

Alton Museum of History & Art remembers 'Gentle Giant' Wadlow 75 years after death

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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The Alton Museum of History & Art is hosting a memorial day for the “Gentle Giant” Robert Wadlow at 10 a.m. on Saturday, starting at the museum and then moving to a closing at the statue.

Robert Wadlow grew to 8 feet 11.1 inches and became the world’s tallest man. He remains the tallest human being to walk on the planet. He died on July 15, 1940, in Manistee, Mich., at the age of 22. This marks the 75th anniversary of his death.

Alton Museum of History & Art President Brian Combs said the anniversary of Wadlow's death deserves recognition.

"Robert's birth and life happened at the right time for him to become the world's tallest man," Combs said. "If it had happened now it could have been corrected with medication. He was the Gentle Giant and his height and personality and way about him caused him to be remembered."

Combs said Wadlow remains the most popular draw to the museum, with people coming from Japan, England, along with other parts of the United States and world to see the elaborate display on him and the statue. Just this past week, he said he had someone in from Texas and Athens, Ga., to view the display.

Combs said Charlene Gill, former president and one of the founders of the museum, always talked about how "kind" Wadlow was and what a good representative of Alton he was to the rest of the country.

Nancy Alexander coordinated the Wadlow Memorial Day for the museum. She said the day will include a gathering in the Wadlow display at the museum, a showing of the Wadlow video. The Masons and DeMolays, Wadlow's two favorite organizations, will have someone speak on his behalf and the assistant pastor at Main Street Methodist Church, Wadlow's old church, will also talk.

Alexander said Robert showed everyone how they can "stand tall and be the best he could be."

She explained that Wadlow had a lot of difficulties with walking, speech and the constant public attention, but through it all he handled it with grace and dignity.

"Robert would always tell other people outside of the area, 'let me tell you about Alton, Illinois,' when he was interviewed," Alexander said. "He set a great example for us. He crammed in a lot of life in 22 years."