



# The Two-Wheeled World of George B. Thayer

*Kevin J. Hayes*

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Cyclotourism has recently risen to prominence with growing national media coverage and thousands of participants taking to America's roadways on two wheels and under their own pedal power.

But the concept is not new. More than a century ago, George B. Thayer took his own first "century," or one-hundred-mile bicycle ride. *The Two-Wheeled World of George B. Thayer* brings to life the experience of late nineteenth-century cycling through the heartfelt story of this important cycling pioneer.

In 1886, just two years after his first century, Thayer rode his high wheeler across the United States, traveling from his home in Connecticut to California and back. Thayer took an indirect route without any intent to set speed records, but his trip was full of adventure nonetheless. Thayer loved going downhill, his legs over the handlebars, risking life and limb atop the large wheel on often rough and muddy roads. With aplomb and humor, he dealt with the countless other hazards he encountered, including dogs, mule teams, and wild hogs. Even bad weather and poor sleeping conditions could not keep Thayer down.

After his epic tour across the United States, Thayer had the urge to cycle abroad and eventually toured England, Germany, Belgium, and Canada on his bike. His later travels were in part aided by his hometown of Hartford, Connecticut, which was the epicenter of American bicycle manufacturing in the late 1890s. In addition to telling Thayer's cycling story, Kevin J. Hayes brings to life the culture of cycling and its rise at the end of the nineteenth century, when bikes became more affordable and the nation's riding craze took off.

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