

Robert Wadlow remembered 75 years after his death at museum, statue

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
July 12 2015 8:30 PM







Seventy-five years have passed since Robert Wadlow's death, but both young and old are still interested in hearing his story.

On Saturday, the Alton Museum of History & Art hosted a day of remembrance for the "Gentle Giant" and a large crowd gathered and kept flowing in at the Wadlow Statue. The day started with a film presentation and visit of the Wadlow displays at the museum, followed by tributes. Multiple people remembered Wadlow, including the Masons, Demolays and Main Street Methodist Church, his church.

Robert Wadlow grew to 8 feet 11.1 inches and became the world's tallest man. He remains the tallest human being to have ever walked 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.

"His presence is still felt today," Nancy Alexander, museum coordinator for the Wadlow event, said. "A lot of people came over here today for the first time to see this. I think Robert leaves the biggest impression on children."

Children first want to know Robert's story, Alexander said, but then gravitate to the stories told about his gracious personality.

Alexander said even when people acted mean to Robert he would say, “They are just curious.”

“He thought so much of this town and its people,” Alexander adds.

Alton Museum of History & Art President Brian Combs said Alton was home for him, even when he was as far away as New York City on his travels.

“We are very pleased with the turnout today,” Combs added. “There were so many children here. Their eyes get as big as saucers when they hear his story.”

Dick Propes, a past Alton Museum of History & Art board member and president, said he thought the turnout was great to remember Robert on the 75th anniversary of his death.

“Robert’s memory is still alive and well,” he said. “Still as we travel the country, people will ask where we are from and when say Alton, Illinois, Robert Wadlow always comes up. He is known all over the country.”

Ruth Bell said when she volunteers at the museum she constantly hears new stories about Robert Wadlow. One story Bell said her mother would tell her about Robert is when he would walk through the hallways he would swing his arms and everyone had to watch out for him. Bell said her mother’s locker was next to Robert’s at Alton High School.

“He is an important figure to Alton,” she said. “Bless his heart from being from here.”

Even today, Combs said people flip through the Guinness Book of Records and find Robert being the tallest man and want to visit the museum, no matter what state or country.

Combs said he has been approached by Mike Doucleff, one of the owners of Duke’s Bakery in Alton, about working to have a commemorative stamp for Robert Wadlow. The idea is to have the stamp in place for 2018, Robert’s 100th birthday.

“We are going to work on that best we can,” Combs said about the stamp process.

