnants.”¹² Recreation and entertainment sites must remain relevant to their main audiences, otherwise they might be deemed “old-fashioned” and become obsolete in the face of sites that continue to update. As a result, roller rink owners often choose profits associated with modern renovations rather than maintain much of their historical integrity that would make them appealing for preservation. In order to preserve historic roller rinks, these two seemingly divergent concerns need to be bridged in such a manner that rinks can still be operated as modern amusement and recreation venues as well as maintain historical integrity of sorts.

In understanding why historic roller rinks are not being preserved but should be, it is likewise necessary to understand what elements of the roller rink should be considered for preservation. Lee Nelson writes that “visual character” of historic buildings is a result of the sum of its parts rather than a single element alone:

Even though buildings may be of historic, rather than architectural significance, it is their tangible elements that embody its significance for association with specific events or persons [or cultural practices] and it is those *tangible elements* both on the exterior and interior that should be preserved.¹³ [Emphasis original.]

The first of these is the building itself. Within the types of historic roller rinks, the arched and composite styles are those that are most likely to be considered significant for their architectural features as well as their cultural and historical legacy. As twentieth century building types, many historic roller rinks likely were developed of structural framing, creating larger spaces for the rink. Framing likewise plays a significant role in

¹² Charleton, “Recreation in the United States,” 1.

¹³ Lee H. Nelson, *Preservation Brief 17: Architectural Character: Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Heritage Preservation Services, 1988.

the development of the roof of the roller rink. With the arched style, the framing would require the barreling of the beams and trusses used to establish the roof line. Aside from roller rinks that are considered arched or composite, the preservation of the structure itself should not be any different than any other buildings.

Potential preservation of the internal elements of the historic roller rink proves more cumbersome. One of the most significant elements that creates substantial cultural and historical relevance for the roller rink is the floor. However, the floor is also often one of the most updated and replaced components of the roller rink interior. Aside from the enclosed space created by the building, the floor is one of the most significant factors in what creates the atmosphere of the rink for roller skating. Lee Nelson writes, “if the various materials, features and spaces that give a building its visual character are not recognized and preserved, then essential aspects of its character may be damaged in the process of change.”¹⁴ In the space of the roller rink, the floor is one of those features that contributes to the building’s general visual character. For example, Elhurst Roller Rink in New Castle, Pennsylvania maintains the original skating floor that dates to when the rink opened in 1947 (Figure 4.1). In this, the stakeholders would want to ensure the preservation and longevity of the floor.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 4.1: Elhurst Roller Rink Skate Floor, New Castle, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Author, 2018.

Yet, maintaining historical integrity of a roller rink floor likely proves far more difficult because it is under constant strain and wear, more so than most other floors of other historic buildings.

In the case of wood skate floors, moisture and abrasions are the most likely causes of damage sustained at roller rinks. With the moisture issue, it can either cause the floor to shrink or expand and buckle, both of which create uneven and unsafe environments for skaters.¹⁵ Likewise, because of the nature of the roller rink, abrasions to the floor is a natural and unsurprising form of deterioration to rink floors.¹⁶ The primary strategy for

¹⁵ Robert A. Young, *Historic Preservation Technology*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 264.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

the preservation offered by preservation technology professionals is to consider and monitor the uses and maintenance of the floor, in order to limit the deterioration to the floor surface.¹⁷ Obviously limiting the usage of the floor is not plausible in a roller rink, because it is the primary function of the building. As a result, to maintain the function of the building, the roller rink operator likely resorts to repairs or replacements of the deteriorations in the floor system. Again, the question arises: how can we preserve something that is in flux, on average, every ten years? Or should we even attempt to do so?

If the original floor has not been retained there are alternative methods to maintaining the internal historical integrity of a roller rink. Yet though the outermost portion of a floor might be replaced more often, it still has a structure of support underneath.

The finished floor that is viewable within a space is the topmost layer of a construction sequence that begins with either wood skeletal framing (wood timbers or floor joists), masonry load-bearing construction or a concrete floor slab. Once a smooth, level supporting surface has been constructed, the finished flooring can then be installed.¹⁸

Following this description, there would then be the potential to preserve the ‘bones’ of the floor, even if the outermost layer of flooring does not maintain a level of historical integrity.

In situations where the roller rink floor material is a replacement of the original, there are different methods of preserving contributing elements in a building. Working

¹⁷ Ibid., 266.

¹⁸ Ibid., 256.

within the framework of H. Ward Jandl's "Rehabilitating Interiors in Historic Buildings: Identifying and Preserving Character-defining Elements" for the NPS Preservation Brief 18 best illustrates how preservation of interiors of historic roller rinks might occur.¹⁹

Jandl stated that

interior components worthy of preservation may include the building's **plan** (sequence of spaces and circulation patterns), the building's **spaces** (rooms and volumes), individual architectural **features**, and various **finishes** and **materials** that make up the walls, floors, and ceilings...Individual rooms may contain notable features such as plaster cornices, millwork, parquet wood floors, and hardware. Paints, wall coverings, and finishing techniques such as graining, may provide color, texture, and patterns which add to a building's unique character [emphasis original].²⁰

Building from Jandl's descriptions, preservationists can use both the plan and spaces to create opportunities for preservation of historic rinks. While the material, itself, of the floor might not be authentic to its period of inception, the plan and space for skating activity typically remains original to the creation of the rink. Some instances do exist in which the skating area was shortened to make space for a larger game area or climbing gym. Likewise, if the original material no longer remains, the original pattern remains, particularly with wood floors. For example, if an operator had a rotunda wood floor previously, it is likely that they would use the rotunda pattern again. Therefore, if it is not possible to preserve the physical floor material itself, it is possible to preserve the space of the floor within the larger context of the building. In the case of preserving

¹⁹ H. Ward Jandl, *Preservation Brief 18: Rehabilitating Interiors in Historic Buildings: Identifying and Preserving Character-defining Elements*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Heritage Preservation Services, 1988.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

historic roller rinks, it is the sum of the parts that can fully define the preservation methods, rather than single elements alone.

The skating space is likewise considered a primary space within the roller rink. As above, the material components of the skating space is ideal if original. However, if that is not possible, there are other methods to preserve this portion of the interior. Here, the sequence of space is necessary visualize the function of the space. Many rinks have bars or retaining walls, on one or more sides, that delineate the specific skate floor from a more general lobby, observation area. Figure 4.2 illustrates this delineation between the skating area and the seating area. Preservationists can make use of such structures to determine the size and needs of the primary space for preservation matters.



Figure 4.2: Mentor Skateland, Mentor, Ohio, Photograph by Author, 2018.

In addition to the floor, there are three other components within the historic roller rink that contribute as character-defining features: the ticket window/box office, the music space, and the snack bar. The first space is the ticket window or box office area. Typically, this area is separated from the main portion of the roller rink, but it is the first component of the rink that requires public interaction. With some historic roller rinks, this is an open space at the front of, or on the exterior of, the roller rink (See Figure 4.3). Though some ticket windows might occur on the exterior of the rink, it still serves as a fundamental link to the interior of the roller rink and should still be considered a character-defining space in the rink. In other instances, it is a completely enclosed space (See Figure 4.4). This separation of space for the ticket window area likewise ensured that rink operators were able to fully control those individuals deemed acceptable to enter the rink in order to maintain a specific clientele. Once inside, individuals had full use of the space, provided they adhered to the rules of the rink. It was at the ticket window that desegregation efforts took place to challenge the racially discriminatory admission practices in the mid-twentieth century. In this case, the ticket window became a place to push for equality as well as equal access and use. This gateway of access to the interior of the roller rink was a significant component of rink design.



Figure 4.3: Tarena Roller Rink Box Office, Tarentum, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 4.4: Roller Dome Skating Rink Box Offices, Coffeyville, Kansas. Photograph by Author, 2018.

The space where music production occurred—whether the organ booth, the stage, or the DJ booth—is another significant element of the historic roller rink for preservation considerations. Although there is little public interaction in this space, music in the roller rink is a specific component of the culture created in it. Whether this space is a stage where performances took place (See Figure 4.5) or an organ booth, the music space is a necessary aspect of rink preservation. Some rinks, such as Moonlight Rollerway in Los Angeles, California and The Oaks Rink in Portland, Oregon maintain and continue to play organs (See Figure 4.6). The DJ booth follows the previous pattern—often little direct public interaction, an enclosed individual space, and reflection of the progression of technological sophistication of music production. Recorded music was increasingly played in roller rinks as a cheaper option, requiring less maintenance, than organ music. DJ booths also developed alongside this practice. As technology shifted so too did DJ booths. However, maintaining the historicity and integrity of these music spaces might prove more critical than the other rink components. For example, the increasing use of digital format music and projection today might completely eradicate the need for such spaces, in favor of more games or redemption areas, in future rinks. Thus, those of the past might prove increasingly relevant to future studies of music culture in historic roller rinks.



Figure 4.5: Elhurst Roller Rink Stage, New Castle, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 4.6: The Oaks Rink Organ, Portland, Oregon. Photograph by Ginger Dawn Matthews, August 7, 2017. Used with Permission.

The final interior element that adds to the character of the historic roller rink is the snack bar and refreshment area. This area served as a social space, outside of the skating floor, that allowed skaters to interact with each other. This space saw the development of relationships as skaters formed connections with each other. This area varies from rink to rink but generally consists of the ‘bar’ for ordering food and beverages and the seating space to consume them (See Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8).

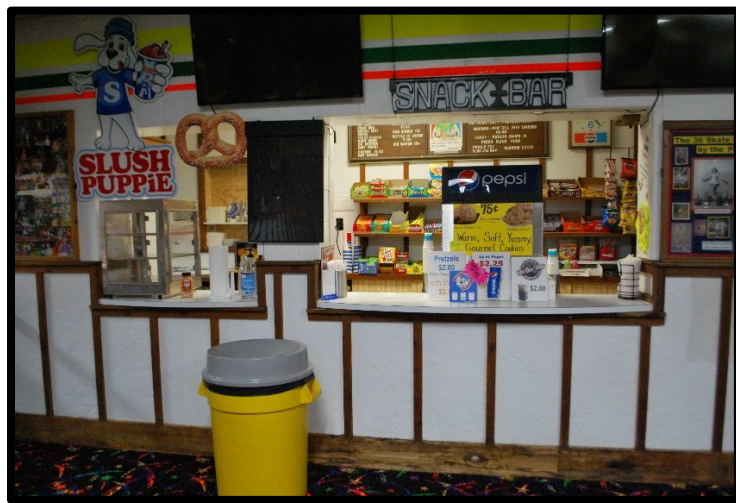


Figure 4.7: 36 Skate Club Snack Bar, Piqua, Ohio. Photograph by Author, 2018.



Figure 4.8: 36 Skate Club Snack Area, Piqua, Ohio. Photograph by Author, 2018.

Secondary spaces that will likely morph into defining elements include the prize or redemption counter or area, the arcade and other play areas, and the birthday rooms. Outside of the scope of this research, in the later decades of the twentieth century, many of these spaces transitioned into significant spaces. It is these spaces that become the ‘money-makers’ for roller rinks throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. For example, the Dreamland Skating Center in Pensacola, Florida, opened in 1976, underwent renovations in 2004 which added “laser tag, a game area, a redemption center and novelty shop, and ten separate birthday party rooms.”²¹ In discussing subsequent renovations to the ‘redemption island’ and ‘Stuff Shop Extreme,’ Dreamland’s owner stated, “We paid for the cost of the remodel during the very first session open after the remodel.”²² Likewise, birthday parties and packages are another significant source of income for rinks, so what were initially secondary spaces have evolved to primary spaces over time. At the Crystal Palace in Caddo Valley, Arkansas, the birthday party package was \$250 per hour (with a two hour minimum) to rent the whole rink (not including the \$10 per additional guest over the included 50 persons), but also has the privilege of the birthday-specific spaces.²³ Because these two aspects have become significant sources of income for roller rinks, it is likely that they will shape how space is used in future rinks, however that is a concern for future preservationists to consider. In relation to current historic roller rinks, these spaces are not significant to their preservation.

²¹ Dionne Obeso, “Dreamland Skating Center’s renovations lead to novelty, redemption success,” *Rinksider* (May—June 2009), 1.

²² Robert Bentley quoted in *Ibid.*, 33.

²³ Jan Mowle, “Arkansas roller skating center re-packages business as Family Entertainment Center,” *Rinksider* (July—August 2009), 15.

With all of the revenue generated by these new additions to the roller rink, is preservation of the building even an option that property owners would consider? Perhaps owners might view this as spending money to save something that does not produce, in their eyes, significant revenue instead of spending money to create revenue generating attractions. The case must be made to show that preservation of historic buildings does serve to benefit the property owner and is not just a means of halting change to the building.

Historic preservation serves as a means of creating economic vitality and has a far-reaching impact. Preservation specialist Donovan D. Rypkema writes, “at the most elemental level economics and preservation are fundamentally about the same thing—saving scarce resources.”²⁴ Reports from several states across the nation note the economic impact of historic preservation in that it “creates jobs, increases property values and tax bases, revitalizes communities, and brings thousands of tourists into the state every year.”²⁵ For example, according to a 2011 report about the impact of historic preservation in Connecticut, historic preservation projects that were completed created state tax credits of \$32,480,944, private investment of \$139,347,209, 560 jobs, salaries and wages of \$28,658,753, and an annual property tax of \$2,788,576.²⁶

Ultimately, for every \$100 invested in the rehabilitation of a historic building, \$83 ends up in the pockets of Connecticut workers. Historic

²⁴ Donovan D. Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader’s Guide*, (Washington, D.C.: PlaceEconomics, 2014), 7.

²⁵ “Banking on Tennessee’s History: The Economic Value of Historic Preservation to the People of Tennessee,” Tennessee Preservation Trust (2005), 2, <http://www.tennesseepreservationtrust.org/resources/economics-of-preservation>.

²⁶ “Investment in Connecticut: The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation,” (2011), PlaceEconomics, Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, 2, https://www.placeeconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/rypkema_ct_economic_impact_study_6-2011.pdf.

preservation is about jobs—creating more jobs than most types of economic activity in Connecticut, including new construction. Historic preservation is labor intensive, so the economic impact is overwhelmingly local, with salaries, wages, profits and jobs staying in Connecticut.²⁷

Reports and studies from other states and cities provide similar conclusions—historic preservation pays in a multitude of ways.²⁸ Not only does historic preservation have an impact in the state and local communities developing such preservation policies, it is also significant in attracting tourists to these areas. Rypkema writes, “quality of life is becoming the critical ingredient in economic development, and historic preservation is an important part of the quality-of-life equation.”²⁹

This trend will likely continue as people increasingly want more experiences—authentic experiences—over goods. In this concept, historic preservation can enhance experiences. As such, historic preservation serves as a means of increasing tourism, particularly heritage tourism, to the areas that understand the value of preservation. In general, tourism creates significant revenue. Without tourism, a study in Rhode Island concluded that households would have to pay nearly \$2,000 in taxes to accommodate that lack of revenue.³⁰ Within tourism, heritage tourism is a significant source of revenue, contributing about \$1.4 million to the state economy.³¹ The examples of the economic

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “State, Local, and Regional Economic Benefit Studies,” *Advisory Council on Historic Preservation*, Accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.achp.gov/index.php/initiatives/community-revitalization-economic-benefits/area-studies>.

²⁹ Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation*, 24.

³⁰ “Historic Preservation: An Overlooked Economic Driver—A Study of the Impacts of Historic Preservation in Rhode Island,” (2018), PlaceEconomics, Preserve Rhode Island, The Preservation Society of Newport County, 8, https://www.placeeconomics.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rhode-Island-Report_3.2.18-pages-smaller.pdf.

³¹ Ibid.

impacts of historic preservation and heritage tourism can go on, but there is no denying it is beneficial and produces revenue.

Roller rinks are the perfect candidate for preservation and the related impact of tourism. This resource type sits at the intersection of general heritage tourism and sports tourism. Roller rinks encompass the general cultural and social history many tourists desire, but they also carry with them a nostalgic undertone that is common with historic sports sites. Sean Gammon and Gregory Ramshaw write that sites of sport tourism:

are no different than many other non-sports sites, in that they will entice a broad range of individuals and groups, all of which will have very different reasons for visiting. It is important, however, to point out that heritage sport tourism is not solely about travelling to gaze at important sporting relics or to pay respects to the great players and coaches of the past. In the same way that sports are inextricably linked to a nation's culture they also represent an important legacy tied to a country's and/or a region's heritage... Therefore the ability of sports related heritage to attract tourism is far reaching, in that each sport has its own history and resulting heritage which it is able to protect and display.³²

Roller skating, and by association the roller rink as space of that performance, is classified as both a sport and a recreational activity, based on the perception of the individual participating. As such, the roller rink can be viewed as a site of sport. Yet as a site of recreation, it would likely follow similar patterns. Within that, Gammon and Ramshaw define four categories of sport heritage that attracts tourism.³³ The two most applicable categories are the tangible immovable sport heritage and the goods and services sport heritage.³⁴ Each of these is relatively self-explanatory. In terms of the

³² Sean Gammon and Gregory Ramshaw, "Editorial: Placing heritage in sport tourism," *Journal of Sport Tourism* 10, no. 4 (2005), 225.

³³ Greg Ramshaw and Sean Gammon, "More than just Nostalgia? Exploring the Heritage/Sport Tourism Nexus," *Journal of Sport Tourism*, 10, no. 4 (2005), 233.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

former, historic roller rinks provide the extant, tangible portion of cultural tourism. Relatedly, in terms of goods and services, again, historic roller rinks offer the opportunity of an authentic experience in a historic recreation site. Essentially, both can be marketed as ‘skate in a historic roller rink’ or, if applicable, ‘skate on an original wooden skate floor.’ Using preservation practices to create such an atmosphere of tourism would be only of benefit to historic roller rinks.

In the cases where preservation or adaptive reuse did not prevail over demolition, there are other methods to preserve the history and legacy of historic roller rinks. The increased presence of digital technologies in history and historic preservation make the dissemination of roller rink history far more possible. Similarly, exhibits at local or regional history sites or organizations is another means to preserve the history of the roller rink if it was not possible to preserve the rink itself.

Historic preservation, contrary to some perceptions, is an effective means to generate revenue, increases tourism, and serves as a means to revitalize a town or city. When applied to historic roller rinks, historic preservation can be equally beneficial. Historic roller rinks have a story to tell; one that has been overlooked but deserving of preservation.

CHAPTER V: ADAPTIVE REUSE OF HISTORIC ROLLER RINKS

Drawing on the preservation practices in the previous chapter, adaptive reuse is a practical tool that allows for the care of a building, but also the creation of a new function to better suit the community. It is good for the building or site. It is good for the people. It also maintains historical authenticity within a town or city. Adaptive reuse projects number in the hundreds, possibly thousands. From bus stations to post offices to motels to canal buildings, basically any building, regardless of historic age, has the potential to be preserved and adaptively reused.¹ That is also true of historic roller skating rinks. There are several instances of historic roller rinks being reused for other functions, with some featured in this chapter, but there is still a great potential for more. Drawing on the examples highlighted in this chapter and the historic preservation practices of the previous chapter, historic rinks offer great potential.

Roller Rinks to Stores

The conversion of historic roller rinks to stores is one of the most notable forms of current adaptive reuse practices geared toward this particular resource style. Due to their size, roller rinks are easily repurposed for stores, warehouses, or the like. Some of

¹ Meghan Drueding, “Just the Ticket: Fine Dining in an Old Art Moderne Bus Station,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, July 13, 2017, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/just-the-ticket>.; Cheryl Weber, “A Post-Office-Turned-Art School in Portland, Oregon,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, January 20, 2016, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/a-post-office-turned-art-school-in-portland-oregon>.; Laura Walser, “From Mod Motel to Creative Hub: The Metlo in Denver,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, March 6, 2017, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/from-mod-motel-to-creative-hub-the-metlo-in-denver>.; “The Gaylord Building,” *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, <https://savingplaces.org/places/gaylord-building>.

the resulting stores keep elements of the previous roller rink for aesthetic or historical purposes.

One such store is the Roller Rink Antique Mall in Detroit, Maine. As a nod to the building's origins, the term 'roller rink' remained in the name (Figure 6.2). The rink is said to have dated to the 1950s. In the reuse of the building into a store, the original hardwood floor and mirror ball from the roller rink years remained in the building, with the floor visible in Figure 5.2.²



Figure 5.1: Exterior of Roller Rink Antique Mall, Roller Rink Antique Mall Facebook Page, June 13, 2013.¹

² "Our Story," Roller Rink Antique Mall Facebook Page, Accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pg/RollerRinkAntiqueMall/about/?ref=page_internal.



Figure 5.2: Interior of Roller Rink Antique Mall, Roller Rink Antique Mall Facebook Page, February 17, 2019.¹

Located in Clawson, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, the “destination/lifestyle store” Leon & Lulu has a similar story and preserves the legacy of the Ambassador Roller Skating Rink.³ Like many rinks in the early decades of the twentieth century, Ambassador Roller Skating Rink grew out of a former ballroom. It developed in a ballroom, of the same name, in the late 1920s.⁴ It moved to the current location in 1941 and remained there until closing in 2005, when it was purchased and entered a new phase of its history.⁵

³ Dionne Obeso, “Leon & Lulu: The unique preservation of an historic rink,” *Rinksider* (November-December 2011), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

They [the new owners] carefully restored as much of the original rink as possible, repainting and lovingly caring for each detail, from the original floor, which still bears the hockey markings, to the original rink rules (no spitting, no gum, no in and out privileges), which are still clearly posted for visitors.

Some of these elements are visible in Figure 6.4. The supply of 350 pairs of skates and skate benches were kept and restored for use as displays or general seating. In adapting the roller rink for the purposes of a store, the owners sought to maintain a sense of historicity and comradery for the surrounding community, through the creation of a “Wall of Injuries,” where the public is invited to share memories of their experiences at the Ambassador Roller Rink. Owner Mary Liz Curtin states that when they purchased the building, they purchased a community and historic building that had significant meaning for the people of Clawson.⁶



Figure 5.3: Exterior of Leon & Lulu, The Former Ambassador Roller Skating Rink, Clawson, Michigan. Leon & Lulu, Mary Liz Curtin. Used with Permission.

⁶ Mary Liz Curtin, Phone conversation with author, May 2, 2019.



Figure 5.4: Interior of Leon & Lulu. Leon & Lulu, Clawson, Michigan, Mary Liz Curtin. Used with Permission. This photograph shows some of the remaining elements of the roller skating rink including the original hardwood floor.

Likewise, continuing this practice of preservation of historic entertainment sites, the Curtin family also purchased the neighboring Clawson Movie Theater and adapted it for use as a restaurant. They preserved the building in much the manner as the Ambassador Roller Skating Rink, maintaining as many original elements of the building as possible and recreating the original marquee. Curtin states of the preservation process, “anything that came with it [the original building], keep it” because a new purpose might be created

for it later in the process.⁷ This former roller rink is now a significant part of the Clawson Main Street program.

The above examples set a precedent of how historic roller rinks can easily be adapted for reuse, particularly for retail purposes. The following two examples feature a significant series of adaptation for differing functions over the years.

Chicago Roller Bowl (Chicago, Illinois)

The corner of West Washington Boulevard and North Aberdeen Street (formerly Curtis Street) encapsulates a unique story of roller skating rinks and adaptive reuse. From 1942 to the early-1950s, this location served as the Chicago Roller Bowl. Before the Roller Bowl inhabited this building though, several accounts write that was previously the Second Regiment Armory building in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ This assertion is correct. The building at this site was indeed home to the Second Regiment Armory for several years.⁹ However, this was not the original function of this building. It was originally built as a roller skating rink. A purpose-built roller rink, The Washington Boulevard Rink, as it was called, opened on October 1, 1884.¹⁰

The structure, which when finished will be one of the finest of its character in the country, will have a frontage of 125 feet on the boulevard and 200 feet on Curtis street. The outer walls, which will be of painted brick and terra cotta, will rise twenty-six feet from the walk, and will be covered by a trussed roof at an elevation of forty-one feet from the street. On the southwest corner will be an octagon tower of picturesque design,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Tom Russo, *Chicago Rink Rats: The Roller Capital in Its Heyday*, (Charleston, SC: 2017), 68—70.; “Harpo Studios,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), October 29, 2004.

⁹ “The Second Regiment’s Home,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), August 8, 1886, 9.; “Fire in Second Regiment Armory,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), March 2, 1897, 7.; “Three Armories Are Closed,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), January 9, 1904, 2.

¹⁰ “The Boulevard,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), March 1, 1885, 8.

sixty feet high. Through this will be the main entrance. The architects, Messrs. Burnham & Root, have provided for the generous use of stained cathedral glass in the tower as well as the windows on the boulevard, which will enhance the appearance of what would under any circumstances be an attractive exterior...The surface will be of maple, laid on a concrete bed to deaden it, and it will be 77x180 feet in the clear...A feature of the structure will be the entire absence of posts in the interior of the building to obstruct the view of spectators. The building will be devoted exclusively to roller-skating...¹¹

The Washington Boulevard Skating Rink was one of particular splendor for rinks in this period, particularly in how it was constructed in order to create a steady and comfortable atmosphere for the patrons.

When the subject of steam heat was mentioned the manager desired to call attention to the engine-room. This was carpeted and as neat as a parlor, while the engine itself ran with no more noise than an ordinary clock. The heat of the rink is kept at 68°. The system of ventilation is perfect. The skate-room is neatly kept and is a perfect system...The women's dressing-room is handsomely furnished. The gents' dressing-room has a cigar-stand attached.¹²

Such steady climate control seems unusual for the period, but the Washington Boulevard Skating Rink was made to be impressive. However, the rink did not last long as it was purchased for the home of the Second Regiment Armory in 1886.¹³ The former rink was adapted to meet the needs of the regiment, but some aspects of the building remained consistent.

The outside and inside of the rink have not generally been changed, but in detail considerable alteration has been made. An advantage gained is that all the rooms are on the ground floor, with the exception of the rifle range and store-room. The building entire is of brick 225x125 feet. The floor formerly used for skating is now used as the drill-room, and it makes a very handsome one. It is 77x187 feet, and the ceiling is about 60 feet above. The flooring is composed of cement, eighteen inches in depth,

¹¹ "A New Roller-Skating Rink," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), July 4, 1884, 12.

¹² "The Boulevard."

¹³ "The Second Regiment's Home," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), August 8, 1886, 9.

covered with two floors of ordinary wood, above which is another flooring of maple. Eight company rooms, 32x16, each containing from thirty-six to forty lockers, face the drilling-ground. These occupy the southern and eastern part of the building. On the western side are the Quartermaster's department, the hand-rooms, the line officers' rooms, the field and staff rooms, and the general headquarters are situated next to the entrance. There are also two storerooms in the left. The rifle-pit is on the west side of the building underneath a platform containing seats for 400. The pit is six feet in high [sic] and the length of the entire building. At the extreme north northern end is the band stand, and the acoustics overhead are made perfect. The ventilation of the whole building is perfect. The place will be lit up by electric light and heated by steam.¹⁴

The former roller rink building retained the primary distinguishing features through its history as the Second Regiment Armory. By the late 1910s, the building again found a new function as a Post Office garage (See Figure 5.5), but the identity as the Second Regiment Armory persisted. The site proved useful during one of Chicago's, and the nation's, deadliest disasters. It served as a temporary morgue, sheltering over nine hundred bodies of individuals who died during the Eastland Steamer tragedy.¹⁵ The Eastland Steamer capsized, while still docked, before it was meant to leave on a day excursion for Western Electric employees and their families, with the majority of the deceased under the age of 25.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "919 Bodies Recovered, Total Eastland Victims May Reach 1,200," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), July 25, 1915, 1.; Susan Q. Stranahan, "The Eastland Disaster Killed More Passengers Than the Titanic and the Lusitania. Why Has It Been Forgotten?," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 27, 2014, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/eastland-disaster-killed-more-passengers-titanic-and-lusitania-why-has-it-been-forgotten-180953146/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

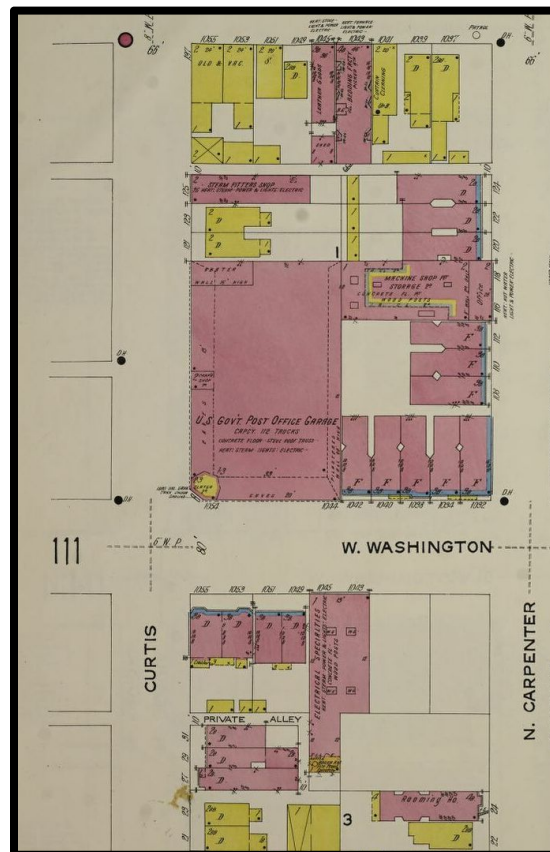


Figure 5.5: “Image 113 of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Chicago, Cook County, Illinois,” Sanborn Map Company, vol. 6, 1916, 118 sheets, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

The years that followed saw a variety of functions for the former rink, but never one long or stable enough to rid the image of this building as the former armory. That is, until early 1941 (Figure 5.6).

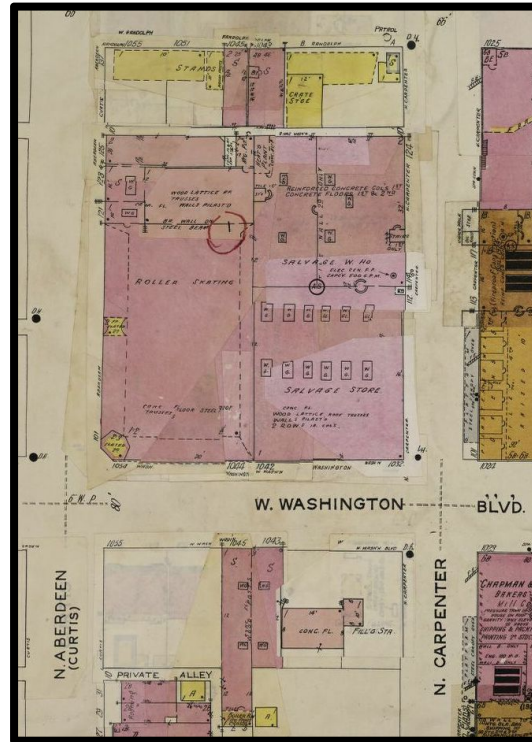


Figure 5.6 “Image 113 of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Chicago, Cook County, Illinois,” Sanborn Map Company, vol. 6, 1916—June 1950, 119 sheets, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

Samuel Schaffer, the owner of Roller Bowl, originally planned to open it to the public on Labor Day 1941.¹⁷ This was pushed back to Halloween 1941, Thanksgiving 1941, and finally opened July 3, 1942.¹⁸ Opening a rink in the early stages of World War II seemed a daring feat, but Schaffer reused and adapted a different building in order to create the Roller Bowl. This likely benefitted him and the rink as building materials for roller rinks, as well as all amusement activities, were limited and re-appropriated for the war effort, under War Production Board Order M126.¹⁹ The delay for materials necessary

¹⁷ “Schaffer to Open New Spot for Chi,” *The Billboard* 53, no. 15 (April 12, 1941), 56.

¹⁸ “Chi Bowl Being Readied,” *The Billboard* 53, no. 41 (October 11, 1941), 41.; “Roller Bowl in Chi \$80,000 Investment,” *The Billboard* 53, no. 45 (November 8, 1941), 45.; “New Chi Bowl Gets Good Bow,” *The Billboard* 54, no. 29 (July 18, 1942), 45.

¹⁹ Russo, *Chicago Rink Rats*.

for the Roller Bowl was likely relatively less extensive than for operators who sought to completely build a roller rink.

Once the Roller Bowl opened in 1942, it was a grand and modern place of amusement, at an expense of nearly \$80,000.²⁰ The Roller Bowl featured a “unique sound system (Western Electric) inclosed [sic] in a seven-foot ball suspended from the ceiling in the center of the rink and equipped with 2,500 mirrors, which will reflect myriads of lights as the ball revolves,” as well as a noiseless floor, a beginner’s floor, and a Hammond Organ and Novachord for music.²¹ With nearly 24,000 square feet of skating floor space, the Roller Bowl quickly gained a spot among Chicago’s elite rinks and experienced significant popularity.²² Civilian roller skating enthusiasts were encouraged to visit the roller rink and skate multiple times a week, as a means of supporting the war effort. Oftentimes these were in the form of ‘benefit’ nights.²³ For a fledgling rink like the Roller Bowl, these special skating nights likely proved instrumental in gaining a skating audience.

Two short years later, the Roller Bowl played host to state and national skating tournaments. In early April 1944, it hosted the Illinois State competitions.²⁴ Following the state-level skating trials, the Roller Bowl also hosted the third annual tournament of the Amateur Roller Skating Association, an organization sanctioned by the Amateur

²⁰ “Roller Bowl in Chi \$80,000 Investment,” *The Billboard* 53, no. 45 (November 8, 1941), 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*; “New Chi Bowl Gets Good Bow,” *The Billboard* 54, no. 29 (July 18, 1942), 45.

²³ Edward W. Smith, “Important Developments During RSROA Semi-Annual Board of Control Meeting in Detroit, Oct. 27th and 28th, 1942,” *Skating Review* III, no. 2 (November 1942), 12.

²⁴ “Qualifying for Skate Tourney to Start Today,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 10, 1944, 21.

Skating Union of the United States.²⁵ The national competition attracted an audience of over three hundred people, from across the nation, to the Roller Bowl.²⁶

The Roller Bowl slowly closed its doors and ceased operations in the early 1950s. Due to its spacious nature, the former rink became an excellent candidate for reuse as a film and television studio. By 1954, it was site being adapted for film use by Kling Studios.²⁷ The building maintained this entertainment legacy through its new life. The building was purchased in the late 1980s and was renamed Harpo Studios and became home to the “Oprah Winfrey Show,” for its entire series.²⁸ The building saw its demise in 2016 when it was purchased and demolished to make room for “Hamburger University,” one of McDonald’s headquarters and learning centers.²⁹

The lot at the northeast corner of West Washington Boulevard and North Aberdeen Street reveals how spaces evolve and are adapted over time, but it also shows the ease with which adaptive reuse of historic roller rinks, or other historic resources, can be undertaken to preserve the spaces legacy.

²⁵ “Roller Skating Meet Booked for May 1 to 5,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 5, 1944, 24.; “ARSA Champs are Set for Chi,” *The Billboard* 56, no. 7 (February 12, 1944), 46.; “Entries and Officials Are on Their Toes for Chi ARSA Meet,” *The Billboard* 56, no. 18 (April 29, 1944), 44.

²⁶ “ARSA Meet in Chi Attracts 300 Entrants,” *The Billboard* 56, no. 20 (May 13, 1944), 45, 57.; “Entrants Represent 32 Clubs and 8 States at ARSA Chi Meet,” *The Billboard* 56, no. 21 (May 20, 1944), 57.

²⁷ “Movie Stars Nobody Knows,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 28, 1954, 19, 36.

²⁸ “Chicago, Illinois,” *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), June 12, 1996, A4.

²⁹ Brad Parks, “McDonald’s set to take over Oprah’s old Chicago studio,” CNN Money, June 22, 2016, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/06/22/news/companies/mcdonalds-harpo-studios/index.html>.

Flushing Meadows Roller Rink (Queens, New York)

The Flushing Meadows Roller Rink (actually a combined roller skating and ice skating rink) was not a purpose-built rink. It was a roller skating rink that was adapted out of a different building.

This story of adaptive reuse begins in the late 1930s. A dictatorship in Germany was mechanizing to prove its dominance. Other European nations simply sought to appease this government rather than wage another war. Occupied regions were beginning to push back against colonial powers. The United States ended a decade far better than it began, with a return to economic stability. In the midst of worldwide tensions bubbling under the surface, New York City hosted the World's Fair of 1939—1940. s

The World's Fair amplified the developmental process of the Flushing Meadow area in Queens, New York. This portion was an area once known for its idyllic scenes and landscapes that slowly transitioned into a vast wasteland.

³⁰ The Canarsies, the Rockaways, and the Matinecocks tribes first controlled the territory.³¹ European settlement occurred in the seventeenth century, the land progressed through settlements of various groups. The Bowne House, built in 1661, is a remaining legacy of European conquest in the Flushing Meadow area.³² It would become known for its botanical beauty. However, the use of the land shifted.

...It was a dumping ground: not merely wasteland where junk and rubbish accumulated, but the specified depository for the daily refuse of a large

³⁰ Cleveland Rodgers, "From World's Fair to World Forum: The story of the magical Flushing Meadow, linked to freedom and the unity of nations," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1946, SM7.

³¹ *The 'Fair' Borough*, (New York: Borough of Queens, 1964, Queens Borough Public Library, <http://digitalarchives.queenslibrary.org/browse/fair-borough-0>).

³² "The House," The Bowne House, accessed March 10, 2019, <http://www.bownehouse.org/the-house/>.

part of New York City...The entire section became infested with rats; river and bay were polluted by sewage, and the Meadow was a breeding place for mosquitos that tormented communities far removed. It was a place generally shunned by home builders, although shacks sprang up around the dump and marsh...³³

The process of revitalization began in the 1930s with the extension of parkways and thoroughfares into the Queens area.³⁴ The World's Fair planning and construction simply magnified that development.



Figure 5.7: “New York World’s Fair 1939, Airview of Existing Conditions,” 1936, Gilmore D. Clarke papers, #15-1-808. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

³³ Rodgers, “From World’s Fair to World Forum.”

³⁴Ibid.

The planners of the World's Fair sought to take the world in a new direction—one of modernity and progress.³⁵ Where the Chicago's World's Fairs of 1893 and 1933 had been labelled as “look[ing] back over a Century of Progress,” the New York World's Fair “look[ed] forward to a Century in the Making.”³⁶ On an idealistic platform, the fair planners sought to promote democracy, production and distribution, communication and business administration, “community interests,” government organizations and transportation schemas.³⁷ In addition to the main thoroughfare, it also featured an extravagant amusement zone. This amusement area described as a “veritable city of pleasure,” accented the theme of modernity.³⁸ A roller rink comprised a segment of the amusement zone, though it was eclipsed in media attention by attractions such as the Aquacade or the Parachute Jump.³⁹ This rink, however, is not the one of notoriety.

³⁵ Robert H. Kargon, Arthur P. Molella, Morris Low, and Karen Fiss. *World's Fair on the Eve of War: Science, Technology, and Modernity, 1937—1942* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 57. Ebook.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁸ August Loeb, “Varied Amusements for Fair: In the Mile-Long Area Devoted to Frivolity Will Be Provided Thrills, Theatricals, Spectacles, and Scientific Wonders,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 1939, 162.

³⁹ *Ibid.*; “Play Zone at Fair is ‘100% Sold Out,’” *The New York Times*, April 29, 1940, 8.



Figure 5.8: “Top: Birdseye view: New York World’s Fair 1939, Flushing Meadow Park. Bottom: Plan of New York World’s Fair 1939, Flushing Meadow Park,” Gilmore D. Clarke papers, #15-1-808. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

The roller rink, what would be known as the Flushing Meadows Roller Rink, of note opened in the former New York City Building of the 1939—1940 World’s Fair. Aymar Embury, II (1880—1966) designed and supervised the development of the building itself.⁴⁰ Embury was a New York-based architect with a list of designed buildings include a selection of buildings on various university campuses (for example, Kalamazoo College, Princeton University, Hofstra College), the New York Port

⁴⁰ Irving Spiegel, “U.N. Debate to Ring in Skating Heaven: City Building in Flushing Park, Built for World’s Fair, Was the Favorite of Millions,” *The New York Times*, April 12, 1946, 3.

Authority Building, the Lincoln Tunnel, and the Argentinian Pavilion at said fair.⁴¹ Built at a cost of nearly \$1,000,000, the New York City Building was originally designed to showcase the various departments and actions of the city government.⁴² “Air conditioned, the one-story structure, with mezzanine, has limestone and terra cotta and glass brick for its walls. The color scheme is based on the gray buff of the limestone, accented by black, jade green and bronze. The building is 421 feet long and 214 feet wide and about forty feet high.”⁴³ The majority of World’s Fair buildings and structures are designed to be temporary. However, a few examples to the contrary exist: the Eiffel Tower, Treasure Island (San Francisco), and the Century of Progress Homes relocated to the lake coast of Indiana.⁴⁴ The NYC Building ranked among these, unlike the fair’s iconic Trylon and Perisphere (Figure 5.9). It was one of the few buildings at the World’s Fair that was intentionally designed to be adapted following the close of the fair.⁴⁵

⁴¹ “Embury, Aymar II (1880—1966),” *North Carolina Architects & Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, last modified 2014, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000567>.

⁴² Spiegel, “U.N. Debate to Ring in Skating Heaven”

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Steve Piccione, “America’s World’s Fairs Icons That Have Stood the Test of Time,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, June 20, 2014, https://savingplaces.org/stories/remaining-relics-american-worlds-fairs#.XIk_e5NKgmU; “Yesterday’s Tomorrow, Today!,” Indiana Landmarks, September 14, 2016, <https://www.indianalandmarks.org/2016/09/century-of-progress-homes-indiana/>.

⁴⁵ Rodgers, “From World’s Fair to World Forum.”



Figure 5.9: "Theme Center- Trylon and Perisphere- Trylon and Perisphere," New York World's Fair 1939-40 Records Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections.



Figure 5.10: "New York City-Building-View of Front," New York World's Fair 1939-40 Records Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

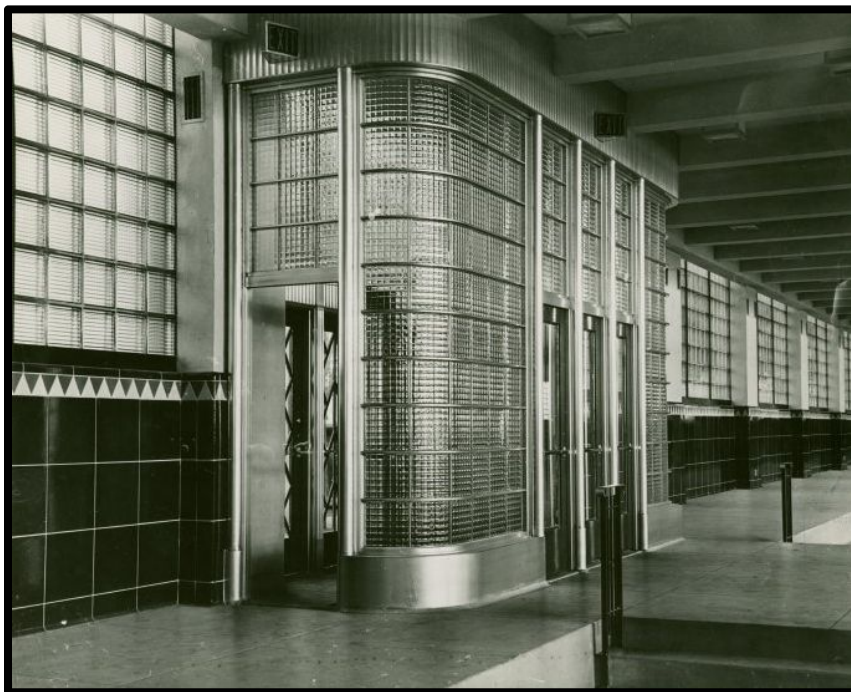


Figure 5.11: "New York City-Building-Doors," New York World's Fair 1939-1940 Records Collection, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

The Flushing Meadows Roller Rink opened as an indoor recreational center for the Queens community on January 12, 1941.⁴⁶ The roller skating rink measured at 150x116 feet, and the ice rink measured slightly larger at 178x116 feet [some sources stated the ice rink portion as 165x116 feet].⁴⁷

Both have diffused lighting, public-address system, and music by radio and phonograph. WNYC, municipal station, had a permanent broadcasting studio in the building. Cafeteria on the second floor is open continuously, with rink level having stands for hot dogs, soft drinks, etc. a gallery has ping-pong, shuffleboard, and other games.⁴⁸

The rink space was developed so as to simultaneously function as an exhibit and convention center, as necessary, with the ability to accommodate 6,000 to 10,000 individuals.⁴⁹ Within a week of the opening of both the roller and ice rinks, over 16,500 individuals attended skating sessions, with nearly 1,400 of those attendees were children.⁵⁰ In the first year of the combined rinks opening, the rinks received a combined visitorship of over 180,000 individuals.⁵¹ The New York City Building served the Queens area as double rinks from 1941—1946. That year, the site took on another international perspective.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, vol. 53, no. 4, 43.

⁴⁸ “Rinks and Skaters,” *The Billboard*, vol. 53, no. 4, 43.

⁴⁹ “‘Super Rink’ Draws Crowd to Fair Site,” *The New York Times*, January 13, 1941, 17.

⁵⁰ “16,537 Use New Rinks at Park in First Week,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 1941, 23.

⁵¹ “Parks’ Revenues Up 100% Over 1933,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1941, 14.



Figure 5.12: “Skating Rink, Flushing Meadow Park. Roller Skating I,” Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Figure 5.13: “Flushing Meadow Park Ice and Roller Skating Rink Sticker,” Rink Stickers, New York, National Museum of Roller Skating.



Figure 5.14: Skating Rink, Flushing Meadow Park. Roller Skating II," Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Figure 5.15: Skating Rink, Flushing Meadow Park. Cafeteria," Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

In the period between 1946 and 1951, the New York City Building served as the headquarters for the United Nations General Assembly. The building underwent massive renovations in order to accommodate the General Assembly and its required staff. Such renovations included public viewing spaces, foyers and lounges for delegates, dining rooms, press rooms, writing rooms, and the Office of the Secretariat.⁵² The City of New York even offered the Flushing Meadow location as the official site of the United Nations, however, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. ultimately donated several blocks in Manhattan, along the East River to become the final home of the U.N.⁵³ The NYC Building's tenure as the home of the United Nations ended in 1951. However, plans were established, as early as 1947, to return the function of the building to a roller rink, with an expected cost of \$1,000,000.⁵⁴ The New York City Building was returned to its previous function as combined roller and ice skating rinks, opening again on October 18, 1952.⁵⁵ To celebrate the reopening affair, club skaters from the Mineola Rink on Long Island performed exhibitions as part of the day's activities.

Roller skating continued in the building until the early 1960s. However, with the preparation underway for the 1964—1965 World's Fair, again in Flushing Meadow, the fair planning committee sought to include the New York City Building in the second

⁵² "U.N. Hall Planned for 1,000 Visitors: Alterations on Fair Grounds, Assembly Building Outlined—Dining Facilities Projected," *The New York Times*, April 21, 1946, 14.

⁵³ Frank S. Adams, "New York Offers U.N. 350-Acre Site at Flushing as Permanent Home; Conveys City Building to Assembly," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1946, 1.; Robert Moses, "Natural and Proper Home of the U.N.," *The New York Times*, October 20, 1946, SM5.; George Barrett, "Six Blocks in Area: Site Offered to U.N. by John D. Rockefeller Jr.," *The New York Times*, December 1, 1946, 1.

⁵⁴ "N.Y. to Spend 16 Mil for New Beaches, Parks," *The Billboard*, vol. 59, no. 51 (December 20, 1947): 48-49.

⁵⁵ "U.N. Hall in Queens Will Be Rink Again," *The New York Times*, March 20, 1952, 33.; "City to Reopen Rinks: Park Department Modernized Flushing Meadow Park Site," *The New York Times*, October 12, 1952, 42.; "Skating Rinks Open: 1,000 Glide in Queens Park as City Starts Season," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1952, 71.

coming of the fair. Once again, this meant the roller and ice rinks vacated the building. Architect Daniel Chait oversaw the \$2.5 million renovations which included “the building’s exterior limestone [was] renovated and coated with a permanent waterproofing material...[with] pierced masonry grill work with back-lighting,” on the façade of the building.⁵⁶ The 1964—1965 New York World’s Fair hosted nearly fifty million visitors, but that visitorship did not necessarily equate to a successful event, though in *The End of Innocence: The 1964—1965 New York World’s Fair*, Lawrence R. Samuel seeks to return the positive views of the event itself.⁵⁷

Following the close of the second New York World’s Fair, the building remained open for public viewing of a city panorama installed in the building for the fair. The other half of the building returned to an ice rink.⁵⁸ According to the map in Figure 6.11, the New York City Building served as the New York City Pavilion and Ice Theater during the 1964—1965 World’s Fair. Therefore, it is logical that the ice rink remained in the building, while the roller rink did not.

In 1972, the Queens Center for Art and Culture (now the Queens Museum) moved into half of the building and eventually took over the full building.⁵⁹ A short-lived roller rink opened in the defunct New York State Pavilion, developed for the 1964—1965 World’s Fair, in 1972, but it was closed in 1974 due to hazardous conditions.⁶⁰ From that

⁵⁶ “’39 Fair Building Being Refurbished for ’64 Fair,” *The New York Times*, January 31, 1964, 28.

⁵⁷ Lawrence R. Samuel, *The End of Innocence: The 1964—1965 New York World’s Fair*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

⁵⁸ “Building History—The Queens Museum—New York City Building,” The Queens Museum, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://www.queensmuseum.org/building-history>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Samuel Weiss, “Future of the Fair Site Still Debated,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 1972, 134.; “Hazardous Roof Forces Rink Closure,” Queens Library Digital Archives, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://digitalarchives.queenslibrary.org/browse/hazardous-roof-forces-rink-closure>.

time, there has been no specific designated space for roller skating in Flushing Meadow Park. The Queens Museum gained full use of the NYC Building in 2013.⁶¹

The Flushing Meadow Roller Rink suggests that roller rinks, in general, are seemingly more adaptable to a variety of shifting factors. The function of the New York City Building might have changed several times, but the community, whether large or small, continued to establish and re-establish the roller rink, reflecting the enduring nature of rinks themselves. The story of the Flushing Meadows Roller Rink is one of adaptability and functionality. When first established as a rink 1941, it was done in such a manner that it could be easily converted as a multi-functional location as was needed.

Roller rinks are large places that have the space to accommodate a variety of functions and priorities. The included stories reveal that roller rinks should be viewed as a resource for reuse rather than for demolition. The adaptive functions of roller rinks are significant and should not be ignored.

⁶¹ “Queens Museum Today,” Queens Museum, accessed March 10, 2019, <https://queensmuseum.org/queens-museum-today>.

CONCLUSION

The historic roller rink floor is best described as an ellipse. It is longer in some areas than others, but it always curves back. It is a metaphor for the pattern of popularity and usage of the roller rink. One generation grows out, and another grows in. The intangible roller rink is an encapsulation of adolescence, culture, and history and is maintained through memories and popular culture representations. Without the tangible rink though, these intangible characteristics will quickly fade away.

Without the physical space of the roller rink, roller skating likely would not exist as it does. Edward Smith, editor of *Skating Review*, wrote “without roller rinks there is no roller skating. There are no natural places to roller skate. All roller surfaces are man made.”¹ Smith is accurate in this statement, because even outdoor roller skating is done on man-made roads and surfaces. The tangible roller rink has been understudied, and this research sought to reconcile that fact. Roller rinks hold a significant place in cultural and social history. Roller rinks tell a unique history of how people of the past lived. As a space of recreation and leisure, roller rinks were not spaces that people were required to visit or frequent. Rather, they were places that people consciously chose to visit, places people chose to freely spend their time. As such, they should be preserved as spaces that people voluntarily attended or explored of their volition.

In order to determine how best to preserve this specific resource type, it is first necessary to understand the cultural and historical significance of the roller rink. The roller rink entered the cultural landscape in the midst of a period of strife, Reconstruction,

¹ Edward W. Smith, ed., “Let’s Be Grateful,” *Skating Review* III, no. 4 (January 1943), 3.

in the nation and grew over the following decades, first creating the pattern of summits and basins of popularity that continued through the history of roller skating. From its inception, the roller rink was a place where class, society, and race all intersected and reflected the normative narrative of American history. Early rink operators wrote of the prospective and sought after clientele:

It is strictly a moral amusement, and is spoken highly of by all sensible clergymen.²

Do not admit any person into the rink, either of complimentary or cash tickets, unless they are neatly dressed. If a man or boy comes to the rink without a collar on do not admit him. If any children come in the evening without their parents, do not admit them. If a person comes to the door that appears to be intoxicated, tell them you cannot admit them as it is against the rules. Law suits are a good way to advertise. If you are arrested every month for refusing admittance to objectionable persons your business will boom, and you need not spend a cent in advertising your rink.³

The desire to deny ‘objectionable’ or unsuited patrons access to the rink continued throughout the following decades. Operators and industry stakeholders sought to portray roller rinks as moral, upstanding, and wholesome places for children and families to spend their leisure time. The attempt, by roller rink operators, to maintain decorum and morality continued through the middle of the twentieth century. Roller rink operators generally maintained similar dress code policies for their patrons. The dress code at Arena Gardens in Detroit, Michigan maintained that:

Gentlemen—Skating is permitted in business suit. Coat may be removed providing skater is attired in neat dress shirt with tie, or sport shirt with collar. Collarless shirts, sweaters, jackets, suspenders and uniforms other than those of the ARMED FORCES are not permissible.

² I.S. Moulthrop, *The Rink Manager’s Guide and Rink Directory* (1885), 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 28.

Ladies—Skating is permitted in your choice of dress providing the costume skirt reaches to the knees. Slacks, beach pajamas, riding breeches, etc., are not permissible.⁴

Dress code played an instrumental role in maintaining this identity that operators hoped roller rinks would portray. Blue jeans were an area of fierce cultural debate in the roller rink. This debate began in the late 1940s and continued through the 1970s. There were debates that, if allowed, blue jeans would lead to the increase in the ‘undesirable’ element of patrons, and rink operators wanted to avoid that situation.⁵ It was not until 1976 that a general consensus developed among roller rink operators to allow patrons to wear jeans.⁶ The dress code was not the only cultural element established in roller rinks.

Roller rinks were also sites of segregation for much of the twentieth century. Part of this was the implementation of ‘Black Nights’ which set aside one night a week for Black skaters to use the rink. Another practice used to veil the blatant discrimination at roller rinks in the period was the club system. Rink owners developed clubs for skaters—of which Black skaters were usually excluded—and have ‘Club Nights,’ during which they justified their exclusion of Black patrons. These methods of segregation, when taken to court, were overruled. In other instances, roller rinks served as sites of protest by groups such as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), beginning in the mid-1940s.

⁴ “Arena Gardens Weekly Schedule,” *Skating Review*, Arena Gardens Issue (1943), 18.

⁵ “The Passing of the ‘Levis’: (or the Lament of the ‘cow-conscious’ in the West,” *Skating News* V, no. 2 (November 1948), 5,8.; “Industry Holding Line on Dress Rules,” *Rinksider* 14, no. 10 (December 1970—January 1971), 4.; “Devise Acceptable Dress Code and Enforce Rules,” *Rinksider* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1975), 3.; “His Dress Rules are Realistic and Enforced,” *Rinksider* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1975), 9.; “Rinks Taking Second Look at Dress Rules,” *Rinksider* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1975), 3.; “Are Our Dress Rules Reaching Relaxing Trend?” *Rinksider* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1976), 6.; “Jeans Gaining Acceptance in Rink Dress Policy,” *Rinksider*, 21, no. 4 (Summer 1976), 14.; “Realism Influences Dress Rules,” *Rinksider* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1976), 14.

⁶ “Jeans Gaining Acceptance in Rink Dress Policy,” *Rinksider* 21, no. 4 (Summer 1976), 14.

In addition to the significant cultural contributions and connotations of historic roller rinks, they also provide valuable insight into non-traditional building types. There is little historical precedent for the design and style of past roller rinks, other than I.S. Moulthrop's *The Rink Manager's Guide and Directory* (1885) and Eugene C. Cooper's *Erection and Operation of a Roller Skating Rink* (1948).⁷ With little historiographical evidence to build from, this dissertation develops a typology in which historic roller rinks can be divided into four categories: the arched, the gabled, the flat, and the composite. Because of the assumed prerequisites for rink design—large and long—the creation of this typology required a different avenue of architectural study, and the roof style of rinks was the most distinguishing factor. Of the four styles developed, the gabled type is the most prolific among historic roller rinks (See Figure 6.1). This type, though appearing more frequently among rinks built in the 1950s—1970s, has little geographic or temporal boundaries. The arched style, which is the next populous, does have more significant geographic and temporal boundaries. The arched style is more prevalent in the early- to mid-twentieth century, with a peak in the 1940s and 1950s. This style is also not reflected in southeastern states. There is conjecture, such as the building type in the South might have fallen out of favor and into demolition, however, there is no significant evidence as to this boundary evident in arched roller rinks. The flat style of roller rinks, like the gabled, is not restricted by such boundaries, but they are less prevalent than gabled or arched rinks. Finally, composite style roller rinks are fewest in number, but they also do not neatly fit into one of the other categories. With composite roller rinks, these are

⁷ Moulthrop, *The Rink Manager's Guide and Rink Directory*.; Eugene C. Cooper, *Erection and Operation of a Roller Skating Rink*, (Oxford, Alabama: Eugene C. Cooper, 1948).

buildings that encompass multiple styles or are comprised of other, non-rink building types. Due to this nature, this building style is least visible on the skating landscape.

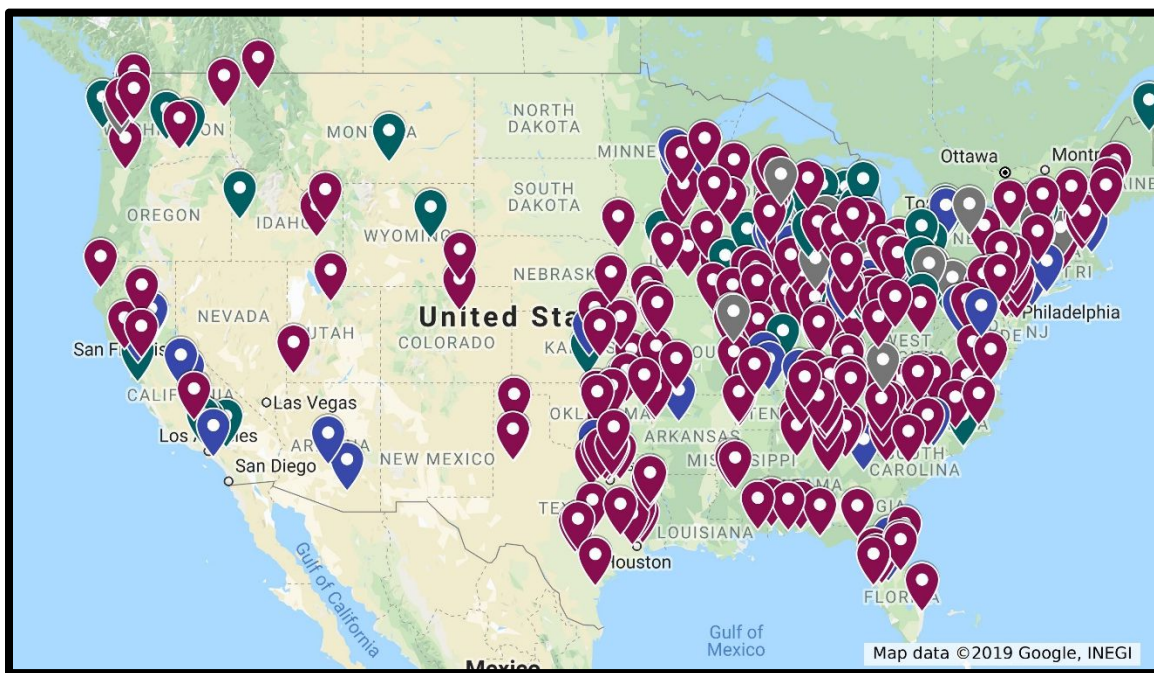


Figure 6.1: Map of Historic Roller Rinks by Style. Developed by Author using Google Maps, 2019. Key: Purple (Gabled), Green (Arched), Blue (Flat), Gray (Composite)

Resulting from the overwhelming cultural significance, history, and architectural influence, historic roller skating rinks serve as an ideal resource type for preservation efforts. Despite the fact that roller rinks, even historic ones, must update and incorporate new activities or technologies to stay relevant, historic preservation can still be tailored to fit preserve the integral components of the building while also allowing the building to continue to generate business and revenue. If the business cannot be saved, adaptive reuse is a significant viable choice to save the building itself. However, preservation

efforts, for any building type, cannot wait until just before the wrecking ball arrives. Preservation must be proactive rather than reactive. Preservation organization must occur before a building crisis.⁸ The persistence of historic roller skating rinks, numbering nearly 400, suggests that recreation and amusement of the past are still alive, they are just waiting for preservation in order to continue to live and influence future generations.

The patterns of cultural and historical significance are easily applied to other sites of recreation and amusement. Such sites face the same deterrent to preservation. They must remain “updated” and “modern” if the business is to remain steady. However, the preservation practices suggested for historic roller rinks can also be applied to other sites of recreation. Heritage tourism and leisure tourism are both factors that often increase the business of sites across the nation. For example, roller rinks and other recreation sites have the potential to be advertised as “the oldest roller rink” or “the oldest outdoor playground” in this or that state, substituting adjectives as they are applicable (largest, smallest, longest, etc.). Likewise, some roller rinks across the United States develop history walls or exhibit cases featuring historic photographs of the rink and its skaters. Some even have pieces of the original floor after it needed replacement. Such a method can likewise be applied to recreation and leisure sites. Just because historic sites of recreation typically must update to be relevant to current audiences, that does not mean that their historical significance need be discarded. Individuals and groups participate in leisure and recreational activities out of their own free will and choice. Failing to

⁸ Paul Rogerson and Janet Rogerson, “School-Owned Recreation Facilities: The Challenges of Their Preservation...No Slam Dunk,” in Deborah Slaton, et. al., eds., *Preserve and Play: Preserving Historic Recreation and Entertainment Sites*, (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 2006), 113—118.

acknowledge the significance of such sites of recreation, and allowing them to be demolished or otherwise robbed of their historical integrity, proves detrimental to the historical and cultural understanding of people's daily lives. Preserving the historic roller skating rink creates opportunities to explore the cultural and social history as well the ability to recognize and preserve the significance of related sites as well.

The historical and cultural study, and preservation, of historic roller rinks provides insight into the everyday lives of individuals and groups, particularly among the youth as they developed identities and formed spaces of their subcultures. The roller rink, and other sites of recreation, should not be neglected because their significance may not be obvious. Rather they should be studied and preserved because they are sites of independently formed communities and identities.

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APPENDIX A:

LIST OF HISTORIC ROLLER RINKS IN THE UNITED STATES

*Note: This is not meant as a comprehensive list of all historic roller rinks in the United States. This is a list of those that resulted from research and survey work.

Rink Name	City	State	Zip Code	Year Opened	Year Verified or Estimated	Building Type
Royal Roller Rink	Anchorage	AK	99504	1971	Verified	A
Dreamland Skate Center	Mobile	AL	36619	1972	Verified	G
Sportsworld Skate Center	Cullman	AL	35058	1979	Verified	G
Barger Roller Rink	Morris	AL	35116	1950	Verified	G
Russellville Skate Station	Russellville	AR	72801	1956	Verified	F
Jack's Skateland	Fort Smith	AR	72901	1962	Verified	G
Wheels in Motion	Van Buren	AR	72956	1979	Verified	G
Skate Country	Tucson	AZ	85710	1972	Verified	F
Skateland Mesa	Mesa	AZ	85210	1974	Verified	F
Skateland Events Center	San Bernardino	CA	92404	1972	Verified	A
Santa Cruz Roller Palladium	Santa Cruz	CA	95062	1950	Verified	A
Kings Skate Country	Elk Grove	CA	95758	1948	Verified	A
Moonlight Rollerway	Glendale	CA	91204	1956	Verified	A
Rollerama	Bakersfield	CA	93301	1957	Verified	A
Northridge Skateland	Northridge	CA	91325	1958	Verified	A
Roller Towne	Visalia	CA	93277	1975	Verified	F
Fountain Valley Skating Center	Fountain Valley	CA	92708	1976	Verified	F
Sunrise Rollerland	Citrus Heights	CA	95610	1973	Verified	F

The Golden Skate	San Ramon	CA	94583	1976	Verified	F
Foothill Skate Inn	Sacramento	CA	95841	1973	Verified	F
Cal Skate Clovis	Clovis	CA	93612	1973	Verified	F
Roller King Roseville, LLC	Roseville	CA	95678	1977	Verified	F
Skateland	Bakersfield	CA	93307	1955	Verified	G
Cal Skate	Rohnert Park	CA	94928	1976	Verified	G
Blue Lake Roller Rink	Blue Lake	CA	95525	1950	Verified	G
Cal Skate Chico	Chico	CA	95928	1978	Verified	G
Paradise Skate Roller Rink	Antioch	CA	94509	1958	Verified	G
Wagon Wheel Skate Center	Brighton	CO	80601	1958	Verified	G
Rollermagic Roller Rink	Waterbury	CT	*06704	1979	Verified	F
Middletown Roller Skating Rink	Middletown	CT	*06457	1948	Verified	G
Babb's Beach Amusement Park (Rink)	Suffield	CT	*06078	1930	Estimated	C
Christiana Skating Center	Newark	DE	19713	1979	Verified	G
Skate World	Lakeland	FL	33801	1973	Verified	F
Skate World	Leesburg	FL	34748	1979	Verified	F
Atlantis Skateway	Greenacres	FL	33467	1975	Verified	G
Skateland of Brandon (Astro Skate)	Brandon	FL	33511	1977	Verified	G
Skate and Shake Center	Ormond Beach	FL	32174	1979	Verified	G
Fort Sk8 Family Fun Center	Fort Walton Beach	FL	32547	1976	Verified	G

Skater's Choice of the Southeast	Panama City	FL	32404	1977	Verified	G
SpinNations Skating Center	Port Richey	FL	34668	1977	Verified	G
SkateWorld Tampa	Tampa	FL	33615	1977	Verified	G
Landmark Rink	Pensacola	FL	32507	1950	Estimated	G
Semoran Skateway	Casselberry	FL	32707	1978	Verified	G
Astro Skate Orlando	Orlando	FL	32822	1979	Verified	G
Go Taylor Rollers	Perry	FL	32347	1970	Estimated	G
Astro Skate Pinellas Park	Pinellas Park	FL	33782	1978	Verified	G
Rocket Roller Rink	Milledgeville	GA	31061	1970	Verified	F
Sparkles Family Fun Center (Hiram)	Hiram	GA	30141	1970	Estimated	G
Sparkles Family Fun Center (Kennesaw)	Kennesaw	GA	30144	1970	Estimated	G
Red Wing Rollerway	Augusta	GA	30907	1974	Verified	G
Sparkles Family Fun Center (Smyrna)	Smyrna	GA	30082	1959	Verified	G
Sparkles Family Fun Center (Gwinnett)	Lawrenceville	GA	30045	1970	Estimated	G
Golden Glide	Decatur	GA	30034	1973	Verified	G
3 Creeks Entertainment (Rink)	LaGrange	GA	30240	1958	Estimated	G
RollerCoaster SkateWorld	Fort Oglethorpe	GA	30742	1970	Estimated	G

Fun Wheels Skating Center	Cedartown	GA	30125	1974	Verified	G
Chamlee's Roller Rink	Trion	GA	30753	1958	Verified	G
Skate 'N' Play	La Fayette	GA	30728	1960	Estimated	G
Spinning Wheels Skate Center	Ogden	IA	50212	1960	Verified	A
Roller City	Mason City	IA	50401	1978	Verified	G
Spinnin' Wheels Skate Center	Oskaloosa	IA	52577	1979	Verified	G
Rollerama	Sioux City	IA	51106	1966	Verified	G
Skate West	Des Moines	IA	50265	1972	Verified	G
Kenny's RollerRanch	Burlington	IA	52601	1974	Verified	G
Super Skate Roller Rink	Cedar Rapids	IA	52402	1976	Verified	G
The Roller Drome	Nampa	ID	83651	1948	Verified	A
Deleta Skating Rink	Pocatello	ID	83202	1945	Verified	G
Starlite Skating	Idaho Falls	ID	83401	1977	Verified	G
Stoppkotte's Super Skate	Granite City	IL	62040	1943	Verified	A
Freedom Roller Rink	Monmouth	IL	61462	1940	Verified	A
Aurora Skate Center	Aurora	IL	60504	1955	Verified	A
Fleetwood Skating Rink	Summit	IL	60638	1956	Verified	A
White Pines Roller Skating Center	Mount Morris	IL	61054	1953	Estimated	A
The Rink	Chicago	IL	60619	1975	Verified	C
Sk8way Roller Rink	Taylorville	IL	62568	1953	Verified	C
Funway	Batavia	IL	60542	1977	Verified	F

Coachlite Roller Skate Center	Roseville	IL	60172	1977	Verified	F
Morton Roller Rink	Morton	IL	61550	1961	Verified	G
Scottie's Fun Spot	Quincy	IL	62305	1979	Verified	G
Fun Spot Skating Center	Belleville	IL	62221	1968	Verified	G
Skateland--Springfield (Skateland South)	Springfield	IL	62711	1972	Verified	G
Lynwood Sport Center	Lynwood	IL	60411	1975	Verified	G
Illini Skateland	Danville	IL	61834	1977	Verified	G
Skateland Savoy	Savoy	IL	61874	1978	Verified	G
Skateland--Jacksonville	Jacksonville	IL	62650	1974	Verified	G
Skate 'N' Place	Bloomington	IL	61701	1965	Verified	G
George's Skate Center--Great Skate North	Decatur	IL	62526	1970	Estimated	G
Emery Brothers Skating Rink	Marion	IL	62959	1957	Verified	G
Pearson's Skating Rink	Benton	IL	62812	1978	Verified	G
Bonanza Roll-A-Rama	Mount Vernon	IL	62864	1971	Verified	G
Idyl Wyld	Marion	IN	46953	1937	Verified	A
Roller Dome North	Fort Wayne	IN	46805	1955	Verified	A
Michiana Roller Skating Rink	Mishawaka	IN	46544	1970	Estimated	A
Plymouth Skate Center	Plymouth	IN	46563	1950	Verified	A
Franklin Skate Club	Franklin	IN	46131	1959	Verified	A

Inman's Bowling and Recreation Center	Valparaiso	IN	46383	1941	Verified	F
Skateland	Indianapolis	IN	46254	1974	Verified	F
West Park Skate Center	Huntington	IN	46750	1976	Verified	F
Bells Skating Rink	Fort Wayne	IN	46774	1926	Verified	G
Eby's Family Fun	Bristol	IN	46507	1953	Verified	G
Roller Cave	Indianapolis	IN	46219	1977	Verified	G
Wigwam Roller Skating Rink	Terre Haute	IN	47805	1970	Estimated	G
Western Skateland	Bloomington	IN	47404	1974	Verified	G
Gibson Arena	Muncie	IN	47302	1940	Verified	G
Anderson Roll Arena	Anderson	IN	46012	1977	Verified	G
Hoosierland Roller Rink	Frankfort	IN	46041	1949	Verified	G
Bazz's Roller Rink	Rensselaer	IN	47978	1953	Verified	G
Gibson Arena-New Castle	New Castle	IN	47362	1975	Verified	G
Columbus Skateland	Columbus	IN	47203	1970	Estimated	G
Holiday Roller Rink	Elkhart	IN	46517	1968	Verified	G
Honeywell Center Skating Rink	Wabash	IN	46992	1952	Verified	C
Rolla-Rena Skate Center	Harper	KS	67058	1972	Verified	A
Skateland Family Fun Center	Hutchinson	KS	67502	1978	Verified	F
Starlite Skate Center	Salina	KS	67401	1963	Verified	G
Roller Dome Skating Rink	Coffeyville	KS	67337	1948	Estimated	G

Rollers Skating Rink	Emporia	KS	66801	1979	Verified	G
Starlite Skate Center	Newton	KS	67114	1937	Verified	G
Jimmie's Rollerdrome	Elsmere	KY	41018	1948	Verified	A
Skateway USA	Henderson	KY	42420	1978	Verified	A
Champ's Rollerdomo	Louisville (Valley Station)	KY	40223	1960	Verified	F
Skate World Preston	Louisville	KY	40219	1978	Verified	F
Kingsway Skateland	Paducah	KY	42003	1973	Verified	F
Maysville Roller Rink	Maysville	KY	41056	1950	Verified	F
Circus Skate	Murray	KY	42071	1976	Verified	F
Skate O'Rama	Shepherdsville	KY	40165	1971	Verified	G
RECA Roller Rink	Alexandria	KY	41001	1958	Verified	G
Club Arena Roller Skating Rink	Berea	KY	40403	1958	Verified	G
Finley's Fun Center	London	KY	40744	1978	Verified	G
Robben's Roost Roller Skating Rink	Louisville	KY	40218	1971	Verified	G
Rudy's Roller Rink	Maysville	KY	41056	1953	Verified	G
Gerry's Roller Rink	Corbin	KY	40701	1955	Verified	G
Skateland	Bradford	MA	*01835	1951	Verified	A
Chez-Vous Roller Skating Rink	Dorchester	MA	*02124	1937	Verified	F
Roll On America	Leominster/Lancaster	MA	*01523	1979	Verified	G
Roller Kingdom	Hudson	MA	*01749	1979	Verified	G

Roller Kingdom	Tyngsboro	MA	*01879	1979	Verified	G
Starland Roller Rink	Hagerstown	MD	21740	1946	Verified	A
Moon Glo Roller Rink	Cumberland	MD	21502	1959	Verified	A
Turner's Skate	Hagerstown	MD	21740	1974	Estimated	G
Laurel Roller Skating Center	Laurel	MD	20723	1970	Estimated	G
Melody Roller Rink	Caribou	ME	*04736	1964	Verified	A
Sunbeam Roller Rink	Smithfield	ME	*04978	1922	Verified	G
RolloDome	Auburn	ME	*04210	1954	Verified	G
Happy Wheels Skate Center	Portland	ME	*04103	1973	Verified	G
Lincoln Park Skating Center	Lincoln Park	MI	48146	1939	Verified	A
Riverside Arena	Livonia	MI	48150	1952	Verified	A
Rainbow Gardens Roller Rink	Crystal	MI	48818	1948	Verified	A
The Fun Spot (Kentwood Location)	Kentwood	MI	49548	1949	Verified	A
The Fun Spot (Byron Location)	Byron	MI	49315	1952	Verified	A
Northland Roller Rink	Detroit	MI	48219	1950	Verified	A
Tarry Hall Roller Rink	Grandville	MI	49418	1959	Verified	A
Skateland Arena	Mount Morris	MI	48458	1961	Verified	A
Jumpin' Jupiter Skate & Fun Center	Muskegon	MI	49442	1965	Verified	A
Roll Arena	Midland	MI	48642	1967	Verified	A

Ramona Roller Rink	Dowagiac	MI	49047	1952	Verified	A
Rolladium Family Fun Center	Waterford Township	MI	48328	1949	Verified	A
Big Rapids Roller Rink	Big Rapids	MI	49307	1950	Estimated	A
Edru Skate Center	Holt	MI	49942	1957	Verified	A
Rollhaven Skating Center	Flint	MI	48507	1955	Verified	A
Dixie Skateland	Newport	MI	48166	1958	Verified	A
Caseville Family Arena	Caseville	MI	48725	1953	Verified	A
Hastings Roll-A-Rama	Hastings	MI	49058	1940	Estimated	C
RollerCade Roller Rink	Detroit	MI	48217	1955	Verified	F
Skateworld of Troy	Troy	MI	48083	1974	Verified	F
Skate Ranch	Coldwater	MI	49036	1979	Verified	G
Royal Skateland	Detroit	MI	48224	1973	Verified	G
Rollerworld	Kalamazoo	MI	49009	1978	Verified	G
Johnny's Skate Center	Custer	MI	49405	1948	Verified	G
Stadium Roller Rink	Hillsdale	MI	49242	1978	Verified	G
Rollerama	Brighton	MI	48114	1972	Verified	G
Roller Garden	Saint Louis Park (Minneapolis)	MN	55416	1944	Verified	A
Skateville	Burnsville	MN	55337	1976	Verified	F
Belle Creek Roller Rink	Goodhue	MN	55027	1950	Verified	F
Cheap Skate	Coon Rapids	MN	55433	1978	Verified	F
Rohler Rink	Brownsdale	MN	55918	1960	Verified	G
Woodale Fun Zone	Woodbury	MN	55125	1974	Verified	G

Skate King Roller Rink	St. Louis	MO	63121	1970	Verified	A
Rollercade	St. Louis (Concord Village)	MO	63128	1971	Verified	F
B&D Roller Rink	Independence	MO	64055	1965	Verified	F
Park Roller Rink	Carthage	MO	64836	1950	Estimated	G
Rock Roll-O-Rena	Arnold	MO	63010	1965	Verified	G
B&J Skate Center	St. Joseph	MO	64507	1977	Verified	G
Winnwood Skate Center	Kansas City	MO	64117	1967	Estimated	G
Landmark2 Skate Center	Lee's Summit	MO	64081	1974	Verified	G
SkateWorld	Branson	MO	65616	1976	Verified	G
Rink Ratz Sk8 Center	Blue Springs	MO	64014	1977	Verified	G
Puxico Skating Rink	Puxico	MO	63960	1961	Verified	G
St. Nick's Skating Rink	St. Louis	MO	63103	1970	Estimated	C
Funtime Skateland Clinton	Clinton	MS	39056	1971	Verified	G
Funtime Skateland Pearl	Pearl	MS	39208	1972	Verified	G
Golden Gate Skateland	D'Iberville	MS	39540	1970	Estimated	G
Skate World Billings	Billings	MT	59102	1976	Verified	A
Carousel Roller Rink	Libby	MT	59923	1976	Verified	G
Scooter's Family Skating Center	Wilmington	NC	28412	1959	Verified	A
Carolina Skate Land	Dunn	NC	28334	1972	Verified	A

Skylite Skating Rink	Hudson	NC	28638	1970	Verified	A
Thomasville Skating Center	Thomasville	NC	27360	1950	Verified	A
Round-a-Bout Skating Center (71st Location)	Fayetteville	NC	28304	1974	Verified	F
Frye's Roller Rink	Concord	NC	28027	1951	Verified	G
Skateland USA	Kannapolis	NC	28081	1974	Verified	G
Kate's Skating Rink (Lowell)	Gastonia	NC	28056	1961	Verified	G
Kate's Skating Rink	Gastonia	NC	28054	1961	Estimated	G
Kate's Skating Rink	Indian Trail	NC	28079	1961	Estimated	G
Statesville Skateland	Statesville	NC	28677	1970	Verified	G
Round-a-Bout Skating Center (Eutaw Location)	Fayetteville	NC	28303	1974	Estimated	G
Round-a-Bout Skating Center (Goldsboro Location)	Goldsboro	NC	27534	1974	Estimated	G
Skate World	Kernersville	NC	27284	1974	Verified	G
Sky Vue Skateland	Rocky Mount	NC	27801	1958	Verified	G
Skateland USA of Hickory	Newton	NC	28658	1973	Verified	G
Riverside Roller Rink	Burnsville	NC	28714	1958	Verified	G
Roll-A-Bout Skating Center Burlington	Burlington	NC	27215	1975	Verified	G
Seven Gables Skating Rink	Clinton	NC	28328	1973	Verified	G

Skatehaven USA	Winston-Salem	NC	27104	1972	Verified	G
Rollerland	New Bern	NC	28560	1971	Verified	G
Rolla-Rena Skate Center	Beatrice	NE	68310	1972	Verified	G
Great View Roller Skating Rink	Enfield	NH	*03748	1970	Estimated	G
South Amboy Arena-- RollerMagic	South Amboy	NJ	*08879	1958	Verified	A
Holiday Skating and Fun Center	Delanco	NJ	*08075	1971	Verified	A
Jackson Skating Center	Jackson	NJ	*08527	1978	Verified	F
Florham Park Roller Rink	Florham Park	NJ	*07932	1937	Verified	G
Cherry Hill Skating Center	Cherry Hill	NJ	*08034	1973	Verified	G
Sk8 47 Skating and Fun Center	Franklinville	NJ	*08322	1976	Verified	G
Villa Roller Rink	Washington	NJ	*07882	1925	Verified	G
Orchard Park Roller Rink	Orchard Park	NY	14127	1965	Estimated	A
Rainbow Roller Rink	North Tonawanda	NY	14120	1949	Verified	A
Gupitll's Roller Skating Arena	Cohoes	NY	12047	1951	Verified	A
Rollarama	Schenectady	NY	12303	1957	Verified	A
Hyde Park Roller Magic	Hyde Park	NY	12538	1950	Estimated	A
Angola Roller Sports Center (Angola RollerCade)	Angola	NY	14006	1948	Verified	A

Purling Roller Rink	Cairo	NY	12413	1940	Verified	C
United Skates of America-- Seaford	Seaford	NY	11783	1979	Verified	F
Kiddy Skateland	Buffalo	NY	14209	1950	Estimated	F
The Fun Spot	Queensbury	NY	12804	1961	Verified	G
Joycrest Skating Rink	Elmira	NY	14901	1931	Verified	G
Skate-A-While Roller Rink	Rome	NY	13440	1976	Verified	G
Wood'n Wheel Family Fun Center	Ulster Park	NY	12487	1974	Verified	G
Be-Mar Roller Skating	Honeoye	NY	14472	1958	Verified	C
Roll-a-Way Skating Center	Newark	OH	43055	1954	Verified	A
Roll Arena Family Skating Center	Elyria	OH	44035	1948	Verified	A
Lind Arena Skate Center	Zanesville	OH	43701	1948	Verified	A
Indian Lake Rollarena	Russells Point	OH	43348	1965	Verified	A
Roller Haven Fun Center	Washington Court House	OH	43160	1948	Verified	A
Wellston Skateland	Wellston	OH	45692	1940	Estimated	A
Roller Hutt Skate and Fun Center	Garrettsville	OH	44231	1948	Verified	A
Skate America	Grove City	OH	43123	1954	Verified	A
Medina Skateland	Medina	OH	44256	1940	Estimated	A
Chagrin Valley Roller Rink	Chagrin Falls	OH	44022	1947	Verified	C
Sk8 Factory	Bucyrus	OH	44820	1960	Estimated	C

United Skates of America-- Refugee Road	Columbus	OH	43232	1972	Verified	F
Skateway Middletown	Middletown	OH	45042	1950	Estimated	F
Skate Zone 71	Columbus	OH	43229	1972	Verified	F
36 Skate Club	Piqua	OH	45356	1965	Verified	F
The Skate Place	New Philadelphia	OH	44663	1977	Verified	F
USA Skate Center	Springfield	OH	45504	1976	Verified	G
Mentor Skateland, Inc.	Mentor-on-the-Lake	OH	44060	1910	Verified	G
Amanda Roller Rink	Amanda	OH	43102	1949	Verified	G
Cavalier Skating Rink	Chillicothe	OH	45601	1950	Verified	G
North Canton Skate and Entertainment Center	North Canton	OH	44720	1960	Verified	G
Orbit Fun Center	Huber Heights	OH	45424	1963	Verified	G
Skateworld of Kettering	Kettering	OH	45429	1974	Verified	G
Jackson Cavalier Roller Rink	Jackson	OH	45640	1950	Verified	G
Lorain Skate World	Lorain	OH	44053	1976	Verified	G
Edgewood Skate Arena	Lima	OH	45805	1978	Verified	G
Springfield Lake Roller Rink	Lakemore	OH	44250	1948	Verified	G
Dow's Roller Arena	Nelsonville	OH	45764	1964	Verified	G
Route 66 Rollerdome	Sapulpa	OK	74066	1951	Verified	A

Skateland Tulsa	Tulsa	OK	74112	1968	Verified	G
Southwestern Skate Center	Oklahoma City	OK	73139	1960	Estimated	G
Ardmore Skateland	Ardmore	OK	73401	1976	Verified	G
Orbit Skate Center	Prague	OK	74864	1977	Verified	G
Skatehouse	Tahlequah	OK	73086	1978	Verified	G
Star Skate Norman	Norman	OK	73069	1963	Verified	G
Oaks Park Amusement Park and Roller Rink	Portland	OR	97202	1905	Verified	G
The Rink Family Fun Center	Titusville	PA	16354	1958	Verified	A
Presque Isle Skating and Event Center	Erie	PA	16505	1940	Estimated	A
Neville Roller Drome	Pittsburgh	PA	15225	1948	Verified	A
Ellhurst Roller Rink	New Castle	PA	16101	1947	Verified	A
Swaney's Roller Rink	Uniontown	PA	15401	1956	Verified	A
Valarena Roller Rink	North Apollo	PA	15673	1949	Verified	C
Moonglo II	Bedford	PA	15522	1947	Verified	C
Doc's Family Fun Center	Middletown	PA	17057	1962	Verified	C
Tarena Roller Rink	Tarentum	PA	15084	1950	Estimated	C
Ringing Rocks Roller Rink	Pottstown	PA	19464	1956	Verified	C
Palace Skating Center	Philadelphia	PA	19116	1979	Verified	G
Bushkill Park Skating Rink	Easton	PA	18040	1902	Verified	G

LaRose's Skating Rink	Lehighton	PA	18235	1926	Verified	G
Magic Elm Skateland	Hanover	PA	17331	1976	Verified	G
Big Wheel	East Stroudsburg	PA	18301	1977	Verified	G
Skateaway	Wilkes-Barre	PA	18702	1972	Verified	G
Mount Gretna Roller Rink	Lebanon	PA	17042	1930	Estimated	G
Fountainblu Skating Arena	New Cumberland	PA	17070	1973	Verified	G
Skateaway-Shillington	Shillington	PA	19607	1969	Verified	G
Pee Dee Skateland	Marion	SC	29571	1970	Estimated	F
Skate Palace	Spartanburg	SC	29302	1979	Verified	G
Skateland USA	Florence	SC	29501	1970	Estimated	G
Skate Away USA	Greenwood	SC	29649	1974	Verified	G
Roller Sports	Taylors	SC	29687	1969	Verified	G
Jammer's Skating	Orangeburg	SC	29115	1970	Estimated	G
Bristol Skateway	Bristol	TN	37620	1977	Verified	C
Rivergate Skate Center	Goodlettsville	TN	37115	1978	Verified	F
Happy J Skating Rink	Carthage	TN	37030	1970	Verified	G
Woodmere Skating Center	Crossville	TN	38555	1974	Verified	G
Thelma's Skateland	Dyersburg	TN	38024	1963	Verified	G
Star Wheels Skate Center	Fayetteville	TN	37334	1979	Estimated	G
The Hangout	Kimball	TN	37347	1971	Verified	G
Skatetown	Knoxville	TN	37918	1974	Verified	G
Roll Arena Party Zone Maryville	Maryville	TN	37804	1976	Verified	G

East End Skating Center	Memphis	TN	38115	1979	Verified	G
Skateland Raleigh	Memphis	TN	38128	1973	Verified	G
SkateCenter West	Murfreesboro	TN	37129	1977	Verified	G
Thelma's Skateland 2	Union City	TN	38261	1979	Verified	G
Skateland East	San Antonio	TX	78239	1976	Verified	F
Thunderbird Roller Rink	Plano	TX	75075	1973	Verified	F
Skate Ranch	Lubbock	TX	79414	1967	Verified	F
Decatur Skate	Decatur	TX	76234	1955	Verified	F
Car-Vel Skateland South	San Antonio	TX	78223	1970	Verified	G
Granbury Roller Rink	Granbury	TX	76048	1977	Verified	G
Prince's Roller Rink	Highlands	TX	77562	1966	Verified	G
Terrell Skateland	Terrell	TX	75160	1955	Estimated	G
Dad's Broadway Skateland	Mesquite	TX	75150	1961	Verified	G
Playland Skate Center	Austin	TX	78757	1973	Verified	G
Redbird Skateland	Duncanville	TX	75116	1972	Verified	G
Forum Roller World	Grand Prairie	TX	75051	1976	Verified	G
Skateland West	San Antonio	TX	78227	1971	Verified	G
The Rollerade	San Antonio	TX	78216	1959	Verified	G
Rollerland West	Fort Worth	TX	76116	1978	Estimated	G
Humble Family Skate Center	Humble	TX	77338	1977	Verified	G
Sk8 Land Annaville	Corpus Christi	TX	78410	1970	Estimated	G

Dairy Ashford Roller Rink	Houston	TX	77077	1974	Verified	G
Silver Wings Ballroom	Brenham	TX	77833	1976	Verified	G
Rollerworld Northeast	Fort Worth (Haltom City)	TX	76148	1950	Verified	G
Westlake Skate	Garland	TX	75042	1976	Verified	G
Skateplex	Amarillo	TX	79119	1975	Verified	G
Roll Arena	Lubbock	TX	79407	1961	Estimated	G
Skate Ranch	Lufkin	TX	75904	1974	Verified	G
Skate-O-Rama	Nacogdoches	TX	75964	1968	Verified	G
Sherman Skateland	Sherman	TX	75090	1974	Verified	G
Veyo Roller Rink	Veyo	UT	84782	1977	Verified	G
Classic Fun Center of Orem	Orem	UT	84058	1978	Verified	G
Mac's Roller Rink	White Post	VA	22663	1954	Verified	F
Bush Tabernacle	Purcellville	VA	20132	1947	Verified	G
Chester Skateland	Chester	VA	23831	1979	Verified	G
Peninsula Family Skating Center	Newport News	VA	23601	1970	Estimated	G
Skateland Fun Center	Union Gap	WA	98903	1948	Verified	A
Rollarena Skating Center	Richland	WA	99352	1953	Verified	A
Harborena Roller Skating Rink	Hoquiam	WA	98550	1953	Verified	A
Southgate Roller Rink	Seattle	WA	98106	1940	Estimated	A
Centralia Rollerdrome	Centralia	WA	98531	1904	Verified	C
Skate Tiffany's	Puyallup	WA	98371	1969	Verified	F

Pattison's West	Federal Way	WA	98003	1979	Verified	F
Lynnwood Bowl and Skate	Lynnwood	WA	98036	1958	Verified	F
Mustang Grill & Roller Skating	Prosser	WA	99350	1975	Estimated	G
Everett Skate Deck	Everett	WA	98208	1961	Verified	G
Pattison's North	Spokane	WA	99218	1951	Verified	G
Skateland	Olympia	WA	98506	1950	Estimated	G
Auburn Skate Connection	Auburn	WA	98002	1973	Verified	G
Rollareo Skate Center	Cudahy	WI	53110	1979	Verified	A
Skateland-- Cedarburg (Also Ozaukee Skateland)	Cedarburg	WI	53012	1955	Verified	G
Skateland-- Waukesha	Waukesha	WI	53186	1955	Verified	G
Gem Roller Rink	Appleton	WI	54952	1972	Verified	G
Melody Gardens Roller Rink	Marshfield	WI	54449	1974	Verified	G
Galaxie Skate Center	Richland Center	WI	53581	1976	Verified	G
Rola-Rena	Green Bay	WI	54304	1972	Verified	G
High Roller Skating Center	La Crosse	WI	54601	1976	Verified	G
Skate City	Rice Lake	WI	54868	1978	Verified	G
TraXside Skating	Burlington	WI	53105	1978	Verified	G
Rollaire Skate Center	Manitowoc	WI	54220	1956	Verified	C
Skate-A-Way Roller Rink	Fairmont	WV	26554	1950	Estimated	A

Skateland-- Buckhannon	Buckhannon	WV	26201	1950	Verified	G
Roll-a-Rama	Huntington	WV	25701	1962	Verified	G
Skate Country	Parkersburg	WV	26101	1977	Verified	G
Wagon Wheel Roller Skating	Mills	WY	82644	1952	Verified	A
Roller City	Cheyenne	WY	82009	1972	Verified	G
Anacostia Skating Pavilion	Washington D.C.		20020	1976	Verified	F

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