

# Alton Museum of History and Art, Inc.

Spring 2008

## News & Views

2809 College Avenue, Alton, Illinois 62002 618-462-2763 altonmuseum@yahoo.com

### In Memoriam

Josie Croft

Samuel H. Duncan

Robert Graul

Mary Abbot Haxel

Pauline Roller

**Reminder:**  
*AMHA  
Annual  
Membership  
Meeting  
April 9,  
2008  
7:30 p.m.  
Loomis Hall*

*The City of Alton prepared for the  
1856 State fair by building new  
roads and adding gaslights from  
downtown. The fair was promoted  
by a huge banner hung above the  
Mississippi River bluffs on a 1600  
foot cable.*

### Captain! My Captain!

American poet Walt Whitman wrote this poem in honor of Lincoln

O Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done,  
This ship has weather'd every rack, the prize is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
But O heart! Heart! Heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! My Captain! Rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up-for you the flag is flung-for you the bugle thrills,  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths-for you the shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;  
Here Captain! Dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck, you've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father dies not feel my arm; he has no pulse nor will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;  
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I with mournful tread, Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

### What is Accreditation?

The highest honor a **museum** can receive is **accreditation** by the American Association of **Museums**.

Accreditation certifies that a museum operates according to standards set forth by the museum profession, manages its collections responsibility and provides quality services to museum visitors. Of the 8,000 museums nationwide, only about .09% or some 700 are accredited.

Accreditation is a voluntary, quality assurance peer review. Museum quality assurance programs are not offered at the state level. Accreditation (MAP) is operated by the American Association of Museums Washington, D.C. [www.aam.org](http://www.aam.org), and AAM is responsible for the administration of it in the United States.

To qualify, museums must clear basic requirements on how they care for and document their collections, how they are governed and managed, and on the information and services they offer to their users. All associate or full AAM members receive advice and assistance before, during and after the application process All accreditable museums must have a mission statement, institutional plans, and a comprehensive collections management policy. The content of the collection should be guided by a tiered system of controls – the mission statement, institutional plans, collection statement, and collecting plans.

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Membership Application  
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**ALTON MUSEUM OF HISTORY & ART, INC**  
2809 College Avenue, Alton, IL\* 62002  
(618) 462-2763  
\*\*\*\*\*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

- Youth .....\$5
- Senior.....\$20
- Active (Single).....\$25
- Family.....\$30
- History Lover.....\$40
- Patron of the Arts....\$50
- Business.....\$100
- Life.....\$1,000
- Benefactor.....\$5,000

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**DONATIONS**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

\$25 \_\_\_\_\_

\$50 \_\_\_\_\_

\$100 \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**MILES DAVIS HEADLINER**  
Arlin Strader, jazz drummer,  
a native Altonian, featured.

**THANK YOU**

**THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSOR,  
MADISON COUNTY ART COUNCIL,  
FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE TO  
“PUT THE JAZZ BACK INTO  
SMOOTH, MUSIC TO MOVE YOU.”  
THOMAS & BARBARA RAGLIN AND THE  
STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE MILES  
DAVIS JAZZ CELEBRATION.**

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**Thank you**

**THANK YOU TO CO-SPONSOR,  
RUSS SMITH OF THE  
BOSSANOVA, 112 3<sup>RD</sup> STREET  
FOR MATCHING THE MADISON  
COUNTY ART COUNCIL GRANT.**

**Biography >> Luther Ingram**

One of seven children, Luther Thomas Ingram was born in Jackson, Tennessee, and raised in the Midwest. His older brother, Archie, guided him and his brother, Richard, through the early years of singing spirituals with their group, The Mid-West Crusaders, but it was his mother, Mrs. Callie Ingram, who recognized and nurtured his love and enthusiasm for music during his childhood. Later, Luther joined his brothers and some high school friends

to form a vocal group known as The Gardenias. Touring the heartland, they caught Ike Turner's ear for talent, and in the early 60s, the two teamed up to make the group's first single, "Flaming Love." His most popular release is his hit single "If Loving You Is Wrong – I Don't Want To Be Right." Luther toured the country with his own band, Isaac Hayes and The Bar-Keys. He shared the stage with many notable acts.

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**WE ARE GRATEFUL TO  
THE ALTON FOUNDATION  
FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF  
ALTON MUSEUM OF HISTORY & ART**

**MILES DAVIS  
JAZZ  
CELEBRATION**

Sunday  
May 18, 2008  
2 p.m.

TRIMPE HALL  
LEWIS & CLARK  
COLLEGE  
5800 GODFREY ROAD  
GODFREY, ILLINOIS

Admission  
\$20.00

Tickets available  
Alton Museum  
(618) 462-2763

## ROBERT C. ERWIN & Marjorie Erwin

Robert C. Erwin was born in Detroit Michigan August 28, 1919. In the early 1930's his father lost his job at a body shop in Detroit and moved the family to Jerseyville, Illinois, his home town, where he started "Erwin Body Shop" repairing and painting cars.

Bob graduated from Jerseyville High School. In 1941, he received his Bachelors' degree from the old Western State Teachers College, now known as W.I.U., in Macomb, Illinois. He earned his Masters from University of Illinois at Champaign and Urbana in 1953.

While attending college he met Marjorie Wilkins of Avon, Illinois at a school dance. Bob & Marjorie sang in college choirs and church choirs, and in different places in Illinois using college buses. They married on May 18, 1943.

Mr. Erwin was drafted into the army and served in World War II and the Korean War. He attained the rank of First Lieutenant.

Mr. Erwin censored letters, during World War II. He was a replacement officer and did not see battle. Bob was in Vatican City, Rome and Florence. Near the end of the war, Mr. Erwin guided German Troops home by train through the Austrian Mountains to the German Border.

After World War II, Bob stayed in the reserves. He was sent to Korea where he did see battle. Eight inch Howitzer guns used near 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel – close

to Panmunjom Area.

Robert Erwin left for Fort Sill, Oklahoma January 27, 1951. He went overseas a month later. Bob was a motor officer – trained and supervised drivers and mechanics.

Mr. Erwin received the Bronze Star Medal for Service in Korea. Bob came home April 1952. Robert left the Reserves May 1952.

Bob started teaching in Jerseyville High School in 1948 and stayed there until 1956. In the fall of 1956 he started teaching in Alton High School. He retired in 1982.

In 1964 Bob was a seasonal ranger in the Great Smoky Mountains. Later, he gave up being a ranger in order to teach summer school in Alton.

Mr. Erwin was a member of Pi Mu Epsilon Fraternity in the field of Mathematics in St. Louis University under National Science Foundation. He attended during summer months 1960 – 1963. He was also a member of V.F.W. Post 1308 and a 10 year member of River City Swingers (square dancing).

After Bob retired, he and Marjorie wintered near Harlingen, Texas for 14 years at R.V. Parks, and traveled and camped all over the United States. They took five cruises plus tours in Europe.

In 1987, Bob and Marjorie Erwin toured Europe. He wanted Marjorie to see places where he had been – that he could not visit during the war but was able to see after the war ended.

He wanted Marjorie to see the Isle of Capri. Bob took her there on vacation for three weeks one year. They also visited Geneva, Switzerland, Venice, St. Marks Church, Grand Canal, Florence, Vatican City, Rome – Coliseum, Roman Forum, Naples, Pompeii Ruins, Sorrento and Paris. They left Calais, France and rode on a Hover Craft to Dover and London.

Bob & Marjorie have two daughters, Nancy, born in 1947 and Barbara in 1953. Nancy has two children, Scott and Kerri.

Mr. Erwin died on February 5, 2002. He is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery in Jerseyville, Illinois.

Marjorie Erwin lives in Alton and continues to lead an active live. She is a much loved member of the Museum family, volunteering one day a week.

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The Alton Brick Company sprawled across many acres just north of Alton, where Alton Square and a car dealer are now located. The huge operation could manufacture about 185,000 bricks per day around 1912. Edward Rogers was president, and E.B. Rogers was secretary -treasurer.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Alton, Jacksonville & Peoria Railway was founded in 1907 to provide inter-urban service in the area. The railroad was abandoned in 1918. The first car used to carry passengers was the Canary.

### IN MEMORIAM

*William M. Duncan, president of Duncan Foundry & Machine Works lived in a spacious residence at 442 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Alton.*

*The Duncan house on 12<sup>th</sup> Street was built just after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by John N. Drummond. He was associated with his brother J. T. Drummond in the plug tobacco business in Alton and later St. Louis.*

*Duncan Foundry & Machine Works Inc., 102 W. Seventh St., sold products: Steel castings, metallurgical & mining equipment, stokers Mining and Well Drilling Machinery and Accessories, V process castings, Castings, Die castings, Sand castings, Permanent mold castings, Shell mold castings, Investment castings.*

*The Alton Baking & Catering Co. opened in 1903 on Front Street in Alton. It was purchased by J.J. Beeby in 1926 but was destroyed by fire in November 1929.*

# AS THE BIRTHPLACE OF MILES DAVIS, ALTON MAKES LINK TO JAZZ

The birthplace of the world's tallest man is the same quaint Mississippi River community where one of the giants of jazz was born.

But while a life-size statue and tourism brochures tout the fact that 8-foot 11 inch Robert Wadlow once strode Alton's hilly streets, evidence that trumpeter Miles Davis was born here is much harder to find.

At the Alton Museum of History and Art press clippings and photographs of Davis are kept in a "black pioneers" scrap book. In the museum's files is a copy of Davis' birth certificate.

But details about Davis' trendsetting 40-year career in jazz are missing from the museum's archives – a glaring oversight, according to noted jazz pianist Herbie Hancock.

"As far as (jazz) being the primary art form from that was born in this country, Miles is a central figure," said Hancock, who played in Davis' landmark 1960s quintet.

"Davis was an innovative leader of the post-bebop "cool" jazz in the 1950s. In the '60s, he helped propel the jazz fusion movement.

In the history of music, he's made one of those rare marks on human culture," Hancock said.

With only a modest memorabilia collection to show for someone who generates such lofty praise, could it be that Alton has turned its back on the native son who often played with his back to the audience?

That's what Davis biographer Quincy Troupe believes.

"It's a sad commentary," said Troupe, a poet and the author of "Miles: The Autobiography" and "Miles and Me," a memoir published recently. "He's probably the greatest person of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to come out of Alton, Illinois, and for them not to celebrate this man is just a shame."

In the meantime, Alton has been playing second fiddle to the nearby cities of East St. Louis and St. Louis when it comes to honoring Davis.

Gill acknowledges that Alton long has been remiss in capitalizing on Davis' international fame. But

insufficient funding is more to blame than indifference, she said.

"We have limited resources," Gill said.

Davis' family moved 30 miles southeast to East St. Louis shortly before his second birthday.

"There seems to be a movement developing to give homage to these great masters," Hancock said, noting the recent national attention being given to centennials of jazz luminaries Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. "Here's hoping that Alton, Illinois, will be joining the bandwagon."

Excerpts from article printed in "The Telegraph"

\* \* \* \* \*

## Biography >> Miles Davis

Throughout a professional career lasting 50 years, Miles Davis played the trumpet in a lyrical, introspective, and melodic style, often employing a stemless Harmon mute to make his sound more personal and intimate. But if his approach to his instrument was constant, his approach to jazz was dazzling protean. To examine his career is to examine the history of jazz from the mid-'40s to the early '90s, since he was in the thick of almost every important innovation and stylistic development in the music during that period, and he often led the way in those changes, both with his own performances and recordings and by choosing sidemen and collaborators who forged new directions. It can even be argued that jazz stopped evolving when Davis wasn't there to push it forward.

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## Biography >> Russ Smith

Russ Smith, a native of St. Louis, came to Alton in 1977, two years out of the University Of Missouri Journalism School, to take a job as staff photographer on the Alton

Telegraph. Twenty two years later, after thousands of assignments taking photos for the paper...of local civic leaders, politicians, and interesting members of the community...he had a good knowledge of his adopted hometown and its residents.

He has rehabbed several commercial buildings in the area, and around 1985, was one of the first to revitalize upper floor space for loft living. His home on the third floor of his building at 112 W. Third, which he shares with fiancée Allison, and twenty month old daughter Joleigh, boast 14 foot ceilings and a great river view.

Russ has always taken an interest in downtown Alton, serving as president of Downtown Alton, Inc. as early as 1990. Last year, he worked with other downtown property owners to reestablish Downtown Alton, Inc., a group that promotes downtown beautification, improvement and growth. He has organized downtown volunteers to fiancé, install and maintain the hanging flower basket project, and with the city to improve the fountains and surrounding green islands in Downtown Alton. He has also taken a major hand in promoting and organizing the summer Alton Block Party series, an event that draws thousands of people and dollars to our area.

In 2004, Russ opened Bossanova Restaurant and Lounge. What started as a martini lounge with a "big city" feel has developed into a casual fun spot to catch a great dinner and, on Friday nights, see some great jazz. Bossanova has won the River Bend Growth Association Small Business of the Month Award, and has been named one of the best bars in the metro area by St. Louis Magazine. This year, Bossanova Restaurant and Lounge is the sole corporate sponsor for the Miles Davis Jazz Festival, held this coming May 18.

## ROBERT PERSHING WADLOW

Robert Wadlow was born in Alton on February 22, 1918. He weighed eight pounds, six ounces. He weighed thirty pounds, when he was six months old. At eighteen months he weighed sixty-two pounds. He continued to grow at a fantastic rate, reaching six feet, two and one half inches and 195 pounds by the time he was eight years old. He became the tallest person in the world in 1939, when, at the age of eighteen, he outgrew an eight foot, four inch Irish giant who died sixty years before.

Robert did the things most boys his age enjoyed. He joined the Alton YMCA when he was eleven and became the world's tallest Boy Scout at seven feet four inches when he was thirteen. He swam, fished and played with his little brother, Harold Jr. He collected stamps, matchbooks and took up photography. He loved ice cream. When he was seventeen, he opened a soft drink stand in front of his home on Brown Street. The next summer he operated a stand at the 1936 Illinois State Fair in Springfield. He was eight feet four inches tall and weighed three hundred and ninety pounds.

Robert received a scholarship to Shurtleff College in Alton and enrolled after he graduated from high school. He planned to study pre-law. He quit after one year, mostly, his father said, because he had trouble moving from building to building between classes. He had to climb stairs sideways to crowd his huge feet on the steps, duck to escape low hanging ceiling fans and chandeliers and walk in the street to avoid store awnings. He had to bend down to go through doorways, stoop to peer in mirrors and fold almost double to enter his parents converted automobile. The front passenger seat had to be removed to make room for Robert's long legs.

It required three times the normal amount of cloth to make Robert a suit. His thirty-seven and a half shoes cost \$100 a pair. He traveled all over the West Coast as a goodwill ambassador for The Peters Branch of the International Shoe Company, when he was twenty. The company provided Robert with shoes free of charge.

The twenty-two year old giant was making a personal appearance at the National Festival in a small lumber town called Manistee, Michigan in July 1940, when a brace on his left ankle chafe causing blisters to form. Infection set in, and on the fourth of July, the big day of the festival, Robert was confined to bed. Robert died July 15, 1940 at 1:30 a.m.

Robert's body was brought back to Alton for burial. An estimated 40,000 persons filed past his bier at the Steeper Funeral Home. Another 10,000 showed up at the funeral home for services July 19<sup>th</sup> and later that day for Masonic burial services in Upper Alton Cemetery.

City businesses were closed for the funeral. The 1,000 pound casket required twelve pallbearers assisted by eight other men. It was placed in a twelve foot long reinforced concrete tomb.

There is a life-size statue of Wadlow on the SIUE Dental School Campus in Alton, where his birth home, the property of the Alton Museum now stands. A collection of memorabilia is maintained by the museum. There are some photographs still around. Dan Brannan, Executive Editor of The Telegraph, wrote a new book "Boy Giant" in 2000. That's about all the evidence of the nationwide sensation Robert Wadlow once created.

Robert Pershing Wadlow was a shy, bespectacled, friendly young giant. He never sought publicity. From the day reporters learned about a boy too big for his school desk until the day of his death, his activities were followed by almost every major newspaper in the Country.

"He never had any privacy except in his own home," said his father, Harold F. Wadlow, mayor of Alton from 1945 to 1949. "But Robert never complained."

The day after Robert Wadlow's funeral, an Alton Telegraph editorial said, "Bob was a good son, a good citizen, studious, religious and a wonderful friend."



Robert Wadlow Birth Home

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The museum plans to furnish the home as it was in 1918.

### LOOMIS HALL

#### One Hundred Seventy Five Years Old!!

Loomis Hall, built in 1832, and the home of the Alton Museum, is situated on the SIUE Dental School Campus in Alton, Illinois.

Dr. John Mason Peck, a Baptist Missionary, had established a school called Rock Spring Seminary near Belleville, Illinois, but it was not a success. Dr. Peck moved his school to Upper Alton and built Academic Hall, later called Loomis Hall. It is the oldest building of higher education, still in continuous use, in the state of Illinois.

In 1836 the name of the school was changed to Shurtleff College (because of Dr. Benjamin Shurtleff's generous donation.)

In the 1860's many of the students left for the Civil War and the enrollment declined. Some of the graduating class became officers.

In 1910, a new building (used for a library) was built west of Loomis Hall through Andrew Carnegie's generous donation of \$15,000.

In 1957, the state of Illinois purchased Shurtleff. Loomis Hall and the other buildings were put to use by SIUE. In 1972, a dental school opened on the Alton Campus.

In 1997, the museum leased Loomis Hall from SIUE. Exhibits include Robert Wadlow, Piasa Bird, Lovejoy, Lincoln, Trumbull, Civil War Prison, Black Pioneers, Lost Alton, Illinois Glass, Western Military, Shurtleff, Monticello. "Fancy Work" a textile exhibit with dresses from the 1800's to the 1950's dedicated to Mrs. Jessie Belle Culp and Neva Belle Unterbrink by the exhibit builder David Culp.

# Lincoln Reception

## THANK YOU DONORS

**William J. Barnard**  
**James Ballard**  
**Kathleen Duncan**  
**Marjorie Duvivier**  
**Mrs. Robert Jacoby**  
**Mr. & Mrs. Paul Maley**  
**Marty Pfeiffenberger**  
**Dorothy Sibley**  
**Lucille Stevenson**  
**Elizabeth Sutton**  
**Dr. J. Edmond White**

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In 1837 Alton had a  
population of  
2,500.

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*"History outlives those who  
would destroy it."*

...anonymous

**We're on the Web!**

See us at:

**www.altonmuseum.com**

Senator and Mrs. Lyman Trumbull  
 cordially request the honor of your presence  
 at a reception for  
 President and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln  
 on  
 Saturday, April 12, 2008  
 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.  
 at  
 Alton City Hall  
 101 East Third Street  
 Alton, Illinois

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## Lincoln Reception

Saturday, April 12, 2008

\$30.00 per person

No. of reservations \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I cannot attend.

Enclosed is a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to:

Alton Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau  
 200 Piasa

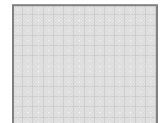
Alton, Illinois 62002

(618) 465-6676

Please respond by April 1, 2008.

Thank you for supporting this event and contributing to the restoration of Alton's historic sites.

Alton Museum of History and Art, Inc.  
 2809 College Avenue  
 Alton, Illinois 62002



**TO:**