Trips Awheel: Where to Go and How to Get There
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Cycle Route No. 25 (1897-98 Series).

Brandywine to Susquehanna Along the Baltimore Pike: Through Kennett Square, Avondale, Lincoln University, Oxford, Brick Meeting House and Port Deposit

Last week’s trip along the Baltimore pike brought as far as Chadd’s Ford.

“Chadd’s Ford” it used to be, and originally “Francis Chadsley’s ford.” It looks as though John, the heir of said Francis Chadsley thought life was too short for him to write two whole syllables every time he had to sign his name, for when he contracted to maintain a ferry boat here in 1737 he put himself down as John Chads, hence the present further mutilated designation of the locality.

A famous place (alas!) it became in our national history. Old Chad’s house, Washington’s and Lafayette’s headquarters are all here still. We might make a special pilgrimage here some day and study one of the painful chapters of our annals on the very spot where its scenes were enacted.

INTO CHESTER COUNTY.

At the crossing near the hotel the R road leads to Lenape and West Chester, the L to the railroad station; we proceed straight out westward, cross the creek and enter Chester county, bearing R at Chadd’s Ford Junction Station, on the other side of the bridge.

Would that our change of State implied an improvement in the condition of the highway! The country is beautiful, but the less is said of the roadway the better, and the unbroken series of hills between this and the Susquehanna are sure to tax the forbearance of any cyclist who is not compelled to travel this way for business purposes.

OLD WILLIAM BRINTON.

One and a quarter miles from Chadd’s Ford Hotel, bear L (no sign at present date). Half a mile farther a road from Brinton’s Bridge on the West Chester Lenape road, joins us from R. Do you notice the house in the angle formed by the two roads? The present occupier of it is the fifth successive representative of the Brinton blood that has lived in it. William Brinton, of Birmingham, England, was one of the earliest pioneers in this section; his name was bestowed on the bridge in question and on the creek it crosses, and the name of his native home on the township next to this one, on the east side of the Brandywine.

Another mile ahead (3 m. from start), notice turn R to Parkersville and thence to Downington, 10 m.; L to Fairville and on to Wilmington, 10 m. distant also; straight on for us.

ROADSIDE HAMLETS.

On reaching Hamorton bear R, going up the hill, and a few yards farther (4 ½ m.), we are joined L by the Wilmington road, into which you would have fallen had you turned L at the preceding fork.
If you keep your eyes open you will see a couple of bicycle repair shops here. Such things prove convenient at times. Last year I picked up, some distance from this town, a young cyclist who had started from Philadelphia for Conowingo on the Susquehanna without his pump. Mine unfortunately did not fit the valve stem of his deflated tire; the amount of walking that poor young man went through, up and down these hills until he struck this place, must doubtless have been a lesson to him for the future.

The house at the next crossing used to be The Anvil tavern, years ago, and the locality is still known by its name. That mud road R goes to West Chester, and we are careful to take the turn L for Kennett Square.

KENNETT SQUARE.

Another couple of turnings R to Red Lion or Dugdale or Longwood (which is all the same), and L to Rosedale, we keep straight on; a rough descent brings us down to the East Branch of Red Clay Creek; we run up State street, and at its intersection with Union street our cyclometers register a little over seven miles from Chadd’s Ford.

There is a little river called Kennet in Wiltshire, in England, and on it a little town of the name of Kennet, not far from Marlborough. The fact that the Kennett township in which we are now, at the head of the Toughkenamon Valley, – is adjacent to Marlborough township, is not a mere coincidence of course. Francis Smith, one of the first pioneers hereabouts, in 1686, came from Wiltshire; and this sufficiently explains the origin of these two names.

In old documents the designation of this place is always spelt Kennet; why modern reformers have gratuitously added another t is more than I can tell you.

Outside of a well-known road machine factory there is hardly any business in Kennett Square, save in connection with agriculture; but as is generally the case in old localities occupied by the descendants of the original settlers, most people here are “pretty well fixed” – to use the local expression.

Let me throw out the hint, however, that cyclists who might drop in here on Sunday, without having made arrangements for their bodily comfort beforehand, would be likely to find themselves anything but “well fixed.”

WHAT THERE IS IN A NAME!

Well, out of Kennett Square we spin through Union street and over Clay Creek (the western branch this time).

What there is in that name “Clay” Creek I hope you’ll never find out, on a wet day. Just now the clay on our road is in the pulverized state, and we are thankful for it.

Names? How about Toughkenamon (10 m. from start)? The station is on L on the road to Newark (or, as the present sign post has it, “New Ark”); the village comes as far as the pike; R to London Grove, 2 m.

The funny aspect of that “Toughkenamon” would be best appreciated by its originators, the Indians. What with us is an outlandish freak was, with them, doubtless a very simple word, and it meant “firebrand hill.” On one of the hilltops hereabout they used to flash their fire signals across the valleys, and hence the very natural designation.
“OLD COUNTRY” MEMENTOES.

Avondale (11 ‘m.) would recall to any sympathizer with the cause of downtrodden Ireland the homestead of the late Charles Stewart Parnell in the “ould countrhy.”

As a coincidence, did we keep straight on at the crossing here we should go to Chatham, and the English Chatham is not far from the place where poor Parnell died. And the turning L (which we follow only for a block when we branch R) would take us to New London.

London Grove, north of us; New London, southwest of us; where are we at?” You might be tempted to inquire. Well, you see, in William Penn’s time, a few Englishmen clubbed together to purchase land from him under the title of the “London Company,” and they located in this section, and that’s all there is in it.

As to that, the English settlers seem to have scattered pretty well all over this beautiful country, while the Germans showed a preference for the northern section if it, the Irish for the southwest and the Welsh for the “great valley.”

LOVELY COUNTRY; WRETCHED ROADS.

Should you ever be puzzled at the bifurcations hereabouts on your way to West Grove, follow the electric wires, not the telegraph posts.

What a long hill this is, some 12 m. from Chadd’s Ford! West Marlborough, the adjacent township was once known as Hilltown; no wonder the name was changed; it would apply equally well to every other township that we cross on this trip.

And to make it worse, the road surface is worthy of New Jersey, and the path that we usually find there, is often invisible here.

And how lovely it is on the summit, when we have reached it!

Here another turn R offers to bring you to Chatham; don’t take it; pass by the extensive grounds of Dingee & Conard, the florists, and turn sharp R down this steep descent; but, should you have got on to that tempting sideway on R, come away from it at once, it has been completely washed away, 100 yards further, and you’ll break your neck down the high embankment.

As we strike West Grove station, we bear L then R into Prospect avenue, L into Evergreen street and away.

Away, but not very fast, unless you wish to smash your wheel over this rocky roadbed.

We pass a turn R to Doe Run, another near the mills to London Grove, and we strike another toilsome hill, practically unclimbable awheel.

On its summit, little Jennersville (16 ¾ m.) enjoys the charms of its splendid location and the advantage of its pure atmosphere. Jennersville naturally recalls the world-known Edward Jenner; yet who could associate so healthy a spot as this with smallpox or any other disease. By the way, it will be 100 years, this coming year, since Jenner announced his discovery of vaccination.
At the crossroad here, R to Londonderry, L to Elkview; keep straight on as though you were bound for Russellville; a bad hill and a wretched road.

At bifurcation with sign pointing R to Russellville, L to Oxford, take the latter branch.

A short but positively dangerous descent 18 m. from start; and 1 1/4 m. further is Forestville, the merest shadow of a hamlet.

Here another turn R to Russellville and another to Elkview. See Elkdale a short distance S W on the map? And did you notice a creek that we crossed between Jennersville and Forestville? It is Big Elk Creek, one of the two feeders of Elk River at the head of which is Elkton; and you passed through that town if you came with us to Baltimore last season via Perryville.

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY.

About a mile beyond Forestville, on one of the highest hills we have climbed to-day, where the road for a short distance shows intermittent signs of slight improvement, a group of brick buildings on L attracts your attention. It is the Lincoln University, an institution for the higher education of colored youth.

It was first incorporated 43 years ago, as “Ashmun Institute” after the well-known philanthropist and founder of Liberia, Jehudi Ashmun; but its name was changed to its present form immediately after Abe Lincoln’s assassination.

It occupies, as you may see, a commanding position; it educates an average of 200 students who, on graduating after a four years’ course, receive the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and boasts a library of some 18,000 volumes.

MORE HILLS.

And now having come up so very high, we must needs go down again, of course, past that turn R to Hayesville and further down still, how would our “hands off” asphalt youths look, going down this declivity, think you? And do you notice that serpentine thing curling up that other rise right ahead of us? Well, we shall know what hill-riding is like, before this day is over!

OXFORD, PA.

Here we are at Oxford anyhow (23 ½ m.). Lincoln avenue, which we strike first, leads us into Market street; we turn R into it and L immediately after into Third street.

You have got two hotels to select from, right at this very corner. Oxford, you must know, is a thrifty town, the centre of a prosperous agricultural district; but my, those roads! What do you think of local wheelman making a circuit northward by way of Coatesville and the Lancaster pike, or eastward via Wilmington, when they want to ride to Philadelphia, rather than face the Baltimore pike we have just traveled?

WE LEAVE THE PIKE.

Well, we are only 17 miles from the Susquehanna now; and the road is slightly better, we are told.
So we go out Third street; and one-half a mile away, on the outskirt of the village, we turn L away from the pike across the railroad track and bear R on the other side of said track; this newer road is easier than the pike and we shall fall into the latter again at Chrome.

“It’s a crooked road,” a passer-by informs us, “but you can’t go astray unless you turn off of it, one side or the other.”

Thus forewarned we follow this mud road, which turns out to be rolling rather than hilly, and we avoid successive turnings R to New Prospect, L to Elk Dale, R to Stubbs’ Mill, L to Mt. Jordan until (27 m.) we fall into the pike again; bear L into it (as if going to Elkton, as per sign post), and strike Chrome (27 ¾ m.).

CHROME AND ITS PITS.

The climbing of those hills may have reminded you painfully of grinding up “chromatic scales;” this little village is associated with valuable chrome pits; and you may be pleased to know that Chester county exports a considerable quantity of chrome to Europe.

At the village crossing, R to Nottingham, L to Lombard.

We go straight through, cross into Maryland unknown to ourselves, and a little over two miles from Chrome we come to a useful landmark, a grove by the side of which a rod joins us on L from New London.

OLD-TIME ROAD-SIGNS.

There is no post at this angle; our ancestors in Maryland in general and in Cecil county in particular, were more careful in this respect.

The roads leading to the courthouses of the different counties were ordered by the Act of 1704 to be marked “by two notches cut in the trees on both sides of the road aforesaid, and another notch a distance above the other two. Roads leading to a church were to be marked at the entrance into the same, and at the leaving of any other road with a slip cut down the face of the tree, near the ground.”

Similarly, three notches indicated a road leading to a ferry; and if a road passed through an old field, it was to be marked by stakes plainly discernible and notched like the trees along a new road, etc., etc.

BRICK MEETING HOUSE.

Beyond the grove on L is the old historic Brick Meeting House (30 ¼ m.).

R to Conowingo, L to Elkton; straight ahead lies our road to Port Deposit, or “Port” as the folks here call it, just as they curtail “Brick Meeting House” to “Brick” simply.

Whether it is that we are getting used to rough riding or that things are really what they seem, the roads appear better here and there in patches; and along this stretch by the way, we follow the telegraph posts; don’t forget it, at a fork about 3 m. from “Brick,” where the said posts make a dive among those stately old trees.

Three miles farther, that “Temperance Drink” sign on a grocery L is a cruel tantalizer in this weather, for there is not a drop to be had; and one miles from the latter we get our first view, yonder on the horizon, of the range of hills that guard the west bank of the Susquehanna.
DOWN TO THE RIVER.

Down we go, down, down, but not to the river yet as you may possibly imagine; we have just one more hill, stiff and rough, to climb, and then we run down in earnest (do, be cautious), into Port Deposit (40 ½ m. from Chadd’s Ford).

We shall have more to say of Port Deposit next Sunday; meanwhile, if you are fond of fishing look for the Fisherman’s page in this issue of the Inquirer, and see what may be found in the Susquehanna, right at this place.

A.E.