

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'Silent Steeds'

"Who can look upon the wheel
Its noiseless bows and arms of steel
Or gaze upon the silent steed
Carrying its load with utmost speed
To see the old man once again a boy?"

The above is the opening paragraph of a story written 76 years ago in the Monterey Cypress telling of a visit to Monterey by the San Francisco Bicycle Club and of the reception given the members at the home of Harry Greene in New Monterey.

Mr. Greene had been a fellow member of the club but had been prevented by illness from taking an active part in the organization for some time.

This well known club in those days had been in existence for some 15 years and was the oldest organization of its kind in the United States. At that time it counted among its members ex-Gov. Perkins, one of its organizers, and many gentlemen of the "governor's caliber" and the elite of the city.

The Sunday event about which I write today was the club's 15th run, intended especially to visit Harry Greene. To illustrate the type of journalism used in the Cypress 76 years ago, I will repeat a paragraph describing the men who were interested in bicycling and referring to the bit of poetry above:

"These and many other thoughts have frequently flashed through our minds as time and again we have seen these men, whose beards had long been sprinkled with grey and whose pantaloons in some cases had become a world too small for their 'shrunk shanks,' paddling along on their silent steed; moving or rather gliding by like a passing vision until turning a corner they had vanished out of sight.

"Many a time had we wished that the world were less skeptical, less prone to look upon the cyclist through the glasses of ridicule, that we too might enjoy the pleasing sensation which one must undergo when cognizant of the fact like a fairy he is vanishing from the sight of human eyes, and were it not that our avoirdupois is against us, we long ere this would have

joined that army of cyclists which is yearly growing in numbers."

Then the following praise: "But it was not until Sunday that the climax of our admiration for the wheel was reached. To see 30 strapping well-built young men, springing with cat-like agility upon their wheels, and then like a well-drilled regiment glide noiselessly along through our public streets should be enough to make anyone feel friendly to the vehicle. It was just such a sight that completely captivated us."

Mr. Greene had heard of the event and so had prepared a gay reception for the San Francisco Bicycle Club. A "unique and commodious tent" had been stretched on the green lawn south of the "elegant mansion." With the assistance of the "female members" and visitors of the family, festoons of flowers and evergreens encircled the tent, the door being surmounted by the wheelman's emblem, the wheel being made of flowers, and in the center a "genuine pair of wings the handiwork of Mr. Greene's only daughter."

The article goes on to relate that there were three long tables stretched out under the tent where the visiting wheelmen were entertained at a real Spanish luncheon.

"To say the boys did justice to the chili con carne, enchiladas, tamales, frijoles, etc., capped with American roast beef, mashed potatoes, French wines and Yankee pies, would be putting it lightly, but for such a jolly crowd nothing would have tasted bad," so the reporter thought and wrote.

The club presented Mr. Greene with a beautiful bicycle made of flowers, and then after a run through the Grove and Monterey, and a swim in the bath house at Del Monte, the 30 light-hearted lads "mounted the cars and were soon rolling, headed for the iron horse."