Portland Bike History

Weather Prophet Pague,
Governor Geer,
& Portland’s First Bicycle Paths

Eric Lundgren – fortunaerota@gmail.com
Outline

Intro & Bicycle Leadership
Need for Good Roads
What Did the Roads Look Like?
Bike Culture
Early Legislation – 1899 & 1901
Transition to Auto Era
Sam Adams

Photo courtesy Jonathan Maus/BikePortland.org
Governor Geer learns to Ride

JUNE 29, 1898.

GEER HAS A WHEEL

GOVERNOR-ELECT LEARNED TO RIDE IN TWO LESSONS.

He Will Bike From His Home to the State Capital During Half the Year.

T. T. Geer, of Macleay, governor-elect of the state of Oregon, is in the city. After cultivating 12 acres of summer fallow on his farm, Monday, and pitching two or three tons of new mown hay, he made up his mind to shake the dust of the rural districts from his feet and come to the metropolis on a short visit. When seen at the Perkins last evening...
Theodore T. Geer

- Born 1851 in Waldo Hills
- Educated in Salem and at Willamette University
- Bought Farm 1877
- Republican - Elected to House 1880
- Speaker 1891
- Governor 1898
- Signed “Oregon System” of Initiative & Referendum 1902
Inaugural Address 1898

Few questions demand more serious consideration at your hands than the enactment of some system that will give our people better roads.... We will always have bad roads until we overcome them by systematic legislation. This we have never had, nor has any serious attempt ever been made in that direction.... Our present road laws... amount to a mere travesty on the object for which they were intended. They are the result of haphazard, patchwork legislation from session to session, usually amendatory of previous acts that were themselves mere apologies for existing conditions.
Part 1 - Need for “Good Roads”

- Existing System
  - “Dismal Failure”
  - “Travesty”
  - “Haphazard”

- Improved System
  - Unified taxing & collection
  - Coordinated planning & building
The present method of securing street improvement in Portland is by petition of a majority of property owners along a street, the expense of the improvement being assessed at an equal rate per foot frontage. The repair of streets is made also by the property owners, on an order issued by the city council.

In practice it is found that a street must become almost impassible before such an order can be secured.
East Morrison Closed a Year

I am here with the others of Central East Portland to aid in removing an intolerable condition. It is amazing that East Morrison Street should have remained closed up for the past year, dangerous to the public….I understand that the recent proceeding to get it repaired because the property owners refused to repair the roadway…
Part 2 – What did the roads look like?

Who used the roads?

Typical Road Conditions
Road Users

- First Portland Auto 1899
- Two counts
  - 1905 – 40 in Portland, 218 in Oregon
  - 1906 – 40 PAC members, 242 total autos in Portland
- 1900 about 10,000 bicycles and bicyclists out of a total Multco population of 103,000
- 10% Bicycles vs. .2% Autos
- Countless teams, horses, carts, buggies
Road Conditions

State Street in Downtown Salem, 1909

Photo Courtesy of Salem (Oregon) Public Library Historic Photograph Collections
Early Road Sharing - 1885

That it shall be the duty of any person or persons running or propelling a bicycle...over the public highways or streets in this State, to bring the said bicycle...to a stop within one hundred yards of any person or persons going in the opposite direction with a team or teams, and remain stationary until said team or teams have passed by.
League of American Wheelmen

- Formed 1880, Rhode Island
- First Oregonians joined nationally 1886
- Local “Oregon Division” formed 1896
Part 3 - Bike Culture
Technology & Bicycle Styles

Photos Courtesy of Salem (Oregon) Public Library Historic Photograph Collections
Going “Buggy-Free”

FEBRUARY 23, 1899.

THE SAME THE WORLD OVER
IN COUNTRY AND CITY

We’ve sold our Horse and Buggy
Since these 99 Ramblers Came out.
I’m going down to the City now
and Buy a Bike for Sarah.

RAMBLERS
IDEALS, with G. & J. Chipher Tires
$20, $25, $30
FRED T. MERRILL CYCLE CO.

SPOKANE, WA.
105 to 111 Sixth Street, Portland, Oregon

We’ve sold our Horse and Buggy
Since these 99 Ramblers Came out.
I’m going down to the City now
and Buy a Bike for Sarah.
Women on Bikes

The Portland “summer girl” is bred to her wheel, as a trooper is bred to his horse. From dawn till dark she lives in the saddle. Whatever be her errand, she mounts her wheel and rides easily to her destination…performs whatever duty happens to be hers, and bowls home again, serene tranquil, content.

Since bicycles came to Portland, not to play with, but as useful and valued servants, they have become part of the daily life of many women.
Conflict: Scorchers & Sidewalks

- Early Regulations
  - 1893 Ordinance required bells & lights
  - 1897 Ordinance permitted bicycles on sidewalk only during rainy season, Nov – April
    - Bicyclists required to dismount within 30 feet of ped

- Club “Rules of the Road”
  - Don’t Scorch
  - Keep Right
  - Ring Your Bell and Pass on the Left
“Barbarians on a Bicycle”

There are a few notorious scorchers who shamefully abuse the public without any interference or reprimand from the police…

Nobody need look to the police to interfere with these hoodlums, but a little effort on the part of the members of the Wheelmen’s Association, who expect their paths to be respected, would soon put a stop to these scorchers…These hoodlums, these barbarians on a bicycle…are all backed like a camel; they all have the same goose look, the same low brow… the same idiotic open mouth, looking like a country churchyard, full of weather-stained tombstones upheaved by the frost…these froway, unkempt, reckless hoodlums on a bicycle…will run down some old man, or woman, or child…and then in the outcry that will be made over a serious accident public indignation will take the form of an unreasoning but natural indifference to the legal rights of the wheelmen.
Scorchers Terror

TERROR FOR SCORCHERS

East Side Policeman’s Simple but Effective Invention

The scorchers of Portland must beware. An East Side policeman has a device…called “the scorchers terror”…It consists of a flat piece of board with one end well perforated with sharp pointed shingle nails…the terror is applied to either front or rear wheel. Only one application is needed…The scorcher stops instantly. The device is a rather savage looking affair, but assurances are given that it is perfectly harmless, except when in action; then look out!
Bike Tracks & Fields

- MAC at PGE Park Site
- PAAC at NE 12 & Davis
- Mechanics Pavillion at SE 2\textsuperscript{nd} & Clay
- Cycle Park in Sullivan’s Gulch
- The White House at end of Macadam
Fred Merrill – Bike Dealer, City Council Member

- Another bikey politician
- On City Council 1899 – 1905
- “Wide-Open” city, vice regulated & managed instead of “prohibited”
Governor Geer Rides

- To & from Capitol – 8 miles
- Get mail from Macleay – 2 miles
- May 1, 1900 rides half-century to Champoeg to locate site of 1843 meeting for Oregon Historical Society & George Himes
Weather Prophet Pague

- Bemer/Beamer S. Pague
- Born 1862 Pennsylvania
- Joined US Weather Bureau in 1888
- Established Oregon Weather Service
- *Weather Forecasting and Weather Types on the North Pacific Slope*, 1897
- President of United Wheelmen’s Association
Weather Prophet Pague made his debut as attorney in the municipal court yesterday afternoon, as assistant prosecutor in the case of the City of Portland vs. H. Bush, accused of driving his horse and buggy across the Vancouver bicycle path. Mr. Bush was not present, but his attorney was on hand to watch the corners and see that the prosecution did not have things all its own way.
Part 4 – Legal Framework
Vision & 1899 Tax
Bicyclists Lead Efforts to Improve Roads

- League of American Wheelmen start “Good Roads” movement
- 1892 propose Federal Highway Commission – but it goes nowhere
Local Bicyclists also Active

- LAW Oregon Division publishes:
  - 1895/6 Portland Map
  - 1897 Oregon Roads Book
- Oregon Road Club
- United Wheelmen Association
First Cycle Path – Vancouver Road

- 1897 City Council Defeats Licensing
- United Wheelmen – DIY
  - Self-funded through collection
  - Start path at end of Williams Avenue Plank Road – where it intersects with Portland Boulevard
  - Joins Vancouver Road runs north to Vancouver
- 800 pay for it, but 6000 use it
Vision: Mt. Hood Path
Mt. Hood Path
1899 Bicycle Tax

- 1896 White House path went nowhere
- Funding Insufficient & Unfair
- State has wider reach & fairness
- United Wheelmen & Pague, and Senator Josephi get tax passed
- Even merchants get behind tax
Letter to Editor

First, it is necessary outside of town to have a place where the wheelman can be safe from the road hog; second, outside of the town the county roads are generally unfit for a bicycle; third, it is fair that all should pay for what all enjoy; and finally I take no stock in the wheelman who says that neither he nor his family has any use for a bicycle path. One Sunday spent in watching that little three-mile path to Vancouver is sufficient to meet that objection.
The Network of Paths

- 10,000 tags sold – 10%
- Vancouver Ave
- Portland & Willamette Boulevards
- Baseline (Stark)
- Section Line (Division)
- 11th/12th & Milwaukie
- 1917 AAA map shows how bicycle ways became auto arterials
1898 - 1917
The Section Line road has been treated to paths four feet wide on each side, as far as Gresham. Beginning at Seven Corners…these paths are to be used under the rule “keep to the right,” and wheelmen going out to Gresham must take the path on the south side of the road. Coming back into town take the north side. The rule will be enforced wherever two paths exist on the same county road, as the safety of pedestrians as well as the wheeling public will be promoted thereby.
1901 License
1901 Tax Struck Down & New License Act

- Oregon Supreme Court Strikes down Tax
  - Bikes taxed on flat fee; constitution requires proportional assessment
- Replaced quickly with License Act
- Marion County Sheriff refunds monies – not clear if any paths built
Part 5 - Transition to Auto Era
Early Adopters Move On

- Bicycle Trust 1899 – 1902
- Manufacturers promote new models each year – planned obsolescence and incipient consumerism
- Sales decline as commuters no longer replace bikes each year
- Club membership declines as auto is new fad
Autos & Roads

- Autos drive Federal road effort
  - 1905 Bureau of Public Roads
  - 1916 Federal Highway Act
- Local effort
  - 1913 Bicycle Tax repealed & State Highway Commission
  - 1916 Columbia River Highway Opens
  - 1919 Gasoline Tax
Parallels & Tentative Conclusions

- **Parallels**
  - Politicians who bike
  - Bicyclists who self-organize
  - Active Bike Dealers/Merchants

- **Differences**
  - Bicyclists self-policed more eagerly
  - Bicyclists made trade-offs more readily
  - Bicyclists had things buggy/auto drivers craved
Thank you!

Comments or additional thoughts to:

Eric Lundgren
Fortunaerota@gmail.com