Trips Awheel: Where to go and how to get there

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Cycle Route 2 (1897-98 series)

**Bristol to Trenton and Princeton, En Route to New York**

(The stroke line indicates the route described.)

Note –for brevity’s sake, R is used in these Trips Awheel for “right” or “on the right,” L for “Left” or “on the left,” and X for “crossing” or “crossroads.”

**TO OUR CYCLING READERS.**

The present congested condition of the Inquirer precludes the possibility of publishing the Road Information Bureau more than once per week, viz.; on Friday. Correspondents should therefore have their inquiries reach this office not later than Wednesday morning. Owing to the same reasons, and for the immediate present, the Trips Awheel will be issued on Sunday only. A number of inquiries received up to this date will be answered next week.

**TIME-HONORED BRISTOL.**

The first stage of our trip toward New York brought us to Bristol last Sunday.

Just before the bifurcation of our road into Bath street L and Mill street R, take note of J. Headley’s little repair shop R. It might be useful to you on an emergency.

We bear R at Closson’s Hotel, cross over the Delaware canal and the Pennsylvania Railroad track, and as we go along Mill street, watch for Wood street on L. One square down Wood street, at the corner of Market, stands one of the earliest Friends’ meetings houses in this country; it was built about 1713, and like so many others was used as a hospital at the time of the Revolution.

Some day we may follow Mill street to its very extremity on the river and cross over to Burlington or go home by boat altogether. To-day we turn sharp L into Radcliffe street. This was once the King’s Highway, the only street or road through “New Bristol” and “New Bristol” was thus named after Bristol in England, the home of William Penn’s wife, Hannah Callowhill.

If you keep a lookout L for Walnut street, you will get a glimpse, even without dismounting, of old St. James’ Church, the first building of which dates from 1712. During the Revolution our poor troops were compelled to use it as a stable for their cavalry. The student of history, or of folklore, will find much that will interest him in the burial ground that surrounds it. At one place he will see the tomb of Captain John Green, of the American Navy who is credited with the double honor of having been the first to carry the Stars and Stripes in a voyage around the world and of bringing the first batch of Shanghai fowls to this country. Yonder lie the remains of Ludwig, the son of Baron Ludwig and Baroness Hortense
Niedesteeter who had come from Prussia all the way across the Atlantic to summer at the Bath Springs here; for you must know that a portion of this township was once known as “Bath,” and as late as 50 years ago Thomas F. Gorgon enthused over the “dark yellow or ochre colored substance, usually indicative of chalybeate springs” with which the surface of ponds to the west and northwest of the village were covered. “The Carlsbad of America” was then not considered too pompous a title for Bristol.

And further up still on this Radcliffe street do you observe R, as the corner of Dorrance street, that square-build white house with high windows down to the ground and shutters that once were green? This is Bristol’s “haunted house.” The stories that have been told about it would fill a small book. It’s plain matter-of-fact history is that it was erected in 1816 by a Major Knox who had been U.S. Minister to Great Britain, and that its proverbial hospitality was enjoyed by a number of distinguished guests from Europe as well as the noted men of the day in that country. Joseph Bonaparte, the ex king of Spain, and Prince Murat (we shall refer to them again when we ride to Bordentown some day) were often among the former. On the death of the Major, the property went to his niece, Miss S. L. Keene, and she dying in a single blessedness, bequeathed the mansion and a considerable sum of money for the maintenance of “five, six, or more aged gentlewomen, widows or single women, of respectability and decayed fortune.” Somehow (???) the beautiful place has been untenanted for many years; hence it’s alleged occupancy by visitor from spiritual worlds unknown.

ROADSIDE HAMLETS.

About one mile of pleasant riding takes us to another diminutive brook, and we get out of the borough jurisdiction.

It is a pleasure to follow our side path as it meanders through the trees on the grassy bank of the Delaware. Let us enjoy it while we may, for at Tullytown it assumes once more the title of “sidewalk,” and is forbidden to us by order of the powers that be.

The sight of the present roadway would be sure to strike a sympathetic chord in the heart of old John Tully, the first settler in this place; it can’t have altered very much since he saw it last.

Fortunately, the Wheelman’s road Association of Bristol is improving the [rest of]it for us and will soon give us a pleasant cycleway from their town to this spot and ultimately to Trenton. This hustling association, by the way, numbers 300 members at present; may their shadow never grow less!

Outside Tullytown take care you bear L at the bifurcation; the right road goes to Pennsbury and the waterside generally.

You have heard of course of the remarkable affection that William Penn took for this valley in the bend of the Delaware, and of his unrealized dreams ahen Pennsbur, that $25,000 mansion in which he had hoped to end his days in peace; $25,000 was a colossal expenditure in those days.

This ugly bridge over which we go is the twenty-five mile landmark from Philadelphia, and the tavern beyond it on our left is one of the many “Wheat Sheaf” Inns that we meet in our rambles.
Another turn R, here, would bring you to the site of Penn’s Mansion, 2 m. L to Fallsington, 3 m.

Penn Valley, with its station R, in sight of the pike, is the next hamlet on our road.

Again we cross over the canal and the railroad; and now be careful to turn L at the next opportunity and fall back into the line of the telegram posts with which we parted company a few moments ago.

The name of this little hamlet, Tyburn, may possibly recall to you the historical place of execution for felons in London, England. As a coincidence, this locality owes its name to the execution of a certain John Tyburn, whose hanging in the early years of this century was witnessed by the grandfather of the man who tendered me the information.

A Gazetteer of Pennsylvania, published in the year of grace 1832 describes Tyburn as “a small village of Falls t-ship, Bucks Co., on the turnpike road leading from Bristol to Trenton, 7 miles from the former, and 3 from the latter. Contains some half dozen dwellings, store and tavern.”

I fear its present description would not amount even to that standard of worldly prosperity.

MORRISVILLE.

Thirty miles from home we strike Morrisville and turn sharp L into Smith street.

I turned to the right one day, just to kill time while waiting for a friend, and rambled into the burial ground a short distance down the road. When I reached the centre of the place the following caught my eye, over the tomb of a man who died April 18, 1862:

If leading politicians and Priests all go to Heaven then I am bound to stop at some other station.

And talking of eccentric characters, you may be acquainted with Biles Island, a little way from here on the Delaware (see map). Its owner (who had purchased it from the Indians in 1680) was much talked of in his day for the reason that Governor John Evans sued him for slander for calling him a “boy.”

Morrisville? Who has not heard of Washington’s big-hearted colleague in the troublous times of this country’s birth, Robert Morris, the financier of our Revolutionary War? He owned considerable property hereabouts, and resided here form some time; and so the place gradually took his name. His princely mansion was subsequently purchased by the French general, Victor Moreau. You may have had read about the latter. He and Pichegru were two of the Breton royalists whom Bonaparte considered as standing in the way of his imperial dreams as a natural consequence he had them both thrown into prison; Pichegru was found strangled in his cell; Moreau escaped to these shores and lived here for three years in exile. Then the Morris mansion was utterly destroyed by fire; Moreau returned to Europe and was killed at the battle of Dresden in 1813.

Before Morris’s time this locality was known as Colvin’s Ferry; it was Patrick Colvin plied the ferry here when Washington returned across the river with his prisoners after the battle of Trenton.
The first settlers on the opposed shore imitated the Indians and call it “Little Worth” like them, as the red man told them it was liable to be swept away at any time by the river. The name it now bears is that of Chief Justice William Trent, at one time Speaker of the Assembly, who died in 1724.

TRENTON.

After crossing the railroad track take, R, Bridge street, which runs parallel to it. We relieve ourselves of two cents (it used to be five) for toll, cross the Delaware, and the second street L after leaving the bridge is Warren street, which will take us through the city.

The present chitchat affords no opportunity, of course, to do justice to a city of 58,000 inhabitants, the capital of a State, at that, the chief of the pottery industry of this country, and what not. Trenton deserves to be seen in detail and at leisure.

See the Masonic Temple on L, corner of Warren and State streets (31 m. from home)? That’s where Colonel Abram Hunt’s house stood at the time of the Revolution. What a glorious old Christmas Colonel Rahl and his Hessians spent in that house quaffing the choicest brands in the cellars of their host – for old Hunt was a wealthy merchant whose private stock of wines and rum was famed far and near. And what an ending there was to their drunken revelry when Washington and his starving soldiers fell upon them in the early morn!

Think of this when, after proceeding a little farther up the street, you find R, opposite the Reading depot, the monument erected “to commemorate the victory gained by the American Army over the forces of Great Britain in the town on the 26th day of December, Anno Domini 1776.”

AT THE CROSS-ROADS.

This monument is a landmark along our route. Pennington avenue is on our L. Participators in the old-time Newark-Philadelphia century may remember it as the unlovely road along which they toiled and moiled through Somerville, Hopewell and Pennington towards home and glory (?).

Straight on before us stretches an abomination euphemistically designated “Princeton Pike.” Trenton is doing so much toward the improvement of her highways that the day cannot be distant, surely, when this plague spot will cease to disgrace her. If you be a lover of the straight line at any cost, follow it up for a while; about three-quarters of a mile from this spot a sidepath will offer you some relief from your misery and we shall meet you at the Lawrenceville road crossing.

Sharp on R is Brunswick ave. Let us take it. A couple of squares of brick pavement, a good stretch of macadam, a mile of sidepath, a quarter mile of newly piked road, and here we are at the intersection of the thing called Princeton pike aforesaid.

It reminds me forcibly of an advertisement I once clipped from the American Weekly Mercury of February 7, 1737:
“To Accommodate the PUBLIC, There will be a Stage-Waggon set out from Trenton to Brunswick, Twice a Week, and back again, during the next summer. It will be fitted with Benches and Cover’d over, so that Passengers may sit Easy and Dry; and Care will be taken to Deliver Goods and Messages Safe.

“Every Passenger to Pay Two Shillings and Six-pence.”

Heaven help our forefathers! One glance at “Princeton Pike” is quite enough for us, and we gladly follow the finger of that friendly post pointed to “Lawrenceville 3 m.”

ON TO LAWRENCEVILLE.

This tiny creek with the stone bridge is the Shabbakunk; the native gamin calls it Shabby Skunk of course.

And we spin so merrily along that we are in Lawrenceville in a trice. As we strike the town (36 ½ m.) notice L turn to Ewingville 3 m., and R to Baker’s Basin, 2 m.

This little town had the good luck to strike the fancy of the British General Cornwallis during the darkest hours of our Revolutionary struggle. It was then known as Maidenhead. All looked so pleasant in this section, and the cause of the “dirty rebels” seemed so hopeless that he took his ease right here, and thereby gave the said rebels an unexpected opportunity of which they availed themselves with the result that you know.

Do not rush through Lawrenceville without a look at this considerable group of buildings on R. This is the Lawrenceville School, John C. Green Foundation, a non-sectarian, up-to-date, thoroughly American educational institution, second to none in its kind in the magnificence of its material equipment or the high standard of its moral and intellectual training. These grounds and buildings, representing an investment of a million dollars, owe their existence to the large-hearted liberality of one who was born on a farm in this very village and worked his way up to the foremost rank among our tea-traders with China, the late John C. Green. There are worse object-lessons than this, to be picked up on a trip awheel.

GREAT IMPROVEMENTS HERE.

On we go, past this other turn L going to Rossdale; and as we leave the village what a surprise awaits those of us who have who have not travelled this road for a twelvemonth! That red shale on each side of the good stone road we now glide over is a reminder of “a past, happily no more;” that diminutive path, R, was our only plank of salvation, and how we stuck to it!

The predecessor of this neat little bridge over Shipetauken of Nine Mile Creek (38 ¼ m.) was anything but a pleasant landmark with us; the hill beyond it, now so smooth and easy, was a disheartening series of irregular bumps; and what tales of woes those cedar trees heard vented beneath their grateful shade!

The country around is truly fine and varied; not until now, however, could we give it more than a passing glance, without exposing our mounts or our precious selves to too great a risk.
This other hill (2 m. farther) going down to Stony Brook – the Millett’s Hill of the Revolution – wrecked many a cheap wheel in modern times. Since last summer, however, its top has been lowered 8 feet, the grade at its foot has been raised 8 feet also, its surface stone-piked and rolled; you would hardly recognize it now. The steep gradients that had to be overcome and the bridges to be constructed along this stretch from Lawrenceville to Princeton made it an expensive improvement; never mind, New Jersey is sure to get back the $50,000 she spent on it, and more; and she will have the honor, besides, of having set an example which other States will have to follow sooner or later.

STONY BROOK AND GEN. MERCER.

“40 miles to Philadelphia; 56 miles to New York,” says the inscription on the Stony Brook bridge. “Nit!” exclaimed a naughty youth the other day as he looked at his cyclometer and found that it registered 40½ miles from our Public Buildings, forgetting (as so many others are apt to do) the different routes adopted between the same points by our forefathers and by ourselves, as well as the slight margin which it is but natural to allow in the measurement of the same route by different cyclometers or even by the same cyclometer under different circumstances.

This turn R beyond the creek (at present unmarked by any sign) goes to Port Windsor.

Up yonder heights on our R, stood the historic house of William Clark, near which brave General Mercer was mortally wounded while endeavoring to rally his troops suddenly confronted by one of Cornwallis’s regiments, during the American advance towards Princeton. It was after him, you know, that this county was named; so was little “Mercerville,” near Trenton. He was a native of Scotland, where he had served as assistant surgeon at the famous battle of Culloden; and, in this country, he had fought under Washington in the old Indian war of 1756-1766.

We now face one mile of up-grade; and a noble estate on R welcomes us into Princeton. Notice en passant that turn L with the telegraph posts; it goes to Cedar Grove and over Rocky Hill to Blawenberg.

PRINCETON.

Half a mile farther, we pass Princeton Inn and enter the classical atmosphere of the “Rural University” par excellence (42 ¼ m.)

Never again speak of the latter, by the way, as Princeton College.

Last October, the “College of New Jersey,” after 150 years’ of existence, in Elizabeth at first, then in Newark and since 1756 in Princeton, took the proud and well-earned title of “Princeton University.”

What think you of the campus, stretching along the main street for a quarter of a mile, and of its carpet of luscious green? Behind those aged elms is Nassau Hall, the oldest of the University buildings. Read the memorial tablet placed on its front entrance last year:

“This building erected in 1756, by the College of New Jersey, and named Nassau Hall in honor of King William III, was seized by British forces for military purposes in 1776, and retaken by the American army
January 3, 1777. Here met from June 30, 1783, until November 4, 1783, the Continental Congress, and here August 26, 1783, General Washington received the gratified acknowledgment of the Congress for his services in establishing the freedom and independence of the United States.” A.E.

P.S. – SECOND STREET BELOW NICETOWN LANE. – That portion of Second street between Glenwood avenue and Nicetown lane spoken of in last Sunday’s Trip Awheel as “a disgraceful roadway that has been unimproved for a quarter of a century,” is actually being stone-piked this week; and the oldest resident keeps rubbing his eyes in utter bewilderment.

A.E.