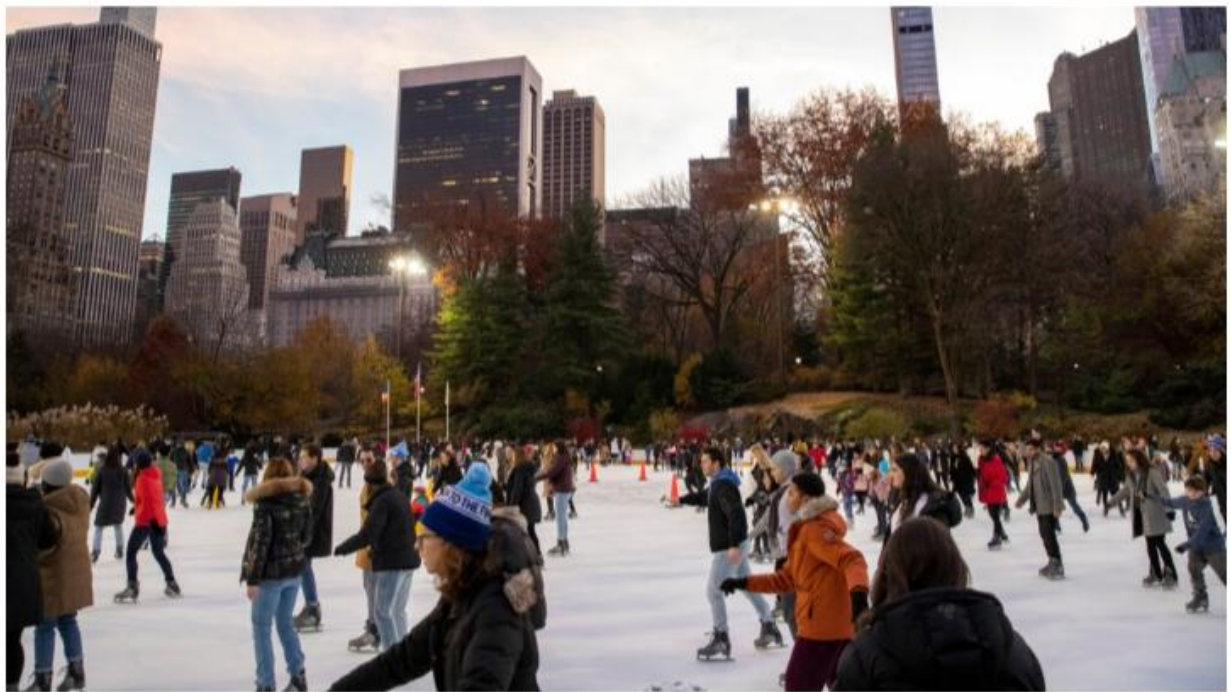


history

Central Park's Wollman Rink, which the Trump Organization hopes to run again, was named for this Jewish family

Trump famously touted his successful renovation and operation of the rink during his 2016 presidential campaign. But first, the rink was built by a prominent and philanthropic Jewish family.



Park-goers enjoy a skate on Wollman Rink. (Liao Pan/China News Service via Getty Images)

By [Jackie Hajdenberg](#) March 26, 2025

Central Park's Wollman Rink, which is named for a philanthropic Jewish family, is back in the news.

The city is embarking upon a “politically charged” search for a new operator for the popular ice skating rink, which generates \$13 million in revenue for its current operator, the Related Companies. As Crain’s New York Business reports, [President Trump’s family business, the Trump Organization, is reportedly competing against Related](#), one of the city’s largest real estate developers, for a lucrative, 20-year contract to operate the rink, starting in 2027.

Famously, the Trump Organization renovated the then-decrepit rink in 1986, and operated it from 1987 until 2021, when it was known as Trump Wollman Rink. Trump frequently boasted about the successful project on the campaign trail in 2016: As Curbed reported, “Remember the Wollman Rink in Central Park?’ [Trump asked in Iowa during the primary](#), speaking to a crowd that only vaguely knew what he was talking about. ‘They couldn’t do it. I knocked it up in four months.’”

That all came to an end when former Mayor Bill de Blasio canceled the Trump Organization’s contracts after the Jan. 6 Capitol riot in 2021. But now, as the city looks to the rink’s future, the Trump family business has thrown their hat into the ring (er, rink).

But who exactly were the Wollmans, for whom the popular rink was — and still is — named?

As it turns out, the Wollmans were a fascinating Jewish family, whose all-American story begins in Prussia.

Family patriarch Jonas Wollman was born in 1824 in Kempen, Prussia (now Germany). He sailed to New York in 1851. Wollman then moved to St. Louis, where he met and married Betty Kohn, the daughter of Jewish immigrants from Bohemia, and they headed further west to Leavenworth, Kansas, where they established a successful clothing business that later expanded into dry goods and other items.

Wollman became a United States citizen in 1858, according to [records held by the State Historical Society of Kansas](#), and also founded Leavenworth's first Reform synagogue, Temple B'Nai Jeshurun, and served as its vice president.

The Wollmans were known for their anti-slavery views, and occasionally were threatened by "pro-slavery forces," according to the 2015 book "Lincoln and the Jews," by Benjamin Shapell and Jonathan Sarna. When Abraham Lincoln visited Leavenworth to deliver what some consider his [first presidential campaign speech](#) in December 1859, [it was reported](#) he either dined in the Wollmans' home or with the Wollmans at another local abolitionist's home.

Wollman volunteered to serve in the Union Army in 1864, where he served for two weeks in the Kansas State Militia before being honorably discharged.

Jonas and Betty Wollman had eight children: Rosa, Morton, Henry, Etta, William, Kate, Benjamin and Lillian. Through Etta, they became the great-grandparents of Henry and Richard Bloch — the founders of tax preparation company H&R Block.

Following Jonas' death in 1905, Betty moved to New York City, where she, and occasionally some of her adult children, lived on West 70th Street in a 22-room apartment across from the [Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, the oldest congregation in the United States](#), whose building next to Central Park was constructed in 1897. Several of the Wollman children were already living in New York, and extended family would often stay at the large home on the Upper West Side.

Daughter Kate Wolman, born in 1870, was the last survivor of her immediate family. After moving out of the West 70th Street apartment, she moved into the Waldorf-Astoria hotel.

In 1949, [Kate donated \\$600,000 toward the construction of the public rink in memory of her parents and four brothers](#), which was built in 1950. A portrait of her mother, Betty, hangs near the concession stand to this day. (A [1951 New York Times article](#) notes that, although Kate Wollman enjoyed watching the children skate, she herself did not partake in the activity.)



Men and women watch ice skaters at Wollman Rink, April 1956. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Anthony Angel Collection, LC-DIG-ppmsca-69954)

At a Dec. 21, 1950 [dedication ceremony](#) for the rink and adjacent playground, New York City Mayor Vincent Impellitteri said Kate Wollman had “added something of real value to our park system.”

“Those children, every day of the week, will thank you for this playground, for this skating rink,” Impellitteri said, adding, “And I’m positive that when they go to their respective churches on Sundays, or on their particular Sabbath day, somehow or another, you will be rewarded, because I’m positive that they will remember you, and the members of your family, in their prayers.”

Kate Wollman died in 1955, and another rink, the Kate Wollman Memorial Rink at Prospect Park (now called the LeFrak Center at Lakeside), built in 1961, is named after her.

The family’s philanthropic efforts were not limited to skating rinks, however. In 1957, the William J. Wollman Foundation — which was set up by Kate — [gave out \\$6.6 million in grants](#) to multiple Jewish hospitals and charitable organizations, including Mt. Sinai Hospital, Maimonides Hospital, the New York Guild for the Jewish Blind, the Jewish Child Care Association of New York, the 92nd St. YM-YWHA, and Albert Einstein College of Medicine at Yeshiva

University. According to a [JTA report from the time](#), the grants “virtually exhaust[ed] the foundation’s assets.”

From 1950 to 1980, Wollman Rink was managed by the Central Park “system” — predating the nonprofit Central Park Conservancy — until the need for major repairs became apparent. It closed for several years, before being renovated by the Trump Organization in 1986. (In 1987, the New York Times wrote that [Trump reported “a large profit” on the venture](#), exceeding expectations.)

Just days after the 2024 election, the New York City Parks Department announced that Wollman Rink was looking for a new operator after the contract with Related (which runs the rink in a partnership with Equinox and Harris Blitzer Sports and Entertainment) expires in 2027. [That very same day, Nov. 13](#), the Trump Organization announced it would submit a proposal to run the rink again.

Not everyone is pleased by this development: In an op-ed published in AMNY on Wednesday, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine — who is Jewish and is running for city comptroller — writes: “[A proxy war against Trump’s anti-New York agenda has come to our city’s parkland](#), and we must not allow Trump to win it.”

Furthermore, as many New Yorkers lambaste Mayor Eric Adams [for seemingly cozying up to Trump](#), any potential deal to operate the rink is being closely watched. [As the New York Times wrote earlier this month](#): “There is no indication that the mayor’s office has advocated for the Trump Organization. But the situation is awkward nonetheless as the city’s Department of Parks and Recreation must evaluate a business owned by a family to which Mr. Adams is seemingly indebted.”

The ice skating rink is now closed for the season. Come Friday, April 4, [it will be transformed into a pickleball complex with 14 courts](#), “the largest pickleball offering in the Northeast,” according to CityPickle.

Kate Wollman never married, nor did she have children. Still, one wonders what she'd make of all this.