

# **Robert Wadlow to turn 101 in February, he remains Alton's biggest draw**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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ALTON - It is difficult to believe but Robert Wadlow, Alton's favorite son, will mark his 101st birthday on Feb. 22, 2019.

Wadlow remains the world's tallest man in the Guinness Book of World Records at 8 feet, 11.1 inches tall.

Since an early age, Robert's birthday was always a big day in Alton. The Alton Museum of History and Art will have some type of celebration on Feb. 22. The museum is located at 2809 College Ave. in Alton.

This past year was Robert Wadlow's 100th birthday. Parties and celebrations were held throughout schools and businesses throughout the area in 2018 around his birthday. The Alton Museum of History and Art held one of the most meaningful parties.

I wrote the lasting biography about Robert Wadlow called "Boy Giant." The book contains many interviews with Harold Wadlow Jr., Robert's youngest brother, and many in the Alton region who either went to school with him or knew him. I am thankful I conducted the interviews when I did because many have since died.

Last year I received more attention with the book than I have since it was released in October 2003. I was interviewed by the local media and from outlets across the country

about the book and Robert's life. Something I am proud of is I have donated several thousand dollars to the Alton Museum of History and Art from the book profits, which has helped maintain the display







through years.

Alton Museum of History and Art Director Brian Combs said last year goes unmatched in many years for how many visited the Wadlow display and also the attention it drew to the Alton region.

Combs said some new artifacts were added to the Wadlow display in 2018, including a new pair of shoes, a People Magazine article about Robert and some other statue replicas of Robert. The museum had a tiered birthday cake and several cupcakes for guests on the 100th birthday party.

“I don’t think there is any other person as noticeable from 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.”

John Langley, the Alton Museum of History and Art secretary, pointed out a little known fact 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 because he 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 was so long they had to remove the rear door of the hearse. There were 18 pallbearers and normally there are six."

As far as an attraction to Alton, the Wadlow Statue is a significant tourism draw. Steve Tassinari of Alton and his partner for the crusade, Ron Vanata, were the catalysts behind the Wadlow Statue on College Avenue, along with the Alton-Godfrey Rotary Club. The statue is lifelike and remains in good condition. Ned Giberson, also an Alton native, did the sculpture work for the Wadlow Statue. The Wadlow Chair sits next to the statue. The fund-raising effort for the Wadlow Chair was led by Scott Neudecker.

Giberson said in my book about the Wadlow Statue: "I captured a folk hero. I am overwhelmed by the response we have had about the statue over the years." It was estimated at the time of my book that 100,000 people a year visit the statue.

Combs said the Alton Museum hopes eventually to completely restore the Wadlow birth house which is behind the statue and chair. Combs said he was thankful to Harold Wadlow Jr. for donating many of the items in the Alton Museum Wadlow display

"Harold Jr. donated the Wadlow class ring, the guitar, his pen, the camera and graduation gown," Combs added. "His brother did a great deal in establishing the Robert Wadlow collection."

The Alton Museum of History and Art and Alton Convention and Visitor's Bureau both are distributors for the book "Boy Giant."





[Steven Spencer also contributed to this story.](#)