

16 AROUND THE BAY

THE 100-MILE SAN FRANCISCO BAY RELAY, 1893-1908

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On May 7, 1893 two riders left San Francisco and headed south on the first leg of a bicycle race around the San Francisco Bay. After ten miles, each rider handed a leather packet to a teammate to take it the next ten miles. This continued through ten stages for a total distance of 100 miles around the southern end of the Bay via San Jose and north to the finish line in Oakland.

The race was a contest between two clubs: the Bay City Wheelmen (BCW) of San Francisco and the Acme Club of Oakland. The race generated so much excitement that organizers decided to make it an annual event. Over the next twelve years, it was to become the biggest cycling event each year on the Pacific coast, attracting thousands of spectators all along the route. In this paper, I will present a brief history of the relay race with highlights from each year in order to show the excitement this race generated and the conditions under which the racers competed.

BACKGROUND

Bicycles were first introduced to California in 1869 when about 100 velocipedes were brought to San

Francisco, and a riding rink was built in the Mechanics' Pavilion.¹ Cycling grew in popularity over the next several decades, and cycling clubs started appearing in the late 1870s. By 1900, at least 66 bicycle clubs had been founded in California, starting with the San Francisco Bicycle Club in 1878, and the Oakland Bicycle Club, circa 1879. Clubs were an important aspect of members' social lives. Club activities included racing, both on the track and the road; parades, excursions, training rides; and parties such as smokers and balls.

The BCW was one of the largest and most influential of the Bay Area clubs. Founded in 1884, it had a large and stately clubhouse at 441 Golden Gate Avenue in San Francisco. The captain in the 1890s was Frank Kerrigan, a young justice of the peace who was later to become a federal judge. Kerrigan was also the Chief Consul for the

Northern California division of the League of American Wheelmen, and he would be one of the ringleaders in the secession movement of the California Associated Cycling Clubs (CACC) in 1897. Club rivalries were often fierce, usually in a gentlemanly way, but not always. Among BCW's main rivals were the Garden City Cyclers (GCC) of San Jose, the Olympic Club Wheelmen of San Francisco, and the Acme Club Wheelmen of Oakland.

In 1892, many California bicycle clubs convened to form the CACC. The two main goals for this organization were to encourage cooperation between the various clubs and to create a consistent method of regulating road racing. Figure 1 shows a gathering of CACC member clubs in San Jose. Individual clubs would host their own races under the guidelines of the CACC, and in the mid-1890s, road races were taking place every weekend somewhere in the San Francisco Bay Area. The CACC had two major interclub events each year: the 25-mile annual road race and the 100-mile relay race. Highlights from each year are described below.

1893

In the 1893 relay race, teams of ten riders from each club carried a message from San Francisco Mayor Adolph Sutro to Oakland Mayor George

Pardee. The teams raced for a trophy donated by the *San Francisco Examiner*. The BCW riders were confident of an easy victory and did little training. They were quite surprised when the Acme club beat them handily, finishing 11 minutes ahead.

1894

The excitement caused by the 1893 race inspired the CACC to make the race an annual event. A trophy was provided, in the form of a large silver cup, by local Rambler bicycle dealer, Thomas H. B. Varney. *Cycling West* called Varney's Biclorama the most impressive bicycle store on the Pacific coast, containing the dealership, a training rink, and a repair shop. The terms of the donation stated that the winning team could keep the cup until another team won the event. Any team that won the cup three years in a row would retain the cup permanently. The donation brought Varney plenty of publicity as the 1894 race started on Market Street in front of the Biclorama.

In March, the clubs began to hold try-out races to determine which of their members would be on the relay team. The Olympic Club had 21 members trying out for the ten spots on the team. The try-outs caused nearly as much excitement as the arrival of the new '94 bicycles with wooden rims,

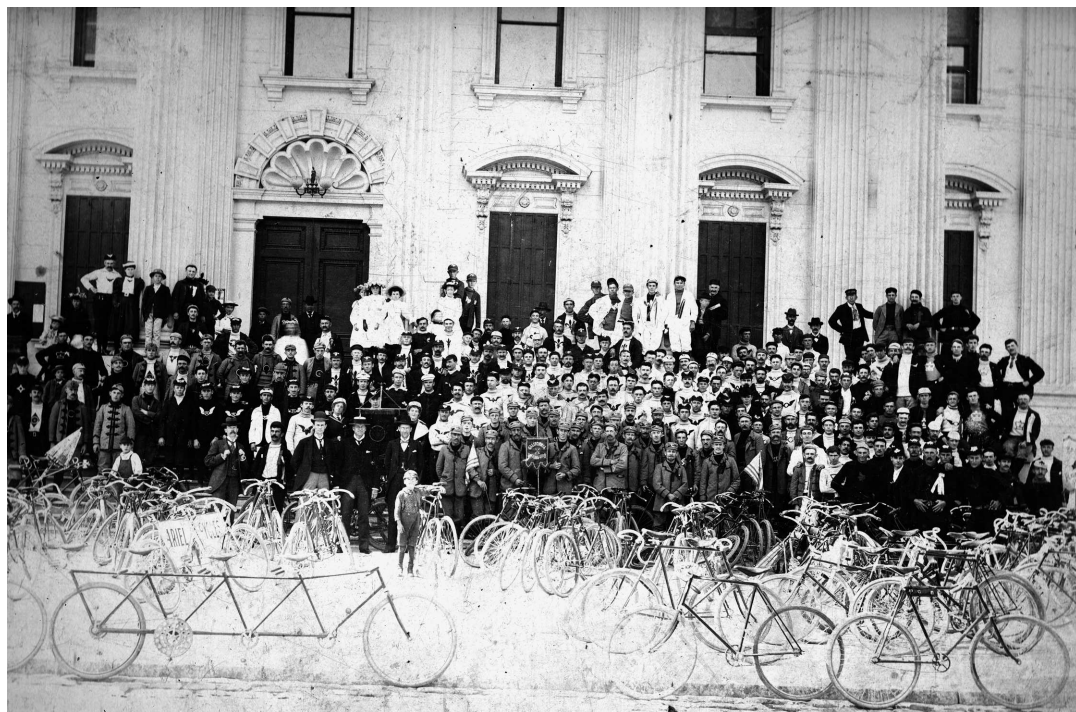


Fig. 16.1. CACC gathering in San Jose, 1896.

though there was much discussion about whether the wooden rims would be too delicate for the rough California roads.²

Seven clubs entered the 1894 race. From San Jose were the GCC and the San Jose Road Club (SJRC); from Oakland, the Acme Club and the Reliance Wheelmen; and from San Francisco, the BCW, the California Cycling Club, and the Olympic Club Wheelmen. The seven riders in the first relay lined up for the 9:00 am start outside the Biclorama while thousands of spectators lined the streets in San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland, and smaller groups waited at all the towns along the route. At the gun, the BCW took the lead and held it through the third relay. Their rider T.A. Griffith broke the world's record for the ten-mile distance by riding the third relay in 26:44, though the record was not officially recognized since it was run on a Sunday. After the third relay, the BCW lost time to the other clubs, and the race was won by W. I. Edwards of the GCC in a time of 5 hours, 22 minutes, and 21 seconds. G. A. Faulkner of the Acme Club was second followed by Thomas Hill of the BCW.³ Figure 2 is a photo from *Cycling West* showing Edwards sprinting to win the race. The local papers called the relay race the greatest cycling event ever held on the west coast.

1895

In 1895, the same seven teams were entered in the race. The GCC, as the defending champions, were

considered the favorites to win.⁴ Their team is shown in Figure 3. The crowds favored the Acme Club for second again and the BCW for third or fourth.

The race started at 9 am with the seven riders lined up on Ninth and Market Streets amidst a great crowd of people. At the starting gun, Languetin of the BCW and Edwards of the Olympic Club darted to the lead. The riders raced down Ninth Street, and Edwards tumbled, then got up and chased after the pack.⁵

As riders in the second relay waited to start their ride, they scanned the road for approaching riders. As they hove into view at a distance, Edwards was leading the pack with Languetin, Smith of the GCC, and Hardenbrook of SJRC in close pursuit. Edwards held the others off in the final sprint, winning the relay in 29:35, exceptionally fast considering the steep grades, cobblestones, and sharp, narrow turns. Languetin and Hardenbrook were close behind. Smith of the GCC had gotten the lead at some point in the sprint until he crashed less than 200 yards from the finish, colliding with Reliance club rider Dieckmann, who was waiting for his packet to start the second relay. This crash cost the GCC over a minute delay.

Despite starting a minute behind his rivals, GCC's Tony Delmas managed to regain the lead after six miles, only to crash into a ditch after running over a friend while turning a corner. Ironically, Delmas' friend had been waiting for him with a spare bicycle in case of an emergency. With his

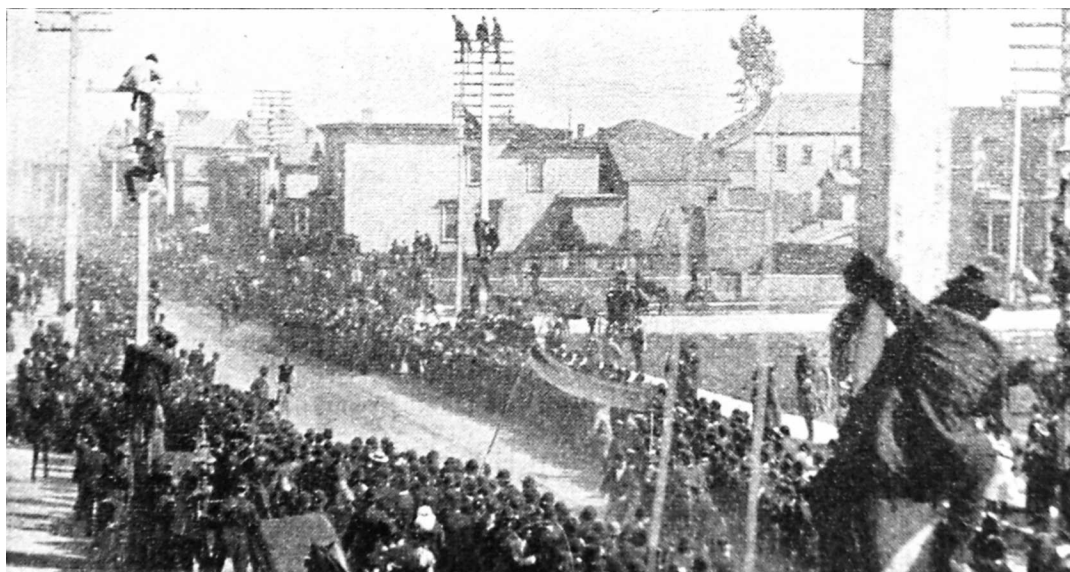


Fig. 16.2. Finish of the 1894 relay.

bicycle smashed, Delmas lost several minutes before finding another one to ride. By the finish, he had nearly managed to catch the leaders again, coming in third, 56 seconds behind the leader.

The BCW took the lead in the third relay and held it to the end of the race. The fight for second and third place was fierce, with positions changing several times between the Olympics, Acmes, and GCC. Charley Wells of the BCW brought the race home for a winning time of 4:56. Casey Castleman of the Acmes was second, nearly one minute later, followed closely by Wilber Edwards of the GCC. The Olympic Club was fourth, California Cycling Club fifth. The Reliance Club and SJRC did not finish due to falls suffered by riders Harbottle and Ziegler.⁶

1896

In 1896, ten clubs were entered in the race and competition was expected to be fierce. The seven clubs from the previous two years were joined by the Imperial Cycling Club of San Francisco, the Capital City Wheelmen of Sacramento, and the Alameda Cyclers. The clubs were investing a lot of time and money getting ready. The clubs spent well over the reported \$125 value of the trophy cup preparing for the race.

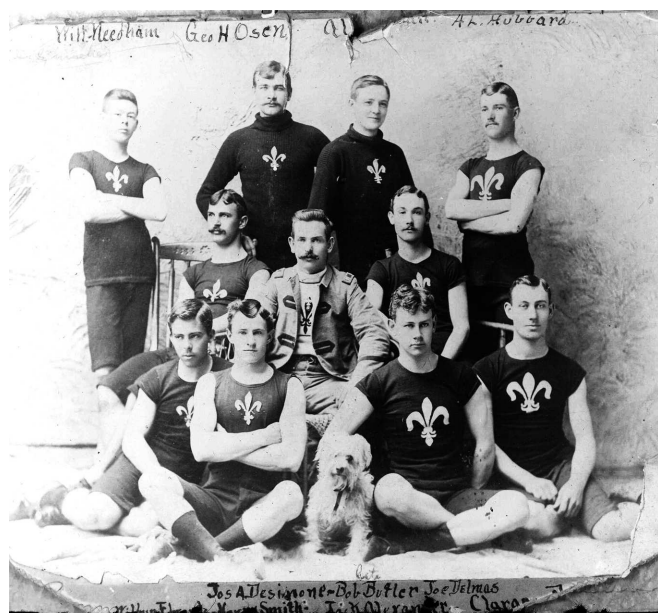


Fig. 16.3. 1895 relay team of the Garden City Cyclers.

On Sunday, April 12, crowds gathered at dawn outside Varney's. In San Jose, it looked as though the entire populace had turned out to watch. The finish this year was in Alameda. Figure 4 shows the course, and *Cycling West* offered this description:

The first relay was in frightful condition and the performances made upon it are certainly to be considered most remarkable. Starting with the rough cobble stones of San Francisco, together with the many streetcar tracks to be crossed and dangerous railroad crossings, then a succession of steep grades which ordinary wheelmen hesitate to ride either up or down, even with the aid of a brake. The road then narrows down to the width of a single wagon and circles in and out around the steep cliffs bordering upon the Bay. At this point the road is cut up in a terrible manner, the last three miles being nothing but a streak of chuck holes, extending from side to side, making it practically impossible for one rider to pass another during that distance without endangering the lives of both.

The second relay to a point half a mile south of South San Francisco was also very rough, for an eighth of a mile the riders being compelled to walk and carry their wheels on account of a fresh covering of sharp stones. More steep grades then followed, after which the road became fairly good to the finish at San Mateo. The third relay was in splendid condition, except a short distance in the neighborhood of Redwood City, which was freshly covered with gravel. On the fourth relay the riders were compelled to walk through Menlo Park on account of gravel, but the rest of the ten miles was very fast. The fifth was likewise fast, except that portion passing through Santa Clara, which was rendered slow by recent alterations in the streets of that city. The sixth, seventh and eighth relays were fast as regards the surface of the road, but from half of the sixth, just back of San Jose, the riders were compelled to buck a terrific head wind clear to the finish in Alameda.

Portions of the ninth relay were in very bad condition, in some places the riders being almost lost sight of on account of the depth of the chuck holes. During the winter the Niles River had broken away from its channel and washed out the road in these places with the above results. The tenth relay was in good shape, the last two miles being ridden through the beautiful macadamized streets of Alameda.⁷

The GCC took the lead in the first relay and held it until they were passed by the Acmes in the fourth. At the start of the fifth relay, Coulter of the Olympic Club was delayed because someone had slashed his tires. As he attempted to repair his tires, his teammate, Jones, dashed up in the lead, so Coulter dropped his bicycle, picked up another that did not fit him at all and dashed off. Despite the ill-fitting bike, Coulter managed to hang on to the lead through the relay. In the sixth relay, Navlet of the GCC had an altercation with a dog. *Cycling West* reported:

There was a mix-up of dog and wheel and Navlet, and when the tangle was straightened out Navlet found his wheel was gone in, and his wind was gone out. The wheel being the most necessary ingredient for a ride, he grabbed one from a bystander and mounted it. But it was a solid tire, spring fork affair, and the position and gear not right for his purpose. So he cast it a side and took another. This was a comparatively modern affair, built only in '94, weighing forty pounds, 63 gear, and actually had pneumatic tires. He finished on this

fully two minutes behind. His wind recovered after finishing.⁸

The Olympics managed to increase their lead during the sixth and seventh relays, only to lose nearly four minutes in the eighth relay, dropping to third position.

At the end of the eighth relay, the Acme rider was in the lead. Johnny Edwards of the Olympics managed to regain the lead in the ninth relay. Downing, of the GCC, lost time due to accidents in the ninth relay that forced him to change bicycles four times.

Otto Ziegler of the GCC started the tenth relay over a minute behind the leaders, but caught them at eight miles and led the pack coming into Alameda for the finish. Squires of the Acme Club was close by with Foster of the Olympics, McFarland of the SJRC, and Wells of the BCW close behind. Cries of "Ziegler! Ziegler!" rose up. As they neared the tape, Foster came around to pass Squires, who wobbled, causing both to fall. Ziegler jumped out of the way and consequently broke a pedal.⁹ Wells shot to the front and won

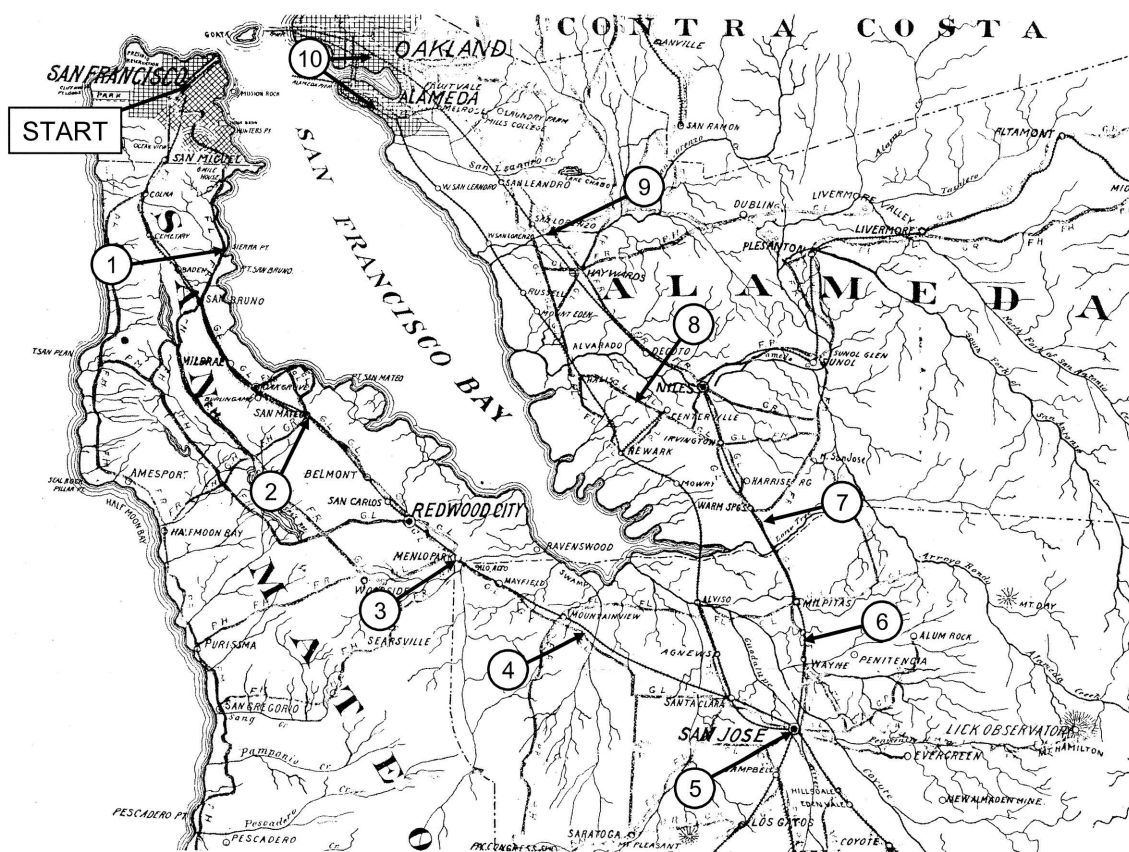


Fig. 16.4. Map of the relay race route.

from Ziegler by a length, followed by McFarland in third. Foster and Squires were so badly injured that they were unable to finish.

Shortly after the finish, a protest was made and the BCW were disqualified for exchanging their packet outside of the allowed area at the sixth relay. At each exchange point, there was a section marked by red flags extending 100 yards before and after the finish line. The riders were required to exchange the packet within this 200-yard stretch. The BCW riders refused to give up the cup until they had a reasonable hearing.

A special meeting of the CACC was held to consider the disqualification of the BCW. It became apparent that most of the clubs had violated rules, and possibly, the BCW riders were actually more conscientious about it than most others.¹⁰ After much discussion, a vote was taken and the decision was made to award the cup to the BCW. Tompkins and Desimone of the GCC and Kerrigan of the BCW all expressed satisfaction with the outcome.¹¹

1897

In 1897, the same 10 clubs from 1896 entered the race. The race started late due to huge crowds watching the start. After the racers left, much of the crowd walked down Market Street to watch the dispatches on the riders' positions from the three daily papers. Many people then crossed the Bay by ferry to join the crowd in Alameda awaiting the



Fig. 16 5. Road race near San Jose, 1890s.

end of the race. Figure 5 is a photograph of a road race in California, near San Jose, most likely in the mid- to late-1890s. A member of the BCW is standing in the foreground with the club's Maltese cross on his white jersey. Though this may not be a photo of the relay, it shows the roads, bicycles, and clubs that would have been involved in the relay.

Davidson, of the BCW, lost his chain soon after the start, then punctured a tire, borrowed a bicycle from a bystander, lost a crank, borrowed another bicycle, then finally caught up to the Acme Club rider. These two reached the finish far behind the leaders. The BCW managed to gain the lead by the third relay, but then lost it to the Olympics in the fourth, who lost it to the Reliance Club in the eighth. Krafts of the BCW and Kroetz of the Olympics were neck and neck in the ninth when Kroetz collided with a dog. Krafts was two minutes ahead when he handed off to Kenna. Kenna maintained the lead despite a puncture halfway through his relay, finishing on his rim a mile ahead of the Olympic rider. The winning time for the BCW was 4:49:39. This being their third consecutive win, they were entitled to claim the silver Varney cup as their property.

Almost immediately, protests were filed by other clubs. The Olympics claimed that Krafts was paced during the ninth relay and that all of the people who joined in after Kenna on the tenth would have made it impossible for another rider to pass him, if any of them had caught up with him. The CACC considered the protests at its next meeting but voted to deny them, giving the victory and the cup to the BCW. The question was now raised as to whether another trophy would be offered so that the annual relay race could be continued.

1898

A new cup was offered in 1898 by the cycle dealers Leavitt and Bill. Only five teams entered this year: the Olympic Wheelmen, BCW, the Reliance Club, the Acme Club Wheelmen, and the newly renamed Garden City Wheelmen (GCW). The GCC had gone bankrupt in July of 1897 and had reformed under the new name. The race took place on May 8, 1898, ending with an extremely close finish. Furman of the BCW edged out Smith of the GCW

and Wing of the Olympics by less than two feet, giving the BCW their fourth win.¹²

1899

Though the relay remained a popular event, fewer clubs were entering due to the expense and organization required to field a team. An estimated \$300 was spent by each club entering the race, and 100 men were needed to support the effort. This left most of the smaller clubs out of the running.¹³ In 1899, only four clubs took part in the relay: the Olympic Club, the BCW, the Acme Club, and the GCW. By this time, the clubs were using "trailers." These were men who followed the racers one minute behind. If the racer had trouble with his machine, the trailer would provide a spare. This did not always work out as planned. In one case, it was reported that a rider had a flat tire, but his trailer was nowhere to be seen since he was further back trying to fix a flat of his own.

At the start of the 1899 race, Gail Hardenbrook of the GCW dashed off without his packet. Another rider was sent after him, but was too late. In a crash involving Hardenbrook, and Ferris of the Acme Club, Ferris dropped his packet, and Hardenbrook picked it up. Ferris spent three minutes searching for his lost packet while the others sped away. He finally gave up and passed a handkerchief to the next rider at the end of the first relay. The misplaced packet was sent across the Bay by ferry and delivered to the ninth rider of the GCW team.¹⁴

This year saw the closest finish thus far, when E.F. Russ of the Olympics beat out J. E. Wing of Garden City by $\frac{1}{5}$ of a second. Figure 6 shows the finish, as reported by the *San Francisco Call*. The BCW came in third, nine minutes later, and the Acmes came in ten minutes after that. Right after the race, a storm of protests were lodged concerning pacing and illegal exchanges of packets, though nothing came of them, and the Olympics retained the trophy.

1900

On May 14, 1900, the Olympic club riders won the relay but also lost it. Only three clubs entered this year, and Edwin Russ of the Olympic club crossed the finish line in Alameda a wheel length

ahead of Milton Francis of the GCW. However, the Olympic club riders had dropped the packet at the end of the eighth relay. Instead of stopping to retrieve the packet, the riders exchanged a handkerchief. When the tenth relay ended, Russ was carrying the handkerchief instead of the packet. The GCW insisted on following the rules, which required that the riders finish with the official packet. The Olympic club surrendered the trophy without a fight.¹⁵

1901

The GCW were once again the winners out of the five clubs who entered. It was an uneventful race until the end. The excitement centered on the fight for second place, with Davidson of the BCW edging out Russ of the Olympic club in the confusion of the finish by less than half a second.¹⁶

1902

Once again, five clubs entered, and the GCW won the day, dominating the race from beginning to end and beating their closest rival, the BCW by over $3\frac{1}{2}$ minutes. This allowed the GCW to claim the trophy as theirs permanently. Several local

SPEEDY OLYMPIC CLUB WHEELMEN WIN THE RELAY, FINISHING FRACTION OF A SECOND IN THE LEAD



RUSS AND WING PASSING UNDER THE TAPE AT THE CLOSE FINISH.

Fig. 16. 6: 1899. Russ beats Wing by $\frac{1}{5}$ second.

businessmen started making plans to provide another trophy to keep the annual tradition alive.¹⁷

1903

The 1903, five clubs entered, and the finish was so close that the winner had to be decided by a panel of judges. Agraz of the GCW, De Mara of the BCW, and Williamson of the Oakland Wheelmen were neck and neck one hundred yards from the tape. The crowd pushed into the road so far that only a narrow path was left. Agraz and De Mara pushed through and crossed the line together. The judges voted six-to-one to give the victory to Agraz, giving the GCW their fourth consecutive win.¹⁸

1904

The GCW continued their domination of the relay race. Four clubs entered this year: GCW, BCW, Oakland Wheelmen, and the New Century Wheelmen. This year, the race was reportedly without any pacing problems. This was due to the riders being followed by motorcycles for the first time.¹⁹

1905

1905 produced an extremely close finish with the first four riders crossing the tape separated 1/5 of a second. The BCW were victorious in the final sprint with most of the credit for the win going to F.W. McLaughlin who started the tenth relay one minute behind the GCW rider but made up the time and then won by almost a wheel length.

This year there were accusations that all four clubs had been paced by motorcycles at various times during the race, spoiling the competitiveness of the event.²⁰

1906 & 1907

In 1906 and 1907 there was no relay race, no doubt disrupted by the earthquake and fire that struck San Francisco on April 18, 1906, destroying much of the city.

1908

1908 saw an attempt to revive the race, and hopes were high that it would once again become an annual event. Local San Jose merchants had donated a \$150 trophy, but stipulated that there must be no pacing in the event. Due to concerns about pacing and possibly to make it more appealing to spectators, the course was changed to a 10-mile circuit rather than from San Francisco to Alameda. The Oakland Wheelmen entered the race but then withdrew when it came to light that they had attempted to fix their entries using advance knowledge of the other teams' line-ups. The rules required each team to provide the names of their riders and the relay each would ride in a sealed packet. The packets would all be opened at the same time. When the packets were opened, it became clear that Oakland had carefully matched their riders with those of the GCW so that one of their sprinters was in the same relay as a GCW sprinter. In order to avoid the disgrace of being disqualified, they withdrew their entry.

As the race got underway, Pete Castro of the GCW took the lead and was one minute ahead of Nugent of the Golden City Club and Goetz of the Central City Wheelmen. These three passed their packets to Joe McCormick, Edward Treacy, and Olive Johnson respectively. McCormick had increased his lead and Treacy and Johnson were neck and neck when tragedy struck. Johnson led Treacy over

Table showing race results for each year

Year	Winning Time	Winning Team
1894	5:21:21	Garden City Cyclers
1895	4:56:47	Bay City Wheelmen
1896	4:56:12 2/5	Bay City Wheelmen
1897	4:49:39	Bay City Wheelmen
1898	4:55:13	Bay City Wheelmen
1899	4:46:24 2/5	Olympic Club
1900	4:51:17 1/5	Garden City Wheelmen
1901	4:42:30	Garden City Wheelmen
1902	4:44:37 3/5	Garden City Wheelmen
1903	4:54:39	Garden City Wheelmen
1904	4:42:43 2/5	Garden City Wheelmen
1905	4:45:57	Bay City Wheelmen

a rail crossing but neither could see the interurban that was approaching the intersection, hidden briefly by a barn. The car grazed the back of Johnson's wheel and struck Treacy squarely in the middle, throwing him and his bicycle into the air. Treacy was then drawn under the fender, and his leg was crushed by the wheels of the car. As the crowd worked to extricate him, Treacy called to his trailer while handing him the packet, "Here you are, Broderick. Don't let this stop the race. Get on your wheel and ride. We'll beat them yet." Despite his urging, the race was called off immediately, and that ended the attempt to revive the 100-mile relay.²¹

CONCLUSION

Though the seventeen year-old Treacy was to recover, this appears to have been the end of the 100-mile relay race. It is unclear why the race lasted as long as it did after the end of the bicycle

boom but then faded out after 1905. There were other relay races being run during this time, but more advertisements were appearing for six-day races in the early 1900s. It is possible that the public's attention shifted to six-day races that were easier to watch and usually promised lots of exciting sprints and spills.

It is also possible that those riders who lent so much enthusiasm to the race in the 1890s had moved on to other activities, and the younger generation had fewer who were excited to carry on the annual event, particularly in light of the expense and complexity of taking part in such a large-scale race. Certainly sponsorship opportunities dried up as newspapers became less interested in writing about cycling, matching the public's shift in interests. The cycling press was largely gone, and local dealers most likely had little surplus with which to sponsor a large race. The public may also have got tired of the inevitable protests that occurred at the end of each race. Whatever the reason, the San Francisco Bay relay race would not be run again.

ENDNOTES

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| <p>1 <i>Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine</i>, Oct 1893, Vol. 22, No. 130, p. 391.</p> <p>2 <i>Cycling West</i>, Vol. 2, No.7, Apr. 1, 1894.</p> <p>3 <i>Los Angeles Times</i>, Apr. 9, 1894, p. 2.</p> <p>4 <i>Los Angeles Times</i>, Apr. 8, 1895, p. 2.</p> <p>5 Ibid.</p> <p>6 <i>Cycling West</i>, Vol. 3, No. 12, Apr. 18, 1895.</p> <p>7 <i>Cycling West</i>, Vol. 4, No. 16, Apr. 16, 1896.</p> <p>8 <i>Cycling West</i>, Vol. 4, No. 17, Apr. 23, 1896.</p> <p>9 <i>Cycling West</i>, Vol. 4, No. 17, Apr. 23, 1896.</p> <p>10 <i>Bearings</i>, Vol. 13, No. 13, Apr. 30, 1896, p. 1402.</p> <p>11 <i>Bearings</i>, Vol. 13, No. 13, Apr. 30, 1896, p. 1404.</p> | <p>12 <i>Los Angeles Times</i>, May 9, 1898, p. 5.</p> <p>13 <i>Cycling West</i>, Vol. 10, No. 21, May 25, 1899.</p> <p>14 Ibid.</p> <p>15 <i>San Francisco Call</i>, May 14, 1900, p. 6.</p> <p>16 <i>San Francisco Call</i>, May 13, 1901.</p> <p>17 <i>San Francisco Call</i>, May 12, 1902, p. 8.</p> <p>18 <i>San Francisco Call</i>, May 11, 1903, p. 8.</p> <p>19 <i>San Francisco Call</i>, May 9, 1904.</p> <p>20 <i>San Francisco Call</i>, May 15, 1905.</p> <p>21 <i>San Francisco Examiner</i>, May 31, 1908.</p> |
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