

CHARLES SIPLE

PROVIDING THE SPARK THAT IGNITED A MOVEMENT

CHARLES SIPLE, born in 1918 and known as Chuck, grew up in a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he developed a love of bicycling. Though he rode only a handful of multi-day tours, won none of the races he entered, and worked only briefly at a cycling-related job, Chuck's passion for cycling was the spark that helped Bikecentennial come into being.

"When I was a boy, the kids that had bikes were special in the eyes of those who

Charles Siple in 1938.

did not," he told his son Greg. "And before I got my first bike, I deplored not having one."

These were the Depression years, and Chuck's parents could not spend freely on unneeded items. They paid five dollars for his first bike, a used model. And his bicycling would likely have not taken him any farther than around his neighborhood were it not for a special event he attended at Duquesne Gardens in downtown Pittsburgh.

"In September of 1934, when I was 16, I heard about an upcoming six-day bike race and decided to see it," Chuck recalled. "Duquesne Gardens was an old trolley barn and really not large enough for a six-day track (proper tracks were $\frac{1}{10}$ of a mile around). Although I knew that this was not the best of facilities, I was excited to see the new wooden track and enjoyed the smell of the fresh-cut lumber. I was thrilled to see the racing and marveled at the bike-handling skills as the riders put on a show."

Chuck was hooked. He attended every six-day race that came to Pittsburgh and even took a bus to Buffalo, New York, to see one. There he landed a job as a runner for the teams, delivering food from the kitchen to the riders, waking them at race time, and handling laundry.

A chance encounter with Gilbert "Chic" Millstine, a Pittsburgher Chuck's age who owned a bike similar to the six-day racing bikes, transformed Chuck from spectator into participant. Chic was acquainted with a small group of serious riders and he brought Chuck into the fold. With his new friends, Chuck logged lots of miles at informal races and rides out into the countryside. Chuck and Chic were members of a small group that toured 140 miles to Cleveland, Ohio, one night. After a layover day, they returned to Pittsburgh more in racing mode, attempting to replicate the feel of a stage of the Tour de France. Independently, Chuck also made a two-day ride to Washington, D.C., and back. He kept scrapbooks full of clippings, photos, drawings, and other memorabilia from those days.

Chuck hung up his bike at the age of 23, when America entered World War II, and he enlisted and spent three and a half

years in the U.S. Navy. Bicycling was not his top postwar priority, either. He had married while in the service, and he had to find work and a place to live. Greg was born in 1946 and two brothers, Bruce and Doug, soon followed. Drawn by an employment opportunity, in 1954 the family moved to Columbus, Ohio, where Chuck went to work as a draftsman for North American Aviation, an aircraft manufacturer. His bike languished in the basement for years. Greg recalled,

In the early 1960s, the bicycle in America was considered a kid's toy. When you turned 16, you got a driver's license and left the bicycle behind. I suppose I would have gone that route, but there was this exotic bicycle in the basement, as well as Dad's scrapbooks, and the stories he told me about riding long, long ago.

My father never tried to persuade me to bicycle, yet I embraced the idea. I didn't care what my peers thought. Cars held no appeal for me. I wanted a pair of drop handlebars. I wanted to ride 100 miles in a day. I wanted to earn a spot in one of his scrapbooks!

When Chuck recognized his eldest son's interest, he retrieved his bike from the basement and started riding again. In July 1962, Chuck proposed to Greg that the pair take a weekend ride from Columbus to Portsmouth and back, 210 miles in two days. "My father was at last back on the road," Greg said, "and I was at last going to enter that exotic and mysterious world that I had only glimpsed in the yellowing photos in his scrapbooks."

In the ensuing years, Chuck led day rides for the local Columbus Council of American Youth Hostels (AYH) and utilized his drafting skills to produce route



4-8 62



* Four of the best East of the Mississippi
L to R. George Edge - N.T.W. - 3rd - 38 NC. "25" - Phila.
Otto Sorbini - U.S.I - 1st - 37 NC.S. "15" - Phila.
Mario D'Allessandro U.S.I. - Phila.
Marino Guerra U.S.I - New York
Now (3a) with Detroit Sunset Riders.

Walt, Gus, Chic, Fritz, Pepper, Bill, Chas. - On Ellipse
Washington D.C. - Oct 16, 1938



* At Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool
Washington, D.C. - Oct 15 1938



Le Chemineaux

Bob Webb
Indianapolis, Indiana



At left - Vince, Gus, Fritz
Bill, Chic, Chas. South Park
Armistice Day 1938



Below On the Ellipse L to R Walt, Gus G, Gus S.,
Chic, Pepper, Bill, Chas.
(Blockinger is holding crash helmet)



available Armistice
Day 1938
Special 39 1/2 South
Park Chas.



Pittsburgh Wheelmen
members Chuck Siple, Fritz
Schneider, and Chic Millstine
at a local racing event.



Chuck was swept up in the excitement of six-day racing.



Chuck's cycling scrapbooks captured his son Greg's
imagination.

CHARLES SIPLLE



Chic and Chuck in front of Boehm's Bike Shop in Pittsburgh. "If there were any bike news afloat, you would hear it there," Chuck said.



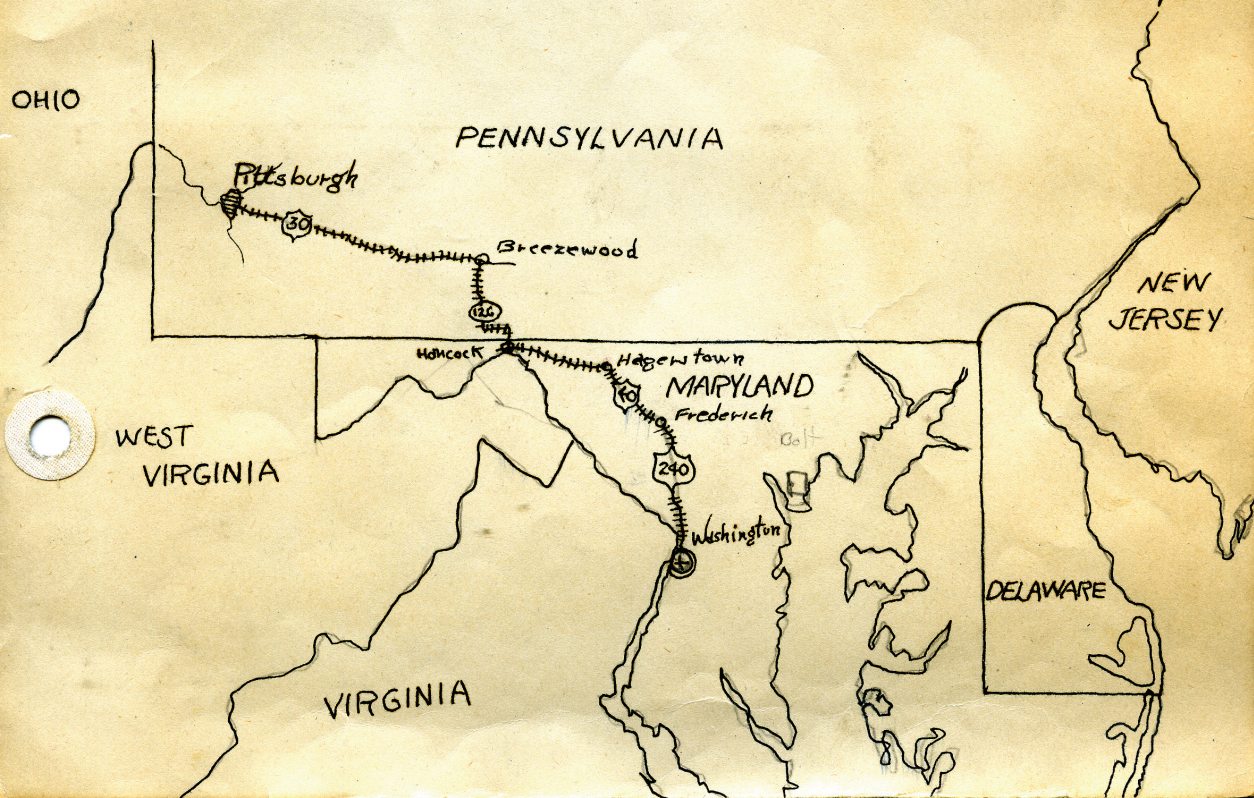
At the finish of the 1940 Buffalo six-day race. Chuck, at left, supports Cecil Yates. Heinz Vopel is held by Ewald Wissel.

3-3441

Pittsburgh to Washington July 13th and 14th.

July 13 { Left Pgh. - 5:30 A.M. - E.S.T. } 14½ hrs.
 { Arrive Breezewood Pa. - 8:00 P.M. - E.S.T. }
 Rest ----- 11 hrs.
 July 14 { Left Breezewood Pa. - 7:00 A.M. - E.S.T. } 13 hrs.
 { Arrive Washington D.C. - 8:00 P.M. - E.S.T. }
 Distance 250 miles
 Elapsed time - 38½ hours
 27½ actual cycling hours

Average for 27½ actual cycling hours - almost 9.1 m.p.h.



In 1938, when he was 19 years old, Chuck rode solo from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Washington, D.C.



World War II brought an end to Chuck's cycling activities when he enlisted in the U.S. Navy in December of 1941. Here he is on leave in the backyard of his parents' home in Pittsburgh. In 1945, he returned to civilian life, married, and became a father. It wasn't until the early 1960s that he got back on the bike, after he saw his three sons had embraced the sport.

maps for other riders. He was eventually limited to a stationary bike, but his enthusiasm for cycling never diminished. He passed away in June 2013.

"The roots of Adventure Cycling Association and the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail can be traced back in many direc-

tions," said Greg, "but it was the joy my father found in bicycling that is at its core. I don't think the organization would exist today if Dad hadn't watched those six-day riders whirl around the track in the 1930s—and then carefully pasted clippings and photos into his scrapbooks." •



DREAM FULFILLED

1996

IT TOOK HER A WHILE TO GET TO IT, but Shirley Braxton of Missoula, Montana, pedaled the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail from Yorktown, Virginia, to Astoria, Oregon.

Shirley and her late husband, Sam, were pioneering bicycle travelers in the early 1970s. Their love of touring evolved into an ambition to bicycle across the United States, even before the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail existed.

However, the demands of raising two sons and running the family business, the Braxton Bike Shop—which for many years lived up to its motto, "An Oasis for the Cyclotourist"—forced the couple to put their plans on hold. When Sam died in 1988 following a yearlong battle with cancer, Shirley abandoned her dream of riding across the country. After all, she and Sam had always been a team, so it just wouldn't be the same, she thought.

But the dream refused to go away. A slide presentation about a cross-country ride by a friend inspired Shirley to reconsider, and in 1994 she signed up for an Adventure Cycling TransAm group tour.

"Unfortunately," Shirley said, "my trip was curtailed in Kansas when I touched the wheel of the cyclist in front of me, hit the pavement, and fractured my collar bone and four ribs."

Two summers later, in 1996, Shirley got back on her horse. She returned to Kansas and, with two cycling friends, completed her TransAm ride at age 67.

-Mike McCoy