

THURSDAY  
JULY 21, 2011  
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

Your  
guide  
to the  
weekend  
ahead

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# An uphill battle

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# Racism followed Taylor abroad

By Pamela H. Sacks

SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

**M**arshall W. "Major" Taylor has become a familiar historic figure in Worcester. The city has a Major Taylor Boulevard, and a bronze statue honoring "the Worcester Whirlwind," as he was known, stands next to the Worcester Public Library.

Taylor, an African-American, was the top professional bicycle racer at the start of the 20th century, when the sport was the most popular in the world. He won staggering amounts of money while drawing tens of thousands of spectators to races in North America, Europe and Australia.

Taylor earned the nickname "Major" as a kid when he performed bike tricks in a military uniform in front of a bicycle shop in Indianapolis. He moved to Worcester

with the shop's owner, who had taken an interest in the talented cyclist. Taylor made the city his home for much of his adult life.

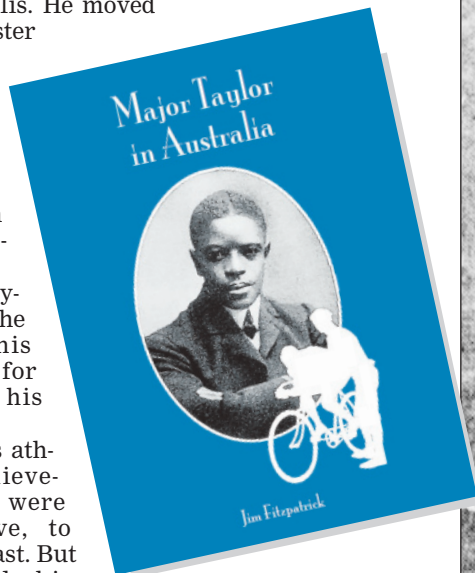
Taylor's athletic achievements were impressive, to say the least. But what made him even more remarkable was his capacity to rise above abhorrent treatment at the peak of vicious, segregationist Jim Crow laws in the United States. Taylor was heckled and hounded and even physically attacked. He was turned away from restaurants and hotels from coast to coast, subjected to dirty tricks by racist competitors and banned from Southern tracks. In Atlanta he was told to get out of town within 48 hours — or else. Yet he was so big a draw at competitions that cycling promoters had no choice but to invite him to participate.

Since the 1980s, Taylor's life and legacy have come to light through a full-length biography, a children's book and numerous newspaper stories and columns. This year, a new book, "Major Taylor in Australia," by Jim Fitzpatrick, highlights Taylor's experiences Down Under.

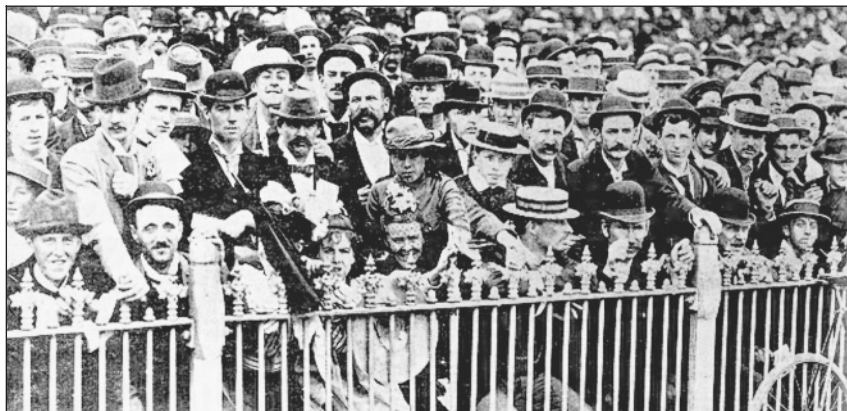
Reinstating Taylor to his rightful place in history has not been easy. The Major Taylor Association, a Worcester organization, campaigned for both the renaming of the boulevard and the monument to Taylor. On Sunday, the group will hold its 10th annual competition in Taylor's honor — the George Street Bike Challenge for Major Taylor.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, an American living in Australia, ran into his own headwinds when he decided to tell Taylor's story.

Back in 1987, he sought publishers for his account of the 1903 and 1904 Australian bicycle racing seasons — to no avail. Undaunted, Mr. Fitzpatrick proposed the story to an Australian movie producer, who used it as the basis for a film titled "Tracks of Glory." It premiered in Australia in 1992 during Black History Month and subsequently won several Logie awards, the Australian equivalent of the American Emmys. It was then made



Pictures from the book "Major Taylor in Australia" show Major Taylor with his Australian trainer, Sid Melville, above, and, at right, the "Pit" crowd at the Austral Cycling Carnival at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1903.



T&G File Photo/CHRISTINE PETERSON

into a four-hour miniseries and shown on ABC-TV before the 1992 Olympics.

Yet Mr. Fitzpatrick still could not find a publisher for his book, so he put it aside. Last year, when he started his own publishing company, Star Hill Studio, he dusted off the manuscript and published "Major Taylor in Australia." The 188-page book recounts in detail two racing seasons that Mr. Fitzpatrick views as a turning point in Taylor's life. It is filled with period photographs of nearly all of the key people in the story as well as wonderful street scenes of Australian cities, cycle tracks and hordes of racing fans.

"It was a bit of a mission that the book would be out there, and people could read about a truly great person," Mr. Fitzpatrick said.

Taylor already had endured years of what he called "the dreadful monster prejudice" by the time he agreed to race in Australia. In fact, he had decided not to compete in the United States anymore because, as Mr. Fitzpatrick wrote, "the situation had become intolerable."

Taylor's first season in Australia was largely a triumph. He competed against the best Australians, drew massive crowds and won large sums of money.

Thrilled with the success, promoters decided to up the ante for the next year and invited Americans Floyd McFarland and Iver Lawson, among the best cyclists in the world and known to be rabid racists, to participate. McFarland had vowed to drive Taylor from the racing scene. Lawson was his protégé. They already had proved to be an explosive combination.

In Mr. Fitzpatrick's view, it will never be known whether Taylor knew that McFarland and Lawson would be racing. In any event, he signed on, and Mr. Fitzpatrick lays out the ugly details of what occurred, describing rigged races and dirty tricks in hard-fought competitions that ended in a ruined season for Taylor.

Through it all, Taylor, who at one point was badly injured, held his tongue. Mr. Fitzpatrick said that in combing the newspapers and magazines of the era he found just one instance in which Taylor expressed bitterness. "Some of your officials have all along entertained a disgusting prejudice against me ... they have regarded me merely as a revenue earning machine; nothing more. My, I could fill your pa-

Turn to **Taylor**/Page 14

## George Street Bike Challenge for Major Taylor

**Where:** Main and George streets, Worcester

**When:** 10 a.m. Sunday

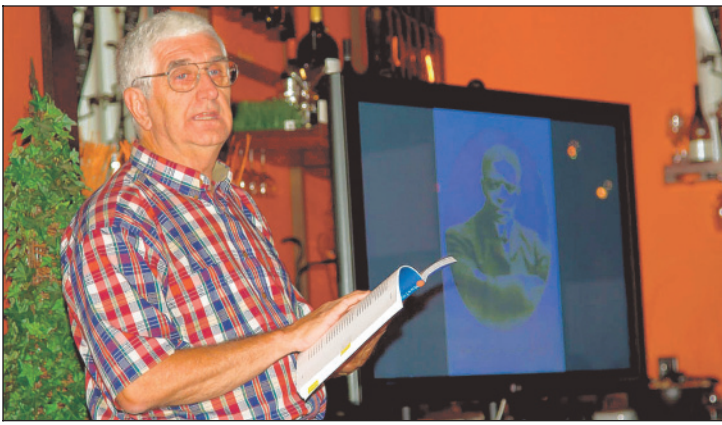
**What:** Cyclists compete to see who can pedal the fastest up the steep hill Major Taylor used as a training ground when he was the world champion in 1899.

**How much:** Entry fee \$20; contest open to riders age 12 and older. Register at [www.majoraylorassociation.org](http://www.majoraylorassociation.org). Proceeds go to the association.

At left, Eric Brassell of Arlington was last year's overall race winner with a time of 23.22.







SUBMITTED PHOTO

Jim Fitzpatrick read from his book, "Major Taylor in Australia," during a visit to Worcester last month.

## Taylor in Australia

Taylor/From Page 7

per up with incidents of how this bias has been displayed," he told a reporter. The writer went on to describe how Taylor thumped him on the knee and stamped his feet while making the comments.

But that outburst was a rare exception.

"You really do get the impression that Major Taylor was remarkable to do what he did," Mr. Fitzpatrick said. "He clearly bit his tongue many times. He let his racing do it all."

The three-and-a-half-month experience in Australia in 1904 was, finally, more than Taylor could endure.

"He had a nervous breakdown when he returned to America," Mr. Fitzpatrick said. "The pressure had been such that he didn't race for three years. The Australian trip distilled his problems with the racers, promoters and officials. It's what makes the whole experience so significant."

Taylor died in 1932 at the age of 53, a broken man, penniless and peddling his autobiography on the streets of Chicago. He was buried in an unmarked grave until, 16 years later, a group of professional bike racers had him reburied at a better spot in the cemetery with a headstone attesting to his achievements and his strength of character.



Major Taylor with his wife, Daisy, and daughter, Sydney.

Last month, Mr. Fitzpatrick toured the United States to talk about his book. He visited a number of cycle clubs, several of them named for Major Taylor. He discovered that few members knew much about the man who was once the most popular athlete in the world.

"Taylor broke the racial barrier in professional bicycle racing in 1896, five decades before Jackie Robinson did it in baseball, in 1947," Mr. Fitzpatrick said. "I often say Major Taylor broke the color barrier in America — but they slammed the door right behind him."

"Major Taylor in Australia" is available on Amazon.com and at www.starhillstudio.com.au in print and e-book forms.



Taylor at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

## Stage

**"Blue Man Group"** 8 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays; 7 p.m. Fridays; 4, 7 and 10 p.m. Saturdays; 2 and 5 p.m. Sundays. \$48; \$62. Charles Playhouse, 74 Warren-ton St., Boston. (617) 931-2787 or (617) 426-6912.

**"39 Steps — A Farce"** 8 p.m. July 22, 23, 29, 30, Aug. 5 and 6. Matinee: 2 p.m. July 24, 31 and Aug. 7. \$17; seniors, \$15; children 12 and younger, \$8. Stageloft Repertory Theater, 450 Main St., Stur-bridge. (508) 347-9005.

**"Crazy For You"** 8 p.m. July 21, 22 and 23. \$18; seniors and students, \$15. Calliope Theatre, 150 Main St., Boylston. (508) 869-6887 or www.calliopeproduction-s.org.

**"Postcards"** a selection of 10 short plays presented by Stratton Players, 8 p.m. July 23, 29, 30; 2 p.m. July 24 and 31. \$12. McKay Auditorium, McKay Campus School, Fitchburg State University, 67 Rindge Road, Fitchburg. (978) 345-6066.

**"Beauty and the Beast, Junior"** 7:30 p.m. Aug. 3, 4, 5 and 6. \$10. Calliope Theatre, 150 Main St., Boylston. (508) 869-6887 or www.calliopeproductions.org.

**"Girl Talk — A Girls Night Musical"** 7:30 p.m. Aug. 4. \$30-\$40. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester.

**"Seussical"** 7:30 p.m. Aug. 5 and 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Aug. 6. \$15; seniors and students, \$13; children 10 and younger, \$10. Hudson High School, 69 Brigham St., Hudson. (978) 562-1646. www.upwithart-s.org.

**"The Producers"** 7 p.m. Aug. 5, 6, 12, 13, 19 and 20. Matinees: 2 p.m. Aug. 7, 14, and 21. \$20; seniors and students, \$17. The Bradley Playhouse, 30 Front St., Putnam. (860) 928-7887 or www.bradley-playhouse.org.

**"The Winter's Tale"** 7:30 p.m. Aug. 12, 13, 19 and 20. Matinee: 2 p.m. Aug. 14 and 21. \$14; seniors, \$12; students with ID, \$10; children 12 and younger, \$7. Barre Players Theater, 64 Common St., Barre. (978) 355-2096 or (800) 733-2096.

**"Affairs of a French Afternoon"** 7:30 p.m. Aug. 18, 19 and 20. Matinee: 2 p.m. Aug. 21. \$15; seniors and students, \$12. Calliope Theatre, 150 Main St., Boylston. (508) 869-6887 or www.calliopeproduction-s.org.

**"Bye Bye Birdie"** Gateway Players Theatre. 7:30 p.m. Aug. 19 and 20. Matinee: 2 p.m. Aug. 21. \$15; seniors and children, \$12.

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Charlton Middle School, 2 Oxford Road, Charlton. (508) 764-4531 or www.gate-wayplayers.org.

**"Rent"** 8 p.m. Aug. 19, 20, 26 and 27; 2 p.m. Aug. 28. Evenings, \$20; Matinee, \$15. Theatre at the Mount, Mount Wachu-sett Community College, 444 Green St., Gardner. (978) 630-9162. http://theatre.mwcc.edu.

**"Anne of Green Gables"** 7:30 p.m. Sept. 16, 17, 23 and 24. Matinee: 2 p.m. Sept. 17 and 24. Sterling Community Theatre. \$15; children and seniors, \$12. First Church, 6 Meetinghouse Hill Road, Sterling. (508) 410-9655.

**"Young Frankenstein"** 8 p.m. Sept. 30; 2 and 8 p.m. Oct. 1; 1 p.m. Oct. 2. \$32-\$62. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester. (877) 571-7469 or www.thehanovertheatre.org.

**"Nevermore"** 7 p.m. Oct. 7, 8, 14, 15, 21 and 22. Matinees: 2 p.m. Oct. 9, 16 and 23. \$16; seniors and students, \$13. The Bradley Playhouse, 30 Front St., Putnam. (860) 928-7887 or www.bradleyplayhou-se.org.

**"Beehive"** 8 p.m. Oct. 7, 8, 14 and 15; 2 p.m. Oct. 16. Evenings, \$20; Matinee, \$15. Theatre at the Mount, Mount Wachu-sett Community College, 444 Green St., Gardner. (978) 630-9162. http://theatre.mwcc.edu.

**"Max & Ruby: Bunny Party"** 6:30 p.m. Oct. 19. \$19.50-\$31.50. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester. (877) 571-7469 or www.thehanovertheatre.org.

**"Peter Pan"** 8 p.m. Oct. 28; 2 and 8 p.m. Oct. 29; 1 and 6:30 p.m. Oct. 30. \$38-\$68. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester. (877) 571-7469 or www.thehanovertheatre.org. Tickets on sale July 25.

**"Disney's Phineas and Ferb: The Best Live Tour Ever!"** 4 and 7 p.m. Nov. 18. \$17,

\$27, \$49 and \$67. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester. (877) 571-7469 or www.thehanovertheatre.org.

**"Children of Eden"** 8 p.m. Nov. 25, Dec. 2 and 3; 2 p.m. Nov. 27 and Dec. 4. Evenings, \$20; Matinee, \$15. Theatre at the Mount, Mount Wachu-sett Community College, 444 Green St., Gardner. (978) 630-9162. http://theatre.mwcc.edu.

**"The Nutcracker"** 7 p.m. Nov. 25 and 26. Matinee: 2 p.m. Nov. 26 and 27. \$24-\$36. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester. (877) 571-7469 or www.thehanovertheatre.org.

**"Annie"** 7 p.m. Dec. 2, 3, 9, 10, 16 and 17. Matinees: 2 p.m. Dec. 4, 11 and 18. \$20; seniors and students, \$17. The Bradley Playhouse, 30 Front St., Putnam. (860) 928-7887 or www.bradleyplayhouse.org.

**"A Christmas Carol"** 7:30 p.m. Dec. 16; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 17; 1 and 6 p.m. Dec. 18; 2 and 7 p.m. Dec. 23. \$25-\$48. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester. (877) 571-7469 or www.thehanovertheatre.org.

**Sesame Street Live-Elmo's Super Heroes** 7 p.m. Jan. 20; 10:30 a.m., 2 and 5:30 p.m. Jan. 21; 1 and 4:30 p.m. Jan. 22. \$14-\$67. The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts, 2 Southbridge St., Worcester. (877) 571-7469 or www.thehanovertheatre.org.

**Auditions** Worcester County Light Opera Company is auditioning for "Flora," female, age 10-12 for "The Innocents," 7 p.m. July 21. Grandview Playhouse, 21 Grandview Ave., Worcester. (508) 753-4383.

**Auditions** Gateway Players Theatre Arts Barn for "The Rimers of Eldritch," 7-9 p.m. Aug. 22 and 23. 111 Main St., South-bridge. (508) 764-4531. http://www.gate-wayplayers.org/.

For more information, go to [www.telegram.com/stage](http://www.telegram.com/stage).

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