

World's Tallest Man Robert Wadlow Died On This Date - July 15, 1940 - In Manistee, Michigan

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ALTON - An unforgettable moment in Alton history occurred 81 years ago at 12:40 a. m. on July 15, 1940, when the world's tallest man, Robert Wadlow, died at age of 22.

Robert stood 8 feet 11.1 inches tall and was still growing when he died. The book "Boy Giant," chronicles Robert's last hours in Manistee, Mich. The book details what Robert's last words were at 10:20 p.m. on July 14, 1940: "The doctor says I won't get home for the celebration."

Robert was referring to a golden anniversary wedding celebration for his grandparents who lived in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The celebration was set at Robert's parent's home prior to his death, however, it was postponed. Robert's family meant everything to him, and he was devastated when he was told by a tending physician in Michigan he would not be able to attend the family get-together because of his condition.

The infection that led to Robert's demise came from a blister on one of his feet, and it was discovered before he left Alton. At first, it wasn't of that much concern.

Robert had walked a long distance prior to the Manistee, Mich., parade, and it further irritated the blister. He became very ill from the infection that ensued and had to sit in the car for several hours before the event.

Harold Wadlow Jr. and his mom, Addie Wadlow, both flew from St. Louis to Michigan to see him when they learned of the seriousness of his condition. Harold Jr. and his mother both noticed quickly Robert was deathly ill.

In a one-on-one interview in "Boy Giant," Harold said: "When we saw Robert in Michigan, he was very quiet. He had a very high temperature."

Alton was riveted by Robert's death at age 22. The townspeople back then viewed Robert as "one of their own," regardless of his height.

Streeper Funeral Home in Alton handled the funeral arrangements. A crowd of 33,295 turned out for Robert's funeral visitation and funeral at Streeper Funeral Home.

Robert Streeper, the funeral home director, drove personally to Manistee to get Robert's body. A specially-made casket was made for Robert by Grand Traverse Casket Co. in Traverse City, Mich. It was 10 feet 6 inches long, 32 inches wide and 30 inches high, fitted in a redwood case made of 2-inch material. The coffin weighed 1,000 pounds, so a total of 16 pallbearers were asked to carry the casket.

An odd side note, Streeper Funeral Home had to replace all their carpeting because so many had trekked through to view Robert in his casket. July 15, 1940, is a day Alton people and others across the country will never forget.