



100 years old - Robert Wadlow's legacy lives on in Alton, Illinois

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ALTON - Thursday, Feb. 22, 2018, was a memorable day in Alton as the 100th birthday of the Guinness Book of World Records tallest man - Robert Wadlow - was celebrated.

There were several parties and celebrations throughout schools and businesses in the area. One of the largest and most meaningful birthday parties was held at the Alton Museum of History and Art.

The museum was busy throughout all their hours with visitors and some of Wadlow's older friends who are still alive stopping by on College Avenue in Alton. The museum had a tiered birthday cake and several cupcakes for guests.

John Langley, the Alton Museum of History and Art secretary, pointed out a little-known fact at the gathering, that the Guinness Book of World Records height of 8 feet, 11.1 inches tall was taken on June 27, 1940. He died at 1:30 a.m. on July 14, 1940, in a hotel in Manistee, Mich., so Langley believes he may have been over 9-foot tall at the end. Langley said Robert Wadlow was obviously still growing.

Langley said what he loved about Robert was his positive outlook on life and his life was as he put it, "an ordeal."

“He went to Alton High School and everything in his life was affected by his size,” Langley said.

Langley said Robert’s last shoe size was 44.5 when he died. “Once, when his shoe size was 37, they had a contest to where someone could guess how many dimes were in Robert’s Shoe. There were 6,250 dimes in his size 37. His casket so long had to remove the rear door of the hearse. There 18 pallbearers and normally there are six.”

“We have a film here at the museum where you see Robert walking and talking. He seemed like he was a very positive person. We are thankful that we have a lot of artifacts from Harold Wadlow, Jr., here at the museum. Robert is most known as the tallest person to walk the face of the earth.”

William Brandt attended the event Thursday and said his mother was in Robert’s class.

“I even have a funeral home invitation for Robert’s funeral from my mother,” she said.

“He sat next to my mother in a class at school. They were good friends, so I wanted to be here today.”

Alton Museum Director Brian Combs said there were some new artifacts that had been added to the Wadlow display, including a new pair of shoes, a People Magazine article about Robert and some other statue replicas of Robert.

“I don’t think there is any other person as a noticeable form of a physical or personality standpoint in this town (Alton) as Robert,” he said. “We have a lot of interesting personalities, but he stands out taller than anyone else as far as Alton is concerned.

“This is a destination for many different folks. An extraordinary amount of people come here. Last week we had people here from Brazil interested in hog farming but they had to come here to see information about the world’s tallest man. This was a wonderful event today with a single purpose of enjoying this man’s legacy.”

