

FIRST DRAFT

Bicycling was a popular pastime in early days of Grand Junction

An estimated 500 people gathered at Grand Junction's railroad depot on June 4, 1897, along with two local bands, to greet a pair of hometown heroes.

What had Alex Struthers and his uncle, William G. Struthers, done to deserve such acclaim?

They'd won first and third place, respectively, in the 25-mile



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Decoration Day bicycle race in Denver, against some tough competition.

As The Daily Sentinel put it: "The victory, in the cycling world, was a great one." The annual race had attracted some of the top riders in the country, the paper said, but Alex Struthers had recorded the best time ever. "All honor to the victors," the Sentinel added.

In the still-small agricultural community of Grand Junction just before the turn of the 20th century, not everything was about fruit farming and ranching.

Bicycling was already a popular activity.

There were "wheel clubs" for cycling enthusiasts throughout western Colorado in the early decades of settlement. There were competing bike shops offering spare parts, repairs and the latest advancements in bicycle technology.

There were races — both short and long — that attracted athletes like the Struthers, as well as some of the founding fathers of Grand Junction. Women joined the pedal brigades early, despite some initial obstacles.

There were also social rides, from Grand Junction to Palisade, to Fruita, to Whitewater, to Delta and even Glenwood Springs.

"I don't think cycling was just about cycling then," said Chris Brown, owner of Brown Cycles in Grand Junction and the author of the book, "Bicycle Junction."

Groups such as the Denver Bicycling Club had their own building, he noted, with a bourbon room, and an athletic room. Even smaller groups focused on social activities.

"Cycling was a piece of the aristocracy at the end of the Victorian era," Brown said, before it became more available to the less affluent.

"The number of town founders who were on bikes is ridiculous," Brown added.

In addition to William G. Struthers, who became Mesa County Sheriff in 1902, there were people like Fred Mantey, for whom Mantey Heights is named, and Samuel McMullin, founder of what is now Home Loan Insurance and State Bank.

Even then-Mayor William Ela, a renowned horseman, rode bicycles.

By the 1880s, the high wheelers — the bikes with the large front wheels that had dominated the 1870s — were being replaced by more modern-style machines, called "safety bikes." They had front and rear wheels of about the same size. They had chain-driven rear wheels, powered by pedals under the rider's seat, and pneumatic tires.

The tires were sometimes filled with butter-



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

An 1890 Crescent bicycle, discovered in a shed near Fruita, has been refurbished and put on display at Brown Cycles in Grand Junction.



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

An 1884 high-wheeler bicycle is shown at Brown Cycles in Grand Junction.

milk to prevent flats, and some early riders were known as "Buttermilk Boys."

Most of the early "safety bikes" were fixed-gear machines, Brown said. There was no coasting with pedals at rest. When the rear wheel turned, the pedals turned. To stop, one had to halt the pedals. It wasn't easy to do quickly.

Brown's book tracks the fictional experiences of an unnamed man who, in the 21st century, finds a "mysteriously futuristic and charmingly antiquated" bicycle in the desert near the Lunch Loops. It turns out to be a chain-and-wheel time machine that takes the man on a journey through the decades of Grand Junction history up to 2015.

The book was made into a folk/jazz opera called "One Bike" by the Mesa County Historical Society and performed at Colorado Mesa University in 2021.

Although the main character in "Bicycle Junction" is fictional, he encounters many real people from Grand Junction's history. The book also recounts some of the interesting biking events in the community's past.

For instance, there was the 1898 race sponsored by Sam McMullin, who also rode in the race. It was an eight-mile time trial from Main Street, east on D Road toward the Teller Indian School, then back to the starting line.

The surprise winner was John L. Gray, a 300-pound lawyer from Montrose. But suspicions arose quickly about Gray's victory, even though he was given a 14-minute handicap.

Gray was stripped of his win when he admitted he'd ridden only to Ninth and Main Street, then hidden under a bush while the other riders passed, before remounting his bike to arrive at the finish line ahead of everyone else.

After Gray was disqualified, a man named Dr.

Warner was declared the winner.

"Bicycle Junction" relates other stories, such as a ring of bicycle thieves who stole 25 bikes in Grand Junction in 1901, and people who passed through the community on long-distance bike rides.

Additionally, there was a 23-mile race from Basalt to Glenwood Springs, which attracted riders from around the state. Grand Junction wheel men performed well, winning the race on several occasions.

The race, sponsored by the Colorado Midland Railway, began in 1899, and in less than a decade it was attracting hordes of spectators as well as riders.

In 1907, the Sentinel estimated that more than 500 people from Grand Junction and Palisade rode the special Midland train from the Grand Valley to Glenwood Springs to watch the end of the race. The same train brought spectators and local race participants back to Grand Junction.

But not everyone took the train. A number of riders from the Fruita Social Wheel Club rode their bikes more than 100 miles each year to watch the end of the race in Glenwood, then took the train home after the race.

Their rides were the inspiration for the L'Eroica Historic 102 Mile Bike Ride from Grand Junction to Glenwood Springs, which Brown organized beginning in 2013. It was held annually for six years.

While male riders garnered most early headlines, a few women also won renown.

Dora Reinhardt, or Rinehart, of Denver became known for long-distance rides. In 1895, she rode 100 miles each day for 20 consecutive days, on a single-speed, steel bike.

Reinhardt's exploits were unusual, but female bicyclists were common by the end of the 19th



COURTESY OF CHRIS BROWN

Harold Guesberg of Orchard Mesa was the winner of the 1915 Basalt to Glenwood Springs bike race.

century. It wasn't always easy.

"It was rare for women to ride initially," Brown said. Their clothing — dresses with multiple petticoats — and Victorian mores that frowned on women showing their ankles made it difficult for women to ride bikes at first.

Moreover, some attitudes of the time clearly discouraged women from riding, as an 1897 brief in the Aspen Times illustrates: "How can bicycle riding be good for girls, when it develops a set of muscles they can't use in cooking?" it asked. "Girls don't stir cake with their feet."

However, both fashions and attitudes were already changing when that snarky comment was published.

In 1896, women's activist Susan B. Anthony declared of the bicycle that "it has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance."

By the 1920s, girls and boys alike were winning prizes in local bicycle competitions. And bicycles were an important part of western Colorado's transportation, recreation and social scenes.

Sources: "Bicycle Junction," by Chris Brown; Author interview with Chris Brown; historic editions of The Daily Sentinel at www.newspapers.com; historic editions of other newspapers at www.coloradohistoricalnewspapers.org.

"Bicycle Junction" is available at Brown Cycles, Out West Books and Grand Valley Books in downtown Grand Junction.

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More than 60 folks displaced by a fire in Colorado Springs

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLORADO SPRINGS — Dozens of residents in a Colorado Springs apartment complex were displaced after a fire Friday night that was possibly caused by a lightning strike, fire officials said.

Fifty firefighters responded to a blaze at the Apex Apartments at 11:40 p.m. Friday and had it under control in about 90 minutes, according to the Colorado Springs Fire Department.

Fire officials said 64 residents were displaced

from 34 apartments because of fire damage. Officials also said residents of the building were not alerted by smoke or fire alarms and that firefighters alerted people by going door to door, KKTV reported.

The blaze began after a lightning strike to the building, officials said. An investigation into the cause is ongoing.

No injuries have been reported. The American Red Cross opened a shelter for displaced residents.

22-year-old jailed in fatal shooting outside Salt Lake convention center

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — Salt Lake City police say a Florida man attending a convention was shot and killed outside the Salt Palace Convention Center this weekend, and authorities have made one arrest in connection with the incident.

Delford Knight, 41, died at a hospital after being shot Saturday afternoon, police said in a statement Sunday. Knight and a group of friends had traveled from Florida to attend a footwear convention known as Sneaker Con at the Palace.

The gunfire sent people fleeing the busy area, KUTV-TV reports.

The shooting, reported at 3:15 p.m., occurred during a dispute over money between Knight and several people who had attended the conven-

tion, police said.

"According to information provided to detectives, Knight and his friends have traveled to similar conventions in different states where they engaged in betting matches to defraud people out of money. It is alleged one of the suspects lost money to Knight and became angry," the department said.

While they search for the gunman and other suspects who fled the scene, officers arrested 22-year-old Deng Buk on suspicion of murder and aggravated robbery, the department said Sunday.

No hometown for Knight was immediately released.

Police Chief Mike Brown on Saturday offered his condolences to the victim's family.

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