

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received FEB 8 1988

date entered MAR 10 1988

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox

and or common N/A

**2. Location**

street & number 3rd Street and Bemidji Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Bemidji N/A vicinity of

state Minnesota code 22 county Beltrami code 007

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: tourist attraction

**4. Owner of Property**

name City of Bemidji

street & number City Hall, 401 Minnesota Avenue

city, town Bemidji N/A vicinity of state MN 56601

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Beltrami County Courthouse, County Recorder's Office

street & number Beltrami Avenue and Sixth Street

city, town Bemidji state Minnesota 56601

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Beltrami County Historic  
title Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date September 1986  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office—Minnesota Historical Society

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		_____ N/A

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

This property consists of two contributing objects in the form of statues, representing the mythical, giant lumberjack Paul Bunyan and his equally gargantuan companion, Babe the Blue Ox. Both statues are constructed of concrete over a steel frame with a plaster finish and painted features. Paul Bunyan is approximately 18 feet in height, measuring about five feet across at the base and about three feet from toe to heel. Sporting a wooden moustache and pipe, the statue is painted with a grey cap, red-plaid shirt, blue trousers, red socks, and black shoes. Babe is painted blue with a gold muzzle. It stands about ten feet tall, measuring about eight feet across the front hoofs and about 23 feet from nose to tail. Situated in a municipal park adjacent to the Bemidji Tourist Information Center, the statues overlook Lake Bemidji on the east and downtown Bemidji on the west.

Alterations have been largely cosmetic. Both statues have been repainted several times, causing minor changes in their facial expressions. Paul Bunyan's present pipe is smaller than the original. At the time of its construction, the statue also was equipped with a public address system, which was subsequently dismantled. The dates of these modifications are unknown. Babe the Blue Ox was originally mounted on a Model T Ford automobile, which propelled the statue in parades. In 1938, it was removed from its mobile chassis and placed on permanent display next to the statue of Paul Bunyan.

This nomination consists of two contributing objects.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) tourism

**Specific dates** 1937-1938 **Builder/Architect** Cyril M. Dickinson (Paul Bunyan);  
Jim Payton (Babe the Blue Ox)

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Minnesota's first and best-known example of "the roadside colossus," the statuary grouping of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox is historically significant for their role in promoting tourism in northern Minnesota.

Located in a vast woodland and lake region, the City of Bemidji played host to a modest tourist trade as early as the 1890s. After the establishment of rail connections in 1898, promoters began developing lakeshore sites for summer cottages and constructing a variety of tourist hotels and resorts, primarily catering to hunters and fishermen. Benefiting still further from the emergence of the automobile and a state-sponsored highway system, the Bemidji tourist industry boomed during the 1920s, but then suffered with the rest of the economy during the Great Depression.<sup>1</sup>

In 1936, as a means of stimulating tourism, a number of Bemidji civic organizations and businesses decided to sponsor a winter carnival that would promote the city's resources for winter sports. During the previous year, the city had constructed, with WPA assistance, a large winter sports arena, containing facilities for indoor ice skating, hockey, and curling. Although winter was traditionally the region's "off" season, the carnival's organizers hoped that the four days of planned festivities would show that "Minnesota can exploit its winter attractions in a way which will draw thousands of tourists in the winter months as well as in the summer season."<sup>2</sup>

The carnival opened on January 14, 1937. Taking its theme from the city's former prominence as a lumbering center, the celebration focused on the mythical figure of Paul Bunyan a giant lumberjack of redoubtable endurance and skill who, during the mid-nineteenth century, had migrated with the folklore of the lumber camps from New England to Minnesota. The Bemidji carnival was not the first attempt to commercialize the Bunyan legend. As early as 1914, one of Minnesota's leading logging concerns, the Red River Lumber Company, had published a pamphlet using the Bunyan fables to promote nationally the company's wood products. The pamphlet was the work of copywriter and ex-lumberjack W. B. Laughead, who embellished the original folk tales by emphasizing Bunyan's Minnesota exploits and by christening his previously anonymous quadruped companion as "Babe the Blue Ox." Revised and reissued in succeeding decades, the advertizing piece helped make Paul and Babe national celebrities.<sup>3</sup>

The Bemidji winter carnival, however, did have a unique promotional twist. It unveiled giant concrete statues of Paul and Babe to serve as mascots for the festivities. Both statues were designed and built by city residents. Cyril M. Dickinson of the Dickinson Construction Co. was "the mastermind" behind the Bunyan figure, while Jim Payton, manager of the local power company, supervised construction of Babe. Both statues became overnight tourist sensations, garnering a full-page spread in Life Magazine. Although the Bunyan statue established immediate residence at its present location in a municipal park overlooking the city's busiest intersection, Babe initially led a more adventuresome existence. Mounted on a Model T Ford automobile, it paraded through Bemidji during the carnival and then, the next month, journeyed to St. Paul to take part in that city's winter festival. In the summer

(see continuation sheet)

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE con't.

1937, Babe returned to the Twin Cities as a guest of the State Fair. Finally, in 1938, the statue was dismantled from its mobile chassis and placed on permanent display in Bemidji next to the figure of Paul Bunyan.<sup>4</sup>

Although over-sized statues have become fairly common devices for promoting tourism, Bemidji's Paul and Babe were pioneer efforts in the field. According to Karal Ann Marling's recent study of the subject, these two statues "introduced the roadside colossus to Minnesota and the Midwest" and remain the "prototypical" expression of the genre. Still highly popular tourist attractions, the statues of Paul and Babe have received recognition in such diverse publications as Gebhard and Martinson's A Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Transportation's "Minnesota State Highway Map" (1986).<sup>5</sup>

NOTES

1. The statewide "historic context" associated with this site is "Northern Minnesota Resort Industry, 1900s - 1930s." For elaboration, see Minnesota History in Sites and Structures. Historic Context Outlines: The Post-Contact Period Contexts (St. Paul: State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, 1985), pp. 19-21; Barbara E. Hightower and Jeffrey A. Hess, "Beltrami County Historic Properties Survey 1986," unpublished report prepared for Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, 1986. The development of tourism in Beltrami County is discussed in Harold T. Hagg, The Mississippi Headwaters Region (Bemidji: Beltrami County Historical Society, 1986), pp. 85-89.
2. "Winter Carnival is Given Wide Publicity," Bemidji Daily Pioneer, December 8, 1936.
3. For a thorough study of original Paul Bunyan folktales and their commercialization, see Daniel Hoffman, Paul Bunyan Last of the Frontier Demigods (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
4. On the construction of Paul and Babe, see Bemidji Daily Pioneer, December 19, 7:4; December 12, 3:2; December 19, 3:4; December 30, 1936; January 9, 1937 3:3. On Babe's ambulatory adventures, see Pioneer, January 12, 1937, 1:4; February 1, 1937, 1:6; August 6, 1937, 1:2; August 7, 1937, 3:5. See also Life Magazine, 2 (February 1, 1937), 21.
5. Karal Ann Marling, The Colossus of Roads -- Myth and Symbol Along the American Highway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 3, 9; David Gebhard and Tom Martinson, A Guide to the Architecture of Minnesota (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 217.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Bemidji Pioneer, Dec. 12, 19, 30, 1936; January 9, 12, August 6, 7, 1937.  
Hoffman, Daniel. Paul Bunyan Last of the Frontier Demigods. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1983.  
Marling, Karal Ann. The Colossus of Roads -- Myth and Symbol Along the American Highway. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1984.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Bemidji West Quadrangle

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

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5	12	5	19	9	15	10
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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeffrey A. Hess

organization Jeffrey A. Hess, Historical Consultant

date January 30, 1987

street & number 305 Grain Exchange Building

telephone (612) 338-1987

city or town Minneapolis

state Minnesota 55415

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Nina M. Archabal

Nina M. Archabal

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 1/20/88

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Melvyn Beyer  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 3-10-88

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Geographical Data

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point formed by extending in an eastward direction the centerline of Third street until it intersects with the west boundary of Bemidji Avenue (State Highway No. 2), then progressing eastward in a straight line a distance of 170 feet, then turning at a right angle and progressing southward in a straight line a distance of 100 feet, then turning at a right angle and progressing westward in a straight line a distance of 55 feet, then turning at a right angle and progressing northward in a straight line until said line intersects with a straight line formed by extending in an eastward direction the centerline of Third Street, all in Outlot A of the Original Townsite of Bemidji.