

The Henley Bicycle Company of Richmond, Indiana, USA, and Its Founder Micajah C. Henley

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The Henley Bicycle Company evolved in 1894 from The Henley Manufacturing Co. of Richmond, Indiana (IN) that was established in the early 1880s by Micajah C. Henley for the manufacture of roller skates. [Figure 1] The founder of this company [Figure 2] was very successful



Figure 1. An 1893 advertisement for Henley Roller Skates from the back cover of the Richmond City Directory for 1883-84 published by M. Cullaton & Co., Richmond, Indiana.

as a manufacturer of several different products, but as this paper will explain, his excursion into the bicycle industry was not one of his usually successful ventures.

Micajah was born near Fountain City, IN, on June 6th, 1856, into a family of Quakers who were part of a migration of many Quaker families from North Carolina to Indiana in the preceding 20 years. This Henley family moved to Richmond in 1867, and Micajah's father established a firm called H. Henley & Son that was involved in the building and contracting trade - The "Son" in this company's name was 11 year old Micajah. Over the next 20 years, this company was the builder of several of the grandest buildings and residences in Richmond including the

Friends' Fifteenth Street Yearly Meeting House and the Richmond National Bank.ⁱ The Henley firm was successful in getting contracts to build grand edifices, but the profitability was poor due to strong competition.

The poor profitability of the contracting business lead Micajah to begin experimenting with making things in a small shop at the rear of his family's home, and in 1880 he was granted his first US Patent for an improvement in "Roller Skates."ⁱⁱ Micajah's inventiveness is further evidenced by the 21 U.S. Patents that he was granted from 1880 to 1921 for several different products. [Table 1]

Micajah's interest in roller skates in 1880 was well placed because in the 1870s and 1880s the popularity of roller skating in the United States was growing by leaps and bounds.ⁱⁱⁱ [Figure 3] Micajah proceeded to make a few pairs of roller skates and to open a small roller skating rink in Aurora, IN, about 70 miles south of Richmond. The patrons of Micajah's rink purchased his roller skates, and they were pleased with the performance of these skates which encouraged Micajah to make more roller skates. To keep up with the rapidly growing sales of Henley Roller Skates, Micajah increased the size of his manufacturing facilities step by step until by the early 1890s he



Figure 2. Photo portrait of Micajah C. Henley (1856 – 1927) taken in 1894 when he was 38 years old.

had built a large factory near the railway station on the north side of Richmond [Figure 4]. Micajah C. Henley invested in a comprehensive program to promote his business and roller skating in general such as advertising his product [Figure 1], writing a manual on roller skating,^{iv} and supporting a "Roller Skate Hockey Team" [Figure 5]. Micajah C. Henley became in the 1890s perhaps the largest manufacturer of roller skates in the U.S.A. with sales extending overseas.^v



Figure 3. Inside a Roller Skating Rink from Harper's Weekly, February 21, 1885, p. 121. Notice the spectator's gallery around the rink. This is the type of skating rink that was often converted to a velocipede riding school in the late 1860s during the period of "velocipede-mania" – see Gary W. Sanderson (2008), *Velocipede-mania in the U.S.A. – 1868-1869*, Cycle History 19, p. 9-18 (JPMPE, Birmingham, UK).

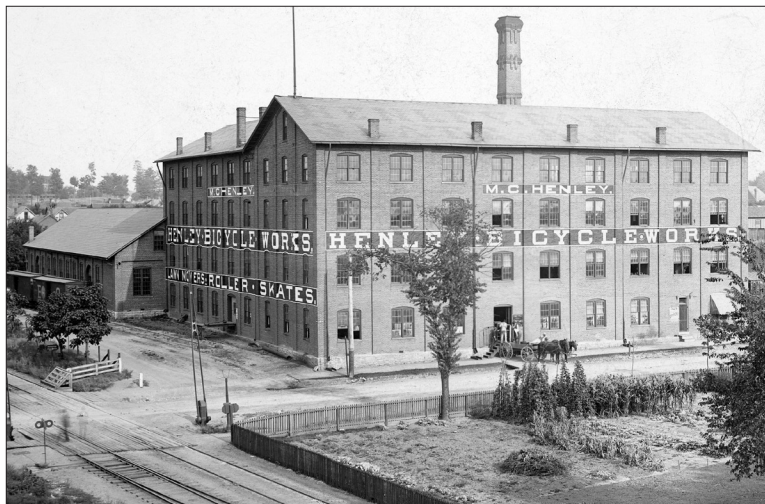


Figure 4. The Henley Bicycle Works factory in Richmond, Indiana, built in 1895. *The Wheel and Cycling Trade Review*, Vol. XVI (6), p. 42 (September 27, 1895).



Figure 5. The Henley Roller Skating Hockey Team in 1901. Micajah C. Henley is man in the back row dressed in a business suit.

Micajah had become a very successful entrepreneur. [Figure 6] **Micajah C. Henley enters the Bicycle Manufacturing Industry:**

The Henley Bicycle Company was formed in 1895 and begins to be listed annually in the *Richmond, Indiana, Directory* in this year. The first advertisements for Henley Bicycles also appear in 1895: It is these ads that announced to the world that the first sales of Henley bicycles would be in 1896 [Figure 7].^{vi} A full line of Henley bicycles was developed [Figure 8],^{vii} and these bicycles were marketed in the usual ways: (a) through advertising [Figures

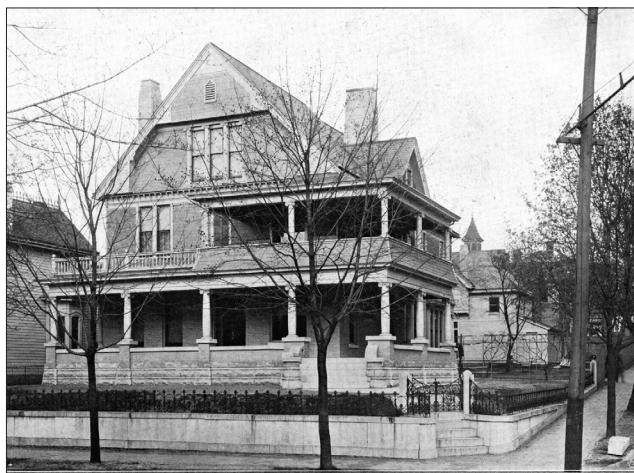


Figure 6. The home (still standing in 2016) of Micajah C. Henley built in the early 1890s at 201 N. 14th St. in Richmond, Indiana. Note: The Wright Brothers lived at 211 N. 14th Street for a time in the 1890s, and Henley sold Wilbur his first bicycle for \$10, which Wilbur borrowed from his brother Orville. Thus the Wright brothers migrated from an interest in kites (which they were manufacturing in their father's carriage house) to bicycles and subsequently to airplanes (from Wikipedia).

9a & 9b); (b) exhibiting at the major cycling shows held in Chicago, IL, and New York, NY;^{viii} (c) sponsoring a bicycle racing team [Figure 10]; and (d) creating rather spectacular mobile displays for civic events [Figure 11]. Some favorable reports were published as shown in [Figures 12a & 12b].

It was reported that the sales of Henley bicycles in 1896 were strong.^{ix} Of course, it must be remembered that 1896 was the peak year of the bicycle boom of the 1890s and the overall strong sales of bicycles at the peak of this boom undoubtedly contributed to the Henley Bicycle

Co.'s success in its first year. A freefall of bicycle sales nationally began in 1897. This especially hurt the Henley Bicycle Co. because its bicycles were only beginning to gain a position in the marketplace. Indications are that sales in year 1897 and beyond were not as strong as was necessary for the company to be truly successful as a bicycle manufacturer – it is stated in the report shown in Figure 13b that the Henley bicycle factory was only running at 30% of capacity at the beginning of 1897. By 1898 the Henley Bicycle Co. had decided that they would cease their participation in the trade shows in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New

York. Actual production figures could not be found, but the evidence available suggests that the Henley Bicycle Company had only limited success from 1897 onwards: For instance, this writer could find no advertising for Henley bicycles in trade journals after 1897. Furthermore, beginning in 1898 ads for Henley Roller Skates begin to appear in trade journals such as *The Wheel and Cycling Trade Review* suggesting that Micajah was de-emphasizing bicycles as his company was directing more attention to its roller skate business.^x

The Henley Bicycle Company ceased to exist after about 1904 as indicated by the disappearance of the Henley Bicycle Company from any listing in the *Richmond City Directory* after this year – the

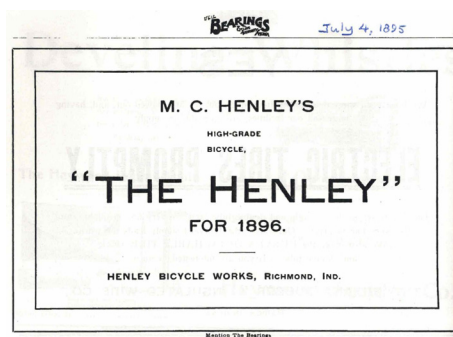


Figure 7. An advertisement in *The Bearings: The Cycling Authority of America* on July 4th, 1895, for Henley Bicycles that would be available in 1896. This ad, or ads that were very similar, appeared regularly in the weekly issues of *The Bearings*, Volumes XI and XII; and in *The Wheel and Cycling Trade Review*, Volumes XV and XVI; from July to December 1895.



Henley Bicycle Company appears to have been transitioned into The Henley Manufacturing Co. as evidenced by listings in this *Directory* from 1904 onwards. So, what happened?

Reasons for the Henley Bicycle Company's Lack of Greater Success in the Bicycle Industry:

Micajah had been very successful in manufacturing and selling roller skates, and it is virtually certain that he believed that he could replicate this success in making and selling bicycles. Safety bicycles were developed in stages starting in the late 1880s culminating with the development of the pneumatic tired safety in the early 1890s. These safety bicycles spurred a boom in the market for bicycles that grew at a phenomenal rate from about 1891 to 1895.^{xi} Micajah could be described as an entrepreneur, an inventive manufacturer of mechanical products, an opportunist in that he entered businesses that were relatively new and growing rapidly, a brave and confident business man willing to invest in facilities and labor to operate his factories, and a man committed to promoting his products. These character traits, combined with his success in the making and selling of roller skates, lead him naturally in the early 1890s to enter the burgeoning market for bicycles. So, where did he go wrong in the bicycle business?

First, Micajah was truly an entrepreneur: This is clearly evident by his rapid movement from working with his father in the buildings construction trade to

Figure 8. Studio photos of Henley bicycles for 1896: (top) Henley Lady's Bicycle, (middle) Henley Man's Racing Bicycle, (bottom) Henley Tandem (Lady Front) Bicycle, and (top right) Close-up of the Henley Bicycle Head Badge.



Figure 9a. A beautiful advertising poster for Henley Bicycles from ca. 1896. There were also ads for Henley bicycles that appeared in 1896 and 1897 in trade magazines such as *The Wheel and Cycling Trade Review*.

becoming a manufacturer of roller skates in the early 1880s when he was only about 25 years old. Micajah's start in the world of bicycles started with a flourish - a complete line of bicycles were developed and the trade was alerted with regular announcements designed to promote these machines for their quality and performance. No problem at this starting point.

Next, Micajah's inventive abilities were evident with his first U.S. Patent granted in 1880 for an improvement in roller skates.^{xiii} His inventiveness is further substantiated by the twenty-two additional U.S. Patents that he was granted between 1880 and 1921 [Table 1]. However, not one of these patents was for bicycles or anything closely related to bicycles. This suggests that either Micajah was not totally committed to this very competitive business or that its serious decline just at the time that he entered the field discouraged him from further investment in the bicycle business.

Micajah's dedication to manufacturing is amply attested to by the growth of his manufacturing activities starting with producing roller skates in a shop in the back yard of his parent's home and then progressing to ever larger buildings until 1892 when he had a large building built



Figure 9b. Items for showing or for giving away as souvenirs at trade shows in 1896 and 1897: (l-r; top to bottom) a bicycle bell owned by M.C. Henley, a Head Badge found on all Henley Bicycles, a personal Card Holder embossed "Henley Bicycles", Henley Bicycles Buttonhole Pin, and an Oiler Can embossed Henley Skates. (Courtesy of Fred Fisk)

near the railroad terminal for his operations [Figure 4]. At its peak, the Henley Manufacturing Co. owned by Micajah was one of the largest employers of skilled

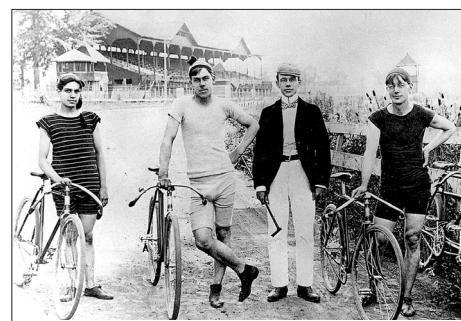


Figure 10. The ca. 1896 Henley Bicycle Racing Team in Richmond, Indiana.

workers in Richmond, Indiana; a city that was known for its numerous prosperous industries.^{xiv} However, this building was always adorned with signs that indicated that several products (i.e., roller skates, lawn mowers, and bicycles) were being manufactured inside. So, it was probably easy to divert manufacturing resources from the manufacture of bicycles to the needs of other products when bicycle sales lagged. There was no necessity for Micajah to pursue the bicycle business when the market was contracting.

A maxim for success in business is to be involved with a product that is enjoying an expanding market with distinctive products: Micajah certainly understood this well and he executed his business plans with skill and success as long as the market conditions were favorable for his products. He had started out as a partner with his father in the construction busi-



Figure 11. A float for the 1903 Fall Festival Parade in Richmond, Indiana, with a display of Henley bicycles. Notice a poster for Theodore Roosevelt, who was running for President of the U.S. this year, high on the front of the Henley Bicycle and Roller Skate Works factory.

Article in The Wheel and Cycling Trade Review, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, January 1, 1897, p. 47:

PRETTY AS A PICTURE

If there is a more fetching pair of tandems than those pictured herewith, they have yet to be seen. These are both Henley's, the product of the M.C. Henley Bicycle Works, Richmond, Ind. Any one with half an eye can see that they are "charmers" – the very lines show it – but the pictures only half convey the beauty of the wheels, which are reputed as good as they are beautiful. The double drop frame for two ladies is one of the few of its kind. It will list at \$160; the other at \$150. They are splendid types of the Henley line.

Figure 12a. Report on the fine appearance of the new Henley Bicycles that would be offered on the market for the first time in 1896. The Wheel and Cycling Trade Review, Vol. XVIII (13), January 1, 1897, p. 47.

ness: The business had been successful as builders of grand edifices, but strong competition kept the profitability very low. Moving into the business of manufacturing roller skates in the early 1880s provided more opportunity because the demand for skates was growing rapidly, and through innovation (i.e. improvement) and advertising, Micajah was able to create demand for his product. So Micajah's formula for success was founded on (a) manufacturing a product to fulfill the needs of a growing market, and (b) innovating the product (or improving it) to differentiate his product from the competitor's product thereby increasing buyers' demand for his product. This formula had little chance for success after 1896 when the market for bicycles went into a steep decline.

The reasons for Micajah's lack of success in the bicycle business might be summarized as follows: The dramatic downturn in the market for bicycles after about 1896 is certainly a big factor, but the lack of innovation evidenced by no patents related to bicycles [Table 1] was almost certainly an important contributing factor to this situation. Henley bicycles were simply "not particularly interesting" which made these bicycles a poor choice for buyers.

The Fate of Micajah C. Henley's Businesses after Bicycles:

THE RICHMOND DAILY REGISTER JANUARY 21, 1897 (p. 4)

THE HENLEY

Has Made a Reputation Both at Home and Abroad

THE WHEELS FOR 1897

Will Surpass Those of Last Year – The Wheels of the Factory Turning Out Wheels – Off for the Chicago Show.

A Register reporter this morning had the pleasure of seeing the line of wheels which M.C. Henley will have on display at the Chicago show. The entire line is fine and it will be hard for any factory to surpass, although there are scores of factories and the majority of them are making excellent wheels. Last year the Hendee made an excellent reputation, not only in the United States but also in foreign countries, for durability, speed, and excellent running qualities. The sale of the wheel was enormous and all the machines gave the best of satisfaction, and very few of them ever came back to the factory for repairs, which is one of the best recommendations a bicycle can have.

This year the Henley will be far in advance of other wheels. New ideas and improvements have been added and the wheel will be a joy forever. The Chicago show will open Saturday, and to-day M.C. Henley left for the Windy City with a full line of wheels which will be exhibited at the Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston shows. The line consists of a triplet, which is one of the finest pieces of workmanship ever shown in the bicycle trade. It weighs 101 ½, twenty-four-inch frame, two inch-tires, double line frame, and has a triple fork crown. While the triplet is not intended for road work, this one will stand the use.

Three styles of tandems will be shown. They are the diamond frame - one of the handsomest wheels on the market, the combination tandem, and the double drop frame. The latter is something new in the tandem line, and will prove a great seller. It is designed especially for ladies, two being able to ride with comfort.

The racing wheel is something that will cause the racing man to dream in his sleep of records and victory if he can own a Henley A. The lines are perfect and adapted to speed. The wheel weighs only nineteen pounds, is geared to 84, and has an entirely new drop [handlebar], and will attract attention. It is made to win.

The Henley A Special is a novelty in the bicycle line. The joints are all made flush, and the appearance is much neater than the way the former joints are made. The regular roadster, one each of the ladies' and gentlemen's wheels, will be shown also. The Henley will use several styles of fork crowns, the arch, the triple fork crown, and the same that was used last year. The buyer is given the option of several of the best makes of saddles, tires, and other minor parts. The wheels are finished in black, carmine, maroon, royal blue, and robin egg blue. The finish is the finest that is put on any wheel.

Figure 12b. Report describing the line of new Henley Bicycles that would be offered for sale in 1897. The Richmond Daily Register, January 21, 1897, p.4.

The Henley Manufacturing Company manufactured roller skates from the company's beginning in 1880 to long after bicycle production was discontinued in about 1904. Even before Micajah had stopped making bicycles in 1904, he was again emphasizing his Henley Roller Skates as he made moves to capitalize on the public's resurgent interest in Roller Skating.^{xv} Two of several other successful product lines that were important for the Henley Manufacturing Company in the 1890s and early 20th century were (a)

machines to stretch wire in making fences and (b) lawn mowers. The wire stretching machines filled a need as more and more fences were being put up on undeveloped land that was being opened up across the United States and especially in the west. Lawn mowers were needed for use to maintain lawns that surrounded the new homes going up in the burgeoning suburbs of cities around the country, and companies (including the Henley Manufacturing Company) in Richmond, IN, led the way in manufacturing these machines.^{xvi}

Micajah C. Henley died in 1923 at the age of 67, and he is buried in Earlham Cemetery outside of Richmond, Indiana. Micajah lead a productive life, and he is remembered fondly by the townspeople for his many contributions to the town in which he lived and worked throughout his life.

Acknowledgements:

First, I want to thank Harriet Fell and John Allen for putting a wreck of a Henley tandem in my hands for restoration and creating an interest in this story. Next, I must acknowledge that the paper by Fred Fisk published in *The Wheelmen Magazine*^{xvii} in 1985 was most helpful, and Fred himself was generous with his time in answering my questions. Two other people gave me much of their valuable time and help in accessing pictures and records that were essential to putting this story together - James D. Harlan, Executive Director of the Wayne County Historical Society in Richmond, IN, and Susan E. King, Archivist at the Morrisson-Reeves Library in Richmond, IN. Without doubt, any richness in my paper comes from the help that these people gave me. ●

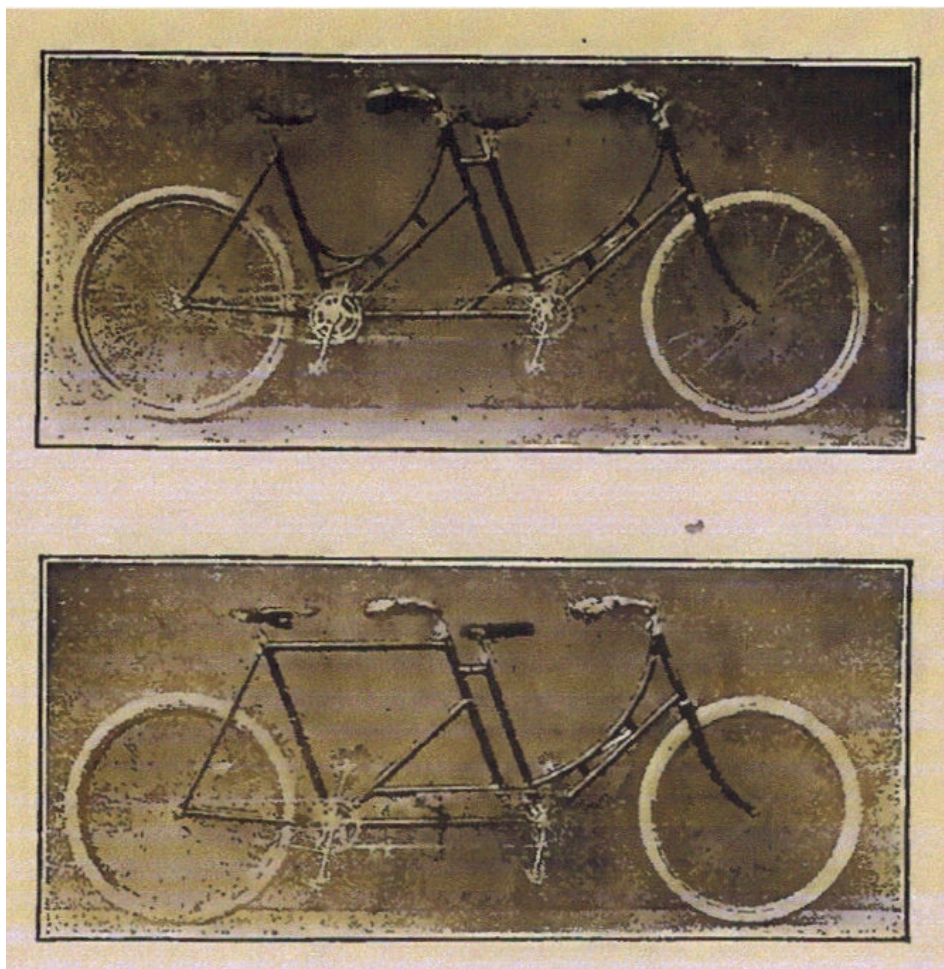


Figure 12c. Picture of the new Henley Tandem Bicycles that was printed with the article shown in Figure 12a. These tandems were described as being “Pretty-as-a-Picture”.

Endnotes

- i Richmond, Indiana, was a prosperous city in the second half of the 19th century with many wealthy citizens involved with banking, retailing, manufacturing of a variety of articles of trade, and all aspects of agriculture; and all of this required fine buildings. Good samplings of the buildings in Richmond at this time are found in *Dalbey’s Souvenir Pictorial History of the City of Richmond, Indiana (1896)*; *Richmond: Postcard History Series* by Susan F. King (2005); and *Richmond: Images of America* by Susan E. King and Thomas D. Hamm (2015).
- ii U.S. Patent No. 234,404; *Roller Skate*; granted on Nov. 16, 1880, to Micajah C. Henley.
- iii James Turner & Michael Zaidman (1997), *The History of Roller Skating*, 111 pp. (National Museum of Roller Skating, Omaha, Nebraska); and Morris Traub, ed. (1944), *Roller Skating through the Years*, 101 pp. (William-Frederick Press, New York).
- iv M.C. Henley (1885), *Henley’s Manual of Roller Skating*, 160 pp. (M.C. Henley; Richmond, Indiana).
- v A brief article on the history of Micajah C. Henley and his roller skates can be found on the internet at <http://waynet.org/biography/Henley.htm>.
- vi See also *The Evening Item*, Richmond, Indiana, Tuesday, June 4, 1895, p. 3.
- vii *The Richmond Daily Register*, January 21, 1897, p. 4. See also Figures 13a, 13b, 13c, & 13d in this article.
- viii The Henley Bicycle Company exhibited its line of bicycles at the 1896 Cycling Trade Shows in Chicago,

Table 1. U.S. Patents Granted to Micajah C. Henley

Patent Number	Date Granted (Applied for)	Title of Patent
234,404	11/16/1880	Roller Skate
245,950	08/23/1881 (05/23/1881)	Roller Skate
285,484	09/25/1883 (06/30/1883)	Screw Driver
316,226	04/21/1885	Roller Skate
319,712	09/06/1885	Roller Skate
320,352	06/16/1885	Skate Toe Clamp
320,392	06/16/1885	Roller Skate
338,736	03/30/1886 (04/18/1885)	Roller Skate
338,738	03/30/1886 (11/30/1885)	Tension Device for Fence Machine
342,010	05/18/1886	Tension Device for Fence Machine
346,749	08/03/1886	Fence Machine
371,195	10/11/1887	Machine for Boring, Drilling, Etc.
10,892	01/03/1888	Reissue of No. 371,195
383,730	05/29/1888	Machine for Boring, Drilling, Etc.
396,279	01/15/1889 (11/12/1886)	Fence-making Machine
438,156	10/19/1890 (12/19/1889)	Lawn-mower
443,711	12/30/1890	Oscillating Meter
446,448	02/17/1891	Pully-lathe
506,398	10/10/1893 (06/10/1893)	Pulley Lathe
518,670	04/24/1894 (12/15/1883)	Lawn-mower
518,995	05/01/1894 (01/08/1894)	Boiler-tube Cleaner
527,979	10/23/1894	Meter
755,133	03/22/1904 (03/07/1903)	Coliseum Chair
1,366,729	06/28/1921 (04/26/1920)	Automatic Oil-drip Catcher

Illinois, and in New York, New York (*Wheel & Cycling Trade Journal*, Vol. XVI (8), p. 36-37; October 11, 1895, & Vol. XVI (10), p. 42-43; Oct. 25, 1895), and again in 1897 (*Wheel & Cycling Trade Review*, Vol. XVIII (23), p. 82-86; , and Vol. XVIII (25), p. 87-91), but this company had no presence at subsequent shows.

ix Bruce D. Epperson (2010), *Peddling Bicycles to America*, Chapter 7, p. 105-128 (McFarland & Co., Jefferson, NC, USA); Gary W. Sanderson (2015), The Gormully and Jeffery Manufacturing Co. and Its Founders, *Cycle History* 26, 224-226 (FFCT, Paris, France).

x This writer could find no ads for Henley bicycles in the bicycle trade journals at his disposal after 1897. In fact, by 1898 the section titled "OF INTEREST TO BUYERS" in *The Wheel and Cycling Trade Review* does not list the Henley Bicycle & Roller Skate Works at all until on October 20, 1898, in Volume

XXII (10), p. 19, the company is again listed not under "Bicycles" but under "Skates". Subsequently, beginning in this trade journal on October 27, 1898, in Volume XXII (11), p. 33, ads for Henley Roller Skates (Figure 8a) begin to appear, and these ads appeared regularly from then on.

xi See for example the story of the Gormully & Jeffery Manufacturing Company in a paper by Gary W. Sanderson (2015) in *Cycle History* 26, 218-228. (FFCT, Paris, France).

xii See for example the article "Pretty as a Picture", *Wheel & Cycling Trade Review*, Vol. XVIII (20), p. 47; January 1, 1897; and Figures 10a, b, c, & d.

xiii See End Note i.

i Hon. Henry Clay Fox (1912), *Memoirs of Wayne County and the City of Richmond, Indiana*, Vol. 1, Chapter XXVII, p. 499-521 (Western Historical Soci-

ety, Madison, Wisconsin).

xvi Articles in *The Cycle Age and Trade Review*, Vol. XXIV (5), p. 148, November 30, 1899; and Vol. XXIV (9), p. 318, December 28, 1899 tell the reader that the Henley Bicycle and Roller Skate Works is offering a line of very fine roller skates although the company is in no way diminishing its interest in the Henley high quality bicycles that the company manufactures. Noticeable is the appearance of ads for Henley Roller Skates even though there is at this time, and in following years, a complete absence of advertisements for Henley bicycles (see also End Note ix).

xvii Fred C. Fisk (1985). Micajah C. Henley, Bicycle Maker, *The Wheelmen Magazine*, No. 27 (November 1985), p. 10-14, and Annette Zamarchi (1985), Henley Patents, *The Wheelmen Magazine*, No. 27 (November 1985), p. 14-15.

Conference Moment



Riders with old bicycles wait with Wheelman Stephen Hartson (on the right) to participate in a ride out of Ansonia, Connecticut, that would trace the first ride on a velocipede in America made by Pierre Lallement in 1867.

GREG SIPLE