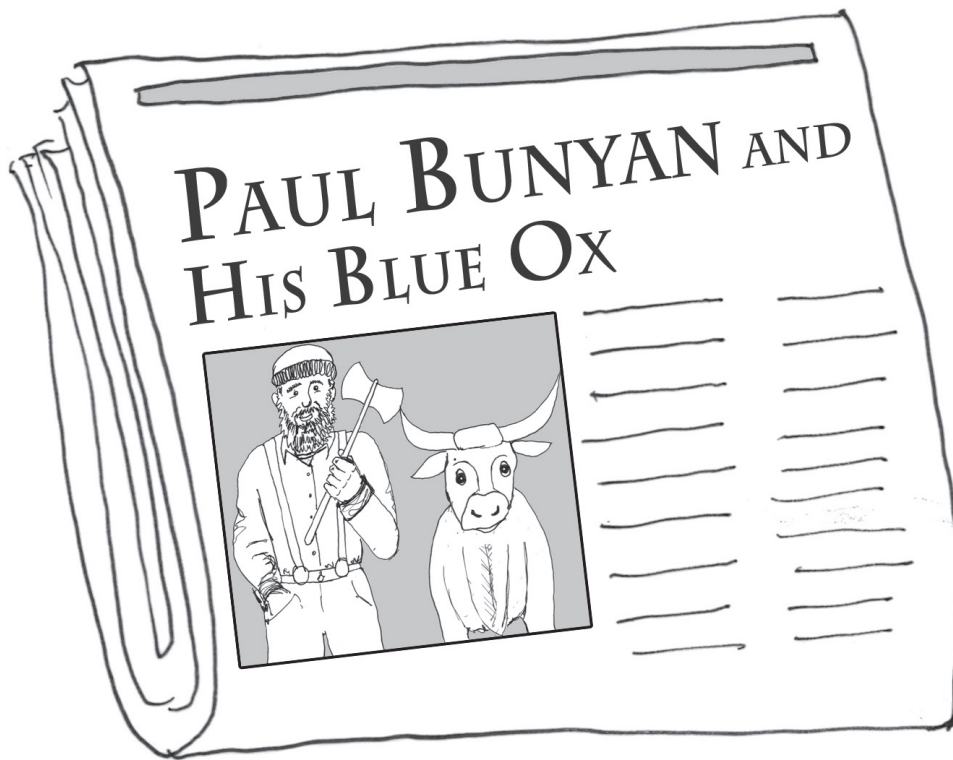


# The Making of a Legend

## The Origins of the Paul Bunyan Story



Paul Bunyan is an American legend. Legends often start with an unusual story about an event or person. The story is told over and over again. As time passes, the story gets exaggerated. Storytellers add to the story. Soon it becomes larger than life—a legend.

So how did the legend of Paul Bunyan start? Historians believe it is based on a combination of tales about two real-life men. Both were French-Canadian lumberjacks who lived in the 1800s.

Bon Jean was a French-Canadian hero. He fought in the Papineau Rebellion of 1837. Many people knew and liked Bon Jean. After all, he was a hero. The name Bunyan probably came from Bon Jean. In French, his name is pronounced BOHN-JAWN.

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Paul Bunyan got his name from Bon Jean, but his larger-than-life character is mostly based on stories about Fabian Fournier. Fabian moved to Michigan after the Civil War to work in logging.

He was six feet tall with enormous hands. Being tall and powerful, Fabian stood out. In those days, the average man stood five feet seven inches tall.

Fabian stood out for other reasons, too—not all of them good. He was known as a strong axman and mighty lumberjack. But he had a bad reputation. He often drank and got into brawls, which are fistfights.

Fabian became famous after he was murdered in 1875. The sensational murder trial that followed got people talking about his life. Soon, tall tales about his life began to surface. For example, they said that he had two sets of teeth and that he would bite off chunks of wooden poles.

Loggers helped spread Paul Bunyan tales across the country. They also invented more stories about him as they sat together around a campfire. Loggers began to compete to see who could tell the best Paul Bunyan story.

Over time, the legend of Paul Bunyan grew to include a giant blue ox. And his movements around the country also explained how many American landmarks were formed, like the Grand Canyon and Great Lakes.

