



**Black Rock**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Black Rock  
Riverside  
Grant Amherst  
West Hertel

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## The Black Rock Cycle Club

By Doreen DeBoth



The Black Rock Cycle Club c.1900

Buffalo was called a "Wheelman's Paradise" back in the 1890's when bikes were used as the main source of transportation to get to work, other destinations or make deliveries. Earlier, bikes had to compete with horse and buggies with almost no asphalt pavement. As the City of Buffalo grew, paved streets were added and recreational biking became popular. It was during this time that many bike clubs were formed.

The Black Rock Cycle Club was formed, and incorporated on September 2, 1896. Other bicycle clubs were active at the same and included the Rambler's Bicycle Club, The Press, the Parkside, the Imperial, and the Comrades to name a few. They made club runs to surrounding towns on Sundays. Afterwards they would engage in a game of football or similar sport then bike together back to Buffalo.

The BRCC clubhouse was originally located at Austin and Churchill Streets and moved to a new clubhouse at 1909 Niagara Street to increase their membership and it was easier to reach than the present one.

As the use of automobiles grew, the cycle clubs added other sports and the BRCC gymnasium was booming with baseball, basketball, cribbage, push ball, wrestling, handball tournaments, or regular gymnastic exercises. The *International Gazette* of Feb. 16, 1909 states that "the gymnastics stunts put up by some of the members would cause a professional to blush, but then it's developing muscle and making men"

Bowling was also part of their agenda as many amateur bowlers turned up at Barth's alleys

for fun and match games played on Friday evenings. This is where the committee would pick the best for their teams.

The *International Gazette* featured all club activities in a column titled "Among the Club" each Wednesday so that sports enthusiasts would be kept informed of games scores, players, tournaments and other activities of the cycle clubs.



BRCC First Handball Tournament trophy won in 1909

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The very first Handball Tournament was held by the Black Rock Cycle Club in 1909. In that year, twelve handball teams were entered in a tournament and games were played on Monday and Saturday evenings. In one particular game, they played their heads off to retain their lead in the league. They were so confident that they challenged any team in the city for a series of games.

BRCC was also well-known for their fast baseball team. Games were played against the West Sides, the All Stars at Highland Park (corner Main and Leroy), and the A.R. Co. teams played on Goetz's grounds

In basketball, the Buffalo and Susquehanna team was defeated by the BRCC quintette (73 to 23) playing at the Palace roller ring on Maryland Street (April, 1909). In another game against the Stars and Stripes of Niagara Falls they trounced them winning 49 to 14 (Jan. 1909). They also played teams at Lancaster and St. Catherine's and in Caton's Hall on Johnson Park near Delaware Avenue that featured a large court.



Push ball trophy won by Black Rock CC March 1, 1913  
Trophies donated by the Black Rock/Riverside Neighborhood Housing Services

Push Ball, similar to the game of football, was played with a six foot diameter ball. This trophy is one of two push ball trophies that we have in our collection. Won by the Black Rock CC vs Lafayette H. S. on March 15, 1913, this one is made of silver with a simpler elegance of design.

Wrestling and boxing were favored sports and games offered exciting amusement. "Pat Woelfley, a corking 135 lb. ring artist, who hails from the Rock and has admirers galore, faces Kid Becker in the roped arena tonight, and this bout alone will be well worth the admission" was written in the March 28, 1908 issue of the International Gazette. That game was played at Root's Hall, corner of Military Road and the city line.

Many of the bicycle clubs that were active in the 1890's had facilities for complete social activities. The BRCC also held dances and private balls at their club for members and their guests. While other cycling clubs that once flourished such as the Press and the Ramblers had faded out of sight by 1925, an effort was made during this time to bring the BRCC into its old time prominence. We do know that they played and won a trophy on August 10, 1932.

Sources:  
Buffalo Evening News Saturday, June 20, 1996  
Buffalo Courier Saturday, July 25, 1896.  
Documents of the Senate...New York 1897 vol. viii p.41  
International Gazette Nov. 7, 1908, May 22, 1909,  
July,25, 1909, April 10, 1909  
Buffalo Evening News Thursday, August 19. 1925  
Courier Nov. 12, 1927  
Times Nov. 3, 1932  
*Buffalo's Bicycles*, Burgwardt, 2001, NY

Today there are many ways to explore Buffalo's neighborhoods and waterfront by bicycle. Overall connectivity in Buffalo and surrounding areas has been made possible with the expansion of bike trails by the City of Buffalo's Bicycle Master Plan. Safer features have been implemented with new bike lanes on busy streets and sharrow markings have been imprinted on roadways.

Ways to peddle around Buffalo: GO BIKE, Buffalo BikeShare, Buffalo Pedal Tours, SLOW ROLL, Ice Bikes of Buffalo (simulates skating on Lake Erie), and the Queen City Bike Ferry will transport you and your bike to the outer harbor for \$1.

## The History of Bicycling in Buffalo

By Warren F. Glover

In all kinds of weather, bicycle enthusiasts continue to carry on their love of owning and riding bicycles. Mainly used for recreation, bicycles and their riders have formed clubs over the years. Nineteenth century clubs were mainly organized along ethnic, occupational, class and even racial lines. People tended to live in dense neighborhoods largely laid out along similar divisions, at a time when immigrants, mainly from western and eastern Europe were coming into the area to work in heavy industry. They desired to be together in communities reflecting their common language, religious and cultural background, based on their national origin. The population of the late 19th Century in Buffalo was largely German, Irish, Italian and Polish. They formed their own clubs in their communities.



1880 Velocipede

In the 1880's and 1890's, growing middle class participation in cycling led to the formation of about a dozen bicycle clubs in Buffalo, at a time when the horse and wagon provided the only transportation competition. On February 28, 1878, the first bicycle club was formed in Buffalo.



Charles Stewart Rolls (right), cofounder of Rolls-Royce, rides a tandem bicycle with a fellow Cambridge University student., 1895

As the number of clubs and members grew, activities providing a social space were added. These included bike races, dinners, sports award ceremonies and children's events, serving to bring club members closer together in their love for the sport. Many private companies, such as the Thomas Manufacturing complex, sponsored clubs as a way to project their corporate brand into the consumer population. While specialty clubs may have implied divisiveness, many eventually, as members of all income levels joined, proved to be vehicles of assimilation. The Unione Sportiva Italiana (USI), founded in 1908, promoted amateur bicycle racing in many northeastern cities and even provided employment training and jobs to many newly arriving young men of all ethnic backgrounds.

A form of bicycle, the "velocipede" was developed in France in 1848 and essentially was a modified hobby horse, with cranks and pedals attached to a front wheel. It was first produced in Buffalo in 1855 and by the summer of 1869 over 1000 riders of these bikes were reported active on city streets. Several bike riding schools were established simultaneously. By 1872, the firm of Georg Parr at 76 Exchange Street was making thousands of these bikes per year and shipping them throughout the world.



1902 Niagara Street Buffalo  
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**Museum Hours:**

Friday 10:00am-4:00pm  
Saturday 11:00am-3:00pm

For any inquiries please contact us at  
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**Find us online!**

[www.blackrockhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.blackrockhistoricalsociety.com)



**The BRHS  
Seeks Volunteers**

Your expertise, interest and/or love of history are good reasons to volunteer. Students, seniors and everyone in-between are welcome to volunteer in various areas of interest: office/computer, education, outreach, maintenance, etc. You can strengthen your community, learn about preservation, and meet new people. Every volunteer can make a difference. To volunteer, contact us via email on our website or call 716-510-4007.

**Artifact Donations**

If you think you may have items or photos that tell the story of our area. you can bring them to the museum, or we will gladly pick them up ( call 716-510-4007).

The Buffalo Rambler Club was started in 1880, racing at Buffalo Athletic Club facilities, whose riders mostly used the “ordinary”, with a large front wheel and a small rear wheel. When the chain drive was invented in 1877, with one gear speed, the wheels became equal in size. This was the “safety” bicycle, still used today. Then came the “tandem” with multiple riders. Other local clubs included the Buffalo Bicycling Club and the Press Cycling Club, all promoting many races. The first bike race in Buffalo was in 1886, at the Hamlin Racing Track near East Ferry Street. Races became even longer in the 1890’s, with some running over routes 50 miles long. And racers reached speeds up to 110 miles per hour.

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, about 79 manufacturers made bicycles in Buffalo. When the automobile began to replace the bicycle as a more practical means of long distance transport, many of the bike makers, as the George N. Pierce Company, converted to auto production and the boom days of bicycle riding were over. By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, bicycles were mainly ridden by children and messengers, but after the 1960’s, bike clubs like today’s SLOW ROLL Buffalo, began to reestablish themselves and again promise racing, with this club specializing in their safe speed family oriented, open to all ages, exploration of lesser known paths, mainly to examine historic neighborhoods and buildings in our city.

Sources: “Adventures in Western New York History”. Publication date: 1969. Subtitle: (Manufacturers of Wheels and Motors – Bicycles section)., author: Roger Squire.

**Recent Acquisitions**

The Black Rock Historical Society recently acquired a collection of vintage ticket stubs (27) from the 1930’s issued by various clubs in Black Rock and Buffalo. A big thank you goes to the donor Barbara Reynolds of Hertel Avenue.



**150th Fenian Commemoration Recap**

The BRHS was very pleased to host a luncheon on May 25 with a very special guest, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Criona Ni Dhalaigh. Senator Tim Kennedy was instrumental in bringing her to Buffalo. Fenian commemoration planning committee members including local politicians and historians were also present. On June 3 & 4, the Consul General of Ireland in New York, Barbara Jones was our guest for the Hooley at the Buffalo Irish Center; was Grand Marshall of the parade procession with Senator Kennedy and was a speaker at the Commemoration Ceremony that took place at the monument in Tow Path Park. The Parade Procession is believed to be the first parade on that part of Niagara Street since World War I.