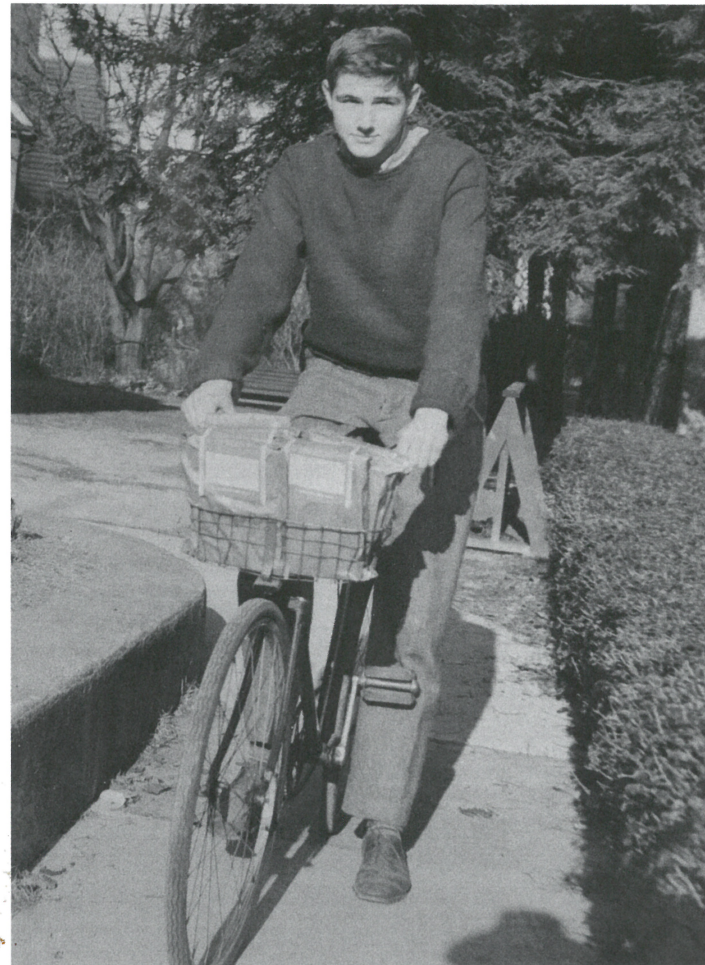


Montclair's Love Affair with The Bicycle

CONTRIBUTED BY ELAINE JOHNSON FIVELAND FOR MONTCLAIR HISTORY CENTER

As the ice and snow begins to clear from our streets and the weather begins to warm, the number of bicycles on the roads begins to rise. This phenomena isn't new. Montclair's love affair with the bicycle dates back more than a century. This article, written by Montclair resident Elaine Fiveland, looks at that love affair's origin in Montclair.

IN NOVEMBER 1866, the first bicycle to receive a patent was called a "pedal velocipede." Although the development of the bicycle had begun as early as 1817 as a wooden human-powered velocipede without pedals, pedals were added around 1863. Its heavy wood-spoked wheels were no match for America's rough roadways. By the late 1870s, cycle builders had started making metal wheels with lightweight wire spokes. This technique, still seen in modern bicycle wheels, allowed makers to enlarge the front driving wheel so that the bike



In the mid-20th century, Montclair Public Library offered a bicycle-powered book delivery service.



In 1895, bicyclists competed with horse drawn carriages on Montclair's roads.

would go farther with each crank of the pedals. The later use of solid rubber tires improved the ride of the cyclist on what was familiarly known as the "boneshaker."

The trend came to Montclair as early as 1875, when bicycle riders formed a group called the Montclair Wheelmen, hoping to make the town officials and residents aware of the joy and necessity of using the bicycle around town. Bicyclists, known as "wheelmen," were challenged by rutted roads of gravel and dirt and faced antagonism from horsemen, wagon drivers, and pedestrians. Though the town streets may have been paved with cobblestones or wooden planks, the cyclists were impeded by trolley tracks, trash, and horse manure. Police stopped riders, made them leave the streets, forbade them from riding on sidewalks, and fined them for small infractions. Topics of discussion at the police department were whether or not ladies could wear bloomers while riding a bike, if cycling was considered a "sport," or if could riders be fined for wearing sportswear in public.

In July 1880 the Montclair Wheelmen thought it best to begin an association with the riding clubs of New Jersey and the League of American Wheelmen. They wanted to have a voice in the promotion of good roads and bicycle safety. The Montclair group became a recognized organization in town.

By the end of the 1890s, the bicycle's first boom had collapsed. The advent of the automobile put bicycle use in a deep decline. Workmen and deliverymen still used the bicycle out of necessity and recreational bicycling was popular, but the early mass enthusiasm for touring by bicycle, racing and the lobbying for the recognition of the bicycle's right to share the road had mostly come to an end. Still, the love of the bicycle continued and the League of American Wheelmen (L.W.A.) exists today as the League of American Bicyclists, still advocating for cyclists and promoting bike lanes across the country.

The Montclair Wheelmen became the largest social organization in town, meeting wherever there was space large enough to hold their "smokers" for fundraising, to sponsor a dance or a dinner, to enjoy entertainment, and to gather to share their tales of cycling feats. Popular sponsored activities included Lantern Parades where up to 400 riders would travel the evening route lit by the lanterns on their bikes which were decorated in the colors of the society, "century rides" when bikers rode at least 100 miles in a day as far as to Philadelphia or the Jersey Shore, staying overnight and returning the next day. One favorite route

was the round trip to Asbury Park, a distance of 186 miles in one day. And local bicycle outings, called "tours," were popular, traveling a pre-set route while enjoying the attention of the residents who would come out to watch and applaud their cycling neighbors passing by.

Shops that sold and maintained bicycles sprang up in town. At 397 Bloomfield Avenue from 1885 to 1886 a roller skating rink had opened featuring skating sessions and traveling skate artists to entertain. By 1888 the rink had turned into the Montclair Opera House, an all-purpose venue, which had its name changed to the Montclair Bicycle Agency by local entrepreneur Philip Young who was a painter turned Opera House manager, auctioneer, bicycle salesman and riding instructor. Young sold bikes, repaired them, ran a bicycle school offering lessons to aspiring riders with "lessons in private" for the ladies, held estate auctions, hired entertainers, and sold fireworks from his bicycle store for the Fourth of July celebrations. He opened a branch



On June 13, 1891, townsfolk bicycled from Newark to Philadelphia in the Great Century Run.

store on Bellevue Avenue in the late 1890s.

While Young may have been the first, other bicycle shops quickly followed. In the 1894 City Directory, two bicycle shops were listed: Lindsley and Rutan at 383 Bloomfield Ave. and Philip Young at 299 Bloomfield Ave. By 1897, that number had grown to five.

Montclair's loving relationship with the bicycle was just as strong nearly a century later when we hosted two bike tours in the 1980s. On September 25, 1983, approximately 900 cyclists registered for a 19-mile loop tour of the town, starting and ending at Edgemont Park and passing 11 historic sites. Organized by Spokes, Inc., headed by Karen Young and Ginna Lyons Ohlmuller, and supported by many businesses in town, the 1983 tour drew riders from all over, 400 more than were anticipated. A featured rider was Montclair's Nicholas "Mickey" Franciose (1918-2004), champion track racer and Olympic hopeful in 1936 and 1940. Recovered from WWII wounds to his leg that almost ended his competitive cycling hopes, Franciose went on to establish The Olympic Shop in Upper Montclair. The eldest rider was 95-year old J. Frederick "Champ" Marble (1889-1993). The following year 1,500 riders registered for the September 30 tour of 25 miles and again Fred Marble, then 96, biked the route again.

Today Bike & Walk Montclair, founded in 2002, advocates for cyclists, educates people about bicycle safety, and organizes tours much as the original Montclair Wheelmen were doing back in 1880. We have come (pun intended) full cycle! ■

Not Necessarily a Distinct Style But Absolutely Georgious

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY, MONTCLAIR TOWN HISTORIAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW WANDER

IN ANDY WANDER'S BOOK *Stately Homes of Montclair* this house on Stonebridge Rd. is described as "Georgian" but with a few unusual characteristics such as an off-center entrance, "highbrow windows" and "unusual dormers". The Junior League Preservation Survey of Montclair calls it a "French Chateau".

It was built in 1925. The Marchini & Martich (Construction) Co. applied for the permit; anticipating that the house would cost about \$18,000. Rudolph Martich was a life-long building contractor who lived in Montclair and built several homes here. It is not so clear who Marchini was. Two possible candidates were: Attilio and Hugo Marchini who lived in Montclair at the time. However, neither of them stayed in the construction business, neither of them stayed in Montclair. Rudolph Martich was still the owner according to the 1926 Tax Map. Directories shown him as living on Howe Ave. in 1926.

According to a handwritten note on the 1928 Tax Map "Swenson" was the "Tenant" on the lot (Map 54, Block A, Lot 66) but contemporary directories show Swen Swenson as living elsewhere. In 1930 Edmund Osborne Jr. and his wife, Anne, rented the house (possibly sub-leasing from Swen). Edmund Jr. was the son of businessman and state senator, Edmund Osborne and his wife Jessie, who owned 80 acres in this vicinity, often referred to as "Osborne's Woods". Edmund Sr. and Jessie lived in a grand house on Stonebridge which was covered in a previous issue of *Montclair Neighbors* in an article entitled *Wynnewood* as they called their mansion. Edmund Jr. studied at Cornell. He served in the Naval Aviation Corps during WWI. He became an executive in one of his father's printing companies, American Colortype, which had its main plant in Clifton. Edmund Jr. was somewhat of an inventor who pioneered the use of photo electric devices in color printing, developed several new processes for offset lithography and created an efficient way to print on metal.

Between 1933 and 1936 Swen Swenson his wife, Jean, and their children actually moved into the house. Swen later had a house built on Upper Mountain Ave. which we covered in an article entitled *Hidden Gem on Upper Mountain*. Swen was listed as a "cattleman" in some directories and as a "banker" in others. He was the son of Eric Swenson who was the CEO of City National Bank (later Citi Bank) and the grandson of Texas rancher, Swante M. Swenson. Swen became a director of City National and co-chair (with his brother) of one of the largest ranches in Texas; actually a conglomeration of five ranches,