

A Note From The Editor

The left photo on the cover shows Robert, age 20, and his six year-old baby brother Harold Jr., in Upper Alton, Illinois. The right photo (1996) shows Harold Jr. looking back and up at his brother's statue on College Avenue, Alton, IL.

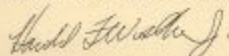
Robert Pershing Wadlow has become a folk hero in the last fifty years. Visiting grandchildren are brought to view his statue and have their photo taken. Tourists stop at the Alton Museum to purchase cut-out footprints, the size of Robert's shoe, to take home as mementos. The Visitor's Center maps Robert Wadlow sites on their Places One Must See.

Charlene Gill

Letter From Harold Wadlow Jr.

"Yes, I should be pleased to allow you to take my photo with the statue of Robert for the front of the 2nd edition of the museum booklet 'LOOKING BACK AND UP'."

I appreciate the good taste that has been used by the museum personnel in interpreting the exhibit about my brother Robert. I will bring down to you more artifacts as I encounter them around the house. They will belong to the museum in perpetuity and may be used for museum purposes, just like the other things from my family."



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A Note From The Author

When family and friends speak of Robert Wadlow, I feel it was a privilege for them to have known him and also a pleasure for Robert to have grown up with such loving people.

Thanks to all who have contributed to this booklet so that we can take a closer look at the Alton Giant.

My appreciation to Ginger Reinerman for her research assistance, layout, and design support.

Sandra Hamilton, Compiler/Author

Acknowledgments

Facts were gathered from:

Alton Evening Telegraph

St. Louis Globe-Democrat

Illinois Magazine

People Magazine

St. Louis Post

"The Gentle Giant" by Frederic Fadoer

assisted by Harold F. Wadlow

Guinness Book of World Records

by Morris McWhirter

Very Special People by Frederick Drimmer

Family and friends of Robert Wadlow

Science World Magazine, Teacher's Edition

THE YOUNG GIANT MOVES FROM TOWN TO TOWN

Robert Pershing Wadlow, the first child of Harold and Addie (Johnson) Wadlow was born in 1918 in a little five-room cottage on Monroe Street in Alton, Illinois. (Birth weight 8 1/2 pounds.)

He shared his birthday, February 22, with two famous men - George Washington and Robert Baden-Powell, the British army officer who was the head of the organization on which the Boy Scouts of America was modeled.

Robert was not destined to stay in one place for long. When he was three months old, he and his parents moved to Charleston, West Virginia. They just got settled, when an epidemic broke out and they headed back to Illinois. Robert's next home, until the spring of 1919, was Grafton, Illinois, a village about twenty miles up river from Alton.



Robert at six months of age.

At the age of 1 1/2, Robert moved again, this time to his Wadlow grandparent's farm about two and a half miles from Grafton. In 1920 the family moved back to Grafton for a short time where Robert's sister, Helen, was born.

In April of 1920, Robert's family moved to Roxana, Illinois, a village about seven miles from Alton, where Robert's father was employed by Shell Oil Company. While there, the family was increased by a second son, Eugene, born in 1922, and a second daughter, Betty, born in 1924.

In 1926, the family left Roxana for a higher and drier altitude to improve Mrs. Wadlow's health. They moved to Colorado and then to Wyoming, and finally in the fall of 1926, the Wadlow's came back to Alton. Robert's younger brother, Harold, Jr., was born in 1932 in Alton. He is the only immediate family member surviving, as of this writing.



*Back Row Addie, Robert (age 8) and Harold.
Front Row Helen, Betty and Eugene.*

ROBERT GOES TO SCHOOL

Robert entered Roxana School when he was a little over 5 1/2 years old. He walked into the 1st grade wearing a suit that would have fit the average 17 year old!

In 1926, when enrolled in the 3rd grade at Milton School, he was 6' tall! In the 7th grade, Robert nominated himself for student body president. He won!

In 1932, he entered Alton High School as a freshman and created a sensation among his fellow students. Robert also enrolled in Lancaster School of Expression so he could prepare himself for public speaking and advertising for Peters Shoe Company the company that made his very large shoes.

Eighty-seven members were in the graduating class at Alton High on January 24, 1936. Robert was one of them and photographs show him towering head and shoulders above

the rest. When he walked up to get his diploma he was 8'3" tall!

His cap and gown had to be tailored for him. The gown contained 14 yards of material and the cap was size 8 1/2. These are now displayed, among other memorabilia, at the Alton Museum of History and Art in Alton, Illinois, located in Loomis Hall.

In February of 1936, Robert registered at Shurtleff College. The Robert Wadlow statue, sculpted to size by Ned Giberson, is located on the campus of the SIU School of Dental Medicine, (formerly Shurtleff College) at 2800 College Avenue, Alton, Illinois. This statue was erected in 1985 by Alton-Godfrey Rotary, Alton Area Optimists, Junior League of Greater Alton and many others who cherished Robert's memory.

The sculptor said, "I heard stories about him. The more I learn, the more I'm amazed. He was so humble."

THE PITUITARY GIANT

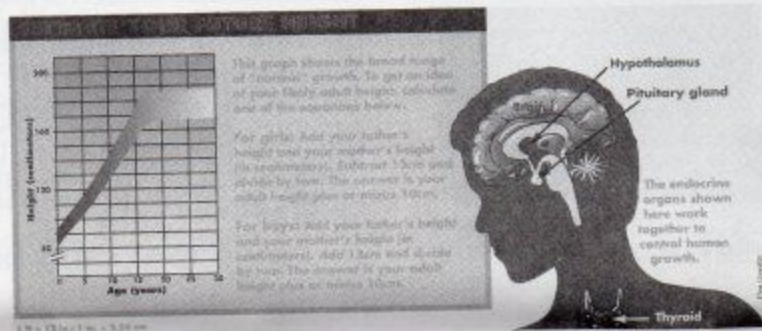
The pituitary giant is the exact opposite of being a dwarf.

The pituitary is a pea-sized gland located at the base of the brain. One of its secretions is the growth hormone. If this hormone is produced in inadequate quantities, the person is likely to be a dwarf. If the gland turns out an oversupply, the person may prove to be a giant. From the time he was 12 years old Robert was

examined regularly by doctors at Washington University School of Medicine. They kept a record of his height and weight.

Robert P. Wadlow holds the record of being the tallest man in recorded history

Robert's father said, "There are one or two advantages in being Robert's size. He can go to ball games and look over the fence and he can see into hotel rooms through the transom, when he passes down the hall."



WATCHING ROBERT GROW

Age	Height	Weight
Birth	No Record	8 1/2 lbs.
6 Months	No Record	30 lbs.
1	No Record	45 lbs.
1 1/2	No Record	67 lbs.
5	5'4"	105 lbs.
8	6'	169 lbs.
9	6'2"	180 lbs.
10	6'5"	210 lbs.
11	6'7"	222 lbs.
12	6'11"	241 lbs.
13	7'2"	255 lbs.
14	7'5"	301 lbs.
15	7'8"	355 lbs.
16	7'10"	374 lbs.
17	8'	(sick) 315 lbs.
18	8'4"	391 lbs.
19	8'5"	480 lbs.
20	8'7"	488 lbs.
21	8'8"	492 lbs.
22.4	8'11 1/2"	439 lbs.

ROBERT WAS INVOLVED

He was a member of the following organizations in Alton, Illinois:

Young Men's Christian Association
 Boy Scouts of America
 Order of DeMolay
 Main Street Methodist Church
 Franklin Masonic Lodge

In 1931 he joined the Boy Scouts - if you have ever read a Boy Scout Manual you will readily see what trials would confront a boy of Robert's size.

Robert collected stamps, match books, and rocks, and he had also taken up photography. He visited a great many hospitals, schools, orphanages, army camps and charitable institutions.

Robert loved children and he seldom refused a request to visit an orphanage or children's hospital.



Robert with John W. Grason



Robert and Boy Scouts

HE WAS A GENTLE GIANT

Robert was a mountain of a man, but people would walk up and kick him in the legs to see if he was walking on stilts. This could be a good way to make a giant angry.

Robert Graul, (Photographer whose photos of Robert have been seen worldwide through the Guinness Book of Records) said it best, "Robert was just a nice polite kid. When he shook your hand, he never crushed it, although he could have."

Robert's hands measured 18" from the edge of his palm to the top of his fingers.

His ring size was 25

His shoe size at 12 years old was 37AA, 18 1/2" long and weighed 4 pounds. The last shoe made for him was a size 40.

His shoe strings were 96" long.

BIG MAN IN A SMALL WORLD

IN SCHOOL

Too Low

blackboards
doors
bulletin boards
book cases
drinking fountains

Too Small

desks
sinks
pencils
pencil sharpeners
books

School gongs above the doors were always going off right beside his ears. Stairs were not deep enough for his feet. He would have to walk the stairs sideways because the steps were 12" deep and his shoes were 18 1/2" long.

Toys were always too small. The huge hands had a lot of trouble with buttons and a spoon could be awkward, too.

Traveling was not all pleasure. Getting in and out of a car was a chore. Trains and taxis were too small. Berths and washrooms in trains were cramped and he could never stand up straight in an elevator.

Airplane travel is restricted enough for an average person today, so for a giant 55 years ago, it was very tight quarters.

Life in a hotel sounds great, but imagine



short beds, small chairs, tiny bath tubs and shower sprays no higher than your waist. He even had to bend down to use the pay telephone.

Swimming, boating, fishing, and hiking could be enjoyed to a limited degree only.

It was always the back row for Robert at the movies. They made a special seat for him at the theater in Upper Alton.

"I remember him stooping to get into church," stated Sunshine (Newell) Rogier.

Robert leaves for Rodeo

FAMILY REUNION IN ROSEDALE

His ancestry shows no exceptionally tall members either in the paternal or the maternal line.



Pictured from left to right: Ethel Collins (aunt), Harold Wadlow (father), Herschel Johnson (uncle), Clifford Johnson (Uncle), Harvey Collins (1st cousin), Melva Guntren (1st cousin), Raymond Phillips, Blaine Thompson (uncle), Ida Johnson, Effie Thompson (aunt), Floy Guntren (aunt), Jessie Johnson (uncle), Luther Johnson (grandfather), Nancy Johnson (aunt), Frank Guntren (1st cousin), John Guntren (uncle), Robert in back.
Around 1932

ROBERT MEETS PRIMO CARNERA

Carnera was the heavy weight prize fighter who was 6'5" and weighed 265 pounds. He posed with Robert in St. Louis in 1930 and much to his embarrassment, was 4" shorter than 12 year old Robert!

LOOKING BACK AND UP

Some remembrances of Robert's first cousins on the Johnson side are as follows

Mina (Johnson) Cornine said, "Robert and his family had always lived in town, and made weekend visits to our home in Rosedale, Illinois for lots of country fun.

The Wadlow family had a seven-passenger car, which was needed for Robert and the

large family. Uncle Harold removed the center seats from the car. Robert sat in the back, his legs and feet extended across the space in the middle to the front." She added jokingly, "The other kids sat wherever they could find room!"

On one of the Wadlow's many visits to the country, "The back water from the Illinois river was up. One of our neighbors was going to his clubhouse with a team of horses and wagon. He took all of us kids with him. Robert sat halfway in the wagon with his feet, shoes and all dragging in the water and he loved every bit of it."

The Johnsons lived in a large, two-story house. There were several porches, and many nooks and crannies for children to play and hide. "My sister and I shared a large upstairs bedroom with a big closet, which had a low, slanted ceiling. The ceiling was too low for Robert to stand up. He would have to crawl

to a door way to pull himself up. After being on his hands and knees for a long time they would go to sleep."

Mina continued, "Our kitchen in Rosedale had a large stove and there was always something cooking. Robert especially liked peaches and whipped cream, and my mother always made sure he had plenty. My mother would bake homemade loaves of bread in big black pans. She would tear him big hunks of warm, browned bread and put a big blob of fresh yellow cow butter on it. What a look on his face when he got that. Pure satisfaction. How he would thank her for all of this."

Robert always wanted to help in the garden. Mina's mother would let him pick pole beans as they were high enough and he wouldn't have to bend very far down.



Luther Johnson (1866-1943) with his grandson, Robert Wadlow (age 14), at the Johnson Farm in Rosedale, Illinois.



Robert with Harold, Jr



Robert shaking hands with Frank Lee Karl, editor of Cumberland Times News, 1938.

"He naturally was very clumsy because he was so big. He would fall easily and always tear the knees out of his pants. His mother would take these pants to a dressmaker in Alton and have girls' skirts made out of the backs of the legs."

First cousin, Erma J Russell, remembers. "Uncle Harold and Aunt Addie used to come to Jerseyville with the children in their seven-passenger car. Back then, the sidewalks were always busy because more people walked than drove. When people would see Robert, they would gasp in shock and you could hear them 'Look, look, look!'"

First cousin, Harvey Collins, recalls. "Eugene and I got into a fight in the yard and he ran into the house and said 'Harvey beat me up, I want you to beat up Harvey' Robert told Eugene he had been watching from the window and Eugene would have to fight his own battles."



Harold, Jr and Robert standing by family car

"His reflexes were very slow and when I pitched him a ball, his swing would be in slow motion."

"Once we caught a butterfly and Robert wouldn't hold it because he was afraid he might hurt it."

First cousin, Pauline (Collins) Seago told us, "When we would visit the Wadlows, Uncle Harold and my dad would play checkers for hours and we kids would run and play outside. Aunt Addie would say 'I wish you kids would come into the house so Robert could play with you.' They had an upstairs and we would sit on the steps and play school. The lower part of the steps would represent a grade and higher up would be another grade and Betty (Robert's sister) was always the teacher. Robert would be in the back bedroom and he was the principal. When we would misbehave, we would have to go to the principal's office. He'd give us a big slap on the behind and we would laugh and carry on and run back to the steps."

First cousin, Norene Hildred, was very young when Robert died, but she shared stories her parents told her . . . "When Robert was young he had an unusual desire for cod liver oil. The family had to really watch him or he would drink it all."

"Robert liked to wrestle and my father would play with him, but soon Robert was able to overpower my father. Not wanting to hurt Robert's feelings, my father wore a suit to any family function, so he would be too dressed up to wrestle."

First cousin, Frank Guntren, remembers trying to climb up onto Robert's wicker rocking chair and as soon as he would get on the edge, the chair would tip and dump six year old Frank onto the floor.

ROBERT'S DEATH

On July 4, 1940, Robert was scheduled to be in a parade and appeared at the Lumberman's Festival in Manistee, Michigan.

Robert started feeling ill during the two hour parade, but because the streets were blocked, it was impossible to get out of line in the parade.

After the parade, he was taken to his hotel and the house physician was called. Robert had developed a temperature of 101 caused by a badly infected ankle. The infection had resulted from an abrasion caused by a poorly fitting brace which he was wearing to strengthen a weak ankle. The brace had been fitted only the week before, and because his rapid growth caused numbness in his legs, he was unaware of the seriousness of the damage until it was too late.



Pallbearers carry Robert's casket through crowd.

He grew very sick and was in a lot of pain during the following days, with his temperature shooting up to 106 degrees. The doctor had no remedy. Everything was done that could be done.

Previous to Robert's illness there was to have been a Wadlow family reunion consisting of relatives from all over the country. His last words were "The doctor says I won't get home for the celebration."

On July 15, 1940, Robert died.



Hundreds of people lined the street at Streeper Funeral Home.

The funeral was conducted by the Reverend W.L. Hanbaum, minister of the Main Street Methodist Church, assisted by two former pastors, the Reverend N.C. Henderson, and Reverend Otto Horsley. The burial rites were under the auspices of the Franklin Masonic Lodge of which Robert was a member. The Order of DeMolay also assisted.

The pipe organ, for which Robert had led the campaign to raise funds, played at the Main Street Methodist Church 1 1/2 blocks from the Streeper Funeral Home. The music was relayed by a public address system to the funeral home.

The Order of DeMolay furnished an honor guard beside the casket during the time it was at the funeral home. Later they marched



Hearse and DeMolay escort at cemetery.

as the honor guard surrounding the hearse on its trip to Oakwood Cemetery. The Boy Scouts also gave valuable assistance by helping state and city officers in directing the traffic.

It took twelve men to carry his 10'6" steel casket, which was 32" wide and 30" high.

A floral piece, 10' in length and made up of 300 white lilies bore the inscription "Dear son and brother."

There were license plates counted from 36 states. Thousands of people stood in the hot sun to say good-bye. They all agreed he had indeed been, in more than one way, a giant.

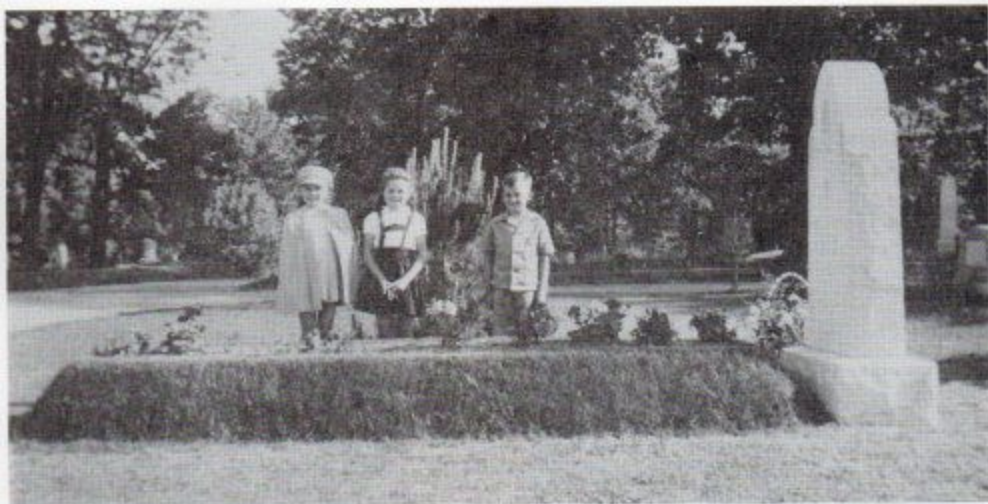
On July 20, 1940, Robert Pershing Wadlow's casket was lowered into a concrete vault which was at the bottom of the grave. Inside the vault was a red cedar box. The red cedar box lid was lowered to cover it. A concrete mixer was rolled up to seal the coffin with concrete strongly reinforced with steel. The guard of honor remained until the concrete hardened.

IN RETROSPECT

Robert had the spirit to overcome the fact he had outgrown his world and to forgive others for their unkindness. At one time he said, "99% of the people are OK, the other percent are just plain ignorant, so why should I let them worry me?"

Robert's parents are to be commended. Although he was placed in the public eye from the time reporters learned about a boy too big for his school desk, they, through their love, understanding, and guidance, taught their son how to turn his disadvantages into assets.

Henry B. Lenhardt, his high school friend said of Robert and of the statue that stands today, "The statue is to preserve the memory of 'The Gentle Giant.' When we who have known him also . . . fade from the hills of Alton, it will be a reminder there existed a person of such great stature."



Robert Wadlow's gravesite, Summer of 1940.

Pictured from left are: Lovelle Gibson, Patricia Gibson and Eddie Gibson.



Robert's votes- 1939.



*Robert at age 17 standing with 6' policeman
Louie Waller in 1938.*



Happy Birthday, Robert!