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Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

The Valley's Love Affair with the Bicycle

by Ralph M. Pearce

*Les Amis (The Friends)
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[16] **George Owen and his “Ordinary,” circa 1891.** High wheel bicycles, also called “ordinaries,” introduced cycling to Santa Clara County in the 1880s. The Garden City Cyclers (later Wheelmen) was the first club in the county when it was founded in 1884. Pictured here, with his two-wheeled steed, is George Owen of the Garden City Wheelmen. Notice the accessory toe clips attached to the pedals for greater pedaling efficiency.



[17] **Safety Bicycles.** By 1896, there were eight bicycle clubs in San Jose, with more throughout the county. Shown here is a man on a “safety bicycle,” which contributed greatly to the popularity of cycling in the late 1880s and 1890s. “Safeties” used a chain-driven gear for speed, making the more dangerous high wheel bicycles obsolete. The first “Safety” bike in the area was ridden by Irving L. Ryder, later the Santa Clara County Surveyor.

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[18] **Cyclists at Washburn School.** The more affordable and safer “safety” bicycles allowed most everyone to become a rider. The Valley’s level roads were well-suited for bicycling, and the “safety’s” pneumatic tires offered a smoother ride than the earlier solid rubber tires. Shown here is a group of 1890s Washburn School students, many proudly posing with their bicycles. Washburn School was founded in 1894, and was located at the corner of San Pedro and Devine Streets.



[19] **Young Cyclist.** For many children, their bicycles were their pride and joy. This 1890s cyclist appears to be a bit small for his bike, but he was likely a capable rider who had learned how to keep his bicycle well maintained.



[20] **Agricultural Park's Velodrome.** Bicycle racing became a popular sport early on. In the 1880s (the high wheel era), cyclists would race at Agricultural Park's horse track on Race Street and The Alameda. Entering the "safety bicycle" era, tracks were built specifically for bicycles in San Jose during 1890 and 1892, and another built in East San Jose about the same time. Pictured above is the start of a race at the county's first "velodrome," which was built at Agricultural Park in 1895. Santa Clara Valley was well on its way to becoming a primary location for bicycle racing in California.



[21] **Agricultural Park Velodrome, circa 1900.** This photograph shows the official's observation tower and the grandstands of the 1895 velodrome at Agricultural Park. The one-third mile track was constructed at a cost of \$9,000.00 and featured an ellipse-shaped cement track with curves banked at 20-degree angles. It was said to be "the best of its kind in the world."



[22] **Cyclists at the St. Claire Club.** Members of the Sainte Claire Club (a private men's organization) are gathered with their bicycles in this circa 1900 photograph. Though these gentlemen have long since concluded their various journeys, this beautiful building still stands at 65 East St. James Street. Identified from left to right are: T. W. McCauley, L. Ingalsbe, S. N. Rucker, Unknown, Fred Moore, and William Moir. Mr. Rucker (third from left) is sporting the symbol of the Garden City Wheelmen on his jersey.



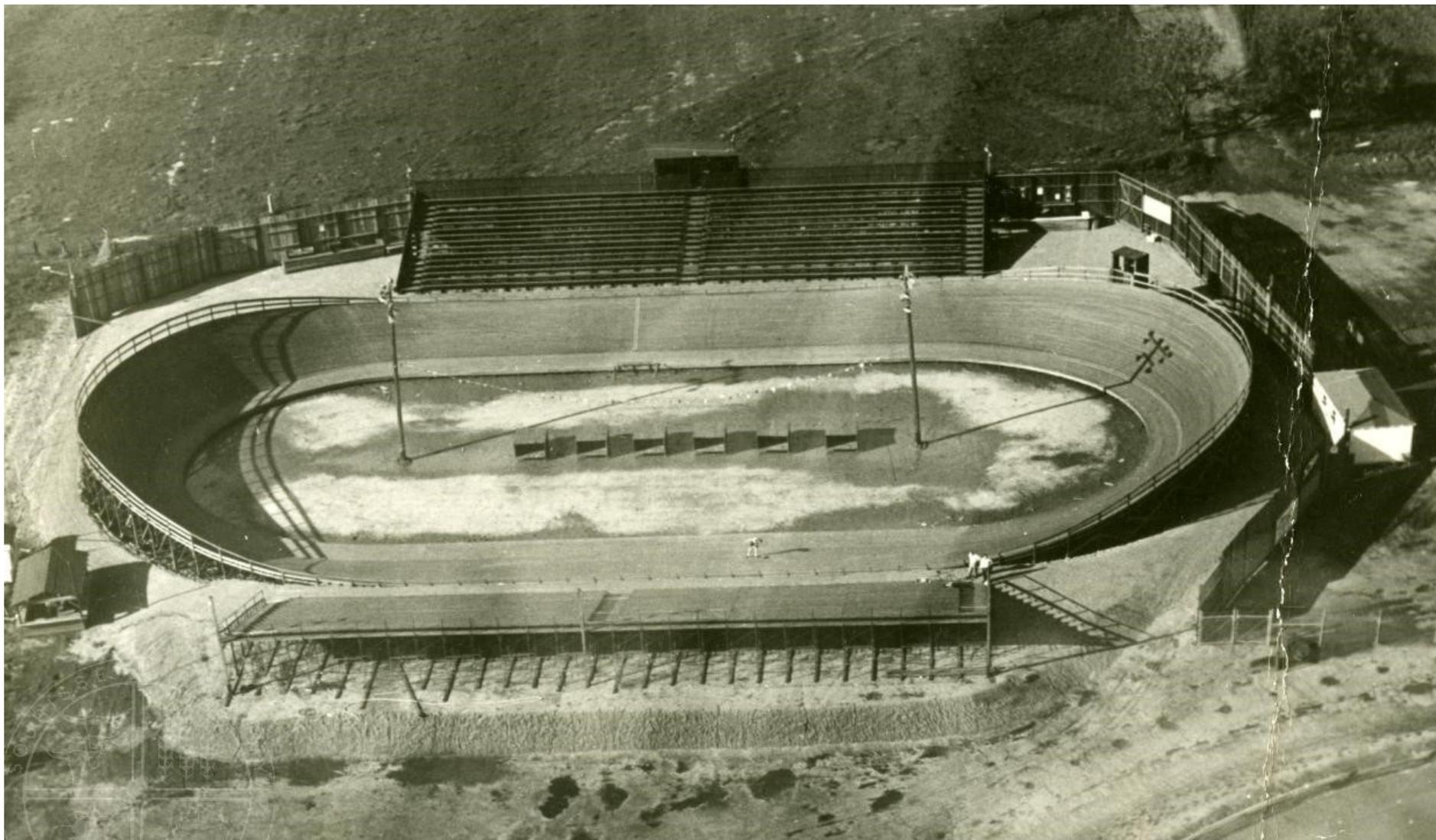
[23] **Women Bicyclists.** The introduction of the “safety bicycle” in the 1890s allowed more women to join in the fun. Women joined local cycling clubs, such as the Garden City Cycler’s Club, and even started their own Ladies Cycling Club. This circa 1910 image shows a bicycle with a frame that was developed to accommodate a woman’s skirt. Chain guards and spoke netting (as pictured here) were also available to prevent skirt entanglement. Many women took to wearing pant-like bloomers. However, that wasn’t always looked upon as lady-like!



[24] **Tricycles.** Besides leisure and sport, the bicycle and its tricycle counterpart were soon adapted for transportation and other practical uses. Here is a wonderful photograph of a delivery tricycle for the Buckeye Grocery Store from about 1913. This particular “trike” was manufactured by the Indian Motorcycle Company.



[25] **Clyde Arbuckle's Record Breaking Race.** Pictured here third from the left is San Jose's first City Historian and former Sourisseau Academy board member, Clyde Arbuckle. A half-brother of Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Clyde raced bicycles from 1917 through 1926. On April 3, 1921, Clyde broke the USA road record for 60 miles by racing to Gilroy and back in two hours, 45 minutes! This photograph from the day of the Clyde's winning race identifies (from left to right): Glenn Neville, George Veit, Clyde Arbuckle, and Otis Erhart, all Garden City Wheelmen.



[26] **Garden City Velodrome.** The Garden City Velodrome (also known as the San Jose or Burbank Velodrome) was San Jose's third velodrome. It was built in 1936 on land that is now occupied by the Lincoln High School athletic fields. The track was twenty-seven feet wide and the grandstands accommodated up to 2,500 spectators. The structure was torn down during WWII, about the time that the high school was being built. San Jose's fifth and current velodrome at Hellyer Park was built in 1963.



[27] **Kids and Their Bikes!** The post-war 1950s was a time of rapid growth in the Valley. The City of San Jose began expanding into the county's agricultural areas to meet the demand for housing. The baby-boomer generation kids were everywhere, and the bicycle was their primary mode of transportation. Schools and law enforcement agencies promoted bicycle safety with events and manuals in this adventurous era before the advent of helmets and bike lanes.



[28] **Faber's Cyclery.** A circa 1980 photograph of the historic Faber's Cyclery at 702 South First Street. The building was built as a saloon in 1882, later known as Benjamin's Corner. In 1923, it became the home of Faber's Cyclery. The business was sold to Alex LaRiviere in the 1970s and remained a cyclery until a serious fire in 2013. Perhaps the fire was a blessing in disguise for the old building, because it allowed Jim Salata of Garden City Construction to give it the complete restoration it so badly needed. And so with this iconic reminder of the Valley's long love affair with the bicycle, we pedal onward, ever vigilant of those bumps and potholes in the road.