

# Lost Cyclist

by David Herlihy (2010)

Frank Lentz [FL] went missing & Will Sachtleben [WS] went looking for him. Lentz bought his 1<sup>st</sup> high-wheeler [45 pounds] for \$125 [> months wages] in 1887. Some called it the original or boneshaker due to the solid tires. It was adventurous, but dangerous. He soon started riding long distances & races. A 100-mile race would take 10 hrs since the roads were mud & directors failed to provide food & water. Pierre Lallement invented the high-wheeler in 1865.

Thomas Stevens [TS] was the 1<sup>st</sup> “globe girder” to travel the world on cycle [1884-1887]. Will Sachtleben & Thomas Allen [S&A] also rode around the world [1890-1893], but on the new “safety” bikes [similar to the bikes seen today] with new pneumatic tires by John Dunlop. Lentz wanted to repeat it, but needed a sponsor. To help his odds, he became a photographer. He would take his camera & bike on a 1200-mile US road trip to allow others see the wonders without having to travel there.

Outing magazine agreed to sponsor him riding a Victor safety. He ordered a sprocket on each side of the rear wheel so he could flip the wheel to get a high or low gear. He left Pittsburgh on 15 May 1892 & headed west across America. He reached Chicago in July to see George Ferris' new attraction at the Columbian Expo. He loved the Columbia River Gorge, before heading south to Portland, Sacramento & west to San Francisco. He covered the 4000 miles in 5 months. He then spent a month in beautiful Japan.

TS avoided Turkey, S&A had escorts, but FL went through Turkey foolishly alone. During S&A trip WS came down with typhoid & cholera. Their host conditions went from royalty to poverty. Bikes had to be repaired or replaced often. On the Gobi Desert they found a post with food & water every 30 miles. S&A crossed the desert in 12 days & then on to Peking. In Dec 1892 S&A were returning home from China while FL was heading to China [2 ships in the night].

Chinese did not like westerners [probably for the poor treatment relatives got that migrated to the US in the 1850s & 60s]; they typically wore black [but white while morning] & generally a very poor nation then. People of poverty often steal his stuff. Most are superstitious & throw rocks at him. Most of the miles in China were carrying his bike due to the route he chose.

He reached Berma [Sep 1893] after 2900 miles in China. Berma was hot, humid & flooded. He came down with malaria, and after 10,000 miles he was ready for a rest before entering India. India had 5x the population of US in half the space. He rode through Persia [modern Iran]. People implored him to go through Russia instead of Turkey, but he didn't listen. Kurds & Turks were violent to Armenians & foreigners.

S&A got the royal treatment from the local bike clubs back in US as they headed across America. First, they rode south along the Pacific coast, and then followed the SPRR east through Yuma, Phoenix, El Paso & Dallas. Another set of RR tracks took them to St. Louis & NYC [after 15,000 miles & \$5000 each invested]. By Oct 1893 FL was reported lost. Enough public pressure was put on the sponsor they reacted.

WS was finally sent to Turkey find him [10 months after FL was last heard from]. There he only got slowed down by a government that did not want the truth known. He ultimately found out

that FL had been murdered by Kurds on 10May1894 for what money he had on him. He kept writing home & finally a local official did an investigation & sent some men to prison, where the Kurd escaped & the Armenian men died. Most who testified against the Kurds, had to move or were killed. WS left Turkey July 1895.

Mrs. Lenz received a life insurance payout & some money from the Turkey govt. WS returned to thriving bike shop & began a lecture tour telling about the Armenian massacre, but the public didn't want to hear.

Books: Around the World on a Bicycle (Thomas Stevens); Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe);