

RIVERSIDE WHEELMEN CLUB DISBANDED EARLY 1900'S

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Temecula Wheelmen of the 1890s

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In a small town consisting of farmers, cowboys, and quarrymen, Frank Fernald's Bicycle Shop seemed out of place in the late 19th and early 20th century. However, by the 1890s, the bicycle craze was at a fever pitch all across America, as people discovered a freedom of mobility without horse or engine. Fernald, a bicycle enthusiast, joined the movement and opened his Temecula shop in the 1890s.

One of the early bicycle tours to travel through the Temecula Valley came through on September 12, 1889. A group of wheelmen (cyclists) left Pasadena on an eight day cycling tour of Southern California. They traveled through La Puente and Pomona then spent their first night in South Riverside. The next day they traveled through Elsinore and Temecula heading south to San Diego. Then they returned to Pasadena via the coastal route.

In 1891, the Riverside Wheelmen Club formed. One year later, in July 1892, club members joined Los Angeles and San Diego clubs in the first annual relay race.

The route description through the Temecula Valley was as followed:

"From Perris follow the road on the left hand side of railroad track to Temecula, 32 miles. Riders must be careful at Temecula and get on the right road to Pala . . . After leaving Temecula keep the left hand of the road until it crosses the Margarita River, about four miles from the village. The road to Pala is the worst part of the journey, on account of sand, rivers, mountains, etc. Good accommodations can be had at the house of William Veal in Pala." (Riverside Daily Press, July 19, 1892)

In September 1893, The Riverside Wheelmen Club hosted their Second

Annual Meet. Prizes were awarded to the first ten riders who completed the road race. There were short distance and long distance races. Temecula residents C. F. Smith and Frank L. Fernald were listed as late arrivals for the Wheelmen's tournament.

C. F. Smith was a new Temecula bicycle enthusiast. The Riverside Daily Press wrote: "C. F. Smith, the Pauba and Santa Rosa rancher, below Temecula, rode from Pauba to Riverside yesterday in five hours, the distance being forty miles, and Mr. Smith has only been riding a wheel for three weeks." (September 9, 1893)

Frank Fernald was named a member of the Riverside Wheelmen Club in January 1894 when he set out to break a century run record between Perris and Pomona. A century run is a 100 mile course. He completed the round trip between Perris and Pomona in 8 ½ hours.

The third annual relay race between Los Angeles and San Diego took place in June 1894. A letter of greeting was sent by the mayor of Los Angeles to the mayor of San Diego in a "Pony Express" manner.

The Los Angeles Wheelmen opted out of the race, so the Riverside Wheelmen picked up the slack. Roy and Frank Fernald and William Wolf, all of Temecula, took part in the race.

The Riverside Daily Press reported on the day of the race, "A dispatch has been received from Temecula that the messages (the mayor's letter) passed through that place at 11:13 a.m. The distance to Temecula, 113 miles, was made in 6 hours and 43 minutes or at a rate of a fraction less than 8 ½ minutes to the mile" (June 16, 1894)

The Temecula team rode from the Temecula River to the Vista Post Office, a

distance of 24 miles. There they passed on the message to the Escondido Wheelmen.

Bicycle races were a common sport in many community events in 1894. Frank Fernald took part in a ten-mile road race at the Perris 4th of July celebration. At the four day Temecula Fiesta in August, not only were there foot and horse races, but also bicycle races!

At the September 1894 Riverside Wheelmen Club's Third Annual Meet, several Temecula residents participated. Riverside Wheelmen Club members from Temecula were F. L. Fernald, C. F. Smith, P. Pohlman, and William Wolf, and non club members, were M. Machado, and F.E. Machado.

By 1895, a quarter-mile bicycle track was constructed in Murrieta. In March, the Riverside Wheelmen, joined by Perris, Good Hope, Elsinore and Temecula wheelmen, enjoyed a casual ride to the Elsinore Hot Springs. In May 1895, James Patterson, Jr. and W.D. Newers, of Perris set out to break Frank Fernald's 1894 century road record. (It is unknown if they accomplished that feat)

Women were also bicycle enthusiasts. In the 1890s, The Ladies' Spinning Club was formed in Riverside. There are few club reports or of women competitors in the sport. Most Ladies' Spinning Club events, such as moonlight rides, were more for leisure. However, in August 1894, Mrs. George W. Cobb, of Riverside, accompanied 35 Riverside wheelmen on a round trip to Pomona. "Quite a long ride for a lady," a Riverside Daily Press reporter wrote.

Children enjoyed cycling just as much. Here is one account from 1895:

"Two little girls fasten an end of a long rope to each bicycle, give the middle of the rope to their mother, who holds it tightly, whips up the horse, and away they go for a mile or so, or until the top of the grade is reached, when the rope is untied and the girls – with a "Thank you mama," go spinning back over the road." (Riverside Daily Press, July 10, 1895)

At the turn of the century, the Riverside Wheelmen Club disbanded. The Inland Highway slowly paved over the old dirt wagon roads and more cars rolled into the valley. Around 1910 Fernald opened the Temecula Valley Garage. Then on June 5, 1917, Frank L. Fernald died. However, the bicycle legacy lived on in the valley.

In 1917, seventy-three Riverside bicycle enthusiasts reformed the Riverside Wheelmen Club. In December 1917, club members Gerald Loucks and Lawrence Martinez, two-sixteen year old Riverside boys, rode their bicycles from Riverside to San Diego to establish the club's first road record. As they pedaled down Front Street, passing Fernald's garage, the spirit of the old bicycle shop owner must have been smiling proudly as the two boys raced by.

How does the two young men's journey end? Well, that is another story waiting to be told.

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