

City Staff Toys With Bike Transit

by Michael Almon

Within the past couple of weeks, bicyclists may have noticed a newly paved, eight-foot wide bicycle trail along the Vermont St. side of South Park. A safe new bicycle facility? A sign of better things to come? Not quite. This project is not the doing of our new City Commission. Hopefully, however, they can salvage what the previous Commission botched when they gave excessive decision-making authority to a few city staff members. And as staff is all too often inclined to do, they solicited no public input while developing and funding this six-mile Bicycle Demonstration Project.

Historically, our officials have made only token efforts to provide safe bicycle transportation in Lawrence. Because they themselves could not comprehend bicycle safety considerations, they consistently failed to apply professional talent to bicycle planning. Their belatedly heralded "Pedalplan" was developed with little encouragement, and done mostly after hours by Myles Schachter while he was a city planner in 1976. The officially adopted bicycle elements of the neighborhood plans grew from my initiative as planning technician three years ago, and still remain incomplete and in need of refinement.

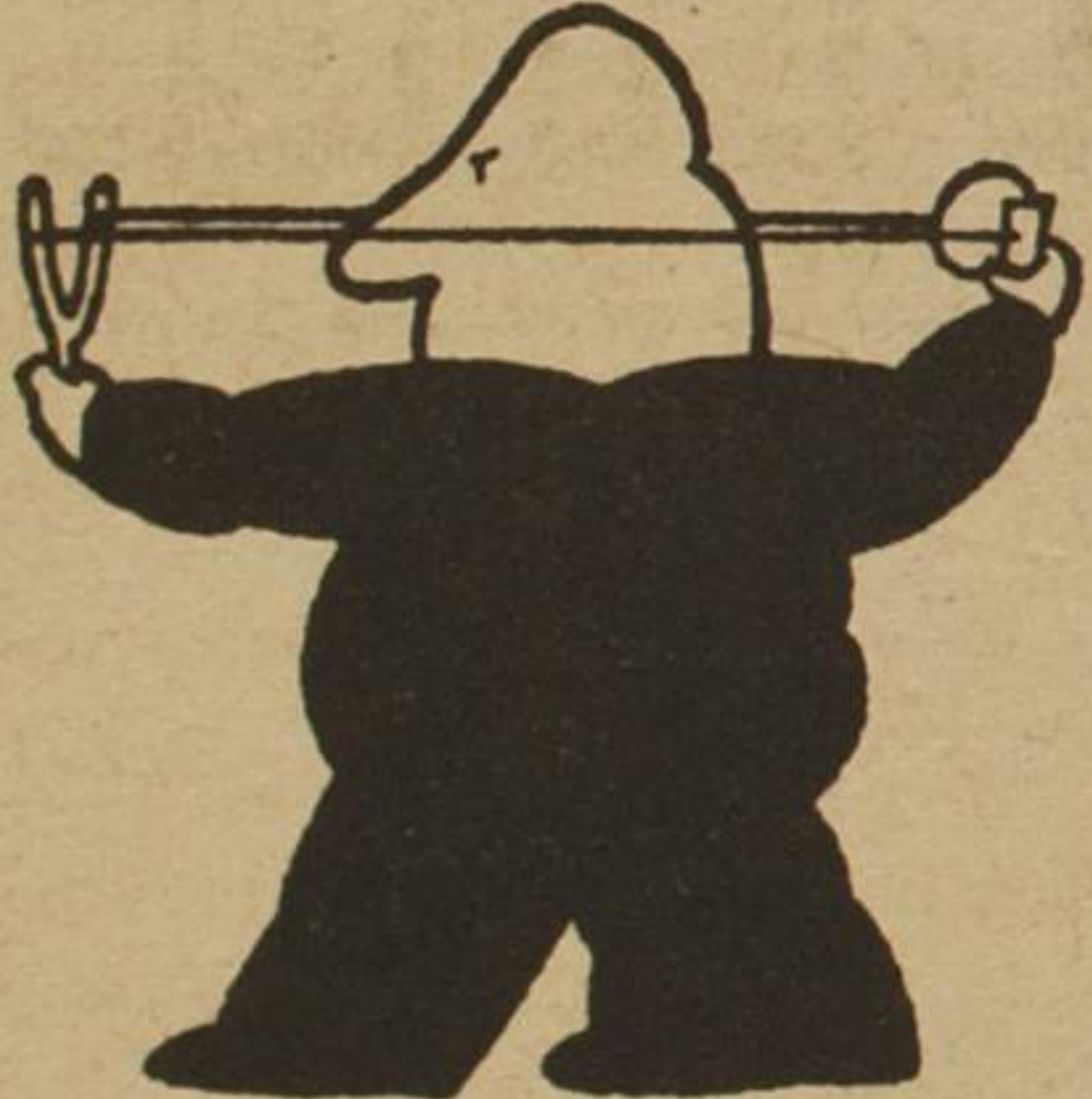
Nevertheless, intent on maintaining a fractured approach to bicycle transit, mid-level bureaucrats without significant bicycling experience were assigned this project. They proceeded to expand upon the already piecemeal bicycle plans by introducing several additional safety problems that were not previously present. Non-signalized crossings at major arterials, bicycle routes on streets intended for heavy auto traffic, and uncontrolled bicycle traffic on one-way streets, for example, would not seem to encourage bicyclists to use this supposed demonstration of quality bicycle facilities.



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The bungling bureaucrats began by ignoring sound advice from many sources. The Management Analyst in charge of the project did not ever refer to the neighborhood plans, and disregarded their own City Planning Office recommendations that scarce Federal funds "be first spent in Pinckney, Oread, and East Lawrence because of need, and since a bikeway system is an element of their adopted neighborhood plans."

In similar fashion, the Oread Neighborhood Association's pending request for Community Development funds to build a bicycle trail, and the Appropriate Technology Center's suggestion that Public Works money be spent under Capital Improvements both went unheeded. The decision was made rather to seek Surface Transportation Assistance Act grant monies, although they failed to simultaneously request Heritage, Conservation, & Recreation matching funds for trail sections through city parks, which would have freed up more S.T.A.A. grant money for non-park portions of the project.



The most astonishing oversight, however, was to effectively exclude the valuable expertise of Commissioner (now, Mayor) Marci Francisco, who is both an avid bicyclist as well as an architectural designer. Also excluded was the Director of Public Works, even though most of the project will be over city streets and paid for with Department of Transportation money, while included in the process was the Director of Parks & Recreation, even though no Parks & Recreation money nor Heritage, Conservation & Recreation money was being spent. The explanation is that, until the recent election, the City insisted on viewing the bicycle as a toy for recreation rather than a legitimate means of transportation, and gauged its decisions accordingly.

Not surprisingly, the resulting decisions proved pathetic. The Demonstration Bicycle Project, as funded, forms a sideways "U" shape, starting along Princeton

Rd. in northwest Lawrence, looping through downtown, past the High School, and connecting with the Clinton Parkway bicycle trail. Northwest and southwest Lawrence show infrequent ridership—mostly recreational—whereas daily bicyclists who need to commute through the chaos of central city were given less-than-adequate



Neighborhoods Gain Pride Through Organizations

by Barry Shalinsky

Nearly everyone in Lawrence is aware of the fact that there are neighborhood associations in the central part of Lawrence, but a lot of people are unaware of why they exist and what they do.

Historically, the neighborhood associations were created as a necessary element for the city to receive Community Development Block Grant funds designed to serve low- and moderate-income people. The Community Development Act passed by Congress mandates community input into the spending of these funds. Six neighborhood associations were created: East Lawrence Improvement Association (ELIA), Far East Lawrence Improvement Association (FELIA), North Lawrence Improvement Association (NLIA), Old West Lawrence Association (OWLA), Oread Neighborhood Association (ONA) and Pinckney Neighborhood Association (PNA). All are duly recognized by the city.

Much of the publicity received by the neighborhood associations has been for their actions in fighting negative change within their neighborhoods. ELIA opposed construction of a highway through East Lawrence known as the Haskell Loop. The Loop would have destroyed and isolated housing, increased traffic and noise, and cut maybe two minutes off a trip from 23rd and Haskell to 7th and New Hampshire. PNA and OWLA opposed location of the city garage at 2nd and Indiana because it would have put a flow of truck traffic onto residential streets. More recently, PNA opposed development of the "bluffs" at 6th and Iowa which would increase runoff water from heavy rains to an area where there is already flooding. ONA has opposed zoning laws which encourage demolition of beautiful Victorian homes to make way for box-type apartment units.



Because of these actions to protect their neighborhoods, the neighborhood associations have acquired an unfair stigma as "agitters." Actually, most of what the neighborhood associations do is of an entirely different nature, but it isn't the type of news that makes the front page of the local daily.

An important function of neighborhood associations is to instill pride in people for their neighborhoods. A few short years ago, the area east of K. U. was commonly known as the "student ghetto." Once people began to take pride in living in the "Oread Neighborhood," they started to rehab their houses, meet their neighbors, clean up their alleys, and the crime rate has dropped drastically. ONA has a tool bank, a monthly newsletter, and a community mini-park developed completely with volunteer labor.

FELIA is active in providing landscaping, play equipment and sidewalks for their neighborhood. PNA sponsors alley cleanups and actively works with the city staff in land use decisions. NLIA provides both service and social functions.

OWLA is sponsoring a series of seminars entitled "This Old House . . ." A recent session about roofing was so successful that OWLA plans future seminars on topics such as foundations, plumbing and wiring, exterior repairs and maintenance, and restoration of architectural details.

bicycle facilities. For example, bicycle trails and bicycle lanes as approved in the Pinckney Plan were arbitrarily (and illegally without public hearing) downgraded to simple routes on the streets, where bicyclists must vie with auto traffic. Several months ago, the City graciously rebuilt West 2nd Street to handle increased traffic for the new Holidome, but failed to use this logical time to build the called-for bicycle trail there.

And of the four planned options for bicycle routes south of downtown, they chose the absolute worst—Vermont Street. Between 14th and 15th streets on Vermont, the recently built Hanover Place Apartments form an effective barrier, eliminating any hope for a bicycle easement through this block, and forcing bicyclists to use heavily travelled Massachusetts or Kentucky streets to get around it. Here too, designated bicycle lanes were eliminated, making the situation awkward, dangerous and practically useless. Far superior choices would have been New Hampshire St., with its already agreed-upon easement through the Central Jr. High property, New York St., or the Oread-requested alley between Kentucky and Tennessee streets.

And then there's East Lawrence, the best neighborhood in the city. (Remember what I wrote about neighborhood pride. I hope other people feel the same way about where they live.) ELIA sends a monthly newsletter to every house in East Lawrence, sponsors two annual neighborhood cleanups and a neighborhood annual picnic. ELIA was active in helping neighbors on east 13th St. in their effort to get new water lines. ELIA recently coordinated 25 volunteers from a K. U. fraternity, directing them to senior citizens in need of someone to do painting, minor repairs and yard work. ELIA sponsored a chicken dinner to raise over \$500 for community service work. ELIA is cooperating with ONA on a paint-up program. ELIA works closely with New York School, Penn House and the Appropriate Technology Center.



Unfortunately, one never hears much about the day-to-day services the neighborhood associations provide; nor will one read in the local press about the rich diversity between the neighborhoods and the creative ways in which the different neighborhood associations try to serve the particular needs of their communities. For all the talk about the older neighborhoods trying to divide Lawrence from itself, the truth is simple. The neighborhood associations are impacting people at the level of their lives. If we can't see to it that the senior citizen down the block gets her grass cut in the summer, what right do we have to try to do anything on a larger scale? That's what a feeling of neighborhood is all about.

Many other arbitrary changes were made to adopted plans, pointing out both the city's ignorance and their indifference to public process. The entire project was thrown together in a matter of weeks, allowing no opportunity for citizen input. And Commissioner Francisco herself was shown the grant proposal only one day before it was submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

If you are one of the 8,000 bicyclists in Lawrence (or even if you are not), you probably feel affronted by city bureaucrats who try to circumvent public input so as to reduce their own work load. Their claim, of course, is that too much citizen participation is slow and inefficient. Quite the contrary. What is inefficient are hastily made decisions by an uninformed few, usually resulting in wasteful expenditures of money for poor solutions.

For Lawrence to be dynamic and creative, city staff will need to be supportive of, rather than obstructive towards, the public viewpoint. Although the new Commission is fostering an atmosphere of open, deliberate decision making, this process could be severely hindered if staff continues to supply the Commission with narrowly conceived information. Lawrence now faces some major decisions that will have repercussions for years to come, so it is essential that we have as much public participation as possible. Our changes will affect many, so many should effect change.

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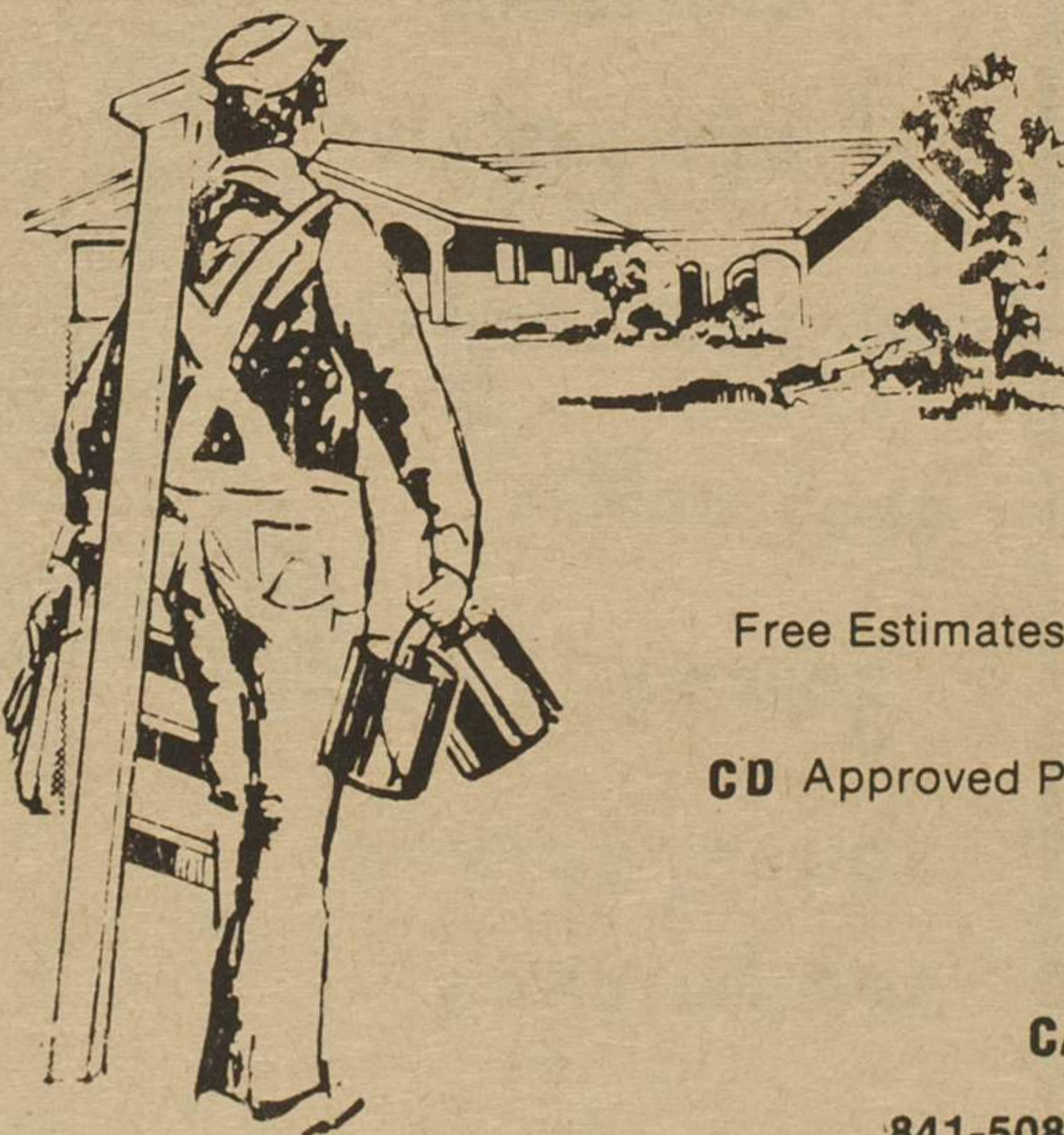
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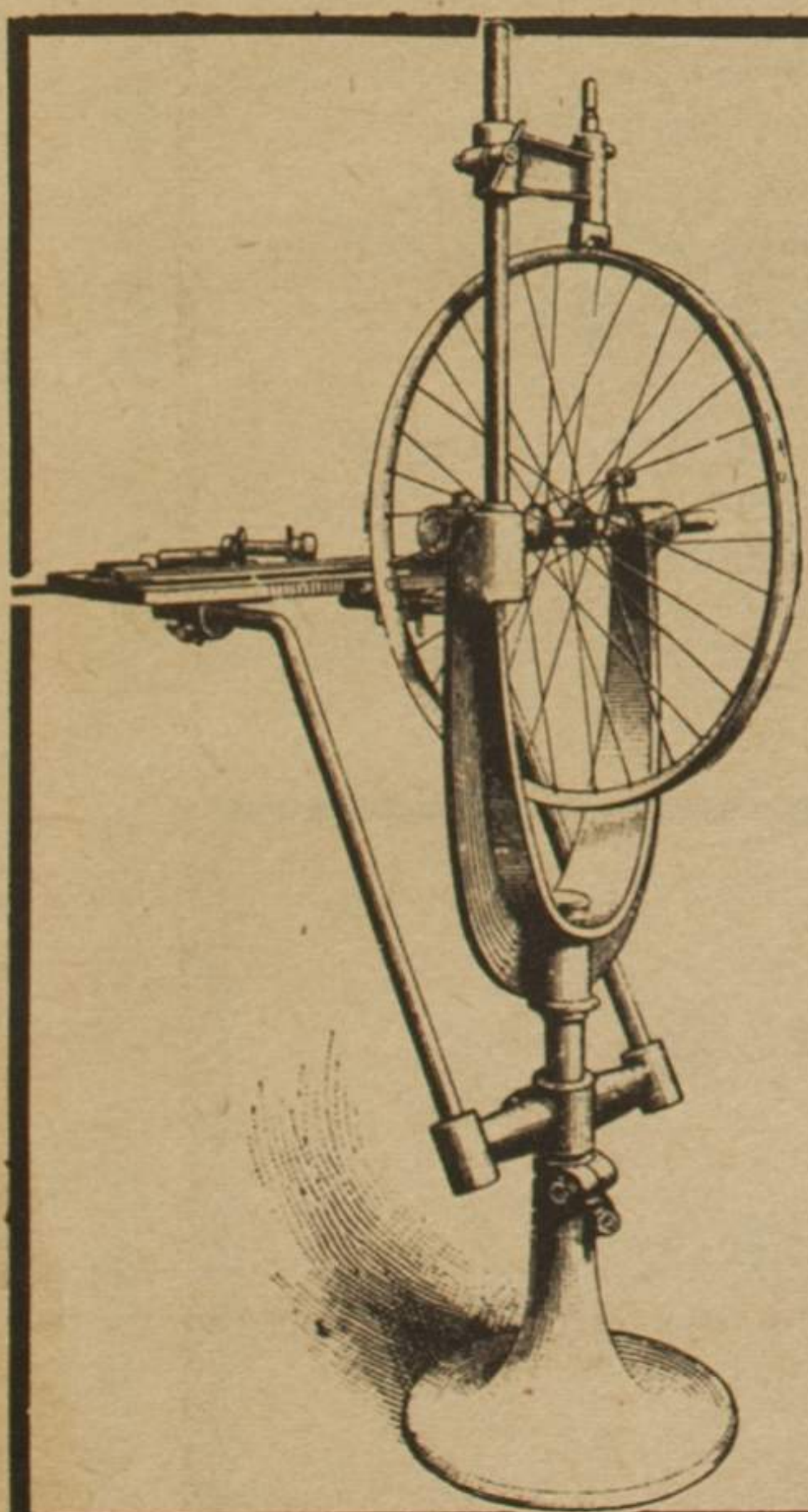
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