

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

Philadelphia Inquirer, January 23, 1898, p. 36

Cycle Route No. 43 (1897 – 1898 series).

**City Sight-Seeing Awheel, North of Chestnut Street. A Zigzag 14 – Mile Circuit Within Three Miles of the Public Buildings.**

I was both gratified and (I must confess) agreeably surprised at the letters of congratulation I received last year anent our rambles awheel within the city proper, not from wheelmen alone, but from horsemen and pedestrians who felt interested in the surroundings they lived in.

Here is one, covering at most some 14 miles within 3 miles of the Public Buildings, which would not frighten even a tyro pedestrian, and may prove convenient to others when country roads are closed to us.

**OUT ON RACE STREET.**

The zigzag round of sights may be started from any point in the circuit, of course, according to convenience; for the sake of uniformity let me jump into saddle as usual at the Public Buildings.

A couple of squares on North Broad street, and we turn off L into Race street.

Did you ever hear of the races that once used to take place on the site now occupied by the street, and earlier still on a tract of land extending from this to Spruce and from Eighth street to the Schuylkill? No wonder it was called Race street.

The Friends' High School and the Friends' Library (established in 1834) occupy an important place in the history of our Commonwealth and city.

**A TURN NORTHWARD.**

We turn up Seventeenth. The conspicuous buildings of the Orthopaedic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases stands on our left at the corner of Summer street. They were erected in 1886, to replace the original hospital founded nineteen years before, and no longer adequate to the standard of usefulness of the institution.

That church, now for sale, opposite the hospital, was the P. E. Church of the Atonement.

**THE MANUAL TRAINING SCHOOL.**

This sober structure R, corner of Wood street, is the Manual Training School, an institution established in 1885, as a department of the public school system of this city.

Some people imagine it to be a trade school. In reality its system of education is perfectly general in character; its peculiarity being that it supplies both the usual high school course in literature, science and mathematics, and at the same time a thorough training in the use and application of tools.

It was originally organized with 130 pupils, but grew so rapidly that it had to be supplemented by a second school in 1889. In the course of that year, by the way, at the last Paris Exposition Universelle, this Philadelphia school obtained a gold medal for the best exhibit presented by any American manual training school.

The short stretch of Belgian blocks above Callowhill street is not very rugged; still we are glad to turn R on to the asphalt of Spring Garden street.

SPRING GARDEN STREET.

Right at the corner L is the familiar green-stone structure of the former Girls' Normal School, now used as the Girls' High School.

We cross Broad and proceed straight on along Spring Garden street. This edifice labeled "Lu Lu Temple," on our left, represents, with its appurtenances, a round \$100,000 to the credit of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine in this city, and is one of the few temples owned by the members of its society. You might be curious to know that this order was founded by a son-in-law of Mohammed, way back in the year 656. In this country it numbers considerably over 40,000 members, among whom are 2500 of our own fellow-citizens.

The noble pile L also, with the monogram G. N. S. over its entrance, is, of course, the Girls' Normal School. This was the site of the Spring Garden Hall of olden days.

For a pioneer athletic and social organization founded exactly forty years ago, and at present in a more flourishing condition than at any previous period of its existence, commend me to the Caledonian Club, here on the corner of Thirteenth street. It was originally started by and for the benefit of natives of Scotland, but when this handsome building was erected, in 1893, members were admitted irrespective of nationality and the club roster now contains about 700 names. Its well-equipped gymnasium and swimming tank are well known to all lovers of athletics.

At the corner of Twelfth street the memorial stone on the Spring Garden Bank reminds us that it was organized in 1870; there are many in this city and elsewhere who need no reminder of the sad day when it closed its doors.

Here the asphalt pavement terminates, but it were a pity not to "take in" the remainder of this typical street; let us ride down to Seventh street.

Yonder little oasis of verdure inclosed within an iron fence is the only relic of the days when this spot was described as "a kind of open common very useful to the up-town boys in kite time." This was about 1787.

The fine porticoed church on our L, now for sale, used to be the First Reformed Church in America and was erected in 1853-55 when our city was consolidated.

That handsome brownstone and brick building farther on L is the Assembly Hall and Library of the German Society of Philadelphia. It is only ten years old, but the society was founded as far back as 1764; its status is as high as its philanthropic work has proved beneficial and extensive.

We have scarcely begun to pedal up Seventh street when a four-story, red brick front house on L may catch our eye on the corner of Brandywine street.

Here it was that E. A. Poe, broken down in spirit after his dismissal from the staff of Graham's Magazine, spent the saddest days of his saddest years. Here his consumptive child-wife, Virginia, ruptured a blood vessel in her throat while singing a melody. What tales those walls could tell of the downward course of that sensitive soul in its struggles with ever-increasing sorrows.

Read the story of Edgar Allan Poe at your leisure and let not the gloom of his memory overshadow this ramble of ours any further.

A look at the handsome Grecian portico of the Second Reformed Church and at the Second Baptist Church, and here we are at Girard avenue.

#### EASTWARD ON GIRARD AVENUE.

The Girard Avenue Farmers' Market, which you see from this point on our L, reminds me of the reputation that our markets and our market system have obtained and preserved ever since the earliest days of the colony, and even before William Black wrote of the old market on Market street that it was "allowed by foreigners to be the best of its bigness in the known world, and undoubtedly the largest in America." This was in 1744.

And here, almost opposite us as we turn R on the avenue, is the Girard Avenue Theatre, a neat little house, seating over fourteen hundred people, and a great favorite with theatre-goers throughout the eight years that it has now been opened.

Is this not a noble thoroughfare, worthy of this city and of the name it bears? If, like so many others, you are acquainted only with its western half, you may be surprised to hear that we shall now enjoy its ample breadth and smooth surface for a distance of 1 ½ miles from this corner.

#### THE CROOKEDEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED HERE.

After passing Fifth street, watch for Lawrence street on R; and here permit me to introduce you to the crookedest thing that happened yet in this city – I used "crooked" in its literal sense, of course; for there is no knowing what our Rogue's Gallery might not supply in other ways.

Here on our right lies a portion of what was known until quite recently as Canal street; its peculiar meanderings between this spot and Delaware avenue were the despair of Uncle Sam's lettercarriers, and it is now sectionally designated under half a dozen different names. Old Cohocksink Creek first laid out the course of this street, and in the closing years of last century an Act of Assembly trimmed up this part of the creek into a canal; this, however, in the course of time, proved more detrimental than useful; what with the smashing of its various bridges and the drowning of people through its frequent washouts, etc., the canal was declared a nuisance and gradually culverted and covered (an alley between George and Wilder streets bears the name "Culvert street" to this day.) This, by the way, may possibly remind you of the story of Canal street in New York city. Our own Dock street tells a similar tale, but neither its name nor its course (tortuous though it be), are so suggestive as those of Kensington's Canal street.

It's a pity its cobblestones at this end and its black mud at the other are so uncyclable, for as a type of its kind it is worth a visit. Should you decide on exploring it, after all, it's only a mile long, and when you "get there," you can ride back via Poplar and Second streets to Girard avenue again. I did it last Tuesday, and have felt none the worse since then for my experience.

A separate map of this late Canal street may prove acceptable as a curiosity, and is offered as such herewith.

#### PENN TREATY MONUMENT.

And now when we have glided along for a mile from Seventh street, watch R for Hanover street; its Belgian block pavement is quite ridable. At its foot you will find a neat little square, in a corner of which stands the not over-pretentious Penn Treaty Monument. Needless to say, this is the spot which, according to tradition, witnessed the scene popularized on canvas by Benjamin West – the treaty of “unbroken faith” between William Penn and the Indian natives.

#### CRAMPS’ SHIPYARD.

Let us turn back to Girard avenue and follow it eastward to its very end at Aramingo Canal. Let not the sight of the hideous cobblestones that meet your gaze at that point mar the pleasure of your outing. Cramps’ shipyard is so near at hand – just there, on the right, the other side of Richmond street – that you can easily walk over to it.

This is no place to tell you about so gigantic a concern as that which was originated here by William Cramp in 1830; I might as well attempt to crowd in a few lines the history of the whole shipbuilding industry of Philadelphia. All honor to private undertakings so nobly carried out as to become part and parcel of a nation’s history!

#### DEAR OLD COBBLES.

When you come back from your visit to Cramp’s shipyard to this wilderness of cobblestones, just “screw your courage to the sticking place” and face bravely the first block or two on East Norris street; you will be rewarded with Belgian pavement beyond Thompson street and with asphalt a little farther, up to Front street; here (5 ½ miles from start) we turn R just the distance of one block, and sharp L on to the asphalt of Diamond street.

#### DIAMOND STREET.

This handsome tract of public ground on our right is Norris Square, so named after the Norris family, under whose lease it was originally held; the brownstone Gothic church on our left is St. Boniface’s R. C. Church, with its large parish school.

And how is this for another long glide, although uphill, ‘way up this Diamond street, across Broad and straight on beyond it?

On this trip we go no farther out than Seventh street and turn L down into it.

#### THE WAGNER INSTITUTE.

Below Montgomery avenue stands the Wagner Free Institute of Science, to which was added, of late years, the first free circulating library established in our midst. William Wagner was of German parentage and had gone in his youth through a priceless apprenticeship, a clerkship in old Stephen Girard’s employ. Out of such a school he grew in time to be a wealthy merchant and a philanthropist in close touch with the needs of his fellow-men. Desirous to share with them the advantages of what he himself had gathered in his many voyages, he invited them to his “great private museum” at his own

residence as early as 1847; then he obtained the incorporation, in 1855, of the Wagner Free Institute of Science, held at first in the old Spring Garden Hall, by the site of which we passed a while ago, and in 1859 he laid the corner-stone of this building, which was not opened until May 1865, the war having greatly interfered with its progress. Get an "announcement" of this institute as you pass by; you will find in it, not what I have just told you, but a synopsis of the work it does, which is sure to interest you.

Columbia avenue, Oxford, Jefferson and Master streets we cross in a trice.

Isn't it funny that we should be made to call "Master" street, a street that was christened after Thomas "Masters," the Mayor of this city in 1707; even as municipal wisdom insists on our calling "Woodland" avenue a thoroughfare that leads to "Woodlands" Cemetery and cuts through the "Woodlands" estate? Funny, indeed, painfully funny!

#### GIRARD COLLEGE AND VICINITY.

About eight squares from Diamond street, as we near Girard avenue, notice R the grounds and buildings of one of the largest ecclesiastical establishments in this city, the lofty Church of the Gesu, with its large parochial schools and St. Joseph's College, all under the direction of the Order of the Jesuits.

On striking Girard avenue we turn R into it and reach Girard College, 8 ½ miles from start.

The historical facts and the statistical data published at the time of the recent semi-centennial festivities of this institution must still be too fresh in the minds of Inquirer readers to allow of their reiteration here; verily Stephen Girard's memory deserves to be cherished by Philadelphians for the good his beneficence has wrought since this college was opened, just fifty years ago.

#### CORINTHIAN AND FAIRMOUNT AVENUES.

Let us wheel L into Corinthian avenue. On our right is the beautiful German Hospital, founded by Philadelphians of German descent, in 1860, and gradually brought up under well-deserved patronage to its present standard of magnificence and usefulness.

It did good service as a United State military hospital during the war, and to its credit let it be added that despite its German origin it is open to patients of any nationality, color or creed.

Below Poplar street is the Corinthian Avenue Reservoir, and south of it the Eastern Penitentiary, the castellated entrance of which we reach after turning R into Fairmount avenue. It was opened in 1829; this avenue was then Coates street, and this particular spot was best known as Cherry Hill. I have an inveterate objection to talking of what I am not personally acquainted with; now, I have never been inside these unlovely gates, but I understand that what's behind them has been taken as a model for similar establishments both on this continent and abroad.

Twenty-first street offers us asphalt pavement; we avail ourselves of it, then turn eastward on Spring Garden street and R down Eighteenth street. It is only partly asphalted, but we have no trouble in reaching the asphalt again on Logan square.

#### LOGAN SQUARE.

This used to be Northwest Square at the time when the three other corresponding breathing places in the city were Northeast Square (now Franklin), Southeast Square (now Washington), and Southwest

Square (now Rittenhouse). Here the public executions used to take place, here, too, thirty-five years ago, was held an exhibition of a very different nature, a magnificent three-week fair under a temporary glass and iron inclosure that covered the full seven acres of the square, shade trees and all. Its object was the raising of funds for the United States Sanitary Commission, and the result was one million dollars. Poor, "slow" Philadelphia! People find some use in her when they need her, all the same.

The massive pillars and the majestic dome of the Roman Catholic Cathedral are the most striking features of this square, equalled by few, as it is, in the character of its surroundings.

AN HONOR TO ANY CITY.

Ere we turn R into Race street, do you notice those green-fronted houses on Eighteenth street? Some of them are occupied by the children's and maternity branches of the Medico-Chirurgical Hospital, the dome of which you may see at their back between us and Cherry street.

Whenever you wish to show a stranger the ne plus ultra of the efforts of modern architecture guided by the most recent discoveries of modern science, take him round to the clinical amphitheatre of that hospital and challenge him to duplicate what he will see there, either in this country or in Europe.

The Medico-Chi College had not the accumulated wealth and fame of centuries at its back, either, to help it in this gigantic undertaking. Its original charter dates from 1850, but its practical work did not begin until 1881.

By the way, among the honorary members secured by the college during its first struggle for existence was Doctor Thos. D. English, the author of "Ben Bolt." Not even the walls of our hospitals were proof against the irrepressible strains of "Sweet Alice."

WESTWARD ON RACE.

Another hospital greets us at 1810 Race street, Wills' Eye Hospital, founded and endowed by James Wills, who died in 1825. Don't spell it Will's, as though the name stood for William.

A little farther is our Academy of Natural Sciences. It was started by a few gentlemen who met together to study the laws of nature in 1812, and after a varied experience of habitats it was moved to this elegant edifice the year of the Centennial.

At Twentieth street the quaint house of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, with its 2 acres of grounds, attracts our attention. It is now sixty-five years old. Did you ever attend any of the musical recitals given by the inmates? They might surprise you.

This year will probably be your last opportunity to visit them here, for new buildings have been imperatively needed for some time and a tract of some 26 acres has been acquired near Overbrook for their immediate erection.

ACROSS BY THE FIRST CITY TROOP.

Down we run Twenty-first street; below Market we observe the Armory of the First Troop, Philadelphia City Cavalry, with the proud date "Nov. 17, 1774," over its portals, and in a moment reach Chestnut street near the First Unitarian Church and the Swedenborgian Church of New Jerusalem.

## DOWN CHESTNUT STREET.

Turning eastward into Chestnut street, we pass by the old Rush mansion (now the Aldine Hotel), once occupied by the widow of Dr. James Rush, the generous donor of our Ridgway Library; by the imposing Tabernacle Baptist Church, below Nineteenth; by the Philadelphia City Institute, a free library established some forty-four years ago; by the extensive stone building of the Young Men's Christian Association, which fronts on Fifteenth from Chestnut to Sansom; by the 64-year-old Church of the Epiphany; and when we reach Broad street we have ridden but 11 ½ miles yet.

## A HISTORIC SHRINE AT EVERY TURN.

There is no street east of Broad that could supply so many national shrines for special pilgrimages as Chestnut street, and one hesitates to make mention of them from the saddle of a bicycle.

And as to that, what information could be tendered to a Philadelphian or an American short of offering him an insult concerning, for instance, our United States Mint, or our immortal State House below Sixth?

Yet, stay. It may not be so generally known perhaps that the first exhibition of "gas lights and lamps burning without wicks or oil" took place right there; in Peale's Museum, in the State House, in 1816. And it took nineteen years to convince the people and the Councils of this city that the use of gas was not "a folly, unsafe, unsure, a trouble and a nuisance," as described in the newspapers; nor was it until Samuel V. Merrick had been sent to Europe to investigate gas lighting there and had brought home a favorable report that an ordinance was passed in 1835 for the construction and management of the Philadelphia Gas Works.

Once more and again, dear old Philadelphia justified her reputation for slowness, you will say. Quite true, friends; Philadelphia, none the less, was the first city in this country to adopt this new system of illumination; how wondrously progressive the others must have been.

And now to complete some kind of a circuit back to our starting point, we pass by the Custom House below Fifth and Carpenters' Hall, a little beyond Fourth.

Here a detour through Fourth street will enable us to take in our new Bourse, a sight worthy of any city; another down Market and up Second will bring us to historic Christ Church of Colonial days.

If we turn L from Second into Arch we have at No. 239, the house in which Betty Ross made the first American flag, the Arch Street Friends' Meeting House, below Fourth; Franklin's grave, at the corner of Fifth; the original home of the Apprentices' Library, opposite it; the Arch Street Theatre, above Sixth, and if we wheel L into Seventh we shall pass by the little house at No. 39, which was the first United States Mint, in 1793.

Finally, let us turn R into Market street, and the Penn Bank, southwest corner of Seventh, on the site of the house in which Thomas Jefferson drew out the Declaration of Independence; our eight-million-dollar Postoffice, at Ninth street, and the magnificent composite-Renaissance terminus of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company will prove a fitting finale to a ramble which it would require a volume to do justice to.

A.E.