Roller Skates
The Invention of the Wheel

**Early 1700s** - In Holland, an unknown Dutchman decided to go ice skating in the summer; ice skating was the widespread method used in the Netherlands to travel the numerous frozen canals in winter. The unknown inventor accomplished dry land skating by nailing wooden spools to strips of wood and attaching them to his shoes. 'Skeelers' was the nickname given to the new dry-land skaters.

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The Invention of the Wheel
By Mary Bellis
Most people use roller skates for fun, but the first roller skates were used for transportation in Holland — as “ice skates” for summer.

**Roll Away**

No one knows the name of Holland’s first roller skate inventor, but the first recorded inventor of roller skates was Jean-Joseph Merlin of Belgium. In 1760, Merlin wore his metal-wheeled, in-line skate boots to show to guests at a party. He had not yet found a way to stop, however, and he crashed into a mirror.
Get Your Skates On!
In 1863, James L. Plimpton designed a quad roller skate. It had two pairs of wheels, on the heel and the toe, making it easier for skaters to turn. In 1866, he opened his own skating rink in New York City.

In 1884, Levant Richardson, of Chicago, Illinois, made roller skates go faster and more smoothly by adding steel ball bearings to the wheels.

Back In-Line
In 1980, two brothers from Minnesota, Scott and Brennan Olson, found an old pair of in-line skates and improved the design to use them for summer hockey practice. They founded Rollerblade, Inc., to produce their in-line skates.

Fun Facts
- **1700s**
  An unknown Dutchman attaches wooden spools to boards under his shoes to make rolling wheels for skates.
- **1760**
  Jean-Joseph Merlin crashes into a mirror while wearing the roller skates he invented.
- **1863**
  James Plimpton designs the quad skate.
- **1884**
  Levant Richardson patents ball bearings.
- **1960s**
  Plastic wheels make roller skates lighter and easier to use.
- **1980**
  Scott and Brennan Olson bring back in-line roller skates with Rollerblades.
Interesting Fact

Joseph Merlin of Huy, Belgium invented the roller skates. To introduce his invention he entered the ballroom-playing violin in 1759. Unfortunately he did not know how to stop and crashed into a full-length mirror, breaking his violin.

Who Invented Roller Skates?
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Fun Facts

- On December 9 in 1884 ball-bearing roller skates were patented by Levant Richardson of Chicago.
- Early roller skates were wheeled frames that clamped onto shoes.
- Roller derbies are races between teams wearing roller skates.
- Roller blades were invented in 1979 by Scott and Brennan Olson, two professional hockey players.
- Many of the first roller skates had 4 wheels in a straight line.
THE HISTORY OF ROLLER SKATES

Early 1700s
The unknown inventor accomplished dry land skating by nailing wooden spools to strips of wood and attaching them to his shoes. 'Skeelers' was the nickname given to the new dry-land skaters.

1760 - A London instrument maker and inventor, Joseph Merlin, attended a masquerade party wearing one of his new inventions, metal-wheeled boots.

1818 - In Berlin, roller skates made a more graceful entrance into society, with the premier of the German ballet. The ballet called for ice-skating but because it was impossible at that time to produce ice on a stage, roller skates substituted.

1819 - In France, the first patent for a roller skate issued. The skate was made of a wood sole that attached to the bottom of a boot, fitted with two to four rollers made of copper, wood or ivory, and arranged in a straight single line.

1823 - Robert John Tyers of London patented a skate called the 'Rolito' with five wheels in a single row on the bottom of a shoe or boot.
1857 - Huge public rinks opened in the Floral Hall and in the Strand of London.

1863 - American, James Plimpton found a way to make a very useable pair of skates. Plimpton's skates had two parallel sets of wheels, one pair under the ball of the foot and the other pair under the heel. The four wheels were made of boxwood and worked on rubber springs.

1884 - The invention of pin ball-bearing wheels made rolling easier and skates lighter.

1902 - The Coliseum in Chicago opened a public skating rink. Over 7,000 people attended the opening night.

1908 - Madison Square Gardens in New York became a skating rink. Hundreds of rink openings in the United States and Europe followed. The sport was becoming very popular and various versions of the roller skating developed: recreational skating on indoor and outdoor rinks, polo skating, ballroom roller dancing and competitive speed skating.

1960s - Technology (with the advent of plastics) helped the wheel truly come of age with new designs.
The late 70's through mid 80' - A second big skating boom occurred with the marriage of disco and roller-skating. Over 4,000 roller-discos were in operation and Hollywood began making roller-movies.

1979 - Scott Olson and Brennan Olson, brothers and hockey players who lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, found an antique pair of roller skates. It was one of the early skates that used the 'in-line' wheels rather than the four-wheeled parallel design of George Plimpton. Intrigued by the in-line design, the brothers began redesigning roller skates.

1983 - Scott Olson founded Rollerblade, Inc. and the term 'rollerblading' meant the sport of in-line skating because Rollerblade, Inc. was the only manufacturer of in-line skates for a long time.

1989 - Rollerblade, Inc. produced the Macro and Aeroblades models, the first skates fastened with three buckles instead of long laces that needed threading.

1990 - Rollerblade, Inc. switched to a glass-reinforced thermoplastic resin (durethan polyamide) for their skates. This decreased the average weight of skates by nearly fifty percent.

1993 - Rollerblade, Inc. developed ABT or 'Active Brake Technology'. The new brake design increased safety.
History

Wooden skate runners were first used in Holland in the 14th century. The network of canals in this country froze in the winter, forming highways over which skaters traveled. Skating became popular in England in the 17th century, and the Members of the Skating Club of Edinburgh was formed in 1742.

It was in the 1740s that British servicemen introduced ice skating to North America. It was popular at the French court around 1776; the French queen Marie Antoinette was among the skaters. Napoleon Bonaparte skated at Auxerre in 1781.

The first known speed skating race in England took place in 1814. The first race for amateurs took place in 1823. The London Skating Club for figure skating was founded in 1842. E.W. Bushnell of Philadelphia invented the first all steel ice skates in 1848. The first skating club of the United States was formed in 1849.

Another American, Jackson Haines, further developed skating. He was a ballet master who went to Vienna during the mid-1860s. The aimless skaters he saw there gave him the idea of skating to music. He became a dancing teacher of ice skaters, and this new form of skating was soon very popular. Haines was called the "American Ice master." He later developed roller skate ballets. All modern figure skating grew out of his efforts.
History
More than 2,000 years ago in Scandinavia (Denmark, Sweden, and Norway), people started skating over ice as a means of transportation. The first known instance of skating on rollers was in 1760, in England. But these skates could only go straight ahead. In 1819 a French inventor named Petitbled devised a skate with two, three, or four wheels in a straight line. The wheels were made of wood, ivory, or metal.

In 1863 the American James Plimpton made a four-wheeled skate, and the sport of roller skating became popular. His skates permitted movement sideways as well as forward and backward. When it became apparent that roller skaters could now do all the movements that ice skaters could do, arenas for roller skating were built. These attracted many people to the sport. In-line skates became very popular beginning in the 1980's. Roller shoes were introduced in 2000. Today millions of people everywhere enjoy the many forms of roller skating.