



The HUB ROLLER RINK

4510 N. Harlem Ave

Chicago, Illinois

*The Hub Roller Rink Opened October 27, 1950
Renamed the "Axle" in 1974 and Closed October 31, 1985*

The History Story

The Hub opened October 27, 1950 on Harlem Avenue, in an area that at that time was quite desolate. For those who know Chicago today, this area is now a mass of malls and shopping activity. At that time there was nothing between the Roller Rink and Irving Park Road. At the corner of that intersection was The Harlem Outdoor Theater, and across the street the State Police HQ. South of Irving Park were some small stores and a few restaurants where many of the Roller Rink Junkies hung out after closing time.

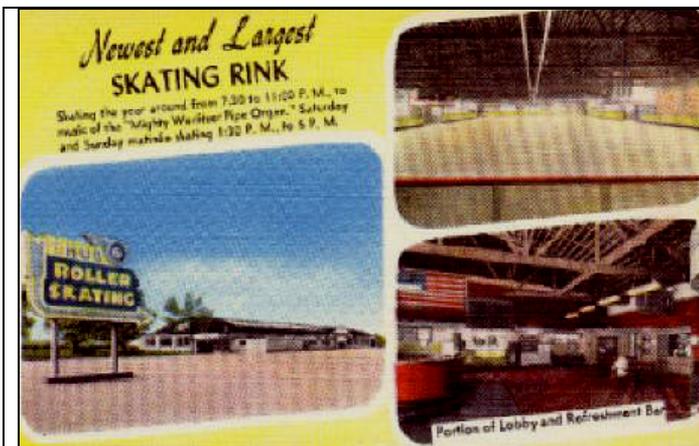
The HUB was a giant in the roller rink world, and it was the home of a giant Wurlitzer pipe organ, originally played by Leon Berry.

The rink was open every night and had matinees Saturday and Sunday. Weekends always found huge crowds, some who never even put on a pair of skates. The lobby area was almost as big as the rink. It had a large oval snack bar, probably 40 feet long, in the center of the lobby. Around the outside walls were cloak rooms, shoe skate rentals, skate sales, skate repairs as well as a small dance floor and a juke box. This is what attracted the non-skaters to the Hub.

The skating area was probably about 275 feet long and some 95 feet wide, and that excludes the area outside the rails that enclosed the main rink. The Program included All Skate, Couples Only, Waltz, Fox Trot, a few fancy dances such as Collegiate and 14 step, and then there was the ROMP! That was when the fun began. It was wild with groups of skaters hands joined whipping around the floor..

Then there were the guards, Bob the head guard, alias the Sheriff, Roy, Troy, George, Elmer, Rich, Jack etc.. And not to be forgotten, the lady guard, Murph...

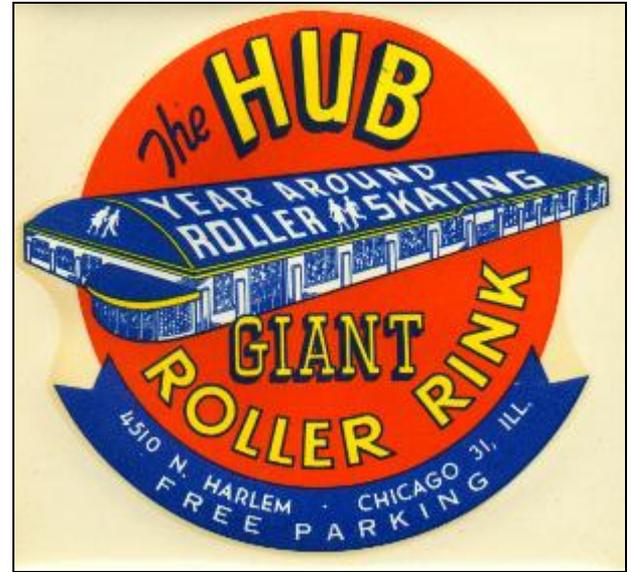
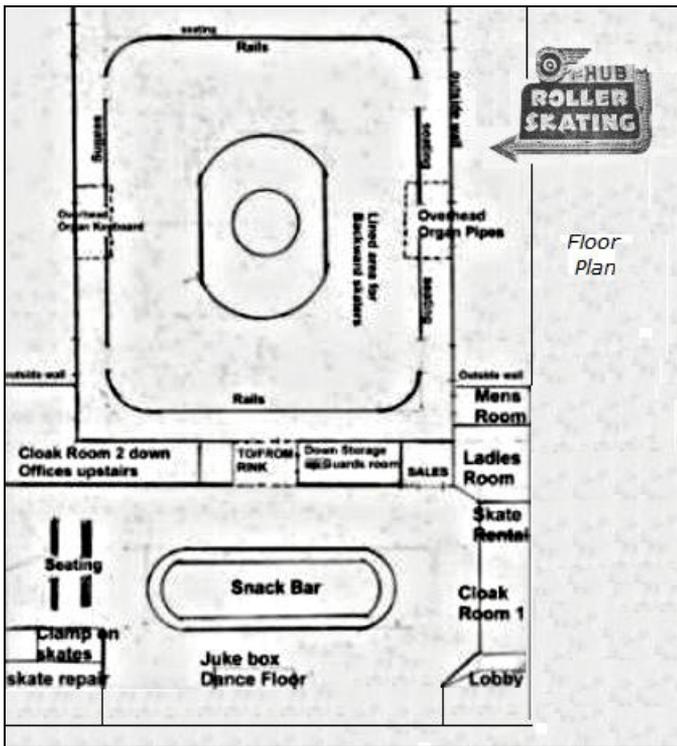
The Hub was a meeting place for many young folks from the Chicago area. Monday was party night and it was often filled to overflow when schools such as Taft, Schurz, St.Mels and other high schools had their parties.



Here is what the SKATE TICKETS looked like.



Here is what the skate RENTAL TICKETS looked like



The giant Wurlitzer pipe organ. Here's a shot of the pipes in the chamber. This magical instrument was referred to as the "Beast in the Basement".



Upstairs the Wurlitzer Organ console orchestrated a special sound. The main organ chest had swell-doors to change the volume, so that as the song reached the wind-up, the swell-doors would open and the music would pour forth!



"Remembering the Hub"

Do I remember the Hub?

Let me paint a picture, there was a glitter ball in the center, which like any dance hall, shone glitter lights all around. There was a sign above the entrance to the skate rental, refreshments, and skate repairs area in front that listed the different types of skating were allowed:

- ALL SKATE** *Just what it says, everyone skates.*
- REVERSE** *During an intermission, people would go the opposite way.*
- COUPLES ONLY** *Just what it says, but with the lights down.*
- TRIO** *Three people linked by hand or arm-in-arm*
- ROMP** *A special 4 person, backwards march, with people skating in-line, to the tune Mickey Mouse Club or Yellow Submarine for example, a terrifically fast, almost dangerous, dance for four that involved a very difficult reverse turn and kick on the corners*
- WALTZ** *A special type dance, which wove in and out, backwards and forwards, in a kind of open "8" pattern on the floor*
- FOX TROT** *Another fast dance for couples which involves a jitterbug step with a backwards inward turn for the guy, wow!*
- LADIES ONLY** *Looking at tight sweaters..., not politically incorrect in the fifties, sixties and seventies*
- INTERMISSION** *Clean up, reverse, for the kids some special event*
- SPECIAL** *The "Backwards Strut" a dance where couples both dance backwards, but with a turn back to face-to-face dancing on the corners, wow, wow, wow!*

There were "guards" who included responsible young people as well as older men. If someone fell, or anything out the ordinary happened, they swooped in with whistles blowing, to isolate the person, and get them off the rink. In the center of the rink was a backwards only inner circle, and places where people could do practice steps, etc.

When a new thing started, the organist would give a keyboard signal "chirp-chirp" for everyone to look at the board to see what was next, and then the guards would whistle everyone not supposed to be out there off the floor. You would hear the sound of the wooden or hard plastic wheels on the maple floor (whhooshhhh...) and then the music would start! A nice little introduction, and then you would just zoom around the floor.



Skates, partner, lights, polished floor... you can almost hear the Wurlitzer Organ vibrating the building!