

Way We Were

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Skating in our winter wonderland

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A cold breeze on your face, the sound of blades gliding on ice, a wintertime classic: ice skating. It was practiced in Finland perhaps as early as 3,000 years ago, popular in China by the 900s, and adapted by the Dutch in the 1200s. And it has been a favorite pastime of Park City residents since the town's settlement.

Early Parkites took every opportunity to skate each winter. Sometimes they traveled for their opportunities, making excursions to frozen mountain lakes. More often, however, they made do with what they had locally. It was popular to flood flat areas of town, creating small, shallow ponds that froze quickly and were easy to maintain. In 1895, a local lumberman named Weeter gave skaters access to a pond that he maintained in the winter months for that purpose.

In 1908, the local tennis club gave up its courts for use as a rink. In November of that year, the Park Record noted that it had been several years "since there was a skating pond in this city" and that the townspeople were looking forward to it. The courts were flooded "by means of a fire-hose connected to a Main Street hydrant," and it was hoped that "good, strong ice" would form by Thanksgiving. A spate of warm weather days prevented that from happening, but the courts did serve as entertainment and exercise later that winter. The set-up was popular enough to return the following year.

Before modern technology, ice skating was almost exclusively an outdoor, winter-only activity. Fickle Mother Nature determined when a season started and how long it lasted. While 1908 saw a delayed start to winter, 1914 was cold enough that an ice pond maintained by Charles Haueter "attracted crowds...[of] old and young" on Thanksgiving day, "a big day for the skaters, the good ice being the only attraction outside of many good dinners at the various homes."

Over the years, Parkites from all corners of town indulged in the skating spirit. Local firemen flooded the ball fields in 1928, and the Junior Chamber of Commerce constructed a rink at the city playground in 1937. And in 1939, residents indulged in games of softball on ice, even floating the idea of a state tournament or series of exhibition competitions hosted in Park City.

Local stores offered specials on skates each winter, including McPhearson's, which gave away a pair of skates with each purchase of a boy's suit. At Paull Bros. & Wilson, a pair of skates cost between \$1.50 and \$1.85. Locals also posted notices of skates for sale by individuals.

We're less confined by the weather these days, given the popularity of indoor rinks, but there are still outdoor opportunities and ice skating remains a classic winter pastime. Bundle up warm, lace up some skates, and enjoy yourself!



Image ID: 1996.15.11

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum

Caption: A note on the back of this photo identifies Carrie Vivian Hodgson and two unnamed friends enjoying a skating pond here in Park City in the 1940s or 1950s.