The Lost Cyclist

The Untold Story of Frank Lenz's Ill-Fated Around-the-World Journey

David V. Herlihy

Mainstream Publishing *eBooks*

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Bicycle: The History

The Lost Cyclist: The Epic Tale of an American Adventurer and His Mysterious Disappearance

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To my mother, Patricia Herlihy

Contents

Prologue: Alton, Illinois, October 28, 1952

I: On the Road

1. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 30, 1887
2. Athens, Greece, January 4, 1891
3. Pittsburgh, August 9, 1891
4. Peking, China, November 3, 1892
5. Shanghai, China, December 15, 1892
6. Vancouver, Canada, December 20, 1892
7. Kiukiang, China, January 27, 1893
8. Ardmore, Pennsylvania, May 31, 1893
9. Calcutta, India, September 17, 1893

II: The Search

10. East Liverpool, Ohio, October 12, 1894
11. Constantinople, Turkey, March 23, 1895
12. Erzurum, Turkey, May 13, 1895
13. Erzurum, September 9, 1895
14. Erzurum, October 19, 1895

III: Epilogue

15. Repercussions
16. Reflections

Notes on Sources
Acknowledgments

Prologue

ALTON, ILLINOIS

October 28, 1952

PAUL COUSLEY LOOKED UP from behind his crowded desk and stared incredulously as an elderly man strolled into the pressroom of the *Alton Evening Telegraph*. Moments later, the veteran editor bounded toward the stranger with an outstretched hand. “Will Sachtleben?” he blurted. “Well, I’ll be!” The visitor beamed, delighted that someone in this small town by the Mississippi River had recognized him after an absence of fifty years.

“Time was when Will Sachtleben was a popular hero in Alton, known to everyone,” Cousley reminisced in the paper the next day. “His fame was nationwide, and wider still, because of his daring deeds.” The editor himself fondly recalled the day, back in the spring of 1893, when Sachtleben and a college chum, Thomas G. Allen Jr., sailed into town on “safety” bicycles, prototypes of the modern machine. The intrepid pair had just completed what one newspaper pronounced “the greatest journey of this century, or perhaps of any century”: a three-year, fifteen-thousand-mile romp across Europe, Asia, and North America. Incredibly, they had eclipsed a similar journey by Thomas Stevens, made a few years earlier atop an old-style “high-wheeler.”

The American public, caught up in the great bicycle boom, relished Sachtleben’s harrowing tales of adventure and hardship in exotic lands astride the wildly popular vehicle. Two years later, his fame grew even greater as he embarked on a second, no less daring mission: a trip to eastern Turkey

to unravel the mysterious fate of another famous cyclist, Frank G. Lenz of Pittsburgh, who had disappeared toward the end of his own global circuit designed to set new milestones while validating the inflatable tire. Sachtleben's timing was impeccable: the ancient Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse, and American newspapers were rife with reports of widespread massacres of Armenians in the very region where the young wheelman had vanished.

The two old-timers sat down for a long chat about the good old days, when the bicycle was the fastest vehicle on the dirt roads and an exchange of letters could take months. Asked why he had come back to Alton after all those years, the retired theater manager and longtime Houstonian explained that he and his nephew, Charles King, had just driven to San Diego to visit Sachtleben's younger brother, Charles, the last of his four siblings still alive. They were on their way back to King's home in Columbus, Ohio, and Sachtleben wanted to revisit his boyhood home, a rambling Victorian on the corner of Seventh and Langdon.

"I have often thought of Alton," the eighty-six-year-old confided to Cousley. "Of my loving mother, also born here, who left us children so early in life, and of my self-sacrificing father, who said to me as we walked down the hill to the Chicago & Alton railroad station the day after my graduation from Washington College: 'Well, son, stay away until you get your fill.'" Added the aged adventurer with a sly smile: "I reckon I did just that."

The veteran newsman, ever on the alert for a good story, coyly mentioned that one of his retired writers was preparing a series of articles on colorful Altonians at the turn of the century. Sachtleben had barely agreed to submit a detailed account of his search for Lenz, the lost cyclist, when he noticed the time. "Now if you'll excuse me, Mr. Cousley," he interjected softly as he rose to his feet, "I really must be on my way."

I

On the Road

1

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

May 30, 1887

HE RIDES WITH a dash and daring that can almost be called recklessness." So marveled the *Bulletin*'s sports columnist, describing Pittsburgh's newest wheelman, a nineteen-year-old prodigy named Frank George Lenz. Perched atop a massive, spidery wheel measuring fifty-six inches in diameter, the precocious Lenz, the reporter noted, "surmounts curbstones and dashes over objects with an ease and abandon that calls forth admiration from even old and experienced riders."

Young Lenz in fact cut a dashing figure on or off his wheel, with his sandy blond hair, boyishly handsome face, piercing blue eyes, and muscular five-foot-seven frame. His ever-flashing grin, easygoing manner, and cheerful company quickly made him as popular with the public as he was with his peers.

A decade earlier, at the dawn of American wheeling, this bookkeeper from a modest German American family might have seemed a bit out of his element. The pioneer wheelmen were predominantly eastern elitists who practiced medicine, architecture, law, and other prestigious professions, while emulating the predilections of their English counterparts. But the sport's popularity had grown considerably in the interim, as Americans enjoyed greater prosperity and increased leisure time. Cycling welcomed respectable, up-and-coming young men like Lenz, driven by ambition.

In Pittsburgh alone, the nation's twelfth-largest city with a population around a quarter of a million, the local fleet of wheelmen had grown from about twenty-five hearty riders to about three hundred, including a handful of lady tricyclists. The national figure, meanwhile, had surpassed 100,000. Numerous clubs flourished across the country, and a handful of manufacturers operated in the East and Midwest.

The impressive growth of the cycling industry in the 1880s was due in large part to the vigorous efforts of Albert A. Pope, the pioneer American manufacturer and the maker of Lenz's Columbia bicycle. This Boston businessman helped to quash the public's initial misgivings about the big wheel and to establish the sport as a healthy and gentlemanly pursuit, albeit a risky one reserved primarily for the young and athletic. Among other successful initiatives, Pope helped launch the League of American Wheelmen (LAW), a national lobby that pushed for better roads while promoting racing and touring.

The prospects for further growth were downright rosy, thanks to the newly introduced Rover "safety," which had already induced a few women and some older men to take to the wheel. Developed in England, it was the latest in a long line of two-wheeled challengers designed to remedy the high-wheeler's chief drawback: its unfortunate propensity to hurl the careless—or unlucky—pilot over the handlebars whenever the big wheel hit an unforeseen obstacle, an all-too-common occurrence known in cycling parlance as a "header." These dreaded spills could inflict serious injury and even, on rare occasion, death. The new pattern promised fewer and softer spills, and it was the first alternative bicycle to gain any real traction in the marketplace. Notwithstanding its solid rubber tires, the safety bicycle was a radical departure from the norm. It featured two small wheels of similar size, the rear one

powered by a chain and sprocket. Some even said it was the bicycle of the future.

But to fanatics like Lenz and other athletic young men the world over, it was no substitute for the “ordinary.” An offshoot of the original “boneshaker” of the late 1860s, the high-wheeler had long delivered to a select few an irresistible mix of speed, exercise, camaraderie, and adventure. Affirmed one early devotee: “I have passed some of the happiest hours of my life on my bicycle.” It boasted light and springy metallic wheels, a backbone of tubular steel, and joints turning on smooth ball bearings. It was a modern mechanical miracle on a par with the telephone, the typewriter, and the elevator.

Nor were purists seduced by the prospect of a safer ride. On the contrary, as one enthusiast explained, “The element of safety is rather distasteful to a good many riders who prefer to run some risk, as it gives zest to the sport.” To them, the big wheel was an asset, not a liability. It effectively absorbed road shock, gave an optimal gear, and retained the boneshaker’s direct action cranks, the simplest and most efficient propulsion scheme. It also placed the rider directly above the pedals, allowing him to apply his full weight when pedaling. From that lofty vantage point, comfortably seated above the dust of the road, the rider enjoyed a view comparable to that of a horseman. Even average riders could easily cover one hundred miles in a single day over the roughest of dirt roads.

Before buying his first bicycle, Lenz had saved for many months, putting aside a portion of his $1,200 annual salary with A. W. Cadman and Company, a manufacturer of brass fittings located in Pittsburgh’s strip district on the southern bank of the Allegheny. At last, he scraped together $125, enough for a Columbia Expert, an entry-level roadster weighing a hefty forty-five pounds. He joined the Allegheny Cyclers, a club based on the other side of the river in what was then the distinct city of Allegheny. With a membership

of about thirty, it was the largest of the three bicycle clubs in the immediate Pittsburgh area.

Before long, the young clerk was spending nearly every free moment on his bicycle, escaping the unhappy home he shared with his tyrannical stepfather William and his dear but doting mother Maria Anna. On weekdays, before or after his dreary workday, he would cycle at least five miles. On weekends he would roam the hilly countryside alone or with any club mate who dared to chase after him. He loved the sensation of flying into the distance as he churned his smooth pedals and plunged ever deeper into nature's lush sanctuary. He had no qualms about returning in the dark, with his trusty gas lamp suspended on his front hub.

Lenz soon earned a reputation for gritty outdoor adventures. In June 1887, he accomplished his first "century" run to New Castle, Pennsylvania, and back. Leaving home at four in the morning, he proceeded over miserable roads. On his return, his handlebars snapped in two. Despite the jolting and jittery ride, he continued to pedal, arriving home at midnight, sore but satisfied. Two months later, Lenz recorded his first long-distance tour, spending his two-week vacation cycling to New York City and back.

Recognizing his extraordinary speed, stamina, and verve, Lenz's numerous friends urged him to give amateur racing a whirl. Throughout the cycling season, from May to October, various bicycle clubs in Pittsburgh and nearby cities organized high-wheel races, which were generally held on weekends and holidays at outdoor tracks before a paying public. The events typically covered between one-half and two miles, with the winner collecting a token prize, not to mention the crowd's adulation.

That Decoration Day, in 1887, Lenz entered his first cycling contest, witnessed by a festive crowd of one thousand. He had traveled by train to Beaver Falls, a small town thirty miles northwest of Pittsburgh. Facing several

competitors, he was to make four circuits to complete a mile. “He undoubtedly would have won the novice race,” the *Bulletin* reported, “had it not been that the track was slippery and his wheel slid from under him on the first lap.” He did manage to prevail in the consolation race, finishing a mile in four minutes less eighteen seconds.

A few months later, in August, Lenz tried another variety of competition: a twenty-mile road race outside Pittsburgh hosted by his own Allegheny Cyclers. The scorching heat had reduced the field to six, including the two favorites, the brothers William (W. D.) and Albert (A. C.) Banker. These club mates were widely considered the strongest wheelmen in western Pennsylvania, and they relished their stature. The family ran a bicycle store in Pittsburgh that specialized in Victor products (Columbia’s chief rival), as well as a riding school in Allegheny.

“Lenz was sick before he started,” the *Bulletin* reported, “and those who had hoped that he might give W. D. Banker a hard tussle, saw that the condition of their man precluded any such ideas.” The challenger nevertheless gamely fought off cramps and gave the Bankers chase. The *Bulletin* relayed the remarks of an old lady in De Haven, who had stopped to watch the men fly by five miles into the race: “Them fellers is fools to race on a day like this,” she scoffed. “Why, my old man had to knock off harvesting, it is so hot.” To no one’s surprise, W. D. finished first, in 1:44.5, followed by A. C., a mere second behind. Lenz arrived six minutes later, in fourth place.

By the close of his inaugural season, Lenz had begun to deliver on his considerable promise as a racer. In October, he entered a two-mile race in Pittsburgh starring A. C. Banker, who was a few months older and an inch taller than Lenz. “The day was inauspicious on account of the high wind that prevailed, raising clouds of dust and rendering anything like fast time impossible,” the *Bulletin* reported,

“but the prizes were an incentive that nerved each contestant to do his utmost.”

Still, no one anticipated a shocking upset. “This was a genuine surprise,” the *Bulletin* affirmed. “Everybody thought that Banker was a sure winner, but Lenz made a great effort on the finish and won by three yards.” A stunned and humiliated Banker vowed that he would never again lose to an “inferior rider” and promptly hired a personal trainer to ensure that he avenged himself at the next opportunity.

In 1888, at the start of his second season, Lenz upgraded to a fifty-three-inch Columbia Light Roadster, which was a good twelve pounds lighter than his original mount. His performances improved markedly. For the first time, he nearly climbed Pittsburgh’s Irwin’s Hill, a two-hundred-yard stretch where the road rose fifty feet. That June he needed only eleven hours to make another run to New Castle and back, this time without incident. His results on the track were even more striking.

That July, before six hundred fans, Lenz took on the revenge-minded A. C. Banker. The *Bulletin* described the half-mile contest as “one of the best races between local men ever seen here,” adding that “the pace was for blood from the word go. Banker was looked upon as a sure winner, though Lenz received all the encouragement.” Amid deafening cheers, the popular upstart crossed the tape just ahead of his rival, registering a time of 1:33 and pocketing a pair of opera glasses. For good measure, Lenz also edged out W. D., winning the two-mile race by half a wheel.

Remarkably, Lenz was still employing a relatively heavy model designed for road use. “If Lenz gets a racer,” the *Bulletin* columnist mused, “he will undoubtedly do much better than on the roadster he now rides, with a cyclometer swinging from the hub.” Bowing to peer pressure, Lenz obtained Columbia’s lightest model, which weighed a scant thirty pounds, just in time for the follow-up races three weeks later. In the quarter-mile open, he again made a

furious spurt down the stretch in a bold bid to eclipse A. C. Banker. But this time Lenz's foot slipped, and he flew off his precarious mount. The bicycle began to flip over and over, before breaking into pieces. For his part, Lenz badly bruised his knee. He decided to go back to his trusty Light Roadster.

Despite the setback, Lenz was assuredly, as the *Bulletin* proclaimed, a "rising luminary in the racing field." But he was not satisfied being a mere local celebrity. He was, after all, a proud denizen of Pittsburgh, a city known for producing overachievers of international repute. The steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, for one, had started out as a bobbin boy in a local cotton mill and was now the world's richest man. The financier Andrew Mellon and the coke magnate turned art collector, Henry Clay Frick, had likewise amassed vast personal fortunes from nothing, not to mention George Westinghouse, the electrical pioneer who ran the factory where Lenz's stepfather labored as a machinist. To no one's surprise, when Lenz spotted an opportunity to vault into the national limelight, he seized it.

That summer, Lenz eagerly read up on a four-day cycling extravaganza scheduled to take place in Buffalo that fall in conjunction with the International Industrial Fair. Grandly billed as the "World's Cycling Tournament," the program was to feature a vast variety of safety and high-wheel track races, ranging from one-quarter of a mile to five miles in length. Effused one reporter: "There is not a champion for any distance in any country that will not be there."

The culminating event—the one that caught Lenz's eye—was to be a one-hundred-mile road race from Erie to Buffalo. As fast as he was on the track, Lenz knew well that his strong suit was long-distance racing on regular roads. In his first two seasons, he had amassed over four thousand miles riding outdoors—more than anyone else in rugged western Pennsylvania. He could just imagine himself arriving in Buffalo on the specially built track at the fairgrounds, making his victory laps while thousands of fans in the

grandstand roared their approval. Where exactly a victory would take him in life he did not know. But he was certain of one thing: both cycling and fame were intrinsic to his destiny. He vowed to prepare diligently for the race.

The ambitious program was the brainchild of Henry E. Ducker, the veteran cyclist turned promoter who, earlier that decade, had introduced untold Americans to the towering “English” bicycle of his homeland. His annual tournaments in Springfield, Massachusetts, were lavish affairs that for several years drew top international talent and thousands of fans. And now he aspired to work similar magic in Buffalo by making the proposed tournament an annual event. The Queen City, whose proximity to Niagara Falls ensured a constant flow of tourists, was in fact a shrewd choice for a new cycling capital. A number of local firms were pumping out large numbers of safety bicycles, and Buffalo already boasted an expansive network of asphalted, tree-lined roads as well as several bicycle clubs, including one just for women.

The great road race, designed to bring the sport straight to the people, was the main attraction in Ducker’s inaugural program. Admittedly, the idea was not entirely novel. Nearly twenty years earlier, in November 1869, James Moore had rumbled some eighty miles from Paris to Rouen atop a primitive, eighty-pound bicycle with a solid iron frame and wooden wheels. His time—nearly eleven hours—was widely considered a stunning achievement and a compelling mandate to improve bicycle construction. Five years later, the newly formed bicycle clubs of Cambridge and Oxford Universities hosted a lively intercampus race, signaling the advent of high-wheel road racing. Covering a comparable distance on a vastly improved mount, the victor required a mere eight hours. Even Americans—relative newcomers to the sport—were occasionally treated to road races. For the past several seasons, Boston-area clubs had been running

an annual century race, the record time standing a shade under seven hours.

Still, Americans had never seen an outdoor cycling contest quite as enticing as the one Ducker proposed, which was destined to feature the best amateur cyclists in the land as well as posted telegraphic reports to keep the crowd at the fairgrounds apprised of the racers' progress. Their dramatic arrival on the track and a possible struggle to the finish over the final laps would provide thrilling theater unlike anything ever witnessed in the annals of American cycling. To all but guarantee that the affair would end with a new world's record, Ducker routed the course over one of the country's best highways, the flat shore road skirting Lake Erie.

At last the big day arrived. In the wee hours of September 8, Lenz boarded a train bound for Erie. Reaching the starting place, the corner of Seventh and Sassafras, he found several hundred curious citizens of Erie jammed into every accessible niche, despite the ungodly hour and the pounding rain. Obviously, neither he nor anyone else would be smashing records on this miserable day. Still, should the contest come off, the courageous winner would no doubt enjoy even greater glory. Meanwhile, to pass the time, the bare-limbed Pittsburgher, seemingly oblivious to the deluge, bantered with the crowd.

The six o'clock hour struck. The starting gun should have sounded an hour earlier, but all one could hear was the relentless rain and the murmuring of the restless crowd. The organizers were huddling together, debating whether to spring the poor devils loose into a quagmire of mud. For their part, the wheelmen quashed any talk of postponement, insisting that they would not linger another day in Erie. They all had jobs to get back to come Monday morning, and some had long train rides ahead of them. Either the great race would come off that morning or not at all.

Of course, the racers were eager to get a move on. These were, after all, the “sturdy fifteen,” as one reporter pronounced the diminished field. These were the hearty ones who had refused to shy away from “an awful trial of physical stamina.” They did not “dread a drenching,” nor were they afraid of a little “heavy wheeling.” They could do without sensational times or lusty roadside cheers. All they wanted was a clean shot at glory and the shiny gold medal offered by *Bicycling World*.

A loud cheer erupted at a quarter after six, when the organizers announced that the race was on. The cyclists dutifully scurried out from under their cover to reclaim their wheels, stowed under an expansive tarp. They were all ordinaries, except for three. One was a Star, an innovative American design that reversed the order of the large and small wheel for greater stability, and another a safety tandem. Only one, belonging to Peter J. Berlo of Boston, was a Rover pattern bicycle. That past season, its third on the American market, the “dwarf” had continued its surprising surge. And thanks to a series of refinements, the safety had considerably narrowed the performance gap. Many old-school riders now grudgingly conceded that the upstart might indeed suffice for the faint of heart. For them, however, the ordinary remained the paragon of elegance and efficiency—the only sensible choice of wheel for the serious cyclist.

As the racers took their positions, several girls scampered about handing each competitor a cup of lukewarm coffee and a small basket filled with broiled chicken and stale bread. Should the racers need more nourishment along the route, they could procure sandwiches from any of three designated roadside hotels. For any other assistance, they could appeal to the timekeepers at the six checkpoints.

Lenz felt extremely confident about his chances. For the past few months, he had been training hard, riding up and down freshly paved Forbes Avenue, zipping past horse-

drawn vehicles and their irate drivers. He knew this road well, having taken it on his return from New York, and he was used to riding in rain and mud. The *Bulletin* had also voiced its confidence, affirming: “There’s good stuff in Lenz, and his friends do right in expecting much of him.”

The Pittsburgher was nevertheless a decided underdog, blithely dismissed by *Bicycling World* as a “delicate youth.” He would indeed face stiff competition, since all the favorites remained in the running. Twenty-six-year-old Fred Eldred, the captain of the Springfield (Massachusetts) Bicycle Club, had just ridden his high bicycle twenty miles in one hour over the level roads near his hometown. The strapping and explosive Robert Gerwing of Denver was one of the top guns in the West. The swampy course seemed tailor-made for G. A. Tivy of St. Louis, nicknamed “Mud Horse.” Frank Dampman, a five-foot-five dynamo rumored to relish moonlit rides over the roughest of roads, had brought along two teammates from the fabled Wilmington (Delaware) Wheel Club to pace him to victory. Among the wildcards were the local boys George McIntire of Erie and Roy Blowers of Westfield, New York.

At last the gun sounded. Lenz pushed his bicycle forward, planting a foot on the small step at the base of his bicycle’s backbone. His small wheel instantly sank several inches into the mushy ground. He gamely vaulted onto his saddle and stood up on his pedals, applying all his weight and might. The stubborn creature lurched forward, just fast enough to avoid a nasty spill. Miraculously, it picked up momentum and straightened itself out as it emerged from a murky pool of water.

The racers spurted en masse toward Lake Erie. The townspeople along the way had been warned by their newspapers to expect an invasion of cyclists that morning. Had good weather prevailed, the locals would no doubt have lined the roadside to absorb the spectacle and lend their cheers. As it was, the smattering of spectators offered only

faint applause. No matter. The racers would be showered with accolades soon enough, should they reach the sheltered compound in Buffalo.

Eldred, the favorite, quickly charged to the forefront and set a surprisingly fast pace. He was anxious to distance himself from the three Wilmington boys so that they could not gang up on him. Upon reaching the shore road, however, the pack was still at his heels. Eight miles out, at Harbor Creek, Eldred nursed a slim lead over the top five, with Lenz occupying fourth place, about thirty seconds off-pace. The stragglers had already fallen at least ten minutes behind.

As the vanguard approached North East, the second checkpoint fifteen miles out, the rain finally stopped. But that was small consolation since the terrain was mushier than ever. Several racers had already suffered severe spills, and all had stopped at least once to remove fistfuls of mud from their wheels. A reporter on hand got the distinct impression that the "travel stained" men were now riding "for something other than pleasure." By the time the caravan reached Ripley, the third checkpoint twenty-one miles out, the three safety riders had already abandoned the race, leaving a dozen competitors.

Just after Ripley, Eldred, too, dropped out. "He was in condition to finish," his hometown newspaper, the *Springfield Union*, would insist, "but it would have been a mere act of bravado for which there was no call. The glory of having pushed through 100 miles of mud and clay he sensibly deemed insufficient recompense for the physical disabilities that might result."

The lanky Gerwing surged to the forefront. As he passed the struggling Dampman, the cocky Denver giant ordered his diminutive challenger to "cheer up" and advised him to follow in his wake if he wanted second place. Dampman ignored the taunt and stuck with his teammate Frank McDaniels. The other Wilmington pacer, Steven Wallis

Merrihew, who had suffered a mechanical mishap, soon rejoined his mates. Lenz, meanwhile, clung to fifth place, two minutes off-pace.

At Westfield, a large crowd cheered the local boy, Blowers, who was mired in the back of the pack. By Portland, thirty-six miles out, the scrappy Dampman had overtaken the deflated Gerwing to claim a narrow lead. Lenz, who seemed to be pacing himself for the long haul, continued to hang on to fifth place, though his deficit had grown to five minutes.

Nine miles later, at Fredonia, Dampman held on to his slim lead. Just behind him were his two teammates and the pesky Gerwing. Lenz continued to hold fifth place, six minutes off-pace. By Silver Creek, fifty-seven miles out, Dampman had widened his lead over his teammates to two minutes. But Lenz had suddenly sprung to life, blowing past the fading Gerwing, and was now just a minute behind the Wilmington trio.

Four miles farther on, at Irving, Lenz surged ahead to claim the lead for the first time. With less than forty miles to go, he could already taste victory. Indeed, to onlookers the fresh-faced Pitts-burgher seemed like a sure winner. The roads, however, were at their soggiest, causing yet another round of tumbles. The brave few who remained in the contest were now doing more walking than pedaling. Lenz failed to pad his slim lead.

Compounding the racers' ordeal was a lack of sustenance: the promised sandwiches never materialized, and the desperate men had gone for miles without food or water. One heartless spectator emerged with a pail of milk and tried to sell drinks. He did not realize that the racers had no change in their pocketless woolen tights. Responding to their pleas, some of the spectators hopped on their own bicycles to fetch water and food. Despite their relatively fresh state, however, they were unable to deliver the goods to the contestants.

At Evans Center, about thirty miles from the finish, Dampman pulled even with Lenz. A distant third was the Star rider, who had emerged out of nowhere. Dampman's pacers, meanwhile, had seemingly fallen out of contention. McDaniels in fact had seriously damaged his machine after jumping full force onto its backbone to avoid a header. The race appeared to be coming down to a fierce duel between Lenz and Dampman.

As the racers approached Bayview, eighty-one miles out, the checker gave a sigh of relief. Unaware of their late start and underestimating the weather's toll, he had expected them a good two hours earlier. Dampman was the first to pass the checkpoint, followed closely by Lenz. But in an ominous twist for the Pitts-burgher, the two Wilmington pacers, working together, had somehow managed to rejoin their leader. Lenz's situation improved slightly when Merrihew faltered once again (he would later blame his hunger), but it would still be two against one going down the home stretch.

At that point, Dampman coyly suggested to the Pittsburgher that they let McDaniels set the pace. Lenz, having noted McDaniels's damaged vehicle and exhausted state, saw no harm in that arrangement and allowed the Wilmington pacer to spurt to the forefront uncontested. As soon as McDaniels was out of their view, however, Dampman suddenly burst forward to rejoin his teammate. Lenz, ever-confident of his superior stamina, failed to react with a surge of his own.

Once Dampman regained his teammate, the two co-conspirators began to work in tandem, furiously swapping positions as they pushed themselves to the brink of exhaustion. Gradually, they widened their lead over their unsuspecting rival. Not until Lenz reached Limestone Hill, the final checkpoint ten miles from the finish, did he realize his tactical blunder. He had fallen a good eight minutes off-pace with precious little time to catch up.

Still, all was not yet lost. From that point to the fairgrounds the road was level and smooth. Drawing on his natural speed and ample reserve, Lenz knew he could still catch his treacherous rivals. But he desperately needed help. Fortunately, at this very point volunteer pacers were allowed to jump into the fray to assist the contestant of their choosing.

Lenz frantically scanned the faces of the dozen or so newcomers, hoping to find his rescuer. His pounding heart sank. Here he was, the most popular rider in all of Pittsburgh, waging the race of his life. Where the hell were his friends at this critical juncture? Where were the Banker brothers, confound it! Blind with rage, Lenz made a wrong turn, quashing any hope for a comeback victory.

Dampman and McDaniels, meanwhile, approached the fairgrounds utterly spent but with an insurmountable lead. The only question remaining was which Wilmington man would take the gold. All things being equal, McDaniels, the stockier of the two and the better sprinter, figured to prevail. But his wheel was badly damaged, and the persistent Dampman was not about to yield to his pacer without a struggle.

The animated crowd of fair goers, which numbered twenty-five thousand, braced itself for a thrilling finish. There was, however, one last snag: the track where the men were supposed to finish was utterly decimated after days of relentless rain and hard use. Ducker had made a last-minute adjustment: the racers would forgo the track and finish with a lap around the road encircling the fairgrounds.

The fans spilled out of the grandstand and planted themselves alongside the ring road, fixing their eyes on the horizon at the point where the racers were expected to appear. A Buffalo paper, the *Lightning Express*, described the chaotic scene. “Occasionally some smart Aleck would raise the cry of ‘here they come’ and everyone would crane his neck and strain his eyes for a sight of the vanguard.”

After repeated false alarms, the crowd was getting increasingly anxious.

At last, at precisely 3:42 according to a report in *Bicycling World*,

> a murmur of voices was heard in the distance, which gradually swelled into cheers, announcing that the leader was in sight. Half a hundred excited wheelmen came tearing down the road shouting and demanding a clear track. Then came a couple of the sorriest looking objects it has ever been my fortune to see: McDaniels, and right on his little wheel, Dampman. The men and the wheels they rode were one mass of mud.

As McDaniels staggered to the gate, one reporter related, he was "rapturously cheered and smiled all over. But when told that he had to continue his journey around the Park Meadow and return to the bridge his look of joy vanished in an instant." In fact, the pacer had nothing left. Dampman blew past his spent teammate and never looked back, crossing the finish line at four minutes after four—just under ten hours since the gun had sounded in Erie. His dejected mate gamely crossed the line three minutes later.

Bystanders quickly pried the groggy Wilmington men from their bicycles and carried them to awaiting cots. There the racers were at last given badly needed food and water. A Buffalo reporter noted that McDaniels was especially "fagged out," adding: "He was a pitiful sight. There was little left of his tights, and the boys threw a blanket around him to cover his nakedness."

Seven minutes after the Wilmington pair had reached the gate, Lenz appeared at the same spot. One reporter found the resigned Pittsburgher "as white as a sheet," but everyone agreed he looked much fresher than the two men from Wilmington. Informed that he had to loop around the park road, Lenz was nonplussed. This was, after all, merely a ceremonial lap, for he was comfortably ahead of the two remaining stragglers.

As Lenz methodically circled the ring road, he heard the deafening cheers directed at the Wilmington pair. It pained

him to think that he would have been the object of their adulation had he run a smarter race or received a little help down the stretch. Crossing the finish line, a frustrated Lenz hollered: “Where do I go now?” The Banker brothers made a belated appearance, lifting their teammate off his bike and laying him down on a cot. While the Bankers gave him food and water, their masseur began to work on his stiff legs.

The barbaric contest had left all the entrants badly bruised and cut; one had even temporarily lost consciousness after a terrible tumble. Still, the race was a smashing success. A reporter with the *Pittsburg Times* affirmed that it was “the talk of the bicycling world.” Indeed, the champions assembled in Buffalo regarded it as the “greatest feat of human endurance ever performed on a wheel.” Marveled the *Springfield Union:* “No other race was ever run, or probably ever will be run, under such conditions.” Many found it unfathomable that the winner could have plowed through that frightful sea of slime averaging over ten miles an hour.

For Lenz, however, the aftertaste was bitter. Although the *Bulletin* insisted that he had “covered himself in glory” and would have won had he been “better coached,” he felt only the pangs of failure and betrayal. Aggravating his misery, the package he had sent from Erie, containing about $60 worth of valuables, failed to appear, leaving him without a change of clothing, a coat, or a watch. He found himself in the humiliating position of having to borrow money from the disloyal Bankers, of all people, so he could pay for new clothes and a night in a hotel room.

Fortunately, Lenz enjoyed a much-needed pick-me-up the following morning when he examined the historic bicycles on display at the industrial exhibition. He stood mesmerized before the “velocipede” of Pierre Lallement, the oldest bicycle in existence, dating back to 1865. Here was the ingenious breakthrough that had given rise to the magnificent high-wheeler. As crude as this vehicle was, it

had established the surprising principle that a slender vehicle on two wheels could be steadily and continuously propelled by means of the cranks protruding from its front hub.

Ironically, given its relatively low profile, the quaint relic more closely resembled the latest Rover safety than the ordinary it had spawned. Perhaps Lallement had the right configuration after all, Lenz mused. An English writer had recently predicted that the ordinary "would soon be relegated to the place where all obsolete machines go." Of course, not everyone accepted this startling prognosis. Retorted *Bicycling World*, "The Ordinary will never be an obsolete pattern; it has far too many splendid qualities for that."

Thanks to his profuse reading of cycling literature, Lenz was well aware of Lallement's personal saga. In July 1863, the Frenchman completed a bicycle prototype in the Parisian workshop where he built baby carriages and carts. After mastering his new steed in a long corridor, he rode it along the boulevards, to the astonishment of onlookers. Two years later, in search of greater opportunity to exploit his invention, he left Paris for New York, toting the makings for an improved machine—this very bicycle.

Lallement settled in Ansonia, Connecticut, where, in the fall of 1865, he made the first bicycle ride on American soil. The following spring he rode his creation around the New Haven green. His curious gyrations attracted an investor, and the two secured the world's first patent describing a basic bicycle. But the hapless pair failed to enlist a manufacturer, and a dejected Lallement retreated to France, unaware that a velocipede craze had already erupted there in his absence. It would soon spread around the world, sparking high hopes that the long-coveted practical mechanical horse was at last at hand.

A mere toddler in early 1869 when the great velocipede craze exploded, Lenz had been too young to remember that

brief episode. Indeed, the vehicle quickly lost favor once it became painfully apparent that it was not about to serve as the “people’s nag” anytime soon. Nearly a decade would pass before the ordinary, developed primarily in France and England, partially filled its void. Unlike the discredited “boneshaker,” the new bicycle made no practical or popular pretensions. It offered a recreational ride, pure and simple, to young, athletic males. Still, it validated the principle of the bicycle and opened a promising path for development.

Lallement himself made little from his patent, having sold it to an American maker at the peak of the craze for a fraction of its worth. Years later the patent wound up in the hands of Albert Pope, who used it as the cornerstone to a lucrative monopoly controlling domestic high-wheel production. In 1888, a few years after his patent expired, Lallement himself entered Pope’s employ and was now working as a lowly mechanic in Pope’s elegant Boston headquarters on Columbus Avenue—further proof, Lenz concluded, that the inventor himself rarely profits from his audacity and sweat. Lenz, who took great pride in his own mechanical ingenuity, hoped someday to meet the reclusive Frenchman.

Even more intriguing to Lenz was the nickel-plated Columbia Expert, reminiscent of his own first bicycle. It belonged to his idol, Thomas Stevens, the world-famous “globe girdler.” Between 1884 and 1887, Stevens had ridden and trundled his way across three continents, covering about 13,500 miles in all. After riding from San Francisco to Boston, Stevens received the bicycle on display from Albert Pope himself and then rode it across Europe and Asia.

Lenz had eagerly devoured Stevens’s firsthand accounts published in *Outing*, a monthly dedicated to sports and travel. The Pittsburgher knew all about Stevens’s harrowing adventures in distant and exotic lands, his joyful encounters with foreign dignitaries, missionaries, and fellow wheelmen,