

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

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Cycle Route 41 (1897 – 98 series).

The Islands At Our Gates: League Island, Mud Island, Province Island, Tinicum Island, Etc.

A Winter Ramble Taken by the Present Writer on Tuesday Last Over Roads Some of Which Were Once Held Impracticable.

Distances between the main points and turnings in this round trip:

Public Buildings to Moyamensing road	2 ½ m.
Public Buildings to Navy Yard gates	4 m.
Public Buildings to Delaware at Navy Yard	4 ½ m.
Public Buildings to Fort Mifflin road	6 m.
Public Buildings to Fort Mifflin	7 ¼ m.
Public Buildings to Bell and Tinicum roads	8 m.
Public Buildings to Essington and Lazaretto roads	12 ½ m.
Essington Crossing to Moore	¾ m.
Moore to Darby	3 ½ m.
Darby to Paschalville	1 m.
Paschalville to Tinicum road	1 ¾ m.

Should any reader imagine that winter, cycling must needs be confined to our asphalted streets, let him follow me on the following ramble: it was taken for his especial benefit.

We start, as usual, from the Public Buildings and steer down South Broad street.

“Ah, you should remember the time,” said an old Philadelphian to me a few months ago, “when your asphalted South Broad street, as you call it, was our favorite ‘Summer Road,’ with trees on both sides of it; and we used to drive down that way and cross the river by the ‘Rope Ferry’ to have a good time shooting reed birds on the islands on the other side! That was not so long ago, either, say, forty-five years.”

What changes have been wrought hereabouts in those forty-five years, however.

Not until we near Porter street do we see any relics (and such scanty relics!) of the grand old trees alluded to above. These once belonged to a shady avenue that led to the Dutch Park, as it was called. Eight of them, all told, still stand there, wondering, apparently, how long more they will escape the merciless hands of the house builders.

Talk of trees! This place was a forest in the olden times, and the legions of pigeons with which it was inhabited made it so uncomfortable for the red man that he named it “Moyamensing,” or “dirty place.”

SOUTHERMOST PHILADELPHIA.

We note, for further use by and by, the intersection of Moyamensing road, where the asphalt ceases at present, and we pedal away straight on along the stone and clay road ahead of us. Even now, in midwinter, in such weather conditions as we had in the early part of this last week, it affords a pleasant ride to us; what will it be when this has become an hourly frequented avenue to a national navy yard worthy of this country and the pride of our city?

GREENWICH ISLAND.

A little over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile south of Moyamensing road we enter Greenwich Island without noticing it, so tiny is Hollander's Creek, which once isolated the southeast corner of the city from the main portion thereof.

"Hollander" in this case is not a synonym of "Dutchman," but a reminder of Peter Hollander the Swedish Governor, who preceded Johan Printz on these shores as early as 1641, forty years before Philadelphia was born.

The wild place we are now going through is ticketed "League Island Park" on the city plan. "Kind of unfinished" for a park, isn't it? It reminds one of a motion made in Council, away back in 1708, to the effect that "that part of the city between Broad street and the Delaware be grubbed and cleared from all its rubbish in order to produce English grass, which would be of great use and advantage to the inhabitants keeping cattle therein."

That was 190 years ago!

Just before we reach the gate of the Navy Yard, among a number of vehicles standing for hire on our left, you are given an opportunity to feed your eyes once more on one of those four-wheeled, double-decked and multicolored featherweights that meandered so long up and down Broad street: No. 19, of the old Broad street omnibus line, is there in the full glare of its former unloveliness. I wonder if it be watching out for the next trolley strike?

IN THE NAVY YARD.

The Navy Yard gates are just four miles from the Public Buildings. The yellowish hue in which they are painted may be a delicate compliment to our friends in the Celestial Empire, while the fur caps of the guards may possibly suggest an entente cordiale with Russia. There is nothing like universal brotherhood!

A sign tells us that visitors are requested to keep off the grass and are not admitted before 8 A. M. or after 5 P. M.

We are safe and proceed.

Note those eight monitors moored in the back channel there on our right? Their turrets and their hulls still bear evidence of the blows they sustained in the war, thirty-some years ago.

Further on, mounting guard near headquarters, are two old-time carronades which will attract your notice. The inscription over one of them tells us that they are:

32 Pdr. Carronade's Cast at Carron, Scotland. Captured on board the British Sloop of War "Cyane," on the Evening of the 20th of Feb. 1815, by the U. S. Frigate "Constitution." Captain Stewart Comd'g. in the engagement with the British Sloop's of War "Cyane" and "Levant."

You may be likely to remark that many a school urchin would have been glad to tell the authorities how to spell "carronade" and "sloop" in the plural for a quarter or less; but you must bear in mind this is a poor country.

Were it not for that deplorable fact, something would surely have been done, before this date, with so desirable a spot as this island for the benefit of the nation in general and of this city in particular.

REGARDING LEAGUE ISLAND.

Unlike some of its neighbors, League Island is not a reclaimed marsh or an island formed by changes of current in the river; it is an original formation, a part indeed of the mainland, from which it has been separated merely by the action of the water upon the softer soil around it.

As early as 203 years ago its peculiarly advantageous position was recognized by the land company of London, and a fort was there and then erected on it.

A century later, in 1783, the island was annexed to the State of Pennsylvania, along with Mud Island, Hog Island and Little Tinicum. In 1862 the city of Philadelphia purchased it for a sum of \$310,000 and presented it to the United States Government for the purpose of a navy yard. Its present condition, in view of the munificence of the gift and in comparison with the development of Philadelphia since that period, is, to put it mildly, a mortifying sight for Philadelphians.

Why is it called "League" Island? They say on account of its length, in the same way as "Five-Mile Beach," "Seven-Mile Beach," etc. If so, it must have shrunk considerably since its christening, for a league is three miles, and the island barely measures two at present.

THE OLD AND THE NEW NAVY.

You must have noticed this huge crane, hard by the water's edge, in your trips up and down the Delaware. Last fall you might have seen it removing the giant masts of the Richmond as though they were little toothpicks.

Here is the trusty old ship herself, lying on our R. What tales of bravery she could tell you as part of her performances during the war! She is only a receiving ship now; well she may rest on her past laurels.

See the little blue indented pennant with one star that she carries at the present date. That bit of bunting is not very large; yet there would be a "hot time in the old town" if a foreigner passed by without saluting it; it's the pennant of the United States Commodore just now in charge of her; two stars on a rectangular pennant would denote a U. S. N. Rear-Admiral; three stars a U. S. N. Vice-Admiral, and four a U. S. N. Admiral.

On the east side of the wharf there lies at this date another ship, one look at which is sufficient to know the primary idea in the mind of its designer, viz., the concentrating of the greatest possible limits of vulnerable space.

This is the Monadnock; you may have heard how she was sent around to California by way of testing whether her type would be fit for a trans-atlantic trip, in an emergency. Did she stand the test? Like a bird, sir.

DOWN MOYAMENSING ROAD.

Now we retrace our course to the intersection of Broad street and Moyamensing road, and turn L into the latter; we find it roughish in places just now, but at other seasons there are few better roads of its kind in our vicinity.

We soon bear to the left, when we meet Penrose Ferry road, and presently we come to the Philadelphia Driving Park, the trotting course of which has been there since 1852. Its wooden cycle track is too well known to require more than a passing mention. Don't ask why it was ever christened Point Breeze Park; the probable reason is not that it is "not" at Point Breeze. Never mind that turn L by the hotel just as we strike the park; it leads nowhere, although known as Wheatsheaf lane.

As we leave the park behind we perceive the Girard Point Grain Elevators on our left – those huge structures have a capacity of 2,000,000 bushels, and on our R Gallows lane offers to take us back to Passyunk; no, thank you; we keep straight ahead, and right away, Penrose Ferry bridge appears in sight.

PENROSE FERRY BRIDGE.

Here was the ferry that my above-mentioned friend spoke of as "Rope Ferry." In his younger days the river at this point was crossed in scows, guided or pulled by the help of ropes stretched across from bank to bank; and many a time those ropes were cut down by the navigators, whose temper they taxed to no inconsiderable degree.

About that time a big "sport" in his day, Kelly by name, started the Suffolk Park track (the remnants of which we shall see by and by on the Bell Road), and began scheming out how he could make it easier for his Philadelphia friends to ride or drive over to his park.

In a short while the Penrose Ferry Bridge Company was authorized by the Legislature, and a first bridge was completed in 1855. It proved short-lived, however, and within five years a second stood in its place. The centre span of this one collapsed the year of our Centennial Exhibition; and the present elegant structure was erected.

The ease with which its 500-ton weight pivots to and fro would doubtless surprise old Samuel Penrose, the ante-Revolution ferryman, whose memory it perpetuates among us.

OLD-TIME FERRY RATES.

In connection with that irksome tax that we have to pay for our bicycles aboard certain ferry steamers, would you care to know the tariff of ferriage across the Schuylkill 200 years ago?

In the year of grace 1690 the pioneer settlers in this section had to pay:

"Twopence (four cents) a head for oxen, bullocks, cows, heifers, horses and mares, and a halfpenny (one cent) a head for sheep and hogs, and twopence for a single passenger and a penny apiece for all passengers above the number one; but for a man's horse, laden or unloaden, threepence (six cents)."

PROVINCE ISLAND.

Don't run down the western embankment of the bridge too fast (those planks are anything but evenly laid), and here we are on Province Island, a genuine island, as you may see by its boundaries on our little map. Never heard the name before? Why it has been in existence ever since the time

When these free States were Colonies

Under the mother nation:

And in Connecticut the good,

Old Blue Laws were in fashion;

and when it was purchased by the province.

When the first "Pesthouse" was erected here in 1742 it was known as Fisher's Island, after the man who had got a patent for it eight years before. Nor are these the only names under which it has lived.

TO FORT MIFFLIN.

Sharp L, at foot of bridge, is Mud Island, or Fort Mifflin road. You can't expect an ideal cycleway to "Mud" Island in midwinter; you will do as well to postpone your visit until next season and then you will enjoy it.

The first inclosure of Fort Mifflin is barely one mile and a quarter distant. By the way, on crossing the first bridge last time I came here, I disturbed the slumber of the most beautiful three-foot-long black snake I ever saw so near the city. I dismounted to offer the pretty thing my best apologies, but with a shake of its head, which spoke volumes, it had done the bridge-jumping act before I had time to begin my speech. Snake fanciers take notice.

Another couple of moats and we are at the fort. The original mud fort was erected here in 1773. It was here under its protection that immediately after the news of the battle of Bunker Hill had been received in this city, the first two tiers of chevaux-de-frise were stretched across the Delaware over to Red Bank in New Jersey (see map); two other tiers were sunk across the river opposite Marcus Hook, not to speak of a number of old hulks; all this to prevent the passage of any British intruders, and as the first chevaux-de-frise were thought to be defective, two other tiers were sunk the following year (1776), between this and Billingsport.

You have read what a good account of itself the old fort gave in 1777, and how in the month of November, after being bombarded for six days by the British batteries on Province Island, by six frigates and a number of galleys and smaller vessels, "the garrison left it, having first set fire to the barracks and moved the cannon and stores; it was like a riddle before they left it; no troops ever behaved with better firmness" -- this from a letter written five days after the event and published in the Pennsylvania Archives.

The present fort was constructed in its place and was named after Governor Thomas Mifflin. Ask leave to look at it; the courtesy of the office in charge has been extended to many a wheelman.

BACK TO THE MAIN ROAD.

After you have seen it, return to the main road; and, by the way, let no ill advised friend, book or map induce you to attempt to make your way awheel from Mud Island to Hog Island and from the latter to

Tinicum Road; the only available "trail" is unfit for man or beast; as to a "roadway," it has no existence but in the fertile imagination of people who ought to know better.

As we spin along this western portion of Penrose Ferry Road, do you notice this farm lane L $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the bridge? It leads to the pre-Revolution homestead of the Bleakley family, the popular "Cannon Ball House" that you can plainly see from the road. It stood there at the time of our little transactions with the British frigates Augusta and Merlin in 1777 and it bears evident signs of the fact to this day.

At the T crossing, a short distance ahead, where the turn L (labeled "No Thoroughfare") would bring us to the Kingsley Model Farm, we bear R, pass by Barney Owen's half-mile track (marked B. O. on map), and almost immediately reach the bifurcation of Bell Road and Tinicum Road.

ALONG THE TINICUM ROAD.

Writing of this section some years ago, I had described it as "The wilds at our gates." I felt curious to see, last Tuesday, how far the march of improvements had made it travelable awheel at this time of the year, after a hard frost preceded by snow, and I turned my horse's head L into Tinicum Road.

The approaches to Elmwood proved decidedly rough and the way out of it was hardly better.

In view of possible mishaps, keep an eye on the soft-drink place here on R. yclept Union Hotel; they keep a huge "free pump" there that would blow life again into the deadest tire in christendom.

Some distance in yonder wilderness on R is a railroad station, named Ninety-second street; you did not think you were in the city still, did you? Here comes its boundary, tiny little Bow Creek; and beyond it we find signs of improvements; this is more complimentary to Tinicum Island than to the city, but truth must out.

THROUGH THE SWAMPS.

Swamps to the right of us, swamps to the left of us, and islands galore, of course. See this neat little stream, Plum Hook creek; if you would follow it worthward it would bring you to Smith's Island; which Smith? It does not matter; the first English ship that came up the Delaware in 1681 was in command of a Smith, and his Christian name was Harry at that; some of his namesakes among my readers may be interested in this reminder.

And north of Smith's Island is Hay Island, the latter so designated as far back as 1668; and at its mouth on the Delaware is Printz island (marked P. I. on map); and there are others still. With Plum Hook Creek, however, we are chiefly concerned at present as being the point where the two-mile stretch of smooth oyster shell road begins, which will take us to the other end of Old Tinicum.

"Tinicum," "Tenicum," "Tennecum," etc. are all so many variants of "Tenakong," the Indian name borne by this water-soaked place when the Swedes first settled on it some 250 years ago. Building a fort right here (Nya Gotheborg, or New Gottenburg, they called it) was in accordance with the eternal fitness of things; but one is tempted to credit Governor John Printz with poor taste when he erected his handsome "Printz Hall" in such a spot as this. However, he and his followers being the first Europeans on record to come to this island, they were probably glad enough to get a first footing anywhere. So were the Dutch, who destroyed New Gottenberg in 1655.

Be that as it may, somehow the public patronage bestowed on Tinicum Island has never exceeded the bounds of moderation. The township, founded in 1781, contained exactly 188 inhabitants at the last census (after an existence of 109 years). Who knows what the future may bring it?

ESSINGTON AND LAZARETTO

Do you observe the pretty view we have of the heights on Darby road, R, as we approach the only village on Tinicum Island? This village rejoices in the name of Essington, and is about twelve miles from the Public Buildings. A quarter of a mile beyond the railroad crossing we are met at right angles by the Lazaretto road.

If your time permits, turn to and run down to what used to be the Lazaretto. That is the spot also that saw the erection of Fort New Gottenburg and Printzhof, or Printz Hall, as early as 1643 and a church 3 years later.

“Lazaretto” is Italian, of course, or the nearest thing to the Italian “Lazzaretto,” a house for “lazzari” or lepers (you remember Lazarus in the Bible): hence a quarantine. And sure enough, the deed by which the owners of this land, ‘way back in 1799, conveyed it to the Board of Health of Philadelphia for consideration of \$2000, distinctly states that it is to be devoted to the uses and purposes of a quarantine, “which place * * * shall be and thereby is called a Lazaretto.”

It continued to be used as such until this very month last year, when the quarantine station was moved farther down the river to Marcus Hook; what its future destination is, its purchaser has not made public.

THE TURNING POINT.

And now, not to return home by the selfsame road, let us run northward to Darby Creek; the half-mile from the creek to Moore on the Chester Pike is at present in a most wretched condition, but when we strike the pike we are on smooth and familiar ground.

We pay 3 cents’ toll and merrily spin through Norwood, Glenolden, where two signs notify us that “fast riding” is prohibited (is the rate of “fast” riding left to the discretion of the constable, Mr. Burgess?) – past Folcroft and Sharon Hill (on top of which the Darby Wheelmen must be thanked for placing a danger sign), through Darby and on to Paschalville, as per our Trip No. 4.

Here, opposite the old Blue Bell Inn, let us take, on R, the road named after it.

One mile of pleasant riding takes us to Suffolk Park (marked S. P. on map) or rather what is left of the 84 acres that once constituted the Suffolk Park racing course. Some of my elderly readers may remember when it was used as a camping group for troops in 1861, and was temporarily known as “Camp McClellan.”

And in a few whirls of our wheel we reach the bifurcation at which we began describing the irregular circle we have just completed, and whence we could wish for no better route homeward than the one we followed on coming out, the whole trip covering no more than 27 miles, excluding the digressions to Fort Mifflin and to Lazaretto.

A.E.

