

This Day in History... March 17, 1893

The Legend of Paul Bunyan

March 17, 1893 marked the first recorded reference to Paul Bunyan in the *Gladwin County Record*.

Logging was the principal work on the frontier after the great days of exploration and fur trapping. The cry for lumber at home and abroad kept loggers pushing deeper into the woods. It was during this push across the northern continent that Paul Bunyan became the lumberjack's hero.

Some believe the legends of Paul Bunyan were in part based on Canadian lumberjack Fabian Fournier. Standing at six feet tall, he towered over most other men and it was said he had giant hands and two complete sets of teeth, which he used to bite wooden rails. Hired as a logging foreman in Michigan, he was nicknamed Saginaw Joe and was known for drinking and fighting. After he was murdered, the stories of his life spread through logging camps. Another French lumberman, Bon Jean, is also considered an inspiration. He participated in the Papineau Rebellion of 1837 against the British regime. It's been suggested that his full name is the source of "Bunyan."



Bunyan stamp from the Folk Heroes issue



Bunyan is often accompanied by his blue ox, Babe.

Paul Bunyan stories evolved in logging shanties during the long winter evenings. After cutting and hauling from dawn to dusk, and after eating a filling meal, lumberjacks gathered 'round to exchange stories of the greatest lumberjack that ever was. As lumber camps followed the great forests westward, Paul Bunyan acquired the traits and exploits of other people.

On March 17, 1893, Michigan's *Gladwin County Record* published the first known printed reference to Paul Bunyan, reading "Paul Bunion is getting ready while the water is high to take his drive out." The line appeared in the local news section, and was likely an inside joke, as Bunyan wouldn't become a household name for several years.

In 1904, an uncredited editorial in the *Duluth News Tribune* described Bunyan's year in North Dakota, during which he cut down millions of pieces of timber and the cooks in his giant camp skated on the stove with hams on their feet to cook for him.

In 1906, James MacGillivray wrote the first written Paul Bunyan story, "Round River," for an Oscoda, Michigan, newspaper in 1906. MacGillivray worked with a poet on a Bunyan poem for *American Lumberman* magazine two years later. That helped bring the character much more widespread attention.

Then in 1914, W.B. Laughead began using Paul Bunyan to advertise the Red River Lumber Company of Westwood, California and Paul Bunyan's exploits became superhuman. This was the time Paul acquired Babe, the Blue Ox. Together, fueled by a powerful mixture of flapjacks and syrup, they dug the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River, shaved the slopes of the Rocky Mountains, and gouged the Grand Canyon – just for starters.

Over the years, several authors produced their own stories about Bunyan and in 1958, Walt Disney released an animated musical short about the legendary character. There are several Bunyan statues across the country with Bemidji, Minnesota, home of the first, built in 1937. The one in Akely, Minnesota, claims to be the "World's Largest Paul Bunyan." Though not the tallest, it's creator says it would be if it was standing up – saying it would reach 60 feet! The tallest Bunyan is believe to be in Klamath, California, standing at 49 feet tall. The statue also waves and says "Hello there!"



Bunyan tales were born out of lumberjack logging camps.

This Day in History... March 17, 1893

The Legend of Paul Bunyan

March 17, 1893 marked the first recorded reference to Paul Bunyan in the *Gladwin County Record*.

Logging was the principal work on the frontier after the great days of exploration and fur trapping. The cry for lumber at home and abroad kept loggers pushing deeper into the woods. It was during this push across the northern continent that Paul Bunyan became the lumberjack's hero.

Some believe the legends of Paul Bunyan were in part based on Canadian lumberjack Fabian Fournier. Standing at six feet tall, he towered over most other men and it was said he had giant hands and two complete sets of teeth, which he used to bite wooden rails. Hired as a logging foreman in Michigan, he was nicknamed Saginaw Joe and was known for drinking and fighting. After he was murdered, the stories of his life spread through logging camps. Another French lumberman, Bon Jean, is also considered an inspiration. He participated in the Papineau Rebellion of 1837 against the British regime. It's been suggested that his full name is the source of "Bunyan."



Bunyan stamp from the Folk Heroes issue



Bunyan is often accompanied by his blue ox, Babe.

Paul Bunyan stories evolved in logging shanties during the long winter evenings. After cutting and hauling from dawn to dusk, and after eating a filling meal, lumberjacks gathered 'round to exchange stories of the greatest lumberjack that ever was. As lumber camps followed the great forests westward, Paul Bunyan acquired the traits and exploits of other people.

On March 17, 1893, Michigan's *Gladwin County Record* published the first known printed reference to Paul Bunyan, reading "Paul Bunion is getting ready while the water is high to take his drive out." The line appeared in the local news section, and was likely an inside joke, as Bunyan wouldn't become a household name for several years.

In 1904, an uncredited editorial in the *Duluth News Tribune* described Bunyan's year in North Dakota, during which he cut down millions of pieces of timber and the cooks in his giant camp skated on the stove with hams on their feet to cook for him.

In 1906, James MacGillivray wrote the first written Paul Bunyan story, "Round River," for an Oscoda, Michigan, newspaper in 1906. MacGillivray worked with a poet on a Bunyan poem for *American Lumberman* magazine two years later. That helped bring the character much more widespread attention.

Then in 1914, W.B. Laughead began using Paul Bunyan to advertise the Red River Lumber Company of Westwood, California and Paul Bunyan's exploits became superhuman. This was the time Paul acquired Babe, the Blue Ox. Together, fueled by a powerful mixture of flapjacks and syrup, they dug the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River, shaved the slopes of the Rocky Mountains, and gouged the Grand Canyon – just for starters.

Over the years, several authors produced their own stories about Bunyan and in 1958, Walt Disney released an animated musical short about the legendary character. There are several Bunyan statues across the country with Bemidji, Minnesota, home of the first, built in 1937. The one in Akely, Minnesota, claims to be the "World's Largest Paul Bunyan." Though not the tallest, it's creator says it would be if it was standing up – saying it would reach 60 feet! The tallest Bunyan is believe to be in Klamath, California, standing at 49 feet tall. The statue also waves and says "Hello there!"



Bunyan tales were born out of lumberjack logging camps.