The Early History of Cycling in Illinois

2016 Illinois Bicycle Summit
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An Illinois History Refresher

1818 Illinois admitted as a state to the Union
1837 Chicago incorporated as a city
1867-1869 Velocipede riding schools in Chicago and Bloomington
1868 U.S. Velocipede fad begins, velocipedes mentioned in Chicago Tribune
1870 Chicago population: 206,977.
1871 Great Chicago Fire
1872 First Montgomery Ward Catalog Published
1879 (Sept. 1) Chicago Bicycle Club founded, G+J begin production in Chicago

How did I settle on the history of bicycling in Illinois as a research topic?
- Pre-Sabbatical Research / Literature Gap
- Lifelong cyclist
- Lifelong Illinoisan
- History major (undergrad)
- Masters in Library and Information Science
- Archival experience: Smithsonian and U of I archives
- Great stories, but so what?

Some Early Illinois Bicycle Statistics

- 1879- Chicago Bicycle Club Founded (second oldest in the U.S.?)
- 1891 Chicago’s Pullman bicycle race attracts an estimated 100,000 spectators
- “Two-thirds of this country’s output of bicycles and accessories comes from within a radius of 150 miles around Chicago” The Chicago Bicycle Directory, 1898.
- 1900 Census of Manufacturers lists 60 Illinois manufacturers whose principal product was bicycles. Chicago City Directory listed 300!
- Total product value of these manufacturers was nearly $9 million or 28% of the national total

Boneshakers / Velocipedes

- Pierre Michaux, Paris
- Circa 1863
- Pierre Lallement brings one to Connecticut in 1866
- Patents the design in 1867
- Major innovation was pedals attached to the front wheel
- 1868 the Hanlon Brothers acrobatic team add velocipedes to their touring show.
- 1868 Velocipedes begin appearing in Illinois
- Riding schools become popular
- 1868-1869 first real bicycle craze hits America

“As a social revolutionizer it has never had an equal. It has put the human race on wheels, and has thus changed many of the most ordinary processes and methods of social life. It is the great leveler, for not ‘til all Americans got on bicycles was the great principle of every man is just as good as any other man...fully realized.”

Scientific American, June 27, 1896 p. 391

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Loring and Keene

“This velocipede is manufactured by Messrs Loring & Keene of Chicago Illinois and has become very popular in that city and throughout the West... Its price is $130. (Goddard, 1869, p. 62)

Loring and Keene are listed as machinists in an 1869 city directory.

High Wheel / Ordinary / Penny Farthing

- 1870-1895
- Logical evolution of the velocipede
- If you want to go faster you need a wheel with greater circumference
- Brakes!
- Metal wheels with wire spokes and hard rubber tires
- 35-45 pounds
- Somewhat difficult and dangerous to ride
- Bicycle racing becomes popular and drives innovation
- Why Ordinary?

Gormully and Jeffery Timeline

1879 G+J begins production in Chicago
1880 Thomas B. Jeffery received a license from Pope to make bicycles with front wheels up to 42”
1884 Gormully & Jeffery Manufacturing Company appears in City Directory
1884 Catalog: Ideal Bicycle, under license from Pope Mfg. (38-50”)
1887 Rambler Safety
1900 Sold to American Bicycle Company

Safety Bicycles

- 1885 Rover Safety Bicycle (England)
- Chain-driven rear wheels
- Mechanical advantage of various gear ratios
- Roughly equal (then equal) wheel sizes
- 1887 U.S. manufacturers produce safeties
- Dunlop pneumatic tires in 1888.
- Faster, safer and cheaper than ordinaries.
- Get ready for the boom!

How Big was the Bike Boom of the 1890s in Illinois?

1890s There were 500 bicycle clubs in the U.S. (Chicago had 50 with 10,000 total members)
1896 “over 5000 men and women rode to work in downtown Chicago” (Epperson, 55)
In 1896, 100,000 people attended Chicago’s third annual bike show featuring 225 exhibitors
By 1897, it was estimated that 300,000 Chicagoans—1 of every 5 Chicagoans—were riding bikes.
In 1898 the Fair Department Store was selling 1,000 bikes a day from its massive store on State Street.
Currently I have identified nearly 400 individual bicycle manufacturers from 1868-1915!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bicycles</th>
<th>Bicycle Repairers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>123</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>75</td>
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</tbody>
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The Chicago Bicycle Industry as Told by City Directories

**Schwinn**

Founded in Chicago in 1895 by German immigrant Ignatz Schwinn
Most dominant and successful American manufacturer
Excelsior-Henderson motorcycles (1917-1931)
Success with kids bikes and racing bikes
Bankruptcy 1992, moved to Colorado 1993

The World Racer

Women’s Rights and Gender Issues

Women and the Bicycle: So What?

The bicycle arrived at a point in time when women were advocating for more rights and equal treatment under the law (Recall women’s suffrage was finally approved nationally in 1920).

The bicycle hastened dress reform and the fading out of traditional Victorian dress.

The bicycle gave women real mobility for the first time in history. This was a move into contested male-dominated space.

The issue of women cyclists divided the (again male-dominated) medical establishment and eventually led to greater reliance on scientific evidence.
Roads Were Not Built for Cars!

- **Good Roads Movement**
  - 1889 League of American Wheelmen: committee on improvement of the highways.
  - Distributed 20,000 free copies of a pamphlet on road building.
  - In 1898, 10,700 men and women rode bicycles to work in downtown Chicago.
  - Illinois was one of the first states to establish a road commission. On May 15, 1903, the General Assembly of Illinois passed "an Act to provide for the appointment of a Good Roads Commission, and to make an appropriation therefore."
  - Advocated for (and succeeded in) building dedicated bicycle paths and sidepaths.

- **Gospel of Good Roads**: A Letter to the American Farmer: 60,000 free copies distributed in 1891.
  - Good Roads Magazine Published by L.A.W. in 1892.
  - Albert Pope (Columbia Bicycles) helped establish a large Good Roads exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair (1893).
  - In 1892 a 4/5ths of a mile long "Monster Petition" to establish a national Road Engineering and a Road Department was signed by 150,000 businessmen and seventeen Governors and sent to Congress.

- **The Chicago Bicycle Lobby!**
  - Mayoral Election of 1897:
    - Carter Harrison II seeks the wheelman vote.
    - Campaign slogan: "Not a champion cyclist, but the cyclist’s champion."
  - Conservative estimate of 75,000-100K Chicago Cyclists
  - Won the election and rewarded his constituents with a bicycle path along Sheridan Road from Edgewater to Evanston.

- **The Church vs. the Wheel**
  - In the 1890s cycling divided many churches.
  - Sunday cycling was keeping people out of churches and was viewed as desecrating the Sabbath.
  - Some clergymen were ousted from the parishes for supporting cycling.
  - Cycling gave young people—particularly young women—new independence. This undermined Victorian Christian values.
  - Some churches and Christian organizations embraced cycling to attract people and for evangelism.
Peoria hosted the L.A.W. National Series Meets in 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892 and 1899

- 8-10,000 spectators
- Deep prize lists that include thousands in cash, a grand piano, solid gold medals for records and even a lot in the city of Chicago
- Evenings after the Peoria races included steamboat trips on Lake Peoria featuring dinner, military band and dancing.

Early History of Cycling in Bloomington

Bicycle club history: 1878 Boston, 1879 Chicago, 1881 Peoria, 1883 Bloomington

The Peoria Bicycle Club at one time had 400 members and a lavish club house.

It’s Not About the Bike (So What?)

- The significance of Illinois bicycle history is actually not about bicycles. The real significance is how one object shaped and impacted:
  - American industrialization and manufacturing
  - Development of the automobile and good roads
  - Gender roles and women’s rights
  - Urban planning and transportation infrastructure
  - Development of professional sports
  - How Americans spend leisure time

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by an Illinois Wesleyan University Artistic and Scholarly Development Grant and an IWU Re-Centering the Humanities Mellon Fellows Grant.

Any Questions?

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