

BARBARA KELLY: The history of the Skating Club of Lake Placid 'for dummies,' Part I

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This week The Skating Club of Lake Placid will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the official recognition of the fledgling club by the United States Figure Skating Association (USFSA) in 1933. As the current historian of the club, I feel that it is important that new generations of Lake Placid residents should understand the importance that figure skating played, not only in our sports culture, but in the economic health of the community during the 1930s and 40s. So, my column this week will be an attempt at presenting the Skating Club History for "Dummies," which will continue with Part 2 next week.

From the beginning of the 1920's, there was a U.S. Figure Skating-sanctioned skating club sponsored by the Lake Placid Club called the "Sno Birds," but it was not a local skating club. The Sno Birds held their own competitions and skaters came from all over to compete for coveted trophies. The officers and directors of this club were not local and they held their competitions in the winter on the Club's flooded tennis courts. It was the Sno Birds that hosted the annual meeting of the U.S. and Canadian Skating Associations in 1921, at which the United States Figure Skating Association was formed.

When the Olympic Arena opened in 1932, the Sno Birds rented ice from Jack Garren to hold their first indoor competition. Some of our talented young local skaters during those early years, including Lorraine Bryant, Clara Wilkins, Sadie Pelky and Helen Carter, were asked to give exhibitions at Sno Birds events. Later on, these girls became our local club champions and joined professional ice shows.

In 1932, following the Olympic Winter Games, H.L. (Jack Garren) wanted to be able to hold shows and competitions at the new arena, so he formed a board of directors with Rollie J. Kennedy as president (also listed as Chairman of the North Elba Park Commission) and himself as a director and executive secretary and applied to the "U.S. Figure Skating Association" on July 26 of 1932 for membership under the name of The Adirondack Skating Club. The board of officers and directors reads like a 1930's "Whos Who" in Lake Placid. In addition to Garren and Kennedy, officers of the club were: J. Vernon Lamb; Clarence Eccleston; William J. O'Hare; and Robert F. Isham. The directors were Honorable James Shea; Willis Wells; William N. Lamb; Benjamin Bull; Deo Colburn; E.C. Paarman and George Lattimer, editor of the Lake Placid News.

The membership application by Garren, requesting to be included in the USFSA, was accepted that summer in order that competitions and “carnivals” could be held that year under the auspices of the new club. However, it was not formalized, according to “Skating Magazine,” until the next Governing Council Meeting in 1933. In 1936, the Adirondack Club requested a name change to the Skating Club of Lake Placid and was granted the change at the U.S Governing Council in 1937. The officers and board of directors were essentially the same under both names.

The Adirondack Skating Club (newly renamed the Skating Club of Lake Placid) and the town of North Elba worked together in the 1930s to produce, with live music, some of the most beautiful skating “carnivals” in the country, starring the best skaters in both the United States and Canada. Gus Lussi was commissioned by Jack Garren to choreograph and produce the early shows, and Gus introduced creative lighting, elaborate sets and painted ice. He also brought in Canadian skaters from the Toronto and Minto skating clubs. When Gus left to join a commercial ice show in 1937, Walter Arian and his wife Edna (a choreographer) from the Toronto Club took over the job vacated by Gus Lussi, who later returned to serve as one of the most prominent and successful figure skating coaches in the world.

During the depression and World War II, the income generated by these well-attended skating events and the summer skating, which drew the best skaters in North America, was a major influence in helping our community survive those difficult years.

A reception to honor the Skating Club of Lake Placid’s 75th Anniversary will be held in the Winter Olympic Museum on Thursday, the 11th of December, during The U.S. Junior Nationals Competiton, which we are honored to hold in our historical ice facility, under the auspices of ORDA and the Skating Club of Lake Placid.

The History of the Skating Club of Lake Placid “for dummies” part 2

**THE RECEPTION:** In the Winter Olympic Museum, at the Olympic Center on Thursday December 11th, there was a reunion of figure skaters and supporters of figure Skating. They gathered at a reception, hosted by the Skating Club of Lake Placid, to remember and honor the 75 years that the Skating Club has occupied a special place in the hearts and lives of the community. The present Skating Club of Lake Placid members, Officers, Directors and high level skaters had a chance to mingle and talk with skaters and volunteers prominent in past decades. It was an ideal time to celebrate the anniversary, as top USFSA officials and judges were

in town for the Junior National Figure Skating Championships. Many were aware of our history and had been coming for years to Lake Placid to officiate at competitions and other events. At the reception, I got a chance to discuss our club's current status with Lucy Brennan, an official referee and judge from New York City. Lucy has often served as a judge at the World's most prestigious figure Skating events, including Olympics and other International competitions. She was a US judge on the infamous Olympic panel of judges for Ice Dancing, when the French judge was caught cheating and caused a scandal that eventually changed the entire marking system.

Current President of the Skating Club, Iris Gladd, introduced special guest, adult skater and Secretary of the skating club, Rosemary Gole. Rosemary presented Club skater, Christie Sousa, with a new perpetual trophy in honor of David Drake, donated by the Adult Skating Camp in Drakes honor.

**THE PARTNERSHIP:** During the years prior to the 1980 Olympics and the subsequent take over by the State agency ORDA, the Skating Club of Lake Placid and the Town of North Elba worked together, each one doing their part to make Lake Placid a prime destination for figure skating. On every show program, advertisement and competition announcement, the two groups got equal billing. The Skating Club provided the volunteers and "sanctions" that the town needed in order to hold any events in which members of the US and "Canadian Skating Associations skated.

**SANCTIONS:** A Skating club could lose their membership in the Association for holding an unsanctioned event, and skaters who participated in an unsanctioned event could be disqualified and lose their membership. Each skating club has a "sanctions" officer.

**THE TOWNS RESPONSIBILITY:** In return, management at the Olympic Arena did their part by providing ice, office services, advertising and production assistance. By working closely together, Lake Placid had one of the most successful programs in the country. The rink management and the club were true partners with respect for each other. Without this partnership, a small town such as Lake Placid could never have competed with the growing number of big city clubs that were soon running summer programs.

**FIRSTS:** The Skating Club of Lake Placid has many FIRSTS which throughout its history it has sanctioned and sponsored:

FIRST-----Winter Olympic Games in the USA-----1932



social ice dancing followed by a ranking ice dance competition, which attracted the adult ice dancers from clubs all over the country and Canada. In the summer, the local kids were not forgotten and many of them, including myself, were able to be on the ice with skaters such as Dick Button, Eileen Seigh and Bill Grimditch. We were also able to skate in the group numbers in the two summer shows, one in July and the other over Labor Day weekend. Most of us club skaters could not afford lessons from the summer pros, but we did a fair amount of learning by hanging out near the bull pen on the side of the 1932 rink where, among others, Gus Lussi, Howard Nicholson and Walter Arian taught lessons. I learned to spin by watching Gus teach our national competitors. I also attended evening social ice dance classes and found myself a partner who was then at my level, John Ladue from Plattsburgh.

When the Garren family left Lake Placid in 1949 for Troy, bobsledder Stanley Benham became the arena manager. In the 1950s, one of our club senior ladies was Phyllis Krinovitz, (Feinberg) of Saranac Lake, who was club Senior Ladies Champion in 1952. Another headliner during this period was Aldrina Lebel, who not only did figure skating but was a speed skater and, along with her brothers Leo and Kenny, was a champion barrel jumper.

Almost all ice shows during the early years featured comedy routines. Ted Cave was a nationally recognized comedian on ice, who moved to Lake Placid in the 1940s and never left town. Before coming to Lake Placid, Ted was a popular entertainer in professional ice shows. For more than 20 years he performed for the Skating Club of Lake Placid and supported his family here by running his own disposal service.

Barbara Burgoyne Colby was the club professional during the 1960s and she choreographed all the club shows during that period. As a young woman, she came to Lake Placid to train in the 1950s and stayed on to marry one of our popular local athletes, William (Bill) Colby. Today she still skates and teaches for the Skating Club of Lake Placid.

Jack and Joan Devitt were the teaching professionals for the Skating Club from November 1969 until March 1984. They coached a local pair, Leeanne and Jeff Labrake to National competition, once at the junior level, winning a bronze and the following year to senior level. The Devitts coached other locals who placed in pairs, dance and freestyle in North Atlantic and Eastern Sectionals. Jack and Joan also coached non-locals from Canada and the U.S. to gold medals in figures and free style, and to national and international competition. During the Devitts 15-

year tenure with the club, they choreographed and produced 14 shows and skating portions of the opening ceremonies of the first Skate America. The Devitts continue to teach privately and for the club.

In 1981, the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) and the town of North Elba (that owns the Olympic Center building) signed a contract with the Skating Club of Lake Placid. The contract stipulated that in return for ORDA providing ice for the Skating Club of Lake Placid sessions, the club would provide volunteers for all the competitions and test sessions, and also skaters for corporate shows. The town of North Elba agreed to contribute to ORDA a sum of money each year to support the programs at the Olympic Center for our local children, such as those run by the Skating Club of Lake Placid and the Pee Wee Hockey Association.

The years following the 1980 Olympics brought many changes.

Ned Harkness, who was a hockey and lacrosse coach, became the new administrator of the Olympic Center for ORDA. As he was more inclined toward hockey, it seems to me that the figure skating program suffered as a result. It will take me another column to bring the Skating Club history from 1980 to 2009.