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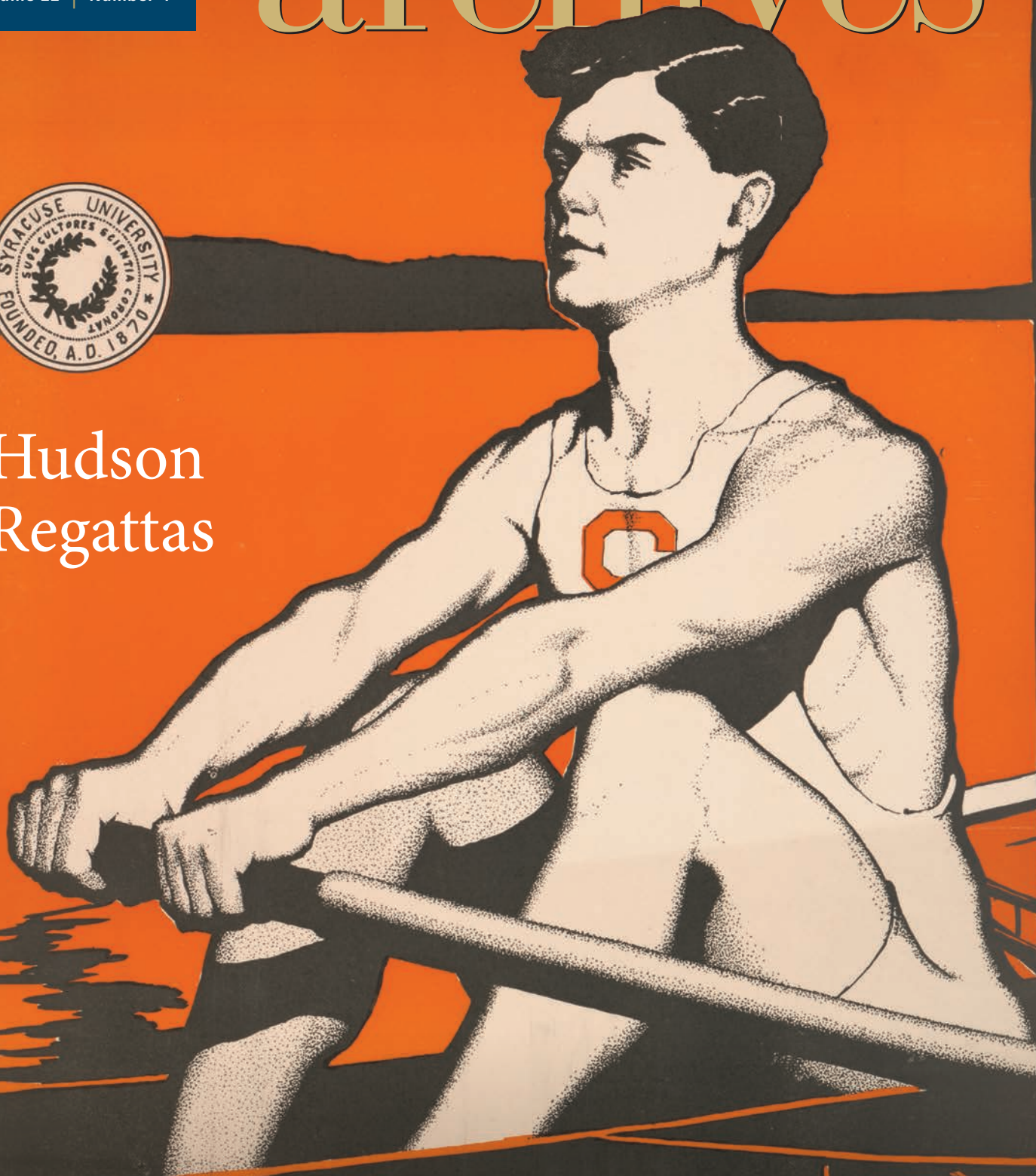
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The Bicycle Craze

BY SUSAN HUGHES

At the end of the nineteenth century, cycling was rapidly becoming a popular pastime due to the development of the safety bicycle. Unlike the so-called “penny farthings,” with their oversized front wheel, a safety bicycle allowed the rider’s feet to be within reach of the ground, making it easier to stop. The new bicycles were lightweight and affordable. Women were especially enthusiastic, exchanging their cumbersome Victorian skirts for more sensible clothing that allowed for increased movement.

Soon, scenic bike paths became a trend, connecting neighborhoods and providing a dedicated cycling route. As a special cycling section in the April 3, 1898, edition of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* attested, cycling was especially popular on Long Island. Affectionately referred to as “wheelmen,” cyclists were offered a self-guided tour of Long Island through appealing line drawings and interpretive texts featuring points of local and historical interest. “To the wheelman Long Island is almost a Paradise,” the article exclaimed, highlighting various attractions, as well as the best roadways for cycling.

The bicycle craze spurred the development of guidelines for cycling on roadways and in parks. As early as 1885, cyclists in Brooklyn were issued badges by the Parks Department. Cyclists were reminded to use care when crossing plazas in Prospect Park and to carry a lamp after sundown; no blowing of whistles or bugles was allowed. Some cities employed “spotters” to check for badges on bicycles using the bike paths.

In 1907, New York State passed regulations for “sidepaths” in Suffolk County, often constructed alongside existing roads or sidewalks. Each town was authorized to fund the construction, maintenance, and regulation of bicycle paths by issuing permits for cyclists. Behavior expected of cyclists was spelled out, such as limiting speed to ten miles per hour

when passing another cyclist. Horses, cows, and other livestock were forbidden on the sidepaths.

The Cross Island Bicycle Path in the town of Brookhaven was built exclusively for bicycle traffic in 1887. By 1902, Suffolk County boasted more than 170 miles of bicycle paths. Today, the former bike path in Port Jefferson Station is known as Bike Path Road, a reminder of the original purpose of the roadway and the heyday of the bicycle craze. ■



WILLIAM G. POMEROY FOUNDATION

In 2006, the William G. Pomeroy Foundation established its New York State Historic Marker Grant Program to help people celebrate their community's history. Since then, the Pomeroy Foundation has funded more than 1,000 markers in all of New York State's sixty-two counties. Across all of the Foundation's roadside marker grant programs, that number reaches to nearly 2,100. Grants for NYS historic markers are available to local, state, and federal government entities; nonprofit academic institutions; and 501(c)(3) organizations in New York State. Funding covers the entire cost of a marker, pole, and shipping. For more information or to apply for a marker at no cost to you, visit: wgpfoundation.org.

Daisy, Daisy
Give me your answer do
I'm half crazy
All for the love of you
It won't be a stylish marriage
I can't afford a carriage
But you'll look sweet upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.

—Harry Dacre, 1892. *Daisy Bell*.

*Ladies cycling Prospect Park,
Brooklyn, 1897*