

2 GLEANINGS FROM ORIGINAL VICTORIAN CYCLING DOCUMENTS

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Life for the collector of cycling ephemera is like that of a hunter chasing foxes. You know there are things out there to be chased, but you don't know when something is going to pop up, nor where, and you also don't know whether it will be a mangy old fox that is losing its teeth, or a fine specimen with a bushy tail.

Some of the ephemera that turns up is dull, some interesting, and a few pearls give you a fantastic rush of adrenalin. This serendipity effect makes it difficult for collectors to narrowly focus a collection since ephemera that come up for sale often consists of an oddball mix of things. So you take the collection, and as a result occasionally discover that you have acquired some fabulous nuggets that you never expected to find. But these nuggets are important to cycle historians, so I want to take the opportunity to share a few items—all related to cycling—that either provide a few new insights into the early history of cycling, or provide excellent illustrations of things we do already know. The items selected do not develop any particular theme, but are chosen for their interest. They are presented in chronological order, beginning with a 1869 letter concerning velocipedes, followed by some observations from an Englishman riding in France in 1872, and then by a witty report of a cyclist's encounter with a mounted huntsman the

following year; the next excerpt comes from the 1880 Minutes of one of the earliest bicycle clubs in the US, the Providence Bicycle Club, followed by a selection from the minutes describing the founding of the Canadian Wheelmen's Association in 1882, then a 1885 letter from one of Canada's first bicycle agents to a potential client, and finally an angry letter written by a cyclist to a New York state sidepath commissioner in 1904.

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER WRITTEN IN FORT WAYNE, INDIANA CONCERNING VELOCIPEDES, 1869

This letter was written in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on Feb. 17th, 1869 by Laura to her parents. The population of the young town of Fort Wayne at the time was 17,718. The letter comments on family life, social issues, and life on the streets of this booming mid-West town. The mention of

velocipedes provides three important insights. First, the velocipede craze in the United States was launched a few months earlier than in Great Britain, where the craze did not take off until the spring of 1869. Second, that interest in the velocipede spread remarkably quickly across the US from Boston and New York where it was launched in 1868, becoming a common sight in the Mid-West within weeks. And third, the velocipede, then a complete novelty, was ridden on the streets in winter.

After long and patient looking for a letter from home, no answer, and none appearing, I sit down in a forlorn sort of way to write anyhow...

Velocipedes are the greatest sensations at present and they are seen every day trundling up and down the streets. I heard that three of them collided one day and tumbled with their riders in a confused heap on the pavement. It is not every rider that can keep his balance on them.

A LETTER FROM AN ENGLISHMAN ON A RIDE IN FRANCE, 1872

This letter describes events that occurred on a ride in France by an Englishman who was a member of the Amateur Bicycle Club (ABC). It was composed in Paris on 6th May, 1872, and addressed to the

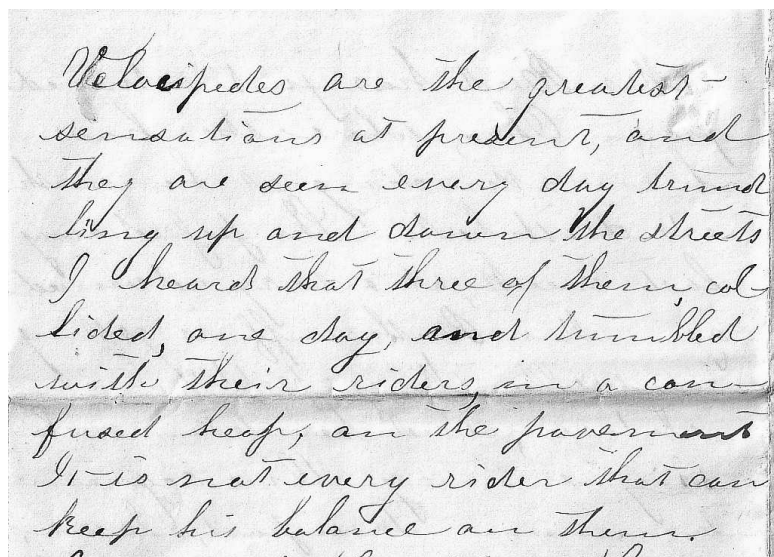


Fig. 2.1. A Letter concerning velocipedes, 1869.

Captain of the ABC. This was a transitional period with velocipedes competing with the newly developed high-wheel bicycle. The letter provides information about the distances covered, the speed of a touring cyclist, as well as his accomplishments and enjoyments.

Since my last I have done some work much to the benefit of my legs. I left Paris Thursday week on a bicycle at ½ past one with the necessary things for a tour and slept that first night at Montes. 35 miles in 5 hours.

(Next day he left at 7:30 a.m. and finished at 7:00 p.m. going 48 miles to Rouen)

There I was met (on the Friday) by a friend who came from Paris via rail with his B(icycle).

(On Saturday they left in the afternoon going 15 miles to Cleres. Sunday they went to Dieppe which was a ride of 28 miles..)

We got 3 hours of rain on our backs ... On Monday the weather having to clear again we went to Warengville and back... 15 miles.

On Tuesday we hired a small fishing boat and sailed from Dieppe with a rather strong N. E. wind at 4 p.m. and reached Havre next morning by 5 —. There my friend left me at 2 p.m. same day I took the steamer for Honfleur where I landed at 3 and proceeded at once for Pont-Audemer 30 miles where I slept.

(...) that charming country. I only regret being back and not having had a friend with me all the way and now “a vous la parole”.

A WITTY LETTER CONCERNING A BICYCLIST'S ENCOUNTER WITH A HUNTSMAN, 1873

This humorous letter, which reviews an encounter that took place between a bicycle and a huntsman in England, comes from the archives of the Amateur Bicycle Club and is dated March 10th, 1873. A lawyer named Jasper Gibson who resided in London wrote it.

My dear Custance,

The following little report for your edification and amusement.

Your humble servant, mounted on his 49 inch

steed (by Keen Brothers, Surbiton Hill) out for a run, on his own account, on Saturday last – The locus in gus being the Ewell Road just by Worcester Park – saw in the distance a valiant huntsman, returning from ye hunt – suitably attired in red coat, velvet hunting cap etc. etc., coming gaily down the road, in the opposite direction to that in which your humble servant was proceeding when a sudden – very sudden change takes place in the position of the respective parties.

First move – The huntsman’s steed gives a sudden turn, which had the effect of unseating his master, and placing him pleasantly on the soft grass land, forming the waste on the side of the road.

Second move – the rider of the Bicycle finding that the horse of the huntsman was proceeding to abandon his splite master; dismounted.

Third move – the huntsman (having in falling landed carefully on a soft portion of his somewhat corpulent body) turneth his head toward your humble servant, & thus venteth his spleen.

“One of those damned things” ... It should be observed that the huntsman, & user of the above unparliamentary expression (toward the noble race of Bicycles) was armed with a hunting crop, & under the circumstances, your humble servant thought it more prudent not to convey too fully his views of the huntsman & his steed.

My report may now be ended by saying that the huntsman having by the aid of two men captured his absconding steed, & somewhat gained the use of his reason, & lost his parliamentary violence of expressing himself; came up to me, & blamed his horse, & thoroughly chastised same, and proceeded on his wild career...

In haste

Yours very truly,
Jasper Gibson

EXCERPTS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PROVIDENCE BICYCLE CLUB, 1880

The Providence Bicycle Club (PBC) of Rhode Island was one of the first high-wheel bicycle clubs to be formed in the USA. It was formed on July 7th, 1879. The Boston Bicycle Club being the first in North America was started on Feb. 11th, 1878.

The New York Bicycle Club formed at the beginning January 1880, after PBC.

Kirk Munroe of the New York Bicycle Club wrote in early 1880 to the Mayor of Newport R.I. asking if NYBC could arrange a Bicycle Parade to accompany the Memorial Day celebrations. The mayor agreed. Forty clubs were contacted, and in the March 20th issue of *Bicycling World*, Charles Pratt of the Boston Bicycle Club and editor of *Bicycling World* wrote proposing the formation of a Bicycle League to serve and protect the common interests of cyclists.

In the minutes of the April 1880 meeting of PBC there were notes about the planned Newport R.I. meet. The Newport meet was a 3-day event from May 29th to the 31st. It was on the last day of the event that the organization called the League of American Wheelmen was formed. Present were approximately 133 cyclists representing 33 clubs (the exact number of clubs and cyclists reported to be present varies, depending upon the report). Eight PBC members attended.

This is some of the basic background. The members of the PBC did not realize what an important historical event they were attending. The League of American Wheelmen was the organizing force for US cycling during the entire bicycle boom, it started the Good Roads Movement, and without the efforts of this movement, the automobile would have probably taken much longer to become the vehicle of the 20th Century.

The club’s Minute Book shows the attitude, concerns and plans of the club members at that time. The Cash Book accompanies this Secretary’s Report and adds other insights.

March 29th, 1880 – “A Special Meeting” ... Remarks were made by several of the members in favor of going to Newport as a club but action was deferred until the next meeting. The Secretary was directed to write to Mr. C. E. Pratt – Boston & ascertain the reason of our not receiving the last 3 or 4 numbers of *Bicycling Journal* (sic *World*).

April 3rd, 1880 – “Regular Meeting” – Motion made by Mr. Lippitt that the Secretary be instructed to notify N. Y. Bicycle Club of our acceptance of their invitation. Carried. After some remarks by the Pres. & Mr.

Richmond it was decided that Mr. R(ichmond) should call on the Secretary N. Y. Bicycle Club & ascertain full particulars & report at the next meeting.

... Mr. Hardy be appointed a committee to get designs & prices for making caps.

April 10th, 1880 – Committee ~ Newport Meet ... Richmond reported that he had seen the secretary of the N. Y. Bi. Club & he wanted the names of all who were going as they would make arrangements with the proprietors of The Ocean House for reduced rates also how many would ride. Uniformed members only will be allowed to ride in the procession. The report was received, accepted and the committee discharged.

... List ~ The following signified their intention of going ... Lippitt, Churchill, Richmond, Cross, Handy, E. S. Thurber, Staten & Burton. (Although 8 were named we know that Carpenter went as well although he was not so named. This making a total of 9)

... Committee Of Monograms ~ Caps at 88 cents each.

May 13th – It was voted to get white flannel shirts at a price not exceeding \$2.25 each.

... Mr. Jesse Howard was elected as Club Delegate to the Newport Convention with President Carpenter as alternate.

May 1st—... The club then proceeded to discuss the excellent breakfast which Mr. Humphrey furnished in quantity sufficient to fill the empty stomachs of all present (this being now faint praise).

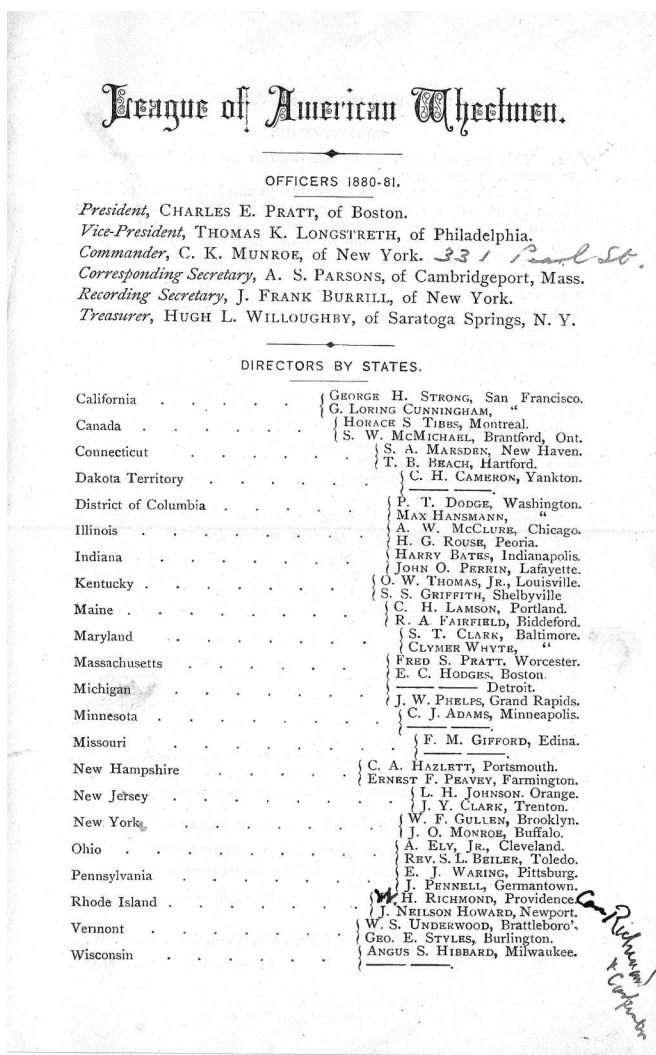


Fig. 2.2.: Minutes of the Canadian Wheelmen's Association inaugural meeting.

THE FOUNDING OF THE CANADIAN WHEELMEN'S ASSOCIATION, 1882

The Constitution for what was to become the Canadian Wheelmen's Association was framed at an organizational meeting held in Toronto during August 1882. It was declared that the first Officers be voted in at a meeting to be held the following month. These are the minutes of that historic meeting of what was actually titled the Association of Canadian Wheelmen, held in St. Thomas on Sept. 22nd, with H. B. Donly acting as secretary of the meeting.

At a meeting held in the rooms of The St. Thomas Bicycle Club on the evening of Friday Sept. 22nd, 1882 the following proceedings were had:-

The meeting was composed of some fifty bicyclists representing the London, St. Thomas, Aylmer, Brantford, Simcoe, Hamilton, Woodstock and other clubs. The meeting was called to order by Mr. C. H. Hepinstall, the Captain of the St. Thomas club.

Moved by Mr. J.H. Eager of Hamilton, seconded by Mr. J. Moodie Jr. ... Hamilton, that the Chairman of

the meetings be Mr. J.H. Brierly of St. Thomas. Ordered.

Mr. Brierly took the chair.

Moved by Mr. Hepinstall ... seconded by Mr. Perry Doolittle of Aylmer, that H.B. Donly of Simcoe be Secretary of the Meeting. Ordered.

The Chairman explained in a brief speech the object of the meeting. How that at Toronto on the 11th inst., a meeting of representative bicyclists had resolved and had organized an association of Canadian Wheelmen. At that meeting a constitution had been framed and was now in the hands of the clubs of the country through the columns of "The Bicycle." It was therefore decided to hold a meeting in St. Thomas on the evening of the 22nd inst. for the election of club officers. This, he the Chairman thought would be out of the power of the present meeting as no notice had been sent to the different clubs as provided for in the Constitution. He proposed that a provisional Board Of Directors to consist of a President, a Sec.-Treas., and seven other members be elected to hold office until the first regular Annual Meeting takes place on the 1st of July 1883. This proposition was agreed to by the meeting.

The election of The Board was then provided with:

Moved by Mr. J. G. Hay of Woodstock, seconded by Mr. T. Westbrook of Brantford that Mr. J. S. Brierly be the President of the Association. Mr. Brierly declined to act.

Moved by Mr. Doolittle (Perry) ... seconded by Mr. Knowles of Brantford that Alderman J. H. Bousted of Toronto be the President.

Moved, in an amendment by Mr. Westbrook, seconded by Mr. Moodie Jr. that Dr. McMichael of Brantford be the President.

On a vote being taken it was found that Mr. Bousted had been elected, and on motion his election was made unanimous.

Moved by Mr. Moodie Jr., seconded by Mr. Perry Doolittle that Mr. Tibbs of Montreal be the Secretary-Treasurer of the association.

Moved, in amendment, by Mr. Westbrook, seconded by Mr. Solon Doolittle of Aylmer that Dr. Charles Clarke of Aylmer be the Secretary-Treasurer. Moved, in amendment to the amendment by Mr. W.S. Perry of Simcoe, seconded by Mr. C.B. Keenleyside of London, that Mr. J.H. Eager of Hamilton be the Secretary-Treasurer.

On a vote being taken it was found that Dr. Clarke received 17 votes, Mr. Eager 7, and Mr. Tibbs 2. Dr. Clarke was declared elected.

The other members of the Board Of Directors were on motion declared elected as follows:

Mr. Perry Doolittle of Aylmer
Mr. H.B. Donly of Simcoe
Mr. J.S. Brierly of St. Thomas
Mr. C.B. Keenleyside of London
Mr. J.H. Eager of Hamilton
Mr. H.S. Tibbs of Montreal

Moved by Mr. P. Doolittle, seconded by Mr. R. Burns that "The Bicycle" published in Hamilton by Mr. J.H. Eager be appointed the official organ of The Canadian Wheelmen's Association. Ordered.

A discussion arising as to the amount of dues to be paid by unattached riders, some gentlemen thinking \$1 to be sufficient, it was moved by Mr. Eager ... seconded by Mr. Carter of Simcoe that the dues be left at the figures laid down in the Constitution. Ordered

Moved by Mr. P. Doolittle ... seconded by Mr. Fred Westbrook that the thanks of the meeting be tendered to the Chairman Mr. Brierly. Ordered

Moved by Mr. Eager, seconded by Mr. Hepinstall, that the thanks of the meeting be tendered to the Secretary, Mr. Donly. Ordered.

Moved by Mr. P. Doolittle of Aylmer, seconded by Mr. Perry of Simcoe that the meeting adjourn. Ordered

And the meeting adjourned accordingly, to meet again at the call of the Board of Directors.

H. B. Donly ... Sec. Of M'tg.

A LETTER FROM GOOLD & KNOWLES,
BICYCLE AGENTS IN BRANTFORD,
ONTARIO, 7 APRIL 1885

In the 1880s Brantford was an important industrial town specializing in agricultural machinery. With a population of close to 10,000, it was one of the larger towns in Canada at that time. Goold & Knowles (bicycle agents for Hillman, Herbert & Cooper of Coventry in England) sent this letter to a Mr. Lemp in Tavistock (a small town outside London, Ontario). Goold became a Manufacturer of bicycles, eventually making the Brantford Red Bird bicycle. This firm became one of the five founding companies creating CCM in 1899. A lot was to happen in cycling between 1885 and 1898. The writer's hyperbole is typical of any salesperson; he uses only superlatives to describe their machines (Hillman, Herbert & Cooper).

Goold & Knowles
Bicycles, Tricycles and Bicycle Sundries
Office and Salesroom, Corner of King and Colborne Streets
Brantford, April 7th 1885

J. Lemp Esq.
Tavistock

Dear Sir,

Having heard that you wish to purchase a bicycle & having sent you one of our catalogues, we would like to hear from you. Our goods are the best English goods made today in Coventry, & having seen the firm direct & bought a very large quantity, we are able to sell a better article for less money than any dealer in Canada. Being riders ourselves & able to judge the best kind of machines suited to our roads, we have added a number of specialties to our machines which we can highly recommend. We are also sole agent for all our machines, so do not believe other dealers when they state they can give you our make of machines as they can only be bought direct through us, which you can find out by applying to H. H. Cooper of Coventry, you will also find our direct steel spokes a great advantage over the tangential spokes, as the bending of them through the flange will make them sooner or later break, & as the spokes run in pairs the fracture of one spoke results in the loss of two, and very often in the buckling of the wheel.

You will also find by looking over our catalogue that the testimonials that we have received over the Dominion, which we could add hundreds to if we had the space, also the medals we received in competition against all the other dealers in Ontario, which we all represented at the Toronto Exhibition, in fact you have only to see our goods to be satisfied they are second to none, both in quality & price in America.

Kindly reply by return mail or call & see us, if possible & judge of our goods for yourself. If you know of any others who wish to purchase machines, kindly send us the names. If we sell them we will allow you a commission on every sale made—awaiting your reply.

We remain,
Yours respectfully,
Goold & Knowles