

The verdict at this stage of the investigation must go against Paul Bunyan. A tentative conclusion is inescapable that Paul Bunyan as the legendary hero of the shanty boy, as true folklore, is spurious. He may have appeared in the camps of a later day, possibly about the turn of the century, when the true shanty boy had all but vanished. He may exist among the lumberjacks of the Pacific coast, where logging is a far different operation than the Minnesota and Wisconsin jack ever knew, but he was a stranger to the loggers of the Middle West when logging was at its height.

The burden of proof may fairly be placed on those who are presenting Paul Bunyan to us as a native product of the imagination of the shanty boy, and who are making him, in a sense, the patron saint of the old-time logger. Before Paul and Babe are any more firmly ingrained in our minds as, to quote Mrs. Shephard, "the unique contribution of the American frontier to the world's folklore" the proponents of this view should be called upon to present the evidence which authenticates their hero as an indigenous product of the pineries. I, for one, will await such evidence with an open mind and a lively curiosity.

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A MINNESOTA SAGA

THE DANCE in all its various forms has long been used as a medium for the presentation of historical subjects. Greek myths and legends formed an important part of the dance choreographer's material when ballet became a theatrical form in the seventeenth century; the Diaghileff Russian ballet in Paris achieved exciting effects through the use of Russian historic tales; and, in the field of the social dance, many folk dances are movement enactments of old stories.

But only recently, within the last ten years, has the American scene been used to any great extent by American dancers

as material for dance compositions. Ballet companies have added such works as "Barn Dance," "Filling Station," and "Billy the Kid" to their repertoires. Modern dancers, with a more adaptable style of movement than the ballet dancer's strict vocabulary, have found in America a great wealth of material for the dance which they felt fitted both their ideas and type of dancing. Charles Weidman has worked on the legend of Paul Bunyan, Eleanor King has used an old Revolutionary hymn for her "Ode to Freedom," and Martha Graham has produced "Frontier" and "American Document," perhaps the most successful of these compositions.

In the spring of 1938, when the Modern Dance Group of Minneapolis began work on its "Minnesota Saga" under the leadership of Gertrude Lippincott and Ruth Hatfield, it was, therefore, following the lead of other dancers who had used American materials. So far as is known, however, it was the first group of dancers to use the history of a particular state for its theme. The "Minnesota Saga" was not intended to be a pageant or an entertainment, but rather a serious art form, a project both of artistic and historical interest.

The work proved to be difficult and exacting because much historical material, however significant as history, is not suitable for translation into movement, which is the dancer's medium. There seemed, however, to be much good material in the colorful patterns of Minnesota's heritage. The difficulty proved to be largely one of selection and of making the work at once a good dance and good history.

After a great deal of study, a plan for a suite of four dances was worked out. The first was an opening dance in the nature of a salutation—"To Minnesota." This was probably the most abstract of the dances in the suite. Its movements were vigorous and open, using running and jumping themes throughout. The choreographers attempted to reflect the free spirit of an unsettled land and also to indi-

cate the events which would follow in the wake of the hardy and courageous pioneers.

The second section was divided into two parts—the “Dance of the Indian Women” and the “Dance of the Indian Women and the French Voyageurs.” The first was a lament of the Indian women for their lost land—the land which they once owned and from which they were driven to make way for Yankee and European settlers. This dance was not intended as an authentic Indian dance, but rather as an abstraction of the type of movement characteristic of the Indian women’s dances. The rhythmic beat of the authentic steps was carefully studied and became the metrical basis for the composition. The formal pattern was suggested by the frequent circular floor tracks of primitive women’s dances, and the movements were restrained. Symbolizing the friendship and intermingling between the Indians and the French fur traders, the second part of the section was short and gay, with both the Indian women and the French voyageurs taking part. In the beginning the two groups remained apart, but at the end they danced together.

In the wake of the transient fur traders came men and women hungry for land, bringing their families, planning to make Minnesota their home. First they came from New England and New York, then from the northern European countries, and finally from the Balkan states. To show this great wave of migration, a generalized folk dance, which would serve as a symbol of the nations whose cultures went into the making of the state, was planned. Because the Scandinavians and northern Europeans have probably been of greatest importance in the settlement of Minnesota, three of their characteristic dance steps, the schottische, the polka, and the waltz, were chosen as the basis for the stylized folk dance.

The last section was the “Dance of the Workers.” It was designed to show the work of the men and women who have built Minnesota—the farmers, the lumberjacks, the

craftsmen, and the railroad builders. The dance was arranged on a diagonal pattern in a processional manner, with the various workers going out from the line and returning to march forward with the group at the end.

The choreography for the suite was arranged by Gertrude Lippincott and Ruth Hatfield, assisted by the members of the group. Marion Roberts, the musical director of the Modern Dance Group, wrote the musical accompaniment, using themes and instruments which would assist the spirit of the dances. In the "Dance of the Indian Women," drums and flutes were used, and the French voyageurs were introduced to the tune of the old song, "En roulant ma boulé." Abstractions of folk dance melodies were used to accompany the "Dance of the Immigrants."

To heighten the interest of the dances and to make them more intelligible to lay audiences, a spoken commentary was added. Writing a narrative to be used with dancing proved to be a difficult task. The verse had to be appropriate and accurate, but it could not detract in its complexity or dramatic interest from the movement of the dance. As the dances were arranged before the commentary was written, the words had to be fitted to the dances. Sometimes they were read before the dances as an introduction, and sometimes during the dances as part of the accompaniment. Miss Meridel Le Sueur undertook the writing of the script, and the result of her work is as moving as it is illuminating. Valuable suggestions from Dr. Theodore C. Blegen of the Minnesota Historical Society served to improve both its historical and literary qualities.

The costuming for the "Saga" presented difficulties, as time was insufficient for complete costume changes between the sections of the suite. A basic costume of bright rust color was selected and used for the opening section. To this were added green fringed jackets for the Indian women, mustard jackets and caps and purple sashes for the French voyageurs, bright-colored full skirts and bodices for the

immigrant women, and kerchiefs and jerkins for the men. For the "Dance of the Workers," the men wore gray overalls and the women, work tunics of gray and blue. Throughout the suite, the colors and the materials of the costumes were kept simple, to fit into the pioneer setting.

The "Minnesota Saga" was given for the first time in April, 1939, in connection with the "Festival of Nations" of the International Institute of St. Paul in the St. Paul Auditorium. It was used as an introduction to a program of folk songs and dances of the various national groups whose cultures have helped to build Minnesota. The work was again performed at the Modern Dance Group's annual concert in May, 1939, and at the Minneapolis Century Celebration in the Minneapolis Auditorium in October. It was included on a program devoted to the cultural resources of the Northwest in literature and the arts, presented before a regional conference of the Progressive Education Association in Minneapolis in January.

The immediate cultural scene offers a challenge to artists and historians. There is a wealth of material which can be translated into artistic terms, whether they are the terms of dance, drama, painting, or literature. For the historian, there is the possibility of presenting history in an interesting and new way in co-operation with the artists. Minnesota, with its colorful historic backgrounds and varied national groups, affords unusual potentialities for such experiments.

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