



She Joined the Cycling League. Then It Drew a Color Line.

KITTIE KNOX'S EXPERIENCE WITH RACIAL
DISCRIMINATION AND HER EFFORTS TO
CONTINUE PARTICIPATING IN THE SPORT

A large, blue silhouette of a bicycle is centered on the slide. A white arrow originates from the bottom left of the bicycle frame and points towards the text box containing the paragraph about Kittie Knox.

Developing an Interest in Cycling

Kittie Knox was born in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, in 1874 and grew up in Boston after her father's death. Working as a seamstress provided her with the money to purchase a bicycle. Her interest in cycling led her to participate in rides and events through which she became known within the local cycling community.



Gaining Recognition as a Cyclist

Knox's participation in cycling extended to demanding long-distance rides. For instance, she completed multiple 100-mile rides, establishing herself as an accomplished cyclist. In 1893, she joined the League of American Wheelmen, a national cycling organization. Although its membership was predominantly male, Knox secured membership and continued developing her involvement in the sport.



Restricting Membership by Race



In February 1894, the League of American Wheelmen changed its constitution to limit new membership to white people. Knox had joined in April 1893, before this restriction existed. Despite her existing membership, the change led others to question her eligibility, creating an obstacle to her participation based on her race.



Challenging Expectations About Women

The expectations Knox encountered were not limited to her race but also included how women should dress when cycling. She used her experience as a seamstress to make riding trousers rather than wear the customary long skirts. Her clothing earned first place in a Waltham costume competition in 1895, although journalists frequently focused on her appearance instead of her cycling ability.



Considerable of a sensation has been awakened by the presence of Miss Kittie Knox, the pretty colored girl from Boston. She has been a member of the L. A. W. for a number of years, but this is the first national meet that she has attended. When she made application at League headquarters for the tickets entitling her to the various privileges accorded League members

She was Refused, Although she Presented her League Ticket.

At several places of entertainment she was also refused admission. She, however, joined in several of the runs, and has been doing the best that she could to enjoy herself. Vice-President Geo. A. Perkins says that she must receive all the privileges accorded other League members, or there will be trouble.

Presenting Her Right to Participate

At the league's July 1895 meeting in Asbury Park, New Jersey, Knox presented her membership credentials after her eligibility was challenged. Reports indicate that she was denied entry despite being a member. However, members of the Massachusetts delegation supported her participation, and newspaper coverage brought wider attention to the discrimination she experienced.



Her Membership Remained Valid

A vintage black and white photograph of a woman riding a bicycle. She is wearing a dark, long-sleeved jacket over a light-colored blouse and a dark cap. The bicycle has a large front wheel and a smaller rear wheel. A white callout arrow originates from the text block and points to the rear wheel of the bicycle.

The league's bulletin addressed the dispute by explaining that Knox's membership preceded the racial restriction. As a result, the new rule could not be used to invalidate her membership. Although the restriction remained for new Black applicants, Knox's efforts challenged her exclusion and brought public attention to the treatment of Black cyclists within the organization.

Sources



Cambridge Black History Project.
"Katherine T. 'Kittie' Knox." n.d.

Historic New England. "Kittie Knox: Nineteenth-Century Cyclist and Barrier Breaker." September 4, 2025.

Miller, Grace.
"Breaking the Cycle: The Kittie Knox Story." Smithsonian Libraries and Archives / Unbound, May 26, 2020.

