Welcome to episode 21 of The Cycling Europe Podcast. My name is Andrew P. Sykes.

This episode of the podcast is going to be slightly different. Rather than talking to a current cyclist, I’m going to be investigating the life of a cyclist from the past. You’ve probably never heard his name before and you’re even less likely to have heard his story. He was a German-born American called Maximilian John St. George. He’s usually referred to as Maximilian J. St. George. I’m just going to call him Maximilian, perhaps even Max.

Max’s cycling story starts at the beginning of the 20th century. My knowledge of him, however, is much more recent and started when, in May 2013, I received an email from a chap called Angelo in America. Angelo explained how he had received a copy of my first book, Crossing Europe… about my cycle from southern England to southern Italy for his 66th birthday and had thoroughly enjoyed reading it. He went on to explain that he had always wanted to complete a long cycling tour of Europe and cited a book, published in 1922 called Traveling Light or Cycling Europe on Fifty Cents a Day. My attention was immediately drawn to the use of the expression ‘Cycling Europe’. By that point, I had become Mr Cycling Europe on social media and on my website, CyclingEurope.org. It seemed almost anachronistic that that same expression should be used within the title of a book from the 1920s.

Angelo continued as follows and here I’m quoting directly from his words in that original email:

“The author, Maximilian J. St George, was a young American, recently graduated from Law School at Notre Dame, in Indiana. Before embarking on his career, he went off on a 16-month cycling tour of Europe. This was around 1920. Total mileage was 16,300 miles... The condition he placed upon himself was that he would not stay in any hotels, rather that he would ask locals if he could stay in a barn or some form of shelter. He wanted to meet the people of Europe face to face. Often he was invited to stay in their home... He passed through every European capital except Lisbon and Petrograd.”

End quote.

Petrograd is the city that we now call St. Petersburg. Angelo went on to say that he would love to follow Max’s general route through Europe but finish in Conversano in southern Italy, the
place from where his own parents had emigrated to America. I’ve tried to contact Angelo for an update but haven’t heard anything back from him so I’m not sure if he ever did set off in the tyre tracks of Max or not. If you are listening to this Angelo, I’d love to know.

At the time, I posted the details about Maximilian J. St. George, his journey and his book to my website. I did a little bit of research about Max but could only find out that he had been born in 1885 and that later in life he had become a successful attorney making his name in The Great Sedition Trial of 1944. I looked online for a copy of the book but no luck. I remember thinking that it would be nice, come 2020 - a hundred years after Angelo had said he had set off - to do something in Max’s honour. Perhaps even try and recreate his long journey across Europe?

In the summer of 2013 I set off on a second long cycle, this time from southern Greece to southern Portugal and subsequently wrote my second book Along The Med… Then in 2014 I decided that there was at least one more long European cycle in me and I came up with the idea of cycling from the southernmost point of Europe at Tarifa in Spain to the northernmost point at Nordkapp in Norway. I was working as a secondary school teacher at the time in Oxfordshire. The previous two European cycles had been squeezed into the long summer holidays. That wasn’t going to be possible bearing in mind the length of the third proposed journey which I estimated to be around 7,500km. I made the decision to leave my job in December 2014, move back up to Yorkshire, the area where I was born and brought up and then head off down to Spain in the early spring of 2015. The book about that journey - Spain to Norway… - was published in 2017 and, in a few moments, I’m going to read a short extract. The context of that extract is as follows.

I was cycling along the west coast of Sweden and I had repeatedly met a German cyclist called Manfred, although in the book, to save his blushes should he ever read it, I referred to him as Helmut. Manfred slash Helmet seemed to put a negative spin on everything and each time we met over the course of perhaps a week, my heart sank a little further.

Here’s the extract. The words of Manfred are read by my good friend from Stuttgart, Claus:

‘Norway is too hilly, the roads are bad and the weather is awful…’ he moaned before getting his teeth into the Swedes: ‘They are poor cyclists. Their bikes only have three gears and you will never find a bike shop to repair your bike properly.’
What had I done to have this man inflicted upon me? His oratory then took a surreal twist: ‘Cycle touring only became possible after 1990 when the technology allowed for proper gears to be used.’

‘Did you say 1990? One, nine, nine, zero?’ I questioned, checking he hadn’t confused his numbers.

‘Yes, 1990. Eins, neun, neun, null.’ I sensed he was annoyed by me questioning his facts.

I was tempted to cite the case of an American, Maximilian J. St. George, who, in the years following the First World War embarked upon a 26,000 km bicycle tour of Europe. He ventured to most parts of the continent and upon his return to the US wrote a book entitled ‘Traveling Light or Cycling Europe on Fifty Cents a Day’. I had tried but failed to find a copy, but mentioned Maximilian, his adventure and his book on my website shortly before setting off to cycle from Greece to Portugal in 2013. Then, on the day I left my job as a teacher in Henley-on-Thames, my colleagues presented me with a package wrapped in tissue paper. Carefully unfolding the wrapping, I found a copy of the book. It was a touching moment.

Indeed it was. One of my soon-to-be-former teaching colleagues had gone to the trouble of finding the book that Angelo had mentioned but that I hadn’t been able to find. Before setting off to cycle from Spain to Norway, I read the book and it was an interesting read. Again, in the back of mind I thought how nice it would be to mark the centenary of Max’s journey in 2020.

Move on five years and we are now in 2020. And in lockdown. So, a few weeks ago, I picked up Traveling Light again and re-read it, perhaps in more detail than I had originally read it in early 2015. But there were two things that troubled me. Firstly, there was only one reference to the war. This was bizarre. In 1920, World War 1 - the ‘war to end all wars’ - had only just finished. You’d think that it might have been something that any traveller through Europe would have remarked upon repeatedly. But he didn’t and when he did mention it, it wasn’t by name - The Great War - it was just in an oblique comment about a conversation overheard in a train carriage.

Here’s the actor Jeremy Walker reading that short section from Max’s book:

AUDIO: JEREMY 1
The next morning I tried in vain to secure a pass to Bordeaux, so I bought a ticket to Angouleme. The train was packed with soldiers. The main topic of conversation was the possibility of another war with Germany and, of course, that country’s certain annihilation. One fat old Frenchman, clad in the long black blouse so universal throughout the country, had grave doubts as to the latter point. The soldiers were indignant and would have nothing further to do with him.

We’ll hear more extracts read by Jeremy later in the podcast.

The other thing Max never mentions - this time not once - is the so-called Spanish Flu. This infected a third of the world’s population in 1918 and 1919 and killed many millions of people so again, you’d think a traveller through Europe in 1920 might have it playing on his mind. Not so Max or if it was, he wasn’t telling us.

These two omissions were curious to say the very least.

We know the book was published in 1922 by Extension Press in Chicago and reprinted in 1923. It says so in the front of the book. But in the text itself, Maximilian never refers to the years in which he was travelling. It’s an interesting observation that nowadays we’re quite fixated with years; many things are defined by the year in which they take place; London 2012, the Silver Jubilee of 1977, the general election of 2010. And, of course, the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020. Most of the defining events of the 20th century that we frequently refer to even now - the wars mainly but also things like the 1966 World Cup Final (if you are English) - had yet to happen. Perhaps using years as placemarkers in time was a much less frequent trait in the first few years of last century compared to now.

Max does refer to certain dates and months so we know, for example, that he left his home in America ‘on the fifteenth day of June’. We also know that at the end of his trip he caught the boat back to Boston on the seventh of September the following year. Angelo, in his email to me in 2013, had said Max’s journey took place, quote, “around 1920”, end quote. Setting off on June 15th 1920 - if you are listening to this podcast on the day it has been published, that’s 100 years ago today - returning home on September 7th 1921, writing a book and then having it published in 1922 seems about right.
But it isn’t. And the clue as to when the journey did actually take place is in the short introduction written by a certain John Cavanaugh. It’s a clue that’s easy to skip over and I did, twice. In the fifth of his six short paragraphs he says the following:

“All this happened before the war; could such an experience befall a pauper pilgrim now? International hatred and suspicion have changed much that was beautiful a decade ago; and it is to be feared that the slowest of “Reparations” will be the restoration of that general international trust and charity manifested... in this unpretentious recital of a pleasant pilgrimage among remote and unfamiliar peoples. Surely no one can read it without feeling how unreasonable and shameful, as well as un-Christian, is hatred among nations.”

So there’s the answer.

Max never mentions the war or the Spanish Flu because they hadn’t yet taken place. He didn’t cycle through Europe in 1920 and 1921. So when did he cycle? This is where I become detective.

Cavanaugh’s introduction is dated November 14th 1922. He uses the expressions “before the war” and “a decade ago” but they are rather vague. Any teacher worthy of their qualification knows that it’s pointless telling a student they have 5 minutes in which to do something as 5 minutes never actually means 5 minutes. Similarly “a decade ago” could be 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 years ago, perhaps even more. So we can’t assume that Max set off in 1912 which is a good job, because he didn’t.

In the last few weeks I’ve spent quite a few hours piecing together the life of Maximilian J. St. George and, crucially, that of his wife, Ape Lucia St. George. She was Italian and that’s important but we’ll come back to her in a few minutes. First Max.

He was born in 1885 in an area of eastern Germany that is now in south western Poland. His original name was Maximilian Juraschek. In April 1892, he emigrated to the United States with his family, initially to Texas. His formal education culminated at the catholic college of Notre Dame in Indiana in 1908. He’s now 22 years old, and, with his qualifications to practise law acquired, free to travel. That said, he’s no novice traveller, as he explains at the very start of the book:
“I have always wanted to see Europe,” said the Editor of a Chicago daily paper, “but the thought of the expense has held me back.” It was this remark that inspired me to write an account of my experiences while cycling through Europe.

By nature I am of a roving disposition. Years ago, when I was a small lad, an old negro woman, respected as the sybil of her people, told my mother that I would be a wanderer, and my youthful venturings seemed to bear her out. As the years passed the wanderlust grew. I did not even go home for my yearly holidays—I spent my vacations traveling. By the time I had completed my University course I had seen practically all of the United States, Canada, Newfoundland, Mexico, Central America, parts of South America, Cuba and the West Indies.

But as I’ve already pointed out, he doesn’t tell us when he did set off cycling around Europe; whether it was just after he graduated from college or a few years later.

His wife, Ape Lucia, as we’ve mentioned, is Italian. Max actually met Ape when he was cycling in Europe and he talks about this in the book. But there are two versions of this romantic coupling; one in the book and another in a rather gushing syndicated newspaper article from 1913 entitled [AUDIO: JEREMY 15] “How a Chicago Wandering Knight of the Bike Won an Italian Fairy Princess”. We actually learn much more from the newspaper article in 1913 than we do from Max’s book written in the early 1920s.

The newspaper article kicks off with a quote:

“You can’t tell ME that romance is dead!” says Maximilian John St. George...
And Maximilian knows what he is talking about. For he worked his way to Europe on a cattleboat, rode a bicycle 16,000 miles through strange lands on 40 cents a day, and won the heart of a rich and beautiful Italian noblewoman in her marble mansion on the Bay of Naples.”

50 cents a day seems to have become 40 cents for the journalist, but that aside, we learn how Max pauses in Castellammare di Stabia to eat lunch and is surrounded by the curious locals attracted by his ‘foreign air’. It’s revealed that Max’s future wife is, in fact, the daughter of a chevalier of the Italian crown, a certain Signor Quirico Mani.

AUDIO: JEREMY 17

“He told them of his wanderings and they listened as Desdemona listened to Othello.

“Oh, I could love such a man!” exclaimed Signorina Ape, impulsively.”

It’s explained in the article how “last year” Max went back to Italy to see Ape and that, on August 4th, they will be married. The whole piece is complemented with a grainy photo of Ape doing her best to channel Princess Lea’s hairstyle decades before George Lucas imagined how it might be and a bespectacled Max looking rather suave in a dinner jacket, bow tie and turned up collar looking like an aristocratic extra from Downton Abbey. There’s even a cartoon of a man dressed head to toe in a chequered suit on a bike. It’s all very entertaining and very different from the style of the book.

But it crucially gives us another date in our investigation: August 4th 1913. This matches the records that show both of them returning to the United States by boat from Naples to New York on August 30th of that year. But it also means that both 1913 and 1912 are out of contention for the years of Max’s journey as it seems unlikely that in 1912, the year that Max returned to Italy to propose, he would have travelled all the way back to Europe within weeks of his cycling trip finishing in the September. So we’ve narrowed things down to 1911 or before.

But which year is it to be? Well, there’s a mention in the listings of the Chicago Tribune about Max wanting to change his name on the roll of attorneys. He tried first in October 1910 but the request was denied. He tried again in October 1911 and… well, we don’t know officially but we can assume that that attempt was successful as we now know him as Mr St. George rather than
Mr Juraschek. So by the autumn of 1910 he had his mind back on the law. It seems unlikely that he would be doing all this administrative changing of his name whilst cycling across Europe so we can now discount 1911.

That change of name got me thinking and, following a search that included his original name, provided the key to mystery.

On December 5th 1935, The Kerrville Mountain Sun in Texas published an article about the history of a local church called St. Mary's. The Juraschek family had connections with this church - Texas was, after all, the state to which the family had emigrated in 1892 - and Max gets a passing mention when church renovations are being discussed. I quote:

“The tile and mason contract went to Theodore [sic?] Juraschek whose brother, Maximilian, graduated from Notre Dame University and then with $250 and a bicycle travelled all over Europe for 16 months, wheeling 16,300 miles. On April 7 1909 he visited Father Kemper in Rome and borrowed his black suit to attend a papal audience…”

End quote. So there we have it. He was in Rome in April 1909 meaning that he started his journey in 1908, immediately after graduating from college.

So, if you are listening to this podcast on the date it has been published - June 15th 2020 - we're not marking the one hundredth anniversary of the departure of Max from Chicago on his epic cycle tour of Europe but the one hundred and twelfth anniversary!

Nowadays, cycle touring is a popular way to spend your holidays. Every year, thousands of Americans travel to Europe with their bikes for a few weeks, perhaps even a few months of cycling. That wasn't the case back in 1908 and Max explains to us why he’s chosen to cycle rather than use other methods of transport.

AUDIO: JEREMY 3
Like most people I wanted to see Europe; to see not only tourist Europe, but the real Europe as well. By rail I would be whisked from one city to another and see nothing of the country between. Walking was too slow, in fact out of the question because of the itinerary contemplated; an automobile was too expensive, a motorcycle too heavy, as well as unsatisfactory because of the speed at which one is tempted to ride, so there remained only the bicycle. On this I determined to make the trip.

In terms of his route, it was a tortuous one to say the very least. He does tell us that he spent months planning the trip but I do wonder if he dedicated much of that time to the twists and turns of the actual route he ended up cycling.

Arrived in London, I rode to Dover, where I crossed to the Continent. With the exception of Lisbon and Petrograd, I saw every capital of Europe. In short, I cycled six times into Germany; four times into England; three times into Belgium, Holland, Austria and France; through Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Scotland; around Switzerland, Ireland, Spain and Italy. The sixteenth month saw me again in London, after cycling sixteen thousand three hundred miles.

That’s just a hint of the complexity. Fortunately, at the end of the book in a four-page appendix he lists every town and city through which he passed. I’ll spare you all the detail but basically - and this is about as basic as I can make it - he set off from London immediately in the direction of the continent taking the boat from Dover to Ostend and then, via Brussels and Amsterdam, cycled north towards Scandinavia visiting his next three capitals Copenhangen, Oslo (although
at the time it was known as Christiania) and Stockholm. Another boat brought him back to Germany where he ticked off Berlin. The area to the south-east of Berlin, as I mentioned earlier, is where he was born and brought up and he revisits it twice. On this first occasion it leads him eventually to Prague and then Vienna before continuing west to Bern in Switzerland via southern Germany and Geneva. He now follows the Rhine north as far as Cologne before passing through Luxembourg and then, for the first time, into France and Paris. He’s now heading south and, via Bordeaux, crosses into Spain on the Atlantic coast before continuing to Madrid. At this point, he doesn’t cycle to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal which makes me wonder if it was ever his intention to pass through all the capitals in the first place or whether it was something that he just happened to do inadvertently. So instead of Lisbon, he heads for the south coast and Cadiz. His journey now becomes very coastal and he travels via Valencia to Barcelona, back into France, Marseille, Nice and then into Italy to Rome and south to Naples where, as we know, he meets his future wife.

He now starts cycling north but on the Adriatic coast of Italy via Venice and Trieste into what is now Slovenia and its capital Ljubljana before Budapest and back towards his homeland in southern Poland.

Continuing through the middle of Germany he revisits Cologne and Brussels before catching a boat back to England via Calais. And he’s not yet done! He has the capitals of the British Isles to visit, or most of them… After travelling along the south coast, through the Cotswolds and the English Midlands, he takes another boat from Holyhead on the Welsh island of Anglesey to Dublin before embarking upon a coastal cycle around the entire island of Ireland via Belfast, returning to Dublin for a boat to Liverpool. Travelling north he cycles to Glasgow and takes a very scenic route to Edinburgh via Loch Lomond.

The final leg of his 16,300 mile journey is through northern England via York and then Cambridge back to Tilbury Docks and his ship home to America.

That’s a European cycle tour to beat most others!

At this point, I think it would be useful to find out a little bit more about life in Europe in the period immediately before the First World War. When Max left America in June 1908, Theodore Roosevelt was the president. In Britain, Edward VII was on the throne and Herbert Asquith had just become the Prime Minister. Looking at a map of Europe from 1910, the political geography of the continent was very different from what it is today. A few days ago I spoke to Dr James Stout, professor of World History at San Diego Mesa College in the United States. He also
happens to be a former professional cyclist… I began by asking James to describe the wider political landscape of Europe in 1908

AUDIO: JAMES 1

There’s only one country that Max identifies as a place where he might have problems and that’s Spain. I asked James why people might have warned him against travelling through that particular country.

AUDIO: JAMES 2

I pointed out to James that Max claims to have visited all the European capitals apart from Petrograd and Lisbon and that he seems to consider everything south of the Austro-Hungarian empire - basically south of the Danube - as no longer Europe.

AUDIO: JAMES 3

Would Max have travelled with a passport as we know them today?

AUDIO: JAMES 4

And finally I asked James how, as an American, Max would have been perceived by the Europeans of 1908 and 1909.

AUDIO: JAMES 5

As John Cavanugh pointed out in his introduction to Max’s book, that would probably have been different in many parts of Europe had he decided to wait until 1920 to set off cycling. Thanks to James Stout for providing some historical perspective.

“What about all his kit? And the trip must have cost him a fortune!” I hear you cry… Well, the clue is in the title of his book: Traveling Light or Cycling Europe on Fifty Cents a Day. We’ll focus on the money side of things to start with. Here’s Max again.

AUDIO: JEREMY 5
How did I manage it on such a small amount of money? In a word, I lived with the people. What I was doing, the trip I was making, was to the Europeans something above the ordinary. It appealed to them. Besides, I was an American. I came from the Land of Promise, the Land of Opportunities, the land to which they all longed to go. Being able to speak the different languages of Europe I could tell them of many interesting things I had seen. Especially could I answer their questions about America. Hardly ever did I stop at a house in Scandinavia, Ireland or Italy, but that I was told of some member of the family, or a friend, who had gone to America.

On applying at a farm I would at first merely ask permission to sleep on the straw in the barn. Sometimes this was given at once; again, only after some hesitation. Occasionally my request met with refusal. I would then call at the next farmhouse.

Once having the required consent, I would set about cleaning my machine. During this operation I would answer a host of questions about my trip. Then, if no one invited me into the house, I would ask to enter and write the day’s happenings in my diary. This request was invariably granted—(with two exceptions). My writing always excited their curiosity, and when they learned that I was a graduate of Notre Dame University, and an attorney-at-law, they considered my visit an honor and would ask me to partake of supper with them. And eight times out of ten, a bed for the night was offered me, with a cordial invitation to breakfast the following morning.

Those of the more traveled class received me well. Very often they urged me to remain a day or two. Priests and ministers were especially hospitable. Naturally such men were able and willing to give me information about the people.
So it helps to have friends in high places. His devout catholicism seems to have been to his benefit, certainly financially and it went down very well with the vicars of Europe. Max was discovering Couchsurfing about 100 years before it had been invented. We'll return to the subject of money in a few moments.

As for his kit, he was the bikepacker of his day.

**AUDIO: JEREMY 6**

> My equipment was as light as possible, for one pound more or less makes a great difference in a long trip. All my impedimenta was carried in a canvas
knapsack, eighteen inches long, eight inches deep and two inches wide, strapped to the handlebars of the bicycle. Behind me, on a carrier, I had a blanket to sleep on and a small rubberized cape, bought in London as a protection against rain. In the knapsack were a pair of light trousers, some handkerchiefs, several pairs of socks, a small folding mirror, and a comb, a razor, a shaving stick and a strop, note books, lead pencil, repair cement, a roll of rubber and a few pieces of outer tire. I wore a strong suit of clothes and shoes, a weather-proof cap, a celluloid collar, a light blue shirt and light-weight underclothing.

This was all I had. It may seem too little, especially on a trip of sixteen months, and yet it proved adequate for all occasions. It is more practical and much easier to replace a worn article of wearing apparel by buying a new one than to carry extra luggage for months. A little water and soap will make a celluloid collar look like new, and when other laundry work became necessary I did it in the evening before retiring, and started out the following morning with a clean supply. While riding during the day, I never wore my coat. By folding, wrapping and tying it to the handlebars it was kept clean, and on arriving at a city or town where I meant to remain for some time, my coat and the extra trousers came into service. Thus with light luggage, and a lighter heart, I toured Europe.

Go on, admit it! Who hasn’t gone cycling without a celluloid collar?

There’s a picture of him in the book with his packed bike and his set up is rather reminiscent of a modern-day bikepacker with his luggage fixed high on the bike over his rear wheel, in his frame and on his handlebars.

When it comes to his bicycle, however, whereas a modern-day blogger or travel writer might mention it quite frequently - I know I certainly do when I’m writing about my own experiences on
two wheels and Reggie, my now-retired bike, even gets mentioned in the titles of the books for goodness sake - but we learn very little about Max’s bike. We have the photograph that I’ve just mentioned of him with his, well… it’s not the bike he brought with him from America. It’s his second bike. He doesn’t mention his first bike much at all until he arrives in Poitiers in France. And, true to form, we don’t know exactly when that was. He subsequently leaves Bordeaux on Christmas Eve after spending a short period of time working in the city so I’m guessing that he passed through Poitiers at some point in November, ish… of 1908. The reason why he finally talks about the bike is because he’s having a few issues.

I’m just going to interrupt him there. This caused me quite a bit of confusion when reading the book but when he talks about his ‘wheel’, he’s not just referring to his, well, ‘wheel’ but his entire bike. I’ll let him continue the story.
“Then you must pay for the damage you have caused.”

He only stuck out his lower lip, looked foolish and smiled a long surprised “no.”

Leaving the wheel with the mechanic I went to see the police. They directed me to the Justice of the Peace, he, to an Englishman, the latter, to the Prefect.

The Prefect sent me back to the police, and so it went until I again stood before the Justice of the Peace. As nothing could be done until after eight days, I gave up the idea of prosecuting.

I returned to the shop of the mechanic. That individual seemed to have grown more solicitous for my welfare. He promised to keep my wheel until the broken parts could arrive from America and then ship the repaired wheel wherever I would direct. As he was under obligation to me, this appeared to be the best plan to follow.

It’s not the only time he has recourse to the law to sort out his problems; he is, after all, a lawyer but I think he’s often disappointed with the European shrug of indifference that he often receives in return.

The story of his bike continues once he is in the Pyrenean town of Pau. While visiting Lourdes, as all good catholics do, Max meets a wealthy brewer from Indiana who, although his financial and physical health have been somewhat (in his words) “shattered by two financial crises” takes Max under his wing and provides him with some money to buy a new bicycle. As with all the other encounters he has with people on his European adventure, Max only uses the initials of the people that he meets. I suppose that way he doesn’t have to resort to doing what I needed to do with Manfred and rename him Helmut...

AUDIO: JEREMY 9
Well I suppose it helps if you get friendly with wealthy brewers from Indiana…

Let’s take a few moments to think about the kind of bikes that he was using and how they compare to what you might invest in to complete a similar trip nowadays. The writer Michael Hutchinson is the author of a book called ‘Re:Cyclists, 200 Years on Two Wheels’. I asked him what the 1908 Alcyon might have been like...

AUDIO: MICHAEL HUTCHINSON

Thanks to Michael for his insights into bicycles and cycle touring at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. That point he makes about the image of a ‘typical’ cycle tourist being dressed in tweed is, of course, how the newspaper artist chose to depict Maximilian beside the article
about his wedding to Ape Lucia. It wasn’t an accurate representation of the man himself but was clearly how others imagined him to be.

Returning to the subject of money, we’ve already heard Max describe his method of minimising expenditure by rocking up at an unsuspecting person’s house and pleading his case, politely. We’ll hear an example of that in a few moments, but it’s worth reflecting upon how much 50 cents - that’s what he claims to have spent on average each day - in 1908 is worth today. According to detailed research… OK, I just Googled it… 50 cents in 1908 is the equivalent of about $14 in 2020. That’s £11 or about €12.50. In 1957 the American travel writer Arthur Frommer wrote a famous travel guide called ‘Europe on $5 a Day’. That would have been quite a lavish trip by Max’s standards as 50 cents in 1908 was worth only $1.50 by 1957. Fromer kept updating his book every few years and in 1975 published ‘Europe on $10 a Day’ by which point Max’s 50 cents had grown to $3. Fromer’s last book in the series was published in 2007 by which time the title had become ‘Europe on $95 a Day’. The chances of you surviving on just $14 a day in 2020 are, I would have thought, pretty slim. But if you want to have a go, here is Max’s technique in action as described by the man himself. He’s in Norway, heading in the direction of Stockholm, quite close to the Swedish border and feeling a bit peckish.

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AUDIO: JEREMY 10
By noon of the following day, near Flisen, between Vand and Kongsvinger, I came to a fine residence, set back from the road, surrounded by gardens. In answer to my ring the door was opened by a handsome young woman, the mistress of the house. She greeted me with a smile. My courage returned.

"Good day, madam," I said. "Do you speak German?"

"Oh, yes, very well," she replied.

"Madam," I went on, "I am a young American student whose purse is not any too full. Perhaps you could give me something to eat."

Was she going to refuse me, or would she tell me to wait while she warmed up something? No, she smiled at me.

"Will you come in?"

I followed her to a richly furnished drawing-room. What next?

"Do you just want lunch, or will you take dinner with us? Our dinner is at three."

Could it be possible that my ears were not deceiving me! I ventured a reply.

"If it will not inconvenience you too much, I would rather take a little lunch, as I want to be on the road as soon as possible."

"Very well. Will you come into the smoking-room;
Much of *Traveling Light* is objective, descriptive travel writing but Max clearly enjoys a bit of people watching as well. It’s not a great tactic to make broad generalisations about an entire nation based upon a relatively small number of encounters with the population, but let’s be honest, we all do it when we travel to a different country. We often do it when we travel to a different part of our own country.

I would, however, argue that as cycle tourists, we have more evidence upon which to base our generalisations and, as we heard him explain earlier, Max had specifically chosen to travel by bicycle to experience things in a way that would have been impossible via any other method of transport. It’s a theme that he picks up on again in the final few pages of the book.
This trip to me was invaluable. I became intimately acquainted with the different countries of Europe and the manners and habits of the people. No train spirited me from one town to another. I observed every foot of the road; every mile impressed itself upon my mind. Unlike other tourists, I did not lodge at hotels. Hotel life is the same throughout the world. I lived with the people of the different lands through which I passed. I observed their houses, ate their fare, entered into their amusements and heard their stories direct from themselves.

And, as an example of his people watching, here he is back in Rome talking about the different kinds of tourists he’s meeting.

In the Forum Romanum one day I met a German professor. You can never mistake a German professor, and once you meet him you can never forget him. A German is the most precise and methodical of all tourists. We spent a full hour and a half at the Arch of Constantine. The professor did not gaze an hour and a half at the Arch; no, he read from a pamphlet, every now and then glancing at the Arch to confirm his reading and check it off. He then walked three times slowly around it to be sure that nothing had escaped him. Then he towed me to the next ruin.

The French tourist skims over rapidly and superficially, yet he is more brilliantly reminiscent than the German. The English, and especially the American
It's after making these observations that Max goes off to have his audience with the Pope, as reported, much to my gratitude, by the Kerrville Mountain Sun in Texas some 26 years later as it allowed me to state definitively that he was travelling in 1908 and 1909.

*Traveling Light or Cycling Europe on Fifty Cents a Day* is a thoroughly charming read, especially for those of us who have also attempted long-distance cycles within Europe. It’s clearly a different world in 1908 to that of today, but if you had the time, the inclination and, let’s be honest, a bit of money to finance such a trip over 16-months, you’d probably be able to manage just fine. And lots of people over the decades have indeed embarked upon similar European cycling expeditions. I managed to locate two of them....

In 2010 Lehel Benedek and Elod Keresszegi set off from their home in the centre of Romania on an 15-month cycling tour of Europe. Elod now lives in Norway running a bicycle shop and Lehel is in Hungary bringing up his young children, as you will hear on the recording. I started by asking Elod what had been the motivation for them to embark on such an epic cycling journey.

**AUDIO: ELOD / LEHEL**

3 Euros per day / 1,300 Euros per person. I stand corrected to what I said earlier. It clearly is possible to complete such a trip on a tiny budget. In terms of hospitality to strangers, it seems that Europe remains just as open and generous as it was back in 1908 and 1909. So, as they both said towards the end of our conversation, just do it.

Which brings us nicely back to Maximilian. In the final two paragraphs of his book, Max addresses his readers directly and attempts to encourage us to embark upon our own epic cycle tour of Europe. He even suggests a more manageable way of completing the feat if we don’t have a spare 16 months available to us.

**AUDIO: JEREMY 13**
Such a trip is not so remarkable that anyone cannot make it. To stretch it out for sixteen months, over all of Europe, on two hundred and fifty dollars, however, one must be able to speak at least six of the principal languages, and have a large amount of patience, perseverance and endurance—patience above all.

But this trip could be divided into periods of three months. One trip could take up the British Isles; another, Belgium, Holland, and northern France; a third, Scandinavia; a fourth, Germany, Austria and Switzerland; a fifth, France and Spain; a sixth, Italy. Anyone during the vacation months could take one of these six trips mentioned. It can be done cheaply, and it is the only way of really seeing Europe.

“It is the only way of really seeing Europe.”

Those are the final words of the book. Well, before he embarks upon his epic appendix listing all the places that he visited.

I agree wholeheartedly. It is the only way of really seeing Europe.

That said, I have no wish whatsoever to follow Maximilian’s route. I’ll happily leave that to someone else. What I do find appealing, however, is how Max manages to visit what he considers to be “every capital of Europe… with the exception of Lisbon and Petrograd”. As I’ve already noted, I don’t think that it was ever his intention to visit every capital city, but we’ll never know definitively. We’ve also got to bear in mind the political geography of the continent in 1908 as set out by James Stout earlier in the podcast. There were far fewer independent countries than there are now.

In 1908 Max cycled through the following modern-day capitals; London, Brussels, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Oslo (which was called Christiania at the time), Stockholm, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Vaduz in Lichtenstein, Bern, Luxembourg and Paris. It wasn't until 1917 that Finland gained its independence from the Russian Empire which also included Poland and all of the Baltic States. Petrograd - modern day Saint Petersburg - was the capital of Russia and that's
one of the two capitals he didn’t visit. Although Max visited Prague, for him it wouldn’t have been a capital city as it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with its capital in Vienna.

In 1909, Max cycled through Madrid, Rome, The Vatican City, San Marino, Ljubljana, Budapest, and Dublin. We know that he didn’t go as far as Lisbon and again, at the time both Ljubljana and Budapest were cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and not capitals. Similarly, Dublin would have been a city of the United Kingdom, not the capital of a free-Irish state.

So by my reckoning he visited 16 capital cities that were capital cities in 1908 and 1909. He visited 20 that we now consider to be capital cities. But what about Romania? Bulgaria? Serbia? Montenegro? The Ottoman Empire which included modern-day Albania? And, of course, Greece? When he writes “with the exception of Lisbon and Petrograd, I visited every capital of Europe”, he’s being a little economical with the truth. But again, as we heard from James earlier, that’s probably how Europe was perceived at the time by most people; everything to the north and west of The Danube.

My definition of Europe is a little more accurate and stops at the borders with Russia and Turkey. That said, I dare say some will disagree, especially fans of EuroVision, but that aside, I think there are now 45 independent countries in Europe including the Vatican City. That’s 45 capital cities. I may have cycled three times across Europe myself and covered about 16,000 km in the process but I’ve only cycled through 21 of those countries and 10 capital cities. I’ve visited another 8 capitals but not on a bike. That leaves a lot of countries and a lot of capitals that I’ve never visited.

Yet I claim to be Mr Cycling Europe!

Cycling to all of those 45 capitals would be a challenging but rewarding experience and, like Max suggests, you wouldn’t necessarily need to do them all in one trip.

Irrespective, embarking upon such a journey would be difficult in the Europe of 2020 with Coronavirus restrictions still in force across the continent, some of which might stretch into 2021. But you could perhaps make a start in your home country...

Max finished his epic journey by cycling around my home country, the United Kingdom and Ireland. He was quite taken by England. This might make you smile...

AUDI0: JEREMY 14
“It is a paradise for cyclists.”

Mmm… perhaps it’s time to test out if that’s still the case in 2020. A trip around the capitals of the United Kingdom and Ireland in 2020. There’s an idea...

Maximilian died in 1959 and Ape Lucia in 1976. I couldn’t find an obituary for either Ape or Maximilian but I did find Maximilian’s death notice in the Chicago Tribune. There’s no evidence that he used the Italian title he married into during his life but in death at least he was elevated to his aristocratic pedestal:

“St George - Count Maximilian J. St. George Von Juraschek of 1202 Chestnut Avenue, Wilmette, husband of Countess Lucia St. George; father of Mrs. Arthur Baker of New York City, Mrs Georgio Ottaviani of Milan, Italy, and George Quirico Mani St. George of Wilmette; six grandchildren. Member of Holy Name society; Knights of Columbus, Lafayette council; Catholic Lawyers’ guild; Advocate society; Illinois Bar association; Notre Dame Law association. Please omit flowers.”
No mention of cycling.

Perhaps this podcast, however, has helped elevate him to the position that he deserves in the pantheon of early 20th century long-distance cycling pioneers. To me, Max, you are royalty when it comes to European cycling and the original Mr. Cycling Europe.

You can find out more about Maximilian J. St. George at CyclingEurope.org/Max

Many thanks to everyone who has assisted in the making of this podcast; Dr James Stout in San Diego, Michael Hutchinson, Elod & Lehel in Norway and Hungary respectively, Claus Blanz in Stuttgart who played the role of Manfred / Helmut and the reader who gave a voice to Max himself, Jeremy Walker.

The Cycling Europe Podcast will return soon. If you think you have an interesting cycling story to tell, please get in touch via the website, CyclingEurope.org, via social media @CyclingEurope or by emailing podcast@CyclingEurope.org.
Thank-you for listening, stay safe & good-bye.