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Pawl Bunyan and His Blue Ox, Babe

C. W. Martin
Iowa State College

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American mythology has no epic hero whose deeds and achievements can in any way compare with the exploits of the great Pawl Bunyon, the patron saint of the foresters. His fame rests secure in the tales of the thousands of leather-throated lumberjacks who worked under the great Pawl during the bonanza days of the great forests.

Pawl was a dyed-in-the-wool American, born in the northern part of Maine late in the seventeenth century. His father was a pioneer, having been the man who built the Mayflower and took passage on the gallant ship when it brought its precious cargo of discontents and horse thieves to the free shores of America. By nature, the elder Bunyon was much opposed to the type of men who wore boiled shirts and posed for Arrow collar advertisements. He swore that no son of his should ever develop into a social pussy willow and besmirch the escutcheon of a family who boasted of the longest prison record of any family in Merrie England. Consequently he built a bough bed for his infant and placed Pawl to bed in the northeast forty each night. As Pawl was an imaginative child, he used to vision terrible ogres and blood-curdling Indians in the darkness of the forest and in his sleep he would roll and toss as he dreamed of fighting off packs of howling wolves. Despite his restless slumber Pawl grew at a prodigious rate in the invigorating air of the balsam forest. At four weeks of age he had grown a full beard and each evening he destroyed twenty acres of balsam and white pine in his fretful slumber. The conservationist became alarmed at the rapid destruction of the virgin forest.
and ordered the elder Bunyon to find some other place for his lusty infant to slumber. Consequently a floating cradle was built and anchored in the bay of Fundy. This move failed to bring relief from trouble. The timber was no longer destroyed, but the lives of the people along the coast were jeopardized by the seventy-five foot tides caused by Pawl's rocking about in his cradle. Furthermore, the sea was so rough that all coastwise shipping was held up and the British fleet was summoned to come up and drive Pawl from his cradle. They came up seven strong and fired seven broadsides at long range. Pawl naturally was frightened and he leaped from his cradle and swam ashore. His leap caused such a tremendous wave that the seven frigates were sunk. This was indeed a misfortune, but British history tells us the damage was settled by commandeering the cradle, which contained enough lumber for seven more frigates.

Like many others of our famous men, little is known of Pawl's youth. It is not until he became of age that we hear of him again. On his twenty-first birthday the elder Bunyon called Pawl to his side and presented him with a cerulean blue ox, which was affectionately named Babe. Pawl then told his father that he was about to set out in the world to seek his fortune. The old man gave Pawl his blessing and the youth set out heavy-hearted with his blue ox Babe tucked under his arm.

It might be well to digress from our narrative for a moment and tell more about the blue ox. He was by no means an ordinary ox. He was born on the 29th of February, which may account for his leaping far in advance of his fellow bovines. At any rate, his size was tremendous. One time when Pawl wanted to buy a special harness for his pet he had to call on one of his old sailor friends to figure out his girth. This was accomplished by using the same reckonings as are used in great circle sailing. Babe's feet were also of heroic proportions. Each time he was shod it was necessary to open up a new iron mine. Another unique feature that was common only to Babe was the annual shedding of his horns.

Now that we have a clear-cut impression of Pawl and Babe we will be able to appreciate more fully how Pawl accomplished some of his almost unbelievable tasks. One of the most noteworthy accomplishments that we owe to this great man was the building of the sourdough road from Alaska to Mexico. During the winter of the blue snow, Pawl was logging Totem poles in Alaska. Affairs were getting desperate. Every day six feet of snow fell and at last Pawl threw up his hands in despair. For the first time in his life
he was forced to give up to the elements. He called into council Sourdough Pete and asked him if he could make a road of biscuit dough from Alaska to Mexico. Pete replied that he was not afraid to tackle anything but his mother-in-law and the next morning the great Hegira of Pawl’s camp began. Each day Pete prepared his dough and each day another parallel of latitude lay behind them. Finally Mexico was reached and today you can still see the monument of Pawl’s sagacity and Pete’s culinary skill. This great highway is often termed the Rocky Mountains, but I am sure that anyone who has ever tasted a six day old sour dough biscuit will agree that the consistency and texture of that biscuit is the same as the material from which the Rocky Mountains are made.

There is another incident connected with Pawl’s work in Mexico that winter that is of world-wide interest. During the latter part of March Pawl’s crew became dissatisfied. They had fallen under the romantic influence of old Spain and they wanted shirts which would rival in brilliancy and design the shirts of the peons with whom they were associated. Consequently, Pawl sent Brimstone Bill, Babe’s chauffeur, to the aurora borealis to get some especially fancy colors. Bill set out with the Babe and two great kegs for the paint. Everything went along well. Bill received a great quantity of striped and plain colored paints and was nearing the completion of his homeward journey when Babe became frightened at a contour cat that happened to caper across his path. With a tremendous bellow he began to paw the ground and weave from side to side. Brimstone tried in vain to stop his charge. Gentle persuasion failing, he truculently addressed the ox with all the passion and eloquence of the author of the “Mule Skinner’s Dictionary”—a book that is noted for its forceful adjectives. Babe would not be quieted and when his fright had run its course a great gorge, blazoned with a myriad of fascinating colors, yawned, where previously there had been a dreary waste of sand and cactus. Today people from many lands make pilgrimages to that spot and it is known throughout the world as the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.

Pawl and his blue ox are responsible for many of our great scenic wonders here in America and it is with regret that I am not allowed the space to relate how he built the Mississippi River and heated the geysers of the Yellowstone. These will without doubt be published in some future edition of the Forester, together with character sketches of different members of Pawl’s crew and other information concerning Pawl’s camps and logging operations.