

Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There

Philadelphia Inquirer, January 30, 1898, p. 36

Cycle Route No. 44 (1897-1898 series).

Round the Big Bend of the Delaware: From Burlington to Trenton via Bordentown – a Trip taken by the Present Writer Last Monday

With such a gale as blew from the west on last Monday morning, in what direction could a wheelman turn the head of his steed but to the eastward?

True, it would have been easy to make a better selection in that quarter; but there are rumors about the old Bordentown road being transformed into a trolley highway in the near future and (who knows?) this might prove my last opportunity to gaze upon the dear old sinner; and then, again, incredible as it may seem, I had been the recipient of two quite recent inquiries as to which of the two was the better route to Trenton, the Bristol-Morrisville road or the Burlington and Bordentown road.

Even leaving aside the distance, which is much greater of course (by four or five miles) around the big bend of the Delaware, I have never been able to understand what impels some people to recommend the New Jersey riverside as “the” road to Trenton from this section.

As interesting localities, Burlington and Bordentown yield it to but few; that goes without saying, and a pilgrimage to either is always worth taking by the pleasure-rider. I now allude to the road only as a means of access from Philadelphia or Camden to Trenton.

In view of the above, then, I went over it this week with the result described here below.

Our trip No. 15 told us the shortest way to get to Burlington. We start from there to-day.

OUT OF BURLINGTON.

Broad street, Burlington, is indeed a poor thoroughfare in winter. A good thing that it is “broad,” for we have to share it with the railroad tracks for half a mile, until we come to Assiscunk creek.

At the fork beyond the bridge beware of the R road, which would take you to Columbus, and bear L.

This station on our L is East Burlington. Yonder, at the mouth of the creek, is Burlington Island, or Chygoe’s Island, as it was called by the first settlers (after an Indian sachem who had made it his home). It was on that 300 acre islet that the Quaker commissioners from England made their first landing when they ventured up the Delaware in 1677.

And you should read the glowing descriptions that were sent home by the bold adventurers. “The country is so good that I do not see how it can reasonably be found fault with, wrote John Crips, 8th mo., 1677. “The country and air seems to be very agreeable to our bodies, and we have very good stomachs to our victuals. Here is plenty of provision, plenty of fish and fowl, and good venison very plentiful, and much better than ours in England, for it eats not so dry, but is full of gravy, like fat, young beef,” etc., etc.

A LITTLE BLUFF GOES A LONG WAY.

Isn't it great fun skimming along this narrow path with a miniature cyclone at your back? Great practice, too, in steady riding. Above all, don't hesitate when you come to a poor stretch where narrow-tired wagon wheels have not left you even the few inches of unploughed roadway with which you would be contented. Don't let your mount feel that you are the least bit concerned at the possibility of your having to alight against your wish among those New Jersey thorns on your left, or perchance measure your graceful length in the quagmire on your right; keep a bold front and you'll pull through as a rule. A little bluff goes a mighty long way awheel or on horseback.

N.B.1. -- Ninety-nine out of one-hundred inexperienced beginners seem to forget their pedalling in the presence of danger on the road surface, and ninety-nine out of one hundred come to grief.

N.B.2 – At this season a number of our country roads are being top-dressed. Zigzag your way in half-hearted fashion among the broken stone. You will be lucky if you escape without a cut. Make a bee-line at a steady gait over the fresh laid bed, and the chances are that your tire won't get a scratch.

FLORENCE AND COLUMBUS.

Not much stone along this particular road. Don't you pity the poor horses that have to drag through that sandy soil? And the side trails branching off from the main one don't seem any better.

Here is one (2 m. from Burlington) going L to the River road; another (4 m.) goes R to Bustleton, and L to Florence; another (4 ¾ m.) at the little church and burial ground leads R to Columbus and L to Florence. Columbus and Florence make up a strange combination; Genoa would have been more appropriate to poor old Christopher. This Florence can't be the genuine article, any way, the home of Dante, Boccaccio, Machiavelli and so many others. Penniless as Italy is, who ever saw so untravelable a "road" as this leading to Firenze?

As we gratefully hug our meandering foot-path, we pass another turning R to York road (great will be your disappointment if ever you go down there with visions of our own old York road before your mind). Beware of the bridge over this next tiny creek; there was a crevasse by the side of it last Monday, that might have done considerable mischief to unsuspecting wayfarers.

Up this hill we go, and down to yonder white bridge (5 ½ m.), over a broad expansion of Craft's Creek.

Our path deserts us at foot of this other hill, and, oh, such a water-soaked bed of clay to climb afoot! Avail yourself of the opportunity, when you reach the top, to take a look riverward.

KINKORA.

Those ice houses (the Knickerbocker), those brickyards and dwellings, a little to your L, constitute the village of Kinkora.

Kinkora is an unusual name. And, faith, if the spalpeens would only spell it Kincora with a c, what would it be? Only the name of King Brian Boroo's palace, near Killaloe, County Clare, in ould Ireland.

Never heard of Brian Boroo, the old king that defeated the Danes in 25 pitched battles? Arrah, then, if ever you go to Dublin, don't forget riding out to Clontari; and, any omadhaun 'll show you where he

gave them their last licking, and by the same token it was on a Good Friday, nearly 900 years ago, and bad cess to it, he never stopped fighting till he got killed.

THE NEWBOLDS AND THE BIDDLES.

The large island north of Kinkora is Newbold's or Biddle's Island. The Newbolds (Godfrey and John) were among the passengers who came here on the "Shield" in 1678; and perhaps you are not aware that this hamlet was the home of William and Sarah Biddle, the ancestors of our Philadelphia Biddles and others, who came over from London in 1681, the year before Philadelphia was founded. William, who was described in the deed given him by William Penn as "cordwinder, cordwainer and shoemaker," obtained a grant of one-nineteenth of West Jersey, settled here in Kinkora and setting at nought the proverb that the cobbler should not go beyond his last, soon became one of the leaders of the young community, was appointed Justice of Peace of Burlington county, and laid the foundations of the family so honorably known in our midst.

THE WORST IN THIS SECTION.

The descent from this point of observation of ours is steep, the corresponding rise is not improved by its being crossed by the railroad track leading to Kinkora, and the roadway cannot be said to be alluring as we go up and down, past Graham & Co.'s brickyard and on to Fieldsborough or White Hill.

There are signs of improvement along this stretch which once enjoyed the unenviable reputation of being the worst in this section of the State, but this is not the time of year when they are seen best.

Go straight through at the crossroad in Fieldsborough (8 ½ m.) and by way of compensation for that ugly down-hill out of the village you will get half a mile of a good cinder track that will take you to the new bridge over Black Creek and practically into Bordentown (10 m).

On entering the town turn L into Prince street (a "princely" thoroughfare, aber nicht!) and on over the railroad entrenchment, and then R into Park avenue. Where is the park? Why, come straight along to where you see those glittering cannons mounting guard for the Military Institute on R at the end of the street. There we shall dismount and look about us.

This four-storied building, with its five acres of ground, originally belonged to the historic park laid out and occupied by the ex-King of Spain, Joseph Bonaparte, after he had fled to this country in 1814 from the throne on which his brother had planted him seven years before.

Bonaparte Park extended across the street to the river on our L and from there the handsome barge presented to the refugee by Stephen Girard often brought him down the Delaware to Major Lennox's at Bristol, the rendezvous of all the distinguished foreigners who visited our shores at the beginning of this century.

Almost opposite the military institute do you observe that ancient colonial house with a coat of white paint? That is where Francis Hopkinson, one of the grand old men of our Revolution and one of the signers, lived for a time until he returned to his native Philadelphia as Judge of the Admiralty in 1779. You are not familiar with his name? Well, did you ever hear of the "Battle of the Kegs," probably the most popular of our Revolutionary ballads!

“ ‘Twas early day, as poets say,
Just when the sun was rising,
A soldier stood on a log of wood
And saw a thing surprising, etc?’”

He was the author of it. And, perhaps, you are not altogether unacquainted with “Hail Columbia?” Well, “Hail Columbia,” was composed by Joseph Hopkinson, and Joseph was the son of Francis. See?

And what brought Francis to Bordentown was his wooing (and ultimately winning) Miss Ann Borden, the daughter of Joseph Borden, after whose father, Sam, Bordentown was named.

There are other mementos of bygone days in this town. That long, low house next to Francis Hopkinson’s, for instance, was the once famous Murat Boarding School, but we have to travel on.

OLD-TIME COMFORTS.

Talk of travelling and of our modern drawbacks in connection therewith; how do the latter strike you as compared with the methods alluded to in the following advertisement? I found it in both The American Weekly Mercury and The Pennsylvania Gazette of June, 1752: “. . . By Joseph Borden, Jun., there is a stage-boat . . . will attend at the Crooked Billet wharf, in Philadelphia, every Tuesday in every week, and proceed up to Bordentown on Wednesday. On Thursday morning a stage-waggon with a good awning, kept by Joseph Richards, will be ready to receive them and proceed directly to John Cluck’s, opposite the the city of Perth Amboy, who keeps a house of good entertainment. On Friday morning a stage-boat, well fitted and kept by Daniel O’Bryant, will be ready to receive them and proceed directly to New York, and give her attendance at the White Hall slip, near the Half-moon Battery.”

A BIT OF RAILROAD HISTORY.

A few hundred yards, at this date in an unspeakable condition, bring us to a bifurcation; straight on to Crosswicks 2 ¼ m.; L to Trenton, 6 m.

Do you observe, a short distance R on the railroad embankment, a large rectangular block of granite, evidently a memorial stone of some kind? Run up and see what it is about.

The first inscription that greets your eye is not quite self-explanatory: “Erected by the Pennsylvania Railroad Co., 1891”; but on the side facing the track, is a bronze plate which is more interesting. Beneath a reproduction of the familiar cut of the original “John Bull” engine with its tender and its two wide open passenger cars, the following may be read:

“First movement by steam on a railroad in the South of New Jersey, November 12, 1831, by the original locomotive “John Bull,” now deposited in the United States National Museum at Washington. The first piece of railroad track in New Jersey was laid by the Camden and Amboy Railroad Company, between this point and the stone thirty-five hundred feet eastward in 1831.”

This little bit of history was worth picking up by the roadside, was it not?

Pennsylvania was about 4 years ahead of New Jersey in this connection. That short stretch between Mauch Chunk and Summer Hill goes back to 1827 and was the first permanent railroad built in our State. The first passenger railway built in this country, as you know, was the Baltimore and Ohio, which was begun in 1828.

THREE CHEERS FOR THE OWLS.

Returning to the fork, we are welcomed by a roomy path in the construction of which we early recognize the hand of man, not alone the feet of pedestrians, as was the case with the trail we once used to follow here. For this luxury we have to thank the Owl Wheelmen of Bordentown, \$500, we are told, have been expended on this path, \$100 of which was given by the township, and the balance collected from voluntary subscribers by our hustling brethren here. They are entitled to the gratitude of every wheelman who travels this way, and will surely get it from those who "knew this cycleway before it was made" as the proverbial Irishman is said to have remarked.

At the familiar bend in the road (12 ½ m.) where we meet our old friend, the footpath "beneath the long-armed cedar trees," there is an intermission in the Owl's track, but we are favored with it again a short distance ahead and it does not leave us any more until we strike Crosswicks Creek, the boundary line of Burlington county.

IN MERCER COUNTY.

Apropos of boundary lines, do you know that Burlington county is the only one that stretches the whole distance across from the Delaware River to the Ocean?

This may not be of vital importance to you just now; the fact is, I just wanted to divert your attention from that red clay hill that faces us beyond the bridge and which is now in a wretched condition.

It is not very long; that's lucky; it does not take us a minute to climb up to the Pearsonville M. E. Church; and there we are at the White Horse Pike, right in front of the White Horse Inn (neither of which must be confounded, of course, with their favorite namesakes in Camden county).

"That road down to the county bridge is going to macadamized this very spring," says mine host, Andrew Gropp, "and so is this pike, for a certainty."

To the which we heartily reply "So mote it be."

WHITE HORSE PIKE.

Right here (13 m. from start), Yardville is a couple of miles away on R, Allentown is 8 m. and thence you might go to Hightstown or to Freehold; the riding is but fair, at its best.

We turn L; the White Horse pike is no better than it has been for a long time; but what care we so long as we have such a good path by the side of it?

It's just about 1 ½ miles to the Broad Street Park. What a bee line into Trenton or into the Morrisville and Bristol road this Broad street will be for us when it is macadamized!

A SIDE LOOK AT LAMBERTON.

By the way, due west from where we are now, down there on the river side, lay the village of Lambertton, now the Sixth ward of this city, and in that village once lived John Fitch, the inventor of the steamboat.

He came here from Connecticut, and starting as a brass founder, making brass and silver buttons for peddling, he was carrying on quite a large business as silversmith when the British army entered Trenton

in 1776. This might not have drawn towards him the very marked attention of the invaders, but it turned out that Silversmith Fitch had no fewer than sixty hands in his employ, busily repairing arms for the Americans; his shop was levelled to the ground and he barely managed to escape with his life to Pennsylvania, where he joined Washington's army and spent that awful winter at Valley Forge with him. How is that for Lamberton?

TWO MAGNIFICENT AVENUES.

As Broad street is now unavailable for us, we turn R into Chambers street (opposite the park) and glide on its beautifully smooth macadam and away past St. Francis' Hospital on R, and on to the residential estate of Abner Chambers, the wealthy Trentonian, after whom this avenue is named, and there wheel L into Greenwood avenue, another noble driveway which goes out (on R) to the famous Interstate Fair Grounds.

If you are in quest of the shortest way home to Philadelphia, keep straight on along Greenwood avenue for a couple of blocks beyond the canal, turn R into Jackson street, L into Market street, L into Warren street, R into Bridge street and there you are, as per our Trip No. 2.

If, on the contrary, you are to make a stay in Trenton, watch for Clinton street on your R, wheel into it and over Assunpink creek.

You should see the funny variants under which this creek was designated in old records, Sun Pink, Saint Pink, St. Pink and what not? With the Indians the word simply meant "gravelly creek."

Beyond it, notice the Pennsylvania Railroad depot on R; turn westward on State street, and you strike the City Hall, practically the central point of Trenton, about 18 miles from Burlington. A. E.

P. S. Trenton city, aside of its importance, is so frequently visited or passed through by our cycling community that I thought a bird's eye view of such of its thoroughfares as we are chiefly concerned with would be acceptable to my readers; hence the additional cut accompanying the present trip.