



# Of Wheelmen, the New Woman, and Good Roads: Historical Perspectives on Vermont's (First) Bicycle Craze

*In 1895, readers of newspapers in Vermont would have learned that the bicycle was at the forefront of exciting technological change and innovation in American industry; that it was creating new opportunities for exercise, recreation, and tourism; that it was affecting women's lives in important and controversial ways; and that it was playing an important role in the improvement of Vermont roads.*

By LUIS A. VIVANCO

**P**icture this. Burlington, Vermont, is known widely as a great destination for bicycle riding. This reputation extends throughout the state and to urban centers in the northeast, attracting visitors who desire the unique experience of riding on its streets and pathways. The city experiences an explosion of popular enthusiasm for bicycles. People see bicycling as an activity that promotes healthy living and strong social ties. Although the profile of the typical rider is male, growing numbers of women see getting around by bicycle as a health-giving and even emancipatory activity. Sales in bicycles and their acces-  
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LUIS VIVANCO is Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Director of the Humanities Center at the University of Vermont. A scholar of environmental social movements, his current research focuses on the meanings and uses of bicycles in culture, politics, and environmental activism.

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sories are brisk, and numerous retailers in the city help the enthusiasm grow by advertising widely in the media, offering financial sponsorship for public activities that celebrate bicycle use, and renting bicycles to short-term visitors. Cultural institutions, including the theater, respond by offering special parking to accommodate those who pedal to their events, and the YMCA provides stationary bicycles for winter riding. Advocates, with strong ties to national and regional organizations, celebrate the bicycle as a solution to multiple social problems, and push public officials to improve riding conditions. They use techniques like bicycle training classes, bike parades, and convivial rides to increase skills and generate enjoyment and fun, but also to raise awareness about their concerns about impediments to cycling, especially poor-quality roads. City leaders, aware of the growing bicycle mania, concern themselves with infrastructural conditions for bicycle riders, and use their regulatory power to control bicycle use, because public concern is rising as students from the University of Vermont race down Pearl Street; bicycle riders traveling on downtown sidewalks harass pedestrians; and at night, rapidly moving bicycles without lights threaten public safety. A bicycle ordinance requires riders to display lights at night and prohibits them from traveling on sidewalks in the Inner Fire District downtown. Some of these bicycle-related conflicts are rooted in class differences, reflecting tensions between city elites and working classes over appropriate ways to move around the streets.

Those familiar with Burlington might recognize these details, as they very closely resemble current cycling conditions. But every detail of this description is drawn from the 1890s, not today. Bicycles in Burlington have enjoyed several periods of popularity, each of which has had important consequences for what it means to cycle on city streets and pathways. In addition to today, the period during the 1970s OPEC oil crisis also saw a spike of enthusiasm and public investment in bicycle use. But none has yet been as transformative as the explosion of bicycling referred to as the “Bicycle Craze” that took place statewide beginning in the 1880s and reached a peak during the second half of the 1890s.

Although the Bicycle Craze had begun to wane by the first decade of the twentieth century, historians have rightly asserted that it was not simply a passing fad. The bicycle played a protagonistic role in various consequential and durable changes, several of which continue to cast a shadow today. It ushered in new ideas about the pleasures of being automobile—the subjective experience of autonomous mobility on a bicycle—and a fascination with effortless speed. Bicycle manufacturing was a cutting-edge industry that laid the technological, industrial, and legal groundwork for the automobile. It expanded the role of luxury goods

and advertising in American life, and helped shape new kinds of consumption and lifestyle sensibilities for the emerging middle class. A new public system of road building and maintenance was created thanks to pressure from cyclists. There was a reordering of gender relations as women took to the bicycle and demanded changes in restrictive clothing and new rights. And bicycles contributed to new ideas about recreation, athleticism, and landscape as cyclists pushed their geographic and physical limits. At the same time, bicycles caused a lot of commotion, disruption, and social conflict as cyclists used bicycles in ways that challenged basic rules of urban propriety, forcing the creation of new modes of etiquette and traffic laws. Religious leaders decried leisurely Sunday riding as promoting moral decay. And health authorities warned of new maladies, among them the much-feared “bicycle face,” a facial contortion caused by excessive speed or the struggle to keep a bicycle in balance.<sup>1</sup>

The Bicycle Craze was a phenomenon of national and international significance, though it was not a given that Vermonters would join in. As the *Rutland Weekly Herald* observed in 1886, “until recently it has been supposed that they [bicycles] could well not be used in Vermont, owing to the steepness of many of the roads and the roughness of most of them during most of the year.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the bicycle did catch on, in no small part due to the state’s geographic proximity to the primary epicenters of North American cycling—Boston, New York, and Montreal—that made the state a destination of bicycle touring and travel, as well as its closeness to the manufacturing heart of the bicycle industry in the Lower Connecticut River Valley. Framed and filtered through dynamics of local history, politics, and social relations, issues of consequence did play out in the state with reverberating consequences elsewhere, such as around the so-called “road question” over who should have responsibility for the improvement and maintenance of roads. In spite of their importance and prestige in late nineteenth-century public culture, business, and politics, bicycles remain invisible in Vermont historiography, raising these questions: How did people in this rural and mountainous state adopt, experience, and adapt to bicycles? What kinds of public controversies were bicycles involved in, and what effects did bicycling have on the state’s culture and politics? Exploring these questions brings interesting and meaningful contours to that larger national story, while at the same time illuminating the role of the bicycle in processes of social transformation in Vermont’s small towns and cities. It also highlights some intriguing parallels and connections with our current twenty-first-century bicycle craze, which is grappling with its own concerns around disruptive bicycle technology,

access to roads, and the social and health effects of large numbers of people riding bicycles.

This article draws on digitized historical newspaper collections and bicycling and transportation archives of a number of historical societies from around the state, including town histories, city directories and reports, personal letters, photo collections, maps, and ephemera.<sup>3</sup> It is organized into three primary sections, each of which examines distinctive aspects of the Bicycle Craze, that together provide a comprehensive picture of how Vermonters negotiated bicycling's pleasures and disruptions during a dynamic period in regional and national history. The first section examines "the Wheelmen," the elite social networks that brought bicycling to Vermont beginning in the 1880s, and the changing nature of cycling as their influence shifted during the 1890s. The second section, "the New Woman," explores the gendered dynamics of cycling, as women took to the wheel, channeling debates over women's freedoms and suffrage, and concerns about control over their bodies. The final section, "Good Roads," explains the advocacy of cyclists to pass legislation promoting a more central role for the state in road building and maintenance, a topic for which Vermont was known widely for its progressive approach.

#### THE WHEELMEN

With newspaper reports of a "velocipede fever rag[ing] in Montpelier," and a velocipede riding school and races happening in the Darrow Concert Hall in St. Albans, 1869 is the year the bicycle began to generate buzz in Vermont.<sup>4</sup> Those bicycles do not closely resemble anything a contemporary cyclist would ride, and they were quite rare. Heavy, unwieldy, and expensive, velocipedes were developed only a few years before in a Paris wagon shop when a tinkering mechanic attached cranks and pedals to the front wheel of an older, two-wheeled "running machine."<sup>5</sup> Their nickname—"boneshaker"—was derived from the effect of riding the 150-pound wagon-wheeled wooden and metal behemoths on uneven streets and roads. Within several years, the boneshaker was eclipsed by the high-wheel bicycle, or simply, "the wheel," thanks to technological innovations in Britain and France, among them spoked wheel designs and the manufacture of steel tubing that made the bicycle much lighter and faster. Domestic manufacture of high wheels began to ramp up in the United States, led by Connecticut River Valley companies in centers such as Hartford, CT, where the Pope Manufacturing Company (founded in 1877 in Boston and manufacturer of Columbia bicycles) set up shop in a sewing machine factory, and Chicopee Falls, MA, where the Overman Wheel Company (founded in 1882 and manufacturer of Victor Bicycles)

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and Ames Manufacturing Company (which produced high-wheel bicycles for a number of different companies) were based.

By the late 1870s and early 1880s, high-wheel bicycles appeared in Vermont, ridden by “wheelmen.” Given the extravagant expense—upwards of six months wages for the typical worker—wheelmen tended to come from the socioeconomic stratum of white affluent professionals, and, well, they were *men*. While tricycles did exist and were available for women to ride, the physical difficulties and dangers of mastering the high wheel required time, dedication, and “sportiness” (athleticism), factors widely regarded as contributing to wheeling’s inappropriateness for women, and for that matter, a lot of men. Reflecting the broader importance of fraternal organizations in American civic life, wheelmen’s clubs were formed to promote recreation, friendly competition, social relationships, and a political agenda for wheeling, especially the improvement of roads. Bearing distinctive uniforms,

elaborate club logos and emblems, and even elegant clubhouses, the elite networks of wheelmen emphasized bicycle riding as a genteel, leisurely, and orderly social activity. Favored activities included parading on town streets, in cavalry formation with riders ordered by rank and directed by a bugler, “making runs” on rural roads, and traveling to meet-ups with other wheel clubs for racing, touring, and socializing.

Vermont hosted some of the country’s earliest wheel clubs, which formed in the state’s commercial and industrial centers, among them Rutland (Rutland Bicycle Club, 1881-86), Burlington (Burlington Bicycle Club, 1886-1887), Bellows Falls (Mt. Kilburn Wheel Club, 1886-late 1890s), St. Johnsbury (Mystic



*Cornele G. Ross, captain of the Rutland Bicycle Club. In September 1885, the club traveled to Springfield, MA for a meet-up, where this portrait was taken. (Courtesy Glenn Eames).*

Cyclers, 1886-87), and Brattleboro (Vermont Wheel Club, 1880-1924). These early clubs included locally prominent figures and socioeconomic elites, including businessmen, bankers, doctors, and lawyers.

A prototypical 1880s wheelman is Joseph Auld, the Burlington club president. Auld was business manager and eventually publisher of the *Burlington Free Press*, and an inventor who gained U.S. patents for a tricycle gearing system and an indoor window blind.<sup>6</sup> He is known for his 1893 photographic book, *Picturesque Burlington: A Handbook of Burlington, Vermont, and Lake Champlain*, a volume that makes only fleeting mention of bicycles but whose emphasis on the value of exploring the landscape and appreciating scenic vistas aligns closely with wheelman ideals and sensibilities.<sup>7</sup> For early wheelmen like Auld, their association with bicycles endowed them with status not simply for their economic means, elite social networks, and athleticism, but as progressive-minded individuals who embraced the excitement of technological change, landscape appreciation, and the surging importance of ideas about sanitary lifestyles and “hygiene” that connected physical activity to good health and well-being.

The largest, most active, and enduring of Vermont’s wheelmen’s groups was the Vermont Wheel Club of Brattleboro. It was founded as the Brattleboro Bicycle Club in 1880 with ten members, just two years after the very first wheelmen’s club in the U.S. was founded (Boston Cycle Club, 1878) and in the same year as the founding of the national League of American Wheelmen. The club, renamed the Brattleboro Cycle Club in 1884, eventually took over a space abandoned by a social organization called the Taurus Club, and in 1885 reorganized itself as the Vermont Wheel Club. By the time it went out of existence in 1924, the VWC was the second oldest wheelmen’s club in the country.<sup>8</sup> Enthusiasm for bicycles was extremely high in Brattleboro, and all roads seemed to lead to there, at least from points south, where southern New England and New York-area wheelmen would enter the state for multi-day tours, and where commercial and social ties with the Connecticut River Valley bicycle manufacturing corridor were strong. During the 1880s and 1890s, the VWC was highly regarded for its stature and influence, hosting a number of bicycle races that could draw several thousand spectators, and sending racers to compete, often with great success, at high-profile races outside of Vermont. But its membership was not limited to cyclists, and by the 1890s it had expanded to 150 men of “good character and standing.” As one of Brattleboro’s most important social institutions, the VWC sponsored annual field days, minstrel shows, mock trials, indoor circuses, a baseball team, and a series of el-

egant winter balls.<sup>9</sup> In 1895, it opened a new clubhouse of stately furnishings, summertime rooftop garden, suites for visiting wheelmen, billiard and game rooms, and a dining hall.<sup>10</sup> Even as enthusiasm for bicycles began to decline in the early 1900s, and when the clubhouse burned down in 1914, the VWC continued to exist as a central community social organization in Brattleboro until it was folded into the Brattleboro Club in 1924.

The longevity of the VWC contrasts with other early clubs that disbanded just a few years after their founding. In the case of the Burlington Bicycle Club, the enthusiasm and status seeking of the city's socio-economic elites shifted toward boating with the 1887 founding of the Lake Champlain Yacht Club. On its roster were a number of those individuals who just a few years earlier were active in the wheelman's club, including Joseph Auld.

A more sensational case is that of the Rutland Bicycle Club, which declared insolvency in 1885 after a disastrous business enterprise involving the construction of a skating rink. The first wheelmen's clubs were closely associated with skating rinks, as they offered a smooth surface to learn and develop riding skills, year-round riding conditions, and, when owned by the club, the ability to rent out the space for roller skating, concerts, and other events.<sup>11</sup> On July 4, 1884, the Rutland Bicycle Club opened its new skating rink with a grand celebration of roller skating, trick bicycle riding, and a concert. Described by one reporter as "one of the largest rinks in New England...[and] carried forward solely by the energy and business talent of that club," the rink had a skating surface of 140x77 feet, seating capacity of 1,200 (800 on the floor and 400 in the balcony), steam heating, and numerous chandeliers with gas jets.<sup>12</sup> The cost was \$15,000, which is approximately \$400,000 today. In spite of the "business talents" of its owners, however, problems mounted quickly. The rink's Church Street location was considered poor, and, as the *Rutland Daily Herald* reported in 1885, "the managers were perhaps not economical in running it, and bought the best furniture and paid a large salary for an attendant." A clerical error in Rutland City offices that improperly recorded a mortgage taken out by the club members to finish the rink's construction invalidated the collateral members put up to secure the loan. When the company that installed the steam heating system imposed a lien, the club declared insolvency.<sup>13</sup> In the fall of 1885, barely a year after it opened, the rink was sold at auction for \$2,325, and a few months later, the club fell apart.

Yet fertile grounds for wheeling had been established in the 1880s. Local wheelmen forged statewide social networks through the Vermont

Division of the League of American Wheelmen, and newspapers around the state explained bicycles to a curious public. In April 1886, Randolph's Lewis P. Thayer, a wheelman and editor of the *Herald and News*, began publishing a twelve-to-sixteen-page monthly newspaper called *The Vermont Bicycle*, dedicated to themes of "good roads, healthful recreation and the wheel interest." As a prominent national cycling magazine noted, it gained a reputation as a "favorite among wheel papers," and was such an unexpected success that Thayer decided to expand its run until the following January, instead of September as originally contemplated.<sup>14</sup>

Several factors drove greater access to bicycles and fueled the craze that began to take off during 1890s: the development of the "safety bicycle" in 1885 (chain-driven bicycles, with equal-sized wheels, similar in form to today's bicycles) that made riding easier and safer; the 1888 invention of the pneumatic tire, which made riding more comfortable; and mass production and technical innovations in manufacturing and materials that made bicycles more affordable. While most bicycles and accessories came from out of state, by the mid-1890s a handful of Vermont machine shops were manufacturing bicycles, including two firms in Rutland: the Coolidge Cycle Company (makers of the "Vermont" and "Rutland" bicycle models) and the Howe Scale Co. (makers of the Howe Bicycle). In Bennington, the Bennington Bicycle Co. produced the "Tiffany Special" and the "Nelson Special" models. In St. Johnsbury, G. H. Paine created a "general hospital for bikes," where he was known for manufacturing bicycles, and the E. & T. Fairbanks & Co. developed the "Bicycle Beam," a scale for weighing bicycles with precision.<sup>15</sup>

Only a few larger towns and cities could support a dedicated bicycle sales, repair, and rental shop, such as Lane's Bicycle Livery in Burlington (1897-1920); but even many small towns across rural parts of the state would have bicycle "agents" (manufacturers' local sales representatives) in town or in close proximity, such as in Woodstock, where during 1896 "all the well-known manufacturers" were represented by eight agents, or in Lyndonville, where the "hustling bicycle and insurance agent" E. J. Blodgett carried "the largest and most complete stock in Northeastern Vermont."<sup>16</sup> While some agencies operated independently, many were located in established businesses, among them dry goods grocers, hardware stores, jewelers, even pharmacies and photographic supply stores.

Although no records exist of the broader scale and impact of the bicycling economy, one remarkable attempt to quantify the local value of bicycle-related economic activity in Montpelier and Barre made an ef-





*Lane's Bicycle Livery, on Loomis Street in Burlington, 1901. (Courtesy of Jerry Lasky)*

fort. It focused on a joint parade of 226 wheelmen and women from those towns that took place in 1896. Approximating the average value of each bicycle at \$100, and noting that another one hundred known cyclists did not show up for the parade, the author estimated that between the two towns, residents had spent some \$32,500 (or just shy of \$1 million today) on their bicycles alone.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1893 and 1896 new wheelmen's clubs formed all over the state, a small sampling of which includes the St. Johnsbury Cycle Club, Burlington Wheelmen, Queen City Cycle Club (Burlington), Capital Cycle Club (Montpelier), Barre Bicycle Club, Essex Junction Bicycle Club, Lyndonville Bicycle Club, Bicycle Club of Swanton, St. Albans Bicycle Club, Granite Cycle Club (Hardwick), Otter Creek Cycle Club (Middlebury), Wabeno Cycle Club (Woodstock), Hartford Bicycle Club, and the Union Wheel Club (Dorset). Newspapers closely followed their meetings, races, long-distance endurance and overnight rides, and social events.

Parading maintained its importance among these new wheelmen, one compelling illustration being an 1895 description in White River Junction's *The Landmark* of a parade that took place in Woodstock,

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sponsored by the town's Wabeno Cycle Club. It attracted 200 riders, many from other Upper Valley towns, who arrived with their bicycles by a special train of the Woodstock Railway. The town was decorated with 3,000 Japanese lanterns, and several thousand people turned out to witness the bicycle parade, listen to a cornet band, and enjoy refreshments.<sup>18</sup>

One of the chief effects of the growing bicycle craze was to expand access to social and economic groups originally kept away because of the expense, difficulty, and dangers of bicycles; club admissions rules; or both. The member profile of new wheelmen's clubs began to shift from the mostly elite composition of the early clubs, and were formed by office and clerical workers and other middle-class and aspirant groups. By 1896, a peak year in the bicycle craze, towns across even the most rural parts of the state could report, as they did from Fairlee, that "Bicycles are all the rage now in this town, as well as elsewhere. Those who haven't a wheel to ride have got the wheel on the brain."<sup>19</sup>

Bicycling's spread, however, also meant that wheelmen's clubs began to lose the ability to define bicycle riding as a genteel, leisurely, and orderly activity, especially as women had taken to riding bicycles (see below), and as laborers and working-class individuals began to get involved in cycling for recreation and transportation. The figure of



*A parade of some two hundred wheelmen and women in Woodstock, sponsored by the Wabeno Cycle Club, 1895. (Vermont Historical Society)*

the “scorcher” assumed a role as a sinister Other to the upstanding wheelmen—not to mention an open threat to public welfare—the term referring to individuals who embraced the exhilaration of so-called “furious” (speedy and reckless) riding over the orderly and convivial style of the wheelman. Not coincidentally, scorching was often associated with young working-class men not eligible for membership in wheelmen’s clubs.

Scorching caused significant public concern, even moral panic, throughout the 1890s, in commercial and industrial towns where demographic changes related to rural migration and the arrival of foreign immigrants were already challenging norms of civic propriety and use of public space. Newspapers reported often on the disruptions caused by scorchers to the innocent affairs of pedestrians and horses, and the at times spectacular crashes and injuries they caused to themselves and others. One such report in the *Burlington Weekly Free Press* from 1899 began with characteristic resignation, “Another accident occurred Tuesday evening as a direct result of the ever-present bicycle scorcher.”<sup>20</sup> Even small towns were not exempt from the threatening scorcher, including in Richford where it was reported, “The spectacle of a flying streak of humanity who pumps his pedals or whacks his nag along our thoroughfares is altogether too frequent.”<sup>21</sup>

The fear among wheelmen was of being demonized as scorchers.<sup>22</sup> The fact that the *Vermont Statutes* of 1894 established fines between \$5 and \$25 for bicycle riding on sidewalks made little difference to prevent scorching, and they often went unenforced anyway. As conflict intensified, some clubs began to advocate for stronger formal regulation of bicycling.<sup>23</sup> For example, in 1897 the Mt. Kilburn Wheel Club in Bellows Falls circulated a petition asserting, “There has been considerable complaint of fast and reckless riding...it is better that the wheelmen take the matter in hand themselves.”<sup>24</sup> The petition recommended that the town enact a law requiring wheelmen to carry lanterns and bells and to formally designate cycling travel to the right side of streets, roads, and pathways (road usage was fairly fluid with wagons, pedestrians, and cyclists interwoven). Indeed, during 1897 and 1898, numerous towns and cities across the state began to implement local bicycle ordinances reiterating sidewalk riding bans, embracing practices like those advocated in Bellows Falls, and empowering police to enforce a new regime of traffic law.

Although the main focus of wheelman politics continued to be on the improvement of roads (see below), wheelmen did seek to adapt the legal environment to their advantage. In 1896, for example, the state legislature took up several issues of wheeling concern, one being a bill allow-

ing bicycles to count as baggage on trains so travelers would not have to pay extra for their bicycles—railroads being one of their preferred modes of traveling to meet-ups and exploring distant landscapes. Introduced by a Brattleboro representative responding to a “very large number of ladies and gentlemen” and accompanied by a supportive letter sent to all legislators from the Mt. Kilburn Wheel Club, it nevertheless failed in the senate.<sup>25</sup> It also took up a bicycle tax, which also failed, though not due to the resistance of wheelmen, who did not object as long as those funds were used for funding pathways and road improvements.<sup>26</sup>

One area where wheelmen pressure did have greater effect was in their appeals to local and state officials to address rampant bicycle stealing. It was definitely not the case, as the *Bellows Falls Times* reported in 1896, that “It is next to impossible to safely steal a bicycle in Vermont.”<sup>27</sup> At a cost of \$75 to \$100 (roughly \$2,000 to \$3,000 today) for a new, well-made bicycle, a wheel was a precious item. Bicycle thieves were regularly punished with two years in state prison, reported by the *Essex County Herald* as “more severe punishment than any other State inflicts.”<sup>28</sup>

#### THE NEW WOMAN

In 1897, the *Londonderry Sifter* published a one-panel cartoon titled “These Latter Days” picturing an elegant young woman standing, with her bicycle, next to a man clad in sporty clothing. Its caption reads, “He—Don’t you think it rather risky to come so far alone on your wheel? She—Hadh’n’t thought of it. But if you feel timid, I’ll see you home.”<sup>29</sup> Here is the 1890s “new woman” on full display, emphasizing her independence, freedom of movement, and self-reliance, qualities closely associated with both bicycles and political feminism’s challenges to traditional gender roles.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, prominent suffragists and advocates of women’s rights famously embraced the bicycle, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who asserted, “The bicycle will inspire women with more courage, self-respect, and self-reliance and will make the next generation more vigorous of mind and of body; for feeble mothers do not produce great statesmen, scientists and scholars.”<sup>31</sup>

Vermont suffrage leaders made no known public pronouncements about the emancipatory potential of bicycles. Their unofficial allies—temperance advocates—did bring positive attention to the bicycle, emphasizing that bicycle riding promotes healthy living and because (as expressed in the *St. Johnsbury Caledonian*) “no bicycle rider ever comes home drunk on his bicycle.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, bicycle riding likely enjoyed at least tacit approval of the state’s suffragists given their empha-



"Mrs. H. Wells and Auntie Wells, Burlington VT," 1896. Courtesy of Glena Eames

sis on a woman's right to "physical culture," or the development of a healthy body through exercise. At the 1892 "Right of Suffrage and the Complete Enfranchisement of Women" congress in Montpelier, for example, Loise Alfred of Newport gave an address in which she asserted that exercise and other "healthy recreations" are central to women's suffrage because they produce "independence and with a good education will permit a woman to make life a success."<sup>33</sup>

However, it is apparent that in Vermont—where women's voting rights faced formidable political obstacles and were only gradually accepted by many women themselves—female bicycle riding was not conflated with suffragist sentiments and politics.<sup>34</sup> This view was at least partially expressed in a humorous, if ambivalent, snippet in the *Orleans County Monitor*: "Miss Mayjune—Do you believe in woman suffrage? Miss Janfeb—Well, er, I haven't quite come to that yet, but I ride a bicycle."<sup>35</sup> White middle-class women throughout Vermont enthusiastically purchased ladies' model (step-through) bicycles and the accessories produced for them, like special shoes, saddles, and clothing that permitted greater freedom of movement, such as bicycle skirts and bloomer pants. The broader view among these "new women" was that bicycling was a modern and progressive activity, one manifestation of a new culture and spirit of healthy living and social reform that was also driving

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greater involvement of middle-class women in civic action and the public sphere.<sup>36</sup>

Bicycling was also a source of embodied experiences, pleasures, and freedoms of unchaperoned mobility, representing a challenge to Vermont's "traditional wisdom that woman's place was in the home."<sup>37</sup> Following the pattern in other states, "wheelwomen" and "bicycle girls" formed ladies' bicycle clubs within their social networks, some of these clubs recruiting only married women, and others of them only young women. Like wheelmen's clubs, these clubs excluded non-middle-class women, such as farming women or textile workers who might have also enjoyed bicycling. Indeed, the appropriateness of non-middle-class women riding bicycles was often questioned, including by Montpelier's overseer of the poor who, when two women who were "city charges" were seen riding bicycles, expressed that the "pauper department" has "no objection to supplying the needy but draws the line on luxuries like bicycles."<sup>38</sup> Though fewer in number than wheelmen's clubs, ladies' clubs existed mostly in larger centers like Burlington, Rutland, and St. Albans; but as the *St. Johnsbury Republican* declared with a certain pride in 1895, "Vermont towns are up to date in everything. Newport has a ladies bicycle club, with enough members to fill all the offices."<sup>39</sup> Women's bicycle races were organized at county fairs and wheelmen meet-ups, and "bicycle parties" became a popular middle-class recreational activity—both *on* wheels, in which a group of women friends or co-ed groups would go for a social ride on country roads, and *off*, by holding bicycle-themed tea parties and luncheons. One of these luncheons occurred in Springfield in 1897 and was declared to be the "pret-



Undated photo of a Lyndonville "bicycle party" posing before setting out on a ride. Based on the bicycles, it was probably taken in 1894 or 1895. (Vermont Historical Society)

tiest, certainly most unique party ever given in town,” featuring bicycle lanterns and bells arrayed on a large round table that was made to look like a bicycle wheel.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, bicycling by women was hotly contested in Vermont, especially by those who viewed it as undermining traditional standards of prim and proper “womanliness.” Local newspapers expressed a range of perspectives—from support to resignation—for bicycle riding by women as a sign of the times. Among these was the *Burlington Free Press*, which although concerned about the “new woman’s negative qualities”—chief among them her apparent desire to replace men—still expressed the view in 1894 that, “The popular verdict, we believe, agrees...[that] girls and women may ride the bicycle as much as they please.”<sup>41</sup> Women bicycle riders challenged prevailing expectations of female comportment, athleticism, appearance, and morality, but they were also stereotyped as accident-prone, imprudent, and hapless. The *Vermont Graphic*, for example, acknowledged that the “strong-minded female” had opened the way for women to ride bicycles, but warned its readers that the roads had become full of “ultra-feminine” riders mounting bicycles “in fear and trembling...and zig-zag[ging] across the highway like intoxicated fowls.”<sup>42</sup> Animated discussions “in press and public and pulpit”—*especially* pulpit—portrayed bicycling as “dragging women away from the fine standard of femininity,” with critics focusing special concern on mounting and dismounting a bicycle, actions viewed not just as lacking in appropriate feminine grace but also “suggestive of immorality.”<sup>43</sup>

Debates over dress reform and appropriate “bicycling costume” were especially pitched. Women cyclists had pushed against restrictive clothing such as corsets and long skirts that interfered with the act of breathing, pedaling, or both, yet walked a fine line where any article of clothing that was looser or shorter than the norm would surely be judged “immodest.” Bloomers (“undisguised pants” as one article in the *Burlington Free Press* derisively called them) came in for unique opprobrium for their “mannish” appearance.<sup>44</sup> But bloomers clearly had their supporters: One Lyndonville writer warned that a minister from central Vermont whose antibloomer sermon had sparked much discussion and commentary would need “an extra amount of life insurance” were his congregation in that town.<sup>45</sup>

Commentary and controversy also flared up around the effects of bicycling on women’s health, physical bearing, and sexual well-being. By the close of the 1890s, most medical professionals would agree with University of Vermont researcher and Professor of Mental and Nervous Diseases Graeme Hammond, who had studied the health effects of bicy-

cling, when he wrote, “experience has shown me that bicycle riding for a healthy individual is one of the most excellent forms of exercise for maintaining health, retarding disease, and strengthening the constitution, and is also a pleasant recreation for the mind; and that in many forms of disease, when used cautiously and under medical supervision, it will often be found of inestimable advantage.”<sup>46</sup> In 1895, a number of newspapers around the state picked up on a report that declared bicycling to be “the best medicine for the ailing woman.” It described the findings of a Brooklyn doctor who claimed that bicycling among his women patients could alleviate problems like anemia, “delayed and scanty menstruation,” dysmenorrhea (menstrual cramps), dyspepsia (indigestion), malnutrition, and even “relaxed patella and strained knee tendons.” The doctor advised ailing women to go only for short rides, “preferably in the morning, preceded by a glass of milk or light lunch, followed by a cool sponge bath and a brisk rubbing.”<sup>47</sup>

But reports of bicycling’s disastrous effects on a woman’s physiology, beauty, and morality circulated just as widely, offering stark warnings—which could be read as thinly veiled threats—to women who exhibited enthusiasm for the wheel. Ailments that drew special attention for women included the bicycle face mentioned above, “bicycle hump” (curvature of the spine due to leaning forward), and “bicycle foot” (trauma to ligaments of the foot caused by mounting and dismounting a bicycle while wearing fashionable boots).<sup>48</sup> Cycling was also believed to cause deleterious vibrations among women with weak pelvic muscles, causing sexual dysfunctions including extreme sexual appetite, uterine displacement, contracted birth canal, even the inability to propagate—beliefs that drove the production of special “hygienic” ladies saddles. One screed on the subject, published in the *Burlington Free Press* in 1895, is remarkable for its especially harsh denunciation of bicycling. Quoting St. Louis-based doctor Heine Marks, the article asserted, “With women, constant riding produces troubles peculiar to women and also promotes amorous desires. Married women riding bicycles are especially liable to very serious physical mishaps. In fact, the dangers are multitudinous. People have neglected them too long, and if the entire world is not depopulated by the rapidly increasing membership of this suicide club, the human race will die out by reason of lack of manhood and inability to propagate.”<sup>49</sup>

For their part, Vermont’s “new women” do not appear to have been put off by such extreme claims. Throughout the decade, enthusiasm for bicycling continued to grow: women paraded alongside wheelmen in large meet-ups; the “cycling notes” columns in the newspapers offered optimistic perspectives on “the woman and the wheel”; and prospective



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female riders were offered guidance about the nuances of learning and riding a bicycle. One amusing illustration of this last was a short article to new female riders that explained that, after purchasing a bicycle, the shop would often send one of its staff to teach the basics of riding, and advised the lady reader that “if one must clutch any male thing by the neck and fall into his arms 10 or 20 times in the course of an afternoon a relative or intimate friend is better than an unknown oily mechanic.”<sup>50</sup> It also appears that moderation was considered the safest bet. As the *Orleans County Monitor* reported in 1896, “The bicycle face and the bicycle curvature of the spine having ceased to alarm, the new indictment against the wheel is that it makes feminine riders pigeon-toed. The truth, probably, is that the bicycle, indulged in moderation, is more likely to cure pedal peculiarities than to cause them.”<sup>51</sup>

### GOOD ROADS

In 1887, A. N. Adams of Fair Haven wrote a letter to the *Rutland Herald* congratulating it on its efforts to “wake up the people to the great importance of good roads.”<sup>52</sup> In his letter, the prominent educator, state legislator, and town historian described the roads in western Vermont as “neglected, shamefully left to be rutted, deeper and deeper,” and accused fellow citizens of a lack of intelligence and public-spiritedness for permitting it to happen. Quoting the League of American Wheelmen, he asserted the wisdom of prioritizing regular repairs to roads.

What is remarkable here is not that a Vermonter complained about the state’s poor roads, a centuries-spanning grievance that stands second only to those expressed about the weather and climate.<sup>53</sup> Rather, it is the fact that an individual with no known connection to bicycling expressed support for the wheelmen’s central cause of road improvement, even invoking specific language and talking points wheelmen’s organizations had worked hard to develop and communicate since 1880. That was the year the League of American Wheelmen (LAW) was formed at a meet-up in Newport, Rhode Island, to support bicyclists’ interests, protect their rights to the road, and to launch a bicycle industry-funded national “Good Roads Movement” to educate, agitate, and lobby governments to make road improvements across the country.

The Vermont Division of the LAW, whose membership included wheelmen from local clubs around the state, had their work cut out for them. Vermont’s road system during that period has been described as “abandoned and dilapidated turnpikes and travel-worn paths between villages and nearby hamlets...[and] thirteen thousand miles of muddy and rutted dirt roads, strewn with rocks and boulders.”<sup>54</sup> For long-distance travel and commodity hauling, Vermonters had come to rely heav-

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ily on the state's railway network, whose construction had begun in the late 1840s and by the end of the century covered every county and boasted of 1,000 miles of steam and 75 miles of electric rails.<sup>55</sup> Roads and highways were mostly used for local farm traffic and shorter hauls, and in some towns, seasonal pleasure travel and tourism. They were also under local town control. During the nineteenth century the Vermont General Assembly and courts had established and maintained certain general standards for roads and highways—instituting the appropriate width of highways, for example, or requiring surveyors to remove loose stones from roadways—as well as providing mechanisms to raise the labor and funds for road work through taxation.<sup>56</sup> But the long-standing principle in Vermont politics of decentralization by deferring substantial authority and control to the towns—the so-called “little republics”—meant that the actual coordination, building, and repairing of roads lay in the hands of local selectmen, town road commissioners, and residents who paid road taxes by providing their labor.<sup>57</sup>

According to an 1894 report commissioned by the General Assembly to analyze the condition of Vermont's highways, this deferral of authority to the towns had dire effects on road quality. In the vast majority of



Plate 3.—EFFECT OF NARROW TIRES ON AN UNDRAINED ROAD.

*A plate from the 1894 “Report of the Vermont Highway Commission” demonstrates the poor quality of roads that created such challenging conditions for bicyclists.*

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towns there was little to no expertise in “road science,” the commonplace term for the principles and practices of planning a road, road bed construction, road surfacing, and road repair.<sup>58</sup> Further, the materials used were whatever was available locally as opposed to what was appropriate and durable, and the work was generally confined to the boundaries of each township, making coordination for longer-distance connections difficult and inconsistent.<sup>59</sup> The report concluded, quite simply, that poor surveying and planning work went into the state’s road system, chiding, “in the original location of our highways the question of future economy of the use and maintenance of the roadways was apparently lost sight of, the main idea seeming to have to open a fairly decent passage-way between two or more points, without regard to the soil passed over, or the steep pitches or unnecessary hills introduced on the line of a road.”<sup>60</sup>

Wheelmen had adapted to this state of affairs by seeking out smooth and hard roads, which did exist, of course—though a string of rainy days could quickly dash their hopes. It was not unusual for wheelmen to travel by train to a town that had invested in good streets or local roadways. Burlington, for example, was attractive because it could boast of several dozen miles of “sandpapered streets,” thanks to the fact that it had purchased a stone crusher in 1873 to assist with macadamizing streets, furthered still in 1893 with the purchase of a steam-roller.<sup>61</sup> Some wheelmen sought to take matters directly into their own hands, proposing to build side paths solely for bicycle use between towns, as wheelmen in St. Johnsbury and Lyndonville did in 1899. Vermont’s side-path movement nevertheless struggled to gain traction among legislators. The Vermont House passed H. 233 in 1900, which would have established county side path commissions, but when it moved to the Senate it was immediately killed.<sup>62</sup>

For the most part, wheelmen relied on intelligence gathered and distributed among themselves about good routes and road conditions. An 1887 book, *Ten Thousand Miles on a Bicycle*, is an especially fascinating illustration of this approach.<sup>63</sup> At over 900 pages, the book is a veritable cabinet of curiosities, characterized by its author Karl Kron as “a book of American roads... a gazetteer, a dictionary, a cyclopedia, a statistical guide, a thesaurus of facts.” Its main purpose was to document Kron’s extensive travels throughout the Northeast (including Vermont), parts of the South, and eastern Canada, reporting detailed notes on routes, road quality, and other local bicycling tidbits and lore. (One intriguing Vermont-related item Kron reported is that the first 100-mile ride, known as a “century” even back then, in the state took place in

1883 by “two Rutland boys.”) It also included letters from local wheelmen about their own favored routes, distances, and road conditions. Kron’s travels and publication expenses were funded by gaining subscribers among wheelmen who would receive a certified copy, providing them with a reference guide for their own ramblings. This would seem to have been attractive to at least one Vermont subscriber—captain of the Rutland Bicycle Club, C. G. Ross—who wrote to Kron, “I have found it impossible to get any reports at all, as to roads, from Vt. wheelmen; and my own riding has been too largely local to furnish with much information.”<sup>64</sup> With its list of 3,200 subscribers, among them forty-five Vermonters, *Ten Thousand Miles on A Bicycle* also constitutes a “who’s-who” of mid-1880s wheelmen, demonstrating the strength of social networks that the LAW and local clubs had sought to cultivate and project.

For its part, the LAW, through its state divisions, also published “road books” featuring curated routes with detailed way-finding instructions and descriptions of road conditions, distances, and amenities along the way. Its *Vermont Road Book*, published in 1895, as well as a handful of commercially produced bicycle route maps, supported the state’s surging reputation among out-of-state bicycle tourists. The road book advised, “In riding a bicycle through Vermont, a stranger will find it a very pleasant State in which to tour. The roads are very good and well-kept, on the whole”—though it should be noted that the sixteen routes provided in the booklet itself were carefully chosen with the quality of the roads in mind.<sup>65</sup> While Vermont’s bicyclists might agitate against poor road conditions internally, there was recognition that visiting cyclists were a source of income for the state’s expanding tourism economy—a point that hotel owners also understood well—so outward projections communicated pleasant riding conditions.<sup>66</sup> This point also became justification for road improvements. As the LAW’s *Bulletin of Good Roads* asserted in 1898, “The greatest crop Vermont has is summer visitors... and better highways are necessary to prevent it from falling off.”<sup>67</sup>

Following national good roads leadership’s motto of “agitation, organization, legislation,” Vermont wheelmen threw themselves into good roads advocacy beginning in the 1880s. As Randolph’s *Vermont Bicycle* expressed in 1886, a central goal was to shape popular views to favor road improvements: “We apprehend there is much to be done to bring the roads into the condition to which we refer, but there is more to be done to bring the people into a willing frame of mind to have the improvements carried out.”<sup>68</sup> To cultivate that “willing frame of mind,” wheelmen wrote letters—a lot of them—to local and state elected offi-

cials and newspaper editorial boards, and worked within their influential social networks to convince others—especially politicians, merchants, and military leaders—of the righteousness of road improvement to support the state’s economy. They framed their cause as a progressive one that would attract millionaires to live or invest in Vermont, fight disease, and reverse the decline in the state’s population.<sup>69</sup> Appeals to a civilizational sense of superiority were also common, including an oft-repeated point that Americans should be ashamed that ancient Peruvians—described in one famous national good roads address as a “people not yet emerged from barbarism”—had constructed a better road system even without the benefits of modern technology.<sup>70</sup>

The most obvious allies for wheelmen to work with on “the road problem” were farmers and agricultural interests. During the 1870s, the Vermont Dairymen’s Association was vocal about the pervasive disrepair of the state’s road system, blaming local town management of roads for the problem.<sup>71</sup> But with the involvement of wheelmen—influential local elites backed by a well-funded national organization demanding urgent change—the cause gained new energy and force. Wheelmen set their sights on, and successfully “enlisted sympathy and support of all the prominent farmers organizations in the movement,” arguing that good roads would lessen the cost of repairs on farm equipment, lessen time, and increase property value.<sup>72</sup> Farmers’ organizations aside, individual farmers themselves were a somewhat different story, with wheelmen and good roads leaders expressing frustration that farmers largely dismissed the good roads movement as a concern of elite bicycle riders.<sup>73</sup> A popular groundswell of farmer support for an overhaul in road management would not come until after the turn of the century with the arrival of the automobile.

At the same time, wheelmen and their allies focused on the development of statewide legislation to overhaul Vermont’s road system. With the encouragement and support of the LAW, wheelmen engaged in the practice of writing sample laws and offering legislative language to officials. H. D. Ryder of Bellows Falls, president of the Mt. Kilburn Wheel Club and a lawyer himself, was active in this regard and seen as a statewide authority on bicycle and road law. Along with O. A. Marshall (a charter member of the Vermont Wheel Club), Ryder was also a founding member the Vermont League of Good Roads, a short-lived organization established in 1892 whose goal was to promote good roads improvement and legislation.<sup>74</sup>

The Highway Act of 1892 was the signature outcome of all of these organizing efforts. Its importance lies in the fact that it began to break

down the hold that individual towns had on control over road management, by mandating that every town elect a road commissioner, requiring an annual report to state officials, and levying new taxes on property in support of local road projects and for redistribution to towns through the practice of “state aid,” a radically new concept for funding road projects introduced in 1891 in New Jersey.<sup>75</sup> It also created a three-person commission to conduct the 1894 study of Vermont’s roads referred to above. The report ultimately recommended against the state assuming full control over funding, building, and maintaining the highway system, which is the direction neighboring Massachusetts had gone in its own good roads legislation. It asserted that, aside from the political unfeasibility of it in a state where towns still held considerable power, there was neither the traffic nor enough taxable property to support it.

The fact that Vermont still maintained limits on state control over roads fueled another decade and a half of good roads advocacy, including the formation of a new statewide advocacy organization, the Vermont Good Roads Association, in 1904. The real turning point would come after 1912, when the cause of good roads was now led by automobilists (many of them former bicyclists), and good roads were becoming a concern of national policy, supported by federal funding and uniform standards of construction and maintenance.<sup>76</sup> But the cultivation of a “willing frame of mind” toward road improvement through greater centralization and state involvement—a primary goal identified by Vermont’s wheelmen during the 1880s—had been largely accomplished with the Highway Act. As a result, over the course the late 1890s and early 1900s advocacy efforts were not so much concerned with “educating the people up to the idea of good roads, but to tell the people how they can accomplish good roads.”<sup>77</sup> The door had also been opened to revisions to the Highway Act creating even greater levels of state oversight over road standards and funding, including a State Highway Commission established in 1898.

The Highway Act also placed Vermont in the national spotlight as a progressive leader on road issues. Looking back, in 1920, secretary of the Vermont State Chamber of Commerce James P. Taylor declared with pride, “Here, as in so many cases, Vermont played the pioneer.”<sup>78</sup> This is a mild overstatement—New Jersey and Massachusetts had gone earlier and further in asserting state aid and involvement in road matters—but Vermont was one of only six states to pass good roads legislation so early. A clear beneficiary of this situation was Governor Levi Fuller of Brattleboro, who signed the Highway Act into law during his term as governor (1892-94). Though not a wheelman himself, Fuller

was a good roads champion. There can be little doubt that he understood the importance of good roads for wheelmen due to the prominence of the Vermont Wheel Club in his hometown, and the fact that his brother-in-law was an active member in it. Indeed, one can only imagine the intense private lobbying he received from his close peers on this matter. Fuller would go on to become somewhat of a national celebrity for his support of good roads in Vermont. For a few years he traveled the country as a guest of honor of the National League for Good Roads and gave speeches on the topic. In 1894 “the ever popular” Fuller was elected chairman of the National Good Roads Convention in Asbury Park, N.J., though it was mainly a ceremonial role.<sup>79</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

In 1895, the *Essex County Herald* of Island Pond, Vermont, quoting a San Francisco newspaper, marveled that “A toy has wrought a revolution in this country,” citing the transformative effects of bicyclists’ agitation about good roads.<sup>80</sup> But there was a widespread consciousness of the bicycle’s wider effects on society beyond this one particular issue. Vermonters living in remote mountain hamlets may have had little or no personal experience with a bicycle, but they were readers of newspapers, and in them they would have learned that the bicycle was at the forefront of exciting technological change and innovation in American industry; that it was creating new opportunities for exercise, recreation, and tourism; and that it was affecting women’s lives in important and controversial ways. Reflecting on the spirit of the age, Vermont Lt. Governor Z. M. Mansur expressed, “This is an age of progress, and the question that confronts us is how best we can improve upon our natural advantages.”<sup>81</sup> With tourism and landscape appreciation already surging in economic importance, Vermont’s wheelmen and women had effectively positioned the bicycle as a means to improve upon those “natural advantages.”

But there was also clearly discord and social conflict among Vermonters about what might constitute bicycle-related “progress.” Depending on one’s perspective, wheelmen were enlightened advocates of the public good, or they were exclusionary and elitist. “Scorchers” were a dire threat to public order, or simply excitable young men without the middle-class marker of “character and good standing” required to join a wheel club. Women on bicycles represented a decline of moral and womanly standards, or they were freedom riders on a machine unlike any other in what it could do for the women’s independence and self-reliance. And bicycles were an excellent vehicle to good health, even a

cure for illness, or they were driving toward grievous injuries, not just for innocent bystanders, but for riders themselves. The apparent silence of Vermont's suffrage leaders about the bicycle, even as their national leaders celebrated it, may indicate not just the sensitivity and challenges facing their cause, but perhaps also awareness of the controversial local meanings of the bicycle itself.

That many of these details are invisible in the state's historiography says more about what happened next, historically speaking, than the qualities of excitement and agitation associated with bicycles. What happened was the emergence of the automobile, and the bicycle began to fade from view. At the turn of the century, reports began to circulate of steam-powered "locomobiles" and vehicles with internal combustion engines in places like Springfield and Brattleboro. In 1902 Burlington's Fourth of July celebration advertised its usual procession of bicycles, horribles, and military figures, but added a new procession of automobiles, "The first large parade in the state."<sup>82</sup> These were not surprising developments since bicycle manufacturers had already begun to shift production to automobiles as the Bicycle Craze peaked during the second half of the 1890s. Automobiles grew out of, benefitted from, and eventually supplanted the technologies, mass production processes, laws, and good road advocacy efforts that started with the bicycle. They also became the exciting new fetish objects that bicycles once were. Status-seeking socioeconomic elites, including former wheelmen, were now eager to acquire automobiles and form "gentlemen's driving clubs," of which Vermont saw a few.<sup>83</sup> And in 1903, Burlington physician Horatio Nelson Jackson made history when, on a bet, he made the first automobile drive across the country. Yet automobiles were out of reach for Vermonters for several years to come. In 1906, for example, there were 373 registered automobiles in the state, a number that grew to 30,000 by 1920 and 90,000 in 1929.<sup>84</sup> In practical terms, it took several decades and the deliberate construction of policies, laws, and forced cultural change for the automobile to be endowed with its dominance in the transportation system; most Vermonters simply continued to get around by horse, trains, carriages, bicycles, and by foot.

By 1905, the Bicycle Craze had largely faded, due to economic problems in the bicycle industry related to the overproduction of bicycles, and the shuttering of wheelmen's clubs as riding a bicycle became less of a status marker and attention-getting event. Bicycles had become taken-for-granted things, a solitary background object observed in street scene photographs of the era. Significantly, bicycles neither were nor



ever became an important form of utilitarian transportation for Vermonters, a situation that has only recently begun to shift due to advocacy efforts and a current explosion of sales in electric bicycles and cargo bicycles. But the fact is that the state's roads—not to mention the climate—did not suddenly improve, the distances between towns and villages did not get any shorter, hills did not get flatter, and the American bicycle industry did not begin mass producing bicycles appropriate for the hauling needs of rural economies. But it was also due to a particular meaning that was fixed during that first Bicycle Craze, which is that bicycles are primarily objects of recreation, leisure, and physical exercise. These are, by their nature, time-out activities separated from the mundane business of simply getting around in everyday life. This meaning has been especially durable, and is surely one of the longest shadows cast by that fleeting era, affecting our own current bicycle craze in subtle and complex ways.

## NOTES

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See Lorenz J. Finison, *Boston's Cycling Craze, 1880-1900: A Story of Race, Sport, and Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014); Evan Friss, *The Cycling City: Bicycle & Urban America in the 1890s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Zach Furness, *One Less Car: Cycling and the Politics of Automobility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); James Longhurst, *Bike Battles: The History of Sharing the American Road* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015); Robert L. McCullough, *Old Wheelways: Traces of Bicycle History on the Land* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> "The Bicycle in Vermont," *Rutland Weekly Herald* (31 March 1886), 2.

<sup>3</sup> The digitized historic newspaper collections include *Chronicling America* (Library of Congress) and the Vermont historical newspaper collections made available through Newspapers.com by the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>4</sup> *Vermont Daily Transcript* (24 February 1869), 3; *Burlington Free Press* (9 March 1869), 3; *Rutland Weekly Herald* (1 April 1869), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce D. Epperson, *Peddling Bicycles to America: The Rise of an Industry* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Auld, *Picturesque Burlington: A Handbook of Burlington, Vermont, and Lake Champlain* (Burlington, VT: Free Press Association, 1893).

<sup>7</sup> In his book *Old Wheelways*, Robert McCullough suggestively describes wheelmen as "land-seers" who cultivated sensibilities of landscape discernment and appreciation.

<sup>8</sup> "Genesis," *With Interest* 5, no. 1 (April 1927); Richard H. Wellman, "Cycling and the 'Vermont Wheel Club'" (Unpublished essay, 1992), Vermont Historical Society, Barre, VT.

<sup>9</sup> Vermont Wheel Club, "Vermont Wheel Club, Brattleboro, VT Articles of Association, Constitution, and By-Laws, Club House Rules, List of Officers, and Members. Also a Brief History of the Club. June 1915." Brattleboro Historical Society, Brattleboro, VT; "Genesis."

<sup>10</sup> "Vermont Wheel Club's Home," untitled newspaper clipping of 2 August 1895, from Scott Scrapbook #10, Brattleboro Historical Society.

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<sup>11</sup> The Burlington Bicycle Club also owned a skating rink, which also served as its clubhouse. After the club sold it around 1887, the building became the primary grocery storage facility in the city.

<sup>12</sup> “The Rutland Skating Rink,” *Rutland Daily Herald and Globe* (28 June 1884), Rutland Historical Society, Rutland, VT.

<sup>13</sup> “The Rink Trouble,” *Rutland Daily Herald* (5 September 1885), 4.

<sup>14</sup> *The Cycle* (Boston, MA) vol. 2, no. 3 (15 October 1886), 32; “The Newspaper World,” *News and Advertiser* (4 Aug. 1886), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Paine’s “general hospital” referenced in *St. Johnsbury Caledonian* (11 December 1896), 8; Fairbanks’ bicycle beam was introduced in 1895, *St. Johnsbury Caledonian* (24 May 1895), 1.

<sup>16</sup> *St. Johnsbury Republican* (22 December 1897), 3; “Bicycle Business Lively,” *Spirit of the Age* (28 March 1896), 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Argus and Patriot* (20 May 1896), 3.

<sup>18</sup> “Bicycle Parade at Woodstock,” *The Landmark* (30 August 1895), 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (1 July 1896), 2. It is impossible to know how many bicycles or bicyclists there may have been in Vermont, although there are tantalizing bits of very sporadic, town-based evidence. For example, the *Burlington Free Press* noted that there were “upwards of 70 wheelmen” in that city (17 August 1893), 5; and in 1897, at the peak of the bicycle craze, the *Rutland Daily Herald* claimed 1,000 bicycles in Rutland (21 April 1897), 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Burlington Weekly Free Press* (11 May 1899), 6. The rest of the story describes how a mechanic named Abner Lozo was scorching on Loomis St. when he ran over a boy of eight or nine years named Barney Buxton. Buxton was knocked to the ground unconscious, with the article concluding, again ominously, “Whether he will sustain any permanent injury cannot be determined at present but it is hoped that nothing serious will result.”

<sup>21</sup> “1894 Richford Gazette,” *Richford History*, accessed July 11, 2020: <https://sites.google.com/site/richfordhistory/by-year/1894-gazette>.

<sup>22</sup> The image of the scorcher as a hell-bound demon was common. An item in the *Burlington Free Press* (9 May 1896), 7 called “Where He Belonged” captures it well:

“What were you on earth?” queried St. Peter as the wheelman knocked at the gate.

“I was a bicycle rider.”

“Did you ride fast?” asked the saint.

“Fast?” repeated the cyclist. “I should say I did. No one could pass me on the road.”

“You were always riding like mad and colliding with other cyclists and running down pedestrians, weren’t you?”

“Yes, I was a scorcher,” the cyclist admitted.

“A scorcher, eh?” St. Peter repeated. “Well, there’s no scorching here. You belong on the floor below.”

<sup>23</sup> *The Vermont Statutes, 1894. Including the Public Acts of 1894, with the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitutions of the United States, and the State of Vermont* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1895). Accessed June 26, 2020: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.35112105421269&view=1up&seq=13>.

<sup>24</sup> “To Regulate Bicycle Riding,” *Bellows Falls Times* (8 May 1897), 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Journal*, (27 October 1896), 1. The letter from the Mt. Kilburn Wheel Club is reported in the *Vermont Phoenix* (18 September 1896), 1. In 1900 a similar bill passed the Vermont House but died in committee in the Senate, reportedly because two members of that committee had recently been hit by bicyclists, as reported in the *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (14 November, 1900), 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Orleans County Monitor* (7 November 1898), 8.

<sup>27</sup> “Vermont News,” *Bellows Falls Times* (18 July 1896), 1.

<sup>28</sup> “Cycling Notes,” *Essex County Herald* (9 July 1897), 4.

<sup>29</sup> “These Latter Days,” *Londonderry Sifter* (3 September 1897), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Christine Neejer, *The Bicycle Girls: Wheelwomen and Everyday Activism in the Late-Nineteenth Century* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Sue Macy, *Wheels of Change: How Women Rode the Bicycle to Freedom (With a Few Flat Tires Along the Way)* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Children’s Books, 2011), 77-78.

<sup>32</sup> *St. Johnsbury Caledonian* (1 September 1887), 2; see also *Middlebury Register* (29 July 1898), 7.

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<sup>33</sup> Loise E. Alfred, "Physical Training for Women," in *The Right of Suffrage and the Complete Enfranchisement of Women* (Jericho, VT: The Roscoe Printing House, 1892), 5-7.

<sup>34</sup> Deborah P. Clifford, "The Drive for Women's Municipal Suffrage in Vermont, 1883-1917," *Vermont History* 47 (Summer 1979): 173-90; Marilyn S. Blackwell, "Gender and Vermont History: Moving Women from the Sidebars into the Text," *Vermont History* 71 (Winter/Spring 2003): 46-61; Karen L. H. Allen, *Political Equality Versus Proper Spheres: Examining the Arguments of the 1870 Woman Suffrage Campaign in Vermont* (M.A. Thesis, University of Vermont, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> "Just for Fun," *Orleans County Monitor* (8 April 1895), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall True, "Middle-Class Women and Civic Improvement in Burlington, 1865-1890." *Vermont History* 56 (Spring 1988): 112-27.

<sup>37</sup> Clifford, "The Drive for Women's Suffrage."

<sup>38</sup> "City Charges on Wheels," *Montpelier Evening Argus* (2 July 1896), 3.

<sup>39</sup> *St. Johnsbury Republican* (7 August 1895), 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Chester Advertiser* (15 May 1897), 8.

<sup>41</sup> "The New Woman Rebels," *Burlington Free Press* (16 May 1896), 4; "The Bicycling Woman," *Burlington Free Press* (18 October 1894), 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Vermont Graphic* vol. 1, No. 2 (20 April 1895), 1.

<sup>43</sup> "Sex and Religion in Bicycling," *St. Albans Daily Messenger* (5 July 1895), 2. See also "Inspired by the Devil," *Burlington Free Press* (21 August 1895), 6.

<sup>44</sup> "Bloomers Finally Defined," *Burlington Free Press* (27 May 1895), 7.

<sup>45</sup> Anti-bloomers sermon reported in the *St. Johnsbury Republican* (14 August 1895), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Graeme M. Hammond, "Appendix: The Influence of the Bicycle in Health and Disease," in *Cycling for Health and Pleasure: An Indispensable Guide to the Successful Use of the Wheel*, ed. Luther Porter (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1895), 177-95.

<sup>47</sup> "Cycling as a Cure," *Burlington Free Press* (3 May 1895), 7.

<sup>48</sup> "The Disastrous Effect of Certain Pastimes on the Physiology," *Burlington Free Press* (29 October 1897), 7; "The Bicycle Foot," *Burlington Free Press* (14 August 1899), 3.

<sup>49</sup> "Bicycle Riding Denounced," *Burlington Free Press* (24 August 1895), 1.

<sup>50</sup> "Selecting a Cycle Teacher," *Burlington Free Press* (12 July 1895), 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Orleans County Monitor* (25 May 1896), 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Rutland Herald* (12 September 1887), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Allan S. Everest, "Early Roads and Taverns of the Champlain Valley," *Vermont History* 37 (October 1969), 247-55; Gwylim R. Roberts, "The Struggle for Decent Transportation in Western Rutland County, 1820-1850," *Vermont History* 69 (Symposium Supplement, December 2001): 122-32.

<sup>54</sup> Owen D. Gutfreund, *20th-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Berger, "Vermont Transportation Theme: Statewide Vermont," report prepared for Vermont Agency of Transportation (2018), accessed on July 1, 2020: <https://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/HP/Final%20Draft%20-%20Transportation%20Theme.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Gillies, "The History and Law of Vermont Town Roads," Vermont Agency of Transportation, accessed on June 20, 2020 at: [http://vtransmaps.vermont.gov/Maps/Publications/Historical/TownRoadEssay\\_11\\_3\\_2014.pdf](http://vtransmaps.vermont.gov/Maps/Publications/Historical/TownRoadEssay_11_3_2014.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> In 1827, the state flirted for a brief period with centralization by establishing county road commissioners. Samuel B. Hand, Jeffrey D. Marshall, and D. Gregory Sanford, "'Little Republics': The Structure of State Politics in Vermont, 1854-1920," *Vermont History* 53 (Summer 1985): 141-66. See also Gillies, *ibid*.

<sup>58</sup> Clemens Herschel, *The Science of Road Making* (New York: Engineering News Publishing Company, 1890).

<sup>59</sup> Vermont Highway Commission, "Report of the Vermont Highway Commission" (1894), Jack and Shirley Silver Special Collections, University of Vermont.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> "Burlington's Attractions for Wheelmen," *Burlington Free Press* (21 August 1885), 3.

<sup>62</sup> "Bicyclers, Attention," *Lyndonville Journal* (3 March 1899), 1; "The Legislature," *Spirit of the Age* (1 December 1900), 2. The side-path movement, which had much greater success in other states, is described in detail by McCullough, *Old Wheelways*.

<sup>63</sup> Karl Kron, *Ten Thousand Miles on a Bicycle* (Karl Kron, The University Building, Washington Square, New York, 1887).

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 579.

<sup>65</sup> B. S. Rogers and M. C. Grandy, *League of American Wheelmen Road Book of Vermont: Principal Through Routes* (Burlington, VT: League of American Wheelmen, 1895). Vermont Historical Society.

<sup>66</sup> The enterprising owner of the St. Johnsbury House, H. S. Chase, for example, hosted a “Wheelmen’s Day” in June 1895 with a sumptuous banquet (“Wheelmen’s Day” souvenir card and menu, Broadsides collection of the Vermont Historical Society).

<sup>67</sup> *The L.A.W. Bulletin of Good Roads* (28 October 1898), 331.

<sup>68</sup> *The Bicycling World* (21 May 1886), accessed on June 15, 2020: [http://www30.us.archive.org/stream/bicyclingworld131876bost/bicyclingworld131876bost\\_djvu.txt](http://www30.us.archive.org/stream/bicyclingworld131876bost/bicyclingworld131876bost_djvu.txt).

<sup>69</sup> *Vermont Watchman and Journal* (9 November 1892), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Roy Stone, “Opening Address,” *National League of Good Roads* 1 (November 1892): 6-15. Similar views were also expressed at the First Annual Meeting of the Vermont Association of Good Roads in 1904.

<sup>71</sup> Hand, et al., “Little Republics,” 154.

<sup>72</sup> “Good Roads Logic,” *Essex Country Herald* (23 June 1899), 1; “A Valuable Paper on Road Improvement,” *Wheel and Cycling Trade Review* 8 (11 December 1891), 491.

<sup>73</sup> Vermont Good Roads Association, “Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Vermont Good Roads Association. May 5, 1904, Montpelier, Vermont,” 43.

<sup>74</sup> Vermont League for Good Roads, “Vermont League for Good Roads: Its Objects, Membership and Officers, Including the Highway Law of 1892” (Montpelier: Watchman Publishing Company, 1892).

<sup>75</sup> Richard F. Weingroff, “Creation of a Landmark: The Federal Aid Road Act of 1916” (Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration, 2019), accessed on July 12, 2020: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/landmark.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> Gillies, “The History and Law of Vermont Town Roads,” 28.

<sup>77</sup> Vermont Good Roads Association, *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> James P. Taylor, untitled typewritten notes, 1920. James P. Taylor Collection. Doc. T5, 40, “Roads, 1898-1919,” Vermont Historical Society.

<sup>79</sup> Federal Highway Administration, “Highway History: General Roy Stone and the New York Times,” accessed on July 1, 2020: [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/stone\\_ny01.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/stone_ny01.cfm). See also “A Road Governor: Levi Knight Fuller of Vermont,” *Good Roads: An Illustrated Magazine Devoted to the Improvement of Public Roads and Streets* vol. 5 (1894): 153-55.

<sup>80</sup> *Essex County Herald* (5 April 1895), 1

<sup>81</sup> *Vermont* 1 (September 1895): 46.

<sup>82</sup> “The Greatest Event of the Year,” *Burlington Free Press* (27 June 1902), 3.

<sup>83</sup> William J. Wilgus, *The Role of Transportation in the Development of Vermont* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1945); “Among our Souvenirs,” *With Interest* 6, No. 3 (March 1929), caption on frontispiece.

<sup>84</sup> Wilgus, *ibid.*