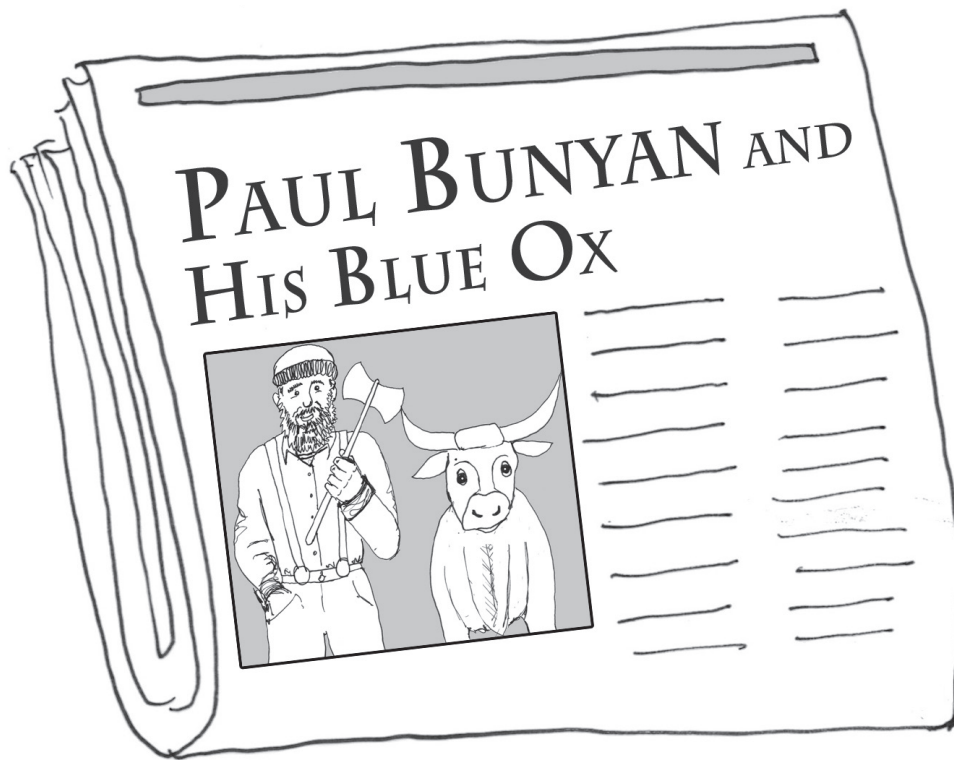


The Making of a Legend

The Origins of the Paul Bunyan Story

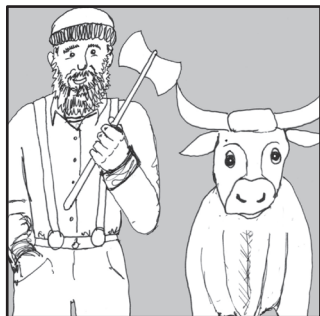


Paul Bunyan is an American legend. Legends often start with a real event or person. The story is told over and over again. People add to the story. Soon it becomes larger than life—a legend.

So how did the legend of Paul Bunyan start? From from a mix of tales about two real-life men. Both were French-Canadian lumberjacks. Both 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, it is said like BOHN-JAWN.

The Making of a Legend



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 and had enormous hands.

He was very tall and powerful. This made him stand out. In those days, the average man was five foot seven.

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

Fabian became famous after his murder in 1875. A dramatic murder trial followed. It got people talking about his life. Soon, tall tales about his life began to spread. For example, they said that he two sets of teeth and that he would bite off chunks of wooden poles.

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

Over time, the legend of Paul Bunyan grew. Soon, it began to include a giant blue ox. His movements around the country began to explain how many American landmarks were formed, like the Grand Canyon and Great Lakes.

