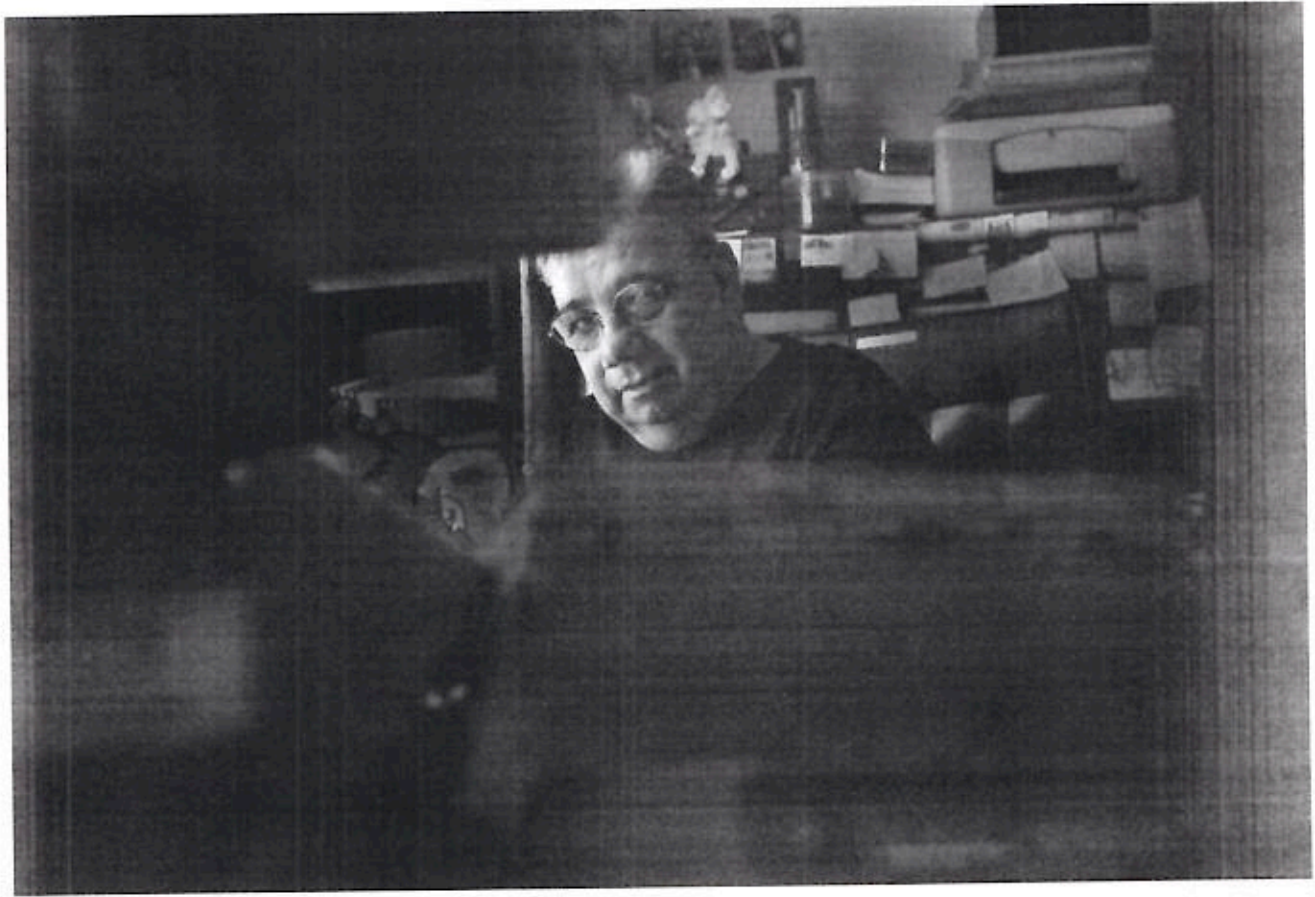


Robert Marshall, 74, Harvard Square 'mayor'



SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2006

Mr. Marshall started out selling rare books out of a suitcase and went on to run Harvard Book & Binding in Harvard Square for 40 years.

By Bryan Marquard | GLOBE STAFF APRIL 27, 2017

Bookbinder and auxiliary police volunteer, friend to the homeless and to those who call Harvard University home, Bob Marshall was a fixture in Harvard Square for more than 45 years.

He was a regular among those who sat in folding chairs on the sidewalk to watch Red Sox games when Cardullo's Gourmet Shoppe had a TV in its front window — his pungent cigars signaling that it was time for fans to gather. Mr. Marshall just as faithfully attended Cambridge City Council meetings, letting elected officials know when street signs were missing or an aging veteran needed assistance.

“He was never pushy or aggressive when he did this, and it was almost always due to his concern over increasing public safety, or with helping the less fortunate,” Cambridge Mayor E. Denise Simmons said last Thursday during Mr. Marshall's memorial service in Christ Church Cambridge.

“In many ways, Bob was the embodiment of the Cambridge that *I* grew up in: He was always there, always checking in to see how you were doing, always sharing his take on the news of the day,” Simmons said. “He reminded me of growing up in a time when everyone knew everyone else in the neighborhood.”

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Mr. Marshall, who started out selling rare books out of a suitcase and went on to run Harvard Book & Binding in Harvard Square for 40 years, died of lymphoma April 9 in Cambridge Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. He was 74 and had lived in Cambridge.

More than 100 people attended his memorial service, their ranks displaying the range of his friendships. The first speakers were the mayor and Vice Mayor Marc McGovern. They were followed by a Harvard astronomy

professor, current and former homeless men and women, and a Cambridge Police patrolman who saluted a large photo of Mr. Marshall at the front of the church and said: “God bless you, Bobby, and we’ll see you some day.”

“It didn’t matter whether you were wealthy or poor, whether you had a fancy title or not — Bob treated everyone with civility, friendliness, and respect,” the mayor said.

And he “seemed to know everyone,” she added. “In fact, Bob was so much a presence and such the social animal, many of us affectionately referred to him as ‘the mayor of Harvard Square.’ ”

Mr. Marshall was known for letting those who were going through troubled times, or who simply needed a place to get out of the cold, spend time reading inside his shop, a couple of floors above the corner of Brattle and John F. Kennedy streets.

“He was a blessed man,” Melissa West said as she stood in the wind outside after the service, talking about how kind Mr. Marshall had been to those who live on Harvard Square’s streets.

“People don’t know why you’re out here, but he didn’t ever judge anybody. Everybody knew him. Everybody looked up to him. We’re going to miss him like crazy.”

In a 2006 interview with *The Crimson*, Harvard’s student newspaper, Mr. Marshall recalled that he first arrived in Harvard Square at the outset of the 1970s, when student protests against the Vietnam War were common. After persuading a used bookstore to sell him, on credit, a suitcase full of 18th century books, he began selling his wares on a Harvard Square sidewalk at lunchtime.

Mr. Marshall told The Crimson that he had not graduated from college but took courses at Harvard. He also spent time browsing through the university's Houghton Library. One day he chanced upon a book, written in French, which explained how to repair and bind old books. "I couldn't read a word of it, so I just figured it out from the pictures," he said.

Robert Anthony Marshall was born in 1942, the son of Maurice Marshall and the former Maria Gulla. He grew up in Lynn and later served in the Air Force Reserve.

After moving to Cambridge, he volunteered with the police auxiliary and more recently served on the mayor's Senior Advisory Committee, readily offering advice to city councilors and other officials about the needs of senior citizens, veterans, and the homeless.

For many years, he also led newly arrived Harvard students on a tour through Harvard Square's bookshops, including his own, encouraging them to handle the ancient tomes.

"There's nothing wrong with touching a book that's been around 400 years," he said in 2006, during a tour a Globe reporter attended. "They used to be touched by people with really dirty, greasy hands. People weren't so tidy in the 1600s, and they read by candle, with the flame up close. You'll see wax drippings on the covers and pages."

Even as Mr. Marshall coped with a variety of illnesses in recent years, he continued to volunteer when crises arose, such as after the December fire on York Street in Cambridge that displaced more than 125 residents.

"In the days following that fire, Bob was out in Harvard Square, seeking donations for the fire victims," Simmons said at the memorial service.

“He would stand outside in the cold weather, hour after hour, day after day, seeking donations for those who had lost everything but the clothing on their backs. I practically had to plead with him a couple of times to be sure he took care not to stay outside *too* long because I didn’t want him to catch a cold or tire himself out.”

Mr. Marshall’s two marriages ended in divorce, and he left no immediate survivors, according to Kelly Dugas, whom he met during the gatherings in front of Cardullo’s and often referred to as his “assistant.” She helped care for him during his final months of illness. “He was always there if you needed someone to talk to,” she recalled.

Of that first encounter watching the Red Sox on the Cardullo’s TV, she said: “I was passing through, but I stayed for the ballgame and kept coming back for 11 years.” She married Dennis Coveney, who helped launch the game-watching group, in a ceremony on the sidewalk outside Cardullo’s in 2009. Mr. Marshall, she recalled, had been hospitalized until two days before the wedding and still insisted on attending.

“It’s impossible to think about how many people he touched and influenced,” McGovern, Cambridge’s vice mayor, said at last Thursday’s service.

“There’s a lot of talk in City Council these days about preserving the character of Harvard Square,” he said, and those discussions often focus on businesses, even though stores and buildings come and go.

“What really makes the character of Harvard Square are the people who are there every day, and the people who make Harvard Square that special place,” McGovern added. “And Bob was the mayor of that. And so as we talk about the character [of] Harvard Square, let’s remember we just lost the character of Harvard Square, and that can’t be replaced.”