

THE ORIGINAL EAGLE CYCLING CLUB
When They Existed and Where They Met
By El Jefe

For as long as I can remember, we've been curious about the original Eagle Cycling Club. However, information has been extremely hard to come by. But recently, the Napa County Library finished a project whereby it digitalized all of its Napa Register microfiches, going back to the mid-1800's. This made it easy to review old newspapers on line. I've been doing that, and found out a great deal about the original Eagles. My first goals were to find out when they were formed, how long they existed, and where their clubhouse was. These have been the source of much speculation over the years.

There is no mention of the Eagles in the Register before 1897, although a couple of other clubs are named. The first mention of the Eagle Cycling Club comes on May 23, 1897: "The Eagle Cycling Club of this city gave its first social dance at the Armor Saturday evening and entertained a large company of young people. Raney's orchestra provided the music. The following named committee had charge, and to them is due the credit for the success of the affair..."

Thereafter, the Eagles appear in the Register frequently, organizing and/or taking part in "club runs", races, dances, whist tournaments, chess tournaments, cribbage tournaments and billiard tournaments. For several years, the ECC had charge of the City of Napa's Fourth of July celebration.

Before 1901, the Eagles met in the Bernheim residence. In May 1901, they were forced to vacate that location. Although they quickly found a new location in "the Lucas Block on Main and Pearl streets", they found that "there is not the floor space that the old club house afforded," and they began to plan to acquire property and build a clubhouse to their specifications. In November, 1901, they purchased a lot on the east side of Coombs street, between First and Clay streets, behind the Migliavaca building (demolished in 1973), with which they shared an alley (about where the west entrance to Kohl's is today). They hired an architect and got to work. The plan for the new two-floor clubhouse, which cost "in the neighborhood of \$3,000," included a bowling alley, reception hall, billiard room, gymnasium (with dressing room and showers), a reading room, four card rooms, a board of directors room, a social hall, and a canteen.



After 1912, there are few mentions of the Eagle Cycling Club itself in the Register. There are, however, numerous references to the clubhouse, which was used as a polling place. In 1913, Napa's National Guard Ambulance Company leased part of the Eagle clubhouse and made some modifications. There are several stories about local boxers training at the Eagle Cycling Club gym.

In 1914, The Eagle Cycling Club and the Migliavacca Investment Company deeded the alley between their buildings to the City of Napa, which moved immediately to pave the alley.

In August, 1917, the Register reports that Ambulance Company No. 1 was called to active service for duty in World War I, and was set up in "a temporary dormitory...at the old bowling alley at the Eagle Cycling Club building."

This is the last mention I've found in the Register, so far, of the Eagle Cycling Club or its clubhouse. There is no mention of either in 1918, 1919, or 1920. However, there was an advertisement in the Napa Daily Journal in December, 1919, announcing the Eagles Cycling Club's Grand New Year's Eve Mask Ball.

My next goal is to find out what happened to the clubhouse.

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Continuing History of the Old ECC And Its Clubhouse

The high point of the old Eagle Cycling Club was between 1897 and 1912. The club was reported to have a membership of 150 in 1901. At the time, the City of Napa had a population of about 6,000. For the ECC to have a membership in similar proportion today, we'd need 2,000 members!

In cooperation with a group of Vallejo cyclists, the members built a cinder paved riding path from Napa to Vallejo, the course paralleling the old Napa-Vallejo Road. Cinders for the project were obtained from cinder waste at Mare Island Navy Yard. Hand-operated rollers, filled with water to give them weight, were used to pack the cinders. The Vallejo cyclists performed the task from their city north to the Kelly ranch, south of Soscol. The Napa cyclists pushed south from Napa to the Kelly ranch. Joining ranks there the members celebrated the occasion with a sumptuous dinner of barbecued steak and beans.

After 1912, automobiles became more common. In 1915, the Register reported that "The end of the Old Eagle Cycling Club is in sight. It is reported that there are only 15 members active, with many others being attracted away by other growing activities for young people." By 1928 the Register reported that "The Eagle Cycling Club is now more than thirty years old – and its remaining active members are but five." A sixth reportedly had "only recently deserted the cyclists and put his machine away for all time."

Meanwhile, the Eagle Club House continued to be of service. Several local boxers trained at the Eagle Cycling Club gym for prize fights that took place at the Opera House. The clubhouse was used as a polling place by the city. In 1917, when Napa formed its National Guard Ambulance Company, the Eagle clubhouse provided housing for the men.

In 1936 "Pop" Giardina bought the building and remodeled it into a barber shop and beauty parlor after the expanding Napa Register acquired his old shop across the street. In 1963, the Gem Bar occupied the building. In late 1972, the clubhouse was demolished as part of a controversial downtown federal redevelopment project. Its neighbor, the Migliavacca office building followed in 1973. They were replaced by what is now the Kohl's complex. The old clubhouse was about halfway between First Street and the Kohl's west entrance, on the east (Kohl's) side of the Coombs Street extension.

Thus, the last remnants of the old Eagle Cycling Club disappeared just as the new Eagle Cycling Club emerged. The first mention in the Register of the new Eagles is in April, 1970: "Young Napan Alan Burney (one of the modern ECC founders) took third place in the recent Lake Merced Handicap Race held in Oakland... Burney also finished second place in the Northern California Roller Racing Championships held in Berkeley. Burney is a member of the Eagle Cycling Club."