# A STORY OF THE RAILROAD AND A BICYCLE

## WHEN "A MILE A MINUTE" WAS BORN

CHARLES (MILE-A-MINUTE) MURPHY, PACED BY A LONG ISLAND TRAIN JUNE 30, 1899, ON HEMPSTEAD PLAINS

# A MILE-A-MINUTE CAREER

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The Thrilling Story of Mile-a-Minute Murphy's Death Defying Ride
Behind the Fastest Engine on the Long Island Railroad
and a Resume of the High Lights in His
Colorful Spectacular Career.

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DETERMINED TO ACCOMPLISH FEAT;
EXPERIMENTS WITH HOME TRAINER

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Charles M. "Mile-a-Minute" Murphy Who Won That Title in 1899
Rode a Mile in 57 4/5 Seconds on Bicycle Behind a Long
Island Railroad Train Is Keenly Interested
In All Progressive Movements

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FIRST PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF STREAMLINE

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By CHARLES M. MURPHY

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I WILL give, as briefly as possible, the story of how I rode a mile in 57 4/5 seconds on a bicycle behind a Long Island Railroad train at Maywood, L. I., on Friday, June 30, 1899.

In 1897, while an amateur cyclist, I was asked to give an opinion of the quality and relative speed of various prominent riders of the time. My answer was that there is no limit to the speed of a bicycle rider, that speed depended largely upon the bicycle, gears, tracks and pacemaker. This was based upon an exhibition at a Philadelphia bicycle show when I rode a mile on a home-trainer with a 64-gear in 1 minute and 19 seconds. The track record was then 3 minutes and 19 seconds.

Mr. Murphy as He Appears Today

I demonstrated that in the absence of wind pressure, one could ride at least two minutes faster than the figure just mentioned.

I declared that I could follow a railroad train, and that there was not a locomotive built which could get away from me.

I immediately became the laughing stock of the world. The more people laughed the more determined I became to accomplish the feat. I figured that the fast moving locomotive would expel the air to such an extent that I could follow in the vacuum behind. Just remember a vacuum is not a suction, it is the absence of air.

It works exactly the same as if I were riding on a home-trainer or in dead air.

This trainer had been repeatedly tested and found accurate. In many tests I had made miles as low as 57 seconds. I always felt that whatever I could do on a home-trainer I could repeat behind a pacemaker on a smooth, level surface, providing such pacemaker was large enough to cause a vacuum that would protect the bicycle.

There are some commonplace truths which only take on a practical value



in men's minds when they revive some startling and easily understood illustration.

Of such a kind is the theory of atmospheric resistance to moving bodies.

For ten years I had petitioned almost every railroad in the United States to prove to the world the disadvantage of wind resistance.

My endeavors, however, were almost in vain. By chance, I met Hal Fullerton, special agent of the Long Island Railroad at Howes Roadhouse. We jested about my ride behind the train. I protested out that an exhibition

Workmen Laying Plank Between Rails Preparatory to Mr. Murphy's Famous Ride.

of that kind would prove to the world that the Long Island Railroad had just as good rolling stock, roadbeds and employees as any other road in the world. I believe that this talk hurried along the agreement as forty-eight hours after the conversation a contract was signed.

It had been arranged to give three exhibitions, so there would be no one to question the accuracy of the record ride. Special arrangements were made to have members of the press from all parts of the United States take part in the event.

## Names of Officials

**Referee**—James E. Sullivan, Secretary A. A. U.
**Announcer**—Fred W. Burns, New York Athletic Club.
**Doctor**—McMunn Holly
**Advisory Board**—Walter Simmis, Manager; Arthur A. Townsend, James Cooper, Advisors; Johnnie Steward, Trainer.
**Timers**—Robert Snell, New York Athletic Club, New York; N. Y.; W. H. "Sparrow" Robertson, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Samuel See, New York Athletic Club, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Sheriff F. U. Creamer, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Col. Charles Dieges, Pastime Athletic Club, New York, N. Y.
**Press**—Jessie Merritt, Farmingdale, L. I., Post; T. W. Post, Brooklyn Eagle; Tommy Lee, New York World; Frank P. Prial, The Wheel, New York; E. R. Evans, Brooklyn Eagle, New York; Al Reeves, Cycling Gazette and Cycling World; Amos G. Batchelder, New York Sun, New York; J. H. Gerrie, New York Herald, N. Y.

They arrived in Babylon at 5 p. m. June 21, 1899, and escorted me to the depot with an array of trainers. There they all mounted the special train and anxiously watched the result.

After a hurried conversation with Sam Booth, I instructed him that whatever speed they would attain, to hold. I donned my racing togs, took my position on a Tribune bicycle geared at 104 behind the train.

The word was passed to the engineer—I was off to make another page in the world's history.

The engine gained momentum a little faster than was expected during the first quarter. I rode wonderfully well for the entire distance. I did not leave the middle of the 10-inch plank; I don't think I varied two inches from the back of the bumper.

The time for the mile was as follows, 16 2/3 seconds for the first quarter, 33 3/5 for the half, 49 1/5 for the three-quarter and a mile in 1.04 4/5.

## Dust Agitation Violent

At the signal of the finish I backed away from the train. About 200 feet back I experienced two swirling circles or eddies that almost threw me to the ground. I was almost helpless; it shook me as if I were a piece of paper. It's a feeling that I'll never forget.

It was generally thought I was aided by suction. That is not so. I rode in atmosphere which was comparatively, but actually still.

The agitation of dust particles within the hood attached to the rear car was violent. There were plenty of dangerous possibilities, however, and in any event, it was spectacular in a tragic degree.



After six trials of Locomotive 39 it was afterwards found that this locomotive could not reach a mile a minute speed.

Various experiments had been made with handkerchiefs, pieces of paper and kites to disprove the suction theory. It was found that the air displaced by the locomotive and rushing in furious currents on either side of the car in almost parallel lines, did not come together immediately behind the train as generally supposed, but met in two swirling circles something like 200 feet behind the train. Consequently there was absolutely no back draught,

**A Crowd of Observers Gathered to Witness Famous Ride, Just Previous to Start.**

nor any wind pressure upon me in any way. I rode in absolutely still atmosphere or dead air, on a slightly up grade rising 100 1/2 feet per mile.

On the rear platform of the special car a windshield had been constructed, which looked like an enormous vestibule, to shield me from the rush of air displaced by the locomotive. This hood was built right up from the track to the roof of the car. It projected eleven feet four inches from the back, but only six feet really protected me. On the rear of the special coach was a vertical strip of wood three inches in width, painted white as a guide to

keep me in the center of the track. To prevent my wheel from touching the car was a protecting cross-bar rearward two and one-half feet, at the height that would allow the front wheel of the bicycle to pass beneath it, but would allow the front wheel of the bicycle to pass beneath it, but would not allow the head of the bicycle to strike the rear of the car.

This acted as a buffer and saved me from a disasterous finish.

On the final ride the heaviest and fastest locomotive of the road was used. This worked disastrously because, when it passed over the joints of the rails, the roadbed would sink, causing an up and down hill race, making the ride very difficult.

It also was decided that I should not risk lacking through the eddies on the final ride, but be pulled aboard the train. Unforeseen things happened. We all forgot our signals.

I mounted my bicycle, took hold of the special rod that was placed on the back of the car to prevent my front wheel from striking the cartrack. Had this not been there at the finish I would have collided with the rear of the car-track and would have been thrown to the ground and probably killed.

As soon as I got into motion I let go of the bar on back of the train and took a firm grip up on the handlebars of my bicycle.

Hal Fullerton asked me if I was all right and I replied, "Yes."

The signal was passed on to Sam Booth in the engine cab and I was off for the famous ride. I began to pedal fast. The blood tingled through my veins. I soon settled down to business. I was determined to win. I bent over and gripped the handlebars as I never did before. The train gained impetus surprisingly fast. Sam Booth pulled the locomotive and car up to the mile-a-minute speed. The acceleration was wonderfully rapid.

With eyes glued upon the vertical strip of white on back of the car, with each push of the pedal I was putting every ounce of energy into the ride. I experienced an entirely different feeling compared with my previous ride. It was a bold, then shove sensation; riding was becoming more uncomfortable as I progressed. The officials knew that there was something wrong, that I was laboring under great difficulties. I could tell from an occasional glance at them that they were on the verge of despair and disappointment.

## On Dead Air

Although I was riding perfectly, still on dead air and going strong, I could not understand the violent vibration in the track, as though the boards were rapping the bottom of my wheel, the effect being as though I was riding over an undulation instead of level track; feeling hot missiles striking my face and body.

I learned afterwards it was burning rubber from under the car. For the first time I realized that the eyes and minds of the people thought my



ride was impossible. Within five seconds the rate of speed was terrific; I was riding in a maelstrom of swirling dust, hot cinders, paper and other particles of matter. The whipsaw feeling through a veritable storm of fire became harder every second; I heard the cheers from the officials and spectators as I rode and they had a fine effect upon me.

I was riding against hope; I expected the worst. The first quarter mile was reached in 15 1/5 seconds.

I then observed that the hearty cheers of the officials had given place to appeals to "Come on, don't give up."

They realized that something was wrong because I was losing ground.

**Mr. Murphy Taking a Trial Spin Over Finished Plankway**

Fred Burns asked through the megaphone what was the matter. I raised my head from the best position on the handlebars to reply to Burns. Quick as a flash I fell back fifty feet. With all the energy and power at my command I tried to regain the lost ground. It was no use, I was doomed to failure. I could feel myself getting weaker every second.

I was closely following into the maelstrom of dust, which whirled, eddied and rushed in a shrieking, roaring turmoil and pandemonium about me. The

suspense became maddening. All kinds of unpleasant things passed through my mind. I saw ridicule, contempt, disgrace and a lifetime dream gone up in smoke.

As I looked up I saw the agonized faces, yelling, holding out stretched hands as if they would like to get hold of or assist me somehow.

They sent the thrill of determination through me.

## Asked God to Help

I raised my thought to God to help me. My prayer was answered and an indescribable feeling came upon me. It was the hand of God. New vigor and energy with each push of the pedal. I felt better and stronger. I could see myself gaining the lost ground. Oh! how I suffered.

It was a hot, fast, serious, life or death contract on my hands. The half was passed in 29 2/5 seconds. I could see the judges watching me.

You could see that their earlier feeling of despair and disappointment had given way to a feeling of confidence and success.

Then I pedalled through the fire of hot cinders and rubber, but with each sting it made me more determined. Wobbling to and fro, but still gaining, the dust, the odor of burning rubber—all these were factors to excite the most stoical mind. The car was crowded with men who had been used to seeing any and all things that were dangerous, but the howling and screaming of sturdy officials and newspaper men from all over the United States that stood on the platform put all on edge.

They sent the thrill of determination through me. In the midst of nervous pressure, the moment when the half minute seemed an hour down there behind the platform, I kept a terrific pace. Suddenly, three-quarters was passed in 43 4/5 seconds.

I was still fifteen feet from the original position, dust partly obscuring the track and rear of the train. I expected to go off the track, traveling faster than the train, with the terrible storm of dust, pebbles, hot rubber and cinders. I looked up blankly. It was the uncanny look of a man gazing at his finish. It was deadening. It was getting to a point where I could expect anything. My eyes were glued upon Hal Fullerton, my friend who made my dream possible to revolutionize railroading and cycling.

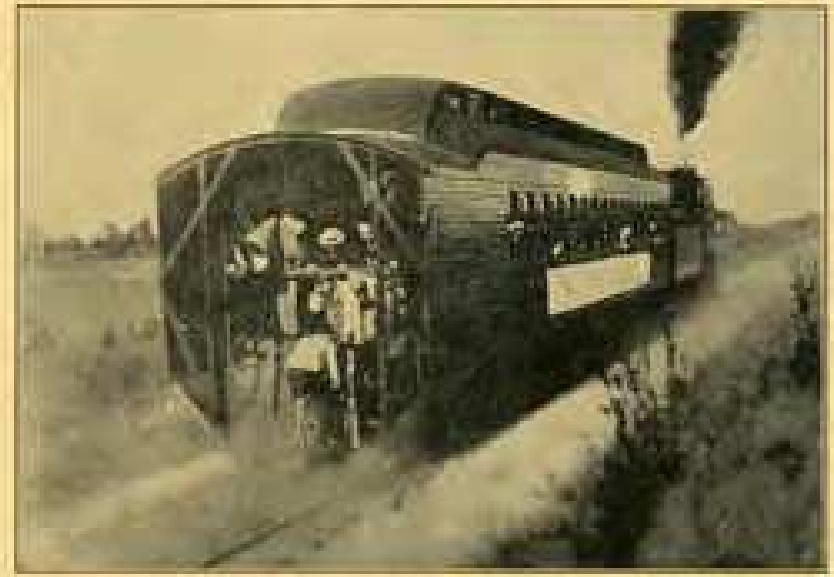
## Crept Back Into View

Second by second I crept back into view. Whew, what a relief! Signal of the American flag signifying the finish. The joy in my heart of success. A moment more of suspense I was riding faster than the train itself, as I was making up the lost ground. Head still bent, overhandlebars, pedalling more fiercely than I ever pedalled before, it seemed like an endless task.



As Sam Booth passed the mile he shut off the steam. The locomotive slowed too suddenly on I came, and crashed head on into the rear of the train. The front wheel recoiled while the back wheel rebounded and continued to revolve in the air. I pitched head forward. A frantic yell of despair went up from the officials on the rear platform. They expected me to be dashed to pieces and sure death. The men on back of the platform reached out in sheer nervousness and gradually drew me close.

The pleasure and glory of this long cherished idea was not to be taken



**Snapshot Taken of Mr. Murphy in Last One-half of His Famous Mile Ride**

from me by death. I reached forward, grabbed an upright on the rear of the car. Simultaneously Hal Fullerton caught me by one arm and Joseph H. Cummin by the other and pulled both the bicycle and myself upon the platform of the rear car.

I lay motionless, face down, on the platform. I was all in. I was on the platform but a few seconds when the train dashed over the end of the boards that were laid between the rails. I would never have been able to finish on the ties, which, no doubt would have resulted disastrously to me.

## Yells Challenge Roar

I was half carried to a cot at the end of the car; the roar of the train was challenged by hysterical yells.

The excitement among the officials and representatives of the press was a sight that will perhaps never again be witnessed. Every man on the car felt that a very remarkable performance had occurred and the general nervous reaction had ended in pandemonium. Grown men hugged and kissed each other. One man fainted and another went into hysterics, while I remained speechless on my back, ashen in color and sore all over from the hot cinders and rubber that came from under the car.

Upon examination by Dr. McMunn Holly, it was found that there was very little difference in my pulse or temperature and the action of my heart quickened only six beats per minute. I was the most composed man in the party.

The overanxious officials could not get my racing jersey off quick enough to rub me down. Little did they realize that they were taking flesh with them, caused by the hot rubber and cinders that had penetrated my jersey into the skin. I was subjected to torture and when the liniment was applied I could have yelled from pain. The scene I just described and the glory of my success proved something, to say the least.

## Nervous Laughter

Just at this time the engineer, Sam Booth, entered, a massive, good natured, brown-eyed giant, who was normally undemonstrative. Between sentences and hand shakes he broke into nervous laughter, and tears came from his eyes, saying "I thought I lost you." He remembered that I had dropped away from the train on the first trial, and not seeing me this time he thought he had killed me.

Fireman Howell, overcome with bashfulness and pride, could not say a word, but felt happy. Sam Booth and the fireman afterward considered by their fellowmen as being in the champion class, have won glory all their own, among railroad men.

The performance behind a locomotive did stimulate cycling in all of its various branches. Analyzed more closely the ride proved the capacity of man on a bicycle to follow practically any pace that human ingenuity could provide.

Physically, the effects of high locomotion upon the human organism, in this instance a perfectly strong healthy and somewhat nervous man, showed no ill effects upon the heart, and the nervous reaction was not great, considering the exciting surroundings.



Athletically, the first feat was comparatively simple to me. I had virtually been training for years in the cycling profession. To others it was marvelous. Without the pacing engine it would have been impossible. I did my best. None who saw it cared to emulate it.

James E. Sullivan, the official referee, although highly elated over the success of the ride, declared he would never again take part in an event of that kind, even if it were the means of making cycling for the next century.

One amusing thing to me was to travel in a train the day after the ride. The eyes of practically every man and woman were glued to the page in each newspaper on which appeared an account of my ride.

## Record Still Stands

I was one of the recognized champion bicycle riders of America. My best and most successful year was 1895. I held seven world records; seventeen American records; and twenty-nine state records. I am the first and only man to undertake or accomplish this feat, and while thirty-seven years have passed since I rode a mile behind a Long Island Railroad train in 57 4/5 seconds, it still remains the record made on a bicycle.

## Subsequent Activities

This successful ride earned me the soubriquet of "Mile-a-Minute Murphy" and sold the scientific idea of streamlining to overcome air resistance, resulting in higher speed and less fuel consumption. This ride was also the climax of my athletic career. My ambition had been fulfilled. After an extensive exhibition tour as a headliner in the Keith Vaudeville Circuit, I brought my cycling career to a close.

## Appointed Policeman

The principal factor which caused me to abandon athletics, was being appointed to the New York City Police Department. This marked the beginning of another notable chapter in my life. While on the force I had experienced many dangerous moments and had many narrow escapes. I also added to my list of injuries while on duty as a policeman.

Incidentally, I have experienced and survived as many as one hundred ninety-five accidents, quite a few of which were received while a policeman. I remember having been confined to five different hospitals during my last two years on the force. I have received four commendations and was cited five times for excellent duties.

## First Policeman to Fly Aeroplane

I was the first policeman in the world to fly an aeroplane, and also the first policeman to use a motorcycle, in uniform, in the New York City Police Department. The last accident I sustained in the performance of my duty, resulted in a fracture of my left knee-cap and caused me to retire from the force.

## Anticipates Boy Scout Organization

After my experience with crime and criminals, I saw the need of character building and sound physical training in the youth of our land. I endeavored many times, without avail, to have the Board of Education permit me to start military training in the public schools. My program was very much similar to that which Sir Baden Powell incorporated in the Boy Scouts six years later.

## Aviation Enthusiast

The year 1901 found me keenly interested in aviation. I already saw the advantages of a practical gyroplane over the ordinary aeroplane. I made many attempts to build one and on February 9, 1901, the New York World published a sketch of a gyroplane which I had designed.

In 1915, I had succeeded in making preliminary arrangements for the establishing of airports every fifty miles along our coast lines.

## Interested in Public Works

I am always interested in anything constructive and I firmly believe in preparedness for any future emergency that may arise. In view of this fact, with the help of Congressman Hon. William F. Brunner, I was able to introduce a bill in the House of Representatives, calling for the construction of a Federal Highway, connecting Fort Tilden, N. Y., with Whitestone and points in Connecticut. This would not only provide good road facilities for easy motor access between the New England States and New York City, but, in the event of a war, it would expedite the transportation of war materials and serve as a connecting link between the airports on the South side and the North side of Long Island.

To close this article, I would like to state that I am still highly interested in anything that will benefit mankind and all ideas that will result in the preservation of the high standard of American living and that my every effort is applied with this in mind.