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Let's meet at The Bal-A-Roue

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Life in the Ville by Jimmy Del Ponte

(The opinions and views expressed in the commentaries of The Somerville Times belong solely to the authors of those commentaries and do not reflect the views or opinions of The Somerville Times, its staff or publishers)

Originally published on October 6, 2010.

A big fat Hammond B-3 organ. Railings surrounding a wooden oval floor, and hundreds of kids on roller skates! The roller-skating rink was called The Bal-A-Roue, and if you grew up in Medford, Somerville or surrounding areas, you remember it.

I believe the historic skating rink was situated where the Century Bank building is now, on Mystic Avenue in Medford. Some say that it opened as far back as 1915 and lasted into the early to mid 1980s, according to the sources we could find.

When we were kids, it was the place to go, on the weekends. Remember the logo that was (I think) a monkey holding a pair of roller skates? There are tons of Bal-A-Roue memories out there. There is even a Facebook page dedicated to the former wheeled hotspot.

You could take roller skating lessons there and even join a speed skating team. Some former patrons actually just held a reunion for those skating enthusiasts of the past. Do you remember barrels of burning wood to keep the place warm in the winter? There was a reminder on the public address system saying "...please stay away from the barrels." My, how safety laws have changed.

Did you ever skate full speed right into the girl's room? Some kids snuck beer into the Bal-A-Roue through a hole in the men's room wall.

The April 4, 1947 edition of the newspaper *Roller Skater's World Tattler* had these headlines: "Next big event will be the State of Mass Amateur Championship Contests...at the Bal-A-Roue, Monday and Tuesday April 21 and 22."

A lot of us had our first dates at the Bal-A-Roue, like John and Heather, who are still married! It was a great place to have Girl Scout and Cub Scout parties too. My friend Billy recalls an Alice Cooper party that featured the band The Modern Lovers, featuring Jonathan Richmond. I actually found a clip on YouTube of people skating at the Bal-A-Roue. Man, those skating skirts were short, and the men's pants were really baggy! In the 70's they featured disco nights at the rink.



I was talking to my friend Steve Hardy who was the player/coach of a group of Somerville roller hockey players from the Mystic projects area. They went undefeated for three years, playing other teams such as Piro's Pipers. Some of the Somerville Bal-A-Roue hockey team members were Billy Cardalino, Stevie Greenwood, Billy Gaudette, Steve and Mike O'Donnell, Johnny Bains, and Dave Greenleaf.

From reading various Facebook posts, I discovered that the Bal-A-Roue was owned by George and Mary Pyche. Their son Marc currently runs Skateland in Bradford.

The mighty Juvenile Boys Relay Team from the Bal-A Roue won the State and Regional Championship in 1967. They were coached by John Holland and some of the members were Ronnie Pyche, Mike Fennelly, John Zucco, and again, my friend Billy Gaudette. Be sure to visit The National Museum of Roller Skating site.

I couldn't end this story without mentioning Kemp's Hamburgers which was across the street from the rink. Back then the cheeseburgers were like 18 cents I believe. For a dollar you could get your weekly supply of yummy cholesterol.

I think we need a place like the Bal-A Roue in the Somerville today. How about The Ville-A-Roue? We had so much fun back then. It seems everyone I spoke to had great memories of that happy place. We couldn't wait for the weekends. We actually *needed* a full week for our butts to stop hurting from all the falling.

And remember, no skating backwards!

If you found this article of interest, please consider sharing it.



5 Responses to "Let's meet at The Bal-A-Roue"

Elsie jennings says:

July 13, 2017 at 11:49 am

That was my Friday night place every weekend for a couple of years loved it

Marilyn Publicover says:

December 30, 2017 at 11:33 am

I loved weekends at the Roue in the late 50s.

Marilyn Publicover says:

December 30, 2017 at 11:35 am

Lots of good clean safe fun. A great place to meet new friends.

BMac says:

January 1, 2018 at 10:31 pm

OK, now I want brunch at the original Caroll's

JOHN DINEEN says:

April 16, 2018 at 10:25 am

On Apr 23, 1952 met a wonderful girl there. 2 years, 8 months and 8 days later we were married. Been married since, 62 plus years. Hoping for at least 10 more.

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