

**PEDALING VACATIONLAND:  
BICYCLISTS, GENTEEL RECREATION, AND THE MAINE LANDSCAPE 1878–1902**

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**ABSTRACT**

Scholars frequently attribute the association of Maine with leisure, recreation, and vacationing to the rise of car culture creating accessibility and leading the state to brand itself "Vacationland" on license plates and highway signs in mid twentieth century. This dissertation makes the case for different attribution and periodization of this identity and examines bicycle culture in Maine during the late nineteenth century. It argues that Maine cyclists were instrumental in promoting the state's burgeoning identity as "Vacationland." Organized into homosocial clubs, these riders promoted cycling as a genteel form of recreation fit for middle class men. As they rode through public spaces such as streets, sidewalks, parkways, suburban neighborhoods, horse-trotting parks, and rural logging roads, they performed the argument that such places were suitable for their fraternal recreation. In addition, they published accounts of their rides and descriptions of their community extensively in local newspapers and magazines. By cycling and writing in the 1880s and 1890s, Maine cyclists fully realized the recreational possibilities of Maine's landscape.

Chapter 1 examines the actions of the largest bicycle club in the state, the Portland Wheel Club, in order to understand how and why the members were exclusively white, middle class, and male. Prominent public figures and cyclists like architect John Calvin Stevens are discussed as examples of this identity. Chapter 2 explores how cycling clubs and the bicycle industry influenced the shape of Portland, Maine's largest city, and assesses the city's streets, sidewalks, parks, business districts, and public squares. Chapter 3 expands the study into Portland's surrounding suburbs of South Portland and Deering to analyze how bicycling affected the growth of streetcar suburbs. It argues that cyclists helped define the role of public recreation in spaces such as neighborhood streets, casino cottages, pleasure grounds, and horse-trotting parks. Finally, chapter 4 looks at the state more broadly, analyzing the industries of bicycle touring and resort hotels. This chapter argues Maine touring cyclists like Frank Elwell most fully articulated the recreational vision of the Maine landscape in the nineteenth century.