

Highland County Historical Society celebrates 50th anniversary, Part XXXIV

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It might be pleasant during this hot week in September to anticipate ice skating on a thick, ice-covered pond or outdoor rink in the frozen tundra galloping toward us.



It is time to get out our boot skates and give them a good going over before the season so quickly advancing actually arrives.

Perhaps you have a pair that easily slip on and off with an adjustable dual buckle closure system and an interior lining providing warmth and comfort.

Or, maybe a pair with plush fur around the ankles for warmth and anatomic padded footbeds for all-day comfort.

Is the boot made of soft leather, hard construction, quilted patent, cloth or reptile? Do they have micro-adjustable memory buckles?

I would need the easily adjustable double runner wide blades with padded liner.

Are yours specifically for recreational, figure, racing or hockey skating? Whichever, they most probably have carbon steel blades. It seems to me that wherever or whenever people came into contact with ice, there must have been sliding and instant effort to slide faster on some sort of conveyance. Historians say that ice skating originated in Ancient Europe. It is a safe bet it probably wasn't in Africa or South America, right? My almost weekly Internet search reveals this week on inventors.about.com that the oldest pair of skates known date back to about 3000 B.C., found at the bottom of a lake in Switzerland.

The skates were made from the legbones of large animals, holes were bored at each end of the bone and leather straps were used to tie the skates on.

An old Dutch word for skate is "schenkel," which means "leg bone."

A 2008 study proposed that ice skates might have first been invented in Finland – where the many lakes would have resulted in energy savings for early Finns, who could then skate across the lakes rather than walk across or around them.

Around the 14th century, the Dutch started using wooden platform skates with flat, iron bottom runners which were attached to the skater's shoes with leather straps. Double-edged blades were added around 1500. The first closed-toe boot with steel blade

attached was invented in 1914.

A very fine pair of mid-19th century skates are owned by the Highland County Historical Society and on display in the Pioneer Hallway of the Highland House courtesy of Mr. R.E. Evans, a generous benefactor of items to the Society.

He presented those pictured here on Jan. 16, 2001. Do you suppose it was just after a last glide around a frozen farm pond? Possibly, it is only because they are now protected under glass that you are not asking to try them out yourself.