

TO THE GOLDEN GATE GEORGE NELLIS' 1887 WHEEL ACROSS THE CONTINENT

By Charles Meinert

Introduction

From crude beginnings in the 1860s the bicycle had evolved by the 1880s into a beautiful high-quality machine, with a huge front wheel and small back wheel, whose speed could only be surpassed by that of powerful trains. The men who rode these handsome wheels were vigorous fellows with a sense of daring, a love of speed, and appreciation for the companionship of other wheelmen. Riders tested their ability in races against other competitors or in long distance rides against the clock and nature. Though multi-day rides might pass through several states, the ultimate endurance challenge was a bicycle journey across the continent. This is still an appealing challenge and each year countless modern bicyclists, mounted on regular or antique machines, complete rides from sea to sea. These modern accomplishments are, however, quite different in nature from the nineteenth century crossings since few roads were then paved and in many regions even dirt roads did not exist. There are two documented cases of pioneer wheelmen crossing the continent entirely by bicycle prior to 1888. The following pages provide an account of one of these remarkable journeys that began in the upstate New York town of Herkimer on May 24, 1887 when George W. Nellis, Jr. rode out of town accompanied by a "send-off" group of the community's wheelmen. (See article "From Sea to Shining Sea" under the website's American Journey for sketches of the 10 men who attempted cross country highwheel rides in the 19th century.)

Herkimer and George Nellis

Herkimer, situated on the Mohawk River and the Erie Canal, is in the beautiful valley formed by the Mohawk River that extends 100 miles from Albany to Utica/Rome, New York. The Valley was caught up in the bloody frontier struggle between the British/Indian forces and the American patriots during the Revolutionary War. The Nellis family and their relations, who had been in the Mohawk Valley since 1723, played a part in the struggle for independence. They were part of the Palatine Germans who had come to the Hudson Valley in 1710 and soon began moving into the Schoharie and Mohawk regions in search of land and prosperity. In the French and Indian War they had fought with the British to defend their homes, but during the Revolution they opposed the English and fortified Herkimer by constructing Fort Dayton.

With the coming of peace and the building of the Erie Canal along the banks of the Mohawk the region prospered, and by the end of the Civil War the town of Herkimer was a bustling community of 3,000. A respected resident of the village was George W. Nellis, Sr. who was born in 1835 and married Melinda Witherstine before the War. The couple had four children who lived to maturity - Irving, Byron, Clara, and George, Jr. who was born in 1865. The family home was at 44 Eastern Avenue and city directories indicate that the father engaged in farming and was a teamster and a cabinetmaker. He was also interested in public education and for a number of years served as a trustee of School District #2. His children attended the District's one-room school and although

records are incomplete, it is known that in 1877 three Nellis children were enrolled – Byron age 18, Clara age 17, and George age 12. A good basic education allowed Byron and his older brother, Irving, to go on for medical training. Irving practiced in Herkimer and Byron moved to Weedsport. It is not known when George left school but by 1881 he began a three-year apprenticeship with the *Herkimer Democrat* newspaper and lived with his parents at 44 Eastern Avenue. He also served as the *Utica Globe's* correspondent in Herkimer and in 1885 the *Globe* published his scholarly account of the history of newspapers in Herkimer County.

By the middle of the 1880s, Nellis became interested in bicycling and acquired a high wheel, perhaps one that had belonged to an elder brother or to another wheelman. Herkimer had discovered cycling quite early and in the 1860s local machinist Henry M. Quackenbush built several velocipedes. Quackenbush also acquired an early high wheel bicycle in partnership with his cousin, Charles Rasbach, and late in the century the Quackenbush Company was manufacturing a Bicycle Rifle.

In 1886 or 1887, Nellis acquired the fully nickel-plated Columbia Expert used on his cross-country ride. He may have obtained it for below the retail price of \$150 since by 1886 he and partner Charles Avery had a sideline business selling Columbia bicycles. This business probably consisted of having catalogs and sales literature used to take orders from venturesome men who wanted to keep up with the times. There was no formally organized bicycle club in Herkimer at this time but there was a group of wheelmen who sported about on their high-wheel machines.

Nellis was an active rider, although one local paper reported that his rides seldom exceeded fifty miles in length. He also showed curiosity about the development of cycling and must have read numerous books and periodicals about the subject. In May 1887 he published a solid article on “Cycling in America” in the *Herkimer Citizen*. He explained the slow adoption of cycling in this country and blamed the situation, in part, on English machines that were not well constructed to withstand the rigors of American roads. The turning point, in his view, was the organization of the Pope Manufacturing Co. in 1877. “So rapid was the growth after the first machines were turned out that other manufacturers were attracted to the business and we now have eight firms engaged in cycle making of various descriptions. From a simple means of pleasure, cycling has advanced to a practical, safe and constantly enlarging vocation, of gigantic proportions....We now boast of better machines, better riders and will soon possess better roads than any country on the globe.”

Nellis also gave attention to a special form of cycling. “As the sport widened and prospered, new converts were found at every turn and gradually long-distance riding became an attractive feature....The first noted undertaking was made in 1883, by Karl Kron, who rode from Detroit, Michigan to Staunton, Virginia, a distance of 1,422 miles in about 25 days. This trip was made on a Columbia bicycle and averaged 42 miles per day. The next important event in cycling history is found in the wonderful trip of Thomas Stevens in 1884. He started from San Francisco, April 22 and reached Boston August 4, covering the 3,500 miles in 105 days. Stevens also rode a Columbia and on reaching Boston, the Pope Manufacturing Co. furnished his expenses to continue his trip around the world (Nellis was not correct in this matter. The company provided Stevens with an Expert Columbia, but funds for the world tour came from *Outing* magazine). His success persuaded others to attempt the journey and in 1886 George B. Thayer, F. E. Van

Meerbeke, and S. G. Speir rode across the Continent on bicycles.” We also learn from the article that Nellis had studied the route used to cross the country and conditions in the West. “The course usually taken by transcontinental tourists follows the line of the Union Pacific railroad and passes thro’ New York, Ohio or Canada, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and California. Autographed letters in the writer’s possession from these wheelmen state that the trip is engendered with far less danger than is supposed. Mr. Thayer says that in crossing the Rocky Mountains, a rider does not notice the fact the grade is so gradual. The most to fear is an absence of water on the plains, a fact which cannot be remedied, but must be endured. At this time of year a rider will encounter continuous heavy trade winds, which last for three months and render riding at times difficult. The inhabitants of western farms are hospitable to a degree seldom found in the east, and we have yet to learn of a case when a traveler on a bicycle has been refused food or shelter.”

The benefits of such an arduous journey were noted. “In touring across the continent one will meet with adventures to be had in no other way. The novelty of his position attracts universal attention of itself and a close observer of human nature can make the trip of vast benefit.” Nellis also recognized the trip would contribute to his journalist career by providing a grand opportunity to provide a thorough report for the readers of the papers carrying his accounts. “The distance to be traveled each day entirely depends upon the roads one encounters as well as upon the nature of the country. Then, too, rainy weather is almost a complete barrier to a cyclist and on such occasions he usually puts in time rubbing up his wheel, seeing the town, and varying the programs by entertaining his companions with thrilling accounts of hair breadth escape on the Erie Canal of New York State.” Practical matters were also considered. “No baggage is carried beyond articles of absolute necessity. Weight is an important desideratum and beyond a pair of hose, a wrapper and handkerchiefs, no extra clothing is necessary to the economical bicyclist. These are usually carried in a small traveling bag on the bicycle, and the entire machine and baggage will not weigh over 42 pounds.”

We have no list of items actually carried on the ride, but his narrative does mention a satchel strapped to the bars or backbone, a derringer, a rubber tube for drinking, a road map, a L.A.W. Road Book, a railroad chart showing section houses, a few items of clothing, and some writing materials. It is not known how much money was carried, but additional funds could be telegraphed to him at stations on his route.

It is clear from the article that Nellis was quite familiar with the cycling situation in the era and that the trip was not a spur-of-the-moment decision. Many months of planning were needed to contact men familiar with riding conditions in the west. A route was selected and a tentative schedule was established so mail from home could be waiting for him at several cities, approximately 500 miles apart along the way. There was also correspondence with former Herkimer residents who now resided in towns he would pass through. They would be expecting him and accord hospitality and a link with his Herkimer home.

A late May departure was decided on in hopes of avoiding the worst of the muddy spring roads in the east and allowing an August arrival in San Francisco that would eliminate the danger of encountering snow in the Rocky and Sierra Nevada mountains.

Nellis may have sought support for his trip from bicycle czar Colonel Pope, but he did not obtain any assistance. When the Little Falls *News* reported that Pope was providing a

bicycle and financing the journey, Nellis responded in the pages of the *Little Falls Evening Times*. "The Pope Manufacturing Co. did not furnish my bicycle nor do they pay my expenses. I purchased my own wheel and the cashier of the Herkimer bank will substantiate it. I also pay my own expenses and I leave it to the cashier to prove the same."

Even without Company support, Nellis certainly favored Columbia bicycles and often mentioned that he was riding a Columbia. He stopped at Pope Manufacturing headquarters in Chicago, mentioned Columbia dealers in other cities, sent at least one telegram on the status of his ride to Pope, and permitted Pope to borrow and exhibit his machine after the transcontinental ride.

Reporting the Journey

Nellis did take the initiative arranging to send back separate periodic day by day accounts of his ride to each of the two newspapers in the village, the *Herkimer Citizen* and the *Herkimer Democrat*. There was also an agreement to supply the *Wheel and Recreation* bicycle paper published in New York City with periodic reports. Even the *Little Falls Journal and Courier* was promised one brief account of the trip. The amount of compensation he received for these reports is not known, but it may have covered much or all of the estimated \$300-cost of the journey (equivalent to \$5,677.70 in 2001).

The reports sent to the first three papers were not identical, but they were consistent in terms of dates, mileage data, names of towns he visited, and places he secured lodging. They were somewhat different in length, language, and incidents mentioned. The twelve-part account carried in the *Citizen* was the longest, with almost 18,000 words. The *Democrat's* seven-part narrative had about 11,000 words plus fifteen short telegrams sent by Nellis from locations in the west. The *Wheel's* seven-part account was the shortest, but it gave more attention to bicycle matters such as wheelmen he encountered, bicycle merchants, and accommodations for riders. Writing a total of almost 40,000 words during a taxing trip that required eight to twelve hours of riding most days was a major accomplishment. His reports were sent from twenty-four cities. Only on five occasions were reports to two papers sent from the same location and reports to all three papers only came from San Francisco. There is no evidence that he kept a diary or journal during the ride, but it seems likely that daily notes were made to help him prepare his reports to the newspapers.

The narrative of the journey that appears in this article is drawn from all three newspaper accounts in an effort to provide the reader with an interesting and accurate description of the 72-day journey to the Golden Gate. A strict chronological order has been maintained. All events took place in the order and on the day indicated. Editorial notations within the narrative are designated by brackets.

The spelling, grammar, punctuation, and language used by Nellis have been retained. Consistent with the times, Nellis used the word dinner for the midday meal and supper for the evening meal. The use of "we" throughout the narrative was used by Nellis in the editorial sense to avoid the use of "I." Only on a few occasions after Charles Avery left him at Niagara Falls did Nellis briefly have riding companions (on days 14, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25). He had a walking companion on Day 59. He did of course have the constant companionship of his bicycle that was never given a proper name.

NARRATIVE OF THE 1887 TRANSCONTINENTAL JOURNEY

Day 1, May 24. Herkimer, NY to Canastota, NY. 46 miles, 8 ½ hours

At six minutes past six o'clock on the morning of May 24th, two wheelmen might have been seen pedaling out of Herkimer, N.Y., on a mission that will bring one of them at least to the land of the Golden Gate. The writer, astride of a fifty-two inch full nickeled Expert Columbia, and C. P. Avery of Herkimer also riding a Columbia, composed the members of this little cavalcade [two other riders accompanied them a short distance].

An overclouded sky obscured the rising sun and rendered riding a pleasure indeed. The first town we passed was Mohawk, a mile from home, whose denizens had not yet been clasped from the arms of morpheus. Two miles farther and Ilion, the seat of the famous Remington Armory flitted by, to give place in turn to Frankfort, three miles further on. Here the first dismount was made and thirty-five minutes were consumed in the six miles. Pushing on, we reached Utica, the 'pent up' city of Oneida county, at 9:15, with a cyclometer register of seventeen miles. Under the guidance of Charlie Metz, that princely wheelman and sprinter of Utica, we bowled out of the city at a lively rate and reined in our steeds at Clark's Mills, eight miles away. Here we bid adieu, and with the parting good wishes of our conductor, rode away to Vernon, seven miles, four of which were unridable and barely passable. While passing a little farm house, two miles from town, we were suddenly hailed with an invitation to cider. We went down the cellar. Two glasses also went down cellar. Had we inbibed any more we would most probably [have] laid down cellar. But we didn't.

From Vernon to Oneida Castle good roads prevailed, although the country is far from inviting. Dinner struck us in the shape of another farm house and our pockets in the shape of forty cents. We anticipated taking dinner at Canastota. But we didn't. We struck a big wind about s'teen miles from there and gave it up – the dinner. But that wind was immense. It blew Poker [Avery] into the ditch all at once.

Leaving Oneida Castle with a mileage of nearly forty, we sallied forth over some of the finest roads of the day. But for that strong gale this ride would have ranked way up. Five miles more and the beautiful village of Canastota appeared in view from a distant knoll. Proceeding into town, we met a jovial cyclist in the person of C. H. Wolf. It was now 3:30 p.m., and, while being introduced to several other cycling brethren, a big shower suddenly appeared and made our acquaintance without undue formalities. Well, this put an end to record breaking for that day, so we accepted the situation and a berth at Canastota with as good grace as possible.

Day 2, May 25. Canastota, NY

Canastota proved to be a lively burgh, and we tarried, there one day, owing to mud, rain, etc.

Day 3, May 26. Canastota, NY to Auburn, NY. 51 miles, 8 hours

We started forth at 7 a.m. in two to three inches of mud. The run to Chittenango, seven miles, was made in one hour, Fayetteville 9 ½ miles farther we reached at 10 o'clock, and wheeled into Syracuse in time for dinner, covering 25 miles in the forenoon. At 12:30 we remounted and sped over some elegant roads out of the saline city. Eight miles were left

behind in short order, and upon emerging from around a bend in the road one of the grandest rural scenes imaginable burst upon our enchanted vision. For miles the undulating landscape revealed many neat farm houses surrounded by smooth lawns and meadows formed a picture grand in the extreme. Further on could be seen the little village of Camillus, resting among all this wealth of rural beauty. With many an admiring gaze we sprang in the saddle and after a coast of one-half mile down the gradually sloping hill, rushed into the village. We had progressed but five miles when a very preemptory halt was called in the interest of a glorious hail storm. This we took in from the verandah of a handy farm house – without invitation. For an hour the icy crystals made music on the stony pavement and we kept time to the patter by jokes and jestings. Three more miles brought us to Elbridge, and to a realization that muddy roads are far from funny, even tho' a hail storm be thrown in gratis. Stopping at a roadside barn Poker resolved himself into a special artist and sketched a cow. I went into a committee of the whole on appropriations and succeeded in confiscating two eggs.

The little hamlet of Senet [Sennett] we espied at 5:30 and rolled into Auburn, the convict city at 6 p.m. Through the kindness of an uncle of mine, we were given a view of the wicked side of Auburn prison. Four convicts came forth and we eyed them in mingled awe and admiration. They looked upon us with scorn and sarcasm.

Day 4, May 28. Auburn, NY to East Bloomfield, NY. 51 miles, 9 ½ hours
Fate was against us Friday morning and we soon found it in the shape of three or more inches of clayey mud, just beginning to dry, and lumpy, like cobble stones. Twenty-four miles of this kind of highway were passed by noon. Cayuga was the first place we struck and ran almost into Cayuga Lake. A row boat soon buoyed us over and dropped us two miles from Seneca Falls. Waterloo four miles further, came and went and left us still plodding the weary way known only to mud struck cyclists. Our real estate possessions were being enhanced at an enormous rate and with difficulty could a clean part of our dirt dabbled wheels be seen. Geneva, 24 miles from Auburn, came into view with 12 o'clock and a raving desire for dinner. This is the garden city of Ontario country, and for miles can be seen the industries carried on in the floral world. Nurseries abound on every hand and the air is filled with a thousand delicate scents. This coupled with its location upon Seneca Lake renders the place a perfect haven of health and unending pleasure.

From Geneva the roads were fine. More delightful roads could not be desired; smooth, level, macadamized, devoid of stones and requiring little effort on the pedals. A run of 17 miles brought us to Canandaigua at 3:30 p.m. Here a sudden transition from dry to muddy roads took place and but nine miles were covered from four to six o'clock. This brought us to East Bloomfield and here we resolved to stop. (Macadamized roads consisted of firmly packed layers of rock and gravel. They were not paved with asphalt or cement.)

Day 5, May 28. East Bloomfield, NY to Medina, NY. 70 miles, 11 ½ hours
At seven o'clock Saturday morning we awoke in the midst of a dream and a dense fog. After waiting an hour we concluded to venture forth and pointed for West Bloomfield, five miles away. We passed through West Bloomfield, Lima, Avon and Caledonia, where we had dinner. But, ah, ye gods! What a feast was in store for us. Seventeen miles to Batavia and the road smooth as a floor. Away we went, passed Le Roy, seven

miles in 35 minutes and finished at Batavia. At this place we met several genial wheelmen and acting on their advice, proceeded to Albion. As luck would have it, we happened upon the remains of a dinner party at a fine country residence and the lady of the house would have it no other way than to treat us as her especial guests. Lucky the wheelmen who fall into the hands of Mrs. W.H.P. of Albion. A repast fit for regal palate spiced by the brilliant conversation of our generous hostess put us chaps in exceedingly fine spirits. From thence to Medina, where we put up for the night.

Day 6, May 29. Medina, NY to Niagara Falls, NY. 41 miles, 6 hours

Passing through Middleport, Gasport and Lockport, we reached Niagara Falls at 5 p.m. Here we register at the Falls Hotel and after supper sauntered out to see the place. Soon we were standing in the presence of that great and magnificent cataract pouring down into the awful depths below. A faintly glistening moon sent silver messengers on the tiny dancing waves below and shrouded the foaming billows in a halo of shimmering light. At 10 p.m. we turned in, determined to make a thorough exploration on the morrow.

Day 7, May 30. Niagara Falls, NY to Atinclair, Ontario. 36 miles, 4 1/2 hours

Monday, Decoration Day, was bright and breezy. After breakfast we visited the Falls, the inclined railway, took passage on the "Maid of the Mist" and went bobbing around almost directly under the mighty torrent of water, and through a shower of mist and spray to the Canadian side. Here parks, museum, Falls, etc., drew our attention, and returning a big hour late we visited Goat Island, taking in the three sides, the Cave of the Winds, precipice heights, etc. Twelve o'clock saw us back in the hotel with a ravenous appetite. The landlord took charge of this to his everlasting regret. Bicyclists alone know how those viands disappeared with lighting-like celerity.

Two hours later we oiled our wheels, adjusted our 'bearings,' and at three p.m. said a last sorrowful adieu to Poker, our boon companion for a week. Riding out over Suspension Bridge we (we and us now used by Nellis to refer to himself) turned southward and struck Welland, Ontario at 5:30. Supper over, we wheel away to Wellandport and reach Atinclair at 8:30. Here we stop for the night.

Day 8, May 31. Atinclair, Ontario to St. Thomas, Ontario. 77 miles, 12 hours

A hard clayey road, fairly ridable, meets us nearly all day, and we push on through Camboro [Canborough], Canfield, Cayuga, Nellis Corners, and Hagerville, where we take dinner, two miles out of town, with a generous farmer. From here we go to Waterford and run eleven miles on the Michigan Central railroad tracks, meeting with good success. Leaving that, we pedal on, through Corinth, Springfield, and Yarmouth, reaching St. Thomas at eight p.m. Copious indulgences of milk were features of the day, and I may say of every other day. At no time has this favor been denied us.

Day 9, June 1. St. Thomas, Ontario to Blenheim, Ontario. 48 miles, 6 hours

A heavy rain meets me at St. Thomas, and Wednesday morning the roads are intolerable. We put in time seeing the boys and the city. The place has three daily papers and several weeklies. One of the pleasantest bicycle men I had the good fortune to meet was C. H. Hefinstall, a gentlemen of no ordinary affability. At 3 p.m. however, I venture out and acting on the advice of a brother cyclist proceed to Fingal, Tyrcoville, Wallacetown, and

Clairville, where supper is procured and at 6:30 I remount and ride away to Palmyra, Morpeth and Blenheim, reaching there at 9 p.m. My wheel was pretty thoroughly coated with mud however, and a force pump is called into requisition, followed by a good rubbing down.

Day 10, June 2. Blenheim, Ontario to Leamington, Ontario. 39 miles, 6 hours

Thursday morning I struck mud in vast quantities. At 9:30, I set out and rode through Buckhorn and Dealtown to Romeny, twenty-four miles, when a farm house was resorted to for dinner. No moral suasion could alter his determination not to be paid. What Canadian people lack in roads they make up in generosity, yes more so. Ask for a drink of water and they will bring out milk or cider every time.

Shortly after Lake Erie appears to the left, and all the afternoon as far as the eye can see there stretches away for miles an interminable waste of water. Romeny is passed after 12 miles of scabbling over clay roads through Canadian forests and lovely wilderness, only dotted here and there by the sturdy settler's log hut. I rode into Wheatley, and was stopped by rain until after supper, when a seven-mile run brought me to Leamington, making but thirty-nine miles for the day, sixteen of these were made on foot, ten were fairly rideable, and the rest were good. All kinds of fruit adapted to temperate zones grow here, and dairy and farm products in great abundance. While farming is a great business here, the lumber interests are immense. [Nellis expressed his feelings about Canadian roads in a poem written several days after he left that country.]

A cyclist sat by the roadside fence,
Sighing whither, ah whither, oh whither?
Is a passable path ever going to commence-
Yes, whither, ah whither, oh whither?
Here I've labored and pushed till I'm dusty
And sad,
And never a rest or a top have I had;
Still this 'ere road is so horribly bad,
I could lay down and perish and wither.

The country it looks like a barren desert,
This desert-filled, barren old country.
Like a man who's minus both stockings and shirt,
This cold, bleak, and barren old country;
I've tramped all the way from Bingen to Bot,
With the sun a scorching so terrible hot,
And never a rod of good wheeling I've got,
In this craven, confounded old country.

After scrambling and panting way up that big hill-
Such scrambling and panting and scrambling!
Only sad desolation awarded by skill,-
My scrambling, and panting, and scrambling.
For when at the top, 'mid grunting and groans,
I found the road covered with big cobblestones,

Then vowed by a mountain of "Nick's" saintly bones,
No more to go rambling.

My wheel is enameled an inch with this "sile"-
This mud-dabbled stony old highway;
While my breeches are nearly quite "done up in ile,"-
With trying to ride on this highway,
My "bearings" are lost, wherever I look,
The same lonesome landscape looms up like a spook,
As I plod 'long this boggy lone highway.

I was startled way back with a consumptive like bark-
A squeaky, disjointed, low howling,
Of a dog which had surely come out of the ark,
And ever since kept up his growling.
He looked at me once, then he laid down and sighed,
Such a sight he had evidently never espied,
And it injured his dogship's ancestral pride,
For such specimens wild to be prowling.

I know that I'm in a sorrowful plight,
Heavy laden with dirt and with sorrow,
With nothing to eat, and no one in sight,
But my cycle, too, weighed down with sorrow,
Oh what will become of me and my bi.
In vain for a supper and a bed do I sigh,
But nothing, not even a small piece of pie,
Will cheer up my soul till the morrow.

Alone in the desolate desert I'm stuck-
And here I keep sticking and sticking,
With a wee stock of patience, and much less of pluck-
I'm bulling the market on sticking.
My financial condition's a sorrowful plight.
In fact, all has vanished in meteor-like flight,
And busted I am, up higher'n a kite,
While my stomach is empty and kicking.

Oh, the beauties of cycling are surely untold,
There's lots to be written, be written,
A tale to harrow thy soul I'd unfold.
On the beauties that yet are unwritten.
With this wonderful pastime there really is naught
That can safely compare with this heroic sport;
Oh, give me a bicycle, rugged and taut,
With its form most truly I'm smitten.

Day 11, June 3. Leamington, Ontario to Dearborn, Michigan. 45 miles, 7 ½ hours

Friday morning rain again greeted me, but at 8:45 I pushed out in ankle mud and wheeled through Ruthven to Olinda, six and one-half miles. At Essex Center I had dinner, and rode into Windsor at two p.m. Taking passage on the steamer "Victoria," I was soon gliding peacefully over to Detroit. On landing a big fellow waltzed me over to the custom house and went through a series of evolutions concerning my importation of a Columbia Expert Bicycle.

"Great Scott, man, what in the great name of Jehovah could attempt me to import a Canadian bicycle? Why we can make three American wheels for what it costs to get one in your confounded old Canada." I hauled papers before that official's eyes by the score and talked bicycle till his hair stood on end. "That's enough, get out o' this with your velocipede, you're all right."

Passing through the smoke and turmoil of Detroit, I wheeled to Recreation Park and resolved to take in a ball game between the Chicagos and Detroit's of the National League. My card [press] was sufficient to gain admittance, and leaving wheel and baggage in charge of the gate keeper, I proceeded to the reserved grand stand, was ushered in gratis, as usual, and walking up the aisle, took a conspicuous seat amid great applause and clapping of hands. Modestly I arise to acknowledge the honor, when loud cries of "down in front" greeted injured vanity. Looking out, I observed a big fellow in center field making a brilliant catch, and this is the cause of all the racket. Oh, for Jonah's big whale to swallow me up! The way Clarkson twirled the sphere for the next hour was a caution to stolid Detroiters, but they heeded it not and came out second best.

Leaving the scene of base glory I came in contact with Messrs. Irwin and Gage, of the Detroit Cyclists, and am shown through the halls of wheeling fame. Royal palaces of pleasure these genial boys possess, and with reluctance I wheel out after supper in the company with a half dozen Detroiters to Dearborn, seven miles away. Next morning I attempt to liquidate my lodging with a five dollar Canadian bill – but it won't pass.

Day 12, June 3. Dearborn, Michigan to Adrian, Michigan. 57 miles, 9 ½ hours

Saturday is warm, yes, in the language of Jericho, it is hot. A few miles out of Dearborn we passed the Wayne County Poor Asylum and stopped for a closer look. One superior feature lay in the separation of the insane from rational patients, male from female, etc., in entirely different buildings. At Poline we have an ample dinner and push on at 2 p.m. to Macon, ten miles away. Shortly after a school picnic comes into view and we take that in, of course. About a dozen little girls and half as many boys get up in succession and with their little piece, while their parents, and cousins and aunts, sit in the sun and try to look wise. Signs of relief are heard when the plume and ribbon bedecked school marm announces a retreat for refreshments. We joined the retreat and took ours with several huge slices of cake, big bumpers of lemonade, etc. This picnic was a grand success far as we were concerned. Push on to Tecumseh, 16 miles for supper and with fine roads before us we bowl away to Adrian. As I ride into town appears a cluster of prison-like buildings which I afterwards learn is the Adrian Reform School for Girls. Here our wayward lasses of America are cloistered and taught to chew gum in the most approved fashion and free from the evils which surround the inmates of Vassar.

A little inquiry and we are grasping the paw of that prince of good fellows, Irving H. Finch, and receiving a cordial welcome at the same time. Under his direction we are stalled at the Central Hotel, taking a good bath and soon afterward being introduced to the Adrian Bicycle Club. Without exception these Adriance wheelmen are as genial and whole hearted a lot of cyclists as have yet been thrown in our way. They possess a club room replete with all modern appliances for comfort and enjoyment, elegant parlors, etc. [Nellis had met two Adrian wheelmen the preceding year when they stopped in Herkimer while on a ride to New York City].

Day 13, June 5. Adrian, Michigan

A run is planned for Sunday afternoon, but rain comes down in torrents and puts a stop to cycling for that day. Various occupations conspire to pass the time however. One of the pleasantest and most picturesque cemeteries extant we saw in Oakwood and a walk thro' its various paths and winding avenues was not the least pleasure we participated in. Sunday evening we had the pleasure of meeting Mr. E. I. Waldby, a native of Cooperstown, New York [near Herkimer]. Mr. Waldby gave us some exceedingly interesting accounts of former central New York events.

Day 14, June 6. Adrian, Michigan to Allen, Michigan. 46 miles, 7 ½ hours

Monday morning we pushed out in the mud and endured it for 19 miles to Hudson, reaching there at 4 p.m. Hardly a bright spot was visible on our Expert, but a thorough force pump bath and rubbing down restored it to its native luster, and weight, and we pushed on to Osseo, Hillsdale, and halted at Allen. Not a bad day's work after all. But saints preserve us from those 19 miles of mud again. The farmers had just made their annual road improvements and this accounted for it. They scrape all the gutter mud into the middle of the road and let it quietly drift back. That is how Michigan roads are made, when made at all.

Day 15, June 7. Allen, Michigan to Sturgis, Michigan. 43 miles, 6 ½ hours

Tuesday morning we start out with great promise of sand - and find it. We reach Quincy and Coldwater. Messrs. Conover, Starr and Johnson of cycling fame, here claim our attention and are bound to keep us here over dinner. Why don't you stop with us a while? was the burden of their song. At 12:30 we mount and ride away to Matteson and from there to Bronson. From here we go direct to Sturgis, instead of following the teachings of our L.A.W. road book and go thro' Burr Oaks 3 miles further. This L.A.W. road guide has fooled us on other occasions. At Sturgis we met very poor hotel accommodations and worse than all the landlord demanded a fee of \$1.50 for lodging and breakfast. Did we settle? Well no, hardly not. Therefore he came down one-half and was glad to get that.

Day 16, Sturgis, Michigan to Mishawaka, Indiana. 49 miles, 8 hours

Wednesday, Klinger Lake, White Pigeon and Mottville are entered and left behind and 22 miles away I cross into Hoosierdom. Three miles and Bristol, Indiana, captures me for dinner. Sorry, indeed was the aspect of Bristol's only hotel. From a mental vision of cold pork, soggy potatoes, bad coffee and musty bread I was suddenly awakened to the reality of a dinner fit for an epicure, and that fellow was I. A nicely broiled steak,

mashed potatoes, elegant coffee, milk, lettuce, cabbage, peas, tomatoes, corn, fine bread, pie, cake and a whole saucer of strawberries to top off with caught me that time, and more astonishing than all, twenty-five cents footed the bill. At 1:30 I mounted my Expert and wheeled south to Elkhart, twelve miles away, over very fine roads. Reach Osceola, 6 miles further, at 4 o'clock. A big rain stops navigation here and for a time nearly paralyzes us. No hotel in the place and six miles to Mishawaka, raining like blixen – and no prospect of stopping. No supper either so we repair to the corner grocery. Glory! A stem of bananas. Glorious! Some molasses cookies. "Cookies 8 cents a dozen, and I'll give you all the bananas you can eat for 25 cents." I take six bananas and a dozen cookies. Five minutes later I want six more bananas and in ten minutes later I want six more bananas. The proprietor begins to quail, I begin to eat. Bananas are going down fast. Extraordinary demand and two dozen have been laid away. "Here, take your quarter and get out of this." I took pity on the poor fellow and desist. He won't pick up any more hungry bicyclists by the wrong ear again, that's certain. The rain presently abated and at six o'clock we were able to go out, two inches of soft mud cover the roadway, but we prefer this to sleeping out doors, and so run on to Mishawaka. At 7:30 I was ensconced in the best hotel the place afforded.

Day 17, June 9. Mishawaka, Indiana to Valparaiso, Indiana. 56 miles, 7 hours

Thursday morning dawned foggy and muggy but we push out at 8:30 a.m., and make South Bend. New Carlisle is reached by dinner time and we push on to LaPorte. This is a fine little city, paved streets, nicely laid out and very pleasant. Westville appears at 5 p.m. We clean up our horse and taking supper run to Valparaiso. We have passed great fields of wheat, growing corn and potatoes during the past few days and not many fine farms, coming in contact with very fine people at every point. But for nice improved farms, well fenced, and stocked, none in this section can compare with those we passed in Cayuga and Orleans counties, New York. The roads here are equally as lacking in comparison. A good road is very generally a harbinger of fine farms and an excellent manager at the helm.

Day 18, June 10. Valparaiso, Indiana to Chicago, Illinois. 49 miles, 10 hours

Friday is another sandy day. It took us five mortal hours to reach Hobart 12 miles away, and we walked every step of the way - with a meager few exceptions. For 34 miles southeast of Chicago there lies the finest sandy desert on the face of the globe. Sand of all sizes, colors and consistencies. Sand in banks, in pools and in avalanches. Sand o'er which riding is a torture and walking is absolute agony. But six miles from South Chicago we struck a hard road at 7:40 p.m. Lake Michigan, ablaze with lights from Chicago on the left, a cool breeze to fan the cyclist's heated brow, and the soft mellow glow of a fading sunset all lend their charms to enchant the heart of the weary dust laden tourist. Reaching the heart of the city, over avenue and boulevard, smooth as glass and hard as adamant, lined with parks and elegant floral banks, I put up at the Windsor hotel and immediately turned in.

Day 19, June 11. Chicago, Illinois

Out next morning with the lark, a stroll around the block and breakfast renews the normal shape of your cyclist and prepares us for the ordeal of hand-doing Porkopolis. We go

through a pile of accumulated mail, meet C. T. Gray, of East Springfield, (N.Y.) our contemplated companion hence-forward, and do up the Porkopolis in general. First we met Mr. N. N. Hadley, whose [bicycle] passage thro' Herkimer from Brattleboro, Vermont, to this place was chronicled in a recent issue of the *Democrat* and are introduced to several jolly wheelmen. Hence we are wheeled around the madly rushing, pushing and rollicking city, thro' its noise and bustle and confusion to one of the finest parks and avenues imaginable. Here base ball of the championship order is digested, and some of another ship. Only sixty-three games were played in the city Saturday, so we were not wanting in that respect. The evening was devoted to sight-seeing, museum, investigating, cycloramas of historical battles, theatres, etc. We had the pleasure of shaking hands with Mr. Harvey D. Colvin, an old Herkimer county boy, and ex-president of the United States Express Company. In the sporting world, Mr. A. G. Spalding gave us a welcome grip.

Day 20, June 12. Chicago, Illinois

Sunday we devoted to church-going and meeting some hundred cycling gents, as well as a pleasure ride down Drexel and Grand boulevards, and yachting on Lake Michigan. All these, of course, are tame as compared to some of the greater points in Chicago, but we were well satisfied in basking under the glamour of the lesser lights.

Day 21, June 13. Chicago, Illinois to Downers Grove, Illinois. 28 miles, 4 hours

At 3 p.m. we saddled our Expert and rode westward out the great wicked city, which true to say we were not reluctant to do. With all its gaiety and grandeur, its beauty and its magnificence, its wealth of sights and scenery, its volumes of smoke and soot, its whirl of fashion and festivity, its miles of plazas and parks, Chicago possesses no charms for such as I. A run and LaGrange was passed at 6 o'clock, together with dinner. Nine miles more and we stopped at Downers Grove for the night. (Although not mentioned in newspaper accounts, Nellis and Theron Gray left Chicago together. They separated near Davenport, Iowa on Day 24 since Nellis wished to travel faster.)

Day 22, June 14. Downers Grove, Ill. to near Mendota, Illinois. 65 miles, 10 1/2 hours

At 5:30 Tuesday morning we were out kicking off miles by the still small light of the morning sun. Three o'clock we were taken in tow by a brother 'cyclist Mr. H. W. Gardenier of Rockford, Illinois, who ran against us in the jovial style peculiar to our craft, and in forty minutes we were eating ice cream at Somonauk. Here we parted. A fruitless attempt was made to catch Mendota but we only caught a farm house four miles out and launched our crafts and our nose in a bowl of genuine old fashioned milk. The farmer was a jolly cove and made our short sojourn with him very pleasant. A good lodging and breakfast – gratis.

Day 23, June 15. Near Mendota, Illinois to Annawan, Illinois. 69 miles, 9 1/2 hours

"Hey, boys! Hey! Five o'clock and time to git eout." I was down and loading up with a genuine old – fashioned breakfast. About 6:30 we sprang in the saddle, and pushed slowly over some terrible rough roads to Mendota. Rushed on to Dover for dinner. Passed Princeton and Wyanet, reaching Sheffield for supper at 5:30, Annawan completed the days run at 8:15. Annawan has a local reputation for their beautiful art, and art is a

female with its citizens. So we found it, both the reputation and the girls. Four of them escorted us out Thursday morning.

Day 24, June 16. Annawan, Illinois to Davenport, Iowa. 46 miles, 7 hours

With light hearts we embarked Thursday morning at seven o'clock, and pulled into Atkinson, six miles, one hour. Fair sailing accompanied the journey to Geneseo. Pushing out, five miles beyond we struck a bad road. This gradually grew worse, then horrible. Reader have you ever mounted a sandy hill one mile long, and no side path, you will know exactly our bill of fare that day. Ye gods! We left Colona at 3:30 with the sun scorching our top knot and indulged in a ferry across the Green river and a weary tug of eleven miles to Moline and spent one hour for tea. Thirty minutes later we were in Rock Island digesting a big morsel of mail. A trip down Government Island, with its vast aggregation of armored and naval manufactories, arsenals, magazine, yards, parks, etc., is one of the most delightful things we absorbed at Rock Island. Spell bound we were soon gazing upon that great and majestic stream first discovered by DeSoto [Mississippi River]. We wheel over the long suspension bridge to Davenport, and put up at the St. James Hotel, directly on the river front. The 196 miles from Chicago here were made in less than three days running time. Characteristic with the appearance of this section, its inhabitants cannot be excelled in the way of hospitality or generosity in our eastern land.

Day 25, June 17. Davenport, Iowa to Iowa City, Iowa. 71 miles, 10 hours

At 5 o'clock Friday morning we shook the dust of Davenport, the Dutch city of Iowa, from our heels and lit out for Blue Grass for breakfast. Fifteen miles of fair roads and Sweetland Center was passed. Muscatine coming into view one hour later. Here we take dinner and meet several jolly cyclists, among whom F. W. Grosheim, comes in for a big share of our praise. With him we wheel out of Muscatine at 2:30, and reach West Liberty at six p.m. Putting up at the National Hotel we partake of as fine a repast as an epicure could desire. At seven o'clock accompanied by Lew Dumar, a new acquaintance, we ride away to Iowa City. The Saint James harbors us overnight, and we turn in at ten o'clock.

Day 26, June 18. Iowa City, Iowa to Marengo, Iowa. 36 miles, 6 hours

Despite an early start we did not secure breakfast till 8 o'clock at Tiffin and push on over some horrible hills and sandy roads to Homestead, a genuine old fashioned Dutch settlement in time for dinner. Here all is on the real old fashioned German scale. Large brick houses with sand on the floor, and wooden shoes, which ground and crushed the dirt in a nerve racking manner. Two hours sufficed to fill us so full of Germantown, we could hardly pedal to Amana in one hour. We did and pushed into Marengo one hour later, about done up. It was one of those hot spells, which usually precede a thunder storm. Hardly had we housed our cycle when the storm burst in a great fluster of wind, dust, hail and rain and kept up its onslaught for two hours.

Day 27, June 19. Marengo, Iowa to Grinnell, Iowa. 38 miles, 5 hours

Sunday we donned our best garb, which we carefully wear during the week also, attend church, hear a devout old preacher expatiate upon the wisdom of "Casting thy bread upon the waters." Mounting our wheel at 1 p.m., ride out in company with one of our craft in

the direction of Brooklyn and push on to Grinnell. Of all bicycle centres yet encountered, Grinnell takes the cake. A place of some 3,000, it has seventy-five riders of the silent steed and we unanimously dedicate it as the "Great American Cycling Centre." Riders of all ages and of all machines are here met – enthusiastic and alive to the issues of this delightful pastime, and ever ready to stretch for the hearty hand of welcome and good cheer. "Long live the Grinnell Bicycle Boys" is the burden of our song as we leave their cozy club rooms.

Day 28, June 20. Grinnell, Iowa to Newton, Iowa. 24 miles, 5 hours

Monday dawned dark and dismal, and it was eight o'clock before we struck out. After running and walking, at intervals, for seven miles, a grand thunder shower comes up and relegates us to an old forsaken and dilapidated shanty that once did service as a house. Along came a belated farmer to share our portly hovel. Our compulsory companion was inclined to be talkative, and we were inclined the other way, so there was no love lost between us. The rain took pity on us and passed away in time for a walk to Kellogg. A good bath and dinner set us to rights – me and my bi and at 3:30 we launched out for Newton. Here another shower set in and we put up for the night.

Day 29, June 21. Newton, Iowa to Des Moines, Iowa. 36 miles, 6 hours

The march was resumed and the hills were also resumed. Twelve miles thro' mountain and dale brought us to Colfax, a summer resort of on little prominence, and we take dinner at the Grand Hotel, now filled with watering people. At 7:30 we wheel into Des Moines, the capital city of Iowa, and register at the Aborn [Hotel]. Meeting several cyclists, we took a run around the city and its beautiful parks, saw the Capitol, and got posted on our journey. Iowa lays claim to the third finest Capitol building in the country [completed in 1884] and it is certainly a fine structure. Some extra fine people were encountered at Des Moines, and we treasure many pleasant recollections of Hawkeye's Capital.

Day 30, June 22. Des Moines, Iowa to Menlo, Iowa. 60 miles, 10 hours

A run of 17 miles landed us in Waukee with a tremendous gale blowing us back all the way. A short distance from the city we met Mr. William Buck and his estimable wife, former residents of Fairfield, Herkimer county. Mr. Buck removed to Iowa about 25 years ago, and now owns one of the finest and best farms in the State. Herkimer grangers ought to come out here and get a few points on tillage. Everything is done by mechanical process. Iowa is the great corn producing State, and immense fields line the roadway on either hand, while wheat, oats, rye, barley, and timothy grass thrive equally well. We proceed to Adel to dinner and thence to Dale City and Glendon. Supper over at 6:15 we set out for Casey and until 7:00 o'clock rush over miniature mountains in a direct southwest bee line, when suddenly the road comes to a full stop. To the right, the left, and on all sides appears the same barren waste – no path. No fences have guided us for miles, nearly all this way the road is simply two beaten wagon tracks. Just as Old Sol is making great shadows creep along the crest of each adjacent hill, and evening is waning into twilight, we espy away to the left a telephone line. That settled it, and quicker'n Jack Robinson we pointed for those 'phone poles knowing they went somewhere. They proved to be on a wagon road running south and that we took, coming out, in thirty

minutes in sight of a small town. It proved to be Menlo. We do not begrudge the five miles for the excitement of our chase was worth more than that. Ah, 'tis sweet and soothing to the cyclist to get into exciting predicaments. If you ride a bike, you will recognize at once the immense sport we had in being actually lost on the prairie.

Day 31, June 23. Menlo, Iowa to Avoca, Iowa. 65 miles, 10 ½ hours

Leaving Menlo early next morning we ate breakfast at Casey and thence encountered the most terrific hills imaginable. We push into Anita, at twelve, tired and hungry as a starving bear. We wheel into Atlantic, the best country town by all odds we have seen in Iowa. Here we meet several cycling men – all bankers and secured some points ahead. It is a remarkable coincidence how many bankers out here ride bicycles. You can find one or two in about every institution and it sort of runs in the family. Under the advice of Messrs. Tarshay, Whitney, and Midles of the local bicycle club, we push on via Marne and take supper. The gentlemanly proprietor of the Marne house will accept no remuneration for the privilege. From Marne to Walnut we have fair sailing, and still better to Avoca, where we pull up for the night at 8:30.

Day 32, June 24. Avoca, Iowa to Omaha, Nebraska. 38 miles, 5 hours

Waking up with the sun making great columns of fire on my chamber walls, I found it 5:45 and by the time I got down in the office six o'clock. I decamp and take a run of ten miles to Minden for breakfast. I push on to Neola and thence to Weston. Riding has thus far been fairly passable, but I'm now promised a good twelve-mile run to Council Bluffs. I am whisked over the river and into Omaha in short order, and at 1:30 am taking dinner and digesting a half bushel of mail at the Metropolitan Hotel. One hour later I am shaking hands with such wheelmen as Prince, Peabody and a host of others of more or less cycling celebrity. All is expectation and excitement over the coming races and tournament on the morrow. The afternoon was spent in seeing the city, and in the evening a big illuminated bicycle parade was inaugurated. Chinese lanterns were fastened to our handle bars and pedals, and these bobbing up and down in a line of 100 wheelmen, made a merry, grotesque, and attractive appearance. All over the city's fine asphalt paved streets we wheeled to the lively music of a brass band, and formed the center of attraction for thousands of people lining the streets. This over, the visiting wheelmen to the city, myself included are handsomely entertained by these Omaha hosts, until a later hour.

Day 33, June 25. Omaha, Nebraska

Saturday was all that could be desired as a racing day, and with good track, etc., some fine sport was looked for. First we saw Sailor of Minneapolis take a gigantic tumble in the 3:30 class that settled his racing for the day. Stockdale walked off with this race in good shape. Peabody captured the three minute gait. Smith got away with the 3:15 event. The chief enthusiasm centered in the one mile professional handicap, with Price, Whittaker and two other starters. "Whit," as he is fraternally known, had twenty yards start, and took the first heat. Refusing to avail himself of the handicap on the second heat, he also won. "Whit" is a dandy from way back and a rough 'un to tackle when in his black silk tights.

The Omaha Bicycle Club treated their guests right royally at their spacious club rooms on Saturday evening, and several pleasant hours were spent around the festive cycle

camp. [Because of his journalistic background Nellis must have been pleased to learn that Omaha had three daily papers, two weeklies, one tri-weekly, and one monthly]

Day 34, June 26. Omaha, Nebraska to Fremont, Nebraska. 37 miles, 5 hour
Sunday Whittaker again came to the front and carried off the laurels in the ten-mile championship race, thereby precipitating a challenge for a \$200 match from Prince, his plucky adversary.

At eleven a.m. we wheel out of Omaha under the guidance of about a dozen knights of the crank and take an easy run of five hours to Fremont. Fremont is a fine little town of over 4,000 souls and wholly given up to business. But it contained an attraction of far more interest to us – the shape of an old Herkimer boy [Irv McKennan] we had not seen for five years. We were soon exchanging reminiscences of by gone days when Irv was trying to beat the stock holders of the Herkimer bank out of their jobs and I was loafing in Howe & Ackley's store just next door, where the New York Store now stands.

Day 35, June 27. Fremont, Nebraska to Silver Creek, Nebraska. 67 miles, 10 hours
From Fremont we were destined to meet the most expeditious travel on our trip, tho' one could hardly believe it. All day we were cheered on by level, hard roads, which with few exceptions, are the predominating highways thro' out the entire state.

Day 36, June 28. Silver Creek, Nebraska to Shelton, Nebraska. 71 miles, 11 hours
Tuesday proved even more propitious, and 71 miles were added to the record. Chapman is a city of some 5,000 inhabitants, pleasantly located, and contains a fine class of people. A half hour is whiled away in an ice cream saloon. Halted at Shelton. Some faint recollections yet linger about this halting place. Here we were compelled to bunk on the floor on a pallet.

Day 37, June 29. Shelton, Nebraska to Gothenburg, Nebraska. 88 miles, 10 hours
Wednesday turned out to be the red letter day of our trip, and bids fair to remain so, unless California hustles out some extraordinary fine roads. Starting out at 7:30 a.m., we passed thro' Gibbon, Buda, stopped an hour at Kearney one of the finest places yet encountered in the west. Here we are again taken in tow and shown around the precincts of a future American metropolis. Mr. A. E. Atkins, a spirited citizen and extensive land agent, spends a half hour in expatiating upon the wealth and beauty of his favorite hobby, and presents some very strong facts to show why Kearney is destined to be the future commercial and business center of central Nebraska. It is a town of 5,000 inhabitants, surrounded by some of the most fertile soil in the La Platte valley and possessing many natural advantages not found elsewhere. In addition, a canal 16 miles long supplies abundant water for manufacturing purposes and furnishes the stimulus to Kearney Lake, a fine sheet of water one-half mile from the city. All in all, Kearney is about as attractive a spot yet to be found west of the Missouri, and we believe a bright future is in store for the place. From there to Odessa, Elm Creek, Overton, Plum Creek, Cozad and finally landed in Gothenburg. About seven o'clock we had our first experience with a rattler. We were riding along nonchalantly when all at once there appeared before our steed in the roadway a streak of green snake [probably not a rattler]. Such as his haste in getting out of our way he didn't even leave his card and not even a rattle to commemorate the

event. We were about to turn in when along comes a fortune teller. Seizing our paw, the swarthy maiden of mystery proceeded to illumine the dark abyss yawning out before us and unravel the countless threads of intricacy woven about the future career of “me and my bi.” We were compelled to bunk in a room with four beds and as many occupants, and every mother’s son of them snored like unto the boss bugler in a brass band.

Day 38, June 30. Gothenburg, Nebraska to Paxton, Nebraska. 76 miles, 12 hours
June 30 was our birthday, and we resolved to do some-thing extraordinary to commemorate the event and make a fit inscription for the milestone of our 22nd anniversary. Starting out at 8 o’clock we cross the Platte river over a bridge one mile long and took a road on the south side, forty-four miles to North Platte. Stopping at the Pacific Hotel we secured the best dinner we had for many a day. Here is the home of “Buffalo Bill,” and other personages of like renown. At three o’clock we mounted our Expert and pointed westward, reaching O’Fallon’s, a section station [on the Union Pacific line]. Here we had supper, and set out for Paxton, the only place where lodgings were obtainable. Four miles through sand and we saw the sun disappear. Darkness settled down upon us six miles from Paxton. Nothing to do but take the railroad for a five mile trudge to Paxton and a place to lay our weary bones. At ten o’clock we halted before a fourth class hotel. They had no beds and would make us one on the dining room floor.

Day 39, July 1. Paxton, Nebraska to Denver Junction, Nebraska. 58 miles, 8 hours
Breakfast was the only redeemable feature of that so-called hotel, and we manage to make up at the table what we lost elsewhere. Twenty miles passed and Ogallala was reached at 10:50. Here a stop of two and half hours was necessitated by a ripped bicycle shoe. [Years later Nellis said he had worn out three pairs of shoes on the journey and had worn the bicycle tire down to the rim]. About 3 p.m., we overtook several cowboys in charge of a great herd of cattle, westward bound, and exchanged some kindly greetings. A short distance further and we came upon a patriarchal old bull, of gigantic proportions, tied, as we thought, to a stake in the ground. After eyeing us a moment, he snorted, pawed the ground and came for our vicinity with no friendly intentions. Instead of being fast, the rope was merely tied to a heavy iron, and by extraordinary exertions, his bullship could go where’er he chose. Looking back we saw the cowboys, and mechanically pointed that way, the bull after us pell mell. Great beads of perspiration stood out on our sunburned brow, and excitement lent wings to our flight. Reaching the cowboys we ran around the cattle drove. One of them dismounted and seizing the rope which held the now infuriated bull, he succeeded, by a series of dexterous twirls, in getting it around the animal’s fore leg, and drawing it taut, prevented the circumvented beast from moving a single step. “Now git, youngster, and we’ll keep this critter till you are out of sight.” Did we git! Well, in less time than it takes to tell it we were miles away.

Day 40, July 2. Denver Junction, Nebraska to Kimball, Nebraska. 82 miles, 10 hours
When we mounted our Expert Saturday morning, at Denver Junction [Julesburg], a tremendous gale came over the hills like an avalanche, and threatened to dislodge our one hundred and forty pounds [decrease of almost ten pounds]. Against this we pedaled on an up grade for fourteen miles to Chappell, and just in time to escape from one of those Nebraska showers which spring up at all hours, and go about as sudden as they come.

We wheel into Sidney and take dinner at the Pacific Hotel. On to Kimball over the best road of the day, registering at Hotel Martha at eight o'clock.

Day 41. July 3. Kimball, Nebraska to Hillsdale, Wyoming. 55 miles, 7 hours

Sunday we resolved to desecrate in an endeavor to reach Cheyenne to spend the glorious 4th. Nine miles of sand cheered us on to the border line of Wyoming territory [Statehood in 1890]. A better road now appeared and we went five miles in no time. Suddenly feeling behind us for our saddle bag, we only felt the place where that useful article usually was. Great Scott! Lost saddle bag and 46 miles from Cheyenne. We were positive that the bag was there at the start. Nothing to do but go back and get it, and we performed the right-about-face tactic with exceedingly bad grace. Long and anxiously did we scan the roadway until just three miles back our optics espied the innocent cause of all our trouble. Well the bag wasn't to blame. The strap which confined it had worn completely in two, and of course no ordinary bag could stay with nothing to hold on to at the rate we were going. We were doomed to still further persecutions. A run of six miles farther and we struck Egbert. Starting out, a half mile from the station a big rain-storm suddenly put in some more protests against our celebrating the Fourth at Cheyenne and back to Egbert we skidaddled. We took supper at the section house and again embarked for Hillsdale. This distance was made partly riding and partly walking. Here we found a jolly son of Erin all alone, the rest of the family as he said, has gone up Cheyenne to "cellybrate the Fourth." A big bowl of bread and milk was forthwith laid before me.

Day 42, July 4. Hillsdale, Wyoming to Cheyenne, Wyoming. 20 miles, 3 hours

I was awakened at five next morning by the smell of coffee, fried eggs, ham and toast. We insisted on his taking four bits and departed. One hour and we were at Archu. Forty-five minutes later we passed Atkins and were at the same time greeted with the far away summits of the Rocky mountains, their snow capped peaks looming up into the clouds about 75 miles away. We now take a coast of eight miles into Cheyenne, pulling up before the Metropolitan hotel at nine o'clock. We saunter out to see a part of the great celebration promised us there. Ye gods! Gentle reader, after all this hurry and trouble was it not outrageous for the first fellow we met to tell us "there was no celebration," but a church picnic and a juvenile ball game in the city. Returning to the hotel, we write several letters, get a good dinner and then feel better. Several bicycle men then claim our attention and a visit to their handsome club rooms enlivens the dreary aspects of a quiet Fourth of July. Here we found pool and billiard tables, besides other games. A fine reading room, good gymnasium, bath rooms, and in fact a complete 'cycling paradise. One of our newly made friends was a former Herkimer county boy, hailing from Manheim [near Little Falls, New York]. His father, Stephen Ransom, emigrated to this country in 1855 and has since lived here. In the evening we saw "Janish" at the city opera house, and a fine building it is.

Day 43, July 5. Cheyenne, Wyoming to Tie Siding, Wyoming. 44 miles, 6 hours

Tuesday morning we devoted to business and at 12:30 wheeled out of the city on our last 1,000 miles more to the golden gate. From Cheyenne we point westward along the U.P. railroad [Union Pacific] and enter Granite Canyon. This is a lonely though rough and romantic spot, and is only attainable by several miles of tall climbing. Pushing on we

stop at Sherman, the highest point on the Union Pacific, for supper. This place is 8,242 feet above the ocean level, and the country for miles around is revealed in an endless succession of rock turreted hills and winding valleys, dotted here and there and everywhere with massive boulders, with an occasional mountain peak standing out like grim sentinels on the lovely landscape. A monument of gigantic proportions is here erected to the memory of General Ames, ex-superintendent of the Union Pacific Railroad. From here we have an easy coast of seven miles to Tie Siding, and put up for the night at a fourth rate hotel. [The name and importance of the town came from the fact that great quantities of railway ties were cut in the forest north of town and transported to the railroad line]

Day 44, July 6. Tie Siding, Wyoming to Eykyn's Ranch, Wyoming. 48 miles, 7 hours

We start out at 8 a.m., and reach Red Buttes, after a nine miles walk. Nine miles of good roads are passed and we enter Laramie City [Laramie] one hour later. Here we loiter till 12:30, and acting under the advice of local wheelmen desert the railroad and take an overland emigrant trail through the Rockies. This is done partly for adventure, partly for diversion, and partly because it is 20 or 30 miles shorter than the railroad course. Ten miles of good road are passed when we suddenly encounter a rough, stony, unridable road, and eighteen miles out strike Birds Ranch. Our Laramie adviser told us to put up here, but we push on, and seven miles further come to Eykyn's Ranch [spelled Eyky's and Eytyn's in other accounts] and secure a good supper, lodging and breakfast. Our host is a generous-hearted Englishman, and readers, our stay with him was very pleasant. These jolly ranchmen never think of taking pay for these favors and consequently we were so much in pocket.

Day 45, July 7. Eykyn's Ranch, Wy. to Tatum's Ranch, Wy. 48 miles, 8 1/2 hours

A run of 20 miles over pretty rideable roads brings us to Rockdale, a romantic ranch on Rock creek. Here we find a pleasant reception from Mr. and Mrs. Williams, who extended the hearty hand of welcome to their pleasant ranch for dinner. We are shown a fine garden and the creamery department under the sole charge of Mrs. Williams, who makes 100 pounds of butter daily. This product retails readily at 40 cents per pound, and is no small part of the ranchero's revenue. She is wholly wrapped up in her home and devoted to its interests founded on a life of nine years in the Rocky Mountains. We might also add that Mrs. Williams is a native of Chicago, Illinois, and how she became accustomed to this wild rural region is a miracle to one of our meager comprehension. We set out for Elk Mountain, 16 miles away. The trip was made in three hours, over somewhat improved roads, and pushing on, after wading a foot of water in Medicine Bow creek, we brought up at Tatum's Ranch. Although given a bunk of blankets on the hard floor of the ranch, we turn in and sleep like a rock till six a.m.

Day 46, July 8. Tatum's Ranch, Wyoming to Rawlins, Wyoming. 45 miles, 10 hours

Sixteen miles down the gradual winding declivity of Elk Mountain, passing over multitudinous mountain brooks, from whose cool, bubbling, depths we quaffed many a refreshing draught, crossing tiny canyons, and running beneath massive rocks and huge boulders hanging in mid air from the mountain side. We at last emerged upon a level prairie. Securing luncheon at a wayside ranch, pushed on this sand and sage brush to Fort

Steele. Crossing the Platte river on the railroad bridge we were soon eating a hearty dinner and congratulating ourself upon once more hearing the rumble of railroad cars and seeing the old familiar telegraph poles. Still we are not sorry we traversed that lonely but picturesque place, for there are many redeeming features about its meandering path. We are assured it is the first time man and bicycle have braved the wilderness and traversed the route crossed by us from Laramie to Fort Steele. Leaving Fort Steele at 5 o'clock we push on and reach Rawlins at 8 p.m., quite content to secure a good night's rest in a *bed*, at the Brunswick hotel.

Day 47, July 9. Rawlins, Wyoming to Latham, Wyoming. 38 miles, 7 hours

We staid at the capital of Carbon county until ten A. M., and while there had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Ira Biderman, an old Herkimer County boy born and matured in Mohawk. He came west about 15 years ago. He is now proprietor of a first-class restaurant at Rawlins, and, if report goes for aught, is piling up cords of western wealth for his future welfare. Wheeled out of Rawlins with no prospect of meeting another town for 120 miles. And the intervening territory no better than a deserted wilderness. Way back in the mountains we registered a solemn vow to assassinate the first individual who again advised us to take a mountain path in preference to railroad road. Before we were ten miles out of Rawlins, the impression began to dawn on our bump of wisdom that our jump from mountains to plains was a leap from frying pan to fire. We walked just 34 miles that day, passing thro' the railroad stations, an occasional depot and one section house. Probably four miles of riding entire and that on the U.P. railroad tracks. The road here was so sandy that it was with difficulty could we even push our wheel walking, and the railroad ties, rough and unballasted, were a parlor carpet compared to the awful road. At Latham we staid at a section house, a place kept for the railroad men, generally four in number who attend to the track for a certain number of miles. These are the only persons to be found in the territory, and with the wife of one of these men, usually the boss of the gang and, the telegraph operator at the stations, who also serves as freight agent, ticket agent, depot master, signal officer, and yard brakeman comprise the total population of any one station on the Railroad between Rawlins and Rock Springs. This, too in a section of country bare and bleak as the desert of Sahara where nothing will grow but paltry shriveled bunches of sage brush, where no animal life can live but gophers, chipmunks and an occasional prairie dog, and where rain never falls to the depth of three inches during the entire year [in a letter written by Nellis, late in his life, he recalls taking headers when his bicycle wheel hit a gopher or prairie dog hole]. We brought up at Latham at eight p.m., tired and I need not say hungry, for we are at all times hungry.

Day 48, July 10. Latham, Wyoming to Bitter Creek, Wyoming. 54 miles, 11 hours

We were not loth when the sun arose to grasp our Expert and get out of that immediate vicinity as fast as the tramp act could carry us in our mad effort to escape from the foul atmosphere of a railroad section house from the association of men whose natures are as wild, whose ideas of life as vague and whose conversations as rough, and uncouth as ever emanated from the denizens of Siberia or Patagonia. Stopped at Red Desert for dinner. We reach Tifton at 3 p.m., and there strike a tolerably hard clay road which carries us to Table Rock for supper, and lands us in Bitter Creek at 8:30 p.m.

Day 49, July 11. Bitter Creek, Wyoming to Rock Springs, Wyoming. 50 miles, 8 hours
Pushing out, we take a ride and walk of 16 miles to Hallville for dinner, and at 1 p.m., are on the road to Point of Rocks, the first post office encountered since leaving Rawlins 94 miles back. We stop a half hour and mail divers letter, postals, etc., and pushing on eat supper at Slat Well, another section house and ride into Rock Springs at 8:30. A good bed here awaits us and we seek its alluring embrace for the first refreshing sleep in a good while.

Day 50, July 12. Rock Springs, Wyoming to Granger, Wyoming. 47 miles, 9 hours
We are off over mountains and through canyons to Green River over some tolerably big hills, and we rush into this western citadel. Dinner is absorbed in the Pacific Hotel and we resume the march. Following the advice of some road agent, we take the railroad track on a promise of some good riding. Crossing the Green River over the ties find no riding at all but a walk of 13 miles to Bryan, which we reach in time for lunch at 4 o'clock. At Marston, 9 miles farther, we take supper. We set out for Granger but it is past ten when we arrive. All have retired and soundly locked in sleep – not to be aroused. We have but one choice and that is a bed in a car house, a small hut large enough to hold a hand car, and we make up our bed on the car itself. Unstrapping our satchel for a pillow we lie down to sleep on a handcar, with no covering and the wind playing through cracks and crevices.

Day 51, July 13. Granger, Wyoming to Hilliard, Wyoming. 56 miles, 10 ½ hours
From Granger we resolved to abandon the railroad again, and as our clever host directed, took an overland emigrant trail south thro' Fort Bridger, striking the railroad again at Piedmont, 42 miles away. With the exception of a stiff up grade for six miles, we lead a fine ride into Fort Bridger and took dinner in the mess. These regular army chaps are hale, hearty boys, and with many a hand shake and lots of well wishes they start us on our way to Piedmont. Twelve miles further comes a big rain storm. Hurriedly we point for a railroad snow shed, about two miles away, as the nearest shelter. But long before we get there the pitiless water deluged us and the road at the same time, transforming a hard clay bottom to a soft sticky mass of mud. By the time we reach that shed we are a fit subject for a clothes wringer, while our wheel is so covered with mud scarcely a bright spot is discernible on its usually polished surface. This is roughing it with a vengeance, and for one mortal hour we sit there, bemoaning the fate which took us on this wild goose chase and wishing that bicycles had never been invented. Once more the sun comes out and we are en-route to Hilliard. The soft clay would clog up in the head of our wheel and actually stop it from going round. Then would we do the wheelbarrow act until some gravel made pushing right side up possible [he pushed the bike with the small wheel in front and the bars facing the ground]. Arriving at 8 p.m., we find nothing but a boarding house, but this is grasped at so eagerly we half scare the landlady who views our forlorn appearance with holy terror. We take some eatables aboard and then give our 'cycle a good shower bath, restoring it in half an hour to its original luster and lightness.

Day 52, July 14. Hilliard, Wyoming to near Castle Rock, Utah. 34 miles, 6 hours
It is 9 a.m., before the roads are dry enough to venture forth; and we then set out reaching Evanston over fair rideable roads at 12 o'clock. Here we take dinner at the Mountain

house, spend two hours with Robinson's circus which is raising Cain in the place and fairly flocked with such a motley crowd of ruralites as the eye ever beheld. Here are bucolics rushing by, pushing and jostling and treading on one another's toes in the mad endeavor to get a seat in the pavilion. There are gangs of cowboys renewing old times over the festive gin and lager and raising such a rumpus that the sense of hearing is anything but a pleasure. And high above the din and bustle and clamor can be heard the stentorian tones of the ticket seller. It was past two o'clock when we left and took a tramp up a mile hill, to coast down the other side. Fairly good roads sent us along flying until about six miles from town a nice little shower introduced itself to our notice. With no better shelter in sight, we repaired to a snow fence erected by the railroad, and tearing off some loose boards, put up a pretty substantial hut for myself and the bike. We proceeded to walk and push into Wasatch for supper. This was taken at a section house and we pushed on at a rattling pace down a steep incline which made the mud fly and brought us up at Castle Rock. Here we secured lodging and several glasses of milk at the ranch of David Moore. This gentleman possesses one of the best properties to be found at this altitude, 6,000 feet, and has many hundred head of cattle and horses, besides running a good dairy.

Day 53, July 15. Castle Rock, Utah to Ogden, Utah. 59 miles, 11 hours

We set out down the winding canyon for Echo. The road traversed one of the most picturesque sections of the Wasatch Mountains. As we passed down its winding course the ever changing landscape, dotted here and there by the log cabin of the sturdy ranchman, made a picture we will never forget. With a solid nearly perpendicular wall of rugged rocks on one side and a gradually sloping chain of hills on the other, a bubbling mountain brook in the center and the steel rails of the Union Pacific, glistening in the morning sun, crossed and recrossed by the circuitous wagon road, this pathway furnished an endless array of objects grand and beautiful for the entire distance to Ogden. High up the mountain side could the eye discern an occasional mountain buck, peering down on the silent steed and its rider. Steady wavering pines, which in the distance resembled tiny shrubs, bent and swayed in the gentle breeze. A compact mass of craggy yellow and stone, forming as it seemed an insurmountable barrier. But science and ingenuity had hewn a way out of the solid rock which led over cliffs and wound around abrupt curves, a yawning precipice on one side and the column of rock on the other. Carefully steering our 'cycle over these places, lest a false move, a suddenly encountered boulder would precipitate us to the yawning chasm below. We emerged upon a level plateau where lies the little village of Echo, 17 miles from Castle Rock at 12 o'clock. The reader may wonder at the slow rate of time – 17 miles in 5 hours, but had we to pass thro' that lovely spot again much more time would we consume in studying its wealth of wonders. Dinner over at Echo. Peterson is reached at 5:30, stopping 30 minutes for supper we push on thro' Devil's Gate and set out for Ogden. We run into the city, registering at the Chamberlin house, at 8:30. Half a bushel of mail awaited us there. Robbins circus was also there, so a little more than the usual excitement was manifest. Ogden is the terminus of the Union Pacific railroad, and from here westward the Central Pacific makes the connecting link to 'Frisco.

Day 54, July 16. Ogden, Utah – visit Salt Lake City, Utah

Saturday is devoted to a run via rail down to Salt Lake City. Arriving in the city we immediately met Mr. D. L. Davis, L.A.W. consul at this place, who undertakes to pilot us about "the center stake of Zion," as this Mormon center has been facetiously dubbed. The tabernacle, temple and other buildings devoted to Mormon worship are duly inspected and admired, together with the late residence of Brigham Young and homes of other lesser or greater lights in saintly circles. A stroll about the city reveals many fine streets, beautified by handsome residences ornamented by pleasant shade trees, and with brooks of pure running water bordering either curb. Many orchards of fruit in various stages of growth are also seen and a ride into the country on either hand will reveal a perfect garden of Eden so extensive is fruit culture carried on here. After dinner we take a trip to Garfield beach on Salt Lake. This is the most prominent bathing and picnic resort of the place and is withal, a beautiful spot. Large steamers ply to and fro and give to the town a splendid opportunity of exploring the inland sea, which has no outlet. We might add that the city is now in quite a furor occasioned by the prospective admission of Utah as a state [not admitted until 1896].

Day 55, July 17. Ogden, Utah to Promontory, Utah. 56 miles, 7 hours

Sunday morning we have the pleasure of meeting Messrs. Browning Bros. at Ogden, agents for bicycling goods in general and the Columbia cycles in particular. These gentlemen also carry a full line of sporting goods and are always ready to meet the wants of their increasing patronage. Accompanied by the best wishes of a host of Ogden's genial riders, we spring in the saddle at 9:15 and ride away across the desert. Hard gravel roads are met with all the way to Brigham City, twenty-three miles. Dinner over we are away to Corinne and here ends our good roads. The next 18 miles is partially ridden across Salt Lake or an arid desert on one end of the lake, and partially walked on the railroad track. When in the center of a wide expanse of sandy waste, which was smooth and hard in some places, we were ready to swear we were on an island. On every hand, as plain as day could be seen a blue expanse of water or what was to all appearances a good imitation of the genuine article. But reader, you have no doubt heard of a mirage. Well this was one, and a most realistic one too. [Stevens reported seeing mirages on his ride in 1884]. One of the first things we did at Blue Creek was to imbibe a quart or more of water for which we were nearly dying, and then set out for Promontory, an eight mile walk up a tremendous hill. The good fortune of a railroad hotel awaited us here, and so assured substantial accommodation. [Promontory was the place where the Central Pacific and Union Pacific were joined on May 10, 1869. In later years the dividing point between the two lines was Ogden, Utah].

Day 56, July 18. Promontory, Utah to Ombey Section, Utah. 52 miles, 8 hours

We pushed out and took a ride over the hills on a hard gravel road to Monument. This section house kept by a batchelor, so we discarded dinner, notwithstanding the fact that it was 12 o'clock and we were ravenously hungry. Taking the railroad track we walk eight miles across another arm of the Salt Lake to Seco, but find no dinner there. The altitude here is very low and water filled the roadway on both sides of the track. So we take the latter and get a tolerably good amount of riding on the ties, arriving at Kelton at 3 o'clock. The landlady at the hotel which was unfortunate enough to have me for a dinner guest, tho't I had fasted a week. Can't help it. I ate several good dinners and then topped

off with a large sized lunch, fetching up with two pieces of pie, three pieces of cake and a big bumper of milk. At 4 o'clock we set out for Ombey and walked thither, 12 miles, in three hours. On the way we passed the scene of a big cloud burst the night before and a large section of the track had been washed away, occasioning a delay of 16 hours to passing trains. Never will forget that night at Ombey. As luck would have it, we struck a solitary old bachelor, an Irishman at that, whose heart was as hard as adamant and his dog as cross as blixen. He wouldn't let us sleep on the floor in his house and we were compelled to bunk in a cow shed, with a matting and pallet of hay. Thank God, there are not many such persons in this world and I find 'em few and far between even in this lonely wilderness. With a heavy heart we wheel our boon companion in sorrow, our only friend, our noble steed that has proved as true as the steel it contains, and is always ready to answer at our beck and call. If bicycles were human, I might say I adore this Columbia Expert which has carried us 2,500 miles over rocks and ravines, plateaus and prairies, thro' sunshine and rain, without a murmur or break. Entering the barn we find a more comfortable quarters than the outside appearance would indicate. We were soon wrapped in the arms of morpheus and dreaming of being eaten up by an Irishman and his cowardly cur of a dog. It must have been about midnight when we were suddenly awakened by a light touch on the arm and opening our eyes, the distinct out lines of a dark object could be faintly distinguished crouching over our prostrate form, but a foot or two away. What it was we could not make out. Was it a midnight assassin or beast of prey? We lay there apparently within the shadow of death. All at once we bethought ourselves of a loaded self-acting derringer which lay in the bottom of our satchel. Luckily we had unstrapped it from the bicycle and it now lay open at our head. Cautiously we put out our hand and was rewarded by coming into contact with the grip. A second more and we had hold of the revolver, while a low growl from our midnight visitor told us our movement was detected. Slowly bringing the weapon on a level with the body of the unknown beast we pulled the trigger. A flash, a blinding volume of smoke and the noise of the discharge was intermingled by a series of most blood-curdling yells. Leveling our gun we let him have one more shot and that settled the commotion. Sleep was impossible for us after that

Day 57, July 19. Ombey Section, Utah to Tacoma, Nevada. 56 miles, 9 hours

At the first gray appearance of daylight we were up and examining the whereabouts of our midnight caller. We found him stretched out near the door, cold, stark and stiff. We had killed a coyote. [Nellis was denied breakfast by the Irish section man] Packing our grip and seizing our 'cycle we lit out over the hills for Matlin, first cutting off the tail of that luckless coyote, as a memento of our thrilling experience. We wish to add that not in all our experiences, during the weary journey through these western lands, have we met another Irishman as hard-hearted as this one and we have serious doubt if another like him is in existence. Many times have we applied for, and been given succor at Irish hands, and given it with a readiness and generosity which would pale the arts of native Americans; and be it said to the credit of old Ireland and her noble sons, that not once was a kindness extended to us with thoughts of compensation. A fair run brings us to Matlin and breakfast at a section house. We capture Terrace at 10 a.m. We conclude to stay here for dinner and so while away two hours with pen and ink. We left to ride thro' Bovine, another section station and passing on reach Lucin at 5:30. A luncheon is here

secured of the section house wife and we embark for Tacoma over the railroad ties, as sand has taken the place of hard ground and for three miles we go bumping along, while old Sol is fast declining to rest. Gradually the wind became stronger and gusts of sand came flying over the rails. Suddenly, with a velocity which baffles description, the storm burst upon us and water fell in torrents. Our eye caught the bank of a deep rivulet about three rods east of the track, and into that we tumbled, cycle and all. Under the shelter of the shelving bank we were somewhat protected from the driven blast, which raged for fully an hour. When we entered the little gully worn into the earth by ages, it was perfectly dry, but hardly fifteen minutes had passed ere two feet of water was rushing thro' the bottom and gradually it encroached upon our resting place. Higher and higher rose the swiftly flowing current, which threatened ere long to engulf us, unless the storm abated. All at once a magnificent burst of light from the now setting sun cast a halo of glory over the wet and dripping landscape. Hastily clambering from out the soft mass of clay, we sought the rails and started on a seven-mile walk to Tacoma [spelled Taconia in some accounts]. You can imagine our joy when the light of Tacoma shone out. We need not dwell longer on one of the most trying ordeals of this transcontinental trip.

Day 58, July 20. Tacoma, Nevada to Toono, Nevada. 27 miles, 4 ½ hours
Strenuous as were our efforts to reach Tacoma Tuesday night, it was not until after eleven next day that we could pluck up enough courage to evacuate the place. Pushing out we found a fair run to Toono over sand and railroad ties and halted for the night. Toono like dozens of other section stations on the railroad was a town of perhaps a dozen souls – lost souls at that – and the only industry of the place is wool shipping. This product is brought to the railroad by caravans of three wagons drawn by a dozen horses, from 20 to 40 miles in the mountains, and is the only source of revenue this God-forsaken country affords.

Day 59, July 21. Toono, Nevada to Bishop, Nevada. 54 miles, 10 hours
From Toono we wheeled forth and took dinner at Otego. Independence was reached by walking as usual and Wells came next. As we arrived at the station our eyes met the most appalling sight ever witnessed by mortal man. An engine was making up at the depot and shifting cars. The conductor had just made a coupling, and in stepping from between the cars his foot caught, he was thrown down and eight wheels passed over his abdomen. The poor fellow's body was literally cut in twain and death was almost instantaneous. Strong men turned away to avoid the sight. In vain we tried to get lodgings at Wells, and so resolved to push on 20 miles to Deeth over, as we were confidently told, a good hard road. About five miles out and the road ceased to be good. It grew unmistakably bad, and two miles further it ceased to be altogether. We went bumping over a horribly ballasted railroad track to Bishop, a section, and fortunately we were able to get a bunk for it was dark and we were very weary.

Day 60, July 22. Bishop, Nevada to Elko, Nevada. 47 miles, 9 hours
A good breakfast is secured which partially compensates for a lack of good rest, and at 7 a.m., we are away, passing Deeth and taking dinner at Halleck. This distance is made almost entirely out of the saddle and for 16 miles we continue the tramp act. It is nearly six o'clock, but we push on and get nine miles of fair riding to Elko. This is the capital of

the largest county of the state, and is a place of considerable size and importance, supporting two dailies and several weekly newspapers.

Day 61, July 23. Elko, Nevada to Beowawe, Nevada. 54 miles, 12 hours

We embark at 7 a.m. Twelve miles of riding brings us to Moleen and 13 miles of walking lands us in Carlin in time for dinner. After a good dinner and with our pockets stuffed with apples by the kind-hearted landlady, we are away on a jaunt to Palisade. This is a picturesque spot in the center of a mountain range, thro' the canyons and passes of which the railroad makes delightful curves, overlooking many magnificent scenes and inviting shady glens on the banks of the Humboldt river. A half an hour is spent drinking in the beauties of Palisade and we are away for Beowawe. Darkness overtakes us. A faint moon illumines the way with grotesque and fitful shadows flitting here and there. Three miles farther we overtake a traveler, a tramp as silent and forlorn as ourself. Any way we were thankful for the companionship of this lone chap, who proved a genial talkative Scot and inclined to be hilarious. At nine o'clock we have the satisfaction of seeing Beowawe and lose no time in getting a good supper, and a good bed.

Day 62, July 24. Beowawe, Nevada to Battle Mountain, Nevada. 35 miles, 5 ½ hours

We concluded to take a 35 mile jump to Battle Mountain to partially relieve the monotony. It was an effective remedy, I assure you. Five miles from Beowawe, as we were wheeling over the ties at a fairly rattling pace, a big zephyr suddenly came along and blowed us gently from the saddle. The rest of the journey we made on foot, and entered Battle Mountain at 6 p.m. Here we put up at the Exchange Hotel and meet a very pleasant mountaineer in the person of a Mr. A. G. Higbie, one of the owners and managers of the Blanco Gold Mines, situated about 12 miles west, and in the hills. Mr. Higbie proved a genuine specimen of the rough, hearty and jolly mountaineer, and served to make our stop at the American Exchange hotel a very pleasant one.

Day 63, July 25. Battle Mountain, Nevada to Golconda, Nevada. 48 miles, 6 hours

Monday morning we set out at 7 o'clock, and walked 20 miles to Stone house by 12 o'clock. Dinner was secured here, and did we say dinner? Hardly. We have not reached that stage of starvation circles where we can conscientiously classify two biscuits, an onion, and half a dozen crackers as "dinner," but on this occasion it had to answer the purpose. On we went to Irion Point, 13 miles more of the tramp act and continued the business another 13 miles to Golconda.

Day 64, July 26. Golconda, Nevada to Humboldt, Nevada. 57 miles, 11 hours

A walk of 18 miles in the morning to Winnemucca. But after a bread and milk dinner we set out for better going. Pass Rose Creek, Raspberry Creek, and take supper at Mill City. We push on, walking and riding at intervals and pull up at Humboldt at 9 p.m. A hotel is met here, but God pity the unfortunate traveler who falls into its meshes. Three-dollar-a-day fourth class shebang it is, and the proprietor is noted for nothing save his thirst for ducats. Six bits for supper, six bits for lodging, six bits for breakfast, is the tune we danced to.

Day 65, July 27. Humboldt, Nevada to Wyllis Ranch, Nevada. 58 miles, 12 ½ hours

At 6 a.m. we are in the saddle and away to Rye Patch. Pass Oreana and stop with a farmer, an actual farmer, for dinner. It was a fact, here in this remote, desert country we had found an oasis, so to speak, and for perhaps twenty miles a fertile area, capable of producing all agricultural products common to the Pacific, was situated, surrounded on all sides by bare and bleak mountains. How was it done? By irrigation. Water was conducted in trenches all over these acres and its life-giving properties rendered the cultivation of corn, wheat, rye, oats, potatoes, etc., a great success. We ride to Lovelock, passing fields of ripening grain, and acres of fertile ground on either hand. Hay-making was just in progress here and the scent of new mown hay, we can tell you, was a welcome relief to the dry alkaline, parched and burnt air, which had infested our nostrils so long. Pushing on we get to Granite Point and mirage, where desolation reigned supreme once more. From here to Wyllis' Ranch, a salt manufacturing concern, we hoof it and pull up at 8:30. The proprietor of the salt works we find to be a pleasant, social ex-Massachusetts man of many good qualities. The freedom of his bed and board was readily extended to us.

Day 66, July 28. Wyllis Ranch, Nevada to Reno, Nevada. 52 miles, 10 hours

Thursday morning we are possessed of a strong desire to sleep in Reno, and set out at 6 a.m., without breakfast. We walk to Hot Springs, and hastily bolting a lot of substantial for the inner gentleman, capture Desert at 9:30. This place is well named. It is a section house, and is not only in the midst of a desert, but it is also deserted as well. A walk of 9 miles and we reach Wadsworth, taking dinner. At 3 p.m. we have the satisfaction of riding past Clark's and stay in the saddle, meeting good roads for 12 miles further to Vista. It is 5:30, and we are terribly hungry, so repairing to a near by farm house, met with a warm reception and a big bowl of bread and milk, appreciating both at the same time. Mrs. McCarron is the name of our kind-hearted benefactor, and in vain we offer pay for our lunch. Oh, how she reminded me of home and mother. Living here 9 years she and her kindly husband have cleared and cultivated a fine little farm, many of which we have seen along the Truckee River since leaving Wadsworth. The valley of the river, perhaps half a mile wide on an average, is fertile and green, but on either side the mountains rise bare and brown. We are off on an 8-mile fly to Reno. This was virtually the finest road this side of Nebraska. Our gallant steed, so long retarded by sand and railroad ties sprang forward like a shot, and responding to the pressure of an energetic pedal, once more infused with life and activity, we are bowling over a built-up, hard gravel road, past fields of grain, thrifty farms and their white-coated houses, commodious barns and droves of horses and cattle, on toward the distant Sierras, which loom up grand and appalling in the distance. We were at Reno at last, thank God, and with that was forever left behind the great American desert. Stabling our wheel at the Palace hotel, we are soon in the midst of a pile of letters and papers from home. To me it has been one of the greatest pleasures of this trip, and long and anxiously have I yearned for the appearance of a place where such a boon was awaiting me. If ever another such journey is made it will be careful to arrange my "mail stations" at least two hundred miles apart instead of about 500 as was the case on this trip.

Day 67, July 29. Reno, Nevada

Friday we devote to a trip down to Lake Tahoe by rail and stage. This inland body of water is perhaps one of the most picturesque lakes in the Sierra Nevada mountains, and is the objective point for vast numbers of tourists daily. An abundance of pleasure resorts abound every where in the vicinity, and numerous large hotels give ample accommodations to visitors. A sail on the steamer *Tom Goodwin* gives one a fair idea of Tahoe and its many beautiful attractions, as well as a fine view of the magnificent scenery surrounding its placid depths. Reluctantly we leave Tahoe and return to the city [Reno].

Day 68, July 30. Reno, Nevada to ?, California. 56 miles, 10 ½ hours

Day 69, July 31. ?, California to Colfax, California. 64 miles, 8 ½ hours

[There is no known narrative for these two days. One of the *Herkimer* newspapers acknowledged receiving an account for this period that they did not print, for unspecified reasons. The mileage and hour data for these days is taken from a chart prepared by Nellis at the conclusion his journey. It is likely that after leaving Reno, Nellis passed through Verdi, Nevada and followed the Truckee River toward Donner Lake, Summit, Dutch Flat, Cape Horn, and Gold Run to reach Colfax. Although going in the opposite direction, Thomas Stevens, used this route to pass through the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 1884. George must have found the view from Cape Horn as spectacular as Stevens' description. "For scenery that is magnificently grand and picturesque the view from where the railroad track curves around Cape Horn is probably without peer on the American continent. Standing on this ledge, the rocks tower skyward on one side of the track so close as almost to touch the passing train. On the other side is a sheer precipice of two thousand five hundred feet, where one can stand on the edge and see, far below, the north fork of the American River, which looks like a thread of silver laid along the narrow valley. It sends up a far-away, scarcely perceptible roar as it rushed and rumbles along over its rocky bed."]

Day 70, August 1. Colfax, California to Sacramento, California. 56 miles, 8 hours

Another of those fine days so characteristic of California climate greeted your 'cyclor, as mounting the ever ready Expert on Monday, we were away down the mountain on our swiftly ending course to the Golden Gate. Three inches of yellow dust covered the roadway which wound up and down the mountain side to Clipper Gap. The railroad track was decidedly the best – most level at least – but we kept heroically pegging away, just for the novelty of the thing, and we were struck by several luscious looking peach orchards which bordered the way. We learn that we are now in the center of one of the most prolific fruit belts of the state. Well, we lived in clover all thro' this section. We took dinner at Rocklin, but could do but half justice to the bill of fare, owing to such hearty inroads in the fruit business. From this point the roads began to grow worse and the next seven miles to the junction ended in a substance very near sand. The main thoroughfare, leading directly into Sacramento, the far-famed capital of the Golden State, was so inexpressibly bad that it could not be called a road by any sane course of logic. The road bed, bad at any rate, was covered by a foot or two of loose straw, through which the heavy draft wagons had worn two deep ruts, and packed it partially down, make a road such as has never before been seen by mortal man. It was only 4 p.m. when we were registered at the Great Western, but concluded to tarry over night.

Day 71, August 2. Sacramento, California to Benicia, California. 69 miles, 10 ½ hours
To our mingled disgust and astonishment, there were no wagon roads leading west out of the city, excepting by way of Lathrop, 40 miles around. The direct wagon road passed thro' the "Twelve Swamps" and was consequently under water for a mile or more. At last we determined to take the track, at the risk of being run down in the middle of a mile trestle. Three times we narrowly escaped being overtaken by trains on the trestle, in which case a jump to the ground 12 or 15 feet below would have been necessary, at the risk of breaking our neck, or 'cycle, or both. Then five miles of good running to Davisville [Davis]. On to Dixon and took dinner with a farmer, three miles out of town, at 12. Eight miles more into Elmira and two hours and a half were consumed going to Suisun. Three hours more in making Benicia, so it was 7 p.m. when we pulled up at the latter place, tired, hungry, dusty and bedraggled generally. Here we were greeted with the astonishing intelligence that a tremendous fire had visited Colfax the night before and burned to the ground two large hotels and half the town, including the hostelry where we were stopping Sunday night. The guests in the hotels had to flee in their nightclothes, and lost everything.

Day 72, August 3. Benicia, California to San Francisco, California. 38 miles, 5 hours
Benicia is located on the bay, so we chartered a row boat Wednesday morning to take us across – our cycle and I – and landed at Port Costa at 6 o'clock. Away we go, up hill and down to San Pablo, on good roads, 18 miles in two hours, our Expert seemingly possessed with as much enthusiasm as we, in the desire to capture the end of the journey. Wheeling along the coast, we reached West Berkeley and entered Oakland, reaching the pier at 10:15, with a cyclometer register of 3,369 miles! Taking the boat, we were soon sailing over, and landed in 'Frisco in thirty minutes. As proudly as our dilapidated, unshod, unshorn, unshaven, dejected, disjointed appearance would admit we marched up Market Street to the "Baldwin," and were soon surrounded by a host of welcoming Bay city wheelmen. We lost no time in dispatching a telegram announcing our arrival. Reader you may imagine with what proud satisfaction we penned those few momentous words. Our task was done. Thank God! But our cup of happiness, already full to the brim received an added nectar, when five hours later the following dispatch was handed us by the cable service. "To G. W. Nellis, Champion Long Distance Wheelman: All Herkimer sends heartfelt congratulations. 'Herkimer against the world.' THE BOYS (His friends C. P. Avery, W. I. Taber, and S. S. Patrick).

But ere I relinquish the pen, already grown blunt and 'tired' from its two months' weary jaunt, I would say a few words regarding this so-called 'great west.' First, many, very many, of you back their in New York have an incorrect opinion of this vast expanse of territory known as the western El Dorado. In my letter to you, I have studiously endeavored to give you a true, unvarnished, unglided, matter of fact picture of the country as I saw it, and as it naturally is, and so you will find it. Those of you who imagine this country is more uncivilized than your New England states, are again doomed to disappointment. Let no one come out here stocked with an arsenal of defensive weapons. There is nothing here to harm you, lest it be the utter desolation found on the plains, and that is too big a game for your eastern magazine guns. Let no one come out here with the expectation of plucking gold nuggets from bushes and scooping up

diamonds from eave troughs, for you will do neither. Your nuggets will turn to sand, and sagebrush, and your diamonds will vanish into thin air. This country is distinctly similar to your own, in that wealth is here in plenty, but you must get it by hard labor. The mechanic, the day laborer, the farmer, is better off in York State than he is out here. The only difference is in the matter of capital. A good, sprightly business man with sufficient capital, and ability to apply his knowledge to the everyday chances of life, will succeed here faster than in the east, because there are more opportunities. The west has been metamorphosed by speculative land agents, and beguiled by "town lot" artists till it is a living panorama of glamour and gold to the uninitiated settler. But listen not to the importunities of railroad magnates or land speculators. The very ground they promise is to yield you a handsome return for your toil and privations and hardship, is as barren as the desert of Sahara. The soil is so sterile it wont support a sagebrush, and even if that hardy plant manages to take root in the parched up sand, a heavy gust of wind will tear it asunder and waft it away to be withered and shriveled by the alkaline breezes. Young man, unless you have a fixed idea, a sure prospect of business in view, never desert your home in the east for a shining El Dorado beyond the Mississippi, existing solely in your mind's eye, for certain, you will be doomed to disappointment. There is much more which only an eyewitness can learn and trusting that some day you may all have an opportunity to see for yourselves the vast difference from the west in reality and the west as it is pictured and prophesied, we will lay the pencil aside. (End of the Trip Narrative)

Completing the Journey

With a mixture of courage and resolution that his contemporaries called "pluck," Nellis had arrived at the Pacific, on August 3, 1887, somewhat the worse for wear. The seat of his pants had been patched, his coat was torn, his helmet showed signs of numerous headers, and he had lost 23 of his original 150 pounds. The *San Francisco Bulletin* of August 4, 1887, described him as a newspaper correspondent and amateur bicyclist, "a short, compactly built, ruddy-faced young man, wearing a weather-stained bicycle suit and much sun-burned as to face and hands."

With the advantage of youth and several days of ample good food and less stressful activity he soon looked quite fit in his new plaid bicycle suit. In a letter to the *Wheel* he reported, "Many pleasant hours have been socially spent in the luxurious rooms of the San Francisco Bicycle Club and the Bay City Wheelmen, and the Pacific Coast has every reason to be proud of these two model organizations." He also provided cycle trade information. "Among the cycling fraternity, I found a live and wide awake class of representatives, chief among whom are Messrs. Osborn & Alexander, No. 628 Market Street. Their large and commodious ware rooms are filled with an enormous stock of fine bicycles and tricycles of all grades and makes, which, with a thorough repair shop and competent riding instructors, complete one of the best equipped and largest wheel establishments on the Pacific Coast."

Nellis also saw some of the natural wonders of the Golden State. He marveled at the gigantic trees near Mariposa. "To ride directly thro' the trunk of one of these forest giants only increases our admiration, and a walk around puts on the finishing touches of a pure intoxication." Yosemite enraptured him. "Truly said, there is an ethereal beauty about this far-famed fall which at once transports the tourist into an ecstasy of mingled delight, admiration and enchantment." He also visited Santa Cruz, "a delightful little

place tho' too far south for actual comfort during the heated season." San Francisco received mixed reviews. "It is decidedly too foggy. There are days when the very air is moist with vapor, and a walk out with out an overcoat surcharges one with all the essentials of a shower bath." California impressed Nellis with its beauty and grandeur, its excellent climate, its matchless fruit industries and its vast farming pursuits but he could not bring himself to concede that that it excelled his beloved Empire State. This same ambivalence could be seen in his comparison of the East and West. "The prospects for all classes of artisans in the great fields of labor in the world are as good in the East as in the West. True merit is recognized everywhere, tho' more so in this section as proficient labor is scarce. Capital, of course, meets with better results here than east, when applied with energy and ability, owing to a larger scope and greater resources.... Young professional men who are not afraid of work, hard labor at all hours and under all circumstances will surely succeed here faster than in the east, tho' for that matter success with them is only a matter of time in any location. At all events, the country is worth seeing, and to those inclined we would say, "Come West."

Nellis' plans for his return trip to the East had fluctuated considerably. In Cheyenne he had told a reporter that he was considering riding to Los Angeles and following a Southern route home. At another point it was suggested that he would return by train and initial reports of a ship passage suggested the destination would be Boston. Perhaps departure dates for passenger ships influenced him, for he booked passage on the steamer *San Blas*, which left San Francisco on August 15 for Panama, where he would board a ship that would take him to New York City.

The voyage agreed with him and he enjoyed the cool delicious air and fine sailing, although there was a dearth of "waltzative females." When the ship stopped at Mazatlan on the Mexican coast Nellis went ashore to observe conditions and report his findings to readers back home. His general assessment of the town and its inhabitants was not very favorable. Many people and buildings were of the poorer class and prices of goods were high. He did have positive comments about the spacious central park, a very good dinner, and ladies of the upper class with "flowery muslins, jaunty hats, and high-heeled boots, with their saucy, sparkling eyes, rosy cheeks, and prepossessing figures."

When the ship reached Panama City, travelers boarded a train that carried them across the Isthmus (the Panama Canal opened in 1914) in four hours for \$25. At Aspinwall on the Atlantic Ocean, Nellis boarded the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's *Newport*. The 2,735 ton ship, 326 by 38 feet, had been built in 1880 and her single screw could obtain a speed of 12 knots. He arrived in New York on September 7, 1887 and explored the City for a few days, possibly visiting the office of the *Wheel and Recreation*. On September 12 he began his ride home on his faithful Columbia Expert. He traveled north along the east bank of the Hudson River to Albany. With a final run of almost 70 miles through the Mohawk Valley, he arrived in Herkimer on September 14, 1887.

The County Fair had opened the previous day with Governor Hill addressing a crowd of several thousand. The *Herkimer Democrat* gave a description of the welcome accorded Nellis. "At about 5 P.M. George W. Nellis, Jr., Herkimer's champion long distance bicyclist, arrived in town from his trip across the continent. He was met [east of the city] by the Herkimer Bicycle Club and escorted by the Herkimer band, rode to the fair ground, and past the grandstand. He was heartily cheered, and after alighting from his wheel received quite an ovation. At an interval during the (horse) races George W.

Nellis, Jr., was called before the grandstand and presented with a medal, the gift of the officers of The Agriculture Association, by E. A. Brown, in a neat speech, referring to the remarkable record made by Nellis in his recent bicycling trip across the continent. Mr. Nellis responded briefly, thanking the officers of the society for the compliment. The medal is a handsome gold ornament, having on the obverse side the inscription "G. W. Nellis, champion long distance bicycle rider, 1887."

A few days later he was the guest of honor at a banquet held by the Kappa Gamma Chi Society at the Waverly House. "There a beautiful spread, served in elegant style by Landlord Fox, was given ample justice. Toasts, speeches, songs, etc. were next in order, and it was past twelve when the gay assemblage adjourned to the hall.... The society hall, in the Munson block, is handsomely decorated with flags, and bunting in honor of the champion bicyclist, and his lengthy trip is the principal topic of conversation on all sides." (The Society had been formed in 1880 by young men of the village as an improvement association and it had grown into an important social organization that sponsored athletic events, pre-nuptial dinners, and dances. The group went out of existence in 1917 when a fire destroyed their quarters. Nellis wrote a history of the Society in 1938.)

Life After the Great Ride

While seeking to chart the direction of his life after his transcontinental journey, he continued to ride his Columbia Expert and to be involved in local bicycle activities. In November 1887 he made a trip to Otsego county, pedaling 21 miles over the Mohawk hills in two hours and twenty minutes. In 1888 he wrote a vigorous article in support of road improvement activities and he joined with other Herkimer cyclists to form the Fort Dayton Wheelmen. The club was named after the fort that had been constructed in the community during the Revolution. Nellis was the Club captain in charge of riding. He was assisted by lieutenant W. I. Taber. The original twenty members adopted a uniform with blue caps, coat and pants, white shirt and belt, and black hose and shoes.

The club sponsored a Grand Bicycle Tournament on July Fourth with 15 races preceded by a parade. The day was a great success and almost 1,000 spectators watched the 100 regional riders in the parade and races. He demonstrated his versatility by placing second in the half-mile club championship and winning the one-mile county championship, the half-mile tandem race, the one-mile club handicap, and the tricycle half-mile. The affair concluded with a "Royal" banquet at the Fox Opera House that was prepared by the lady friends of the Fort Dayton Wheelmen.

Nellis continued to read national cycle papers and when a cyclist requested information on the route from Chicago to Detroit in the *Wheel and Cycling Trade Review*, George responded in the July 20, 1888 issue. He suggested using a train between Chicago and Valparaiso, Indiana to avoid forty miles of sand. Surprisingly, he also suggested that from Detroit, a trip through Canada would be interesting if the rider avoided the direct route he had used between St. Thomas and Niagara Falls. After his encounter with Western roads, perhaps Canadian highways didn't seem as terrible as when he first encountered them.

Even an experienced rider like Nellis had accidents. The local newspaper reported that when he was riding his cycle on July 12, 1888, "The tire came off the large wheel

and threw him violently to the ground. He was insensible for nearly half an hour...The accident was purely carelessness, as he knew the tire was loose and neglected to fix it.”

The situation would have been even worse if the accident had been caused by a flaw in the machine, rather than a human error, since Nellis and new partner W. I. Taber had the local bicycle dealership that sold Columbia machines. The partners also carried second-hand wheels, Springfield Roadsters, and sold wheels on installments. Their ads extolled the merits of Columbia machines and never neglected to mention the reliability of his stellar bicycle that went from Herkimer to San Francisco “without loosening a spoke.”

The Columbia Expert used on the ride also received special attention from Colonel Pope who made arrangements to borrow the bicycle, his old riding suit, cyclometer, and satchel. The items were exhibited at the Bicycle Tournament in Buffalo that was held as part of the International Exposition in September 1888. *Bicycling News* reported: “No exhibit in the main building proved more attractive to the 1,500 wheelmen who were present at the exposition than the array of historic bicycles, velocipedes, and tricycles sent here from the museum of the Pope Manufacturing Company of Boston. The collection included a velocipede ridden by Pierre Lallement, one of the first tricycles with balance gearing, a wooden home made bicycle, Thomas Stevens’ famous Expert Columbia, Karl Kron’s bicycle, and the cycle ridden from New York to San Francisco by G. W. Nellis.”

When his machine returned to Herkimer it had an interesting adventure with a strange rider. On a Saturday in 1889 when Nellis was away from the office, his assistant Lambert Will allowed a Joe Schermer to borrow the Expert for a ride toward Richfield Springs. On his return trip Schermer started down the steep and long Vickerman Hill near Mohawk, New York. The road was little better than a cowpath with a hump in the middle to keep water off. Being a novice rider Joe didn’t realize that even the most experienced wheelmen always walked down this hill. He was soon jolted off the seat, slid down the backbone and lost the pedals. He came down the hill in this manner with his hair on end. The high wheel came through the ordeal with flying colors. Joe never asked to borrow the wheel again and never spoke of the incident. Nellis only learned of the matter years later in a letter from Will.

A Career

Of greater long-term importance than these bicycle matters was Nellis’ decision, late in 1888, to make journalism his life’s work. This wasn’t a surprising decision in view of the years he had worked for local papers as a printer and correspondent and his experience as a cycling journalist crossing the country. What was surprising was the fact that the 23-year-old planned to begin publishing his own newspaper in Herkimer, a town that already had two newspapers. This was another form of the “pluck” he had demonstrated on his long ride. The first issue of his weekly paper, the *Record*, appeared on December 20, 1888. The newspaper stated that it was independent in politics, “untrammelled by party alliances, independent of social dictum, and free from personal restraint.” This position made good sense since the community already had a Democratic paper and a Republican paper. The *Record* claimed a circulation of several thousand and it continued under Nellis’ editorship until 1896.

One of the causes the *Record* championed was the movement to build new public schools. Year's later Nellis recalled the leadership of Miss Tuger for a progressive school system and the big and long fight needed to achieve that objective. The *Record* office was originally on the second floor of a frame building but in the early 1890s a new brick building was constructed on North Main Street to accommodate the paper and Nellis' Columbia bicycle dealership. This building and the printing equipment were later destroyed by fire but through great effort the *Record* didn't miss an issue.

Editor Nellis reduced but did not abandon all cycling. In 1889 he participated in the July Fourth Bicycle Tournament, winning the one-mile Herkimer County race and placing second in the half-mile competition for Rover safety bicycles. Utican Charles Metz who helped get Nellis off to a good start on his 1887 journey won the event.

In 1891 Nellis embarked on another adventure. He married Anna E. Post of nearby Middleville. She came from an old Herkimer County family and was an accomplished musician. In 1893 a son named Aubrey was born and in 1896 Miriam, the first of several daughters, arrived. The marriage lasted almost sixty years and four of their eight children lived to adulthood and provided their parents with two grandchildren.

The exact dates and details of Nellis' career from the mid-1890s to the early part of the twentieth century are not clear. He severed his connections with the *Record* about 1896 and became editor of the Johnstown (New York) *Daily News* for approximately two years. He then must have considered a career change for he attended the Seminary of Colgate University for two years and by 1890 was reported to have obtained a bachelors degree from a university in Chicago. He was a Baptist in this period and had long been involved in Christian Endeavor activities in the Herkimer/Utica region.

By 1900 he was back in the newspaper business as editor of the La Crosse, Wisconsin *Republican and Leader*. Two years later he became the telegraph editor of the Milwaukee *Morning Sentinel*. From that position he moved to Chicago as associate editor of the *New Voice*. In 1904 he returned to upstate New York and purchased the *Chatham Republican*. While fulfilling these editorial responsibilities he held Republican views, remained active in the Baptist Church, and joined fraternal groups such as the International Order of Odd Fellows or the Modern Woodmen and Royal Neighbors.

The final career move came about the time of World War I when he became editor of the *Dedham Transcript* in suburban Boston. A house was built in Rosindale and the family put down roots. There were difficulties mixed with the blessings of life in the Bay State. Nellis was becoming quite deaf, his wife lost a leg in an elevator accident, and a sixteen-year-old daughter died. Experiences related to his wife's accident prompted the couple to turn to Christian Science practices. Nellis continued to work for the *Transcript Press* in various capacities until his retirement on the eve of World War II. Although the family remained in Massachusetts, Herkimer remained dear to Nellis' heart. He wrote articles about its history and corresponded with old friends in the Mohawk Valley. He could not return to Herkimer but the old Columbia Expert bicycle did go home again. In 1931 Nellis asked Henry Ford to accept his Columbia Expert, that he estimated had covered 25,000 miles, for preservation and display at the Henry Ford Museum. It remained there until 1947 when, at the suggestion of Herkimer historians, Nellis asked that the bicycle be returned to the Herkimer County Historical Society. He was pleased to learn that the bicycle had returned to his boyhood home in time to be ridden by a

young man in the town's Sesquicentennial Parade that was held on September 20, 1947. The bicycle has remained at the Historical Society since that date.

End of the Ride

Several rather cheerful letters written by Nellis in 1947, signed "joyfully," describe the couple's failing health and his memories of the bicycle that had carried a youthful man across the continent. In a letter of September 25, 1947 he admitted, "Well I do think a lot of that Bicycle. It was my lone companion over a lot of weary miles. I slept with it as my only companion many nights, with nothing but the blue sky for a cover. My one great desire now is to see it, caress it, feel of the handles, hop up and ride it." A poem in his last article on Herkimer history, appearing shortly before his death, also touched on memories of the past.

Let's shout for the days of Old Pine Grove
The days of our Mothers, the days of their love
Let's shout for the years of Herkimer too
The years we now treasure with friends all true
Let's shout for the days when we hit it in high
The days when we whacked it all over the sky
Let's shout for ties pulling us back into line
For memories triumphant of Auld Lang Syne

With these memories of the past in his mind, George Nellis, Jr. departed from Boston, without his bicycle, for other Golden Gates on September 29, 1948. Only his ashes went home to Herkimer.

Reflections on the Transcontinental Journey of George Nellis

George Nellis' youthful adventure of riding his Columbia ordinary across America in 1887 provided him with memories that lasted a lifetime. His written account of the journey has also provided modern wheelmen with some vicarious pleasure. To help place Nellis' accomplishment in context it is useful to compare his ride to that of the first and most famous transcontinental rider, Thomas Stevens.

A comparison of Stevens and Nellis is undertaken without any desire to extol one man over the other. They were both fine wheelmen with ample pluck. They would have enjoyed each other's company although they might have debated whether it was best to make a transcontinental crossing from west to east (Stevens) or east to west (Nellis). The east to west route of Nellis was better in tune with American history and the flow of pioneers toward the frontier. Neither man, however, expressed a strong sense of historical precedence. They simply started from where they were. They were both fully capable of riding in either direction.

At the time of their respective rides Stevens was 29 and Nellis was 21. Stevens rode a 50-inch standard Columbia ordinary with straight bars and Nellis rode a heavier 52-inch Columbia Expert with cow horn bars. They wore somewhat similar clothing and each carried a satchel strapped on top of the bars. Some illustrations suggest Stevens also had gear attached to the backbone of his machine. Nellis was the more experienced rider. Stevens had only learned to ride in preparation for his journey.

Stevens had emigrated from England in 1871 and the Nellis family had been in upstate New York since 1723. Stevens had been a farmer, storekeeper, and mill worker. Nellis had a taste of farming, clerking, and newspaper work. Nellis made constant reference to his home in Herkimer and looked forward to mail from his family and friends. Stevens didn't seem to have a strong sense of home since he had been moving about the West for several years.

Stevens did not think of himself as a journalist before his ride and he did not have any firm arrangement for the publication of the narrative of his journey. He presented himself at some newspaper offices along the way in hopes of receiving notice. The *Boston Globe* did give him some coverage when he concluded the trip, but he soon went to New York City in an effort to obtain support for a world tour. He had the good fortune of meeting Karl Kron, pseudonym of Lyman H. Bagg, in August 1884 and in the course of several meetings Kron extracted considerable details Stevens' trip that he put in his book, *Ten Thousand Miles on a Bicycle*. These conversations may have helped Stevens formulate a 38,000-word account of the ride that appeared in the four issues of *Outing*, April to July 1885. It is not clear if Kron or Pope helped arrange for the publication but the account did cause Pope to use his influence to have *Outing* support the world tour. During the winter of 1884-85 Stevens was reported to have prepared a 140,000-word account of his ride that could be published as a book if the world tour did not materialize. This long account disappeared and only the 38,000-word version that first appeared in *Outing* was later incorporated into Volume One of *Around the World on a Bicycle*.

This series of events was in contrast to Nellis' situation for he thought of himself as a journalist before the ride and he had firm arrangements with three papers to publish, during the ride, separate day by day accounts of his journey, a total of 40,000 plus words. He did stop at newspaper offices in some towns along his route to meet fellow correspondents and tell his story. He also sent telegrams from the West to the *Herkimer Democrat* so that they could be posted outside their office, and one or more telegrams were sent to the czar of American biking, Colonel Albert Pope. Since he was not planning any foreign tour after he completed the transcontinental trip Nellis did not seek additional support in the fall of 1887, nor were any negotiations concluded to publish a book or embark on a speaking tour.

Nellis timed his ride well in terms of weather conditions. Stevens left too early and had to struggle with snow and wet conditions in the mountains. The routes followed were very similar in West since both men used pioneer trails and depended upon the Union Pacific and Central Pacific section houses for food and lodging. An indication of the dependence upon the railroad routes can be seen by fact that of the 271 stations, some only flag stops, on the Omaha to San Francisco route of these two lines, Nellis specifically mentions passing through 134 of them.

The major difference in the routes followed by Stevens and Nellis came east of the Mississippi where Nellis followed the Canadian coast of Lake Erie and Stevens passed along the Ohio shore of this Great Lake. Their paths parted at Albany since Stevens went on to Boston and Nellis came from New York City to the capital of the Empire State.

Both men had many similar experiences during their rides. They were threatened by coyotes, saw mirages, walked and pushed their wheels often through mud and sand and over railroad beds, visited Niagara Falls, and both carried guns. Stevens had a "Bulldog"

and Nellis was armed with a multi-shot derringer. Nellis may have been the better shot since he killed a coyote and Stevens only frightened a mountain lion. Nellis' wheel held up well and he only reported breaking the handlebars by his headers. Stevens had many headers and his machine was refitted in Chicago and repaired in Buffalo. Neither man carried a bicycle lamp. Nellis had a cyclometer that he used constantly. Stevens only estimated his mileage and Karl Kron recalculated the distance at 3,416 miles.

Kron's preference for details on mileage and road conditions may have influenced Nellis to give these matters more attention in his day by day accounts that were written to be read during the trip, primarily by newspaper readers in his hometown. Stevens' travel account was written after the journey for a national audience. It provided much less "guide book" data on mileage and riding conditions. The Stevens account is also selective. Rather than giving events space in accordance with the associated mileage, he gave significantly more space to the interesting sections of the journey. For example, the long but more routine trip from Chicago to Boston only constitutes about one-quarter of the published narrative. Stevens did not mention home or old friends that he met along the way because he was an intensely private man.

On balance, Stevens comes through as mature and experienced traveler writing in the English tradition of travel narrative that does not dwell on difficulties and portrays the protagonist as calmly in control of events. This certainly was the tone of Stevens' 38,000-word narrative in *Outing*. The 140,000-word account forced him to be more revealing. For example, the *Outing* account only provides a 95-word description of the day near Fort Bridger that was the "toughest twenty-four hours of the entire journey" because of rain, the need to ford cold streams, and the necessity of sleeping in a wagon. A fragment of the longer narrative that has survived provides a 1,400-word account of the same difficult day and it conveys a powerful sense of the misery and life threatening nature of the day in which Stevens wasn't in control of events and was lucky to have survived. What a pity the full long account of the transcontinental journey has vanished.

Nellis, away from home for the first time, was, an intelligent young man with a flair for writing and a sense of humor. He wasn't constrained by an English style of travel writing and he could grumble and complain about roads, weather, lodging, and other matters. He was inexperienced enough not to have recognized that he might have been killed by a flash flood when he sought refuge from a violent storm in a small ravine.

Stevens and Nellis also had somewhat different themes to their narratives. For Stevens the progress of the trip and daily events constituted the substance of his story. Nellis also included ample logistical information about his ride, but a second theme began to emerge, after he crossed the Missouri River. By 1880 most of the old frontier West of hostile Indians, gunfighters, and open cattle ranges had vanished. The order of the day was now settling the land, establishing farms, and developing cities. The prospects and opportunities offered in a West were matters of great interest in the America east of the Mississippi. Private developers and western railroads bombarded the public with claims of Western wonders. They advertised special railroad fares to the West and other opportunities for purchasing land that stimulated significant internal migration. Agents were also sent to Europe to extol the virtues of Western land to potential immigrants. The land to be sold and settled was vast. Prior to 1871 the United States government sought to stimulate the building of Western railroads by granting companies large amounts of public land along their rail routes. The acreage of these

railroad lands equaled the area of New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland.

It is not clear if Nellis planned to examine the merits of western migration on his journey to the Pacific or if the subject simply emerged in the course of his reporting. His narrative is sprinkled with descriptions of how former residents of the Mohawk Valley and new acquaintances were faring in the West, the type of crops that were grown, and how cities were emerging on the prairies. He was inclined to compare what he saw in the West with things back in New York State. His Eastern model usually came out ahead in these comparisons but after he experienced the climate and beauty of California and saw its fruit orchards and commercial activity he was more inclined to recognize that some areas of the West offered opportunities that at least equaled those in the East. Apparently his ties to his Eastern home were quite strong for he never revealed any inclination to remain in the West or to return in later years.

Stevens had been living in the West, but he had little to say about the opportunities it presented nor did he compare it to the Eastern United States or to his native England. He also had ties to the land of his youth. He returned to England by 1895, led a long, useful but undistinguished life, and never again visited members of his family in the United States.

Wheelmen past and present are interested in the time needed for a bicycle ride on the track or road. Most of the men who completed high wheel rides across America in the 19th century claimed that they were tourists interested in crossing the nation to see its sites, not cyclists seeking a record time. Even with these disclaimers and the occasional use of trains, which violated an unwritten rule of record seekers, most riders were conscious of the standard set by Stevens and at least one wheelmen was happy to point out that he had crossed Iowa in less time than it had taken Thomas Stevens.

Stevens of course was in a somewhat special situation since there was no established time for a ride across America prior to his journey. The challenge was getting across by wheel and there is no indication in his writing that he had a time goal. There were weather delays and stops to socialize and make repairs in such locations as Buffalo and Chicago. His stay in the latter city from July 4-13 was also related observing the Democratic National Convention.

Nellis was in a different situation since he was aware of the 105 days taken by Stevens and the time of his 1886 predecessors, Van Meerbeke, Spier, and Thayer. He felt that latter two men had used trains at times and that Van Meerbeke had taken 150 days on the southern route to California. Although it is never stated in his writing, it seems clear that Nellis planned to establish a new record by completing his trip in less than 105 days. After he had completed his journey one of the Herkimer papers reported that Nellis had expected to make the trip in 90 days. Even with weather delays and short layovers in Chicago and Salt Lake City he was able to complete the ride in an amazing 75 days. When he reached the pier in Oakland he considered the journey at an end for that is where Stevens had begun.

After the trip was concluded there was no need for Nellis himself to extol his crossing time since the national and local papers publicized the matter. The *San Francisco Bulletin* noted that Nellis had beaten Stevens's time by 30 days and the *New York Sun* recognized the same disparity in time. As early as mid-July the Herkimer papers had

been predicting a record-breaking time and the medal he received upon return proclaimed him the long distance champion of the world in view of the speed and distance of his ride.

In the matter of crossing America, however, it was far better to be first than to be fast. Stevens recognized this fact, for a correspondent writing in the *Bicycling World* of June 20, 1884, stated that Stevens had remarked, "the journey is one which a fellow don't want to attempt above once, and I wouldn't give ten cents to be the second man to make it." Stevens also gained recognition by continuing his bicycle journey around the world and writing a popular book about the adventure. Stevens became famous. Nellis and the other transcontinental high wheel riders faded into obscurity.

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