

The Making of a Legend

The Origins of the Paul Bunyan Story



Paul Bunyan is an American legend. All legends have to start somewhere. Many 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? It probably came from mix of tales about two real-life men. Both were from Canada. Both became lumberjacks. Both lived in the 1800s. One had a name that sounded like Paul's. The other did not.

Bon Jean was a Canadian war hero. Many people knew him. Many people liked him. After all, he was a hero. The name Bunyan probably came from Bon Jean. In French, it sounds like Bunyan.

The Making of a Legend



Paul Bunyan got his name from Bon Jean. But his larger-than-life character is mostly based on a man named Fabian Fournier.

Fabian stood out. He was tall and strong. At 6 feet, he was taller than most men. He had big, strong hands. He was a great lumberjack.

Fabian stood out for other reasons, too. Not all of them good. He had a bad reputation. He often drank. He liked to brawl, or fistfight.

Fabian was murdered in 1875. Soon after, they arrested his murderer. They put him on trial. The trial was very dramatic. It made Fabian famous. People read news reports about the trial. They talked about Fabian's life. These stories became larger than life. Some said that he two sets of teeth. Others said that he would bite off hunks from wooden poles.

Lumberjacks loved Paul Bunyan stories. They helped make him into a legend. At night, they would sit around a fire together. They told each other stories. They liked to tell Paul Bunyan stories. They made up a lot of them. They began to compete to see who could tell the best one.

Time passed. Soon there were many stories about Paul Bunyan. He had a blue ox. They had many adventures together. Some even explained how parts of America were formed. These included the Grand Canyon and Great Lakes.

