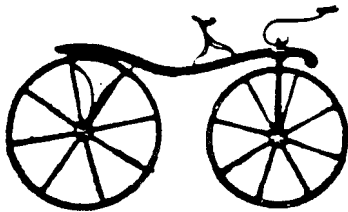




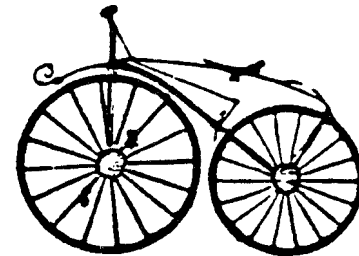
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The Story of Bicycling In America

For centuries men dreamt of a machine that would beat walking, a plank that the rider might straddle with wheels at the fore and aft ends. In about 1820, Baron von Drais of Germany built one with a steerable front wheel. His “walkalong” or Draisine swept over Europe and into America, but the fad was short lived.



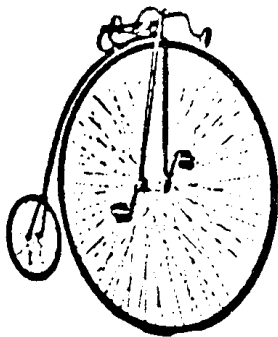
Walkalong or Draisine c 1820



Velocipede or “boneshaker” c 1869

In 1866 Pierre Lallement of France added cranks and pedals to the front wheel and again the invention was received with excitement in America. Riding academies sprang up in major cities, but the “velocipede” was a failure on country roads. Its moderate sized front wheel made it little faster than walking and its wood wheels and iron tires earned it the name “boneshaker”.

Only the English persevered. Gradually the front wheel became larger to increase speed, the rear wheel smaller for convenience: wood gave way to steel. Wheels had wire spokes under tension, and tires were of solid India rubber. The “high wheel” was born! But that name, and the English name “penny-farthing” were derisive names invented by the following generation. In their heyday these were called “wheels,” or “bicycles”.



The Ordinary

Later they were known as “Ordinaries”—that is, Ordinary bicycles! This latter name was used after safety bicycles became popular.

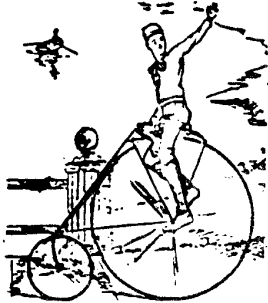
English Ordinaries were shown at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Col. Albert Pope manufactured the first American built model, the Columbia, in 1878 and for the next twenty-five years he was czar of the burgeoning American cycle industry.

At last a man could outrun a horse. Excitement ran high and Wheelmen clubs formed in the cities. It was sport more than transportation and most Wheelmen rode with clubs because there were no road signs and rough roads brought bad spills.

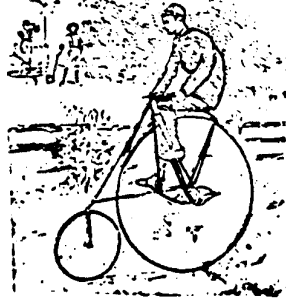
Picture the scene if you can. A bugle sounds from the outskirts of your village and people run to see. They round the bend onto Main Street twenty or more riding two abreast with captain and bugler in front, sitting erect in their lofty saddles, the sunshine sparkling from the nicked wheels and from the rows of shiny buttons on their snugly tailored club uniforms. In 1880, the clubs formed the League of American Wheelmen to fight for bicycle rights and for good roads, and at their annual conventions thousands of Wheelmen paraded in support of their cause.

Despite the gala parades, this was a tough and dangerous sport. One small bump and the rider went over the

handlebar, head down. Someone just had to invent a safer bicycle. Two famous American answers were the Star and the Eagle, both of which put the small wheel forward. They might tip over backward, but the rider landed on his feet. The Eagle had the pedal cranks directly on the big wheel like an Ordinary, but the Star used a lever and ratchet so it could gear up a smaller wheel.



The Eagle, Stamford, CT

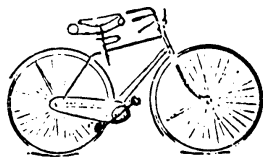


The Star, Smithville, NJ.

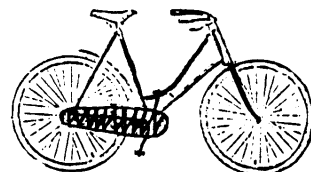
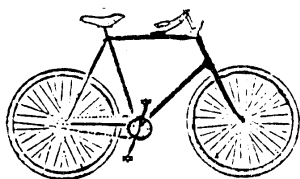
But the final answer was neither the Eagle nor the Star. It was the chain drive “safety”, the bicycle we know today.

The trick that had eluded man’s imagination was to put a chain from a big chain wheel on the cranks to a smaller sprocket on the rear wheel so the wheel would turn two or three times faster than the pedals. John Starley of England perfected this. Then in 1893 the pneumatic tire swept in. The high wheel was dead. Long live the safety! The stage was set for the Gay Nineties.

SAFETY BICYCLES

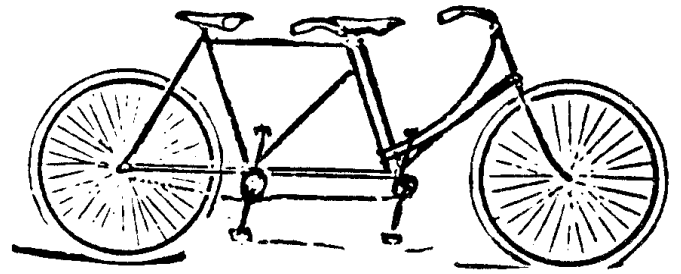


early nineties



late nineties

Never forget that it was the safety bicycle that made the Nineties gay. Every loose penny went into bicycles (to the dismay of all other businesses) and millions took to the open road. Women could now ride bicycles, and having tasted a new freedom they demanded the right to wear shorter skirts and even bloomers when a wheel. The seeds of women’s suffrage and of women’s lib had been sown by bicycling. Historians looked kindly on this happy decade and called it the “Gay Nineties.”



Lady front tandem

American bicycles quickly became the best in the world and by the late nineties their design, workmanship, and lightness were up to the finest cycles of today. Bike racing became a great national sport and champions were idolized—and highly paid.

Then the boom collapsed.

The infant automobile used the pneumatic tires, chain and shaft drives, wire wheels, and differentials which were invented for cycles. Barney Oldfield and Albert Champion turned from bike racing to auto racing. Henry Ford and the Wright brothers turned bicycle skills to new uses. Factories that had built Columbia, Dodge, Orient, Stoddard-Dayton, Rambler, Pierce, and other bicycles put the same names on auto radiators. But, the bicycle spark smoldered on.

The auto brought unforeseen side effects of noise, smell, smog, jams, parking, paving, and general blight on the landscape. People yearn for a simpler, healthier, happier way to get around, and they are looking to the modern bicycle. It has all the fine features of the late nineties plus fine brakes and ten speed gears and at comparable prices despite the tenfold inflation since then. It is a bargain, but places the kids rode twenty years ago are no longer safe; the autos have forced the bikes off the roads. There are as many bicycles as autos in America and among their riders are all our future citizens. Yet towns are abominably laid out for co-existence of autos and bikes. We spend billions extending the auto blight and almost nothing for bicycles.

The Wheelmen organization was founded in 1967 to revive the faded memory of bicycling as a great American tradition. We draw inspiration and rusty relics from the past, but we look to the future, to progress toward a higher standard of happiness through bicycling for transportation and fun. The high wheels we show today were parading for bike roads ninety years ago. The safeties contributed to a happy decade. Let these old bicycles be an inspiration to the future.