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CYCLING: IN AND AROUND SAN JOSE
1890 - 1900

By
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CYCLING: IN AND AROUND SAN JOSE

1890 - 1900

The bicycle, especially the safety bicycle with the pneumatic tire, had an impact upon the way of life of the people in San Jose. The safety bicycle was introduced at the annual meet of the California Division of the League of American Wheelmen held in San Jose in 1890.¹ The pneumatic tire was introduced in the same year.² Both of these improvements made the bicycle easier to ride and control for men and especially women.³ This means of transportation gave the individual more independence. It had a definite effect upon one's health, moral attitudes, social life and manner of dress. The bicycle increased the need for better roads and new city ordinances. This new freedom created by the bicycle was embraced enthusiastically. Statistics show that in 1895, there were 28 bicycle agencies in San Jose and 1,061 bicycles had been sold in the previous year doubling the number of bicycles owned. There were around 3,000 wheelmen in the county.⁴

¹Myrtle Cerf, "The Wheel in California," Overland Monthly 22 (October 1893): 396.

²Ibid., p. 398.

³Ibid., p. 399.

⁴San Jose Mercury, Santa Clara County and Its Resources; A Souvenir of the San Jose Mercury (San Jose: San Jose Publishing and Printing Company, 1895), p. 246.

Riding clubs were as popular as the bicycle, and San Jose had many. A select list of the clubs were the Garden City Cyclers, San Jose Road Club, the Elite Cyclers, the Young Men's Christian Association Cyclers, the Observatory Cycling Club, the Columbus Cycling Club, and the Ladies Cycling Club.⁵ In other parts of the county, there were the Campbell Cycling Club, Mayfield Wheelmen, the Tribune Cyclers of Gilroy, the Saratoga Clover Leaf Club, the Franklin Road Club and the Mountain View Cyclers.⁶ Although the clubs were organized primarily to promote amateur racing, they also provided a social life for their members.

One of the two most popular clubs in San Jose was the San Jose Road Club. It was organized with the main objective of promoting road racing in Santa Clara County, and its races over the East San Jose Course achieved state-wide reputation.⁷ The club was organized around 1892 in a little shanty at 75 South Fifth Street in San Jose. Its first set of officers included W. L. Parker as President, C. A. Heppe as Vice-President, C. J. Belloli as Secretary-Treasurer, John T. Bailey as Captain, Otto Ziegler, Jr. as Lieutenant, G. Minor as Bugler, and A. M. Hobson as Color Bearer. Charles Pomeroy was also a charter member. They adopted the ivy leaf as their club emblem, and straw and lavender as their official colors.⁸

⁵San Jose Mercury, Santa Clara County and Its Resources; A Souvenir of the San Jose Mercury (San Jose: San Jose Publishing and Printing Company, 1895), p. 246.

⁶Ibid., p. 246.

⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, 3 September 1894, p. 8.

⁸Ibid.

By September of 1894 their membership had grown to 80 members, which created the need for larger quarters. They laid the cornerstone for a new clubhouse on the west side of Third street, just north of San Fernando Street. No formal exercises were held for the laying of the cornerstone, but the members gathered for impromptu speeches by the club officials. A box containing the club's history, photographs of prominent members, copies of daily and cycling papers, and coins was deposited in the cornerstone.⁹ The building was to be constructed of pressed brick and trimmed with terra cotta. The front part of the building was to be divided into a parlor, reading room, and billiard room. The rear of the hall was to be fitted with temporary partitions dividing it into a gymnasium and training quarters with lockers and closets. The partitions could be removed to convert the space into a banquet hall.¹⁰ The club continuously supported and organized road racing events.

The Garden City Cyclers were the leaders in promoting track racing, in addition to providing many social events for their members and hosting events for other clubs. In 1894 their membership went over the 100 mark and at that time, the members decided to incorporate.¹¹ It was reported on August 15, 1894 that Directors Lamkin, Carey, Lewis, Ravlin,

⁹San Jose Daily Mercury, 3 September 1894, p. 8.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 8 July 1894, p. 5.

*1901
7/10/1894*

Herndon, Alexander, Chase, Pollard, Macaulay signed the papers for incorporation and sent the papers to Sacramento.¹² The ground had been broken in July 1894 for new club rooms to be built on San Fernando Street between First and Second Streets.¹³ The club would occupy the upper story of the building with a room for the Directors, a parlor, billiard room, reading room, gymnasium, bathrooms, and a wheel room. The furniture cost the club \$2,500.¹⁴

The Garden City Cyclers built a track on South First Street in 1892. It was a quarter-mile track and was embanked at the curves. The track was covered with crushed rock and was rolled and watered. The surface was rough enough to offer resistance to the broad tires on the bicycles.¹⁵ Grandstands were built to seat 1,900, and there was sufficient room on the north side of the grandstands to park the buggies.¹⁶ The track was said to be the fastest in the state, and was ready for the first race.

The new track was used for the inaugural races of the consolidated racing clubs. It was an all-day affair with a parade in the morning, and the races in the afternoon. San Francisco and Oakland clubs chartered a special train which brought in over 500 visitors for the event. In the morning there was a parade through the business center of

¹²San Jose Daily Mercury, 15 August 1894, p. 3.

¹³Ibid., 8 July 1894, p. 5.

¹⁴San Jose Mercury, Santa Clara County and Its Resources; A Souvenir of the San Jose Mercury (San Jose: San Jose Publishing and Printing Company, 1895), p. 244.

¹⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 5 September 1892, p. 7.

¹⁶Ibid.

town. It was a grand affair with Second Street decorated with flags and bunting. Each club rode in formation and used fancy movements. The parade was headed by the Grand Marshall Thomas R. Knox and J. Delmas, President of the Garden City Cyclers.¹⁷ The races held in the afternoon at the new track were witnessed by 2,500 people.¹⁸

If the quarter-mile gravel track built in 1892 was good, the cement track built by the Garden City Cyclers was better. The track was 1/3-mile in circumference, and was built for a 2-minute track which meant that the wheels would stand at right angles with the track when the bicycle was traveling at a speed of a mile in two minutes. The cost to build the track and the grandstands was \$9,000.¹⁹ The bicycle tournament which was held to celebrate the opening of the cement track was billed as "the greatest event in the cycling history of the Pacific Coast."²⁰ The races drew cyclists from all over the country. Forester's Military Band directed by Frank Witherell furnished the music for the occasion. Many businesses closed so that everyone could attend the races, and it turned into a holiday for the citizens of San Jose.²¹

¹⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, 10 September 1892, p. 5.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹San Jose Mercury, Santa Clara County and Its Resources; A Souvenir of the San Jose Mercury (San Jose: San Jose Publishing and Printing Company, 1895), p. 244.

²⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 17 April 1895, p. 5.

²¹Ibid., 18 April 1895, p. 3.

Another innovation in racing by the Garden City Cyclers was the electric light race. A large number of electric lights were suspended over the track, and night racing was initiated.²² The track was a bit dark in places, but the home stretch was brilliantly lighted. Large numbers of Japanese lanterns were strung over the grounds to add to the atmosphere. The race was a financial success, and was attended by 2,000 people.²³

In addition to the competitive races, informal and social runs were organized for the enjoyment of the members. Relaxing rides were planned, such as a watermelon run²⁴, and a picnic ride to Alum Rock.²⁵ A fun race called the Hare and Hound Chase was planned by the Stew Bums of the Garden City Cyclers. The hares given a two-minute start led the hounds on a merry chase through the city, leaving a trail by dropping small pieces of paper behind them. One group of hares made the trail difficult to follow by crossing the bed of the Los Gatos Creek twice. The race took one hour and covered 20 miles. The winning hare was awarded a pair of gold stockings and a cap. The winning hound was awarded a luggage carrier.²⁶

²²San Jose Daily Mercury, 15 July 1894, p. 11.

²³Ibid., 28 July 1894, p. 8.

²⁴Ibid., 2 September 1894, p. 11.

²⁵Ibid., 8 July 1894, p. 5.

²⁶Ibid., 15 June 1896, p. 5.

The Garden City Cyclers also entertained other clubs which helped strengthen friendly relations throughout the communities in the Bay Area. They hosted a barbeque and run to the Blackberry Farm for the Reliance Club of Oakland. The menu was very elaborate including salads, cold meats, barbequed beef and mutton, pickles, olives, and cheeses with ice cream, cake and coffee for dessert. The tables were set for 150 people. After the sumptuous picnic, the Reliance Club Quartet gave a musicale for everyone's enjoyment.²⁷

The ladies were acknowledged as being expert road riders, and they formed their own bicycle club. The club was very succinctly called the Ladies Cycling Club. They adopted the emblem of the wheel and crescent for their own.²⁸ The club members had an active membership and social life including meetings, runs and picnics. In the Sunday edition of the San Jose Daily Mercury on July 8, 1894, it was reported that they were, "becoming more enthusiastic under the efficient guidance of popular captain, Miss Wana Miller."²⁹ On the night of the fourth, they entertained the members of the Garden City Cyclers with a bicycle run around the city, watching the fireworks display at the City Hall, and ending

²⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, 17 May 1897, p. 6.

²⁸Ibid., 1 July 1894, p. 6.

²⁹Ibid., 8 July 1894, p. 5.

the evening at the Hotel Vendome listening to the music.³⁰

The thrust of young people and bicycling didn't have its impetus during this period. There was one mention of the High School Bicycle Club. The club held its second five-mile handicap race on the East San Jose Course. The prize was a gold medal which had to be won three times by any one rider to become his property. Will Black had just won it for the second time.³¹

It added to the credits and popularity of a cycling club to have a crack rider as one of their members. Otto Ziegler, Jr., one of the charter members of the San Jose Road Club, established many records in track and road racing. The beginning of his success was in 1893. At a meet in San Francisco, he won the one-mile Northern Division Championship sponsored by the League of American Wheelmen.³² On July 4, 1894 at the Stockton races, he lowered the two-mile record to 4:46 1-5, and won first place in the 2-mile handicap.³³ San Joseans were certain that they had the fastest wheelman on the coast.³⁴ Ziegler added road racing to his credits

³⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 8 July 1894, p. 5.

³¹Ibid., 17 April 1895, p. 2.

³²Myrtle Cerf, "The Wheel in California," Overland Monthly 22 (October 1893): 397.

³³San Jose Daily Mercury, 6 July 1894, p. 6.

³⁴Ibid.

when he and his trainer, C. C. Hopkins, broke the record from Fruitvale, Oakland to the San Jose townclock. They traveled the distance in two hours and seven minutes, breaking the previous record by four minutes. In addition to being paced by several unnamed wheelmen, they were paced by the Hayward electric cars.³⁵

For Ziegler and his fans too, the height of his glory was reached when he attended the national racing tournament of the League of American Wheelmen in Denver in August 1894. He won the two-mile national championship, and was given a standing ovation by the crowd.³⁶ On the closing day of the race in Denver, he was dubbed with the title, "Ziegler, the Little Demon from San Jose, California" and was the hero of the day.³⁷ He had won the quarter-mile, mile and 2:20 national championship races. The San Jose Road Club back home went wild with excitement. They sent him a congratulatory telegram, and paraded the streets of San Jose shouting,

"Ziegler! Ziegler! Cycling star!
San Jose Road Club! zip! boom! ah!"³⁸

They also sang a parody on "What Did Dugan do to Him?" substituting in Ziegler's name and comments about racing.³⁹

³⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 8 July 1894, p. 5.

³⁶Ibid., 18 August 1894, p. 1.

³⁷Ibid., 19 August 1894, p. 9.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

San Jose gave Ziegler an enthusiastic and elaborate welcome when he arrived home from Denver. He came in on the train from San Francisco, and was met by his own club, the San Jose Road Club, and rival clubs who had put their rivalry aside for the occasion. A parade formed at the depot headed by four cyclers of the San Jose Road Club, and they were followed by Parkman's Band. Following the band were 150 bicyclers, all riding in twos. The body of bicyclers consisted of additional members of the San Jose Road Club, the Garden City Cyclers and the Observatory Cycling Club. Next came Ziegler riding in a carriage drawn by four white horses. Ziegler's parents and personal friends rode in carriages following him. The procession passed through the main streets and the sidewalks were crowded with onlookers. The parade ended at Eintracht Hall which Ziegler's lady admirers had decorated with many flowers. A formal reception was held in the hall with speeches, congratulations and bouquets of flowers.⁴⁰ Ziegler's racing performance was outstanding, and his following responded with an estatic welcome.

In essence the bicycle and its rider was challenging the horse for speed, and of course, it had to be proven which was the faster. The logical way to prove the speed of the bicycle against the speed of the horse was to stage a race between the fastest cyclist, Ziegler, and the great pacer on the West Coast, W. Wood, who was owned by John F. Boyd of Oakwood Park Stock Farm. The race was a special event at

⁴⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 30 August 1894, p. 5.

the County Fair held in Agricultural Park in San Jose. The one-half mile race drew a great number of spectators who were both cycle and horse enthusiasts. Ziegler was the favorite at \$20.00 against the horsemen's money in \$8.00 lots. The betting was reported as not being brisk. Ziegler's prize was a gold medal and W. Wood's prize was a liberal purse. Ziegler wore a bright orange cycling suit for the occasion, and on the breast of the shirt was the green ivy-leaf emblem of the San Jose Road Club. The bright color was chosen so he could be seen at the one-half mile post. It was an exciting race, and it looked like W. Wood driven by M. Sanders was going to win. In the last seconds Ziegler moved ahead and won by a distance of six feet. His time was exactly one minute. W. Wood's time was 1:00 1/4 which the judges declared was the fastest one-half mile race ever paced.⁴¹

Ziegler was the most popular and most successful rider in the San Jose area, but he was not the only cyclist that broke records. Joe Carey of the Garden City Cyclers rode from San Jose to Marysville, a distance of 215 miles in 20 hours and 35 minutes. He broke the record for that distance by 1 hour and 25 minutes.⁴² That ride had to be classified as an endurance record. Carey started at 12 midnight at the intersection of First and Santa Clara Streets. His route took him from San Jose to Irvington through Mission San Jose and over the mountains to Sunol. He had to do a considerable

⁴¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 27 September 1894, p. 5.

⁴²Ibid., 19 August 1894, p. 5.

amount of walking to get over the mountains. He went on through the Sunol Valley and up through the canyon to Pleasanton to Livermore and on to the San Joaquin River. From Livermore he had to cross a steeper range of mountains. He had another delay between Mountain House and the San Joaquin River because he had taken the wrong road. After passing Lathrop, the roads became almost impassable because of deep sand. Between Stockton and Sacramento he encountered terrific headwinds.⁴³ From the report of Carey's trip, it seemed miraculous that he reached his destination, let alone break the record.

Another top rider of the Garden City Cyclers went East in June of 1894 to compete with the Eastern crack riders on the national circuit. However, he injured his legs, after he arrived in the East, and was unable to enter any races. He did visit all of the principal racing centers in America and reported that the Garden City quarter-mile track was equal to any quarter-mile track in the East.⁴⁴

Henry Smith of the Garden City Cyclers made the fastest road ride on record on the coast, riding 21 miles in 57 minutes. He rode from Briar's Ranch, two miles north of Centerville to First and Santa Clara Streets in San Jose. He carried 25 pounds of luggage and rode a 19-pound Lovell Diamond racer.⁴⁵

⁴³San Jose Daily Mercury, 19 August, 1894, p. 5.

⁴⁴Ibid., 25 August 1894, p. 8.

⁴⁵Ibid., 2 September 1894, p. 11.

All cyclists were interested in promoting the bicycle, and the importance of it. In July 1894 there was a railroad strike which disrupted the mail service in the Bay Area. Considerable interest was taken in cycling for carrying messages and newspapers between the cities in the area. The cyclists could travel almost as fast as the railroad.⁴⁶ On July 8, 1894 the Garden City Cyclers ran a newspaper relay from San Francisco to San Jose. From San Jose they branched off, one group riding to Gilroy, Hollister, San Juan, Salinas and Monterey, and another group riding to Santa Cruz. They demonstrated the importance of the bicycle in times of an emergency.⁴⁷ Additional relays were organized to carry mail and newspapers. The average speed between San Francisco and Hollister and Monterey was 16 miles per hour.⁴⁸

Combined meetings of clubs were always popular. On July 4, 1890 the California Division of the League of American Wheelmen held their fifth annual meeting in San Jose. It drew participants from all over the State with the greater majority of the cyclists coming from the Bay Area. The meeting started with a parade of 500 cyclists. In the afternoon races were held at the League of American Wheelmen Park on Julian Street opposite the First Ward Schoolhouse. The day's events ended with a lantern parade in the evening. On the following day a series of tours were arranged for interested

⁴⁶San Jose Daily Mercury, 1 July 1894, p. 6.

⁴⁷Ibid., 8 July 1894, p. 5.

⁴⁸Ibid., 15 July 1894, p. 11.

cyclists. One tour was to the New Almaden Quick Silver Mine which was a distance of 24 miles round-trip. Another tour was to Agnews Asylum, Santa Clara and Fredricksburg which was a round-trip of 11 miles. Several more tours of varying distances were offered too. The meeting closed with a grand ball at the Hotel Vendome with the wheelmen in uniform and all other gentlemen in full dress.⁴⁹ It sounded like a grand affair.

Another popular event was the annual picnics of the California Associated Cycling Clubs. In 1895 it was held in Niles Canyon. The day was reported as perfect for picnicing, but a little too warm for bicycling. It didn't seem to deter the cyclists though, as 500 people attended including 85 members of the Garden City Cyclers. The food certainly didn't meet with everyone's approval because of the complaint of paying 50 cents for a 10-cent meal. Some bicyclists rode to nearby towns for dinner. The afternoon entertainment consisted of dancing, boating and swimming.⁵⁰

A popular race that the San Jose clubs always participated in was the annual relay race around the bay. It started in San Francisco and ended in Oakland. San Jose was the turning point of the race. The distance of the race was 100 miles, and each club entered 10 riders who would ride 10 miles each. The trophy was a silver cup, and had to be won three times by a club to become its personal property.

⁴⁹San Jose Daily Mercury, 4 July, 1890, p. 5.

⁵⁰Ibid., 24 June 1895, p. 5.

The first race in April 1894 was won by the Garden City Cyclers.⁵¹ The second annual race was won by the Bay City Wheelmen of San Francisco. Members of the Garden City Cyclers and the San Jose Road Club suffered serious falls in that race.⁵²

With the increasing number of cyclists, the need for good roads increased. From the varied reports the need must never have been completely satisfied. Cyclists complained that the streets in the city of San Jose were worse than the roads in the county, and the push for good roads was on.⁵³ Yet in the Santa Clara County and Its Resources; A Souvenir of the San Jose Mercury, the city roads were described as miles of level streets paved with asphaltum. The county roads were sprinkled with no heavy stretches of sand. The great number of small farms resulted in the construction of a network of roads and crossroads.⁵⁴

The impact of the number of bicycles brought on the need for city ordinances too. Five unfortunate wheelmen from San Francisco were arrested and put in jail for riding their bicycles on the sidewalk. Their excuse was that they didn't

⁵¹San Jose Daily Mercury, 5 April 1895, p. 5.

⁵²Ibid., 8 April 1895, p. 8.

⁵³Ibid., 26 April 1895, p. 5.

⁵⁴San Jose Mercury, Santa Clara County and Its Resources;

A Souvenir of the San Jose Mercury (San Jose: San Jose Publishing and Printing Company, 1895), p. 244.

know that San Jose had such a city ordinance.⁵⁵ In 1895 policemen in San Jose notified wheelmen that they must lean their bicycles on the outer curb and not against the fronts of the buildings on the sidewalks.⁵⁶

The proper attire for cycling was the concern of both men and women. For the man, it was a straight-forward issue of what he should wear, and fashion prescribed both material and make-up. In 1898 the following costume, in harmony and contrast, was recommended. For country riding, a man must wear a full suit of tweed or cheviot in plain checks or gun-club checks, and a matching cap was in order. For riding in town, the breeches would be of fancy worsted or cheviot in black and white and fancy checks. The coat would be of black or blue worsted. The cap would match the breeches in the town style. Large plaids for suits were not permissible. Although, if the coat was plain black or blue, the man could have a greater choice of patterns for the breeches. The cut of the breeches was closer in 1898 than in the previous season. The cap had less fullness across the top, and was made from a fancy plaid or checked woolen, linen crash or white duck. The shirt was flannel or oxford cloth. Starch was confined to the neckbands which were of stripes or plaids. Wristbands were substituted for cuffs. The gold scarf had to be of washable material. A cardigan

⁵⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, 31 May 1897, p. 2.

⁵⁶Ibid., 26 April 1895, p. 5.

vest was recommended to be in golf red or hunter's green. Correct cycle hose were of cotton, lisle, or wool in medium or lightweights. The latest cycling shoes were low cut of russet leather or black kangaroo.⁵⁷

The proper cycling attire for women was more complicated because it involved a moral issue. The issue of whether or not women should wear the bifurcated garments was one of open debate. In July, 1894 it was noted that the rational craze had not struck the members of the Ladies Cycling Club. It was hoped that the wearing of bloomers would be left to their husbands and brothers. It was thought that the San Jose ladies were always perfectly dressed, and they didn't need the new craze of bloomers to make them attractive.⁵⁸ But the rational costume did appear in San Jose, and was eventually accepted as the proper cycling attire. One of the first to appear in bloomers was Mrs. George Owen who was described as a graceful and accomplished rider. Her bloomer costume was of navy blue storm-serge. The waist was covered with a neat fitting jacket. The bloomers reached half-way between the knee and the ankle. She wore tan canvas leggings, and a white cycling-style cap.⁵⁹ Mala Helm, a young lady cycling

⁵⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, 15 May 1898, p. 15

⁵⁸Ibid., 1 July 1894, p. 6.

⁵⁹Ibid., 22 July 1894, p. 12.

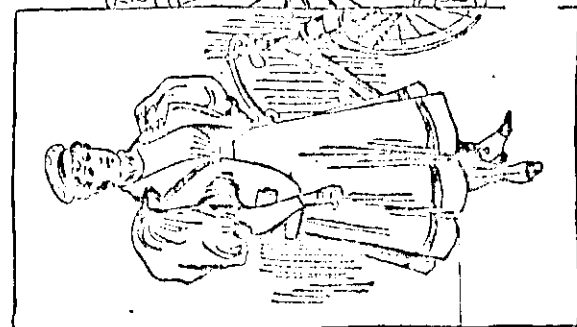
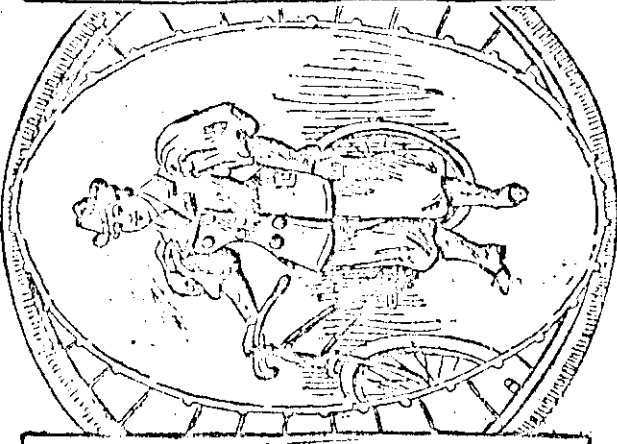
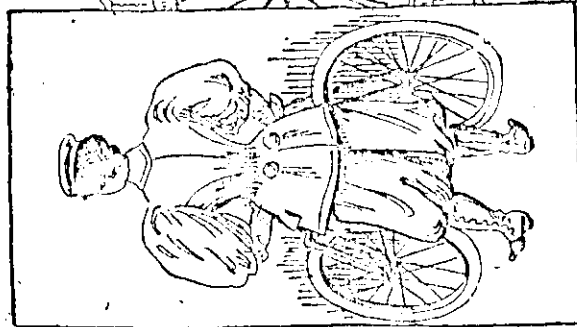
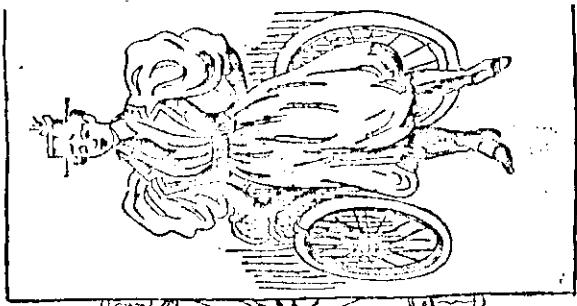
phenomenon from Santa Clara, wore a bifurcated costume when she rode from Santa Clara through San Jose, to Niles, to Oakland, ferried across to San Francisco, and returned in one day.⁶⁰ The ladies of San Jose were well on their way to wearing more comfortable clothing while cycling. The ladies were ready for dress reform.

Cycling in the San Jose area in the 1890s seemed to be surrounded with an aura of lively interest. It offered something to everybody. To the cyclist, it gave better health, a new sense of personal independence, and a new sense of social involvement. To the spectator, it gave the excitement of the races and the parades must have added a new dimension to his daily life. The bicycle era must have passed by too quickly for many people.

⁶⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, 5 August 1895, p. 5.

THE LATEST IN BICYCLE COSTUMES.

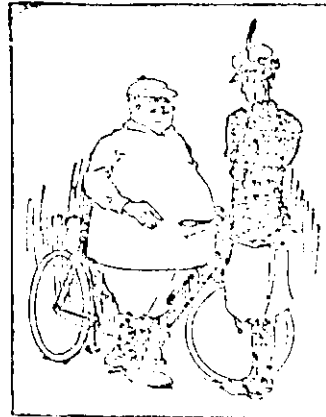
New York World.



JACK SPRATT'S TANDEM.



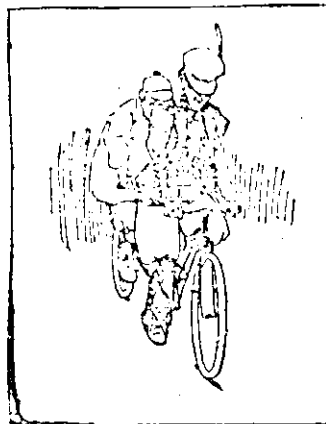
Jack Spratt he grew so fat,
His wife she grew so lean,
O, happy thought, he went and bought
A tandem bike machine.



"Won't that be great, I lose my weight
By sweating on the wheel,
While Mrs. Spratt will gather fat,
Thus both gain by the deal."



And when with smiles they coast for miles
Down some steep hill in town,
All said, though well 'tis plain to tell,
"They both are running down."



Thus Mrs. Spratt on forward sat,
As up each hill they ran,
And smiling said as on they sped,
"Jack is a pushing man."



Day after day they wheeled away
With merry songs and shout,
And people cried, though long they hid,
"At last we find them out."



Crowned with success, they'll ever bless
The wonder working wheel,
Which gave the fat to Mrs. Spratt,
And Jack a form genteel.

THE EFFECT OF THE BICYCLE ON THE HUMAN RACE A HUNDRED YEARS HENCE.—New York World.



San Jose Daily Mercury

July 28, 1895,

p. 3

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