The Pope Family’s Grand Tour

Episode 3 - Bordeaux, Bayonne, Biarritz 1888

For Theodate Pope Riddle, the journey from Paris to the South of France would leave a lasting impression. Having grown up in Cleveland while summering in New England, Theodate had experienced both the bustle of city life with the quietude of country living. Both a city and a country mouse, Theodate embraced the best of both worlds.

Precocious and poised, Theodate floated effortlessly from Paris to the French countryside. She would have many takeaways from her initial journey between the big city to the gentile landscape of Bordeaux, Bayonne, and eventually Biarritz en route to Spain. The duality of these diverse cultural destinations showcased everything from fancy Parisian shops to pastoral landscapes dotted with sheep.

For Theodate, this pivotal part of the Grand Tour, together with her unique upbringing, informed everything that would come after, including the making of Hill-Stead some ten years later. A lover of the natural world, it should come as no surprise that her Hill-Stead project would start with the land. Theodate would create a farm complex inspired by her early experiences before embarking on plans for the House itself.
November 26, 1888

“And now hurrah for Spain...”

The Pope family packed their bags for the next stage in their Grand Tour, leaving Paris by train early in the morning of 30 November.

November 30, 1888, Bordeaux

“Left Paris early this morning, arrived this evening at six. We leave tomorrow morning at seven going to Biarritz on our way into Spain.”

The Popes made the long journey from Paris to the South of France by train; the growth of passenger train service was slow in France, in comparison with other countries, with the first passenger route starting in 1835. For example – in 1842, there were 1,900 miles of railway in England, but only 300 miles in France. This situation improved following support by Napoleon III during the Second Empire (1852-1871), and by 1871 there were over 14,000 miles of railways in France.

The sight of steam locomotives became a familiar one, and attracted the attention of some famous painters, including Claude Monet’s The Train (1872) and Vincent van Gogh’s Landscape with Carriages and Train (1890).

Question:

• When was the first Transcontinental railway line completed across America?
Bordeaux

Bordeaux was a key stop on the way to Spain, and a place to spend the night, before continuing the journey to Biarritz. The journey from Paris had taken most of the day, and there was little time to enjoy this historic town, situated on the banks of the Garonne river. The town was settled around 300 BCE by a Celtic tribe, and was originally called Burdigala.

On leaving the train station, the Pope family crossed the Garonne river on a magnificent stone bridge, completed in 1821 and stretching 1,600 feet. It has 17 arches, coincidentally the same number of letters in the name “Napoleon Bonaparte” and offers spectacular views over the old town.

Although the Pope family only had one evening in the city, they must have enjoyed the sounds of the bells from the Basilica of St. Michael. The Basilica, built between the 14th and 17th centuries, is in a Gothic style. The bell tower, which stands 374 feet high, was built in the 15th century.
Bordeaux is now a World Heritage site. After Paris, Bordeaux has the highest number of preserved historical buildings of any city in France.

**Question:**

- What is unusual about this bell tower? (Hint – take a close look at the photograph).

**To learn more:**

https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1256

November 30, 1888, Bordeaux

*Bought a detective camera yesterday which is to be sent to me in a week or so.*

Theodate was excited at the idea of purchasing a modern camera; earlier in November, back in Paris, she had looked at the latest models, and ordered one to be delivered to her. The model that she bought was called an “Express-Detective Nadar” camera, and was purchased from Nadar’s shop on the boulevard des Capucines, near the Opera Garnier. An similar model made by Kodak cost $25, which is equivalent in today’s money to just under $700.

The first photographers needed a horse and carriage to take photographs. They only had 20 minutes between taking the picture (exposure) and processing the picture with chemical solutions (developing). The horse and carriage transported the room that they used for on the spot development of the pictures. So up until 1800s, photographers were very conspicuous, but one could not easily take a camera on vacation.
Theodate’s camera was in the form of a box and she could preload several plates. It could be handheld and while much more bulky compared to today’s standards, it helped make photography more accessible as a hobby. The Express Detective Model was awarded a Gold Medal at the 1889 World Exposition.

**Questions:**

- Can you recognise this famous painter from a photograph taken by Nadar in 1899? Hint - there are four paintings by him in the collection at the Hill-Stead Museum
- The Nadar Detective camera that Theodate bought weighed approximately 2.75 lbs. How much does your camera weigh?

**To learn more:**

https://www.thoughtco.com/joseph-niepce-the-first-photographer-2688371
http://www.cameraboussat.fr/dossier_collection/cible_g.php?id=4&type=Detectives
https://www.nypl.org/collections/nypl-recommendations/guides/photographic-processes
https://dp.la/exhibitions/evolution-personal-camera/early-photography

December 1, 1888 - Biarritz

“Arrived here about eleven after having left Bordeaux this morning. Most of the road lay through pine woods that are scarred for their sap or gum from which is made rosin & turpentine.”

The next stop of the Pope’s journey to Spain was in the fashionable seaside resort town of Biarritz, where they stayed in the hotel d’Angleterre, overlooking the port.
The journey south from Bordeaux passes through an area called “les Landes”, a low-lying, marshy area, with little industry, but many sheep. The early residents of les Landes were mostly shepherds, and they used stilts to help them move through the marshes without getting their feet wet. They also found it helpful keeping an eye on their sheep from a higher vantage point!

One of the enterprising shepherds realized that there were other uses for their stilts - Sylvain Dornon started a stilt-walking folk dancing group in 1889. He performed several publicity stunts, including climbing up the Eiffel Tower in Paris during the 1889 World Fair, and walking from Paris to Moscow - over 1,800 miles - all on six foot tall stilts.

A significant land reclamation effort started in the early 1800s. Across an area slightly larger than the combined size of the states of Delaware and Rhode Island, pine forests were planted on marshy and unfertile land. Sand dunes were reinforced, and the pine trees helped stabilize the land. New industries emerged, based on the products of pine trees, including:

- lumber
- rosin
- turpentine

**Question:**

- Why is turpentine useful to an artist?

**To learn more:**

https://www.abelard.org/france/les_landes_roundabout_art.php#landes
“This afternoon we took a drive to Bayonne, a town about five miles from here. On our return walked down to the cliffs on the shore.”

The town of Bayonne sits on the river Adour, with a Gothic cathedral and a history that includes whaling, piracy and chocolate – that is quite a combination! The common factor for these three different claims to fame is the proximity of the town to Spain, and its location on a navigable river. Cacao beans were first brought to Europe from South America by Spanish explorers – especially Hernán Cortés in 1528. This new ingredient, together with the know-how of making chocolate, came to Bayonne when a community of Sephardic Jews moved from Spain and Portugal to France in the 17th century. The tradition in Spain had been to turn unsweetened chocolate into a drink; in France, sugar cane and cinnamon were added, and Bayonne became the capital of chocolate confectionary. By 1856, there were more than 30 chocolate factories in the town, and there is now a Museum of Chocolate in town, although you can just as easily stroll down the rue Port Neuf, also known as “chocolate street.”

Questions:

- What is the name of the weapon in the picture, invented in Bayonne in 1670?
- Who, in 1847, made the first bar of chocolate? Hint – it was someone in England!
- Bonus question: One of the most famous residents of Bayonne was René Cassin, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1968. What work was Cassin involved with, that led to his receiving the Nobel Prize?

After an afternoon visit to Bayonne, and perhaps a cup of hot chocolate, a walk along the cliffs at Biarritz would be very welcome – and remains a popular activity.
This painting, “Lighthouse Walk at Biarritz” was completed in 1906 by the Spanish artist, Joaquin Sorolla y Bastida (1863 – 1923), and captures a sunny afternoon – although the wind is still blowing in from the Atlantic.

**Question:**
- Which President of the United States had a portrait painted by Joaquin Sorolla?

**Golf**

Theodate’s diary does not mention whether or not her father took the opportunity of a round of golf during their stopover in Biarritz. The “le Phare” (lighthouse) golf course opened in 1888, and is the second-oldest golf course in Continental Europe. The par-3 third hole was nicknamed “the chasm”, and its design was subsequently adopted by the golf course designer, C.B. McDonald, who renamed it “the biarritz.” A “biarritz” hole is a 210-240 yard long par-3 with a very long green (up to 80 yards), and a 3-5 foot deep sunken trench in the middle of the green is designed to test a player’s accuracy.

**To learn more:**

https://www.liveabout.com/biarritz-biarritz-green-1564024

**Surfing**

The Atlantic coast of Biarritz does not have much protection from the waves – and Biarritz is now a popular surfing
destination, coming to the world’s attention in 1956. It was during the filming of The Sun Also Rises that Peter Vertel, the American husband of the film’s star, Deborah Kerr, identified an opportunity for surfing the waves, and arranged to have his surfboard sent over from California.

The large waves crashing off the coast of Biarritz have also inspired many painters, one of whom has a close connection with the Hill-Stead Museum. James McNeill Whistler visited Biarritz in the summer of 1862, and very nearly drowned. He shared his experience in a letter with his friend, Henri Fantin-Latour:

"would you believe that I nearly drowned the other day! The sea here is terrible! I was carried off by a strong current that dragged me into the breakers...The sea was enormous! The sun was setting, and the scene was set for a great event - I saw the shore move farther and farther away. A fifteen-foot wave swallowed me, I drank a ton of salt water, and went under it only to be swallowed by another twenty-foot wave in which I turned cartwheels and found myself engulfed by a third! I swam and swam and the more I swam the less I came closer to the shore!...Finally someone understood! A brave railroad contractor ran and rolled over twice on the beach! The "bather" (my model) heard the call, came at a gallop, and jumped into the sea like a Newfoundland, managed to grab me by the "paw" and the two pulled me out!"

Whistler no doubt called upon this frightening experience when he completed work in 1862 on “Blue and Silver: Blue Wave, Biarritz”. Mr. Pope bought the painting in 1894, and you can find it hanging at the Hill-Stead Museum in the Second Library.
After a lovely stay in France’s bucolic countryside, Theodate and her family were off to enjoy a sweet sojourn in Spain. Whistler along with many other artists, writers, and patrons of the arts exemplified a fascination with Spain known as “Hispanisme.” Arts aficionados demonstrated enthusiasm for and appropriation of Spanish styles, largely under French influence, especially with the formation of two storied cultural institutions, the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the Museo del Prado in Madrid during the 19th century. Masters such as El Greco, Zurbarán, Velázquez, Murillo, and Goya illuminated the genius of Spanish art, making massive waves at this time and drawing the attention of an international audience including the Pope Family.

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To learn more:

https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31985
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1j0LSSpMgI
http://www.golfbiarritz.com/parcours/historique/?setlang=en
Sources:

Train –

https://pushkinmuseum.art/data/fonds/europe_and_america/j/0000_1000/zh_3374/index.php?lang=ru

Bordeaux –

http://lemap-bordeaux.com/map-listing/pont-de-pierre/
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Basilique_Saint_Michel_ET.gif

Camera –

https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10538679x.item
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Claude_Monet_1899_Nadar.jpg

Biarritz –

https://whitehorsepress.blog/2020/03/09/social-construction-of-pine-forest-wastes/
http://musba-bordeaux.opacweb.fr/fr/search-notice/detail/h69xw54ddzrd3rkfzq3ywzzxqniiiuup8w9cjsgelpnzdmsam
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