

Patrick F. Taylor Foundation Object Project

Fact Sheet

Bicycles=Liberation

Focusing on everyday things that changed everything, “Object Project” will use common objects and uncommon exhibition techniques to encourage visitors of all ages to discover fascinating stories behind objects and the role of innovation in American history. “Object Project” will use more than 250 objects related to and including bicycles, refrigerators, ready-to-wear clothing and a variety of household conveniences to explore how people, innovative things and social change shaped life as we know it. The 4,000 square foot “Object Project” is divided into four sections: Bicycles, Refrigerators, Ready-to-Wear Clothes and Household Hits. Details on the Bicycles section are below:

Bicycles=Liberation

From the 1880s to the 1910s, Americans took to the wheel, sparking a nationwide bicycle craze. In the era before automobiles, bicycles were a means of affordable personal mobility. Americans went to new places and felt differently about themselves.

Americans got their first look at bicycles—high-wheel “machines” from England—at the Centennial Exhibition in 1876. Within two years, brisk sales of imported bikes led to domestic manufacturing as more Americans caught “wheel fever”. The introduction of chain-drive safety bikes in the late 1880s that lowered the rider’s center of gravity—then air-filled tires and coaster brakes in the 1890s—made bicycles more accessible.

HIGHLIGHTED OBJECTS

•Mrs. Wiley’s Bicycle, 1896

“Object Project” features a Columbia bicycle that was customized by Tiffany & Co. in 1896. It boasts a nickel-plated frame with gold-plated sterling silver ornamentation, ivory handlebar grips, and a sterling silver lantern with a rock crystal lens. The bike bears the monogram of its owner—Mrs. M.N. Wiley of Montgomery, Ala.—whose initials are embellished with tiny diamonds and emeralds.



• *The Scorcher March and Two Step* sheet music, 1897

“Object Project” features sheet music from the 1890s with cover illustrations that reflect how women “awheel” enjoyed unprecedented mobility and independence. For women, the bicycle was, according to one observer in 1896, “a steed upon which they rode into a new world.” A scorcher was a fast or reckless rider.

• Gold bicycle racing medal, about 1897

“Object Project” features gold medals awarded to bicycle racers. Among the most famous was African American racer Marshall “Major” Taylor who in 1896 sprinted through the color barrier in professional bicycle

racing—a wildly popular sport at the time. He was the fastest cyclist in the United States from 1897 to 1900 and the second African American to win a world championship title in sports.

- **Bicycle lantern, 1890s**

“Object Project” features bicycle lanterns from the 1880s and 1890s. Young adults rode their bicycles far from the front-porch oversight of parents and nosey neighbors, challenging—and eventually disrupting—social conventions, including courtship. With bicycle lamps, both men and women were free to pedal off to socialize unsupervised even after sunset.



- **Bicycle portraits, 1890s**

“Object Project” features tintypes from the 1890s that show cyclists across the country proudly posing with their bicycles. In doing so, they declared their embrace—and mastery—of the new technology while reinforcing their self-identities as people who were *modern*. For many, a bicycle portrait was a kind of declaration of independence.

ACTIVITIES

- **Book of the Wheel**

Visitors can delve into this “magic” over-sized scrapbook newly created in authentic period style. Overhead projections fill its pages with photographs, clippings, and ephemera that materialize and swoop into place on the page; these are annotated with the musings of journalists, “opinionators” and enthusiasts from the 1880s and 1890s. Touch-activated surprises await visitors on every page in chapters titled “Off to the Races,” “Out on the Road,” “Wheel Fever” and “Untrammelled Womanhood.”

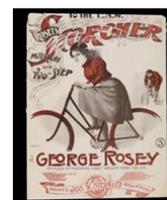
- **Ride a Bike**

Visitors can sit atop representations of two 1880s high-wheel or “ordinary” bicycles and pose for pictures in front of photomurals of painted backdrops from a photography studio of the period (reproduced from glass plate negatives from the Museum’s collection).

OTHER FEATURES

- **Wheelwoman**

Visitors can chat with a costumed interpreter portraying a bicyclist from the 1890s (complete with an authentic 1898 safety bicycle) who will talk about topics ranging from rational clothing to the Good Roads Movement.



- **Object Story Boards**

Within the “Object Project” are unique “gallery boards” that use advertisements, historical photographs and intriguing primary source materials to encourage active exploration of the history behind selected objects on view. Among the stories that will be available in this section are: *Firsts in bicycle manufacturing* (electric welder); *Fellowship on the road?* (stickpins); *Women on the move* (sheet music);

The first freedom rider? (racing medals); *Switching to safeties* (safety bicycle); *Let's be rational* (sport corset); *Out after dark* (bicycle lamp); *Crush hour* (bicycle bell) and *Strike a pose* (tintype bicycle portraits).

- **Stereopticons**

Visitors using vintage stereoscopes will be able to view history in 3-D via reproductions of stereographs from the 1880s to 1910s to find out for themselves answers to the question: What happened when Americans took to the wheel?

- **Hands-on Cart**

In facilitated activities, visitors will be able to handle authentic objects cyclists would have needed for a road trip and piece together the stories they hold.