

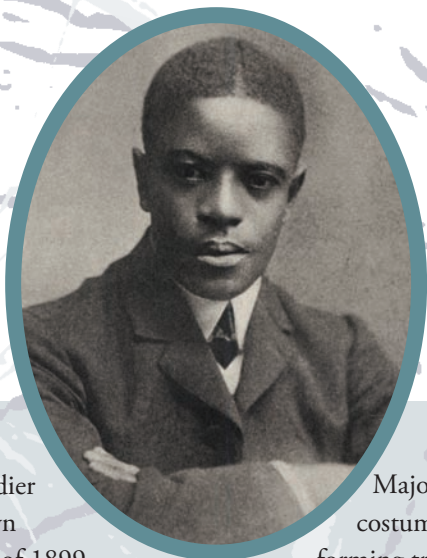
major Taylor

STATUE DEDICATION
LYNNE TOLMAN



CHRISTINE PETERSON, WORCESTER TELEGRAM AND GAZETTE

Those who were part of the May 21, 2008, Major Taylor monument unveiling in Worcester, Massachusetts, included (from left to right): Greg LeMond, three-time Tour de France winner; Karen Brown Donovan, great-granddaughter of Major Taylor; Lynne Tolman and Bob Nasdor, Taylor Association board members; General Dallas C. Brown Jr., Taylor's only grandchild; and Edwin Moses, three-time Olympic track and field medalist.



Retired Army Brigadier General Dallas C. Brown Jr., the only grandchild of 1899 world bicycling champion Marshall Walter “Major” Taylor (1878–1932), says he and his family were quiet about their once famous ancestor for many years because the Indiana native’s remarkable life story was just “reflected glory.”

But they were honored and humbled to take part in a tribute to Major Taylor on May 21, 2008, in Worcester, Massachusetts. The tribute featured the unveiling outside the Worcester Public Library of a larger-than-life bronze and granite monument to Taylor. The sculpture of the “Worcester Whirlwind,” created by Maryland artist Antonio Tobias Mendez, is the city’s first monument dedicated to an African American and is a long overdue tribute to a man who overcame horrendous racial prejudice.

Taylor was the first black international sports superstar, earning worldwide adulation and a sizable fortune in bicycling’s heyday, but he died in poverty and obscurity during the Great Depression. His first cycling successes—and the nickname

Major, for a military-style costume he wore while performing tricks on a bike—came when he was a teenager working at a bike shop in Indianapolis. In 1895 Taylor moved to Worcester with his mentor, former bike racer Louis “Birdie” Munger, partly to take advantage of a more tolerant racial atmosphere.

Still, Taylor faced closed doors and open hostility because of his color. He responded with dignity and forgiveness. Despite race-based exclusions, threats, political maneuvering in the governance of the sport, dirty tricks on the track, and even physical assaults, Taylor became “The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World,” which was the title of his 1928 autobiography.

Featured speakers at the statue dedication ceremony were three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond and three-time Olympic track and field medalist Edwin Moses. “Courage is what makes Taylor’s career so remarkable,” LeMond said. “I hope this statue can be a symbol of hope and more importantly, courage.” Society has advanced greatly in the last hundred years, he continued, noting: “We’ve got a presidential race that could have the first black man as the president, ... and I do hope that it [the Major Taylor statue] does inspire others to overcome and think about humans as humans, not by race or color.”

Moses said that Taylor at last was being given “his rightful spot at the top” of a list

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TIMELINE OF MAJOR TAYLOR'S LIFE

Lynne Tolman compiled the following chronology of Taylor's life for an article that appeared in the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette* on February 8, 1998. Most of these facts are from the book *Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer*.

November 26, 1878

Marshall W. Taylor is born on the outskirts of Indianapolis to Gilbert and Saphronia Kelter Taylor, who moved north from Kentucky.

1886 to 1891

Taylor spends much time with a wealthy white family in Indianapolis that employs his father as a coachman. The family gives him a bicycle.

1892

Taylor is hired to perform cycling stunts outside an Indianapolis bike shop. His costume is a soldier's uniform, which earns him the nickname Major. He wins his first bike race.

Fall 1895

Taylor moves to Worcester, Massachusetts, with his employer and racing manager, Louis "Birdie" Munger, who plans to open a bike factory there.

August 1896

Taylor unofficially breaks two world track records for paced and unpaced one-mile rides while racing in Indianapolis. His feat offends white sensibilities, and he is banned from Indianapolis's Capital City track.

December 1896

Taylor finishes eighth in his first professional race, a six-day endurance event at Madison Square Garden in New York.

1898

Taylor holds seven world records, including the one-mile paced standing start (1:41:4).

August 10, 1899

Taylor wins the world one-mile championship in Montreal, defeating Boston rival Tom Butler. Taylor is the second black world champion athlete, after bantamweight boxer George Dixon's title fights in 1890–91.

of outstanding black athletes who suffered discrimination: boxer Jack Johnson, baseball players Jackie Robinson and Hank Aaron, tennis player Arthur Ashe, runners Jesse Owens and Tommie Smith, and boxer Muhammad Ali.

Other world-class athletes who attended the tribute included: John Howard, 1981 Ironman world triathlon champion and world cycling speed record holder, and Nelson Vails, 1984 Olympic silver medalist in track cycling and the first African American since Taylor to triumph in world cycling competition.

Before the ceremony about a hundred cyclists from across the country, many wearing custom jerseys bearing a picture of Taylor, pedaled a thirty-mile loop in Worcester and surrounding towns with members of a local cycling club, the Seven Hills Wheelmen. That evening, Clark University presented a panel discussion featuring authors and historians exploring the topic “Race, Sports, and Major Taylor’s Legacy.”

The \$250,000 monument commissioned by the Worcester-based nonprofit Major Taylor Association Inc. was nearly

ten years in the making. It was funded by private donations and a \$205,000 appropriation from the State of Massachusetts. In donating the statue to the library, the Major Taylor Association also donated \$15,000 to establish a maintenance endowment.

Lynne Tolman is a cyclist and journalist who lives in Worcester, Massachusetts. She is a board member of the Major Taylor Association Inc. For more information about Major Taylor and the monument, visit <http://www.majoraylorassociation.org/>. •



ABOVE: Nasdor and Tolman assist Moses in unveiling the monument honoring Taylor.

OPPOSITE: Artist Toby Mendez created the monument to Taylor, which depicts the 1899 world cycling champion at a crowded velodrome. INSET: One side of the Taylor monument features a bronze relief showing the cyclist sprinting ahead of his rivals.

November 15, 1899

Taylor knocks the one-mile record down to 1:19.

September 1900

Thwarted in previous seasons by racism, Taylor finally gets to complete the national championship series and becomes American sprint champion.

October 1900 to January 1901

Taylor performs in a vaudeville act with Charles “Mile-a-Minute” Murphy, racing on rollers on theater stages across Massachusetts.

March to June 1901

Taylor competes in Europe, which he had long resisted because his religious beliefs precluded racing on Sundays. He beats every European champion.

March 21, 1902

Taylor marries Daisy V. Morris in Ansonia, Connecticut.

1902 to 1904

Taylor races all over Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, with brief rests in Worcester.

1907

Taylor makes a brief comeback after a two-year hiatus.

1910

Taylor retires from racing at the age of thirty-two. During the next two decades, unsuccessful business ventures and illness sap his fortune.

1930

Impoverished and estranged from his wife, Taylor drives to Chicago, stays at the Young Men’s Christian Association, and tries to sell copies of his self-published 1928 autobiography, *The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World*.

June 21, 1932

Taylor dies at age fifty-three in the charity ward of Cook County Hospital in Chicago. He is buried in an unmarked grave in the pauper section of Chicago’s Mount Glenwood Cemetery.

May 23, 1948

A group of former professional bike racers, with money donated by Frank Schwinn, owner of the Schwinn Bicycle Company, has Taylor’s remains exhumed and reburied in a more prominent section of the cemetery. •