



Bulletin #30

by Charles W. Meinert
Prepared June 1994

📖 Riding 🌿 Collecting 🌿 Restoring 🌿 Research 🌿 History 📖

Researching Bicycling History through Newspapers

One of the great sources of information about bicycling in its golden age are the pages of American newspapers published in that era. The last quarter of the Nineteenth Century was a period when almost every modest village had a weekly newspaper and each major urban center had a number of competing dailies. A large number of the major newspapers of the era and many of the smaller newspapers have been preserved on microfilm. A few libraries in almost every state own microfilm copies of some Nineteenth Century newspapers and most libraries can determine where microfilm copies of specific newspapers are held and make arrangements to borrow reels for their patrons. Most libraries have good microfilm readers that allow users to adjust the magnification and make copies of material for a charge.

Even if you don't plan to conduct a formal research project and write a paper, reading about the bicycle activities described in several months' issues of 1890s newspapers will give a wonderful feel for that age when bikehood was in flower. Small local and regional newspapers are often on microfilm but they are less likely to be indexed. Begin by scanning issues of a specific year of these newspapers and you will soon determine what coverage, if any, was given to bicycling and approximately where it was normally located in that publication. Good news for researchers is the fact that some microfilmed newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, *The New York Daily Tribune*, and *The (London) Times* have been indexed. This makes it possible to turn to a year such as 1895 in the index and find, for example under the topic bicycle, a list of articles that appeared during the year. Each listing includes the month, day, page, and column number, so that the item can be readily located on the microfilm.

While indexes are very helpful, they are not infallible. Newspapers often contain some bicycle items that are not indexed. Occasionally the location listed for an indexed article is incorrect. Normally, however, it is a case of only having the wrong column or being off by a page or two. Bicycle advertisements are not indexed, but since most ads include illustrations, they can be found by viewing the paper's advertising sections.

A newspaper can be a good place to start researching since it gives one account of an event. A competent researcher should, however, attempt to go beyond a single account of any event. Additional newspapers or sources may provide new information or even cast doubt on something reported elsewhere. The value of a multi-source approach was demonstrated to me when I gathered twelve accounts of Mile-a-Minute Murphy's famous June 30, 1899, ride behind a train. Almost every account added something not found in the the other reports, and in some cases inconsistencies emerged.

Most competent public libraries should be able to borrow microfilm reels of *The New York Times* or *The New York Daily Tribune*. Microfilm of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* is more difficult to obtain. The New York State Library in Albany may be the best source for borrowing the *Eagle*. You may need to work in stages when reviewing any of these newspapers because one month's editions of an 1890s newspaper may constitute a reel of microfilm and some libraries will only lend a few reels at one time. College and university libraries in your area may also be useful even if you are not a student or graduate of the institution. Many academic libraries will allow the public to use material in the library. Some academic libraries have a "friends of the library" type of organization that you can join. Membership in the organization will often permit full use of the library's materials and services.

MAJOR INDEXED NEWSPAPERS AND SAMPLE LISTINGS

The New York Times. The paper began publication under this title in the 1850s as a four page afternoon daily selling for one cent a copy. After two decades of growth, the paper began to decline because of competition from Pulitzer's *World* and other illustrated publications. In 1896 the *Times* was restored to health by the Ochs family who made it a quality morning newspaper that obtained a circulation of 75,000 by the late 1890s. The *Times* has subsequently been indexed from its beginning to present and is widely available on microfilm. Editorials on biking and other subjects are indexed separately from regular articles. In the peak years of the 1890s there were so many articles on bicycling that they were often indexed under subheadings such as Bicycling, Bicycle Clubs, Races, and Bicyclers.

While many of the bicycle articles in the paper deal with the metropolitan area, there is also coverage of regional, national, and international news on bicycling. There are, for example, articles on Stevens' world tour, reports of major rides in this country, and news of LAW meetings and activities. Just reading the index is like looking at the menu in a great restaurant; you want to sample it all! Even the number of articles in respective years is interesting, for it gives a sense of the growth and decline in the popularity of the bicycle.

The following short excerpt from the index of bicycle articles in *The New York Times* for 1894 gives a flavor of the contents. You will first find the title of each article then the month and date it appeared, and the page and column number on which the article begins.

Bicycling Affairs

- Amateur Championship Contestants Discussed—April 15-3-3
- Asbury Park; Routes to—May 19-3-6
- Asbury Park Meet—June 18-8-3
- Associated Cycling Clubs' Races at Waltham—May 31-3-3
- Best Wheels in Market Described—Jan 7-1-2
- Bordeaux-Paris Annual Race; Results—June 3-15-6
- Century Run; Newark to Philadelphia—April 17-3-6, April 24-3-6, May 15-3-6, and June 10-3-1
- Coney Island and Fort Hamilton Runs—June 10-1-5
- Delaware Water Gap Route from New York—June 10-13-6
- Eck's Hints on Training—Jan 14-3-5
- England Amateur One-Mile Championship Race: National Cycling Union's Rulings Regarding License—June 24-13-5
- Carlisle, R. L.; Race Against Time From Land's End to John o' Groat's—May 26-3-7
- Hill, H.H. and E. Peltier; Tour Around the World—May 8-3-5
- Irvington-Millburn Race—May 17-3-5, May 20-3-6, May 24 and 26-3-5, May 27-3-4, May 28-6-2, May 30-3-6, May 31-3-1, June 6-3-5
- Handicap—May 26-3-5
- Negro W. Simmons' Entry Rejected; Litigation—May 24 and 26-3-5
- Won by A.H. Barnett: Cut of Time's Medal—May 31-3-1
- Johnson, J.S.; Waltham Track Challenge Accepted—May 3-3-5
- Mile World Record Broken at Waltham; NY Interview—June 19-3-6, 20-3-5
- Long Distance Race at Paris Won by Huret—March 16-6-2, 19-6-4, 21-6-2, 23-6-3, 25-7-2, 26-7-3
- Long Island Century Run—June 8-3-6, 25-6-4
- Long Island Popular Runs—May 26-3-6
- Madison Square Garden; Six Day Race; Prize Money Discussed—Jan 3-3-6
- Madison Square Garden Show—Jan 7-10-1, 8-3-4, 9-3-1, 10 and 11-3-1, 13-6-1, 14-3-5
- Trade Organization Discussed—Jan 11-3-1
- Manufacturers Banquet—Jan 12-3-1, 13-6-1
- Martin Road Race Won by L. Callahan—May 31-3-4
- Middleton, W.; Trial—May 17-9-1

Mile Record Broken by J.S. Johnson in 1:56—June 27-3-5
 Montreal – Sarnia Relay Race—June 17-13-7
 Mosher, H.: Fast Quarter Mile—June 12-3-5
 Newark; Best Route to Reach—June 17-13-7
 Newark–Philadelphia Century Run—April 17-3-6, 24-3-6, May 15-3-6, June 7-3-5, 10-3-1
 Newark–Princeton Century—June 25-6-4
 New Jersey Associated Cycling Club Century Run; Newark to Asbury Park—June 21-3-5, 23-3-4, 24-2-3
 New York City; Lights Ordinance Enforced Discriminatingly; Fair Play Complaint—May 6-19-7
 New York State Circuit; Troy Races—June 5-3-5
 Orange Notes—May 7-8-1

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1841–1955, was an important afternoon newspaper which gave careful attention to sporting news and rejoiced in the accomplishments of its baseball team, yachtsmen, boxers, bowlers, horsemen, and bicyclists. The city had over fifty wheel clubs in the mid-1890s. Some of these organizations such as the Kings County Wheelmen had more than 200 members and elaborate clubhouses. Other clubs such as the Whirling Dervishes didn't have a constitution or by-laws, much less

a clubhouse. Brooklyn cycling highlights of the 1890s included the intensive use of its seventy-five acre Prospect Park, the construction of a bicycle path from the Park to Coney Island, the addition of a return path to handle crowds of riders, massive bicycle parades sponsored by the Good Roads Association, first class racing at the Manhattan Beach track, annual road races, century runs on Long Island, and club social events.

The following is a short excerpt from the index of bicycle articles in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of 1896.

Babylon's Sidewalk Ordinance—Feb 26-10-1
 Bald, Eddie, suspended; Mar 19-10-5, Breaks a State Record—June 21-5-1, Beats Sanger—Oct 11-9-5
 Banks, Louis Albert, Rev. Dr., Liberal Toward Cycling—May 2-4-3
 Bath Beach and East New York Project for a Route Between—Oct 22-12-1
 Bath Beach, Initial Run of K.C.W. to,—Apr 13-10-1, Aug 16-3-3
 Bay Shore Races—July 19-28-5
 Behrends, Rev. Dr., Down on Sunday Cycling—June 8-7-7
 Berkshire Hills, Ride Through the—July 2-4-4
 Berlo's Mile Record—Mar 8-14-7
 Bicycle of Gold and Silver—Aug 23-7-7
 Bicycle Worth \$1,000—Apr 1-10-1
 Bicycle Academy, an Immense to be Built in New York—May 3-17-3
 Bicycle Boat (illustrated)—Nov 15-21-0
 Bicycle Chain, a New (illustrated)—July 26-17-6
 Bicycle, the Electric Coming—June 28-10-1
 Bicycle Patents—Dec 6-21-5
 Bicycle the, Immora: (Ed.)—Oct 10-6-5
 Bicycle Tours of Long Island (illustrated)—July 5-14-1
 Bicycles and the Church (Ed.)—Apr 27-6-4
 Bicycles and Elevated Trains (Ed.)—June 24-6-5
 Bolton, Mr., in Florida—Feb 8-10-3
 Brooklyn Bicycle Club of Present Day, Group Portraits—June 28-10-0, Club in 1888—same
 Patchogue Wheelmen Won in Associated Cycling Tourney Eagle Cup – Nov 13-9-2, 14-10-3
 Patchogue Wheelmen Portraits of Officers – June 28-11-6, Will Build a Club House—July 15-3-2, Glory Won
 by – Oct 3-10-3
 Path, an Elevated (Ed.) – Apr 28-6-4
 Path Building—Mar 17-10-3
 Pequod's and Good Roads Ass'n Controversy—Oct 24-4-3

Pequod's Dispute Amphion's Claim to Credit of Merrick Century Run—Jan 3-5-4, Suit Threatened—Jan 3-5-4,
 Beaten Twice—Feb 25-10-3, Double Century to Sag Harbor—Nov 4-16-2, Annual Events—Nov 4-16-2
 Pequod's Parade—Oct 30-9-5
 Pequod's Rebuked by the Associated Club—Oct 20-12-1
 Piano Squabble Between S. Brooklyn and Liberty Wheelmen in Court—Jan 15-5-4
 Pitman, Will R.—Oct 23-12-3
 Pneumatic Tire Patent Sale Arranged in Dublin—Apr 19-7-4
 Points for Cyclers—Mar 8-16-2
 Police Cycling, Flatbush People Object to—July 29-7-6
 Police Races at Manhattan—July 26-4-1
 Pope, Albert A. portrait of, etc.—Jan 20-10-5
 Post, Carroll J. Jr., portrait—Feb 28-14-4
 Potter-Tinsdale Difficulty in the LAW—Feb 26-4-3
 Prospect Cyclers Split in Ranks—Feb 28-10-3, Property to be Divided—Mar 3-10-5
 Prospect Park, Days When Wheelmen Were Barely Tolerated—June 28-8-1

The New York Daily Tribune. The *Tribune* was one of America's most influential newspapers in the 19th century. It was begun as a penny paper by Horace Greely in 1841. The paper showed enterprise in gathering news and obtaining contributions from famous people. The publication was a reflection of its famous editor who showed toleration for new ideas and supported many types of social reform. While some thought the paper would perish with the death

of Greely, the *Tribune* found new life in 1873 under Whitelaw Reid and his family. The paper had a circulation of 75,000 by 1892 and it was the first modern newspaper to publish an annual index, beginning in 1876. The *Tribune* continued into the 20th century and was merged with the *Herald* in 1924.

The following is a short excerpt from the index of bicycle articles in *The New York Daily Tribune* of 1898.

Bicycles—

Special Article: Fullerton—Sep 11 (IV)-3-3
 Allen, Mrs. Boston Trip—Aug 1-2-6
 Allen, Mrs. A M C, fails in Race—Oct 5-4-4
 Asbury Park Races—Aug 25-8-1
 Bald Defeats Cooper—Aug 13-8-2
 Bald Beats a Record—Aug 25-8-1
 Baltimore's Proposed Tax—Mar 20-5-2
 Bedell in Ten-mile Race—Jul 3 (II)-2-3
 Berkeley Oval Freak Races—July 5-5-6
 Berkeley Oval Contests—June 19-6-4
 Bicycle Day: Approved—Jan 25-10-1
 Board of Trade Endorses—Feb 3-4-1
 Observed—Feb 23-10-1
 Central Park Speedway Plan—July 22-8-3
 Century Road Club and Professionals—Jan 24-4-2
 Century Wheelmen Gymkhana—Sep 4-8-6
 Cissac-Sims Race—July 1-5-6
 Dealers Refuse to Discount—Mar 27 (II)-3-3
 Elevated Train Service—Apr 24 (II)-3-3
 Exports for 1896, 1897, 1898—Oct 24-3-3
 Export Statistics—Nov 20 (II)-2-1
 Firemen of New York Contests—Sep 18-6-6
 Foreign Tariffs—Nov 6 (II)-2-2
 Free Ferriage Bill—Jan 29-4-1

Heart Troubles: Stanton Report—July 1–3–2
Indianapolis Ripple Path—June 26 (II)–2–1
Indianapolis Path—July 31 (II)–2–2
Insanity Cases Helped—June 28–8–4
Kings Co Wheelmen Races—June 26–7–5
Klienberg 300-mile Race—June 29–5–6
Kaser Wins 5-mile Pursuit—May 29 (II)–2–4
LAW Circular on Politics—Oct 27–12–5
 Dealers Quarrel—Mar 25–9–4
 Dealers Answers—Mar 29–10–3
 National Convention—Feb 9 through 14
 NY Division Meeting: Row—June 19–6–5
Linton Breaks 30-mile Record—May 31–4–4
Linton–Taylore Contest—June 19–6–5
Linton–Taylore 30-mile Race—July 6–8–6
Linton Defeats Michael—July 17–4–1
Long Distance Records Broken—July 26–4–5
McDuffee Breaks 15-mile Record—May 15–8–2
McDuffee–Hoyt Race—June 12–7–1
McDuffee Breaks World's Records—June 18–4–5

More information on these and other newspapers can be found in Frank Luther Mott's *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years – 1690 to 1940*. New York: Macmillan, 1941.

Note: A researcher who desires copies of indexes for *The New York Times* - 1875 to 1904, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* - 1892 to 1901, and *The New York Daily Tribune* - 1880 to 1904, contact the Publications Chair.