

The Birth of Paul Bunyan

Now I hear tell that Paul Bunyan was born in Bangor, Maine. It took five giant storks to deliver Paul to his parents. His first bed was a lumber wagon pulled by a team of horses. His father had to drive the wagon up to the top of Maine and back whenever he wanted to rock the baby to sleep.

As a newborn, Paul Bunyan could hollar so loud he scared all the fish out of the rivers and streams. All the local frogs started wearing earmuffs so they wouldn't go deaf when Paul screamed for his breakfast. His parents had to milk two dozen cows morning and night to keep his milk bottle full and his mother had to feed him ten barrels of porridge every two hours to keep his stomach from rumbling and knocking the house down.

Within a week of his birth, Paul Bunyan could fit into his father's clothes. After three weeks, Paul rolled around so much during his nap that he destroyed four square miles of prime timberland. His parents were at their wits' end! They decided to build him a raft and floated it off the coast of Maine. When Paul turned over, it caused a 75 foot tidal wave in the Bay of Fundy. They had to send the British Navy over to Maine to wake him up. The sailors fired every canon they had in the fleet for seven hours straight before Paul Bunyan woke from his nap! When he stepped off the raft, Paul accidentally sank four war ships and he had to scramble around scooping sailors out of the water before they drowned.

After this incident, Paul's parents decided the East was just too plumb small for him, and so the family moved to Minnesota.

Babe the Blue Ox

Well now, one winter it was so cold that all the geese flew backward and all the fish moved south and even the snow turned blue. Late at night, it got so frigid that all spoken words froze solid afore they could be heard. People had to wait until sunup to find out what folks were talking about the night before.

Paul Bunyan went out walking in the woods one day during that Winter of the Blue Snow. He was knee-deep in blue snow when he heard a funny sound between a bleat and a snort. Looking down, he saw a teeny-tiny baby blue ox jest a hopping about in the snow and snorting with rage on account of he was too short to see over the drifts.

Paul Bunyan laughed when he saw the spunky little critter and took the little blue mite home with him. He warmed the little ox up by the fire and the little fellow fluffed up and dried out, but he remained as blue as the snow that had stained him in the first place. So Paul named him Babe the Blue Ox.

Well, any creature raised in Paul Bunyan's camp tended to grow to massive proportions, and Babe was no exception. Folks that stared at him for five minutes could see him growing right before their eyes. He grew so big that 42 axe handles plus a plug of tobacco could fit between his eyes and it took a murder of crows a whole day to fly from one horn to the other. The laundryman used his horns to hang up all the camp laundry, which would dry lickety-split because of all the wind blowing around at that height.

Whenever he got an itch, Babe the Blue Ox had to find a cliff to rub against, 'cause whenever he tried to rub against a tree it fell over and begged for mercy. To whet his appetite, Babe would chew up thirty bales of hay, wire and all. It took six men with picaroons to get all the wire out of Babe's teeth after his morning snack. Right after that he'd eat a ton of grain for lunch and then come pestering around the cook - Sourdough Sam - begging for another snack.

Babe the Blue Ox was a great help around Paul Bunyan's logging camp. He could pull anything that had two ends, so Paul often used him to straighten out the pesky, twisted logging roads.

By the time Babe had pulled the twists and kinks out of all the roads leading to the lumber camp, there was twenty miles of extra road left flopping about with nowhere to go. So Paul rolled them up and used them to lay a new road into new timberland.

Paul also used Babe the Blue Ox to pull the heavy tank wagon which was used to coat the newly-straightened lumber roads with ice in the winter, until one day the tank sprang a leak that trickled south and became the Mississippi River. After that, Babe stuck to hauling logs. Only he hated working in the summertime, so Paul had to paint the logging roads white after the spring thaw so that Babe would keep working through the summer.

One summer, as Babe the Blue Ox was hauling a load of logs down the white-washed road and dreaming of the days when the winter would feel cold again and the logs would slide easier on the "ice", he glanced over the top of the mountain and caught a glimpse of a pretty yeller calf grazing in a field. Well, he twisted out of his harness lickety-split and stepped over the mountain to introduce himself. It was love at first sight, and Paul had to abandon his load and buy Bessie the Yeller Cow from the farmer before Babe would do any more hauling.

Bessie the Yeller Cow grew to the massive, yet dainty proportions that were suitable for the mate of Babe the Blue Ox. She had long yellow eyelashes that tickled the lumberjacks standing on the other end of camp each time she blinked. She produced all the dairy products for the lumber camp. Each day, Sourdough Sam made enough butter from her cream to grease the giant pancake griddle and sometimes there was enough left over to butter the toast!

The only bone of contention between Bessie and Babe was the weather. Babe loved the ice and snow and Bessie loved warm summer days. One winter, Bessie grew so thin and pale that Paul Bunyan asked his clerk Johnny Inkslinger to make her a pair of green goggles so she would think it was summer. After that, Bessie grew happy and fat again, and produced so much butter that Paul Bunyan used the leftovers to grease the whitewashed lumber roads in summer. With the roads so slick all year round, hauling logs became much easier for Babe the Blue Ox, and so Babe eventually came to like summer almost as much as Bessie.

Frozen Flames

One winter, shortly after Paul Bunyan dug Lake Michigan as a drinking hole for his blue ox, Babe, he decided to camp out in the Upper Peninsula. It was so cold in that logging camp, that one evening, the temperature dropped to 68 degrees below zero. Each degree in the camp thermometer measured sixteen inches long and the flames in the lanterns froze solid. No one, not even Paul Bunyan, could blow them out.

The lumberjacks didn't want the bunkhouse lit at night, because they wouldn't get any sleep. So they put the lanterns way outside of camp where they wouldn't disturb anyone. But they forgot about the lanterns, so that when thaw came in the early spring, the lanterns flared up again and set all of northern Michigan on fire! They had to wake Paul Bunyan up so he could stamp out the fire with his boots.

One spring day, the loggers on the Wisconsin River discovered a huge log jam, the biggest they'd ever seen. The logs were piled about two hundred feet high and the jam went upriver for a mile or more. Those loggers chopped and hauled at the jam, but it wouldn't budge an inch. So they called for Paul Bunyan to give them a hand.

Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox sized up the log jam. Then Paul told the loggers to stand back. He put Babe in the river in front of the log jam and began shooting his rifle, peppering the Blue Ox with shot. Babe thought he was being bothered by a particularly nasty breed of fly, so he began swishing his tail back and forth.

Well, that stirred things up a bit in the river. It got so agitated that the water began to flow upstream, taking the logs with it. Bit by bit, the log jam broke apart. Finally, Paul pulled Babe out of the water, and the river and logs began to float downstream again the way they should.

Paul Bunyan's Kitchen

One winter, Paul Bunyan came to log along the Little Gimlet in Oregon. Ask any old timer who was logging that winter, and they'll tell you I ain't lying when I say his kitchen covered about ten miles of territory.

That stove, now, she were a grand one. An acre long, taller than a scrub pine, and when she was warm, she melted the snow for about twenty miles around. The men logging in the vicinity never had to put on their jackets 'til about noon on a day when Paul Bunyan wanted flapjacks.

It was quite a site to see, that cook of Paul Bunyan's making flapjacks. Cookie would send four of the boys up with a side of hog tied to each of their snowshoes, and they'd skate around up there keeping the griddle greased while Cookie and seven other men flipped flapjacks for Paul Bunyan. Took them about an hour to make enough flapjacks to fill him up. The rest of us had to wait our turn.

The table we had set up for the camp was about ten miles long. We rigged elevators to the table to bring the vittles to each end, and some of the younger lads in the camp rode bicycles down the path at the center, carrying cakes and such wherever they were called for.

We had one mishap that winter. Babe the Blue Ox accidentally knocked a bag of dried peas off the countertop when he swished his tail. Well, them peas flew so far and so fast out of the kitchen that they knocked over a dozen loggers coming home for lunch, clipped the tops off of several pine trees, and landed in the hot spring. We had pea soup to eat for the rest of the season, which was okay by me, but them boys whose Mama's insisted they bath more than once a year were pretty sore at losing their swimming hole.

The Birth of Pecos Bill

Well now Pecos Bill was born in the usual way to a real nice cowpoke and his wife who were journeying west with their eighteen children. Bill's Ma knew right from the start that he was something else. He started talkin' before he was a month old, did his teething on his Pa's bowie knife and rode his first horse jest as soon as he learned to sit up on his own. When he started to crawl, Pecos Bill would slither out of the wagon while his Mama was cookin' supper and wrestle with the bear cubs and other wild animals that roamed the prairies.

Yep, the whole family was expecting great things of little Bill; until they lost him in the drink. Seems they took the wagons over the Pecos River while Pecos Bill was taking a nap and he got bounced out of the back and swept downstream afore anyone missed him. If he hadn't taught himself to swim right-quick, he would have been a goner!

Right about the time Pecos Bill was drying out and trying to get a fix on where he was, a Mama Coyote came along and decided to adopt the poor waif and raise him with the rest of her pups. So Pecos Bill spent the first fifteen years of his life running around with the coyote pack, howling to the moon, chasing prey across the prairies, and having the time of his life.

Pecos Bill plumb forgot all about his real family, until the day he turned sixteen and his older brother came along. He was punchin' a herd of long-horn cattle and had brought them down to drink from the Pecos River. The ol' cowpoke took one look at Pecos Bill and knew he'd found his long-lost brother, on account of he looked jest like their Ma, who'd died of a broken heart after they lost little Bill in the river.

"See here, ain't you Pecos Bill, my little brother?" demanded the cowpoke of Pecos Bill when he came jumping over a giant log to run about in the field and howl at the full moon.

"Don't think so," said Pecos Bill. "I'm a coyote! Listen to me howl!" Pecos Bill let out a horrendous shout and scampered about the field on all fours. He scared the herd so bad that the long horns almost stampeded.

"You stop that!" Bill's brother shouted after he got the cattle calmed down. "And tell me this; how come you ain't got a long bushy tail if you're a coyote."

That was a tricky question. Pecos Bill thought about it for a long time.

"I got fleas," he volunteered. "And I howl at the moon!"

"Everybody in Texas has fleas and howls at the moon. That ain't no excuse," said his big brother. "Any how, you can walk upright like a normal person and you can talk too. That ain't what a coyote does."

"I guess you're right," said Pecos Bill.

"Course I'm right. I'm your big brother and I outta know," snapped the cowpoke. "It's about time you stopped foolin' around on the prairie and became a cowboy like all the rest of us."

That made good sense to Pecos Bill. So he bid farewell to the coyote pack and went out west with his brother to learn to be a cowboy. Soon as he learned the ropes some, Pecos Bill began to realize that the cowboys needed some new tricks to help them cope with them stubborn longhorns. The cowboys kept getting the cows mixed up, which made the owners mad, so Pecos Bill invented the branding iron so they could put a mark on each cow telling everybody who owned it. Then he noticed that the other cowboys were having trouble making the wilder cows behave. Now whenever Pecos Bill saw a cow misbehavin', he'd jump on its back and ride it until it had bucked and kicked itself into behaving better. But the other cowboys weren't so skilled as Bill, so he invented the lasso to help them tame the wild cows.

Pecos Bill's brother was right proud of him. "Not bad for a kid raised by coyotes," he told his baby brother. "In another couple of years, you'll be the toughest cowboy in the world."

And he was right!

Pecos Bill finds a Hard Outfit

Well now, Texas jest became too tame for Pecos Bill once he killed off all the bad men, so he struck out for New Mexico, looking for a hard outfit. He asked an old trapper he met on the way where he could find a hard outfit, and the trapper directed Bill to a place where the fellers bit nails in half for fun. It sounded like a promisin' place to Bill, so he set off. But his durned fool hoss got its neck broke on the way, and Bill found himself afoot.

Bill went a walkin' with his saddle on his back. Suddenly, he come face to face with a rattlesnake 'round about fifteen feet long and lookin' fer trouble. Now Bill wanted to be fair to the rattler, so he let it get in a few jabs before he beat the stuffin' out of it. Being a kind man, when the snake was beat, he picked it up, wrapped it around his neck and carried it along with him.

They was a headin' through a narrow canyon when a cougar thought he'd have a bit of fun and jumped them. Bill never turned a hair. He jest put down his saddle and then whipped the tarnation out of the cougar. Hair flew everywhere, blocking the light sose the jackrabbits thought it was night and went to bed. Finally that cat were so beat he cried like a lost kitten and jest licked Bill's hand.

So Bill saddles him up and they tear off across them hills like forked lightning. Whenever Bill wanted to calm that cougar down, he'd just give him a tap with the rattlesnake. They set such a pace that they soon rolled into the hard outfit the trapper'd told Bill about. Quick as a wink, Bill jumps off the cougar, helps himself to some beans and coffee, wipes his mouth with a prickly pear and turns to look at the toughs sittin' around the fire.

"Who's the boss around here, anyhow?" he asks.

"I *was*," said a big mountain of a feller about seven foot tall and wide, "but you are now, stranger!"

Pecos Bill Rides a Tornado

Now everyone in the West knows that Pecos Bill could ride anything. No bronco could throw him, no sir! Fact is, I only heard of Bill getting' throwed once in his whole career as a cowboy. Yep, it was that time he was up Kansas way and decided to ride him a tornado.

Now Bill wasn't gonna ride jest any tornado, no ma'am. He waited for the biggest gol-durned tornado you ever saw. It was turning the sky black and green, and roaring so loud it woke up the farmers away over in China. Well, Bill jest grabbed that there tornado, pushed it to the ground and jumped on its back. The tornado whipped and whirled and sidewinded and generally cussed its bad luck all the way down to Texas. Tied the rivers into knots, flattened all the forests so bad they had to rename one place the Staked Plains. But Bill jest rode along all calm-like, give it an occasional jab with his spurs.

Finally, that tornado decided it wasn't getting this cowboy off its back no-how. So it headed west to California and jest rained itself out. Made so much water it washed out the Grand Canyon. That tornado was down to practically nothing when Bill finally fell off. He hit the ground so hard it sank below sea level. Folks call the spot Death Valley.

Anyway, that's how rodeo got started. Though most cowboys stick to broncos these days.

Death of Pecos Bill

Now, Pecos Bill didn't live forever. Nope, not even Bill could figure out how to do that. Here's how he died.

When Bill was gettin' on in years, a Boston man came down to New Mexico for a visit. He fancied himself a bit of a cowboy. Got himself one of them mail-order suits, don't ya know. The ones with the lizard skin boots, a shiny brass belt buckle, a new pair of blue jeans and a huge ten gallon hat with not a speck of dust on it. Well, when Pecos Bill saw him trying to swagger into a bar, he jest lay down on the sidewalk and laughed himself to death!

Casey Jones

Casey Jones, that heroic railroad engineer of the Cannonball, was known as the man who always brought the train in on time. He would blow the whistle so it started off soft but would increase to a wail louder than a banshee before dying off. Got so as people would recognize that whistle and know when Casey was driving past.

April 29, 1900, Casey brought the Cannonball into Memphis dead on time. As he was leaving, he found out one of the other engineers was sick and unable to make his run. So Casey volunteered to help out his friend. He pulled the train out of the station about eleven p.m., an hour and thirty-five minutes late. Casey was determined to make up the time. As soon as he could, he highballed out of Memphis (highballing means to go very fast and take a lot of risks to get where your headed) and started making up for lost time.

About four a.m., when he had nearly made up all the time on the run, Casey rounded a corner near Vaughn, Mississippi and saw a stalled freight train on the track. He shouted for his fireman to jump. The fireman made it out alive, but Casey Jones died in the wreck, one hand on the brake and one on the whistle chord.

THE BALLAD OF CASEY JONES

Come all you rounders if you want to hear
A story 'bout a brave engineer,
Casey Jones was the rounder's name
"Twas on the Illinois Central that he won his fame.

Casey Jones, he loved a locomotive.
Casey Jones, a mighty man was he.
Casey Jones run his final locomotive
With the Cannonball Special on the old I.C.

Casey pulled into Memphis on Number Four,
The engine foreman met him at the roundhouse door;
Said, "Joe Lewis won't be able to make his run
So you'll have to double out on Number One."

If I can have Sim Webb, my fireman, my engine 382,
Although I'm tired and weary, I'll take her through.
Put on my whistle that come in today
Cause I mean to keep her wailing as we ride and pray.

Casey Jones, mounted the cabin,
Casey Jones, with the orders in his hand.
Casey Jones, he mounted the cabin,
Started on his farewell Journey to the promised land.

They pulled out of Memphis nearly two hours late,
Soon they were speeding at a terrible rate.
And the people knew by the whistle's moan.
That the man at the throttle was Casey Jones.

Need more coal there, fireman Sim,
Open that door and heave it in.

Give that shovel all you got
And we'll reach Canton on the dot

On April 30, 1900, that rainy morn,
Down in Mississippi near the town of Vaughn,
Sped the Cannonball Special only two minutes late
Traveling 70 miles an hour when they saw a freight.

The caboose number 83 was on the main line,
Casey's last words were "Jump, Sim, while you have
the time.

"At 3:52 that morning came the fareful end,
Casey took his farewell trip to the promised land.

Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
With the whistle in his hand.
Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
But we'll all see Casey in the promised land.

His wife and three children were left to mourn
The tragic death of Casey on that April morn.
May God through His goodness keep them by His grace
Till they all meet together in that heavenly place.

Casey's body lies buried in Jackson, Tennessee
Close beside the tracks of the old I.C.
May his spirit live forever throughout the land
As the greatest of all heroes of a railroad man.

Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
Casey Jones, with the whistle in his hand.
Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
But we'll all see Casey in the promised land.

Davy Crockett and the Frozen Dawn

One winter, it was so cold that the dawn froze solid. The sun got caught between two ice blocks, and the earth iced up so much that it couldn't turn. The first rays of sunlight froze halfway over the mountain tops. They looked like yellow icicles dripping towards the ground.

Now Davy Crockett was headed home after a successful night hunting when the dawn froze up so solid. Being a smart man, he knew he had to do something quick or the earth was a goner. He had a freshly killed bear on his back, so he whipped it off, climbed right up on those rays of sunlight and began beating the hot bear carcass against the ice blocks which were squashing the sun. Soon a gush of hot oil burst out of the bear and it melted the ice. Davy gave the sun a good hard kick to get it started, and the sun's heat unfroze the earth and started it spinning again. So Davy lit his pipe on the sun, shouldered the bear, slid himself down the sun rays before they melted and took a bit of sunrise home in his pocket.

Daniel Boone's Dear

Late one night, Daniel Boone and a friend went out fire hunting. Fire hunting involves the shining of the light from a fire pan (a pan full of blazing pine knots) into the woods. The light reflects in the eyes of the deer, which is too dazzled to run and the hunters can shoot it.

This night, as they neared a creek bed, Daniel Boone caught a glimpse of blue eyes shining in the darkness. He dismounted from his horse and aimed his rifle, but found himself unable to shoot. He had never seen a blue eyed deer. A rustle told him his prey had fled, and he followed it over a fence and into a meadow. The moonlight told him his "deer" had really been a young woman, and fate had kept him from shooting her. He followed her to the house, where he was met by her father, a close neighbor.

The father welcomed him in, and while they were still greeting one another, a young boy and girl burst into the room, babbling excitedly about their older sister's adventures. She appeared in the doorway, still flushed from her flight, the light shining on her gold hair. Daniel Boone was smitten. Her father introduced her as Rebecca. Being a determined sort of fellow, Daniel proceeded to woo Rebecca as doggedly as he once chased her across the fields, and did not give up until he had won the heart of the maid.

John Henry

Now John Henry was a mighty man, yes sir. He was born a slave in the 1840's but was freed after the war. He went to work as a steel-driver for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, don't ya know. And John Henry was the strongest, the most powerful man working the rails.

John Henry, he would spend his day's drilling holes by hitting thick steel spikes into rocks with his faithful shaker crouching close to the hole, turning the drill after each mighty blow. There was no one who could match him, though many tried.

Well, the new railroad was moving along right quick, thanks in no little part to the mighty John Henry. But looming right smack in its path was a mighty enemy - the Big Bend Mountain. Now the big bosses at the C&O Railroad decided that they couldn't go around the mile and a quarter thick mountain. No sir, the men of the C&O were going to go through it - drilling right into the heart of the mountain.

A thousand men would lose their lives before the great enemy was conquered. It took three long years, and before it was done the ground outside the mountain was filled with makeshift, sandy graves. The new tunnels were filled with smoke and dust. Ya couldn't see no-how and could hardly breathe. But John Henry, he worked tirelessly, drilling with a 14-pound hammer, and going 10 to 12 feet in one workday. No one else could match him.

Then one day a salesman came along to the camp. He had a steam-powered drill and claimed it could out-drill any man. Well, they set up a contest then and there between John Henry and that there drill. The foreman ran that newfangled steam-drill. John Henry, he just pulled out two 20-pound hammers, one in each hand. They drilled and drilled, dust rising everywhere. The men were howling and cheering. At the end of 35 minutes, John Henry had drilled two seven foot holes - a total of fourteen feet, while the steam drill had only drilled one nine-foot hole.

John Henry held up his hammers in triumph! The men shouted and cheered. The noise was so loud, it took a moment for the men to realize that John Henry was tottering. Exhausted, the mighty man crashed to the ground, the hammer's rolling from his grasp. The crowd went silent as the foreman rushed to his side. But it was too late. A blood vessel had burst in his brain. The greatest driller in the C&O Railroad was dead.

Some folks say that John Henry's likeness is carved right into the rock inside the Big Bend Tunnel. And if you walk to the edge of the blackness of the tunnel, sometimes you can hear the sound of two 20-pound hammers drilling their way to victory over the machine.

Johnny Appleseed

Johnny Appleseed was a hermit and a wanderer who was welcomed wherever he went in the Ohio territory. Everyone loved him, in spite of his unkempt appearance. He always carried a sack full of apple seeds to plant, and walked barefoot all year round. He knew the frontier woods better than anyone. Even the Indians respected Johnny Appleseed for his courage.

When the War of 1812 began, many Indians allied themselves with the British, seeking to revenge injustices done to their people by the settlers. They attacked up and down the Ohio territory, but they left Johnny Appleseed alone. Taking advantage of his position, Johnny Appleseed became the Paul Revere of the Ohio territory, warning settlers of danger.

On one occasion, Johnny Appleseed learned that a band of Indians had laid siege on the town of Mansfield, Ohio. Johnny Appleseed ran twenty-six miles through the forest to Mt. Vernon to obtain help for the settlers. As he ran, he tried to warn other settlers along the path of the danger by blowing on an old powder horn. Aid reached the town within a day, and the settlers were spared, thanks to the bravery of Johnny Appleseed.

Old Stormalong

Now everyone knows that Alfred Bulltop Stormalong was the ultimate sailor. He was the captain of a mighty ship known as the Courser, which was so wide that she couldn't sail into Boston Harbor and so tall that the mast was hinged into the middle so it could be taken down to avoid the sun and the moon whenever they passed by. Her keel was so deep that no harbor in the world could take her, so she spent all her time in deep water.

The Courser only went through the English Channel once. It was a tight squeeze, so Old Stormalong had the sailors coat the entire outside of the ship with soap. Even then, Old Stormalong barely slid the boat through, and so much soap scraped off one side of the boat at Dover that the cliffs there became permanently white. After that, the English very politely asked Old Stormalong to go around the long way, and that is what he did.

The deck of the Courser was so long that the sailors had to ride horses at a full gallop from stem to stern when it was their turn to keep watch. Old Stormalong was the only man strong enough to handle the wheel of the Courser, and it took all of his muscle to prevent the ship from knocking down the smaller Caribbean islands whenever a hurricane blew into the ship.

Old Stormalong and the Octopus

One day Old Stormalong, the ultimate sailor, was sailing the Courser through the deepest part of the Atlantic Ocean when a particularly large wave knocked the anchor loose. The anchor plunged right down to the bottom before the sailors could reel her in, and it got caught on something. The big ship lurched to a halt and the sailors rushed hither and thither, back and forth trying to figure out how to shake the anchor loose.

Finally, Old Stormalong pushed the sailors aside and gave the anchor a tug himself. But that anchor was stuck firm, and the sailors begged Stormie not to pull at it again, because they were afraid that he would wrench a hole in the bottom of the world and all the water would spill out into space. So Old Stormalong he decided to go down to the depths to see if he could unhook the anchor from whatever it was tangled to.

Taking a knife between his teeth, Old Stormalong dove into the water. For a few minutes nothing happened. Then the waters below the massive ship began to bubble and churn. The waves grew higher and higher until the ship was tossed around like a rubber duck in the bathtub. Even the old sailors grew seasick and clutched the rail, groaning aloud. After a few minutes the waves started to calm, and then Old Stormalong popped his head out of the water. "She's good to go, boys. Hoist anchor!" he shouted.

Old Stormalong climbed aboard while his men hoisted the giant anchor. As soon as they caught their breath, the sailors asked their captain why the anchor had gotten stuck on the bottom.

"It was a giant octopus playing games down in one of the canyons," Old Stormie explained. "It took a-hold of the anchor with four legs and was using the other four to hold onto the bottom of the sea."

"How did you get the anchor loose?" asked the first mate.

"Well, I just arm-wrestled the old whale-bait until it shouted for mercy and then tied its arms into double carrick bends. It will take the better part of the month for all the knots to come undone."

Pony Express

The Pony Express is one of the most colorful episodes in American history, one which can be used to measure not only the growth of the nation, but the pioneering spirit of our predecessors. Like so many legendary events of the "Old West," there have been wild exaggerations of the facts.

These young horsemen faced numerous dangers, such as thieves, deserts, or blizzards. Riders continued even at night when the only illumination came from the moon or flashes of lightning.

The Pony Express grew out of a need for swifter mail service between the East and West prior to the Civil War. The Post Office Department awarded a contract to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to carry mail to California. The mail was carried by ship from New York to Panama, where it was taken across the Isthmus of Panama by horseback or rail, and then put aboard ships bound for San Francisco. Under the best of conditions, a letter could be carried to the West Coast in three or four weeks. But, that schedule was optimistic. By 1860, almost 1/2 million people were living in the western states. Those people were determined to have the delivery time of their mail improved.

The completion of a coast-to-coast railroad was years away. At that time, the railroads extended only as far west as the Mississippi River. The completion of a telegraph linking both coasts was close to becoming a reality, but it would still be more than a year before it could be completed.

Some mail also was hauled by stagecoach across country, beginning on September 15, 1858, when the Post Office Department issued a contract to the Overland Mail Company, operated by John Butterfield. Butterfield's stages used the 2,795-mile "Southern Route" between Tipton, Missouri, and San Francisco. Although the advertised traveling time was 24 days, as a practical matter cross-country stagecoach mail service was often delayed for months. Such delays were keenly felt by Californians. The citizens of Los Angeles, for example, learned that California had been admitted to the Union fully six weeks after the fact.

Senator William M. Gwin of California was among those who saw the need to improve the timeliness of mail service to the West. Expecting the Confederacy to cut off the only land-based source of communication between the Federal Government and California, Gwin persuaded Congress to consider the approval of an alternate route. This route would be about 800 miles shorter and was known as the "Central Route."

Gwin found the answer to his concerns in William Russell, a stage express company owner. Russell, and his partners, Alexander Majors and William Waddell, were expected to operate the Pony Express for about a year. Once the race to connect the telegraph had ended, with both ends expected to meet at Salt Lake City, the Pony Express would no longer be needed. Responsibility for making the venture work fell to Alexander Majors. Although he and Waddell had initially opposed the project, once his firm was pledged to the Pony Express, Majors committed his energies to the project's success.

Alexander Majors arranged for the purchase of over 400 ponies; the building of 200 stations in desolate, uninhabited areas; the hiring of station masters to staff them; the stocking of provisions; and, of course, the hiring of the riders themselves. Majors' task, difficult under the best circumstances, had to be completed in two months.

Relay stations were placed 10 miles apart. Every third station was a home station, where extra ponies, firearms, men, and provisions were kept. Here, the mail would be handed over to a new rider.

The route from St. Joseph to San Francisco stretched over 1,966 miles, through the plains of Kansas and into Nebraska, along the valley of the Platte River, across the Great Plateau, through the Rockies, into the valley of the Great Salt Lake, through the alkali deserts of Nevada, then over the snow-covered Sierra Mountains and finally into the Sacramento Valley. The mail was carried between Sacramento and San Francisco by steamboat.

About 80 young men rode for the Pony Express. When he hired the riders, Alexander Majors gave each of them a Bible and required them to sign a pledge promising not to swear, drink alcohol, or fight with other employees. The riders carried the mail in the four pockets of a mochila which fit snugly over the saddle and was quickly switched from one horse to another. Letters were wrapped in oil silk to protect them from moisture. The price of a letter was \$5 at first, and reduced to \$1 per half-ounce by July 1, 1861. Weight was an important factor. Riders, horses, letters, and gear were all chosen with this in mind. The horses averaged about 14 1/2 hands high and weighed less than 900 pounds.

The arrival of the first rider into San Francisco was greeted with tumultuous excitement as the streets filled with people cheering the event. Even Jessie Benton Fremont, the widow of the famous western explorer John C. Fremont, was on hand to witness the rider's arrival shortly before midnight on April 13, 1860.

The Strange Life and Times of Charley Parkhurst

Nobody knows if she really was the first woman voter in California. Nobody knows why she spent her life dressing as a man. But the story of Soquel icon Charley Parkhurst turns the legend of the Wild West upside down.

By Daniel M. Hall

For several decades in the 1800s, stagecoaches were the main mode of transportation for people, baggage and mail in Northern California. And one of the best-known stagecoach drivers in the 1850s and 1860s was Charley Parkhurst.

Parkhurst drove stagecoaches over areas that are now largely dominated by freeways, houses and malls, routes that included Mariposa to Stockton, San Francisco to San Jose, San Jose to San Juan to Watsonville, and a lot of runs between Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

Driving a stagecoach took a lot of skill and courage, as drivers never knew what kind of situation--from holdups to incredibly hazardous conditions--they might have to deal with. Parkhurst had a reputation for being able to deal with whatever came along, and was known as one of the fastest and safest stagecoach drivers of the time.

Of course, there were many other competent stagecoach drivers. So what was the big deal about Parkhurst?

The big deal was that Charley Parkhurst was a woman. For most of her life, however, she disguised herself as a man, and both her unusual life as a cross-dressing stagecoach driver and her status as a registered voter in Santa Cruz County have made her a figure of local legend. There has been controversy over the years over whether Parkhurst ever actually voted, which would have made her one of the country's first woman voters, since national women's suffrage would not be won in the United States until 1920. Even New Zealand, the first country in the entire world to grant women the right to vote, did not do so until 1893.

According to the records of her former employer, Wells Fargo, Parkhurst "was small (only about 5' 6"), slim and wiry, with alert gray eyes. Apparently shy, Parkhurst never volunteered information about himself. Not an uncommon trait in those days. When he did speak, it was in an oddly sharp, high-pitched voice." In some older accounts of Parkhurst, her first name is given the masculine spelling "Charlie." On her tombstone and in her obituary, it is spelled "Charley."

Clothes Make the Man

Interestingly, in the 1800s many men wore beards and mustaches. Despite not having either, Parkhurst was able to pass as a man. No doubt it helped that no one at that time could envision a woman making a career of driving a stagecoach with teams of four or six horses.

Still, Parkhurst did her part with some creative dressing. She wore pleated shirts held in by a wide leather belt, blue jeans, a wide-brimmed hat and usually buckskin gloves--probably to hide her small hands. She was handy with a gun and excellent with a whip, and could and would fight.

What inspired this lifelong deception? The answers can only be guessed at based on a variety of information about her. She reportedly was born as Charlene Parkhurst in 1812 in New Hampshire. Not much is known about her life as a child or teenager, except that for a while she was likely raised in an orphanage, possibly in New Hampshire or Massachusetts.

During her time at the orphanage, she may have developed a fondness for horses. Whether she was permitted to leave the orphanage or escaped from it is not known, but shortly after leaving, she applied for a job at a livery stable in Worcester, Mass. (about 30 miles west of Boston), owned by Ebenezer Balch. Although historical records don't indicate if Balch knew for sure what gender Parkhurst was, he recognized that she was good at handling horses and trained her to drive coaches and carriages with teams of two, four and six horses. It's possible that she simply realized that she would have to disguise herself as a man the rest of her life if she wanted to stay in the stagecoach business, and this may be when she decided to do so.

When Balch moved to the growing city of Providence, R.I., about 30 miles south of Worcester, in the early 1840s. Parkhurst went with him and became a popular driver for people traveling around the city and the surrounding countryside.

Go West, Young Apparent Man

No historical documents indicate that Parkhurst knew how to read. But she still must have heard plenty about the discovery of gold in California in the late 1840s and the rush by people all over the world to go there to find their fortune. The gold rush also meant a need for more stagecoach drivers out West, so in 1851, Parkhurst went to California.

Her hopes were momentarily dashed when she arrived in San Francisco to find there were a lot of unemployed miners who were trying to find work as stagecoach drivers. But with her drive, talent and experience, she had no problem getting a job right away.

Parkhurst quickly found that driving a stagecoach in the Wild West could be a hazardous proposition indeed. First, there were the bandits. The first time that Parkhurst was held up, she was caught completely off-guard. The stagecoach had just rounded a curve when a masked man with a gun appeared and demanded that she throw down a box that could have contained gold and other valuable items.

She did, but after that incident, Parkhurst decided to become proficient with a .44 pistol and have it near or on her while she worked. So when the next robbery attempt occurred, Parkhurst quickly grabbed her gun and shot the robber dead.

Then there were hazardous road conditions. On one trip, Charley raced the stagecoach onto a rickety bridge spanning a storm-swollen river, and then looked back to see the section she had just crossed being washed away. She pushed her horses to get the stagecoach to land--just before the entire bridge collapsed.

Although Parkhurst was fond of horses, they didn't necessarily treat her in the same way. While shoeing a horse, she was kicked in the left eye. She lost sight in that eye and thereafter wore a patch over it. After that, many people referred to her as One-Eyed Charley. On another occasion, her team veered off a road so suddenly that she was thrown from the coach. Hanging onto the reins, she was dragged along until she managed to turn the runaway team into some bushes and gain better control of them. The appreciative passengers took up a collection and gave her \$20.

Considering all of this, it's not surprising that after several decades of stagecoach driving and growing rheumatism in her hands, Parkhurst decided to quit that work in the late 1860s.

Rocking the Vote

About the same time--1867 to be exact--Parkhurst, while living in Soquel, registered to vote in the election of 1868, which featured presidential candidates Horatio Seymour of New York and Civil War Gen. Ulysses S. Grant.

While there is a document proving Charley's registration on file, unfortunately no evidence has surfaced over the years to indicate that she actually voted in the 1868 election, which would have been a significant event at that place and at that time. On her tombstone in a Watsonville cemetery, a plaque declares that Parkhurst was the first woman to vote in the United States. But according to a spokesperson for the Pajaro Valley Historical Society, which has lots of information about Parkhurst, that is no longer a correct claim. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a few states allowed women to vote. Women across the U.S., however, were generally not allowed to vote until 1920 when the 19th amendment to the Constitution was enacted.

The legend that Parkhurst was the first women to vote in the U.S., however, led to a plaque being placed on a building in Soquel that said, "On this site on November 3, 1868 was cast the first vote by a woman in California--a ballot by Charlotte 'Charley' Parkhurst, who disguised herself as man."

It is possible that she did vote when no other voters were around in the small village of Soquel to see her in the voting area. And perhaps documents used to record who voted in the town on November 3, 1868, were lost or discarded and any official who was there had passed away before Charley died or moved away from Soquel after 1868. If Parkhurst actually did vote in the election, she kept it a secret along with her gender.

After she retired from stagecoach driving, Parkhurst pursued several other occupations. She ran a station between Watsonville and Santa Cruz for changing stagecoach horses. Later, she worked at lumbering and cattle ranching, and then raised chickens near Aptos. During the early part of 1879, she complained of a sore throat and swelling on the side of her tongue. The trouble proved to be cancer, which was the cause of her death. She died on December 18, 1879.

Harmon said a long-time acquaintance of Parkhurst was with her when she died, Frank Woodward. He also says in the letter that Parkhurst told him that "she had something to tell" Harmon's father before she died, "but there was no hurry about it." Perhaps she wanted to tell him the secrets of her life.

After she died, a doctor and maybe an undertaker discovered that Parkhurst was a woman. That was a real surprise to most everyone. The revelation that Charley was a woman generated a lot of newspaper stories, some of which didn't treat her very nicely.