

Racing and Wheeling: Horse Racing and Bicycling in 1896

Watsonville has never been, in any sense of the word, a sporting community. During the fairs that were for several years a feature of the harvest season no speed contests of any nature were permitted. Nevertheless there is in every locality where numbers are congregated a certain rivalry as to who shall be possessor of the speediest stock of horses. In this sense the Pajaro Valley is not an exception to the general rule and the maintenance of a race track has always been considered.

The track at Camp Goodall is a good one, but is so distant from the city that the question of a means of conveyance to and from there is always an important one. The location of another track, nearer to the city has been prospected for several years. Last season arrangements were partly made to construct such a track in conjunction with a bicycle track at College Lake. For some reason the bicycle club would not take stock in the arrangement and it fell through. About the same time a combination race and bicycle track and baseball and football ground was selected by a stock company nearer the city, in fact just outside the city limits, but the sporting blood cooled apace after the initiatory steps were taken and the location of such grounds remains unsettled. The proposition was a good one from "start to finish," as the racing men say, but the local financiers refused to see it so. The racing fraternity will yet have a track whereon to cultivate the speed of the fine stock raised here.

This subject would be incomplete without some reference to the interest taken in the "silent steed" as the bicycle is poetically termed. The good roads of the valley are appreciated by wheelmen and more than the ordinary interest of other localities is taken in wheeling in this valley. Over twenty thousand dollars have been paid out in the past few years for bicycles. That fact alone proves that the interest is genuine and active. A large cyclery on Third Street, conducted by Mr. G. Hollenbeck, finds a good demand for rented wheels during the season when the weather invites out-of-door exercise. According to custom, as soon as the number of cyclists warranted it, a Bicycle Club was organized. The large hall in the Peck Block makes an admirable club room and is fitted up for the comfort and pleasure of members of the club. These number about seventy, and the rooms, with their billiard tables and other games for amusement, are well patronized at all times by the active and honorary members. The dues are light, and the amount of amusing pastime afforded more than compensates for the expenditure. Healthful exercise is provided for in a room devoted to gymnastics.

Club runs are indulged in and an excursion to one of the neighboring towns is a regular summer affair. As a rule from thirty to forty members engage in these runs, and they are received by the visited clubs and feasted and feted until thoroughly satisfied. These visits are of course, returned and a gathering in Watsonville of all the adjacent clubs is not uncommon. The central location of this place, being on an average less than twenty miles from ten other towns, makes it the most convenient of any for these gatherings, and the picnic grounds at College Lake, with an old-fashioned barbecue, topped out with a ride around the lake on the launch, afford a day's pleasure not to be excelled in the three counties.

Bicycle races for prizes are now considered a necessary feature of every celebration of importance in the district, and Watsonville has, as a natural sequence, produced some record-breaking riders.

The styles of wheels used are almost as numerous as the owners, although the cheaper grades of wheels have never secured any particular attention. Lightness, strength, speed and handsome appearance are the first considerations, and price is usually last.

For a long time a bicycle agency in this city was a business requiring much active attention, but of late the supply seems to have reached the demand and the business transacted is mostly in the exchange line.



Unidentified Cyclists, an image that appeared with the text.

Sources

- *This article is an excerpt from "Santa Cruz County; a faithful reproduction in print and photography of its climate, capabilities, and beauties." 1896. pp. 177-178. RAP-ed.*

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