

Cycling History in the Platte Canyon by Paul A. Hood

On April 17, 1899 officers and members of the Denver Wheel Club, under its president, Harry Insley, gathered to organize the Denver Wheel Club Country Club on a site in the Platte Canyon comprising 80 acres straddling the river. A month later they selected a name "for the sylvan retreat...near Estabrook, on the South Park branch of the Colorado & Southern. It will hereafter be known as Cycle Park." By August there were three cottages "and a score of tents" on the property now known as Insmont. In 1899 they built their clubhouse/hotel on the hillside above the river. A "crude" nine-hole golf course was built and tennis courts were planned. Bicycling paths were formed.

A railroad stop was established. In time, there were numerous cabins and houses built, a post office established, and a small lake was formed alongside the river. A simple wait station was built by the tracks. Today there is a large meadow by the river, surrounded by 80-100 foot spruce trees that are locally referred to as "the velodrome." There is no evidence of a racing track, but there may have been one there. An early account refers to "the Meadow, where tennis courts, golf links, croquet grounds and other outdoor games will be played."



A view of Insmont about the first decade of the 20th century. The Denver Wheel Club diverted the river for this little lake. Front and center is the house known as the "Witches Hat," which was reputedly built around 1870 as a Mennonite church. It still stands, added onto with many new wings and modifications over the years. It was the Cycle Park "cabin" of Harry Insley, last president of the Denver Wheel Club. He named the subdivision after his family name, Insley-Insmont.

In December 1901 the Denver Wheel Club was renamed "The Centennial" and its emphasis shifted to boxing, wrestling, baseball, football and golf. This evidently was a

trend of the time as, where cycling had been the sport of wealthy young men; bicycles became more affordable and common. Harry Insley continued to operate the resort, now renamed "Insmont," as a private resort until 1910, when he sold the property, with the exception of his cottage. There are mentions in the society pages of the Denver newspapers of the "season at Insmont" starting, with prominent people arriving from all over the country. One story tells of a couple who took the first automobile trip to Bailey on wagon roads, taking many hours.

The Denver Wheel club started as the Denver Bicycle Club in 1882. At that time, some of its members were arrested for riding bicycles on public streets, reflecting popular feelings against the bicycle. In 1894 the Wheel Club hosted a national racing meet that led to a huge increase in membership, making it the largest in the nation, growing from under 100 to a peak of 800! They moved from a small clubhouse on Evans Street to a larger one on Glenarm Street that included a gymnasium and a billiard room. In 1897 they built a still-larger club on California Street. For the national meet, they built a "three lap track at Broadway Park." The track "established more worlds' records than any other in the country and gave the Denver Wheel Club a renown which has never been eclipsed by any similar organization in the country."

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