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Transcript

Speaker 1

It's time for the Outspoken Cyclist, your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike.

Speaker 2

Industry, and much, much more.

Speaker 1

You can subscribe to our weekly podcast at outspokencyclist.com or through your favorite podcasting app to listen anytime. Now here's your host, Diane Jenks.

Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to the Outspoken Cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today. This is the next episode in our series of great rides around the U.S. for the spring and summer of 2026. And today, we visit Maine. Lung diseases affect 35 million people in the U.S., and the American Lung Association is the first stop for advocacy research and funding for those people and their families. The 42nd annual trek across Maine, yeah, 42 years, has to be one of, if not the longest running event of its kind. A fundraiser, as well as what you will hear, is almost a family reunion with hundreds of folks for what promises to be a lovely three-day ride around Maine. And with the Father's Day weekend date, it's a great way to celebrate dad. My guests are Matt Sturgis, who has held many positions with the American Lung Association in connection with this ride and other offices around the Eastern Seaboard, and Lance Bushey, who is the voice of the organization in Advocacy and Public Affairs. My second guest today is Professor Chris Sweet. He's the information literacy and scholarly communications librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University. He just published a book, *A History of Bicycling in Illinois, 160 Years of Booms and Busts*, and it goes all the way back to the late 1800s, tracing the ups and downs of cycling from manufacturing and racing to how bicycles figured into the wars of the 20th century and beyond. Crystal will be with me in the second-half of the show. Perhaps you know someone or are that person who suffers from a lung disease, whether it be asthma, lung cancer, emphysema, or even allergies associated with the environment. The American Lung Association offers many programs as well as advice and will advocate for everyone needing their help with events like the Trek Across Maine, as well as a cohort of delegates who speak directly with members of Congress. Then there's the fun of a large

group of riders who are not only supporting the fundraising efforts, but are enjoying the beauty of the state of Maine with a fully supported three-day ride. Here with me to discuss the details are Matt Sturgis, a longtime rider and advocate, and Lance Bushy, who is the Assistant Vice President of State Public Policy for the Eastern Division of the American Lung Association. Hello, Matt and Lance. Welcome to the Outspoken Cyclist. Thanks for joining me on the show today. How are you both?

Speaker 1

Doing great, Diane. Happy spring. Thanks for having us.

Speaker 2

Yes.

Speaker 3

Yeah, doing well. I really appreciate the time to speak with you today.

Speaker 2

And Maine is nice today.

Speaker 1

Yes, 70. It is here. I saw all kinds of cyclists out on the road. I just wanted to grab a quick sandwich and I think I saw half a dozen cyclists. So it's a high watermark for this year so far.

Speaker 2

Yeah, we're at 78 today. We have some really heavy winds though. So if you're riding, you're hoping for a tailwind. But in Ohio, nah, it's probably a headwind. Anyway, this is part of our ongoing series about great rides across the U.S. And in talking with Lance before we actually got started, I realized, or I didn't realize to begin with, how old the trek across Maine is. Now, we haven't ever done a show about riding in Maine, so that's kind of exciting to me because I like Maine. I've been there, I was there when I was pregnant, and I don't even tell you how many years ago, at Moose Lake. I don't know if anybody knows about Moose Lake. Anyway, there was definitely a moose. It was the biggest thing I've ever seen. It was amazing. But so let's begin with you, Matt. This is the Lung Association's ride. And the Lung Association is not a new organization in this country. This ride clearly is not new. It's 42 years old. Tell us about yourself and your connection to the Lung Association ride.

Speaker 1

Sure. Yeah, my connection I started this is actually my 25th trek across Maine. So I was recruited by my at that point, my girlfriend, who later that year became my wife and her family. Her dad had ridden almost from the beginning. He was he wrote for a long time. He passed this past winter, but he was the one connection that got us all doing it. So

I've done it with my wife, my father-in-law, my mother-in-law. Our daughter's done it, my sister-in-laws, nephews, nieces, the whole family event. And that's, that was kind of my early connection. And then my father was diagnosed with COPD and lung cancer and congestive heart failure. And he ultimately passed from lung cancer. And I think at that point, let's see, he was, Yeah, it's like 14. So it was probably I'd already been doing the trek about 10 or 11 years at that point. He was diagnosed about five years into my trek experience. So that took the intensity of my connection to the to the ride from being a rider to, OK, what can we do for the mission and how can I support the organization? And so I stepped up my game. I volunteered as well as road and we used to, you know, We would help getting our words through advocacy. And then I got on the board here in Maine. And then we evolved into the Northeast board. And then now with the Northeast and the Mid-Atlantic, and I've been chairman of all those boards over the years. So I've tried to put my, let's say my money where my tires are, my mouth where my tires are, and expanded my connection. And just getting to know more and more about the association and the mission and what we do and what the Trek Across Maine really has made such an incredible impact on that over the years is a point of pride being a Maine person and seeing what that's done. It's the single largest fundraising event in the whole universe of the Lung Association event package out there as they have walks and they have climbs and rides, but this is the big one and it's put us on the map nationwide and it's really And this, you know, Lance and I have a common friend, Ed Miller, who was the director for a long time in the state. And he, I think, appropriately coined it the single largest family reunion in the state of Maine on an annual basis. And that still rings true today.

Speaker 2

So it's interesting that neither of you speak with what I would have considered a Maine accent. But that's okay. people say I still sound like I come from Philadelphia and I haven't lived there since I was six. Anyway, so clearly your family relationship with this lung association and then in turn with the ride has some real deep physical roots. You know, you've got a father-in-law and your father. I'm wondering how you also got involved with the Washington, D.C. advocacy, that you went to D.C. Now, we just finished the National Bike Summit, and we had an ask, and I'm sure it was something to do with e-bikes. I wasn't there this year. What is it that you went to D.C. to talk to legislators about? And we're hoping to, what did you have an ask, I guess is my question.

Speaker 3

Do you want me to jump in here or Matt?

Speaker 2

Well, it was originally Matt's question, but did you go to the Capitol Hill too, Lance?

Speaker 3

I did as well. So this was our 11th annual Lung Force Advocacy Day, which is a time when the American Lung Association brings the people affected by lung cancer from all 50 states to Capitol Hill to raise awareness and make some advocacy ask. And we call our participants Lung Force Heroes. And they are individuals who are either living with lung cancer, a caregiver for those who are living with lung cancer, or like Matt, someone who's lost a loved one to lung cancer. And we have a multi-day affair. We bring the heroes together to get to know each other, which is a great, particularly for those who are living with lung cancer, to bond and have some shared experience. And then we take Capitol Hill over. We all wear our turquoise, which Matt is appropriately wearing today, and I forgot. And that's our signature color. And we talked to members of Congress about the importance of National Institutes of Health research funding and the importance of accessible, affordable, quality health care. Because if you have all the great research treatments in the world, if you don't have access to care, you can't access those treatments. And then the importance of CDC funding and the infrastructure that they bring to the public health community, such as lung cancer screening, radon awareness, tobacco treatment. So we had three asks. We wove in how it ties to lung cancer. And I mean, it really is an impactful time. We had over 180 meetings across all of the heroes this year. And we have seen results over the 11 years that we've been doing this. We've seen a nearly 140% increase in lung cancer research funding at the NIH. And as a result of that funding, we've had over 75 new lung cancer treatments that have become available. So it's really impactful when you see someone who is currently using immunotherapy and they're able to talk to their United States senator. put a face to NIH funding and know that if this drug that they're currently taking stops working, the research is being done and the next one is in the pipeline so that they can live a life, a fulfilling life with the diagnosis. And unfortunately, as Matt shared with our senators, the treatment advances weren't there when his dad was going through this.

Speaker 2

So let me take a moment to reintroduce you. And then I have a couple of questions about the Lung Association and other diseases that might fall under its purview. We're speaking with Matt Sturgis and Lance Bushey from the Maine Lung Association, meaning M-A-I-N-E. And we're talking about a ride that's coming up, but right now we're talking about the association itself. So I'm wondering, you mentioned lung cancer several times. Are there other diseases that fall under the Lung Association's umbrella?

Speaker 3

There are. I mean, our mission is to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. And there are a number of lung diseases, 35 million Americans, including 244,000 here in Maine have chronic lung disease. The big ones that people are really aware of are asthma, lung cancer, and COPD. But there are a number of other lung diseases that are under our portfolio to improve lung health from COVID, which we all are familiar with, cystic fibrosis, emphysema, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. There's a

litany of lung diseases that the mission of the Lung Association addresses and The funds raised at the trek across Maine help to educate and go to research for preventing those diseases and finding new treatments.

Speaker 1

And coincidentally, Diane, this past winter, because it's been so lovely up here in Maine, I came down with pneumonia and go to Dr. Google and go in and try to find out what you can for information. And Lung Association featured prominently in my research to figure out how long it was going to take me to get over what I had and treatments that were available. So they really do touch on all lung health areas of concern.

Speaker 2

So then I have a question about the EPA and some of the issues, especially for cyclists. We are on the road. We are out in the open with cars, trucks, trains, planes, all of it. And air pollution is a huge problem around schools. So I'm wondering if the Lung Association has any impact with the EPA or with those kinds of laws.

Speaker 1

Yeah, we do provide quite a bit of testimony and support of that. I know Lance is a superhero. He's in his regular UMaine hockey jersey today, but when he's deployed in the advocacy mode, he can really work very well with mobilizing our, you know, our network of folks to reach out. and advocate on important issues like Clean Air Act, things along those lines that are critical for us because, air quality or healthy air is really critical to what we're doing. that's like the baseline there, where we need to be. And if the EPA was looking at different, or let's say, lowering standards, eliminating standards, or eliminating the reasons for certain levels of, I guess you could say, different particles, particulate matter in the air, we're on top of that. And Lance and across the nation, we have a lot of great folks who do that type of work, who really get after the messaging and reach out with our, you know, we do a lot of grassroots work when it comes to that. And so they'll deploy that network of folks and say, you know, they get an e-advocacy alert that will come from the association. We need your help to reach out to Senator King, who's a... That's pitching to Friendly Hitting there because he's been such a great advocate for what we do here as well as Representative Pingree. But we reach out to them and let them know and they'll provide a lot of that information that will help us provide hopefully critical constituent testimony to let them know the importance of that. So I think that's one of the best parts that we have from the association standpoint is the advocacy. And then as a cyclist, you know, I also had a heart attack a few years back and my cardiologist told me he's like, some of those unhealthy air days just stay inside. So you gotta look at those air quality standards and Maine being where we are, we're at the end of the tailpipe of the nation because the air and the wind travels up to Maine. So we're the last people to get and it loads up on its way here. So we really feel the impacts of unhealthy air. So yeah, we're pretty passionate about that too.

Speaker 2

So let's take a short break and when we come back, let's delve into the nuts and bolts of the Trek Across Maine, the ride coming up pretty soon now. We're speaking with Matt Sturgis and Lance Blushy from the Trek Across Maine, the Lung Association ride. It's A 40-some-odd, 42-year-old ride. And that's a long time to have a ride that's going well and raising funds the way it does. You're listening to the Outspoken Cyclist. We'll be right back. We are back on the Outspoken Cyclist. If you're just joining me, we are talking about the Trek Across Maine. It is a ride coming up. We're going to ask our two guests Matt Sturgis and Lance Bushy and it's Trek Across Maine. We're going to give you a way to look it up. Who wants to dive in and start talking about the ride? I want to know when it is, where it is, how long it is, what kind of terrain, all kinds of stuff. Maximum number of riders.

Speaker 1

I'm happy to jump in and help you out, Diane.

Speaker 2

OK, it's Matt.

Speaker 1

Speaking. Coming up on my 25th year here. It is a three day ride and it's going to be starting at in New Gloucester at Pineland campus, which is a beautiful pastoral setting out in the countryside. And from there we're going to ride roughly 60 miles the first day through overhill, through valleys to the ocean or ocean adjacent, ending up on day at the end of the day in Lewiston at Bates College. And that'll be stop #1. We'll stay there that night. And we usually have a great meal. People get a chance to get together that night and have a fun social evening. And then the next morning, get right back on that saddle. You've got 60 miles to ride again. And we'll ride from Bates College through a good portion of southern central Maine. Not a lot of flat ground in there, but some absolutely beautiful, beautiful miles to ride. And we'll end up riding through such areas as Poland, Mechanic Falls, up around the top side of Thompson Lake, and then finishing up just in Standish at St. Joseph's College, which is on the shores of Sebago Lake, one of the largest lakes in Maine. And then on Saturday, you recover a little bit. And then we have a great event that evening called the Spirit of the Trek, where we can talk about the mission with all of our riders who like to come and hang out and relax in the beautiful summer night of Maine. And then day three, we're going to get back on the ride and ride the 60 miles back through the countryside and ending up back at Pineland and New Gloucester. So it's three days, 180 miles, plus or minus. It's Father's Day weekend, and it's always on Father's Day weekend. So that's a pretty cool tradition to have. And people know that as soon as they see the calendars out, they know when they're going to be busy. I've ridden that ride. with as much as like 2,200 riders back in the day. In the, let's see, probably the early 2000s, we would have that much. We're

building back from COVID. COVID really, you know, any of your... See, you know, road races, rides, all that was really adversely impacted by a couple of years of having to take a pause. So it's tough to build that back, but we're starting to get back there. So we're roughly around 650, 700 riders right now. There's always room for more. But folks can stay, you know, it's. It's a supported ride and it's not a, we're not going to ride the bikes for you, but we will get your gear from place to place. So that's extremely well organized. And it's probably a good opportunity to talk about the volunteers too, because they make it happen. You know, we have Rd. marshals, people out there making sure that you're taking the proper turn at the right location, not getting lost and hopefully not getting lost with sag wagons. We've got the volunteers who help out with setup, who help out with luggage on a daily basis, help you get your room. If you've decided to room or if you decide to camp, they'll move your camping gear and have that ready for you to set up on your own. They don't set up your tent for you, but we will be happy to transfer your bags. So they really make it happen too. I mean, they're a critical part of the success of this. But overall, it's a great team effort and yeah, I think that's Hopefully that summarizes it. And we used to raise about \$1 million a year. This year, our goal, I think, is 750K. We're hoping to hit that goal. Yeah, it's just a highlight. After that point, it's like in Maine, you usually have two dates. You've got the 4th of July and then the first day of winter. It's kind of like how things happen. This adds that third date to the year. So you can do the trek across Maine, 4th of July, and then summer's over.

Speaker 2

So, Lance, tell me how the fundraising works for this ride.

Speaker 3

Sure. So this is our, like you said, 42nd year. And collectively, we've raised over \$32 million since the ride's inception in 1985. And again, that money goes back into fueling the mission for health, education, advocacy, and research. Each rider pays their \$50 registration fee and then has a fundraising minimum of \$550. We obviously encourage folks to go well beyond the minimum and get into what we call winner's circle for those who raise over \$1,000 or more. There's a next level of incentives to do that and just a little more trek swag that you can wear and brag about through the year and also just raise more money for the mission. And then we also have a virtual component because obviously we know since COVID, some of our riders who we've had nearly every state represented in multiple countries over the 42 years. Some of them haven't been able to make it back. So for our virtual riders, it's a \$250 minimum, so a little smaller. But it's a, like Matt said, a great three-day traveling circus, family reunion across the state. A nice new addition this year is we're doing a gravel ride to kind of get into that area and there's going to be a one day, 25 or 50 mile gravel route. The fundraising minimums for those one day rides are slightly lower than the 550 for the three day.

Speaker 2

Are they the same weekend? Are the gravel rides?

Speaker 3

It is the same weekend, yes.

Speaker 2

Okay.

Speaker 1

Yeah, it's a great function of the location that they have the ability to do the gravel there and a lot of good gravel roads around there. So It's kind of trying to add an amenity for riders to attract a group that might or might not come, or they just want to go out there and get dirty.

Speaker 2

What's your recommendation on the big ride, the full ride, the three-day ride, as far as bikes are concerned? Is it basically paved?

Speaker 1

Yes, it's paved. It's paved. Yeah.

Speaker 2

So road bike or whatever you want, adventure.

Speaker 1

Road bike travel bikes, you know, you can put slicks on. I mean, a lot of folks will ride, but I've seen There's one year a guy rode it on a unicycle.

Speaker 2

Yeah, that's the crazy RAGBRAI kind of stuff.

Speaker 1

Yeah, exactly, exactly. We used to have a guy do it on a fix, on a single speed, and he was kind of an interesting character. And there's some hills out there that I saw him walk a little bit more than other riders did. But it's, yeah, you see all kinds of, and I think... we were talking about e-bikes a little bit before we started the podcast and we've seen some of them come along as well. So it's helped some older or let's say more mature track riders continue their connection to the ride. So that's kind of given them some of that liberation to come back.

Speaker 2

That's good, that's good. Well, the last thing we need to know is how to find out more about the ride. And we will encourage some people to look at signing up. If you're taking your vacation this year and you want a nice three-day ride in Maine, this sounds

beautiful and well-organized. Also, I don't think that your registration fee and minimum fundraising is really very daunting compared to a lot of other big rides. that are asking you to, get huge fundraising goals. This is pretty, pretty doable. So tell us how to find out more.

Speaker 3

Yeah, sure. Our website is cycleforair.org and on that you can find information about all five of the American Lung Association rides, but prominently featured is the trek across Maine that That portal is how you would register and get set up with your fundraising tools. I mean, we support you throughout the fundraising journey to give you tips and tricks to help maximize your impact. And anyone who is interested in the mission and other work of the Lung Association, it is lung.org and all of the information about lung disease and our helpline and resources are available there.

Speaker 2

And we will have it all up on our website, outspokencyclist.com. Max Sturgis, Lance Bushy from the Lung Association about the trek across Maine. It sounds like a wonderful ride, Father's Day weekend. What a great place to celebrate with your dad. Three days of beautiful riding through Maine. Thank you so much for talking with me today. I wish you a lot of luck with this year's ride. And we'll check in and see how your fundraising goals go. Thank you.

Speaker 3

Thank you.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Matt and Lance for speaking with me today. While the trek across Maine isn't the only lung association ride, it is their biggest. And if Father's Day weekend doesn't work for you, can find their other cycling events along with tons of great information at cycleforair.org. So let's take a short break, and when we come back, we'll speak with Professor Chris Sweet about his new book, *A History of Bicycling in Illinois*. You're listening to *The Outspoken Cyclist*. We'll be right back. We are back on *The Outspoken Cyclist*. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. I didn't think there was so much to learn about the history of bicycles and cycling in Illinois, and I was wrong. Professor Chris Sweet, who is the information literacy and scholarly communications librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University, is also an avid cyclist and a historian. His research reached back into the late 1800s to explain the subtitle of his book, *160 Years of Booms and Busts*, and brings it right up to the effects that the pandemic had on cycling just a few years ago. Hi, Chris. Welcome to the *Outspoken Cyclist*. Thanks for joining me on the show today. How are you?

Speaker 4

Pretty well. Our Wesleyan students just recently graduated, so things are slowing down a little bit around here.

Speaker 2

And where exactly in Illinois is Wesleyan University?

Speaker 4

So Illinois Wesleyan's kind of smack in the middle of the state. We're about two hours south of the Chicago area.

Speaker 2

Okay. I have a grand nephew who will be going to Wesleyan in Connecticut in the fall.

Speaker 4

Different one.

Speaker 2

Yeah. He wants to be a philosophy professor. I'm like, we'll see how long that goes. But that's okay. He's a bright kid. Anyway, let's talk a little bit about you and your work before we get into your book, *A History of Bicycling in Illinois. 160 years. of booms and busts.* Well, the bike industry. Yeah, that's a whole nother story. So tell us about you and your work.

Speaker 4

My day-to-day job is at Illinois Wesleyan University. I'm a librarian. I have two specialties here. The specialties are information literacy and scholarly communications. So that's what I do on a day-to-day basis. But I also have a background in English and history, both of which I drew upon in the process of researching and writing the book.

Speaker 2

Is this your first book?

Speaker 4

Definitely, yes. First book. I have quite a few articles and book chapters out there, but first book.

Speaker 2

It's got a lot of information in it. I know it took you a while to do it. You said around a decade before we actually started recording our conversation. So are you a cyclist?

Speaker 4

Yeah, pretty much my whole life. I grew up in rural central Illinois. And if you wanted to get around before you could drive, you didn't have a whole lot of options because it wasn't like a neighborhood you could walk to. You know, friends and relatives tended to be a couple miles away in the country. So Learned to ride pretty young and then getting around on my bike was my primary mode of transportation. Rode it to friends' houses, rode it to work. So that was my early experiences with cycling. I started racing triathlon in 1993 and raced triathlon up through about 2017 and had a couple of years where I had a professional card as a triathlete. I race cyclocross and mountain bike, bike commuter. So, you know, kind of covering all the bases there.

Speaker 2

Okay, then I guess that answers that question. All right. I like the commuter part. Actually, I like it all. I think it's really cool. I was into directing triathlons back in the 80s.

Speaker 4

Oh, great.

Speaker 2

The book is The History of Bicycling in Illinois. It's specific, it's in-depth. How did you become interested in the history, especially in your state? What brought you to this topic?

Speaker 4

Yeah, so I was at the university for seven years and I earned tenure, which meant I got a semester to work on a long-term project. And by that point, I had written quite a bit in the field of library science and I kind of wanted to do something different. I just needed a mental break. I wanted to draw on my history background. So I was poking around at ideas. And along the way, I had heard that there was some bicycle manufacturing in Peoria, Illinois, which is about an hour away from Illinois Wesleyan. And that kind of piqued my interest. And I found just a little bit of information about bicycling in Peoria. And I'm a researcher by trade. So I was in my different databases and I started poking around and I kept finding things. And I was like, and so I proposed an article. I said, yeah, I'm going to write an article about early Illinois bicycle history because there's not much out there. And so probably a month into this work or maybe even a couple of weeks in, I was like, well, there's probably more than an article here, but I don't know if I want to tackle everything that I'm finding. But I realized after a couple of months of research that an article couldn't do it justice. And so that led me down the book path.

Speaker 2

Yeah, let me reintroduce you and we're going to actually dive into the book a little bit. We're speaking with Professor Chris Sweet. He's the Information Librarian and Scholarly Communication Librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University. in Illinois. That makes perfect sense. The book is about the history of bicycling in Illinois. So 160 years

of booms and busts, as I said in my questions to you, that pretty much describes the bicycle industry as a whole. But how did you come up with 160 years? Where did that number come from?

Speaker 4

160 years came from the first time that a bicycle, that I could document that a bicycle, something like we would consider a bicycle with pedals and steering and everything appeared on the streets of Chicago, 1867 up until whatever 160 years was. So I mean, it's a ballpark and it's going to be dated right as soon as the book gets published, but that's your 160 years there.

Speaker 2

I just wondered how you came up with that particular number.

Speaker 4

I wanted to tell the whole story. The bulk of the book takes place before 1900. That's probably 70% of the book or something. So it seems lopsided historically, but there was a number of threads that I wanted to trace to bring it forward to modern times. So that's where the subtitle came from.

Speaker 2

There are a lot of books about the history of bicycles in general, but this one's very specific and I think that the way you dive into it is fascinating. It's really interesting. What do you think made Illinois such a big part of the bicycle industry in its day?

Speaker 4

Yeah, I tackle pieces of this in various chapters of the book. And some of it is probably more basic than people maybe would think. So I make the argument that first of all, it's the topography. We've got a lot of flat ground in Illinois, particularly around Chicago, where a lot of the very early cycling originated. And that's important because early bicycles didn't have gears that you could switch, right? You had one gear combination. So if you're in a hilly area, you either are going very slow on the flat parts and have a gear ratio that'll get you up a hill, or you're pushing that bike up the hill because you couldn't shift gears for this early period of bicycling. So then like geology, right, we were close to iron ore. That would be like in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, a lot of iron ore up there, Michigan, that was being shipped down for other industries. Railroads were already kind of crisscrossing the nation, and all of them went through Chicago. So that could get raw materials in and finished materials out. If you know anything about Chicago and Midwest industry, there was already before bicycles, a robust manufacturing base. So a lot of agricultural implements, furniture, sewing machines, these were all big before bicycles and some were able to switch over. Once the manufacturing took off, I think a lot of the rest of bicycle culture, the racing and the

bicycle clubs and the bicycle accessories and all the things that went with it, kind of followed that manufacturing base.

Speaker 2

Of course, we can't really talk about cycling in Chicago at the turn of the century without mentioning Major Taylor, who is such a sort of this iconic figure that everybody still writes about and talks about and reads about. So how did his presence influence the cycling in Illinois at the time he was racing, even though he spent a lot of his time in Europe?

Speaker 4

Yeah, so it's a good question. It's interesting. I actually had, so this is the book's published by University of Illinois Press, which means it went through the peer review process. I actually had some of the peer reviewers push back. They're like, well, Major Taylor, right? There's six books or five books out there. Major Taylor, why do you need to incorporate somebody that was, you know, lived in Indiana into a book on Illinois history? And my response was, well, you know, I think it's so important in American history and bicycle history, it'd be a disservice to leave him out of the book because some people haven't encountered him before. So my hope is that a couple of, you know, I've got a handful of pages about Major Taylor, that might pick somebody's interest to where they'll go out and pick up another biography or even his own autobiography and learn more about him. So I don't really try to go in depth into Taylor other than the different points where he interfaced with Illinois when he traveled here, when he raised here, when he moved back here and eventually died in Illinois. Those are the pieces that I chose to pick for my book.

Speaker 2

Well, I'm glad you explained that because when I was going through it, I'm like, he doesn't mention Major Taylor as deeply as some other actors of the day. And now I understand why, and it makes perfect sense. You're right, there's a lot of stuff out there about Major Taylor, but he was influential in Illinois at the time. So I want to know, as we move towards modern day, what are some of the highlights of the booms and busts that Illinois experienced? And did they coincide with other booms and busts around the country or were there things that were really sort of particular to Illinois?

Speaker 4

Yeah, when you look at the American and Illinois bicycle history in specific, you'll find this big cycle of like when people get really crazy about bikes and a whole bunch of selling and then a crash. And that was such a pattern that that's why I included it in the subtitle. So the big bust that we talk about is what happened after that golden age of cycling, 1890s. It actually was the last couple of years, 1898, 99, 1900, when this great big era of cycling kind of came to a grinding almost halt, not all the way, but much smaller than it had been. So that's the big bust. But then after that, there were more

booms and busts. And it's kind of interesting because they're not there for different reasons. In the 30s, you had Schwinn, debuting like the balloon tire bicycles. Up until that point, bicycle tires were narrower, which did not give you that nice cushy ride. So, you know, some of the big balloon tire cruisers came out and a whole bunch of bikes started to sell. There was an interesting correlation with World War II that I didn't know about before writing this book when there were victory bikes. I think probably People are familiar with Victory Gardens, right? So you plant a garden to help the war effort. So there were Victory Bikes produced by Schwinn and other bicycle companies. And the idea was that if you rode a bike instead of driving a car, that you were helping the war effort. And so that was an interesting one that I came, that I found out about. So sometimes it was bicycle design that caused a boom, the Schwinn Stingrays. were definitely, that really kind of initiated a new boom among the kids market and the teen market, right? And then as those kids grew older, there were like the Schwinn, the collegiate, which is like the original 10 speed, right? Two by 5, 10 speeds that all of a sudden, like in the 1970s, it coincided with the environmental movement. And so you get another surge of interest, not just among kids, but among adults. and getting back on bikes. If you know your sports history, it's the kind of the same time that like fitness running took off. There was a gym fix, the big book of running, or running was the same in the 1970s, and that kind of coincided. And then, you know, a couple more, right? BMX and mountain bike each kind of had their own boom, which brings us up to Modern times, the COVID pandemic, was a big bicycling boom. All bikes were sold out, social distancing and all that put a kind of a, I don't want to say a nice bookend on the book, but I'm glad I didn't publish it like one year before that and have this another boom that I didn't talk about.

Speaker 2

Not to say there isn't going to be another one and another bust and another boom, but you did bring it right up to that point, which is pretty cool. So I do want you to tell us one story because I got a kick out of it. It's about a writer named Charlie Miller. I had heard his name before. I didn't know as much about him until I saw your book. You have an interesting and expanded section about him, unlike Major Taylor, which is fine because I think more people know Major than know Charlie. But tell us about Charlie's wedding. It just cracked me up. I just thought it was a really cool thing. He was obviously a six-day racer at the time.

Speaker 4

I actually, I have a good research story about this, about Charlie Miller, and I'll get to the wedding bit as well. I made multiple trips up to different places in Chicago and other, and around the Midwest for doing archival research. And the Chicago History Museum, in their records said that they had Charlie Miller's scrapbooks. And I was like, this is amazing. I got to get my hands on them. And at first they couldn't find them, which is not really normal for libraries and museums. And so I kept bugging them. And this like over the course of like more than a year, like, hey, do you know where this is at? And it turns

out it was in conservation because it was in such bad shape. And they were like, well, no, you know, it's really deteriorating. We can't let you see it. And I kept bugging them. And they said, all right, you can see it if you see it with the conservator, and she'll turn the pages for you and stuff. So I went back up there because I thought it might be a gold mine. And as it turns out, it was his own personal scrapbooks. And it was two, I think it was 2 volumes of scrapbooks. And they were in bad shape, but it was all kinds of like newspaper clippings about himself, glued into an old scrapbook. So, I just I took a picture of every page so I could analyze it later when I got back to the back to the office. But that's where some of my detailed information about Charlie came from. So now, why is he significant? During this boom period, the 1890s, he was one of the best of the really long distance racers, right? He set world records for like 50 and 100 miles, but that ended up being nothing. His real forte were the six-day bicycle races. And in their original formation, six-day bike races are just what they sound like. One person competing against other people, riding as many miles indoors as they can over six days. If you need to sleep at all, you lose ground to your competitors, but you got to decide when you sleep. You got to decide how much to eat. And these were done on small indoor tracks, like most of them are like 1/10 of a mile. So you can imagine riding a circle for six days. And they were spectator events. People came in and they betted on them. They were preams for, you know, so that you, know, they're more just slugging around the track. Charlie Miller, he wins a bunch of these six-day races. He's generally doing about 2,000 miles over the course of six days. If you divide that out over a little track, it's something in the ballpark of 20,000 laps around a track. I mean, it's crazy, like the endurance and the staying power. The race story, where he and his marriage story is why I included him in one of my chapters as like a chapter anecdote. So this was Madison Square Gardens, which was one of the big venues for bicycle racing, especially these six days. It was like the championship race, right? So 6 days or five days into this race, as kind of a publicity stunt, he had kind of leaked to the papers that there might be a special event, you know, if you come and they were kind of being coy about it, but it was a poorly kept secret that he was going to get married during the race. So he was dominant enough that he had a big lead. So he got off of his bike and he changed clothes. He did a ceremony in the middle of the track, right, when everybody else is still out there going around and around. It's the race that he's in, but he's getting married. So it was good for publicity, probably good for his sponsorship dollars, brought in a lot of spectators. And then he got married and got back on the bike and proceeded to win the race.

Speaker 2

Such a funny story. But yet, you know, people who are prone to those kinds of antics, if you want to call them antics, tend to know what they're doing and to bring in all kinds of either sponsorship or money, like you said, and interest. I think it's really fun. It was really fun. It was a great story, a great story. So before we wrap up and tell people how listeners can get a copy of the book, and I do encourage people if they like history, I mean, there are bicycle history books, but this one's pretty specific and it's got a lot of

information that you probably have never heard before. So when you look back, what do you think we can learn? from the history of cycling in Illinois that may or may not apply to today's bicycle culture? Because today's bicycle culture is very spread out. You know, there's so many sort of fingers in that pie, everything from gravel racing to track to pro racing to commuters to, you know, all kinds of stuff. What can we learn from the history in Illinois?

Speaker 4

It's a good question, I think, and I think there's lessons on both sides of it, like things that we should do and things we definitely should not do. One that comes to mind off the top is that bicyclists can still band together as a block and bring in other associated organizations and people that are interested in bicycle infrastructure and bicycle safety and bicycle legislation. When you work together as a block and you bring representatives on board, you can actually make changes. My book talks about bicycle politics and the bicycle lobby in Chicago and how it swayed an election and how they got their way after their candidate, Carter Henry Harrison, was elected. The bicycle lobby, maybe not as strong today as it was before, but I think there's definitely lessons to be learned learned there. I think one of the lessons of what not to do that I cover is that we need to be aware that cycling really should be for everyone that's out there. In my book, the cycling, we talk about the 1890s and how they said it was the great social leveler, right? Everybody on a bicycle. But bikes in the day, they were about \$100 or \$150 in 1890, which would equate to at least \$3,000-ish probably to today. So they were definitely not for everyone. They were for, at the start, middle and upper class white males. And then eventually some women started riding and eventually some minority populations. But the way that they talked about bicycling was not inclusive, and we're doing a much better job. Although if you look at, so road cycling or something, or if you look at USA cycling demographics, we're still not, the demographics of road cycling, demographics of USA cycling don't reflect the rest of the country. It's better, but we're on the right track, but still work to do there.

Speaker 2

I really appreciate that, the pros and cons. And I couldn't agree with you more. I think they are great points, and I'm glad you brought them up. So the last thing, of course, is how come now I got my copy of the book because of you? How can my listeners get a copy of your book?

Speaker 4

Well, given my profession, I'd be remiss if I didn't plug libraries first, right?

Speaker 2

Perfect.

Speaker 4

Particularly if you're in Illinois, I think a public library would be pretty happy to buy the book and have it on their shelves. If you're in one of the surrounding states, they might kind of give you a squinty eye like, well, why are we buying an Illinois cycling history book? So Illinois people ask your libraries. Outside of that, if people don't know about bookshop.org, that's the next place that I would recommend. Bookshop.org, you can designate a portion of the profits to go to your local independent bookstore.

Speaker 2

Wow.

Speaker 4

Yeah, it's a, so, and they'll ship to you, their prices will be competitive with Amazon or something like that. So I really like bookshop.org and try to use them. you can get it through Amazon and Barnes and Noble as well that's available there. So that's your kind of range of options.

Speaker 2

So if you have an independent bookseller in your area, you can usually go in and request that they order you a book too. They can do that.

Speaker 4

Yeah, right. A direct order through your. Your local bookshop will make money through a bookshop.org order, but they'll probably make a little bit more if you go in and order it direct from them, yes.

Speaker 2

Okay. We've been speaking with Professor Chris Sweet. He is the Information Literacy and Scholarly Communications Librarian at Illinois Wesleyan University. The title of his book is A History of Bicycling in Illinois, 160 Years of Booms and Busts. I really appreciate you talking with me today. It's a great book. It needs to be on your shelf if you like history and if you love bicycles, which that would pretty much wrap up my listener. So I would hope that they will take a look at the book. Again, go to your library, bookshop.org. We'll put the information up on our website. And thank you so much for talking with me. I hope you sell a lot of books.

Speaker 4

Yeah, great. Thanks for having me.

Speaker 2

Take care. My thanks to Chris for being my guest today. His book, A History of Bicycling in Illinois, offers a plethora of stories, anecdotes, and historical records that flesh out his comprehensive history with a large compendium of notes on each chapter. You can order your copy from bookshop.org, your local bookseller, and of course, get one from

your local library. And with this in hand, I think we can learn something about our love for the bicycle and the instability of the bike industry at large. My thanks to you for listening today. Subscribe to our podcast at outspokencyclist.com where you can find links, photos, and a written transcript of the show. Follow Outspoken Cyclist on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. When you subscribe to my Substack, you can also access my podcast episodes without having a different app. Please consider supporting both the podcast and the accompanying Substack commentaries with a small donation, whether monthly, yearly, or just once. So until next time, I hope you have a great day. Remember to stay safe, stay well, and for heaven's sakes, now that the weather's great, go for a ride. Bye-bye. Thanks for joining us today on The Outspoken Cyclist with Diane Jenks. We welcome your thoughts and contributions on our Facebook page, or visit outspokencyclist.com to leave a comment on any episode.

Speaker 1

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