

Welcome to ***The Legacy***—the page that chronicles the history of the Reno Wheelmen. In ***The Legacy*** we will document the origins of the club, highlight key achievements, and introduce you to key figures in our past.

While many know the exploits of some of our most famous members—Greg LeMond and Inga Thompson, for example—did you know the club was founded in 1896? As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, the Reno Wheelmen boasted over 400 members, and that at a time when the city's population was only about 4,000. Today, we have 120 members. We have some catching up to do! The RW was the sporting and social center of the community. At that glorious moment in the club's history the RW even had it's own clubhouse—Wheelmen Hall—with weight room, swimming pool, social hall and more. It held concerts, dances and even plays at the clubhouse. Did you know, the club even had its own band! Yes, like in concert band with tubas and everything! Anybody have a middle-school trombone to dust off?!

Now, the Legacy of the Reno Wheelmen. I hope you enjoy the coming series.

Issue 1: This Guy Could Ride! Meet Art Keddie, “The Big Size”

by Bill Cline
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July, 109 years ago, a couple dozen Reno Wheelmen packed up their bikes and together with 150 faithful supporters set off over the Sierra. Destination, Sacramento, to take on powerhouse Capital City Wheelmen for the Pacific Coast Championships. The format was simple. A 50-mile relay race. One rider at a time from each team, each doing five miles. Ten different riders on a team. Drafting your opponent allowed. Tactics and power on full display. First team to 50 miles wins. Race day July 4, 1900. Game on.

The RW riders who made that trip were or would become notable community figures. James and Arthur Peckham were the sons of George Peckham, a noted northern Nevada pioneer, newspaperman, state assemblyman and one time candidate for Governor. Reno Fire Chief Ralph Hawcroft was the team captain. Benton Sparks was an alternate and the son of then soon-to-be Nevada Governor John Sparks (the City of Sparks is named after him). The group also included the son of a noted Scottish immigrant and land surveyor who founded the rail route over Beckwourth Pass in Plumas County, the key link for the California Zephyr between Oakland and Salt Lake City. The son would later become a Nevada State Senator and nearly a candidate for governor himself, Art Keddie.



Art Keddie outside his family home in Quincy, CA. 1900. With permission, Nevada Historical Society.

William Arthur Keddie, born in Quincy, California in 1877, came to Reno in 1898 to attend the University of Nevada. Keddie, like so many even of our generation, fell in love with northern Nevada and ended up making it his lifetime home. Keddie was an outstanding multiple sport-athlete and by all accounts was *the man*. Keddie was selected to the all-coast football team of the era. He held track records at the University of Nevada, excelled at baseball, and yes, he was even a cyclist.

The RW were in Sacramento to take on the feared Capital City Wheelmen, champions of the Pacific Coast. An estimated 5,000 were in attendance to witness what most simply expected to be a routine Capital City win. All odds were stacked against the boys from Reno—even the horoscope of the day

had predicted a Capital City win (Nevada State Journal, "Off for the Relay Race," July 4, 1900). But the lads from Reno were there to spoil their day. Back home nearly 250 gathered at Wheelmen Hall in eager anticipation as race updates were read aloud off the wire. As the two hour plus ordeal wore on, and the reports became more and more positive, the crowd at the hall could hardly be contained. (Reno Evening Gazette, "Reno Victorious at Sacramento," July 4, 1900, front page.)



RW Relay Team: Front L-R, Barney Frazier, James "Jap" Hart, King Ryan (Trainer), Ed Shaver (seated behind Ryan in bus. suit), Ed Stanley, Alf Peckham. Back L-R: Art Peckham, Bill Thompson, Jim Peckham, Art Keddie, Claude Mersho, Granville Johnson (in front), Will Hart, Pearl Upsom, George Kornmayer. With permission, Nevada Historical Society.

The ten man RW squad that day was built around Keddie and fellow speed-merchants, the Peckham brothers. When all was said and done, the RW boys buried Capital City, finishing with an astounding "...margin of about a mile" (Nevada Historical Society Papers, Vol II, 1917-1920, p. 135). After the first two rounds saw virtually no separation between the two sides, Keddie went off third in the rotation and scorching his five-mile obligation in a blistering 12 minutes and 20 seconds, or less than two and one half minutes per mile--an average speed of 24.33 mph! He was the fastest of the Reno 10. Arthur Peckham, fourth in the Reno rotation, was but 4 seconds slower at 12:24. After Peckham further built on what Keddie had started, it was truly no contest. That feat on July 4, 1900 kicked off an era of RW dominance on the Pacific coast. Through 1907, the RW repeated as champs 11 times.

There is no better description of Art Keddie's cycling prowess than this 1922 recollection by Kim Torp of the Nevada Historical Society:

...Mr. Keddie was one of the fastest riders of the famous Reno Wheelman's Club ... and the splendid collection of trophies now shown [1922] at the Museum of the Nevada Historical Society testifies to the many famous victories won from the various teams of the coast cities. In more than one instance Mr. Keddie saved the local wheelmen from defeat in relay races by his phenomenal spurt at the wind-up of a race. He is spoken of as "the young man who set the Coast afire with his remarkable bicycle riding." "The greatest of them all" and "the big size" were names by which he was commonly known in athletic circles. The fleetest men that ever mounted a wheel came to Reno only to meet defeat at the hands of the team of which this remarkable man was the bright and particular star. (<http://genealogytrails.com/nev/church/obitndx.html>, Nevada Historical Society Papers, 1922, contributed by Kim Torp)

Newspaper reports had it that bringing home the Pacific Coast Championship trophy from Sacramento set off "...the most enthusiastic celebration ever held in Reno," (Nevada Historical Society Papers, Vol II, 1917-1920, p. 134). Bands serenaded. Businesses adorned the RW colors (red and white). "Welcome Champions" signs were everywhere. The next day when the boys stepped off the 8:40 p.m. from Sacramento, they were packed onto a wagon and hauled around town at the end of ropes pulled by the town's young boys. Thousands lined the streets to cheer. You read that right, *thousands*. (Nevada State Journal, "Victorious Cyclists," July 6, 1900). Those were the days.

Keddie went on to live and work as a surveyor and engineer in Fallon, and became quite active in local politics. In 1915 Keddie was elected to the Nevada State Senate where he served as President pro tem, back-up to the presiding officer in the senate. With his deeply engrained reputation for honesty and integrity many of his day had hoped Keddie would also consider a run at the Governorship, but he never did. Keddie eventually married Ada Williams, the daughter of Warren Williams, a founding father of Fallon.

Art Keddie and wife Ada were early, avid aviators. Indeed, Ada was the first female pilot in the state. Unfortunately aviation is how Keddie met his fate. On July 17, 1921, on a "... a trial trip in a new plane [he] met his tragic death near Elko." (<http://genealogytrails.com/nev/church/obitndx.html>, Nevada Historical Society Papers, 1922, contributed by Kim Torp) William Arthur Keddie was only 45 years old.

With all else he accomplished in his short life, including his contributions through public service to his adopted state, to us Art Keddie will always be, simply, "the big size" of the Reno Wheelmen, the RW's first hero, the "greatest of them all."