

## ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: The Elm Skating Rink

The Elm Skating Rink opened its doors in 1956 at 375 W. Roosevelt Road in Elmhurst. Owned by Bill and Lynne Fuchs, the Elm quickly became one of Chicagoland's premier roller-skating rinks. The rink boasted a pair of eye-catching green doors and a distinctive sign out front featuring a giant roller skate. Novices and experts alike came from all over the suburbs to experience the 20,000 square foot hardwood maple floor, one of the largest rinks in the Chicagoland at the time. Its construction was the envy of Chicago rinks, a surface built for speed but also one that absorbed the noise of wooden wheels.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Elm produced top-notch competitive skaters. The rink hosted its first regional competition in 1960, and would go on to host several more in the 1960s. The Elm Skating Club was highly ranked by the Roller Skating Rink Operator's Association (RSROA) during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. But the Elm was more than just a rink for sport—it was a community gathering place. Generations of skaters came to the Elm for shows, dances, and private parties. On weekends, it was a popular place for teenagers to gather and meet outside of a school setting.



*Interior of the Elm Skating Rink, early 1980s. M2018.6.6.*



*Elm Skating Rink at the time of its closure in 1989. M89.1.1.*

One of the most famous features of the Elm was its pipe organ. The instrument was massive, sporting more than one-thousand pipes. For over twenty years, organist Tony Tahlman sat at console, providing the soundtrack to thousands of Elmhurst-area skaters and bringing fame to the Elm Skating Rink. The organ required constant maintenance, and was expanded and customized throughout the decades. When the rink closed in 1989, it took five weeks to dismantle the giant pipe organ.

By the late 1980s, the rink was falling on hard times. Liability insurance was becoming prohibitively expensive, and the ballooning costs almost caused the rink to close in 1985. A fire broke out at the Elm in 1988, causing extensive damage to the building. The waning popularity of roller skating was also difficult for the rink to overcome. The Elm

Skating Rink closed in the spring of 1989 as a place for skaters of all ages to meet, compete, and roller skate to their heart's content. The vaunted Elm organ was put into storage, and the building was demolished. Today, Lexington Square Apartments stand where the Elm once served a community center for suburban skaters.

*By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, February 2022*