4 The California Associated Cycling Clubs

and the Secession from the League of American Wheelmen in 1897

Jonathan Botkin

The San Francisco of the 1890s was no longer the frontier town that had greeted the gold prospectors of 1849. In forty years it had become a bustling, cosmopolitan city. San Francisco was the commercial heart of California and the largest port on the West Coast. Most of the population of the state was in San Francisco or close by. The first transcontinental railroad had been completed in 1869, allowing people to travel from Omaha, Nebraska, to California in fewer than five days. By 1893, four more transcontinental rail lines had been completed, and rail lines connected many of the towns and cities in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. Californians were keeping up on the latest trends, one of which, in the late 19th century, was cycling.

Bicycles were first introduced to California in the late 1860s. Myrtile Cerf, writing for *Overland Monthly and Out West* magazine in 1893, reported that someone brought in about 100 velocipedes in 1869 and built a rink in the Mechanics' Pavilion, a large building near San Francisco's city hall (see Fig. 4.1).[1]

Throughout the 1870s, the popularity of cycling grew, and by the end of the decade bicycle clubs were sprouting up around the country. The first bicycle club in California, the San Francisco Bicycle Club, was founded in 1878, the same year that Colonel Albert Pope started manufacturing bicycles in Boston. By 1879, the Oakland Bicycle Club was in existence, as evidenced by its participation in a Thanksgiving Day tournament with the San Francisco Club. In 1884, the Bay City Wheelmen was founded. It was to become one of the

largest and most influential bicycle clubs in California.

In response to restrictions imposed on where and how cyclists could ride in many areas of the country, an effort was made to organize on a national level. On May 31, 1880, representatives from thirty-one clubs met in Newport, Rhode Island, and formed the League of American Wheelmen (L.A.W.). The L.A.W.'s activities included lobbying for cyclists' rights and the removal of restrictions on cycling in local jurisdictions, regulating racing, initiating the "Good Roads" movement, publishing road books, and arranging discounts for cyclists at pubs and hotels. In 1886, the California division of the L.A.W. was formed, with Robert Welch as chief consul. Membership increased in the first year from 86 to 210. The first meet was held on Decoration Day, 1886, on the baseball grounds at Alameda under the auspices of the Bay City Wheelmen and the Alpine Athletic Club.[2] As cycling became more popular, the L.A.W. grew, and eventually the California division split in two, creating the North California and South California divisions.

Racing in California

Road racing was very popular in California, with many events taking place on Sundays. On June 29, 1896, *Bearings* magazine reported: "Road racing fever seems to be getting more contagious in this section. Hardly a Sunday goes by now without two or three events being on the tapis." Local clubs organized road races frequently, although attendance could be spotty.

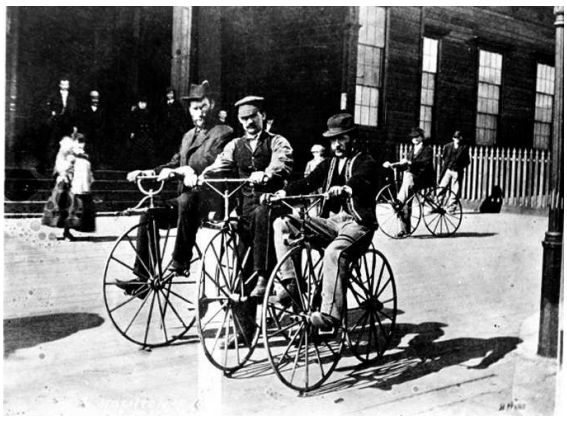

Fig. 4 .1. Velocipede riders in front of the Mechanics Pavilion c. 1869. (*Courtesy of Andrew Ritchie*)

The big event of the year in the Bay Area was the annual relay race from San Francisco to Oakland via San Jose. The first relay race, in 1893, was between the Bay City Wheelmen and the Acme Club of Oakland. The Bay Citys, expecting an easy victory, did little training and were surprised when they were beaten by the Acmes. In 1896, ten teams vied for a magnificent trophy donated by local cycle dealer T.H.B. Varney. Ten riders started from Varney's Biclorama in downtown San Francisco, each rushing to be the first to get to the preferred position on the cable-car slot, perhaps because it was the smoothest section of the road. Thousands of spectators turned out along the route to watch the racers go by. Charles Wells, of the Bay City Wheelmen (see Fig. 4.2), beat out San Jose favorite Otto Ziegler, riding for the Garden City Cyclers, during the final relay. The relay provided entertainment for the cycling community for at least a week after the race as the various clubs squabbled over who committed which foul. The Bay City Wheelmen were briefly disqualified, but their win was reinstated.

Another popular course was the 5-mile San Leandro triangle, south of Oakland. In 1886, the first 25-mile race over the San Leandro triangular track was held. Three clubs competed: the San Francisco Bicycle Club, the Ramblers, and the Bay City Wheelmen. The trophy was captured by Frank D. Elwell of the Bay Citys in 1:37:20.[3]

Track racing was also a popular spectator sport, drawing large crowds, particularly on holidays. The L.A.W. controlled track racing by dictating when races could be held and establishing strict rules governing who could take part in the various races. Amateurs and professionals were not allowed to compete against each other. Racers who broke the rules were often suspended from racing for months or sometimes even a year or two.

According to the magazine *The Cycling West,* the first race in California was held in 1879 at the old Mechanics' Pavilion, at Grove and Larkin streets, near City Hall.[4] The three-day race was between three riders, Fred Merrill, A.H. Bennett, and H.C. Eggers. Eggers won, setting a record distance of 525 miles. Races were held at the Mechanics' Pavilion until at least 1896, and most likely for several years after that.

In 1893 the Bay City Wheelmen were to host the annual championship races, but to do this, they needed a track. Construction of the Central Park track, at the corner of 8th and Market streets, began on May 16, 1893, and the track opened on July 1. Its unusual construction was a subject of interest among local cyclists. The track was made of rough concrete 30 feet wide and 18 feet high at the highest point of the banking, and it was banked at nearly 60 degrees at the curves. This track was eventually called a commercial failure,[5] though it did host well-attended races in 1896 as part of the national circuit.[6]Central Park is shown in Figure 4.3, with the baseball field that replaced the cycle track.

A third San Francisco track was built at Fell and Baker streets and was dubbed the Vélodrome (see Fig. 4.4). Some 4,000 people attended the opening of the Vélodrome track on Saturday, November 21, 1896, and the event was hailed as a great success. Many of the local crack riders showed up to race. There were amateur and professional races and a match series between two local rivals, Charlie Wells and Walter Foster, as well as a one-mile race for Chinese immigrant riders.[7]

The next two Saturdays proved just as successful as the opening day, bringing in similar-size crowds and providing fast and exciting racing. Floyd MacFarland of San Jose excited the crowd, making his first public appearance after a six-month absence from California.[8] Other local riders, such as professionals Charlie Wells, Walter Foster, W.E. Becker, and Harry Terrill, as well as amateur coast champion Jim Kenna, put in appearances. By January 1897 the Vélodrome was so successful that plans were made to build a roof over it to make an indoor track.[9] The early success of the new Vélodrome track got others interested in building tracks as investments. San Francisco Mayor Adolph Sutro expressed interest in adding a six-lap track to his famous baths.[10]

Fig. 4.2. Bay City Wheelmen, c. 1890. (*Courtesy of Andrew Ritchie*)

Grumbling Within the L.A.W.

As cycling grew in popularity, cyclists in various parts of the country expressed their discontent with the League of American Wheelmen and the management of racing affairs. Conflict was not unusual within the L.A.W. Right from its beginnings, at the first meeting, there had been arguments about how to define an "amateur" and whether professionals should be admitted. Joseph Pennell, representing Pennsylvania, argued for a very strict amateur rule that would keep dealers and cycling editors out of the amateur ranks.[11] In 1885 an attempt was made to allow professionals to join the League, but it was defeated almost unanimously.[12] In June 1886, after an unsuccessful attempt to change the League's rules about amateurs, Henry E. Ducker, chief consul of the Massachusetts division, formed the American Cyclists Union. This group, made up of amateurs, pro-amateurs, and professional bicycle racers, lasted only a few years.

Another source of contention within the League, particularly among the western and some southern states, was the prohibition of track racing on Sunday. In California and other western states, Sunday was the only day off for most workers. In the East, most workers also had Saturday afternoons free. East Coast tracks could hold races on Saturday afternoons and expect a fairly good turnout, but West Coast track owners complained that they could not pay expenses if they could hold races only when most of the potential spectators were at work.

In contrast to track racing, there does not seem to have been any taboo on holding road races on Sundays. The annual San Francisco relay race was held on Sunday. Perhaps because these did not

involve charging spectators to watch the race, they were seen as more acceptable.

By 1895, discontent over the Sunday track-racing ban was widespread around the country. League members in many states—such as Minnesota, Colorado, Missouri, Louisiana, Texas, and Utah—joined Californians in calling for Sunday races. An attempt was made at the 1896 L.A.W. national assembly to get approval for Sunday racing, but this was defeated. California delegates then argued for a "divisional option," which would have allowed each League division to decide for itself whether or not to allow races on Sunday, but this, too, was defeated.

In June 1896 there were rumors floating around that the Santa Monica track would hold Sunday races in spite of the L.A.W. rule against it. Expectations ran high during the summer. An official with the Southern Pacific Railroad said, "You need not be surprised to see regular Sunday racing before long." Santa Monica, being near the beach and having three rail lines from Los Angeles, was seen as an ideal location for Sunday races. *Bearings* magazine reported:

> Surf bathing is perfect at Santa Monica, and there is a large bathhouse with plunge and other baths, while the ocean breeze makes the sea inviting all the time, especially on Sundays, as there is nothing going on in Los Angeles, while at Santa Monica everything is open and, as at Coney Island, you can do as you please and go and come at every hour. On account of all these advantages, hundreds and thousands of people are at Santa Monica every Sunday, while many keep their families there all summer and run down every evening after work.
>
> Therefore, of all track towns in the state of California, Santa Monica offers the best advantages for Sunday tournaments. There is a host of racing men in southern California who have to work during the week, but who are usually found at Santa Monica on Sunday all summer, and, as bicycle racing pays where there is a crowd of sightseers, it is argued that an hour of exciting racing at Santa Monica every Sunday would draw a big crowd with a popular admission fee, and it is also claimed that a large number of racing men would like to ride there under these conditions for cash, even though the L.A.W. does not sanction Sunday racing.
>
> Ed. Patterson, that whole-souled sportsman who has done so much to help on local racing, is now seen at the track constantly with a "naughty little twinkle in his eye," and hints mysteriously of a club of racing men being formed which will make race enthusiasts open their weather eyes as they never did before.[13]

In July, reports of the first Sunday meet were circulating. The meet was planned for August 16, and a group of professional riders and well-known amateurs formed a new organization called the Wheelmen's Racing League to run the races. They planned to hold races for the rest of the year and at another track during the winter.[14]

The Wheelmen's Racing League seems to have lasted only a few months. Several meets were held in August, but while the racing was deemed excellent, attendance was not large.[15]

Many prominent men in the cycling world interpreted this as proof that Sunday racing would not improve the popularity or profitability of the sport. By mid-September, the Santa Monica track was on the L.A.W.'s blacklist, as were all the riders who had participated in the unsanctioned races. According to one account, a total of only five meets were held before the Wheelmen's Racing League collapsed.

Despite the defiant attitude of the Wheelmen's Racing League, at this time the L.A.W. still held sway in the affairs of California. Will C. Perot, manager of the Morgan & Wright team, said:

> Personally, I think but little of the proposed outlaw league on the Coast. The Californians have already tried that scheme, and in Los Angeles it is considered

Fig. 4.3. Bay City Wheelmen's winning relay team of 1896. (*Courtesy of Andrew Ritchie*)

nothing more nor less than a joke. It was tried five successive Sundays. The first day the meet made $80, and less than that every other one of the five Sundays. We do not want Sunday racing in this country. Circuit work is hard enough at its best, and the men are entitled to some little rest on the circuit, where they have to jump from town to town and race to the best of their ability.

From the present appearance the racing game will never get so strong that it can stand on its own feet without aid from the manufacturers. This was proven by the cancellation of dates all along the National circuit last year, until a team was sent out from Chicago. There is no manufacturer in the country who will consent to run his factory Sunday, and none would take such a method as making his racing team ride races on the Sabbath to secure advertising for himself. If California or any other section of the country wants to run Sunday racing, it will be of a local character only, and it certainly will do no good to the general sport, which to-day is one of the purest of all outdoor sports.[16]

The L.A.W. 1897 National Assembly

Despite the failure of the experiment in Santa Monica, Northern Californians still clamored for Sunday racing. In December 1896, the North California Division of the L.A.W. picked delegates to send to the National Assembly in February. Frank Kerrigan (see Fig. 4.5) and Robert Welch were two of the delegates. Kerrigan, at 28 years old, was the president of the Bay City Wheelmen and Chief Consul for the Northern California division of the L.A.W. He had received his law degree in 1889 and had been elected Justice of the Peace in 1894. Welch had been the Chief Consul of the California division of the L.A.W. when it was first established, and he was a member of the L.A.W. racing board. The main purpose of the delegation was to advocate for Sunday racing or at least for a divisional option on the matter.

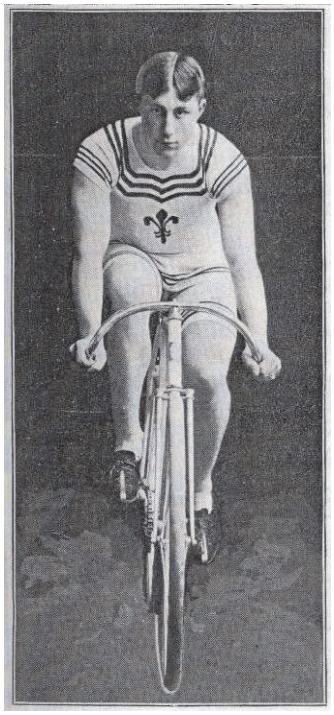

Fig. 4.4. Otto Ziegler, San Jose's "Little Demon." (Courtesy of Andrew Ritchie)

The delegation went to the Assembly with a sense of optimism. Although they were far outnumbered by the northeastern divisions—such as New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New Jersey—they had received many indications that they would be successful. A large number of western and southern states had expressed support of either Sunday racing or a divisional option. On December 24, *Bearings* reported that. "Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Texas and many other western states want Sunday racing. Throughout this great section there has long been growing a strong sentiment favoring secession unless this boon is granted to the people."[17]

The three big topics for discussion leading up to the February 1897 Assembly were the election of new officers, including the League president; the vote on whether to admit professionals; and the vote on Sunday racing. As it turned out, California was divided on the Sunday racing question. While the North California division was leading the charge, the South California division was against the idea.

The two top runners for the office of President were the incumbent, Sterling Elliott, of Massachusetts, and New York Chief Consul Isaac Potter (see Fig. 4.6). Elliott had expressed support for the divisional option.[18] Potter had secretly offered the Californians the support of the New York delegation if they promised to support him in the bid for the presidency. [19] Either way, it seemed, the Californians would be successful this time.

The vote was held on February 11, 1897, and it was quickly apparent that the Californians' hopes were to be dashed again. Potter was the new League President, professionals were once again denied admission, and Sunday racing was voted down, as was divisional option. The final tally is shown in Fig. 4.14. Kerrigan and Welch delivered impassioned speeches on California's need for Sunday racing, but without effect.

Kerrigan spoke about the differences between Northern and Southern California, saying that Southern California was settled mostly by easterners, and Northern California "by a class of people born and brought up to independent ways of thinking and to their own peculiar ways of spending the Sabbath." He stated that most Californians worked a full day on Saturday, unlike their eastern brethren who enjoyed a half-holiday on that day. Kerrigan called Sunday "the day of all days," and pointed out that road racing in California, always held on Sunday, drew large crowds of "the best people."[20]

Delegates from other states spoke in support of California. E.S. Hartwell of Colorado and Douglas Robert of Missouri (see Figs. 4.12 and 4.13) spoke out in favor of the measure. Robert pointed out that St. Louis was denied a cement bicycle track because it could not have Sunday racing. He also said that Sunday racing was held every year by the "outlaws" in that city and was attended by 20,000 people, whereas the largest attendance at a national circuit or any other meet on a weekday had been not more than 5,000.[21]

When the vote was announced, the Northern California delegates left the meeting feeling betrayed. In the next few weeks, rumors flew around the country about what would happen next.

Bearings interviewed Robert Welch on February 23, the day after his return to San Francisco, and reported that: "Mr. Welch told a *Bearings* representative that the majority of the delegates looked upon racing as something entirely unnecessary and upon racing men as being beneath their level, in fact racing men, in the eyes of most of the delegates, were of the lowest order of beings; something bordering on the freakish, something loathsome, and to be let entirely alone as if it were a plague, but, of course, something which the delegates thought they should control."[22] *Bearings* view on the National Assembly is summed up by the editorial cartoon they published in their February 18, 1897 issue (see Fig. 4.15).

It was not only in California that talk of secession followed the National Assembly. On February 17, less than a week later, *Bearings* reported, "Dispatches this morning say that Denver wheelmen, headed by none other than E. S. Hartwell, former treasurer of the League, will join the movement; that New Orleans is ripe for an early jump to some new organization; that Missouri men of prominence are moving; that Chicago professionals will boycott the League meet, a movement that will spread, and the California delegates now in New York define their state's position on the matter and say that the divorce of the League and its racing interests must come about."[23]

Bicycling World reported: "At Denver, Colorado, there is some talk of organizing a secession movement. In California the leaders of the L.A.W. are divided on the subject, some favoring cutting loose from the League while others remain loyal to it."[24]

Wisconsin, too, was a source of turmoil over the subject, though League Vice President A.C. Morrison said that such rumors were exaggerated and that there would be no serious trouble in the West over the National Assembly's refusal to approve Sunday racing or over any other matter.[25] Indeed, most of the grumbling in other states did

Fig. 4.5. San Francisco Central Park shown with the baseball field that replaced the cycle track. (Courtesy of San Francisco Public Library)

not lead to anything. On March 1, 1897, *Bicycling World* reported: "The Colorado revolt in the League of American Wheelmen is not assuming any startling proportions. There are not more than half a dozen members talking secession and the general sentiment is that Colorado should bide her time."[26] A week later, the same publication announced that there would be no secession of the Southern division of the L.A.W.[27]

Despite assurances that talk of secession would lead to nothing, riders in Minnesota and California continued to speak out for a new league. Minneapolis riders started a large mailing campaign, and the first indications were, "that the sentiment in favor of throwing off the League control is strong among the racing contingent."[28]

Secession!

The leaders in the East remained confident that the western states would not dare to do anything, but by March the movement against the League was under way. A letter was circulated to track owners in New Orleans, soliciting their support of a new league to control racing. In Missouri, League members were feeling betrayed, not only because of the failure of the Sunday racing amendment but also because the duplicity of Isaac Potter had become public knowledge. To secure Missouri votes in his bid for League president, Potter had promised that the New York delegates would vote in favor of Sunday racing—the same promise he had made to the California delegates. When this news came out, the New York delegates said that Potter had no right to pledge their votes.[29]

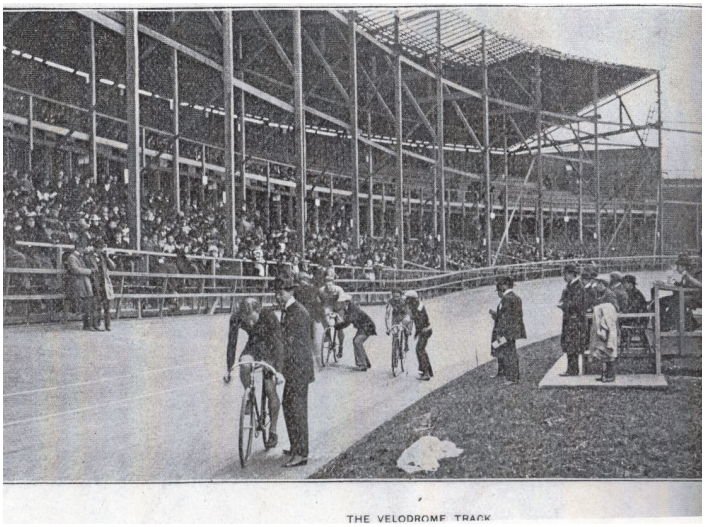

Fig. 4.6. San Francisco Vélodrome track. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

In Missouri and Colorado, wheelmen were pushing for secession from the League, although there was certainly no unanimous push for revolt. Montana and Arizona were apparently ready to join a new league as soon as one of the other states got it organized. Wheelmen in Butte, Montana held a meeting to discuss joining Colorado in the formation of a new league. Charles Hoff, of Tucson, Arizona said that Arizona would stick with her friends on the Pacific coast. [30]These states probably recognized that with their small populations, they did not have much ability to lead the way. It was suggested by a Bearings correspondent that other states—such as Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and New Mexico—were also ready to join a new league.[31]

Northern California seemed headed for secession from the League as soon as the vote on Sunday racing was announced, but California was not the first to take action. After several weeks of unrest, the first volley was fired by Minnesota. In early March 1897, prominent Minneapolis wheelmen gathered to start a rival association. Minneapolis's largest club, the United Wheelmen, decided to join the new association in a body.[32] Letters also came from South Dakota wheelmen saying that they wanted to join. On Thursday, March 11, the United Wheelmen held a meeting at which they voted unanimously to leave the L.A.W. in favor of a new organization.[33]

Although this news was published, League Vice-President Morrison, of Wisconsin, was quoted on March 19 as saying: "Regarding the secession of certain Western or Southern States, from the League of American Wheelmen, I want to say, with all the emphasis possible, that there is no indication of such a movement in any quarter."[34]

The League seemed confident that if they pretended the problem did not exist, it would go away. Around March 25, at a meeting in the clubhouse of the United Wheelmen of Minneapolis, 100 wheelmen voted unanimously to form a new league, which would be called the United

Wheelmen of America. Albert Mott, chairman of the L.A.W. racing board, dismissed this action as the work of a few malcontents who had been struggling to incite a rebellion for two years. He predicted that the United Wheelmen "will have a more brief and precarious existence than even the 'Knights of the Wheel' of Detroit had a few years ago."[35]

California was not far behind Minnesota, and San Francisco's Bay City Wheelmen were leading the way. On March 16, the Bay City Wheelmen announced that they would leave the L.A.W. *en masse*, effective April 1. The Bay Citys were San Francisco's most prominent club, with 156 members. Many of the smaller clubs also expressed their willingness to follow suit. The announcement was made at a special meeting called for the purpose of hearing the reports of Welch and Kerrigan on the outcome of the National Assembly. At this time, Mr. Welch recommended that the California Associated Cycling Clubs (C.A.C.C.) should take control of racing in the state. Welch also announced that he would be resigning from the Racing Board of the League.[36]

On March 29, Frank Kerrigan publicly announced that he was resigning as Chief Consul for the Northern California Division of the L.A.W. In a long letter of resignation to League secretary Stanley Scovern, published by *Bearings,* Kerrigan laid out all of the reasons for his resignation, among which he listed the treachery of newly elected president Potter during the recent election. The letter also detailed the financial status of California's relationship with the League:

> We (the Northern California division) sent east last year from February 1, 1896, to January 31, 1897, of money received from members, $1,069.25, and of money received for sanctions for race meets, over $300. In return for this money what do we get? The League Bulletin is really the only practical and tangible result, which to the national body is a mere nominal expense. Of course, there is the general work of the league in the improvements of roads and highways, but the effects of that branch of work don't begin to reach this western border. Work on these lines must be done locally, with our own legislatures, our own board of supervisors, and by and through our own efforts.[37]

Kerrigan suggested that the League should follow the United States constitution as its organizational model. He wanted the League to "lay down broad principles of objects of the body, and a few general characteristics needed to give uniformity to the organization, but leave the various state divisions the right to legislate upon matters of local temporary import, upon matters dependent upon local conditions and environment."

In an accompanying interview, Kerrigan stated: "I can not bring myself to feel that he (Potter) will manage the League affairs for the best interests of wheelmen, and for myself I certainly could not bring myself to serve in any capacity under him." Kerrigan offered to produce letters and telegrams that would show how Potter had obtained his office by deceit, misrepresentation, and broken pledges.

On April 3, 1897, the California Associated Cycling Clubs held a special meeting at which they adopted a new constitution and byelaws, thereby severing their connection with the League of

From left to right:

Fig. 4.7. Henry Ducker, Massachusetts Chief Consul. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

Fig. 4.8. Frank Kerrigan, North California Chief Consul. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

Fig. 4.9. Robert Welch. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

American Wheelmen and assuming control of racing within the state of California. Their press release, published in many newspapers and periodicals, including the *Los Angeles Times, Bearings,* and *Bicycling World*, stated: "The new organization differs in several important particulars from the national league. Professionals were not excluded from membership, clubs are permitted to pay expenses of members participating in races for club trophies, in which the rider has no personal interest, and the League of American Wheelmen rules suspending members pending investigation are not included." Membership fees were set at $1 per year for individuals and $10 for clubs. The constitutional description of eligibility was "any white person of good character over the age of 18 years." There was an attempt to add the word *male* to the description, but this was defeated.

As the news spread about the secession from the L.A.W., cyclists in the Oakland Cycling Club, an organization of black cyclists, requested admission into the new West Coast league. Captain Harry Williams said:

> We do not want to obtrude ourselves where we are not wanted, and, on the other hand, we do not want to be slighted… What we ask is that the Coast League shall recognize our standing as clubs and that our records be preserved, and also that it will be necessary for us to obtain permits to hold races, with the sanction of the league. This, it seems to me, is only a reasonable demand. The coast cyclists have already seceded from the National League, because of the prohibiting of Sunday racing, and we wish they would go one step more ahead of the National League and grant us the recognition that we ask.[38]

The word *white* had been added to the L.A.W. membership requirements only a few years earlier (between 1893 and 1895) and had been the subject of heated debate. Southern wheelmen had threatened to leave the L.A.W. if blacks were let in, claiming that the League would lose more white members from the South than it would gain in black members. Though this was shown to be specious, the membership rules of the League were nonetheless changed to permit only whites. Unfortunately, the C.A.C.C. was no more receptive to these requests than the L.A.W. had been, and thus membership in the C.A.C.C. was also restricted only to white people.

After the April 3 meeting, the C.A.C.C. started receiving a large number of membership requests as wheelmen flocked to the organization. On April 5, Kerrigan predicted that within 90 days the C.A.C.C. would have 1,000 members. This was in a division where there had been between 1,600 and 1,700 L.A.W. members. Kerrigan also said, "All (professional) riders in this division with four exceptions will race under our sanctions. The exceptions are Wells, MacFarland, and Ziegler, who left for the East this morning, and possibly W.A. ("Bob") Terrill, who expects to go East. Walter Foster and Harry Terrill (Bob's brother) have agreed to ride here in the first Sunday races, which will be held April 18."[39]

Early in May 1897, Robert Welch, chairman of the C.A.C.C. track racing committee, and Charles Albert Adams, chairman of the C.A.C.C. road racing committee, issued a bulletin that, among other things, removed all suspensions and restrictions that the L.A.W. had imposed on tracks and riders in California. This restored the sanctions of two tracks that the L.A.W. had blacklisted: Santa Monica and Agricultural Park in Los Angeles.[40]

Sunday Racing

With the C.A.C.C. in control, the leaders and the track owners were eager to start Sunday racing. The C.A.C.C. held its first Sunday race on May 2, 1897, at San Francisco's Vélodrome track, and the event was widely reported in newspapers around the country. Despite the excitement in the press, racers were slow to sign up for the first event. *Bearings* noted that "there is a decided feeling among the racing men against the management of the Vélodrome, and the lack of entries may be attributed to this cause."[41] It may have been, however, that many of the racers were waiting to see whether the C.A.C.C. was going to endure as the controlling body on the West Coast. If they joined that first race and the secession failed, they would be blacklisted by the L.A.W. and unable to race.

Bicycling World and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported that attendance exceeded the expectations of the promoters. However, there were fewer riders in the professional races than had been expected, due to the absence of four anticipated entries from Southern California.[42]

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported:

> The first Sunday bicycle race meet ever held in California was successful enough from the standpoint of attendance to satisfy the most sanguine of those who foresaw in the attempt the positive and complete downfall of the sport.
>
> The grandstand of the Vélodrome was filled yesterday afternoon with a large and a well-dressed crowd, the ladies being as numerous in all their summer finery as the male with cycling tendencies. The only drawback to the afternoon's sport was the high wind, which, driving at full force down the back stretch, smote the riders full in their faces and prevented any possibility of fast time being made.
>
> The most noticeable thing perhaps was the exceedingly prompt manner in which the heats, both preliminary and final, were started. Few hitches occurred to mar the pleasure of the spectators.[43]

Bearings, which had been supportive of Sunday racing all along, described the event in glowing terms:

> The grandstands were packed by an enthusiastic throng and the attendance convinced the most skeptical wheelmen that Sunday racing will be a grand success in this city if properly conducted… The attendance far exceeded the expectations of the promoters who looked for a slim crowd owing to the unfavorable weather, it being exceedingly cold and windy.
>
> The professional races brought out an excellent field of starters, including Clint Coulter, Otto Ziegler, Allan Jones, Clarence Davis, and several lesser lights…
>
> The amateur races drew a large entry, all of the cracks with the exception of Kenna, the coast champion. Kenna has not yet made up his mind about Sunday races and withheld his entry.[44]

Most of the reports described the event as a huge success, although *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review,* which had been very dismissive of the Sunday racing and secessionist movements, still viewed it negatively. Their report stated that "'Uncle Robert' Welch officiated as referee, but strange to say, 'Judge' Kerrigan and the Bay City Club shouters were conspicuous in their absence."[45]

The second Sunday meet was held a week later, on May 9, and was less successful. *Bearings* at first issued a brief positive report, saying that the races were well attended, but the sport was rather tame.[46] Later, however, they said, "Whether or not Sunday racing will be a success in this city is still a matter of doubt in the minds of most wheelmen… yesterday's meet at the Vélodrome was almost a failure, both from a racing standpoint and from the number of the spectators."[47]

True to form, *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review* reported the event in a negative way. Under the headline "Fizzling Out in 'Frisco," they wrote, "While the attendance was fairly good, the appearance of the same riders over and over again failed to arouse the enthusiasm of the spectators, and unless recruits for the outlaw meets are speedily secured, the public will tire of the game."[48]

The third Sunday race may have been more of a success. *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review* issued two reports, the first one a short article saying, "A match race between Otto Ziegler and Allan Jones attracted a large crowd at the Sunday meet held at the Velodrome yesterday (May 23)."[49] Later, however, the same publication published a long, condemning report in which it said:

Left: Fig. 4.10. L.A.W. Presidential Incumbent Sterling Elliot. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

Right: Fig. 4.11. L.A.W. Presidential Candidate Isaac Potter. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

> Some one has said that the "third time is the charm," but that phrase certainly could not be applied to the bicycle races at the Veledrome (sic) Beer Garden yesterday (May 23). "Uncle Robert" was there early, and ever and anon polished his eyeglasses to get a better view of the multitudes he looked for in vain. When the races commenced and the gates were locked so that none could escape, some one who had nothing else to do counted the crowd, and the grand total was a few less than six hundred, over half of the spectators occupying the two-bit seats.

Southern Californians followed closely on the heels of their northern brethren, holding their first Sunday race on May 30 at Agricultural Park in Los Angeles.[50] San Jose also held its first Sunday race on May 30, and the attendance was less than hoped for. The race was reported as far afield as Washington, D.C. The *Washington Post* stated that the meet "was a success as regards the races, but the attendance was only fair."[51] *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review* reported that attendance was "hardly satisfactory" at about 4,000.[52] *Bearings* was more forgiving, pointing out that "in spite of the fact that nearly 3,000 people left the city to attend a picnic held at Niles, the attendance was good, but not so good as it would have been had there been fewer counter attractions."[53] The spectators were excited by the excellent racing. Among other notable successes of the day, Otto Ziegler, San Jose's star rider, set a new record for two-thirds of a mile at 1:20.

Sunday racing spread to other towns over the next few months. Woodland and Vallejo reported successful events, drawing reasonable crowds and providing exciting racing.

During the summer of 1897, race meets held on national holidays seem to have been the biggest draw for spectators. Races on Memorial Day in Vallejo and on Monday, July 5 (probably a holiday for many workers since Independence Day fell on Sunday), in Sacramento, attracted very large crowds. According to *Bearings,* the July 5 races attracted a crowd "so large that the inside of the track had to be used to accommodate the people who could not get seats in the grand stand."[54] Night races in San Jose drew the largest crowd that had been seen in a long time. *Bearings* reported that "the grand stand was crowded for the first time since the National circuit races held here two years ago."[55]

Left: Fig. 4.12. Colorado delegate E. S. Hartwell. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

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Right: Fig. 4.13. Missouri delegate Douglas Robert. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

The L.A.W. Fights Back

Following the national assembly, Potter and the League tried to ignore the problems in California and other areas of unrest, assuming they would fade away after a while. But when the C.A.C.C. took over and started gaining momentum, the L.A.W. decided to take action. In early May, Potter appointed George Strong, a prominent San Francisco lawyer (see Fig. 4.11), as the new chief consul for North California and Francis Dwyer, of Sacramento, as vice-consul. Strong had been one of the original organizers of the L.A.W. in 1880 and had been chief consul for North California in 1893. President Potter expressed confidence that Strong would deal with the secessionists and build up the League in the state.

Strong issued an announcement to those wheelmen loyal to the League, asking them to have patience while the division was reorganized and "to uphold the grand organization which has already done so much for you and which will continue to serve you in the future." *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review* predicted that with Strong at the

head of League affairs, no one need fear that the L.A.W. would die in California.[56]

Despite the predictions of the League and some of the press, Kerrigan remained defiant: "We will give Mr. Potter and the rest of the League of American Wheelmen officials all the fight they want, if that is what they mean, and it would appear from the dispatches that they mean to down us if possible. The day of Eastern domination in California wheeling matters is past, and we see the dawn of a new era."[57] The *San Francisco Call* reported that the appointment of Strong did not worry the secessionists at all, "because, while they have much respect for Mr. Strong as a veteran cyclist and a man of sterling character, they realized that he is far past the prime of life and that he will not have the energy and strength to stem the tide of discontent and secession that has taken such a strong hold on the rapidly failing North California Division of the League."[58]

In June, the League offered a medal to loyal members in California who brought in ten new applications. President Potter had many boxes of medals ready to distribute, but it is unclear how many were awarded.

While the C.A.C.C. was growing, the L.A.W. tried to continue to hold races, though they were clearly becoming the minority. On Saturday, July 3, the L.A.W. held a race meet in Santa Monica that was poorly attended, drawing fewer than 600 spectators. The racing was reported as "very good, considering the absence of the racing men who have been riding under the C.A.C.C. sanctions."[59] A day later, on Sunday, July 4, a race meet held in nearby Los Angeles was described as well attended, drawing a crowd of 1,500.[60]

Chief Consul Strong was in an awkward situation, since he was good friends with many of the prime movers of the C.A.C.C. He tried to take a pacifying stance, saying, "I will not enter into a controversy with the officers of the C.A.C.C., as I have many friends among its most 'cheerful workers,' and besides, I do not see the necessity for a clash. The racing interests are now in their hands, practically, and I will do little in that direction. It was this racing game that precipitated the trouble… I greatly regret that we have lost the services of Mr. Kerrigan and Mr. Welch, but I think they will be with us again some day. I hope so, anyway."

Kerrigan responded in kind, saying, "I think very much of Mr. Strong and Mr. Dwyer, but think they have a hard row to hoe if they are going to try to beat us. The time has come when it is impossible for easterners to control the doings of us westerners and it will stop right here as far as cycling goes." [61]

Growth of the C.A.C.C.

Despite the predictions of the nay-sayers, membership in the C.A.C.C. grew rapidly in the first several months after the secession. By May 12, just one month after the secession, there were 500 members. By June 5, membership had swelled to 1,000.[62] On June 18, the *San Francisco Call* reported that the mayor of the city had joined the ranks of the California Association.

With the growing success of the C.A.C.C., other western states signaled their interest in joining. In June, some of the prominent wheelmen of Arizona and Nevada applied for membership. Movements were afoot in Oregon and Washington, and rumors were flying that British Columbia and Mexico were interested in affiliating with the Californians.[63]

In July, an Oregon division of the C.A.C.C. was formed, and the local L.A.W. consul, Henry Goodman, was credited with much of its early growth due to his caustic personality. Goodman was described as a despot and had alienated many of the League members, making them happy to have

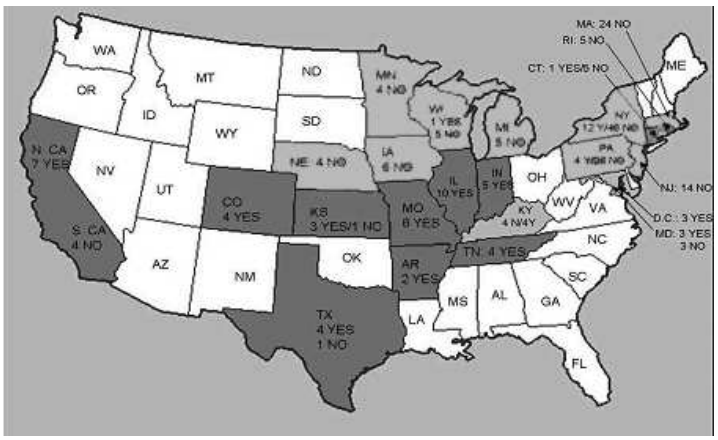

Fig. 4.14. Sunday racing vote by state.

another organization to defect to. Washington followed suit the next month, starting with the resignation of E.G. Dorr as chairman of the League state racing board in Washington and his application for membership in the C.A.C.C.

Wheelmen in Portland, Oregon held their first Sunday race on August 15. The L.A.W. almost succeeded in thwarting plans for the meet by blocking the use of the two local tracks. However, according to *Bearings*, "the owners of Portland oval were prevailed upon to rent their track to the C.A.C.C. promoters, thus giving the C.A.C.C. first blood."[64]

A week later, on August 22, the first Sunday race in Tacoma, Washington, was held, drawing a crowd of 2,500. Many California racers arrived to take part, including professionals Ziegler, Jones, and W.B. Vaughn. The races were sanctioned by the Tacoma Race Promoters' Association, which had allied itself with the C.A.C.C.

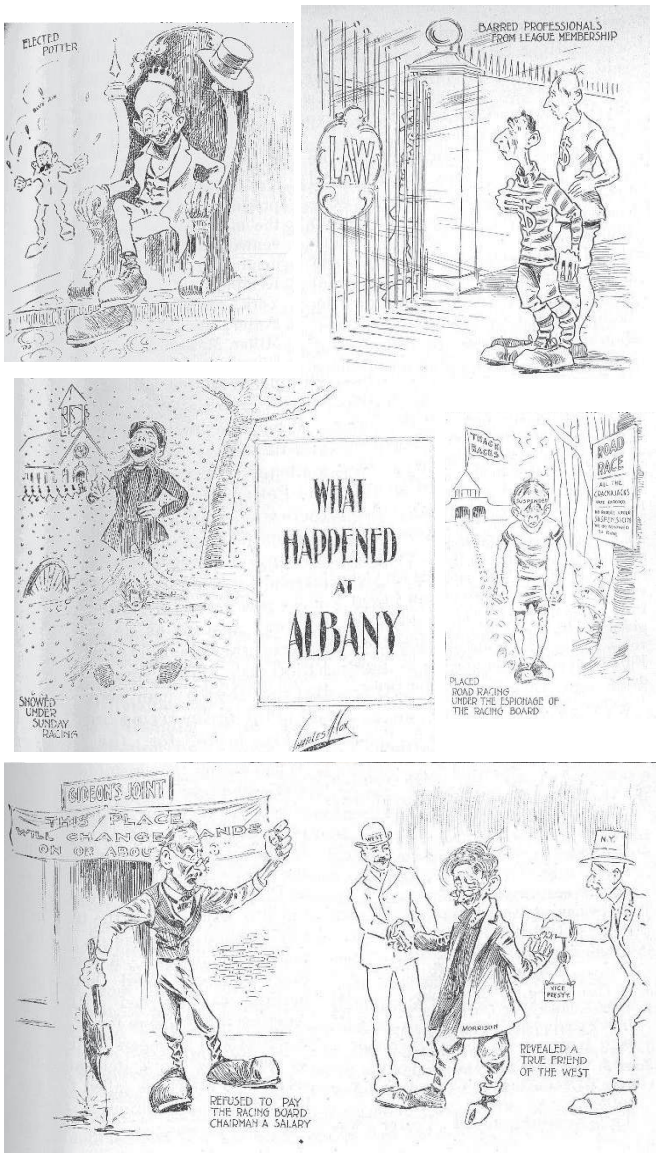

Fig. 4.15. Editorial cartoon about the 1897 national assembly published in *Bearings*. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

While the C.A.C.C. was expanding in the West, things were heating up in New Orleans and Minneapolis. On August 23, the C.A.C.C. and the Southern Cyclists' Association applied for membership in the International Cyclists' Association. In Minneapolis, the United Wheelmen of America were planning the start of Sunday racing at the state fair races in early September.

With the addition of other states to the organization, the C.A.C.C. considered changing its name to something that would reflect its expanded scope. In September, many names were considered, such as the Pacific Coast Wheelmen's League, the Associated Cyclists of the Pacific, the United Wheelmen of the Pacific Coast, the League of Pacific Coast Cyclists, and the Independent Cyclists' Association. However, in October, the organization decided to stick with its original name.

Sunday Racing Does Not Guarantee Profits

Through the summer and fall of 1897, Sunday racing expanded to many parts of the West. By the end of the year, the entire West Coast was largely under C.A.C.C. control. The question remained, however, whether the changes were sufficient to make racing profitable. There were many indications that racing still would not pay.

In October, the owners of the Vélodrome announced that the track would be torn down, just a year after it opened. The owners had fired the manager after six months of disappointing profits, but had been unable to find a replacement. They tried to sell the track, but could not find a buyer. The last cycling meet was scheduled for October 4, and after that the track would be dismantled. During this time there was also some infighting among the owners of the track. Several of them were suing each other before the track had been operating for one year. This quarreling may have been a factor in the lack of profits.

Some of the professional racers, too, were having trouble earning money. At the end of July, C.R. Coulter announced that he was leaving California and wished to be reinstated in the L.A.W. Then, in November, Otto Ziegler announced that he, too, was leaving the C.A.C.C. and had written a letter to L.A.W. racing chairman Albert Mott, asking to be reinstated. Ziegler said he thought the C.A.C.C. was on its last legs and that prizes had been so small he was unable to make a living. He said he had cleared a total of $1.15, after expenses, for six first-place finishes and one second. In the East, he said, these would have earned him at least $650. Ziegler said he sought reinstatement in the L.A.W. on the advice of an eastern firm that was presumably sponsoring him or had offered to do so. The sponsors said they were unable to pay a salary for riding only in California. He pointed out that cycle tracks were being torn up because they were unprofitable, and that they were unprofitable because the eastern riders would not come to California for fear of being suspended by the League.[65]

Not all were unhappy to see Ziegler leave. Though he had drawn large crowds at races on the western tracks, the *Fresno Weekly Republican* called the "Riddance of Otto Ziegler a Good One," and went on to say, "He never was very popular this side of the Rockies." A letter to the Fresno editor from one R.M. Thompson seconded this opinion, saying, "Mr. Ziegler is a fair specimen of the men who disgrace any track that they ride on. His racing at San Jose, his home, was so shady that the people hissed him when he appeared on the track in that city."[66] This seems somewhat like sour grapes. *Bearings* had reported that after racing outside California the previous December, "Otto Ziegler was banqueted upon his return to his native heath, over fifty of the leaders of cycling on the coast being present. The toasts were many and all showed great friendliness toward the 'Little Demon' whose season ended so disastrously."

In late September, A.W. "Bob" and Harry Terrill, the popular racing brothers, returned to California from Europe. They planned to race in California, but did not intend to join the C.A.C.C. After six months of Sunday racing, the hoped-for improvements in profitability had not materialized. Even though the C.A.C.C. was in control in California, it could not ignore the influence of the national circuit races. Since the L.A.W. refused to cooperate with the C.A.C.C., racers had to choose between racing in the West or taking part in the national circuit. Racers in the rest of the country were unlikely to come to California as they had when the entire country was under the control of one organization. The splintering of this control was not going to be effective unless the various groups were willing to work together. However, the L.A.W. still held too much influence and still refused to acknowledge any authority but its own.

In truth, however, in late 1897 the bicycle boom was on the decline, and even if the L.A.W. had agreed to Sunday racing so that racers could freely compete in the West and the East, profits might still have eluded the organizers and the racers.

Beyond 1897

In December 1897, the C.A.C.C. elected new officers and started to discuss other important aspects of their intended role, such as advocating for better roads in California. Charles Albert Adams was elected as the new president, and Vincent Dodd and George Taylor were elected vice-presidents. Frank Kerrigan had resigned from active work in the association in August due to poor health.

In 1898, the C.A.C.C. issued a road book of California, with maps, advice, and club information for members. They inherited some problems that had faced the L.A.W. Although the C.A.C.C. admitted professionals and amateurs, there were still fights over what the definition of those two

Fig. 4.16. George Strong. (Courtesy of John Weiss)

categories was. The C.A.C.C. had retained the militaristic structure that was prevalent in most clubs and in the L.A.W., and they dealt with rule breakers with the same heavy-handedness that the L.A.W. had used, suspending riders for a wide variety of infractions.

While the C.A.C.C. was growing into its new role, the L.A.W. was seeing a decline in membership around the country. Reportedly peaking at 102,000 at the end of 1897, by June 1898, just six months later, the L.A.W. had lost 12,000 members. The press expressed some doubts as to whether the membership had actually reached the peak number reported, but whatever the actual number was, the League was seeing the start of a decline from which it would never recover. The bicycle boom was going into a nosedive, and League membership would continue to dwindle over the next several years.

Other factors were at work in 1898 that would have made it difficult for professional racers and tracks to make money. Arthur Garford, a manufacturer of saddles and other bicycle parts, wrote in 1901 that the Spanish-American War took a toll on the cycling industry. Garford stated that 300,000 young men enlisted in the armed forces within months of President McKinley's call for volunteers. Most of these young men were wheelmen and had been active in cycling clubs. As they enlisted, they put their bicycles up for sale at very low prices, creating a glut of secondhand machines that flooded the market.[67] Coupled with slowing sales, excess inventory, and on-going over-production by the bicycle industry, this caused financial problems for many manufacturers. These difficulties would have decreased the opportunities for sponsorship of professional racers.

As the 19th century was drawing to a close, the League's control of racing in the rest of the country was still the subject of angry debate. In January 1899, the National Cycling Association (NCA) was created by a number of groups that were fed up with the League's handling of racing sanctions. Many track owners in New York joined the new organization. At the League's National Assembly, the delegates once again voted on whether to give up control of racing, and once again the motion failed. In December, an idea was put forth that would have the League retain control of amateur racing but cede control of professionals to the N.C.A. The N.C.A. rejected this proposal, and the new group's influence continued to spread.

The year 1900 brought change for both the C.A.C.C. and the L.A.W. In January, the C.A.C.C. voted to allow the N.C.A. to control racing in the West. At the L.A.W. National Assembly in February, the delegates finally voted to let go of racing and let the N.C.A. take over, ending 20 years of infighting.

In April 1900, *Outing* magazine lamented the decline of cycling clubs around the country. As the fad that created the bicycle boom faded, the clubs became less important in the social lives of their members, and many of the clubs that survived expanded their scope to include other types of athletic activities.[68] The L.A.W. had by this time gone from its purported peak of 102,000 members to 51,000 in just two years.

After 1900, information about the C.A.C.C. becomes harder to find. After the secession and then the ceding of race control to the N.C.A., the C.A.C.C. ceased to be a big news topic for papers around the country. In 1902 or 1903, the C.A.C.C. voted to take control of racing back from the N.C.A., but the reason is unclear. In July 1903, the San Francisco Cycle Board of Trade made an attempt to take over racing control from the C.A.C.C.[69] This fight continued for at least a year, and it appears that the C.A.C.C. retained control. The association continued to show up here and there at least until 1920, when a race in Woodland, California, was announced as being held under the rules of the N.C.A. and the C.A.C.C. How long the C.A.C.C. lasted after that, I have yet to find out

Conclusions

Although the Californians succeeded in wresting control of racing from the L.A.W., it would appear that this was not enough to make racing pay. Many factors contributed to this failure.

By 1898, the bicycle boom had peaked and was rapidly declining. What had been an immensely popular fad was ending, and the cycling world was shrinking and changing. Membership in the L.A.W. was plummeting, perhaps indicative of the general

level of interest in cycling, so it is probable that nothing would have made racing in California profitable at that time.

While the Californians took over control of racing on the West coast, most of the professional racers were still in the East, and they would not race with the Californians, either because they were afraid of being suspended by the League or because they did not agree with the secessionists. This limited the competition and reduced the appeal for spectators. The professional cyclists were dependent on either a national organization that controlled racing or at least cooperation between organizations in different parts of the country. That the L.A.W. refused to acknowledge any authority other than its own drove many cyclists away from competition in the West. The N.C.A. would eventually come in and reunite the racing interests across the country, but it would be a couple of years too late, and even its success would be short-lived.

The story of the C.A.C.C. and the secession provides insight into the cycling scene of late-19th-century California. Clearly, economic and cultural differences across the United States made it impractical to apply the same moral standards in all regions of the country. Nevertheless, some level of coordination was required on a national level. Although California was relatively isolated geographically, its economy and society were closely tied to events in the East.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to John Weiss for his help and for the generous loan of many volumes of *Bearings*, *Bicycling World*, and *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review*, as well as numerous books on the L.A.W. and other topics. I would like to thank Andrew Ritchie for his support and for supplying photos and articles that helped fill in details on the California cycling scene and some of the later history of the C.A.C.C. I would also like to thank Bruce Epperson for the material by Arthur Garford on the effect of the Spanish-American War.

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