

SOUTHEAST MISSOURIAN

For fans of Jackson Skating Center, time rolls on

By Lindsay Jones ~ Southeast Missourian
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Steve Turner salvages wood from the razed Jackson Skating Center rink Monday in Jackson. (Fred Lynch)

For children of the 1970s, '80s and '90s, the death of Jackson Skating Center is a solemn occasion.

"I felt like I was watching my childhood crumble," said 36-year-old Kia Abernathy, who once circled the floor there regularly and happened to drive by in recent days, only to realize the cherished old venue was being torn down.

Janet Sanders, the city of Jackson's building and planning superintendent, said the former rink at 1102 S. Main St. has been demolished, and only an adjoining business stands on the concrete foundation left behind.

"I don't know of any plans they have to do to [the property]," Sanders said, saying the wooden structure was "beyond saving."

One of the owners of the former skating rink, Brian Wilson of Wilson's Paint & Body Works in Jackson, could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Although it is unclear when Jackson Skating Center closed and how long it had fallen into disrepair, Abernathy remembers it being open the Wednesday evening in 1999 when she broke a bone there. Admission was discounted that night but "Mom said that wasn't very cheap."

A Southeast Missourian article from January 1998 talks about the rink being alive and well -- "augmented with the latest video games" -- and how "the social life of Jackson's youngsters and teenagers orbited a fixed point" there for decades.

Built in 1952 by Elmer Seabaugh and Rock Wilferth, the facility started as Jackson Skate Rink. In 1954, Seabaugh and his wife, Jean, bought the rink and renamed it Roll-O-Fun after adding a lunch counter and recreation room in 1960. Cliff Wilson of Kennett, Brian Wilson's father, bought the rink in 1983, dubbing it the Jackson Skating Center.

"Wilson ... bought the rink when skating was at one of its popularity peaks, probably because disco was still in fashion ..." the article said.

The facility was still going strong in the early to mid-1990s when 36-year-old Nick Murphy worked there as a deejay. He was 15 at the time and proudly refers to himself and his old friends as devoted "rink rats."

"That rink is a place I'll never forget, because I can't," he wrote in an email.

He continued: "It was more than just an old building -- it was home to us. When I saw photos of it being torn down, it felt like a piece of myself was being torn down with it."

Murphy is a filmmaker in Los Angeles and heard about the demolition via social media.

Josh Johnson, who lives in St. Louis and grew up a few blocks from the skating rink, also has fond memories. He wrote in an email: "It seems like yesterday I was rollerblading on the wooden rink, feeling every groove -- the sounds of the '90s pop radio echoing from the rink, the other kids hanging by the walls, and the disco ball in the corner glistening and casting sparkles on the floor."

He said he blew plenty of money playing arcade games such as Mortal Kombat and Pac-Man, Primal Rage and San Francisco Rush: Alcatraz Edition. He was forever ogling the assortment of candies at the snack counter, too.

"When I saw the pictures of the skating rink being torn down, I nearly welled up," he wrote. "That place was a part of my childhood I won't see again. All the memories flooded back. The vivid purple walls were faded and crumbled."

And now those walls have come tumbling down.

Added Abernathy: "I hate it my children never got to experience the skating rink, [but] what I hate more is that we're losing another piece of Jackson history."

ljones@semissourian.com

388-3652

Pertinent address: 1102 W. Main St., Jackson

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