Good afternoon everyone and I hope you enjoy the community bike ride today. My name is Paul Schopp, the borough historian, and the Historical Society of Riverton has asked me to say a few words to provide a context for cycling in Riverton. The bicycle and its popularity rode triumphantly into Riverton during the 1890s. By 1894, the Riverton Athletic Association had constructed a velodrome, or bicycle track, which became the talk of the cycling circuit. The association’s primary trainer was Jack Cummings, a one-legged man whose prowess as a wheelman became legendary. He proposed participating in a race to determine the one-legged champion rider of America with the race to transpire in Asbury Park, where he expected to beat the other two participants. Whether he did so is unknown, but he ably demonstrated that even those individuals with handicaps can enjoy cycling.

Although the track only held three seasons of activities before closing, it ushered in the age of pedal power to our fair town, which is still enjoyed today. On your ride, you will pass by the historical marker for the track placed by the Historical Society near the Light Rail Station.

Riverton truly had a romance with cycling and the wheelmen who rode them. The track’s closure did not dampen spirits one bit and a year after the track ceased operations, residents formed a new cycle club in town, which even included a flag bearer! A local ordinance passed during the same year provided cyclers with the right to ride on sidewalks except the walks of Broad Street and Main Street, although the officials required you to arm your bicycle with a warning bell. The ordinance limited the bicycle speed on sidewalks to five miles per hour. A newspaper notice reported “Riverton now possesses one more attraction for riders. The borough authorities have just placed their sidewalks (with the exception of those on two streets which are macadamized) at the disposal of wheelmen.”

The annual Riverton Children’s Parade held every 4th of July certainly encourages cycling since it began in 1897, a mere 120 years ago. The participants have always festooned their cycles with crepe paper, flags, and other patriotic paraphernalia. More recently, Carlos Rogers started the Historic Riverton Criterium in 2011, while native son Rob Gusky has revived the Historic Riverton Century Ride, a 100-mile trek across New Jersey inaugurated in 1895 and ending at the Riverton Velodrome. So, I bid you, ride on Rivertonians, keeping the town’s cycling tradition alive, and I’ll be waving to you from the velodrome marker!