

historically speaking

THE WAY IT WAS

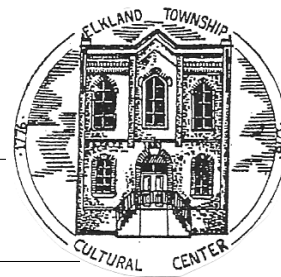
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The Cass City Historical Society met on Wednesday evening, October 16th, at the Rawson Memorial Library for its annual Soup Supper. Those attending enjoyed several kinds of hearty soup along with crackers, breads and desserts. A very interesting program was presented by Al and David Eicher on the "Orphan Train".

If you haven't paid your society dues you can send \$10 for a single and \$15 for a couple to The Cass City Historical Society, Rawson Memorial Library, 6445 Pine St., Cass City, MI 48726.

"Rolling on....."

Roller skating has been an on and off again activity in the community that goes back many years. In 1900 Charles Robinson purchased a building at that time that stood on the corner where Dr. Nahernak's Dental Office is today to start a laundry business. He stated that the building had previously been a creamery, but before that it was a roller skating rink. That building still exists. In 1959 George Janssen bought and moved it to the corner of Sebewaing and Elkton Roads where he operated a store and also sold buffalo burgers.

In 1924 the village celebrated the first paving of one mile of Main Street through town. One of the contests of the celebration was a roller skating race for girls (assumed for a mile), and the prize for first place was \$2.00. Paved sidewalks were necessary for roller skating and the sidewalks on Main Street were the first, and a popular location to skate. The skates at the time had steel wheels. They were strapped over their ankles,

and clamped to the toes of their shoes using skate key to tighten or loosen them. The keys would get strung on a shoe string and hung around the



skaters' necks so they wouldn't lose them. This practice put a lot of wear and tear on the shoes of the day, and it was a usual thing for parents to take their kid's shoes to a local cobbler to have the soles sewed back on. Over the years men such as John Zinnecker, Joe Daez, Joe Riley, Floyd Ottoway and Carl Wright enjoyed the business.

In 1926 The new Cass City School was built with a large gymnasium which had a hardwood floor. Roller skating in the gym became a very enjoyable recreational activity

much to concern of the basketball coach. That's where many people first learned to skate. The coat lockers in the hall outside of the gym were filled with roller skates. Older students often helped the younger students put their skates on for their P.E. Class.

A 1943 summer activities program listed roller skating in the gym and dancing in the library.

Cass City wasn't the only early place to have roller skating. In February of 1925 Amos Webster advertised in the Chronicle that he had a new, electric, player piano for the roller skating music in his roller rink in Deford. Research on the story indicates that his skating arena was on the upper story of a building that later became the former Tuscola County Road Commission Garage. That building had a tragic fire in 1953, and is no longer there.

In December of 1948 the McLellan Brothers built a new, large concrete block roller skating arena with hardwood, maple floors and steel roof trusses to make it a clear span with no supporting

posts in the middle. Jack Warrington was the first operator. There was a rotating globe of cut glass mirrors in the center of the



Former Roller Rink next to McDonalds

ceiling with colored lights from the sides reflecting off from it filling the arena with multicolored light.

The arena was also filled with recorded music from a Wurlitzer organ through several speakers around the arena.



There were shoe skates of all sizes to rent that were a far cry from the old strap-on type. The wheels were wider and made of a hard rubber-like material, and there was a brake at the toe that you could drag to slow down or to stop. Many serious skaters had their own skates along with carrying cases to bring them in.

The arena could be rented for special occasions and groups, but the week-ends were for open skating for everyone at a cost of 50 cents.

Automobiles were not as accessible then for young people as they are now so skaters often came in car loads from surrounding areas. Many who came from places such as Pigeon and Shabbona were regulars. Some of the people in town walked to the arena.

One thing nice about skating was

that you didn't have to have a date. It was normal to come without one, and unlike dancing it was perfectly normal to skate by yourself.

There were several different skating programs with some



requiring some degree of skating ability including skating backwards. "All Skate" meant everyone could skate, however you wanted. "Boys Move Up" was for couples skating, when at the signal the boy would move up and skate with the girl in front of him. The guys liked this one because they got to meet and skate with all the different girls.

This was the "Fifties", a time of innocence and of nostalgia along with a special genre of music when many romances were started at the roller rink. These were the children of who Tom Brokaw named the "Greatest Generation", the generation that fought their way through the Great Depression and the Second World War.

Sooner or later, most couples at least got temporarily separated. Some went off to college, or to find a job. Most of the guys got drafted or enlisted, and went off to do their

military service. Some went to war in Korea, and some got sent to occupied Germany or Japan. Some got married first, and some later. But it was an era that seemed to come to a close in the sixties along with it the popularity of roller skating and the sale of our roller rink to be used for other purposes.

It had been a time that introduced pizza, of black and white television, with "The Colgate Comedy Hour" and Milton Berle, the music of Nat King Cole, The Four Aces and The Four Freshmen with their song, "We'll Remember Always, Graduation Day". It was a time of "I Like Ike", of Billy Graham Crusades and Tennessee Ernie. There were bygone cars such as the Henry J, the Nash Rambler, and the Hudson Hornet that you had to step down to get into.

Other towns had also taken advantage of the popularity of roller skating, and had their own skating rinks. Advertisements appeared in the Chronicle for skating in Bad Axe and Caro. Caseville also had a rink. Roller Skating, however, seems to have been an activity of it's time.

The "Sixties" saw the social atmosphere of the fifties change to a more troubled tone with the resistance of the Viet Nam War, of "Woodstock", the assassinations of President John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. The music of the fifties became the "Moldy Oldies", and resistance movements became a new norm on many fronts, including gender, race, politics and religion.

Although we don't roller skate anymore, all is not lost. The older generation can still savor its fond memories of the good old days, and on Saturday night we can turn up our hearing aides and watch The Lawrence Welk Show in full color on PBS Television.