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A giant undertaking

Can the Cardiff Giant still draw a crowd? Ty Marshal thinks so.

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Ty Marshal stands beside an historical marker in Cardiff, where the Cardiff Giant was "discovered" in 1865. Marshal is fundraising to recreate the Cardiff Giant and put it on display in Syracuse in honor of the hoax's 142nd anniversary. ([click for larger version](#))

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Inspiration for Ty Marshal's latest project actually came while he was researching a different concept.

Marshal, a local artist and activist who prefers the label "inter-disciplinarian," had set out to find whether Onondaga Lake had ever been rumored to harbor a lake monster.

Instead, he discovered a nearly 150-year-old hoax that entangled P.T. Barnum, the courts and thousands of residents, and began a few miles from Syracuse.

Heck of a hoax

In case you haven't heard of the Cardiff Giant, here's a breakdown:

Workers digging a well on Oct. 16, 1869, uncovered what appeared to be a 10-foot 4-inch petrified man on the farm of William C. Newell in Cardiff, about 12 miles south of downtown Syracuse.

Of course, the giant was a contracted carving, and the workers weren't digging a well — they were digging up the statue they'd buried a year earlier. But the goliath was put on display right there on the farm, where Newell charged 25 cents per viewing, and it was six months before the jig was up.

"Giants were a thing back then," Marshal said. Petrified, or fossilized, giants had been popping up all over the world for years by the time the Cardiff Giant was uncovered. So it was no surprise that locals showed up by the wagon load to get a glimpse of their own giant.



[courtesy the farmer's museum.](#)

Crowds line up to pay for a peek at the Cardiff Giant in 1869, above.

(click for larger version)

Word traveled fast, and after the Syracuse Journal reported the finding, the price to see the spectacle doubled. Less than a week later, a five-man syndicate from Syracuse purchased the petrified "man" for \$23,000, moved him to Syracuse and started charging a dollar a view. Syndicate investors included banker David Hannum.

After an agent reported back that more than 3,000 people had lined up for a glimpse of the goliath one afternoon, P.T. Barnum offered the owners \$50,000 to buy the giant. They refused, so Barnum created his own giant, put it on display, and started calling the Cardiff creature a fake.

"There's a sucker born every minute," said Hannum upon hearing of the crowds paying to see Barnum's giant.

Naturally, Hannum and crew took Barnum to court over the scandalous statement, but when they couldn't prove the authenticity of their own specimen, the judge declared one couldn't make a fake of a fake, and the case was thrown out.

Now, nearly 142 years later, the hoax is considered the biggest in U.S. history and the original Cardiff Giant rests in The Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown, (Barnum's "fake" is on display at Marvin's Marvelous Machinery Museum in Farming Hills, Mich.).

Keeping a 142-year-old joke fresh

Back in present-day Syracuse, Marshal believes the story holds enough intrigue and complexity to translate to the 2011 crowd.



[courtesy the farmer's museum.](#)

The giant, a detailed, 10-foot 4-inch limestone carving, was designed to fool. (*[click for larger version](#)*)

That's why he's attempting to re-create both the giant, and the spectacle, with "There's a Sucker Born Every Minute: Recreating the Cardiff Giant."

Spectators won't be searching for clues of authenticity or evidence of ancient men, but Marshal is confident locals will still revel in the chance to relive history.

Marshal said he plans to stay as historically accurate as possible when he "discovers" his own giant, a replica he'll build himself, in Lipe Art Park on Oct. 16.

Through a partnership with the Westside Arts Council, Marshal will pitch a tent right there where the giant lies, just as Newell did in his field in 1869, and charge a quarter per viewing. After a few days on the West Side, Marshal said the giant will travel downtown, by horse and buggy, he hopes, to the City Hall Atrium — the same location the original giant was displayed when it came to Syracuse.

There, he'll charge a buck to see it, just like Hannum and company.

"I'm not raising prices for inflation: 1869 prices!" he said.

The combination of folklore and freakshow will get people to the tent, Marshal believes.

Onondaga Historical Association Executive Director Gregg Tripoli agrees.

"It's a fascinating story," Tripoli said. "It was major bucks back then, and it was a major hoax. It got national attention."

He said there's an element of the circus sideshow that appeals to people, as does the chance to relive history and learn a local legend.

To expand appeal, Marshal is organizing related programming throughout the city. He's also partnering with local businesses to incorporate the giant into their marketing, trying to reflect how, for a few months at least, the Cardiff Giant became the center of Central New York life.

So far, he's partnered with WAC and OHA, the Near Westside Initiative and Gear Factory, Sparky Town and bc restaurants, Syracuse Soapworks and Scholaro Shulman Cohen Fetter & Burstein law firm.

Marshal hopes to see the giant in advertisements and marketing materials for the same local businesses that would benefit from a boost in tourism.

"The Cardiff Giant was a huge money maker, and I think one could equate the atmosphere around the giant with today's branding initiatives and marketing schemes," said Erin Richardson, director of collections at The Farmer's Museum.

Richardson said many fourth-grade classes visit the museum, and the giant attracts a lot of attention.

"Most kids run over immediately and ask 'is this a real giant?'" she said. "Obviously, the giant still has powers of deception after all these years!"

Now all Marshal has to do is prove that his fake of a fake will capture the city's curiosity.

For more on the project, [visit the project blog at syracusecardiffgiant.blogspot.com](http://syracusecardiffgiant.blogspot.com) syracusecardiffgiant.blogspot.com or help pitch in [here at the Kickstarter page](#).

Editor's note: P.T. Barnum offered \$50,000 to purchase the giant from the Syracuse syndicate, not \$150,000 as written in the story originally. We apologize for the error.

Read more: <http://www.eaglenewsonline.com/Articles-c-2011-07-26-109404.114134-sub-A-giant-undertaking.html#print#ixzz1TbHTDu8z>