

The Cardiff Giant is returning to Syracuse — thanks to local artist Ty Marshal

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Michelle Gabel/The Post-Standard

Ty Marshal is building a replica of Cardiff Giant at the Gear Factory art studios.

Syracuse, NY — Ty Marshal is beginning an adventure that will take him back 142 years, to an event of Syracuse history many folks may have forgotten.

He's building a replica of the Cardiff Giant. The way-past lifelike figure of a man was carved in Chicago out of a piece of gypsum from Iowa. Later, on Oct. 16, 1879, it was dug up on a farm at

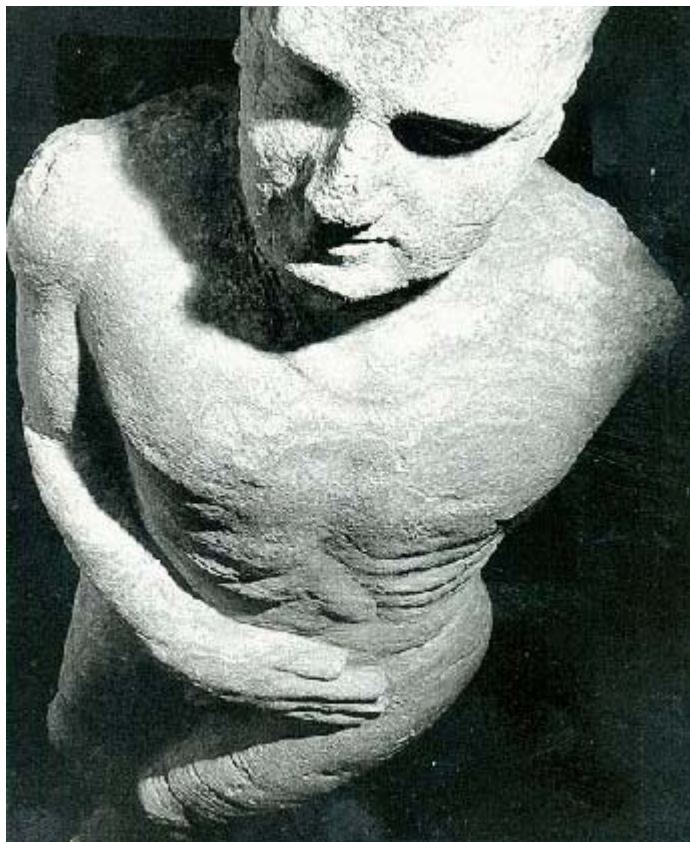
Cardiff, south of modern Route 20.

Later still, it was declared a hoax.

Ty, a Syracuse artist, scenic designer and actor, plans to bury his replica in Lipe Art Park on West Fayette Street and dig it up again on the anniversary of the original Giant discovery, Oct. 16, 2011.

Ty said Wednesday he plans to sculpt his replica out of material called hypertufa, a blend of Portland cement, peat moss and Pearl-lite, a plastic substance sometimes used to create the small balls put in antique milk bottles for display.





Provided photo

The original Cardiff Giant sits in the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown

"I tried using plaster, but it doesn't work," Ty explained, standing in his studio at the Gear Factory, a former industrial building on Syracuse's Near West Side that's been converted for artists' workshops. "This material – my mother, Wendy Pitoniak suggested it to me – is easier to work and stands up to the elements."

The reproduction will follow the original Giant's dimensions: the body will be 10 feet, 4½ inches long, among other specifications. The original weighed more than 2,900 pounds.

Ty explained he is working up lots of plans and spin-offs to go along with displaying the replica, which will be public shortly after it is "rediscovered." He plans to move it – maybe by horse and wagon – from the Art Park downtown to the Atrium of City Hall Commons, which is across from street from where it was shown 142 years ago, in the Bastable Block (now the State Tower Building).

"This is a theatrical event," according to Ty, who is a native of Syracuse and studied theater and art in college. His family roots go back to his great grandmother, Francis Sacco, who lived on Oswego Street, in the Near West Side neighborhood. He was one of the founders and first curator of Lipe Art Park.

He said he's already got arrangements in place to sell Giant-related items at a gift shop in the Atrium, including Cardiff Giant soap, candy, wine, coffee and T-shirts that read "I saw the Cardiff Giant, in SYRACUSE, N.Y." There will be tie-ins to reading of a Cardiff Giant play, a "mock-u-mentary" by Syracuse's Media Unit and events in Homer.

Homer was where David Hannum, a bumpkin banker, lived. He was one of the investors who bought the original Giant from William "Stub" Newell, where it was dug up. The hoaxer was a man named George Hull of Binghamton. Hannum brought the figure to Syracuse, where it was displayed for one dollar a look. Ty Marshal said he plans to charge a nickel at first, then increase admissions to 25 cents and finally \$1, just as was done back in 1869.

He said he was drawn to the idea of a Giant replica after researching for a mystical event in Syracuse history. He also was charmed by the folk tale among Onondaga Indians, about "stone giants" who once menaced the nation. He calls himself a "history buff."

Ty said he hasn't seen the original Giant, which is display at the Farmers Museum in Cooperstown, but plans a trip to the Otsego County village soon. He's aware of other replicas, including one made for Homer's sesquicentennial

celebration that's owned by a Homer business man and will be displayed there in concert with Ty's Syracuse show. He has visited the Hannum homestead in Homer. The copy P.T. Barnum had made is in a museum in Minnesota.

Ty said the Onondaga Historical Association is a sponsor of his event and staff has promised to provide him with historical panels to accompany the exhibit. He praised the association archives as "amazing."

Homer also will screen a copy of the 1934 film, "David Harum," starring Will Rogers. The community has claimed for years that David Hannum was the model for David Harum, the character created by Edward Westcott of Syracuse for his novel, published in 1898. Pals of Westcott, who died of TB before the book was published, have denied the connection to Hannum.

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