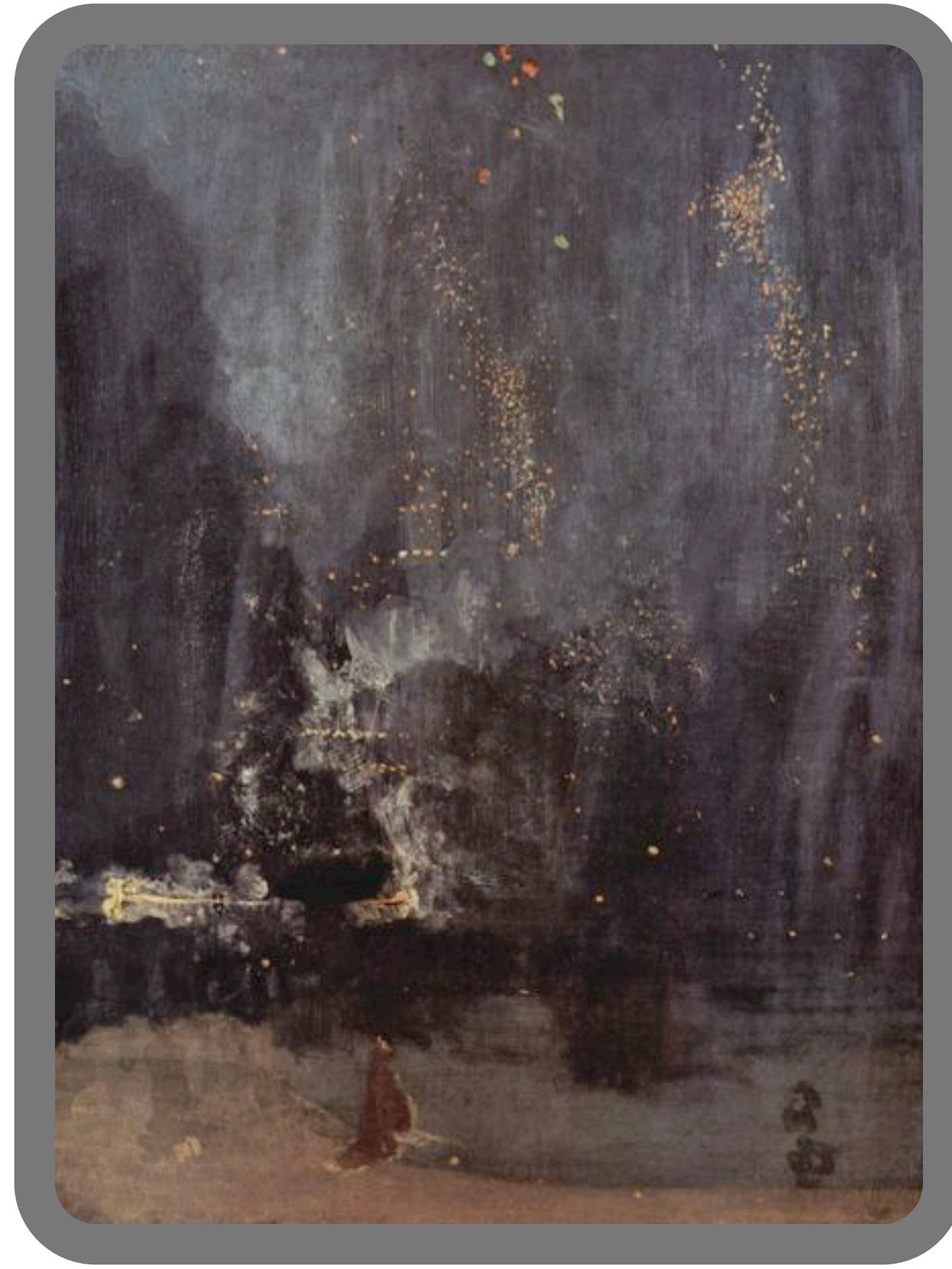
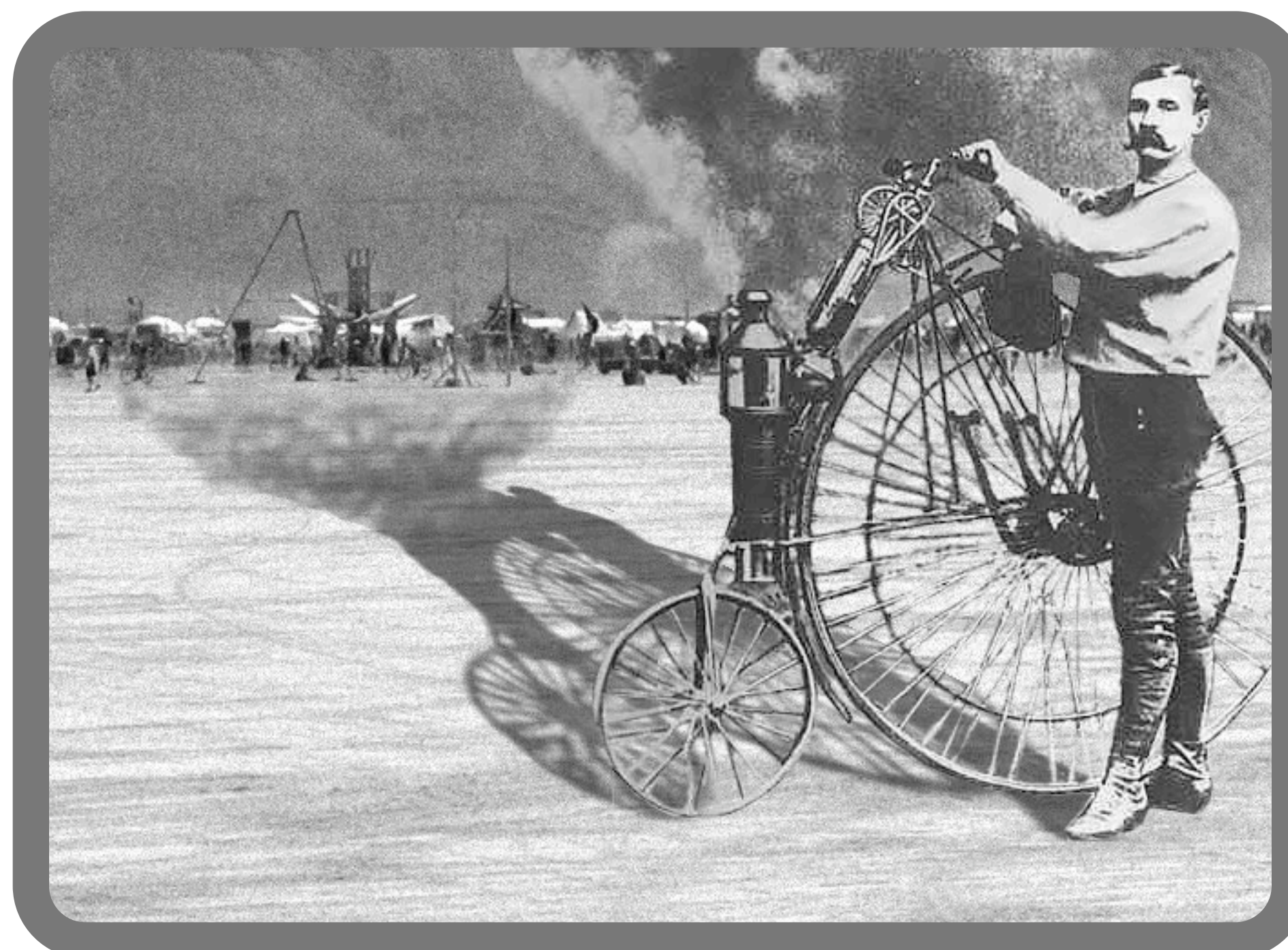


The 1880s

Feast of the Kindle-Man



James Abbott McNeill Whistler's
rendition of the 1883 burn



Lucius Copeland with his steam-powered bicycle, 1885

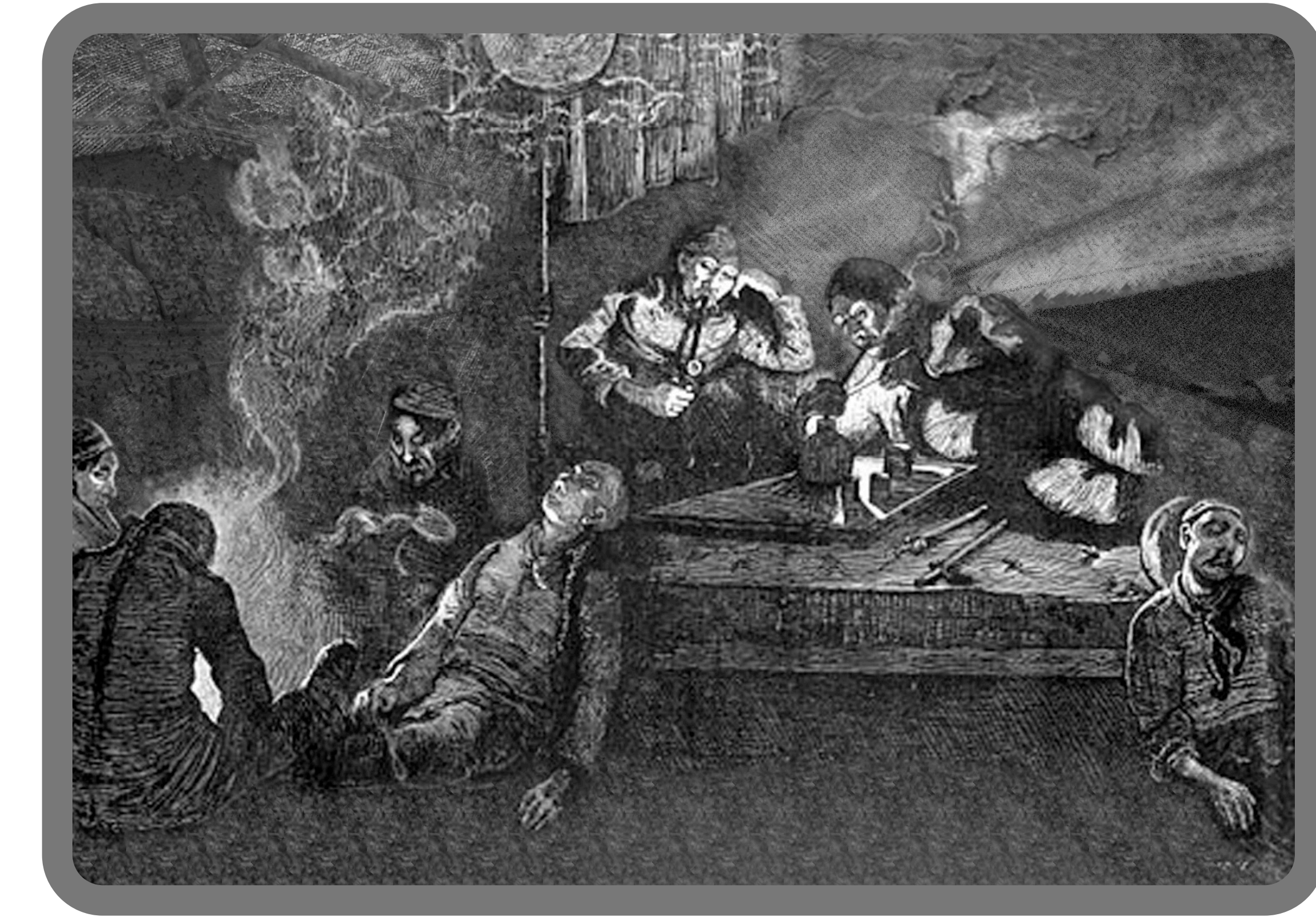
Bicycles began appearing in the Black Rock Desert in the early 1870s and steadily grew in popularity. By 1888, high wheeler bicycles overtook horses as the favorite mode of personal travel within the city, but in 1892 were themselves outnumbered by modern safety bicycles.

The Capital Bicycle Club, based in Washington D.C., had a strong presence on the playa throughout the 1880s, organizing group rides, repairing bicycles, demonstrating proper falling techniques, and performing their costume-oriented "Presentation of the Sacred Cat" ritual.

In 1884, Thomas Stevens set out by bicycle from San Francisco carrying only a change of clothes and a travel poster for the Feast of the Kindle-Man. From the Black Rock Desert, he continued on to Boston, becoming the first trans-American cyclist.



Scantily-clad maids dust down a lucky participant c. 1885



Opium smokers c. 1881

Despite the best efforts of the growing Prohibition movement, alcohol flowed freely in the Great Basin throughout the 1880s. Morphine, laudanum, opium and various patent medicines were also popular.

The newest, most sought after miracle elixir was Coca-Cola, a Vin Mariani variant. As in the outside world, it was used to provide a quick pick-me-up, a jolt of mental clarity, a shot in the arm or a glint in the eye. The actual cocaine content of the drink has been debated for years, but a formula in the handwriting of Candler's chief assistant called for one quarter pound of coca leaves per gallon of syrup. This would provide roughly 8½ milligrams of cocaine per drink. Though small, when combined with the caffeine content (caffeine is a cocaine synergist, much increasing its effect) the kick was considerable. A standard street dose of cocaine is 20 to 30 milligrams. So drinking three glasses straight would have given the jolt of one line of cocaine.

"Frank [Robinson] brought 5 gallons of Coca-Cola syrup all the way from Atlanta! Almost immediately after drinking a glass, Gregory's eyes shone, his body became tense, and his whole being pulsed with exhilaration. We're going to Frank's camp to have some more tonight."

Journals of Annie Brown, August 1889