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John C. McCubbin

Historian of the "76 Country"

by Kenneth Zech

In August of 1886 a young man of twenty-two drove a spring wagon down the San Joaquin Valley from Tehama County. His destination was the Tulare County boom town of Traver. He had heard that prospects were good in the Traver area. A year earlier, the young man had accompanied his father to California, following a family tradition of westward pioneering dating back to at least the mid-eighteenth century. The young man later became a charter member and organizer of the Fresno County Historical Society and one of the first and most important historians of settlement in the southern Fresno and northern Tulare counties region. The young man was John Cameron McCubbin.

Born in 1863 in Hancock County, Illinois, McCubbin had been raised by parents very conscious of the past and observant of the present. McCubbin describes his parents, Thomas B. and Martha Cameron McCubbin, as inveterate record-keepers who instilled the values of knowing one's personal history and the history of one's community. Their instruction was not without result. John Cameron became a diligent diarist who carefully recorded what he saw and heard. The year 1886, just two years after Traver's establishment, and only two years before Reedley was founded, was a propitious time for the presence of a chronicler of pioneering.

When McCubbin first arrived in Traver he worked as a painter and as a hanger of wallpaper. Within a few months he started working for a lumber yard. A few months later he changed jobs again, this time accepting a position with the 76 Land and Water Company that would eventually lead to his becoming its assistant superintendent.

John McCubbin standing in front of his famous gum tree, four miles south of Reedley, in 1926.



The 76 Company was conceived as a land and water development enterprise that would supply irrigation water to 130,000 acres of land straddling the county line between Tulare and Fresno counties south of the Kings River. Thirty thousand acres of land were held by the company itself for purposes of lease and sale. The company took its name from the 76 Ranch of Thomas Fowler, a principal in the land and water enterprise.

McCubbin's position with the company caused him to travel widely in the "76 Country." As a consequence, he had the opportunity to meet and work with many of the people who were among the earliest settlers in the area. It was from these people, "fresh from their lips," that he learned the facts about the early days. Of course much was going on in McCubbin's own day, and this he recorded too. His writings about the 76 Country — the people, the landmarks, the old trails and river crossings, the prosperity and decline of Traver, and the rise of Reedley — are the principal, and in many cases, the only reliable accounts historians have of these places during those early times.

In late 1889, McCubbin left the 76 Company, moved to Selma, and became a beekeeper. In the years that followed he maintained his interest and activity in beekeeping, though periodically he pursued other lines of work. For a time, McCubbin returned to the lumber business as the manager of the Reedley Lumber Yard. He farmed, and he appears to have been in partnership in a firm selling real estate and insurance in Reedley. However, it was his beekeeping that occupied the greatest portion of his working life — a profession which brought him awards and widespread recognition.

McCubbin married Lucy Marie Terry, a schoolteacher, in 1892. They became the parents of a son, Bruce, in August 1894. In April 1895, the family established their residence at the ranch McCubbin has purchased in 1888, four miles south of Reedley. McCubbin had planted a eucalyptus tree on this ranch in 1889 that eventually grew so large that it became a local landmark and a source of great pride to its owner.

A daughter, Grace, was born to the McCubbins in December 1895. Sadly, Mrs. McCubbin died just seven days after Grace's birth.

In November 1899, McCubbin bought a colony lot one mile south of Reedley and moved there with his family. He remarried in 1908, but his marriage to Lottie L. Rose, a widow, did not last. They separated after three years.

McCubbin remained at the colony lot home until 1918, when he moved to Fresno. In September 1928, McCubbin moved to Southern California. In November 1942, Mr. McCubbin took up residence at the Hollenbeck Home for retired persons in Los Angeles. He remained there until his death.

John McCubbin began compiling notes for his local histories in 1886. However, since many of his papers are undated, it isn't entirely clear when he actually began writing his articles. It appears that he started writing in earnest in the 1910s, concentrating at first on the stage roads, ferry crossings, Traver and the 76 Land and Water Company. He seems to have been quite active in the 1930s in preparing papers on these subjects that ultimately became final or near final versions. His articles on Reedley appear to have come later, with virtually all of his Reedley material

undergoing final revision in the early 1950s when he thought these writings were to be published.

McCubbin's historical research and writing continued for the remainder of his life. Just one year before his death at age ninety-three, McCubbin was still carrying on an active correspondence, obtaining additional details about people and places and then revising his "sketches" to be just that much more accurate or complete.

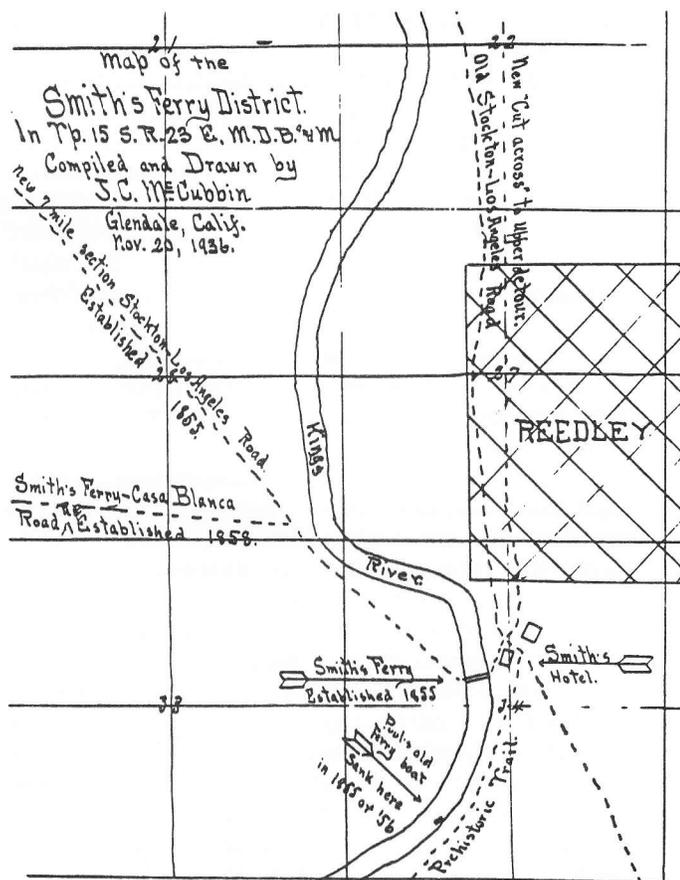
Over the years various McCubbin articles have appeared in print. Newspapers in Fresno, Reedley and Dinuba have printed his articles. The Fresno and Tulare county historical societies have published his papers in their newsletters. Katharine Nickel's book, *Beginnings in the Reedley Area* (Reedley: Nickel, 1961), contains the largest number of McCubbin's articles, but is long out-of-print and generally held in library reserve or special collections. Long excerpts from his writings appeared in Wallace Smith's book, *The Garden of the Sun* (1939). More recently, two McCubbin articles appeared in *Fresno County—The Pioneer Years* (Fresno: Panorama West, 1984), by Charles W. Clough and William B. Secrest, Jr.

Among McCubbin's most important writings were his articles on James Smith and his Kings River ferry operation. Smith's Ferry was established in 1855 near the present Olson Avenue bridge in Reedley. McCubbin located and interviewed each of the three surviving Smith children. No other writer spoke with these first-hand witnesses to the activities of that place. Among the many things he learned were details about the establishment of early roads:



James Smith, who had a ferry operation on the Kings River in the 1850s.

During the early days of activity at Smith's Ferry, there was no line of travel extending in any direction across the broad expanse of plains lying between the S Joaquin and Kings Rivers, except near the margins of that territory. In 1858 Smith saw the necessity for a wagon road leading directly across this tract from his ferry to Casa Blanca [at the present day Tranquility]



located at the head of Fresno slough, which was the head of navigation coming up the San Joaquin River. At that time there was no watering place or landmark of any description along the entire fifty-mile stretch of sand and alkali.

After having two wells dug, which would make the watering places about sixteen miles apart, Smith proceeded to mark out his new line of travel as follows. He had a lot of willow trees cut along the river and slough, and with the aid of one of Colberg's mule teams and "Big Jake" as driver, these trees were distributed all along the proposed route. They were then set in the ground at regular intervals, not with any intention that they would grow, but to serve as temporary landmarks to guide the teamsters and stage drivers until a permanent roadbed could be sufficiently marked that the teams could follow it in foggy weather, darkness or sand storms. This cross-country road was established for the special purpose of accommodating the Butterfield overland stages when the water was too high in the river for them to cross at the Whitmore ferry.

The contemporary reader wishing for a vivid description of life in a Valley grain-shipping town of the 1880s need only read from McCubbin's extensive writings about the activities in Traver:

During the grain season it was a daily sight to see three long wagons, the front of each lined up at a separate warehouse, and at the rear of the columns extending several blocks away. On one occasion one of these trains reached from the 76 warehouse to the corner of Hershey and Eleventh streets, practically a mile. At such times a team would take its place at the rear of the column and be two days working its way up to the front where

the wagons could be unloaded. Those who could not afford to wait so long to unload, would unload alongside the railroad and, later, haul it to the warehouse or load it onto the rail cars from where it lay. Hundreds of tons were handled in this manner.

Since the advent of the motor truck, the long wagon trains with their beautiful animals have gone forever. No words can do justice to one of those wagon trains in motion. Nor can the imagination of one who never saw its counterpart produce more than a dim picture of that rare spectacle.

In memory I see one of those long trains in Traver. The dust-begrimed mule skinner sits patiently in his saddle, astride the near wheel horse at the rear of the long string of twelve animals that draw the three loaded wagons. His jerk line (the single line that controls the entire team) is in his right hand, his black snake whip in a loose coil is thrown around his neck. The wagons alongside the warehouse are emptied and moved away. The entire train of wagons prepare to advance the length of the warehouse, which is 500 feet. The crack of black snakes, the clank of fifth chains and the chuck of the wheels are heard, as well as the beautiful chimes of the sweet-toned hame bells that adorn the leaders. Over all is heard, sharp and clear, all up and down the long line, a volley of oaths poured forth by the teamsters. Many a good Christian name worn by those long-eared beasts of burden would be used as a nucleus around which vile epithets and profane language would be grouped with revolting effect upon anyone unused to such disgusting abuse.

As soon as a complement of wagons would be spotted alongside the warehouse, the train would again come to a halt, and the cloud of alkali dust that had partially obscured the procession would slowly float away in the almost motionless and super-heated atmosphere.

McCubbin was a regular churchgoer, a complete abstainer (in fact, a registered Prohibitionist), and a faithful recorder of what he called the "wild and woolly" side of Traver life:

Should we fail to call attention to the seamy side of life during the prosperous days of Traver, this sketch would be incomplete. A half score of saloons and gambling halls and their attendant places of evil were running unrestricted in that wide open town. With hundreds of laborers in the warehouses, at the ditch camps and on the ranches, most of whom collected their wages on Saturday night, the scenes that were witnessed in the town beggar description.

Scores of drunken men would stagger up and down the streets trying to keep track of all the gambling games that were running. The drunkenness would increase as the day advanced. Crowds would assemble where an exciting game or other excitement was in progress, and not only fill the building but would extend clear out across the sidewalk and compel pedestrians to detour out in the street.

An occasional case of delirium tremens would be reported. Two sufferers from the "jim jams" were sent to the County Hospital in one week, and one of them died later while tramping back to Traver.

A miscellaneous lot of professionals, amateurs and

“tin horns” made up the population of gamblers. One game was reported to have run continuously for two weeks, day and night, in which over 200 packs of cards were used. When one gambler would go broke or have to quit for any reason, another was ready to take his place. In one dice game it was claimed the stake was \$200 a throw.

The two places “across the track” where men without self-respect and women without shame congregated, served as way stations on the road to ruin. The two places housed from fifteen to twenty women.

With so many saloons, it may be presumed there was no room for bootleggers. Such was not the case, for a woman did a profitable business in that line. As a sideline to her bootlegging, she kept a woman or two, who it was claimed were for immoral purposes. She would be arrested occasionally, but could never be convicted by a Traver jury.

McCubbin loved a good joke, a clever pun, and bringing smiles to the faces of friends and acquaintances. In his own words, “the mirthfulness in my makeup was always difficult to restrain.” His humor even invaded his work as a professional beekeeper. In 1921 he copyrighted his “Unkist Honey” brand and wrote the following commentary.

This is to certify that the undersigned, G.O. Tewitt & G.E.T. Busy, have engaged in a general bee and honey business and have employed B.O. Nedd, alias J.C. McCubbin, as business manager.

The manager claims to have produced a very superior grade of honey which has been carefully protected from contamination and is now securely packed, where it will remain absolutely pure and in perfect condition indefinitely. This grade is to be known as “Unkist Honey.”



As there are brands of California products on the market which the packers admit have been kissed and re-kissed by all the suns of the Universe, including those two well known parties the “son of a gun” and the “son of a sea cook,” the designation, “Unkist Honey” will suggest at once, the exceptionally sweet, charming and attractive qualities of this brand of goods.

It is further claimed by the manager, that the free use of this article will not only cure love-sickness, but that it will level the head and set it in the right direction and fix the thoughts of the victim on a real “honey” regardless of race, color, creed, sex or previous condition of heart or appetite. There are exceptions however, and those are the cases which have developed to that stage which has been described by one authority as being “an outward all-over-ish-ness and an inward insensibility,” and which the Irishman, in giving his own experience, said, “there was no takin’ a wink of shlafe for the pleasure of the pain.”

That these goods might prove to be all the manager claims for them and to aid in their protection as above referred to, he has developed a very efficient and pains-taking (as well as pains-giving) strain of bees. A home guard, composed of volunteers from this strain, has been organized and thoroughly drilled for service. Their special duty (and apparent pleasure) is to remain on the firing line and keep things hot.

One of McCubbin’s fondest wishes, particularly in his later years, was that someday a book of his own would be published. He realized, though, that this was unlikely to occur. A history book dealing with a comparatively small geographic area would obviously not have wide sales, and his own financial circumstances prohibited his subsidizing such a publication. Further, he doubted his own writing skills and felt that his articles would require extensive editing to be publishable in book form.

As important as his wish for a book, his greater wish seems to have been that his histories not be forgotten or lost. He sent articles to anyone who seemed the least bit interested, and to those institutions that should have been interested. He welcomed the use of his sketches in newspapers, historical society bulletins, and books.

McCubbin’s hopes for a book containing his collected historical writings were finally realized thirty-two years after his death when the Reedley Historical Society published *The McCubbin Papers: An Account of the Early History of Reedley and Vicinity* as part of its contribution in commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Reedley and the 75th anniversary of the city’s incorporation. The 256-page hardbound book came out in December 1988 and contains all of McCubbin’s significant writings about the 76 Country, most of his hand-drawn maps locating early roads and landmarks, and over 60 early photographs from the historical society’s archives.

The society acquired John McCubbin’s papers through the late Oscar Noren. Shortly after McCubbin’s death, his daughter, Grace Cheatham, sent all of his papers to Noren. Noren, raised in Reedley in the early 1900s, was a correspondent with McCubbin since at least the early 1930s, and shared McCubbin’s interest in the history of the area. Mrs. Cheatham wrote Noren saying that she was certain that there was no one more than he that her father would have wished to have his papers.

With the establishment of the Reedley Historical Society in 1976, Noren began donating selections from McCubbin’s papers to the society. When Mr. Noren died in 1985, his family donated the balance of the collection to the society. Additional materials were acquired through copying papers in the possession of the Reedley Branch of the Fresno

County Free Library, which has the second largest collection of original McCubbin writings.

In addition to the papers on local history, the McCubbin collection—amounting to approximately four linear feet—includes maps, photographs, hundreds of pages of correspondence, memorandum books, receipts, humorous newspaper clippings, extensive writings on the history and genealogy of McCubbin's ancestors, and articles on the history of Hancock County, Illinois, his birthplace.

McCubbin's later years were filled with many activities aside from his history writing. He volunteered countless hours helping various groups organized for the blind, and he made regular visits to the patients in a tuberculosis sanatorium. During both World Wars he wrote hundreds of letters to servicemen overseas or in hospitals.

John C. McCubbin died January 2, 1957, in Los Angeles. He is buried in the family plot at the Reedley District Cemetery—a plot on the bluff overlooking the historic Smith's Ferry site and in the very path of an early trail that he documented and studied.

The book, *The McCubbin Papers*, is available directly from the Reedley Historical Society, P.O. Box 877, Reedley, CA 93654. Cost, including tax and shipping, is \$23.35.



An earlier photograph of John C. McCubbin.

The Bicycle Express

by Charles W. Baley

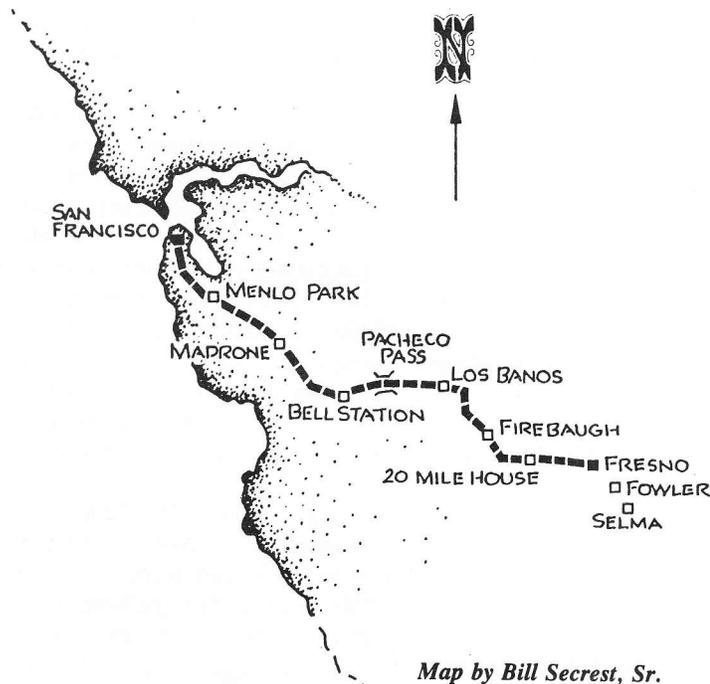
Nearly everyone has heard of the Pony Express and how it carried the U. S. Mail between Sacramento, California and St. Joseph, Missouri before the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, but only a few people have ever heard of the Bicycle Express. The Bicycle Express, Fresno's very own, was used to carry the mail between Fresno and San Francisco during the Great Pullman Strike of July 1894. Although its life was brief, just 12 days, and it never achieved the fame or recognition of its equine counterpart, the Pony Express, the Fresno to San Francisco Bicycle Express, nevertheless, is well deserving of a place in history.

A nationwide railroad strike which went into effect on July 1 of 1894 brought rail traffic in many parts of the country to a complete halt. Fresno's being an inland city with no waterways or alternative means of transportation, it was particularly hard hit. Among the many strike-caused inconveniences suffered by Fresnoans, according to the *Daily Evening Expositor* of July 6, 1894, was that the price of beer had to be raised from a nickel to ten cents a glass. This was punishment enough for thirsty Fresnoans, but an even gloomier reality was the almost total shutdown of U. S. Mail deliveries to and from Fresno and other parts of the Valley. Americans will grudgingly shell out another nickel for a glass of beer, but when they are threatened with the stoppage of their mail delivery, prompt action is called for. Fortunately for Fresno, a man of action was already on the scene. His name was Arthur C. Banta and he was the proprietor of the Victor Cyclery Shop located at 1730 Tulare Street in ground level space leased from the Hughes Hotel.

The idea of using bicycles to carry the mail during the strike was first suggested to Banta on July 1 by John C. Nourse, a local groceryman of the firm of Whitham & Nourse, but it was Banta who transformed the idea into reality. The plan had to be implemented hastily as the effects of the strike on local mail deliveries had not been anticipated. Banta spent the first five days of July 1894 formulating his plans. A route had to be laid out, riders had to be found to carry the mail, depositories for receiving the mail had to be established, a fee schedule had to be determined, and notices had to be published and distributed. By July 5 the plan was ready to be put into operation.

The first news about the Bicycle Express appeared in the *Daily Evening Expositor* of July 6, 1894, tucked away in a long column about the strike. It stated, "As there seems to be a very slight prospect of sending any mail matter through regular channels, A. C. Banta has decided to establish a bicycle mail route between Fresno and San Francisco and maintain it until the tie-up is over. Important letters and papers will be carried..." Mail was to be carried both ways between Fresno and San Francisco. Daily mail service was promised. Advertisements for the service were placed in both the *Daily Evening Expositor* and the *Fresno Morning Republican* and probably in other local newspapers along the proposed route. A large number of handbills also were printed and distributed.

To keep clear of strict postal laws and regulations which prohibit anyone without a government contract from carrying the U.S. Mail, Banta advertised his service as a messenger route in which he would endeavor to carry letters entrusted to him to the post office in San Francisco where they would be deposited for mailing by postal authorities. It was decided that 25 cents per letter would not be an unreasonable fee for this service, plus the cost of the regular U.S. postage. The mail for this messenger route was to be deposited at Banta's Bicycle Shop on Tulare Street. Letters also could be deposited in Selma at Nees and Matthews Drug Store and in Fowler at the office of the *Fowler Courier* and at other designated places along the route.



The route laid out by Banta ran due west from Fresno out Whitesbridge Road to Whitesbridge; then northwest through Firebaugh and Dos Palos to Los Banos; then over Pacheco Pass to Gilroy and up present day U.S. 101 through Madrone, Menlo Park, and then on to San Francisco. The San Francisco terminal was the Overman Wheel Company, manufacturer of the Victor Bicycle which Banta represented in Fresno. Overman would then deposit the letters at the San Francisco Post Office. The total distance was estimated to be approximately 210 miles. It was thought that the route could be covered in 18 hours if a relay system were used. Relay stations were established at 20 Mile House, Firebaugh, Los Banos, Pacheco Pass, Bell Station, Madrone, and Menlo Park. The distance between each station varied between 18 and 38 miles, the shortest being over tortuous Pacheco Pass. Each man was to ride to the next relay station, deliver the mail to the next rider, then wait there for the southbound mail to Fresno. Each rider wore a badge printed on satin ribbon which read, "Fresno and San Francisco Bicycle Message Route." Should the riders have a punctured tire or other problems they were instructed to push their bicycles ahead of them and keep going. The rider at the next station was to wait a reasonable length of time for him to arrive, and if he didn't, was to go back and meet him.

Except for a few paved city streets, the route was entirely over dirt roads full of chuckholes, rocks, deep ruts, and a never-ending cloud of thick, choking dust. Although the bicycles then in use looked much like those of today, they lacked many of the modern-day features. Instead of ten gears or speeds they had only one. They had handbrakes instead of coaster brakes, and many had no brakes at all! Instead of balloon tires they had narrow thin tires which were extremely susceptible to puncture. No wonder that many Fresnoans were skeptical of the promised 18-hour delivery! Many were predicting that it would take at least three days to complete the schedule.

On July 6 Banta received a visit from a Mr. Eugene Donze, whom he had not known previously. Donze suggested that Banta have a special stamp printed for the bicycle mail. Donze, who was an engraver for the firm of Hall Brothers, local undertakers, (he did engraving on casket lids) further suggested that he could engrave the die for just such a stamp. Donze was also a serious stamp collector. Banta, although not a stamp collector at that time, thought that a special stamp might be a good idea. He had originally intended to frank the letters only with a pictorial bicycle rubber handstamp which he had designed for that purpose. Although Donze engraved the die for the stamp, the design was Banta's. The actual printing of the stamp was done by Mr. O. J. Treat of the Commercial Printing Company located at 1135 J (Fulton) Street. O. J. Treat was probably a relative of B. J. Treat, one of the Bicycle Express riders.

The stamp was unique in several respects. It was the first in the United States to carry an illustration of a bicycle and the only one with the word "strike" printed on its face. It was also the first stamp to refer to a labor union. The letters A.R.U. at the top stand for the American Railway Union, the union involved in the strike. The stamp was diamond-shaped and green in color. In the inner oval were inscribed the words "Fresno and San Francisco Bicycle Mail Route, 1894, A.R.U. Strike, 25 cents." Since it was a private stamp issued without the authority or blessing of postal authorities it could not have the words "U. S. Postage" inscribed upon it. In the center of the oval was pictured a messenger riding a bicycle with foothills in the background and sagebrush in the foreground. An envelope stamp, brown in color, also was issued. The stamped envelope sold for 30 cents.

After about 800 stamps had been printed it was discovered that San Francisco had been misspelled "San Francisco," thus creating a bonanza for stamp collectors. Mr. Donze attempted to correct the error by using his penknife on the die to change the offending letter "s" into the correct letter "c". The results were less than perfect, thus creating another variant of the stamp. Not satisfied with his hasty improvisation, Donze then set to work and engraved a completely new die. Oddly enough the first "c" in San Francisco of the new die was also slightly blurred as in the second variant of the first die. It would appear that Donze started to repeat his spelling error but discovered it in time.

Choosing the riders for the Bicycle Messenger Route was apparently no problem for Banta. Bicycling was very popular at that time. Banta had his riders selected and ready for deployment by the evening of July 5. According to H. B. Phillips, as quoted by Lowell B. Cooper in *The Fresno*

BICYCLE MESSAGE ROUTE

To San Francisco.

The undersigned begs to announce to the public that he will establish a Messenger Route to San Francisco on bicycles, via

**WHITE'S BRIDGE,
PACHECO PASS,
GILROY AND
SAN JOSE.**

A daily service will be established between Fresno and San Francisco, beginning Saturday morning. The rate for letters to San Francisco and intermediate points will be 76 cents. All mail matter should be addressed to street and number, and will be stamped and deposited at the postoffice at destination. All mail must be left at VICTOR CYCLERY, 1770 Tulare street, Hughes Hotel, not later than 10 p. m., to insure delivery on the following day. The San Francisco headquarters will be Overman Wheel Co., corner Larkin and McAllister streets; and San Jose at Merritt & Co's

Call on or communicate with

ARTHUR C. BANTA,

1770 Tulare St., Fresno, Cal.

This advertisement appeared in the Daily Evening Expositor in July 1894.

and San Francisco Bicycle Mail of 1894, the riders and their relays were as follows:

Relay 1: B. J. Treat of Fresno, Fresno to 20 Mile House, distance; 20 miles.

Relay 2: H. S. Gangbin of Sanger, 20 Mile House to Firebaugh, distance; 20 miles.

Relay 3: R. O. Puryear of Fresno, Firebaugh to Los Banos, distance; 35 miles.

Relay 4: Arthur W. Drummond of Los Banos, Los Banos to foot of Pacheco Pass, distance; 20 miles.

Relay 5: W. B. Atwater of Fresno, over Pacheco Pass to Bell Station, distance; 15 miles.

Relay 6: Joseph M. Smith of Selma, Bell Station to Madrone, distance; 32 miles.

Relay 7: George Calquhoun of Fresno, Madrone to Menlo Park through San Jose, distance; 32 miles.

Relay 8: C. S. Shaffer of Fresno, Menlo Park to San Francisco, distance 30 miles, then back to Menlo Park non-stop for a total distance of 60 miles. Shaffer was selected for this grueling run because he was considered an especially skilled rider and if the mail were late he could make up the time.

In addition to these riders, five substitutes also were chosen. They were John Enos, Walter Banta, a brother of Arthur, L. W. Rowley, H. P. Badgley, and H. Morgan. All were from Fresno.

Even Arthur Banta himself got into the act; he rode at least one relay as a substitute. In a talk before the California Philatelic Society at San Francisco on July 13, 1934, Banta stated: "Forty years ago today, July 13, 1894, on my twenty-fifth birthday, I personally rode the first relay of the Bicycle Mail route, taking the place of B. J. Treat, who was unable to make the run owing to the extreme heat, but he was able to continue the schedule the next day." Banta stated that it was 110 degrees in Fresno that day.

There is some question as to what compensation the riders received for their services. H. B. Phillips, writing in the July 1894 issue of "Filatelic Facts and Fallacies," states that the best riders were employed. This seems to suggest that perhaps they were paid for their services, but since Banta's total expenses for the mail route were only \$134.10, this left little money for salaries. The matter of pay seems to be cleared up by Walter Banta, one of the riders, in an interview published in the *Fresno Bee* on May 7, 1941. In that interview he stated that the riders worked for their board. Apparently they received only their food, sleeping quarters, and perhaps any out-of-pocket expenses.

The first mail of fifteen letters left Fresno at 4:30 A.M. on Saturday, July 7. About ten more letters were picked up along the way. These did not have the bicycle stamp on them as the stamps had not yet been delivered to all the stations. The first letters were carried only as far as San Jose by the Fresno riders. From there to San Francisco they were carried by the McFarland brothers, who operated a newspaper route between the two cities. Apparently Shaffer, who had the last relay, was not yet in place.

The mail left Fresno at 5:00 A.M. on Sunday, July 8 for the first full run of the Bicycle Express. Everything went well until the rider on Relay 6 had a punctured tire near Gilroy. He was able to get a conveyance to carry his vehicle, but he had to walk six miles into Gilroy, causing a considerable delay. The next morning Banta was delighted when he received a telegram from the Overman Wheel Company stating that the mail had arrived in San Francisco



The first design, die 1. San Francisco spelled "San Fransisco".

at 8:45 A.M. on the morning of July 9. This was considerably longer than the eighteen hours which they had set as their goal, but it was still less than the two to three days predicted by skeptics. By riding hard all night the return trip to Fresno was made in eighteen hours. The goal had been achieved! The Bicycle Express was now in business.

When news of the success reached Fresno, the skeptics were finally convinced. The mail began to pour in. With a little experience under their belts, the riders were consistently able to maintain the eighteen-hour schedule in spite of an occasional punctured tire. Then suddenly on Sunday, July 15, President Grover Cleveland called out the local militias to assist federal troops in ending the conflict. The strike was effectively broken and the trains started rolling again. The quick ending of the strike caught Banta by surprise. He had quite a few letters on hand on which he had placed his bicycle stamp and collected fees. He felt duty-bound to deliver these letters.

Letters continued to be received at the Victor Cyclery, many people believing that the call-out of federal troops



The second design, die I-R. Spelling of San Francisco corrected.



Full sheet of the second stamp, S 2, printed July 7, 1894, sheet height circa 68 mm.

would only escalate the violence. A decision was made to run the route with only three relays because some of the riders, including Shaffer, Atwater, and Walter Banta, were members of the local militia and had already reported to the armory for duty. It is not clear just where the changes were to be made or who the other two riders were to be, but one fact is clear, and that is the identity of the last rider. His name was John Enos, and he probably made the most memorable ride of all.

According to Joe Smith, writing in the *Fresno Bee* on July 9, 1894, Enos left Fresno with the last pack of mail on Monday morning, July 16 at 2:30 A.M. He rode past the relay stations at 20 Mile House, Firebaugh, and Los Banos, finding them all deserted. After a grueling climb over Pacheco Pass he stopped at Bell Station, but it too was empty. Word of the strike had reached here, as well as at stations farther up the road. After a brief rest he again mounted his wheel and pedaled on. Although he was very

tired and had had little rest, he knew that the mail must go through. At noon on Wednesday, July 18, he wearily rode into San Francisco. Like the Pony Express before it, the Bicycle Express had passed into history.

There being no mail in San Francisco to return, Enos placed his bike and himself aboard the train and rode back to Fresno.

The total number of letters carried by the Bicycle Express between July 7 and July 18 was approximately 380. In addition to the letters, several small items of merchandise were carried by the Bicycle Express, including a set of false teeth ordered by a Fresno dentist. What better way to sing the praises of the Bicycle Express than with a new set of choppers!

The sudden ending of the strike left Banta and Donze with a good supply of unused bicycle stamps. Banta used some of his leftover stamps on letterheads and envelopes as souvenirs of the Bicycle Express. Donze, the originator and engraver of the bicycle stamp, was an experienced stamp collector who realized that the value of the stamps would probably increase if collectors knew that the original die had been destroyed. But instead of destroying the die, Donze made a counterfeit die which he then defaced by making heavy lines across its face with an engraver's tool. He then had copies printed from the defaced die to prove that he had destroyed it. Stamp collectors, however, became suspicious when Donze raised the price of his stamps. Their suspicions were confirmed by experts in that field. A group of local collectors headed by Mr. Charles C. Jenney made a call on Donze and confronted him with the evidence. Caught by surprise, he readily admitted making a counterfeit die. Donze then asked the group what they thought he should do. They advised him to destroy the original die in their presence. This he did by cutting one horizontal and one vertical line across the face of the original die. Donze then asked Banta and Jenney if they would go before a notary public and take an oath that they had witnessed the destruction of the original die, which they did. Thus ended the episode of the bogus die before much damage was done.

When Banta got around to closing the books on the enterprise he found that he had taken in \$180.80 while his expenditures were \$134.10, leaving a deficit of \$25.30, which he absorbed. Although the venture was not a financial success, it brought a lot of positive publicity to Fresno. Stories about the Bicycle Express made front page news in newspapers all around the nation. The event created a renewed interest in bicycling. The *Expositor*, in its July 23, 1894 issue, reported that a bicycle club was being formed in Fresno, stating that A. C. Banta had successfully demonstrated that the bicycle was now more than just a hobby. No doubt many of the bicyclists, or wheelmen as the *Expositor* preferred to call them, would be wheeling around the city and countryside in bicycles purchased from Banta's Victor Cyclery. All the publicity was good for Fresno's businesses, but it was even better for Banta's business.

Business continued to prosper for Banta. In 1909 he was the operator of a large bicycle and motorcycle shop in San Jose. He was a lifelong bicycle enthusiast and after his experience with the Bicycle Express he became an ardent stamp collector as well. He was in demand as a guest speaker, appearing before bicycle and stamp clubs in the

Bay Area; his most frequent topic was the Fresno and San Francisco Bicycle Mail of 1894.

In 1934 Banta began planning for a 40th anniversary rerun of the Bicycle Express, but it was well into 1935 before he could get the rerun sanctioned by the proper authorities. He was able to borrow the original defaced die for the bicycle stamp from Helen G. Bowen, a daughter of Eugene Donze, who had inherited it from her father after his death. Banta had about 2000 of the bicycle stamps reprinted for the rerun when he received a letter from the Post Office Department informing him that the word "mail" must not appear on the bicycle stamps because the rerun was not over an authorized mail route. He had to obliterate the word "mail" from each individual stamp, thus creating another variety of the famed bicycle stamp—all to the great delight of stamp collectors.

The rerun of the Bicycle Express took place on May 1, 1935. Why May was chosen rather than the true anniversary date of July 6 is unclear. It may have had something to do with the heat in the San Joaquin Valley during July, or maybe they thought that traffic would be less heavy in May than in the vacation month of July. Besides Banta, two other original riders, R. O. Puryear and W. B. Atwater, were on hand to watch the start of the race. Riders left Fresno and San Francisco simultaneously at 8 A.M. on May 1. Thirty-one changes of riders were made during the 1935 rerun, and approximately 1500 letters were carried. The Fresno to San Francisco mail required 10 hours and 34 minutes to complete, while the San Francisco to Fresno run took 8 hours and 56 minutes. Both of these times were considerably better than the original 1894 run of 18 hours or better, but one must remember that both the roads and the equipment had been greatly improved.

The Scott Stamp and Coin Company deleted the bicycle stamp from its listing of local stamps in its 1937 stamp catalog, claiming that both the stamp and the Bicycle Express were only an advertising stunt to promote and sell Victor Bicycles. Banta angrily responded to Scott with a long letter in which he vehemently denied that the Bicycle Mail was a publicity stunt or scheme to increase the sale of Victor Bicycles. He referred Scott to some of the recognized authorities on western franks and local stamps whom he says would not lend their names to any issue which could be called an advertising stunt. He also quoted Mr. W. Parker Lyon of the Pony Express Museum in Pasadena and a former mayor of Fresno, who Banta says recognized the Bicycle Express as being just as authentic as the Pony Express. Banta further stated that the object of the Bicycle Express was not to sell stamps or bicycles, but to offer an emergency service for carrying the mail to the post office in San Francisco at a time when there was no regular mail service out of Fresno. He carefully pointed out in his letter that the word "Victor" did not appear on the stamp nor did it appear in any of the advertising except in the address (Victor Cyclery, 1703 Tulare Street) where letters could be left for delivery to the post office in San Francisco. He also reminded Scott in the letter that for 40 years they had recognized the bicycle stamp as an authentic local issue and philatelists had relied on this recognition and had added these stamps to their collection. The letter achieved its purpose; Scott reinstated the stamp in its 1938 edition.

Arthur and Lillian Banta celebrated their golden wedding anniversary on August 15, 1941. They were living in Oakland at that time. In an interview published in the *Post Enquirer*, Banta stated that his only regret was that he couldn't cycle anymore. "It's getting on that darned saddle, you know," he told the reporter. Although he was 72 at the time he still commuted daily across the bay to his job as a salesman.

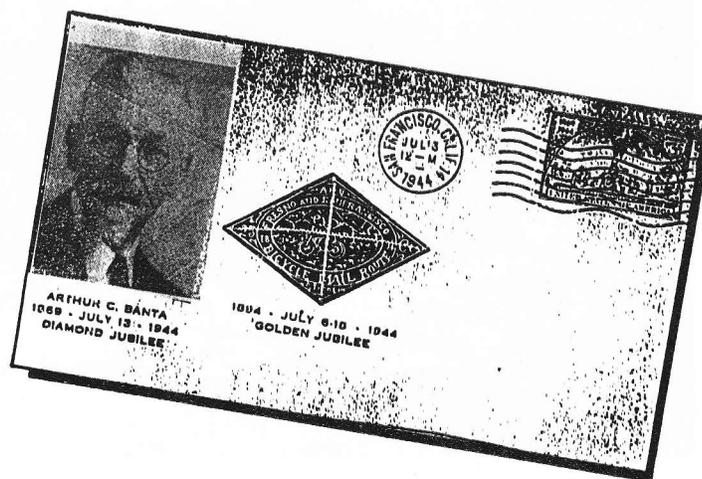
The golden jubilee for the Bicycle Express was July 6-18, 1944, but since the United States was deeply involved in World War II a golden anniversary rerun of the Bicycle Mail was out of the question. July 13, 1944 was also Banta's 75th birthday. He celebrated both events by having a special memorial envelope printed which he mailed to his many friends. He illustrated the cover with a portrait of himself in the upper left corner with the inscription: "Arthur C. Banta, 1869-July 13-1944, Diamond Jubilee." In the center was a picture of the bicycle stamp with the inscription "1894-July 6-18-1944, Golden Jubilee".

Arthur C. Banta died on October 1, 1945 at the age of 76 and is buried at Oakhill Cemetery in San Jose.

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Charles W. Baley is a native of Fresno County. He is a retired deputy sheriff of Fresno County and a historian.



Marfreda Danks Was One of the First Women in Fresno to Drive an Automobile

The following story was written by Mary Johnson Bartlett (Mrs. Paul Bartlett), granddaughter of Charles H. and Marfreda Reiman Danks, who lived on five acres just beyond Chandler Airport. Danks worked as a machinist at the Valley Foundry and Machine Works, then located on H Street. Mrs. Bartlett's story appeared in "The Chairman's Letter" by Edwin M. Eaton in the March-April 1965 edition of *Fresno Home Life*.

Kearney Avenue was by no means the end of the world for my grandmother Danks, for she never allowed it to be. The "side road" was merely the spot where she paused and gathered strength before she piloted the high black Studebaker out between the palms into the stream of non-existent traffic every morning to drive Grandpa down to the "Shop." Grandpa understood all about automobiles and bought a very good one the moment he considered them safe and practical, but he didn't care much about driving, especially after the hand throttle was eliminated. He was a big man, standing handsome and tall and erect at 6'4", and he disliked being cramped behind the wheel of a car with his long legs and feet obliged to accomplish "things a man's hands ought to be doing" as he put it. And although he was a great personal admirer of Henry Ford and quoted him on every possible occasion, he never forgave him for inventing the complicated system of footwork necessary for driving

the early model T, and flatly refused even to consider buying one. Besides all this, my grandmother liked to drive, and was always needing to deliver a loaf of bread or some fresh jam or pickles somewhere clear across town to some friend or relative. She never complained about living "way out there in the wilderness" as her friends on Glenn Avenue used to say, and perhaps it was because the Studebaker with its shiny black cushions, square headlamps and rasping Claxon horn made her extremely mobile.

My grandmother Danks was among the few of her feminine contemporaries to drive a car, and she was greatly admired for it, particularly by my grandfather, whose loyalty and caution led him to conceal rather effectively all evidence of the one blemish on her traffic record. Fifty years after the incident occurred, I came across a sheet of paper, locked in an ancient strongbox, that bore the signed release from a gentleman who had suffered minor injuries in a collision between his bicycle and my grandmother's automobile. This happened in 1913 at the corner of Fresno and J (Fulton) Streets, and it must have been more or less my grandmother's fault, since my grandfather promptly paid the man \$25 to cease and desist from embarrassing her by mentioning the affair further. I suspect this was rather early in her driving career, or anyone else's for that matter; she soon acquired skill and confidence to such degree that in the early twenties when the Studebaker began



Kearney Boulevard in early 1900s. (FCCHS Archives)



Charles H. and Marfreda Reiman Danks on the porch of their home, 1908. (FCCHS Archives)

to get a big shaky, my grandfather bought her a brand new Oakland Touring car, which raced along at thirty or so . . . in the country, of course. He drew the line at the new Sedan models, however, and never owned one, declaring it was too stuffy being shut up inside one of those "boxes" and downright unsafe, riding around with all that glass on every hand.

Right from the beginning, driving was a joy and a necessity for Grandma. Other ladies who lived on O and R Streets might hail the Chinese vegetable man who came by in his wagon, hop on the streetcar or walk down to Einstein's or Kutner-Goldstein's or Graff's—or even telephone for an order to be sent out. But on Kearney Avenue nobody delivered anything at all, except the Watkins man with his supply of vanilla, lemon extract and linament. For everything else of a commercial nature Grandma went to town. Sometimes she drove directly from the "Shop" on H Street where she deposited my grandfather at 7:45 to the Free Market alongside the courthouse park. There she would pick up the few items of produce she didn't already have in good supply; after exchanging a

friendly word of greeting with the stall keepers, many of whom were near neighbors, she proceeded to her favorite butcher shop to select the good cuts of meat which invariably graced her table.

For her "dry goods" shopping in the afternoon Grandma usually found a good parking place on Tulare Street, close to Radin and Kamp's and other stores that sold stamped pillow cases and embroidery thread for her "fancy work." It took a lot of thread and pillow cases to keep her going through sessions of the Madison Club and the Tokay Embroidery Club. Being a talented as well as an industrious woman, my grandmother through her years of membership managed to turn out enough monogrammed, flower be-decked and crochet-edged pillow cases to bruise the cheeks of several generations.

Next to embroidery, these groups were dedicated to the consumption of chicken salad, Grandma's hot "light rolls" and feathery white coconut layer cake with boiled frosting. Along with a few side attractions such as pomegranate jelly, home cured olives, cucumber pickles, watermelon preserves and home grown almonds salted and served in little crocheted nut baskets, these edibles made up a repast that the good ladies consumed at 4 p.m., after they had embroidered their fingers to the bone all afternoon.

No matter how pressing were her duties as a hostess or how desperately she needed another skein of pale green thread, Grandma always dropped her bricks in time to get the Studebaker or the Oakland over to H Street to be in her customary spot to greet my grandfather when he emerged from the Valley Foundry at 5:05 or a bit later. I was brought up to believe that the world would fall apart if Grandma were not outside the shop a few minutes ahead of time, waiting for Grandpa. And so it did—his world at any rate—one sad June day in 1927 when I was about 12 and my sister 7, when my grandmother made her last trip home from the shop with Grandpa and quietly died less than an hour later.

Judge W. J. Kilby Wins Re-Election

HOW IT WAS DONE IN COALINGA
IN THE MID 1930'S
(As Reported by A. J. McCollum)

F. J. McCollum was editor and owner of the *Coalinga Daily Record*. It was his custom to organize and run a "Candidate Night" during election years. This was the arrangement. McCollum retained the bandstand, publicized the meeting and provided the music. Jim McCollum, F.J.'s son, played trombone, and he organized the band. Each candidate was charged a dollar a minute to talk, and each was allowed a minimum of three minutes and maximum of five.

Justice of the Peace W. J. Kilby was up for re-election. He had served for 20 years, and was nearing the age of 80. He filed for re-election.

A young lawyer from southern California moved into town. He aspired for the job and filed the usual documents to qualify his name on the ballot.

There then ensued a whispering campaign to the effect that Judge Kilby was not a lawyer and therefore not qualified for the job. Furthermore he was too old, and it was time for a change.

Kilby sought F. J. McCollum's advice. How to counter the innuendo? Thereupon McCollum picked up a used envelope, wrote a speech and handed it to Kilby.

As expected, the young lawyer appeared at the "Candidate Night" function and spoke first. He commented on his youth and legal expertise, and Kilby's age.

Kilby followed. He shuffled to the front of the stage, pulled out the envelope and this is what he read to the audience:

"Folks, I hear it's being said around town that I'm too old. Well, Mrs. Kilby doesn't think so."

Then he sat down.

He was re-elected by a landslide.

A. J. "Jim" McCollum served as editor of the *Fresno Guide* following World War II. He later joined P.G.&E. in San Francisco as vice-president in charge of public relations. He is now retired.



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Founded 1919

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