

Open Road Gallery

1892

by Greg Siple Photograph by William A. Hobitzell



98-0110 ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA MISSOULA WILLIAM A. HOBITZELL



GREG SIPLE

THIS IS WHERE YOU WOULD EXPECT TO SEE ONE OF MY FORMAL PORTRAITS OF BICYCLE TOURISTS accompanied by a story written by Sarah Raz. But for this history-themed issue of the magazine, I decided to become the writer and feature the work of another photographer.

I began shooting my portraits in 1982. I wanted to make a permanent record of the grand parade of traveling cyclists that visit our Missoula office every summer. I always shoot the cyclist with bike in profile on black and white film. More than 3,000 portraits later, the formula is unchanged. What a surprise it was to learn that I was not the first to shoot such a portrait in Missoula.

The portrait above is of Frank Lenz, a cyclist who in 1892 set off from his home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with intention of riding around the world. He mysteriously disappeared in Turkey in 1894, never to be seen again ("The Last Ride of Frank Lenz," *Adventure Cyclist*, January, 2009). The first time I saw the Lenz portrait was in David Herlihy's 2010 book *The Lost Cyclist*, a detailed account of Lenz's ride and the attempt to find him. The caption indicated that it was taken in 1892 here in Missoula, Montana. The building in the background looked familiar and I realized it was St. Francis Xavier Church. The church is on the same street as our office and just four blocks away. I got up from my desk and walked to the spot where Lenz stood 108 years ago.

The photographer was William A. Hobitzell, like me an avid cyclist. Frank Lenz wrote in his account of the trip that in Missoula he was greeted by 10 "wheelmen" including Hobitzell, the only one to have the new pneumatic tires. The Lenz photo is preserved in the archives of the University of Montana along with other Hobitzell photos.

Hobitzell left us with a window into the past. I hope that my portraits will attract viewers who will want to gaze back at us a hundred years hence.