

## FROM THE FILES: A BICYCLE RACE TO REMEMBER

By Katlyn Guajardo and Dana Dorman

**O**n New Year's Eve, 1897, a group of bicycle riders held a race through Haddonfield where riders tried to catch a leader who happened to be wearing a large, inflatable frog costume.

Newspapers around the country ran articles about the 11-mile race, and we found mentions of the race in newspapers in Rochester and Syracuse, New York; Lawrence, Kansas; and Washington, D. C., among others.

The following is the text of the article that appeared in *The Washington Post* on January 2, 1898:

### BIG BULLFROG AWHEEL

#### Strange Sight That Scared the Jersey Farmers

##### FANCY COSTUME FOR CYCLISTS

Chasing a Giant Croaker on a Bicycle Is a Novel Sport Introduced in Jersey – The Fugitive Frog Captured After a Chase Extending Over Eleven Miles of Country Roads – Nearly Shot by a Sportsman Who Thought He Was “Seeing Things.”

*Special Correspondence of The Sunday Post.*

Haddonfield, N.J., Dec. 31 [1897].

The good citizens of this town are not more addicted to the whiskey habit than others, but there were many who thought that their sins had found them out when, one fine day last week, they were treated to the spectacle of what looked like an antediluvian monster riding a modern bicycle through the streets. The monster was unmistakably a frog, but of what a size! No fabled croaker who in an attempt to equal the size of the boastful cow swelled himself until he burst, ever reached the bulk of this Haddonfield frog. He was monstrous, terrible, appalling, and as he rode swiftly through the streets and out into the country men turned pale and muttered solemn vows, women shrieked and ran terrified into the houses, while even the small boy, who is afraid of nothing that does not wear a glittering shield and carry a hurtful club, turned tail and made way for the apparition.

It gave heart to the startled Haddonfielders, however, to see that the specter was in reality fleeing, with a band of determined men in hot pursuit. It seemed to be

frightened, too – more frightened, even, than the spectators – for its great bulging eyes stood out of its head and its big-clawed feet gripped the pedals of the bicycle firmly, and pressed on as though for dear life. No man is afraid of anything that flees from him, and so the pursuers were soon joined by a mob of supporters, who kept up with the chase until the monster who led them had distanced all but the wheelmen, and was far in advance of these.

His big bulk kept on, scaring passers-by, who ran into ditches and climbed over fences in their haste to get away, until at last one man rode out of the ruck behind, and, bending over his handle-bars, began foot by foot to overhaul the gigantic frog. The pursuer was Elisha Lloyd, of Moorestown, a speedy rider, who can give a generous start to most of the wheelmen in his vicinity and beat them out.

#### Came Near Getting Shot.

Steadily the pursuer gained, and it looked as though the monster in front would be speedily run down. The rest of the wheelmen contented themselves with keeping within hailing distance of the leaders and watching the course of events. Presently the race came near ending with the death of the giant frog, for a sportsman who came along leveled his gun at the ugly-looking figure that led the chase, and was about to pull trigger and bring it down, when the warning shouts of the wheelmen made him lower his gun. A big dog ran out of a farm gate and dashed at the frog, barking madly, and making frantic efforts to get at him, but the monster had evidently been accustomed to such interruptions, and, cleverly dodging the dog, he scorched on faster and left him behind.

Further on a team took fright at the unusual spectacle of a mammoth frog riding a bike, and were with difficulty restrained from riding down both pursuer and pursued. Then a cow that had been peacefully chewing the cud in a meadow by the roadside caught sight of the frog, and, forgetting all but its ancient grievance against the croaker, it charged with lowered head on the procession of riders. The interruption was all in favor of the frog who raced along the roadway as though possessed with an evil spirit. Lloyd still gained on him, however, and at last ran him down.

The spectators who were in at the finish were then treated to the greatest surprise of all. Instead of throwing

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the monster from his wheel and fastening him with ropes, the pursuers gathered around, laughing and cheering. Then the big frog suddenly opened up down the center, and out from the interior stepped a man, very much disheveled, panting and exhausted, but not at all dangerous in appearance.

**New Style Hare and Hounds.**

"A fine run, boys," said the frog-man. "Five minutes more and I should have been safe home. Good thing you stopped that fool from shooting me. One of you fellows can be frog next run. Too much risk in it for my blood. I'm delicate and have an aversion to shotguns. Besides, I never liked cows, and dogs I detest, But it was a great run. I'm thirsty. Come on."

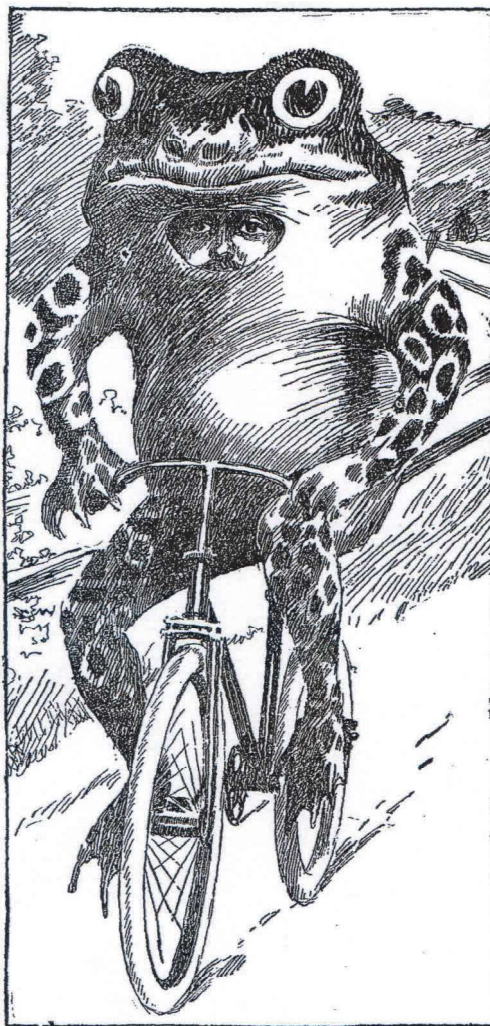
So ended the first great frog run. For it was only a man made up to look like a giant frog, after all. The idea originated with Mr. G. L. Carr, of Haddonfield, who offered a handsome medal for the winner of the race. The distance covered was eleven miles, and the time 38 minutes.

The man who caught the frog gives the following description of the novel event:

"The frog was allowed five minutes' start, and seventeen of us went in pursuit. It was the finest sport ever seen in this vicinity, and nothing has occurred for a long time to arouse so much excitement. The country people went wild over the frog's appearance among them. No one guessed for a moment that the frog was a man, and the fright we gave them as we swept along made the event all the more enjoyable. We are arranging for another frog run, this time to take place at night. The frog will be furnished with illuminated eyes and a phosphorescent suit, and as he sprints through the dark country roads I venture to predict that the appearance of the frog by daylight will not be a marker as regards scaring qualities to the frog that will appear by night. When the frog idea gets lame we intend to concoct some new scheme to keep the

excitement at fever heat."

The suit worn by the frog-man was inflated pneumatically, so that when he mounted the wheel the figure was of monstrous size, while the rider was not seriously hampered by his outfit. It was easy for the pursuers to keep him in view, for, apart from the fact that his course could be tracked by the sensation he caused, the frog was so big that he towered over every other object on the roadway. Those who saw him for the first time on that eventful run and were not in the secret of his make-up will long have reason to remember the shock it gave them.



THE BICYCLE FROG.