

BOOKS | SHELF LIFE

'Worcester Whirlwind'

By Jan Gardner



A century after Marshall "Major" Taylor of Worcester raced to international fame, his legacy is undergoing a revival. During the heyday of cycling at the turn of the 20th century, Taylor became the first African-American to win a world bicycling championship.

A native of Indiana, Taylor moved to Worcester in 1895 to escape racial intolerance. Yet whites protested when he bought a house in the city. Meanwhile, he was feted as a hero in Europe. A religious man, he refused to race on Sundays and faced racial taunts with stoicism. His life fell apart after he retired, and he died at age 53 in 1932, impoverished and alone.

In Taylor's adopted hometown, schoolchildren learn about his accomplishments and a statue of him has been commissioned. It is to be erected at the Worcester Public Library next year.

Two new books take a fresh look at the trailblazer. "Marshall 'Major' Taylor: World Champion Bicyclist: 1899-1901" (Lerner), by Marlene Targ Brill, has been published as part of a series of biographies for young adults. "Major: A Black Athlete, a White Era, and the Fight to Be the World's Fastest Human Being" (Crown), by Todd Balf, is due out in February.

Balf of Beverly is the author of books about epic adventures in Tibet and Panama, as well as "The Story of Manny Being Manny" for children. For his new book, Balf, a cyclist, was drawn to Taylor's quiet determination. "It's a very good tale for these times," he said.

A debut with feathers

"High Season" (St. Martin's) is a campy debut mystery set in Provincetown. What impresses Kate Mattes, owner of Kate's Mystery Books, is how well author Jon Loomis captures the town in all its out-there glory - from the drag queens to the fishermen to the denizens on Commercial Street. Clearly, Loomis, who lives in Wisconsin, made the most of his time during two fellowships at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

Cambridge connections

New Hampshire may lay claim to Robert Frost and Maine to May Sarton, but both literary icons have deep roots in Cambridge. Frost owned a house there for 22 years; Sarton attended Cambridge High and Latin School, wrote for the school's review, and later taught at Harvard and Radcliffe. Michael Kenney's essay about the city's literary life is part of a new collection, "Cambridge in the Twentieth Century: A City's Life and Times" (Cambridge Historical Society), edited by Daphne Abeel. The book itself - with essays on folk music, politics, immigrants, and religion - may be a thing of the past before too long, because only 750 copies were printed.

Coming out

- "Operation Broken Reed: Truman's Secret North Korean Spy Mission That Averted World War III," by Arthur L. Boyd (Carroll & Graf)
- "Hand of Evil," by J. A. Jance (Touchstone)
- "The Spectrum: A Scientifically Proven Program to Feel Better, Live Longer, Lose Weight, Gain Health," by Dean Ornish (Ballantine)

Pick of the week

Samantha Hoyt Lindgren and Don Lindgren, co-owners of Rabelais in Portland, Maine, recommend "The Kitchen Diaries" (Gotham), by Nigel Slater: "He writes in a universal voice about eating locally, seasonally, and intuitively. This is our current favorite book, an entertaining read with fantastic recipes that are delicious and approachable."

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