

# EVOLUTION OF THE BICYCLE AND ITS HISTORY IN LANCASTER COUNTY\*

By D. B. LANDIS

FROM the beginning of human experience man has been a persistent walker. Throughout the ages his locomotive travels were aided by further assistance from horses and camels. Then came the addition of chariots, carts and vehicles of every sort, and these in some form or other continue to be used at the present time; while we may include trains, trolleys, automobiles and airplanes as continuing adjuncts for greater speed.

Outstanding figures for going ahead have been the great military characters on horseback, typified by the heroic Washington of Revolutionary fame and brave General Reynolds, of Lancaster county, in the Civil War.

Adding to the ability of man to go faster than his legs would carry him, he began to make mechanical contrivances, which could be impelled by him. Among the early forms having one, two, three, four and even five wheels, were some forerunners having no accelerating pedals, ratchets, levers, chains or pulleys.

In 1816 Baron von Drais, at Manheim on the Rhine, invented the Draisine, two wheels connected by a bar-perch over them, and which was propelled by the rider thrusting his feet on the ground, guiding the device by handles turning the direction of the front wheels. In going down grade the rider lifted his feet and let the contraption run, thus performing the act of gliding or coasting as practiced by bicycle riders of high wheels more than a half century later.

After the contrivance was introduced into England, Denis Johnston took out patents in 1818 for his vehicle, a "pedestrian currie." This improved type had an adjustable saddle and a cushioned place for the forearms, besides a unique arrangement of the handles. At this same time the French and Germans made copies of two-wheeled striding machines under various names, as Drasina, Drasienne, celerifere and velocipede.

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The practice of running pedestrian curricles became a pleasing fad and soon aroused excitement in England and America. British wags called the contrivance a "dandy-horse" and "hobby-horse." New Yorkers took to the Draisine in 1818 and the furore created by the innovation among the dandies is recorded as wonderful. Philadelphians rapidly got into stride, and people rode up and down grades and on paths in the parks. A Troy, N. Y., firm built numbers of them and let young men run around with them at a quarter dollar an hour. Students at Harvard and other colleges indulged the craze for these "walking-machines."

For forty years thereafter, with many inventions and patents, cranks and pedals were hardly thought of. In 1821 Louis Gompertz's hobby-horse, with its rack and pinions, aided the rider to work his way along with both hands and feet. For twenty years hobby-horses were ridden in Europe and America, then the sport began to decline.

Velocipedes at first had three wheels until changed later on to two-wheeled affairs, which were known as "bone-shakers," a name befitting them.

The French have always claimed invention of the bicycle, yet as early as 1840, exact date unknown, Galvin Dalzell, of Scotland, made the first "two-wheeled one-track vehicle clear of the ground and provided with a satisfactory driving and steering apparatus." American authorities have generally conceded the bicycle invention to Pierre Lallement, a maker of perambulators. He exhibited his machine at the Paris Exhibition in 1865. Lallement came to the United States without money, having worked his passage over as a stoker. While looking for employment in Connecticut, he made one of his two-wheeled velocipedes (or bicycles). A Yankee named Carrol, saw its utility and between them a patent was obtained November 2, 1866. This was the first patent in the United States showing a two-wheeled velocipede with foot-crank, the immediate predecessor of the bicycle here; in fact the first complete patent obtained anywhere for such a machine.

Lallement afterward sold his remaining interest in the United States patent and returned to France. He evidently did not think his device of sufficient account then to obtain a French patent. For two years nothing was practically done to improve it. The machine,

however, was used considerably there. Improvements were made and patented by Michaux et Cie., of Paris, and others. Parts of the machine were made of iron and bronze instead of wood. In a short time there were several makers and Lallement himself became a manufacturer. The Parisians again became enthusiastically interested. It was even suggested that the new machine ought to have been called the "Lallementienne."

An Englishman, Edward Gilman, disputed Lallement's title, claiming he was the first to record accurately a description of the new velocipede (or bicycle), August 1, 1866. Gilman's description possibly approached nearer to what was then recognized as the coming bicycle, in respect to placing the rider nearly over the axle of the driving wheel, "and also in respect to driving by weight of rider rather than by unaided muscular effort"; while Lallement made "a nearer approach in making the front wheel at the same time the guiding and driving one." Neither of these men fully succeeded in fashioning what afterward became the successful "high wheel."

Three important features were brought out in 1868, of which in November of that year, C. K. Bradford of the United States, suggested the rubber tire, it being the first if not one of the most important contributions to the so-called "steed" of latter half of the nineteenth century. In December, 1868, Edward A. Cowper, an Englishman, put in the suspension wheel and anti-friction bearings, being the remaining element needed for an easy-working bicycle.

In three years' time, from 1867 to 1870, the Americans became "crazy" over the improved free-moving velocipede. Rinks, halls and riding schools were opened, and almost everybody caring for exercise rode a velocipede.

Between this period the excitement, in lesser degree, reached Lancaster. There are men and women living who saw these novel, though rather cumbersome and not too certain controlled, machines in action. While living in Rohrerstown, about 1869, I witnessed two riders going at one time over the highway of that village. A wooden velocipede (or bicycle), built by John Wise, is among the rare relics preserved by the Lancaster County Historical Society, having been presented to it by Samuel Bitner, Lancaster, at a

function held in Hotel Brunswick May 5, 1916. The late Augustus F. Reinohl, an ardent bicycle rider in his day, also witnessed the riding of velocipedes such as I have described existing before 1870.

A writer in 1869 had this confidence: "The machines now in use are so radically different from those of fifty years ago, so swift of motion, so useful as a means of conveyance, that it seems impossible for history to repeat itself with regard to the present mania." In two years from that period "not a 'velocipede' was to be found in the United States except as junk or in the hands of a boy." The "boneshaker" was done for and treated from then on as an obsolete relic.

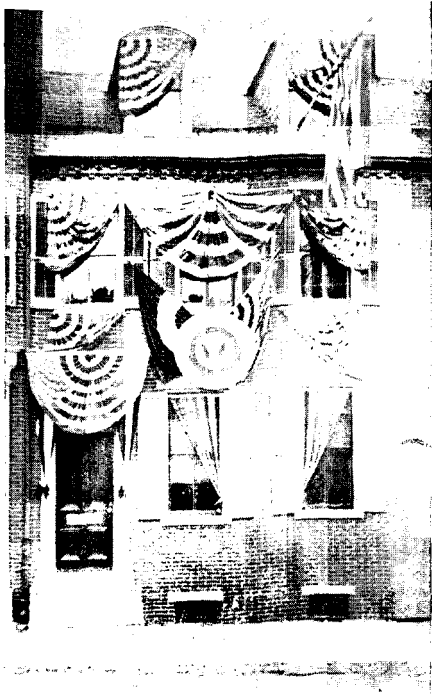
### ADVENT OF THE BIG BICYCLE

England and France went ahead and brought out bicycles to greater perfection, in lightness and general utility. American visitors were astounded at their free use by professional men and messengers, over city streets and better roads than in their home land. The display of bicycles at the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, in 1876, by foreign makers, aroused American manufacturers and dealers.

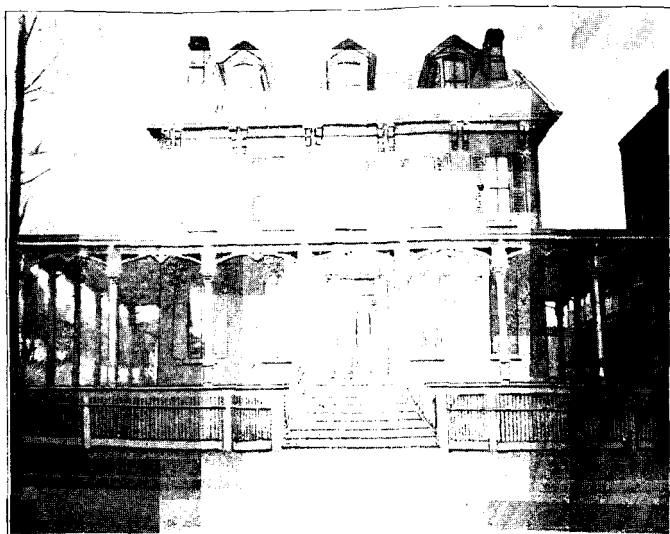
In 1877 a young lawyer, seeking to regain his lost health on one of the imported skeleton steel and rubber-tired steeds, became a veritable pioneer rider of the alluring bicycle in Massachusetts. Bicycles were imported at that time by Cunningham, Heath & Co., a firm located on Pearl Street, Boston.

The enterprise progressed so rapidly that on December 22, 1877, a bi-weekly of sixteen pages appeared in Boston, called "The American Bicycling Journal," edited by Frank W. Weston, who afterward became secretary of the Boston Bicycle Club, organized February, 1878. This famous pioneer wheel organization in America made annual tours, styled "A Wheel Around the Hub," when "Papa" Weston was sure to be at a stopping place for a feast of food and fun-making.

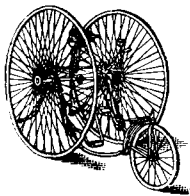
The "father" of bicycle builders in this country, Col. Albert A. Pope, in 1878, started his industry which afterwards became the Pope Manufacturing Company, of Boston. The name Columbia was given to their make of bicycles and the new wheel trade began to grow. In 1879 there were approximately about 500 bicycles



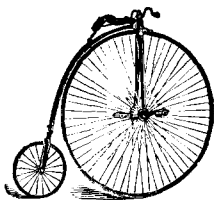
LANCASTER CYCLING CLUB, 42 EAST CHESTNUT STREET, LANCASTER, PA.



THE CLUB'S LAST QUARTERS, NORTH-WEST CORNER OF NORTH DUKE AND EAST FREDERICK STREETS LANCASTER PA



LARGE TRICYCLE. 1884.



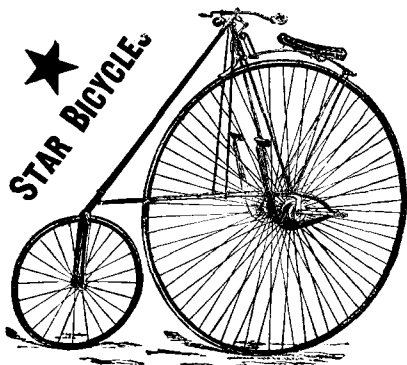
COLUMBIA  
BICYCLE. 1886.



CLUB RIDER. 1882.



LADIES' BICYCLE. 1898.



1886.



HIGH WHEEL  
RIDER. 1885.

of the graceful high wheel type, imported or being made in America.

By 1880 there were some thousands, distributed mainly in the eastern part of the United States. While there were other early Lancaster wheelmen, I can fairly claim distinction of being the first bicycler west of that city toward Elizabethtown, when living near Landisville, Pa. This was in May, 1881. When learning to ride I had never seen another wheelman mount or dismount, so the teaching was all my own. In 1882-3 my contributions on bicycle matters appeared in "The Wheel," New York; also in "The Wheelman" combined with "Outing," Boston.

Bicycles of the high-wheel type were made to fit the person and, of course, intended for men. Measurements were planned according to the stretch from seat or saddle over large front wheel to farthest pedal. The popular sizes were 48, 50, 52 and 54 inches, but they ranged from below 44 to 58 inches, with an extreme of 60 inches for fellows over six feet in height.

Among my first wheelmen acquaintances was the late Martin Rudy, of Lancaster, in the summer of 1881. He was a progressive bicycle enthusiast and became an enduring worker and life-long friend to the cause.

An early organization, the Lancaster Wheelmen, was formed of local riders, which included: Fred A. Achey, W. Frank Gorrecht (captain), Dr. Walter Boardman, Dr. J. H. Day, Michael Gray, Charles E. Haberbush, John C. Hager, Sr., H. C. Hartwell, Horace Rohrer, Martin Rudy, John E. Snyder, and Christian Longenecker. Rudy and Gorrecht were among the short-sized riders and also the more agile and active. Gorrecht became known for his vigorous writings in local papers.

This club had many "runs" to surrounding places, drilled frequently and met in its club rooms on East King street. Experiences were plentiful when out-doors, for roads were more or less rough—dusty in summer and just "too bad" for winter use. Spring and fall were ideal periods for riding along good paths, the better stretches of macadam or hard dirt roads. Sandy places had a way of slowing up hard-breathing wheelmen, with attendant spills and "headers" as part of the riding exercise.

To learn to mount and dismount a high wheel presented its

difficulties to most beginners. Providing for this in Lancaster city, Martin Rudy opened a riding school on the top floor of a building on the east side of the first block on North Queen street in the early '80s, where protecting strips were boarded across the windows to prevent tyros from going through them. Later he opened another school having locker-rooms on the top floor of the old Locher bank building, with entrance on West King street at Penn Square. The famous West King street roller-skating rink, beyond Water street, at Nos. 222 and 224, witnessed bicycle exhibitions of fancy riding about 1885, some of which were given by William B. Youngman. Fancy riding stunts were also gone through with in McGrann's Park, before its grand stand.

The earliest county organization was the Marietta Bicycle Club, made up of representative men from the river borough. While not belonging to it, I became an invited guest in trips made to Philadelphia and elsewhere. This club had great pride with its nickel-plated wheels and was in its prime from 1883 to 1885. Among its riders were: Victor Haldeman, Benton G. Hipple, Dr. Alexander, John J. Carroll, Samuel B. Gramm, the two Libharts, Elmer E. Lindemuth, David R. Mehaffy, Dr. Musser, George Rudisill, and Jonas E. Witmer. The latter and I took rides together over the northern roads and to the Quaker city.

Rev. Dr. Sylvanus Stall, of Lancaster, and Rev. W. P. Evans, of Columbia, were the first local ministers I knew who rode bicycles while visiting friends or members of their flock. This was about 1883-4. In August of the latter year they toured together for nearly 500 miles.

One of the middle period bicycle clubs in Lancaster started its career in May, 1893. It became, for that time, a large and influential organization in the Red Rose community. Among some of its members were: C. Herbert Obreiter, Wm. C. Dittus, W. Scott Leinbach, H. C. Weidler, John M. Nolt, Wm. G. Baker, W. Frank Gorrecht, Jack L. Straub, Willis B. Musser, Leon von Ossko, Rev. J. W. Meminger, W. M. Schaum, Dr. E. B. Ilyus, Melvin R. Long, H. B. Keiper, J. L. Bushong, Dr. D. Sherman Smith, Frank Williamson, and others. This club flourished, participating in bicycle meets and races, besides taking long runs into the country, in which events there was eager rivalry. The membership increased some-



what in succeeding years, falling away like former clubs, in about five years.

The first half of the '90s brought in the low-framed, chain-driven, pneumatic-tired bicycles, making riding more easy and comfortable. Originally these bicycles were termed "safeties," suited mostly to older folks. They, however, became the universal type, after solid rubber tires were discarded for inflated ones; and to this day the general style or build of bicycles seen in Lancaster is of the kind which gave service thirty-five years ago.

The Pennsylvania Division of the League of American Wheelmen issued practical road-books of over 100 pages annually, illustrated by scores of sectional maps, which were most valuable to its members and other wheelmen. Lancaster county contributors to their information and publication included A. Heber Francis, C. Herbert Obreiter, Percy P. Schock, M. M. Kurtz, D. B. Landis, and others at various times.

By 1896 there were many bicycle riders in Lancaster county. It was then that I conceived and promoted a Thanksgiving Day parade, of seven large divisions, which with the co-operation of fellow wheelmen, young and old recruits, proved to be the most colorful and inspiring affair of its kind ever held in this locality.

### THE MOST POPULAR CLUB

A meeting was held at No. 38 East Chestnut street, Lancaster, on July 6, 1897, attended by leading wheelmen, with George H. Halbach as chairman and D. B. Landis, secretary. There the Lancaster Cycling Club was born, under considerable eclat, which with energetic management, by September had a membership of one hundred bicyclists.

This club's first officers were: President, Geo. H. Halbach; first vice-president, D. F. Magee, Esq.; second vice-president, Dr. H. D. Knight; third vice-president, D. P. Stackhouse; corresponding and recording secretary, D. B. Landis; financial secretary, John M. Nolt; captain, J. Ira Stoner; first lieutenant, Wm. W. Gable; second lieutenant, D. M. Newswanger; third lieutenant, B. Lisle Fohl; color-bearer, H. Musketnuss. They served until April, 1898, when a re-election took place. Old gold was an adopted color, being part of the League of American Wheelmen colors, royal purple

and old gold. A number of the local riders were affiliated with both bodies.

The new club had its quarters in the secretary's office for several months, in which time there were weekly bicycle trips to county boroughs, York and elsewhere. Much enthusiasm was created and an entire building of nine rooms, at No. 42 East Chestnut street, was secured on a lease. This place was improved and occupied before October. Thereafter, with social evenings and frequent meetings and outings, the membership continued its increase to over 150 wheelmen. A century run to Gettysburg and return was one of the big trips in less than ten hours, in which many clubmen participated, some of whom won special silver medals. There were slow hill-climbing contests at Potts's, near Witmer bridge; besides races at night in McGrann's Park, under non-professional regulations, which prohibited money being paid to winners.

By this time ladies rode bicycles of special open-frame construction, allowing for their dresses which were not so short as they have recently been. Some girls, however, wore natty riding dresses for trips from home and for League meets; there I witnessed them astride men's bicycles.

The Lancaster Cycling Club members made use of bicycles geared up for faster running and easier manipulation. Gearings of 72 and 7 placed them beyond lower or higher gears, John H. Boehringer tells me. The idea was to procure more speed on the level without too strenuous exertion in climbing grades, of which Lancaster county has always had its abundant share of "hively up and hively down" places.

The Cycling Club, at the close of the last century, removed to a larger home at the corner of North Duke and Frederick streets, where after a few more years of further popularity and usefulness, it finally went out of existence with a splendid record of achievement in street and road betterment, prior to the automobile era. Between 1905 and 1910 a number of men who formerly possessed bicycles, purchased automobiles, with which they could take their families or friends along with them from time to time.

It is of historic interest to note that on March 8, 1900, the first locomobile carriage arrived in Lancaster from Philadelphia,

driven by Walter B. Smith, who with the late Rev. C. Elvin Haupt, D. D., rode for a day or two over Lancaster, when and where large, irregular stones at crossings bumped them up and down at every street intersection.

### WHAT BICYCLES DID FOR GOOD ROADS

In concluding this history of bicycling in the nineteenth century, of which I have alluded to a few of the high lights, it is proper here to call attention to the country-wide aid given by the League of American Wheelmen to the cause of roads and progressive legislation for their improvement and up-keep. Had it not been for that influential body, with its able local consuls, and allied fraternal bicycle interests, the automobile people, a score of years since, would have had much more laborious work to accomplish in getting the "good roads" movement fully under way. Thousands of dollars were freely contributed to direct state legislation, while local efforts resulted in cleaner spaces and streets in towns and cities.

This entire subject is so personal that I shall refrain from putting into print, at this time, more of what I know about it, and of the able and unselfish co-operation of others in Lancaster and neighboring districts. These friends gave generously of their time and means to create and foster fellowships of more than transient kind and duration.

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Several sources for reference:

The American Bicycler, by Charles E. Pratt, 1880.

Good Roads—How to Make and Keep Them, by D. B. Landis, 1885.

Ten Thousand Miles on a Bicycle, by Karl Kron, 1887.

The Landisville Vigil, 1883-5.

Pluck, Lancaster, 1897-8.