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Skater lives on in video

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Montrealer Louis Rubenstein (1861-1931), the world's first figure-skating champion, is a figure-skating legend. He cut a dashing figure on the ice in a bowler hat, the blades of his skates engraved with his name. Off the ice, he played a lifelong role in organizing skating and other sports.

In *Inspiring Figure: The Louis Rubenstein Story*, video-biography producer and personal historian Iris Wagner of Memoirs Productions preserves his extraordinary story: there are copies of the 26-minute video at the Jewish Public Library and the Eleanor London Public Library in Cote St. Luc. Wagner hopes it will air on national television.

How Rubenstein's story came to be told is a story all its own.

With national and North American championships under his belt, he travelled to St. Petersburg for the world skating championships in 1890.

As a Jew competing in a virulently anti-Semitic czarist Russia, he would probably have been expelled, if not for his letter of introduction from then governor-general Lord Stanley. He stayed - and came home with a gold medal.

Rubenstein retired from competition at 28 but stayed involved with amateur athletics all his life. Former International Olympic Committee vice-president Dick Pound, featured in the video, said Rubenstein, as someone who "understood sport and the ethics of it," embodied the Olympic ideal.

He was a dedicated community and civic leader, who served as a city alderman from 1914 until his death. His funeral was attended by thousands and a monument to him, a fountain, stands on Fletcher's Field.

Rubenstein lived with seven siblings who, like him, never married. And so his story might never have been told.

The ninth of 12 siblings, he worked in the family business, Rubenstein Brothers - then founders and metal finishers, today suppliers of machinery and equipment to the garment industry. Shortly before his death, Rubenstein Bros. was sold - to the Becker family. Lavy Becker, who headed the firm for many years, was fascinated by Rubenstein, and kept clippings and wrote about him.



Lavy Becker died in 2001 and his son, Hillel, found the files. He knew of Wagner's work and approached the YM-YWHA, where Rubenstein had been president for years, about helping to finance a video biography. Becker appears in *Inspiring Figure*, which premiered at the Y's annual meeting last fall, as does Olympic figure-skating champion Barbara Ann Scott. Rubenstein himself does not appear, but he is represented by a skater in a bowler hat.

"It's all very well to read 10 lines in *Who's Who*," said Pound. "But these kinds of compendia don't give you any flavour, or the chance to look at old photographs, trophies or press cuttings - as Iris and her team did."