

# Skating On The Creek

by Lynne Belluscio

I was watching with keen interest the Olympic speed skating events. Almost fifty years ago, when my husband was in high school, he spent a lot of time speed skating. In fact, that's how we met – at the rink at Genesee Valley Park in Rochester.

He skated both short track (although nothing like the short track races of today) and the longer distance races. To strengthen his ankles, he skated with his skates loosely laced and he spent hours on the ice. Most of the races in Rochester were held at the natural rink at Cobbs Hill. Eastern meets were held in Cleveland and at Lake Placid. In fact Bob raced in the Olympic trials a couple of times at Lake Placid. Once he started college, he didn't have the time to train and the skating was over, although he always enjoyed strapping on those long bladed kangaroo-hide, racing skates.

When we first moved to LeRoy, people were still skating on the creek. If the green flag was flying and the lights were on, there were people skating. Kids were jammed in the small warming hut. I think one of the most beautiful sights of LeRoy I remember, was sitting at the Creekside on a Friday night in the dead of winter, looking out over the creek, while a gentle snow fell. Out on the creek were fifty or more people skating on the ice. It was a Norman Rockwell scene.

Through the years, there were problems trying to keep the creek cleared for skating. In the '20s, while scraping the ice, a horse fell through, but was rescued. In 1928, they flooded an area behind the high school, but the weather was too warm and the ice wasn't good. In 1929, the weather was great and the rink behind the school was very popular. More recently there were attempts to flood an area behind Wolcott Street School and to install lights, but it was difficult to maintain the berm that held the water in place. There were attempts to flood the tennis courts but the freezing and thawing destroyed the surface of the courts. It's all a memory now.

People wonder why kids today



aren't more active. Think of it. If you want to skate now, you have to find a skating rink and know when it's open to the public. You have to get mom or dad to load everyone into the car and make sure you have the money for admission and renting skates. It's not like throwing your skates over your shoulder and walking down to the creek. I suspect that most kids today don't own ice skates and don't know how to skate.

We have several pair of ice skates in the collection, including a pair with a wooden base and a long curled front blade with acorn finials. These skates were probably manufactured during the Civil War and they belonged to Frank Comstock who was born in LeRoy in 1855. I suspect they were used on the creek.

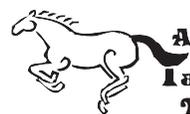
We also have two pair of very long wooden racing skates. One pair was made by the Samuel Winslow Skate Mfg. Co. of Worcester, Massachusetts. The blades are 16 inches long and there are brass fittings in the heel plate with a very long wooden screw that would be screwed into the

wooden heel of your shoe or boot. Two smaller prongs are placed about where the ball of the foot would be. The other pair of racing skates are 18 inch "Donoghue Racing Skates" manufactured by the Union Hardware Company of Torrington, Connecticut. Doing a quick Google search would indicate that both pair of racing

The Donoghues, Tim and J. F. Donoghue, and their father, were some of the fastest skaters in the world in the last part of the 19th Century. Joseph Donoghue won almost every event at the International Championship held in Amsterdam in 1891. In the 1890s it was politically OK to call these skaters a "gay blade."

skates date from the 1890s.

In the wooden bed of the skate are three slots for the leather straps that held the skates to your boot. The Donoghue skate is named for a speed skating family that lived in Newburgh, New York along the Hudson River. This town claims to be the birthplace of American speed skating.



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