

Junior

71

SKEPTIC

THE GREAT

CARDIFF
GIANT!

SPECIAL NOTICE.
AMERICAN GOLIATH

A WONDERFUL
Geological Discovery.
A PETRIFIED GIANT,
TEN AND ONE-HALF FEET HIGH

WONDERFUL SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY.
HISTORY OF THE DISCOVERY ON OCTOBER 16,
1899, OF AN IMAGE OF STONE, THE SAME
BEING A PERFECTLY FORMED AND
WELL DEVELOPED MAN. DE-
SCRIPTIONS OF THE
PETRIFICATION,
WITH

The Opinions of Scientific Men thereon.

B
BEWARE OF IMITATION GIANTS.



CONTRIBUTORS:

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This Issue's Cover features a digital painting by Daniel Loxton, based upon a c.1870–1908 drawing of the Cardiff Giant (artist unknown).

THE COLOSSAL CASE OF THE CARDIFF GIANT

HELLO!

Today we'll tell a story of gigantic proportions! Once upon a time, America buzzed with claims that the remains of a *giant* had been dug up from a field in New York state.

It was over ten feet tall and made entirely of stone. Amazed onlookers said this was the fossilized body of a colossal human being. Could this be true? Was America once home to a lost race of giants? Or was this a whopper too big to swallow?

Let's Find out!



DIGGING INTO A MYSTERY

The case began in a New England farming village called Cardiff. It was an October day in 1869, four years after the end of the American Civil War. That morning started out like any other brisk Autumn day. Birds sang. Wind rustled through the trees. People tended their farms and went about their business.

Bright and early, a farmer named William "Stub" Newell greeted two men he'd hired to dig a well. He showed them just where to dig. At first their work went smoothly. They shovelled soft, wet soil. But then their shovels clunked against something hard. A rock?

The men cleared dirt away from the obstacle, and then stood in shock. The rocky object appeared to be a *foot*—a humongous human foot, almost two feet long! How could this be? The excited men dug and dug. Soon they uncovered an incredible sight: a lifelike, naked, giant man made of stone. The figure lay awkwardly in the Earth, as though preserved in a position of death. Was this strange figure an ancient statue? Was it a trick? Or was this stunning evidence for the existence of giants?



IMAGINING GIANTS

Throughout history, giants have stomped through the stories of countless cultures. Greek myths said that Zeus led the gods to overthrow the giant Titans in battle. In another Greek story, the hero Odysseus tricked and defeated a giant blood-thirsty cyclops. In Norse mythology, Odin, Thor and the other gods fought against frost giants. In one well-known Bible story, a young shepherd named David killed the giant warrior Goliath with a stone hurled from his sling.

The story of "Jack and the Beanstalk" has been told and retold for centuries. It's related to stories much older still. For

thousands of years, people have shared folktales about outsmarting, defeating, or stealing treasure from giants.

Ogres or giants are among the most common types of monsters imagined by storytellers around the world.

Why do these huge creatures loom so large in so many stories from so many places?

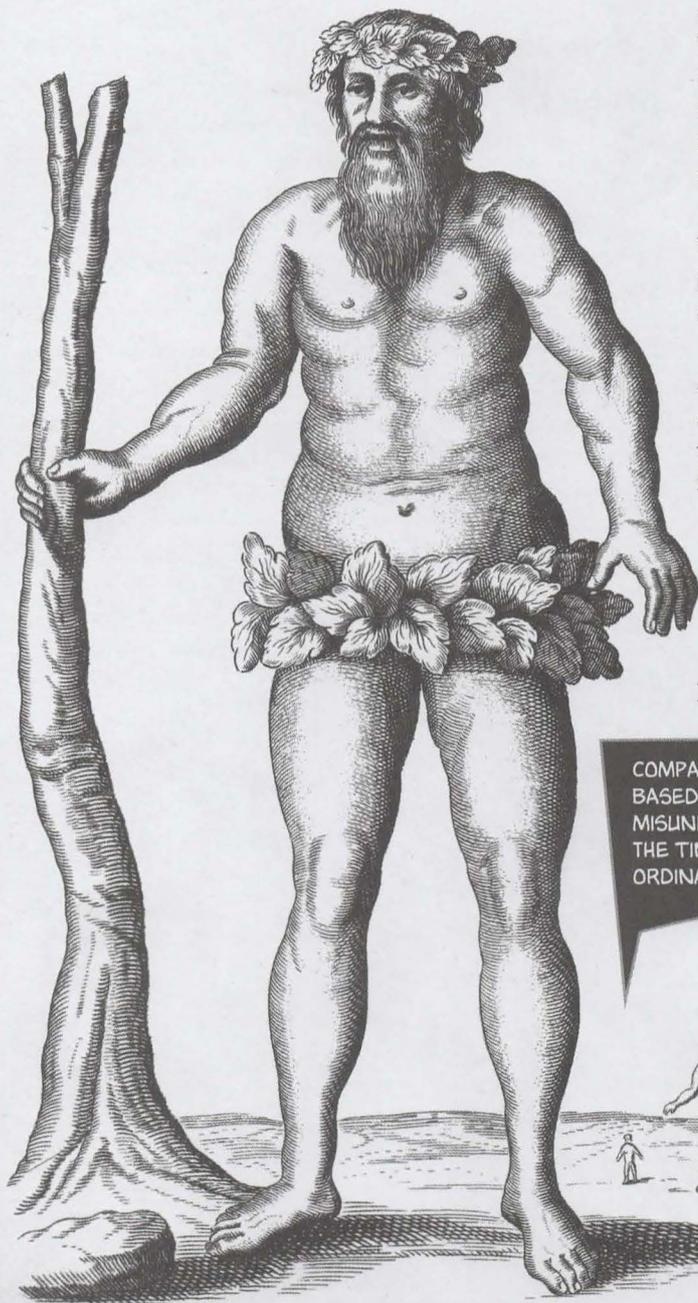
One simple explanation might be that giants are very easy monsters to imagine. They're really just exaggerated versions of ourselves. Giants are like us, only bigger and stronger.

However, some people have proposed a very different explanation. According to claims made in past centuries—and sometimes repeated even today—legends of giants were inspired by *real* giants who actually existed in some forgotten past.

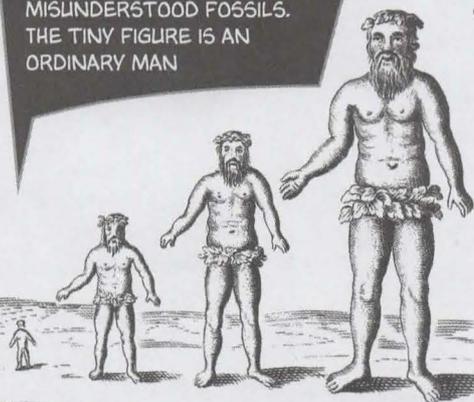
Now, it's true that some people are unusually tall. A rare few even suffer from a medical condition that causes their bodies to grow to unhealthy sizes. The tallest person ever recorded was 8 feet 11 inches!

But legends speak of giants *much* larger than any known human. Over the centuries, people have claimed to find solid evidence for the existence of giants dozens or even hundreds of feet tall!

In ancient times, people had no scientific way to explain huge fossil bones from prehistoric creatures. Enormous fossils were often interpreted as the bones of giant humans.



COMPARISON OF GIANT CLAIMS BASED UPON LEGENDS AND MISUNDERSTOOD FOSSILS. THE TINY FIGURE IS AN ORDINARY MAN



AMERICAN GIANTS

The Cardiff Giant was not the first time that gigantic human fossils had supposedly been found in America. Similar claims had been made in the same region a century and a half earlier.

In the summer of 1705, a farmer happened across a fossilized tooth. It looked human—but it was *enormous*. It was as large as a man's fist. It weighed nearly five pounds!

This discovery caused a huge sensation! What sort of creature could possibly have teeth that big? Early men of science puzzled over it. Many thought the answer was obvious: if it *looked* like a giant human tooth, it must have come from a giant human.

Science was just getting started in those days. People who studied the natural world—called naturalists—usually mixed science and religion together. It was thought that studying nature and studying the Bible were just two different ways to learn about the world that God had created.

At that time, it was widely believed that giants once existed because giants are mentioned numerous times in the Bible. "There were giants in the earth in those days," said the story of Noah's ark. The gigantic fossil tooth seemed to confirm what people thought they already knew.

Further evidence seemed to come from Native American folklore. Like most cultures, Native Americans told stories of giants. The giant tooth seemed to confirm a Native legend about a "monstrous person as high as the tops of the pine trees."

An early scientific thinker named Cotton Mather agreed that the fossil "must be a human tooth" despite its enormous size. He was a religious minister who is best remembered today for inspiring a very unscientific tragedy: the Salem witch trials. Nevertheless, Mather was intensely interested in nature. He was the first American to publish a popular science book, *The Christian Philosopher*. Mather argued that religion and science *should* be mixed together.

Not everyone believed Mather's claims. Some skeptics said that the mysterious fossil tooth could have come from a

large animal such as an elephant or whale. Mather thought that was ridiculous. The tooth was found too far from the ocean to be a whale, he said. Nor did it look like an elephant's tooth. It looked human, Mather argued, so that's what it was—a tooth from a *man ten stories tall!*

Mather thought this fossil confirmed the accuracy of Bible stories about giants. And if the Bible was right about giants, Mather figured, stories such as Noah's flood must also be reliable descriptions of real events.

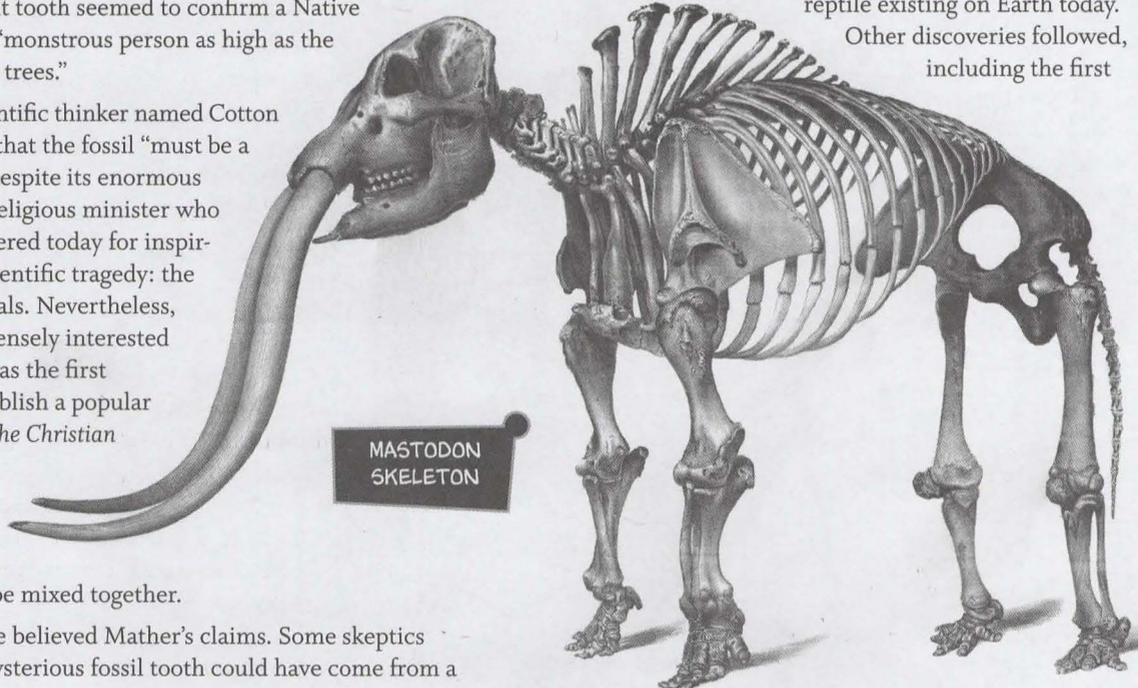
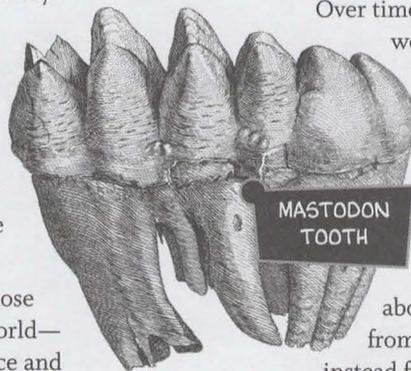
Over time, many other gigantic fossil teeth and bones were found in America. These remained mysterious for decades. Some fossil hunters claimed these bones came from ferocious monsters. Audiences paid to marvel at these fossils. Scientific thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson debated about how to explain them.

Eventually naturalists learned the truth about these gigantic bones. They did not come from giant humans or modern elephants, but instead from species that were no longer alive on the Earth: mammoths and mastodons. (For the whole story of how this mystery was solved, see JUNIOR SKEPTICS 60 and 61.)

Evolving Ideas

Further fossil discoveries showed that many species had lived and gone extinct in the prehistoric past. Some of those species seemed stunningly weird. In England, fossil hunter Mary Anning found skeletons of huge reptiles adapted for life in the ocean. Some of these reptiles had bodies shaped like dolphins. These were totally unlike any reptile existing on Earth today.

Other discoveries followed, including the first



dinosaur fossils. Clearly there were periods in the Earth's prehistoric past when plants and animals were different from the plants and animals of our own time. How could this be?

At first naturalists looked to Bible stories for clues. Based on the story of Noah's ark, naturalists speculated that the surface of the Earth was changed by a worldwide flood. Naturalists imagined that this flood washed away animals known only from fossils, while modern animals survived aboard Noah's ark.

However, evidence revealed big problems with the flood idea. A world-shaking catastrophe would have destroyed delicate structures such as stalactites in caves. The Earth's surface also had features that could not be explained by a sudden flood. For example, deep river canyons were carved over millions of years by the slow process of erosion.

Furthermore, a global flood would have buried fossils of modern and extinct animals all mixed together in one big muddy jumble. This isn't what naturalists found when they

studied the layers of rocks that make up the Earth's crust. Instead, every layer of rock contained a unique collection of fossils. Each distinct layer had fossils from *only* those things that lived when that layer was forming. Also, more recent fossils were more similar to modern plants and animals. Older fossils were more strange. Fossils showed that the living world repeatedly changed over time. But how?

That puzzle was solved by English naturalists Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. They discovered how living things evolve through the process of natural selection. New species evolve from older species over thousands or millions of years. Fossils such as dinosaur bones were the remains of animals that lived before human beings evolved.

Naturalists no longer needed to speculate about giant humans or a worldwide flood. However, some people ignored the discovery of evolution. Some insisted that the flood really happened. Some still believed in giants.

A DEVIOUS MIND

Which brings us back to the story of the stone giant of Cardiff.

Here, Reader, I must tell you that this story includes a dastardly scoundrel. His name was George Hull. Tall, dark-haired, and dressed all in black, Hull looked like a villain from a Hollywood Western.

The world would be very simple if honest people were always clever and wise while dishonest people were fools. But here I must also tell you that the world is not so simple.

Hull was cunning *and* crooked. As a young man, he schemed with a partner to swindle people at gambling. The partner travelled from town to town posing as a playing card salesman. The cards he sold were secretly "marked" in such a way that a cheater could tell which cards another player held in their hand. Soon after, Hull would arrive in town. He would get into "friendly" card games, then use the marked cards to cheat townspeople out of their money.

At one point Hull was jailed for the playing card swindle. This did not teach him a lesson. He went on scamming money and breaking the law. Hull secretly burned down his own home or businesses *three times* to fraudulently collect insurance money!

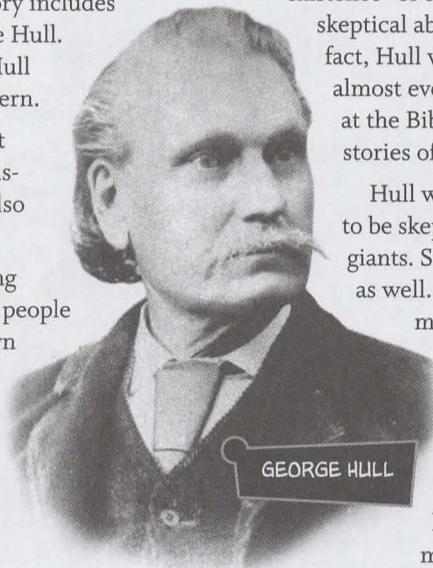
However, people are complicated. It turns out that the scheming, dishonest Mr. Hull also loved science. He enthusiastically agreed with Darwin's big new ideas about evolution.

Hull was a "firm believer that Nature and Nature's Laws both created and developed the wonderful and phenomenal existence" of every living thing. He was also highly skeptical about unscientific religious claims. In fact, Hull was a passionate atheist in a time when almost everyone was religious. He openly scoffed at the Bible's "marvellous stories"—including stories of giants.

Hull was right about evolution. He was wise to be skeptical about extraordinary claims such as giants. Some readers will agree with his atheism as well. But Hull was an angry, quarrelsome man. He didn't just *disagree* with religion; he *hated* it.

Hull was angry for personal reasons. He felt that the religious people in his community looked down on his family. He felt that it was unfair that he struggled to earn a living as a cigar maker. And, he felt that religion turned people into "hypocrites" (people who spoke one way but acted another). Hull recalled incidents in which he was cheated or mistreated by churchgoing men who pretended to be generous and kindhearted. These were "trifling incidents," Hull admitted, but they gave him a deep "distrust of commonly received religious opinions, which too often encourage hypocrisy and cloak wrong."

He wanted to teach religious folks a lesson—and he wanted to get rich doing it.



GEORGE HULL

A SCHEME IS BORN

The true story of the Cardiff Giant began two years before it was found buried in a field. George Hull was staying with relatives. One night a travelling preacher also stayed over as a second houseguest. You might already guess that this was a recipe for trouble.

After dinner, the preacher lectured the family about religion. Hull bristled at everything the preacher had to say. Hull was a guest, but he just couldn't help himself. As soon as their hosts went to bed, Hull launched into a "heated discussion" with the preacher. We can imagine Hull's mustache trembling, his intense eyes flaming by lantern light. It was said that Hull's eyes seemed to "cork-screw their way clear down into the innermost recesses of your soul."

The two men argued into the night. Hull ridiculed Bible stories that he considered absurd. Surely the preacher didn't *really* think there used to be people "fifteen to twenty feet tall"?

"Yes, I believe there were giants," the preacher replied. He supposed that these hulking beings towered three times taller than a regular person.

"At midnight we went to bed," Hull later recalled. He "lay awake wondering why people would believe those remarkable stories" about giants. He was irritated. His mind was racing. And then, suddenly, Hull had an idea—a delightfully devious idea! Hull suddenly "thought of making a stone giant and passing it off as a petrified man."

Hatching a Giant Scheme

Hull's plan was simple. He would carve a large statue, then bury it to be "discovered." The statue would be made to resemble some sort of fossil. And yet, giants were fairy tale creatures! To anyone with a lick of sense, Hull's giant *should* seem as immediately suspicious as a centaur or mermaid.

Hull didn't expect people to be sensibly suspicious. He believed "people can be deceived now as well as in former times." He felt sure that Americans would eagerly buy into the hoax—not only with foolish belief, but with heaping piles of easy money. Then, when he was ready, Hull would reveal the whole thing! He'd show people how gullible they really were. A tell-all book would make him yet more money while also embarrassing everyone who took silly stories seriously. He would have his revenge and riches too!

But first he needed a giant. Creating one in secret was literally a huge project! It required years of effort, thousands

of dollars, and an absolutely colossal block of stone. To find the stone, Hull and a co-conspirator travelled to the gypsum quarries of Fort Dodge, Iowa.

Gypsum is a common, soft, white mineral. It's the main ingredient in both plaster of Paris and the drywall in your home. It was a convenient choice for Hull's hoax because gypsum is easy to carve. Hull and his partner negotiated with one Fort Dodge gypsum mining company, only to get kicked out of the quarry for suspicious behavior.

Hull hurried next to Chicago. There he made a deal with a marble merchant. Hull would provide the stone. The merchant would arrange for sculptors and a barn where the sculptors could work in secret.

Returning to Fort Dodge, Hull hired workers and leased land to mine his gypsum. Eventually they succeeded in cutting a five-ton block of the stone. Loading that onto a creaking, groaning wagon was no easy task! Once finally loaded, an oxteam failed to pull it. Eventually a team of four large work-horses got the wagon rolling. It was a brutal 40 miles to the nearest railway. The wagon got stuck at least twice, once for more than a week. Workers quit. New horse teams had to be hired. The wagon even collapsed under the weight of the stone! Hull had no choice but to cut the stone down to a smaller three-ton block.

In all, it took a full month for Hull to get an eleven-foot block of gypsum quarried, moved, and loaded onto a train.

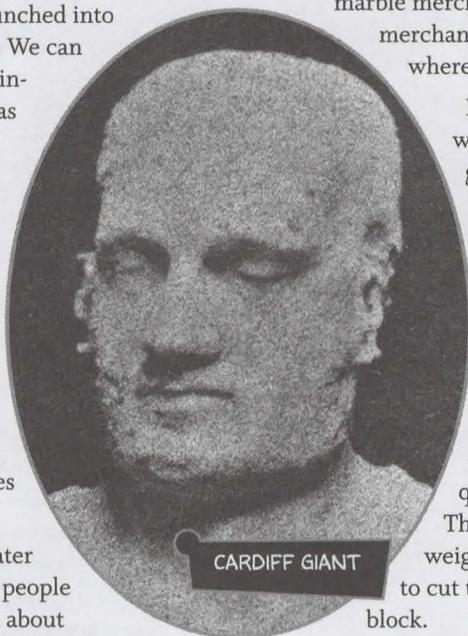
Carving a Giant

The gypsum block was then hidden inside a Chicago barn. Two sculptors set to work. The men hung carpets and blankets on the walls to muffle the sound of chisels. Hull supplied plenty of beer to keep the sculptors inside the barn and out of sight.

Over the next few weeks, the men carved the stone into a lifelike human form. They chose an awkward pose intended to look like a natural death posture. To give the giant a realistic skin texture, Hull set needles into a block of wood and then hammered away at the sculpture. The needles created small holes resembling pores.

At last they had a huge stone sculpture. It looked brand new, because it was. For Hull's hoax to work, the giant needed to look ancient. They sanded it for a worn appearance. They washed it with ink and then acid. This gave it a convincingly dirty, antique look.

Finally they boxed up the giant in a massive iron bound wooden crate. The bait was ready! Now to set the trap.



CARDIFF GIANT



Secret Burial

Hull considered many possible burial sites before settling on Stub Newell's Cardiff farm. Newell was a distant relation who was willing to help in exchange for part of the profits.

Hull shipped the crate to the general region by train. Then he hired men to load the crate onto a wagon. They were as stealthy as they could be when moving something so big. For several days they followed back roads through the wooded countryside. Still, some people did notice the four-horse team and wagon straining under the weight of the enormous crate. They noticed, and later remembered.

The men reached Newell's farm under cover of darkness. The farmer and his family were away that night. That was part of the plan to avoid suspicion. The crew unloaded the crate and concealed it under heaps of hay. Then they loaded a second, similar crate onto the wagon. This second crate was full of machine parts. The wagon continued on its way as though it never stopped at the farm. Hull made sure that some people saw the machine parts inside this second box. That was the best he could do to cover his tracks.

Later, Hull and two helpers returned to the farm. Working late at night, they dug a huge pit and lowered the giant into the ground. While digging they found a tree root that they positioned on top of the giant, as though the tree had grown after the giant was buried. They covered over the giant with dirt and slipped away into the night.

Giant Sensation

Hull was patient. He waited almost a year before springing his trap. Then he told Newell the time had come. The farmer hired unsuspecting well diggers to make the "discovery." Newell pretended to be shocked when the giant was uncovered. He even pretended he wanted to bury it again. A group of farm workers and passerby gathered around the spectacle. Then they rushed home to share the astonishing news with their families and neighbors.

By afternoon, a crowd had gathered. Most thought the figure must be a "petrified" man—a being slowly turned to stone the same way that fossilization turns prehistoric bones into stone. They marvelled at the figure's ten-foot length, but



did not find that suspicious. The Bible said giants were real, after all. Most locals had also heard similar Native American legends.

Word spread like wildfire. At dawn the next morning, an excited crowd from Cardiff and surrounding villages came flooding into the farm on foot, wagons, and horseback. One of those visitors then hurried to the nearest newspaper office.

A group of medical doctors soon showed up to see for themselves. In those days, science was not usually divided into expert subject areas such as "geology," "biology," or "chemistry." People with any scientific knowledge were considered experts in "science" in general. The crowd respectfully parted to allow the doctors to examine the giant. Unfortunately these doctors knew next to nothing about rocks, fossils, or sculpture. They mistook the statue for a genuine fossil. Whoops!

Reporters arrived later that day. So too did a scientific lecturer named John Boynton. He was a popular speaker and inventor, but locals considered him odd. He had been an early member of the Mormon church, which was disliked in the region. Also, he had gotten married in a hot air balloon. People thought that was just plain weird.

Boynton climbed into the pit and examined the giant up close. Unlike the doctors, he correctly concluded that the figure was not a fossil. It was a statue, he told the crowd. Nevertheless, Hull's hoax fooled Boynton too. The scientist thought the statue must have been buried for centuries. The crowd agreed the figure was ancient, but scoffed at the statue idea.

On the third day, newspaper headlines trumpeted that the "petrified giant" was a "New Wonder!" Larger and larger crowds raced toward the farm. But this time, people would have to get in line. On day three, the wonderful sight was no longer free to behold. Newell erected a large tent over the giant and—predictably!—began to charge admission.

CASH AND CONTROVERSY

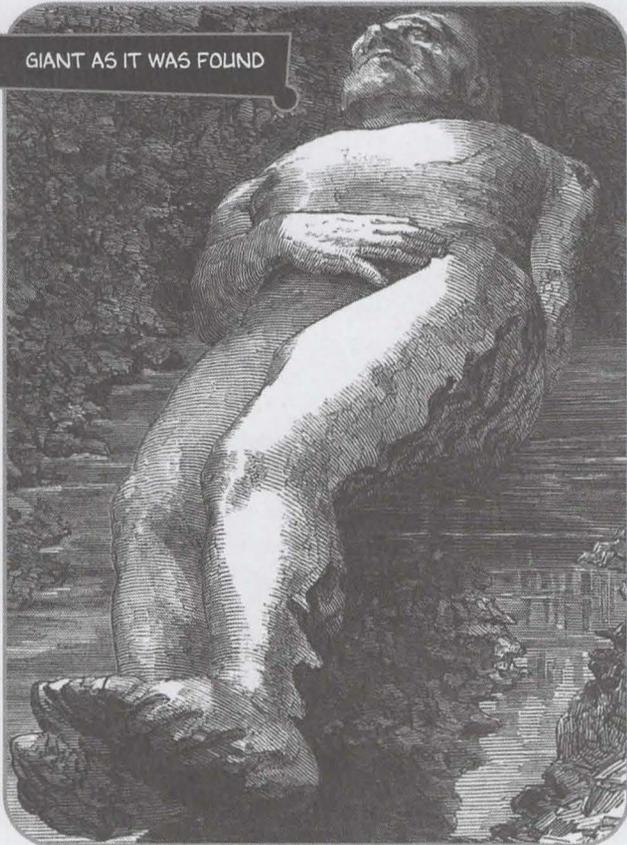
One thing was soon obvious: the giant was worth money, whatever it was. Newell charged 50 cents admission to anyone who wanted to see it. (That would be something like \$10 per person in today's dollars.)

Newspapers across the country ran headlines about the giant. Business boomed. As curiosity seekers flowed into Cardiff, the local hotel booked solid. So did every spare room in town. Everyone with a wagon got into the taxi business. Two competing concessions popped up at the farm to sell food and drinks to visitors. An endless line of people paid admission to see the giant—sometimes several times each.

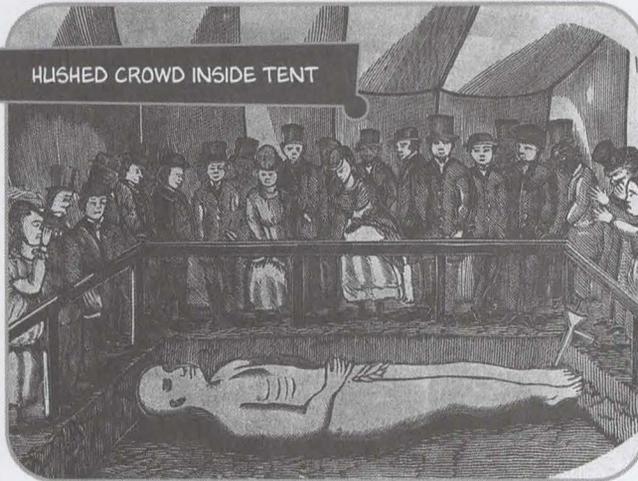
It was quite the scene! “The roads were crowded with buggies, carriages, and even omnibuses from the city,” said Andrew White (co-founder of Cornell University). He saw “lumber-wagons from the farms—all laden with passengers.” The farm bustled like a “county fair” with a crowd “pressing for admission.” Packed inside the tent, White gazed upon the giant:

Lying in its grave, with the subdued light from the roof of the tent falling upon it, and with the limbs contorted as if in a death struggle, it produced a most weird effect. An air of great solemnity pervaded the place. Visitors hardly spoke above a whisper.

GIANT AS IT WAS FOUND



HUSHED CROWD INSIDE TENT



With so many people paying for this experience, ambitious businessmen wanted to get in on the action. Some tried to buy the giant from Newell. One offered to trade the giant for a parcel of farmland. Others offered large sums of money. The offers kept growing, but Newell held out for more.

Hull arrived in Cardiff and went out to the farm. He quietly told Newell not to accept anything less than \$30,000 for a three-quarters share of ownership. This was a fortune—the equivalent of \$600,000 today! Amazingly, a group of wealthy investors did soon offer that much. Newell made the deal.

This deal was completely crooked. Hull knew the giant was a fraud. Newell knew that too. Their investors did not. The investors were fooled into buying a fake.

Growing Skepticism Versus Hasty Opinions

Newell was a “man of pretty good intelligence,” one newspaper said, “but not an educated or learned man in any way.” The small town farmer soon made a very suspicious mistake.

The investment deal was worth more than Newell's farm. He simply wasn't used to dealing with that much money. Once the deal was signed, Newell went to the bank to withdraw Hull's share of the money. The bank explained that they didn't even have that much cash. (It would hardly be safe to carry around such a fortune anyway!) So Newell instead ordered a money transfer to Hull's bank account.

Newspapers got wind of this suspicious activity. Why was Newell sending someone a huge amount of money? Who was this “George Hull” person, anyway? Was he somehow connected to the giant?

Reporters began to put two and two together. It quickly came out that Hull was the same man who had transported a massive iron bound crate through Cardiff a year earlier! Skeptics correctly guessed that the giant was hidden inside that box.

The investors angrily confronted Newell after reading these accusations. Newell insisted there was an innocent explanation. He swore in a signed document that he had

absolutely zero “knowledge or information” about the giant until the day it was uncovered. This, of course, was a bald-faced lie.

However, the constant flow of paying customers helped to calm the investors’ fears.

Visitors by the thousands made the same mistake: they looked at the giant and immediately formed an opinion. As the skeptical White explained,

There seemed no possibility even of suspending the judgment of the great majority who saw the statue. As a rule, they insisted on believing it a “petrified giant,” and those who did not dwell on its perfections as an ancient statue.

It’s a huge mistake to jump to conclusions about an un-solved mystery! People should have waited until relevant experts could investigate. For example, sculptors who later examined the giant recognized marks from stone carving tools. As we’ll learn, there was also scientific evidence that the sculpture was modern and not ancient. However, that evidence was only obvious to experts who studied the properties of stone.

Blockbuster Tour

People across the country were clamoring to see the great wonder—and eager to pay for the chance. After a couple of weeks, the obvious next step was to take the giant on tour.

A crowd watched in awe as workers used pulleys to lift the massive stone figure onto a wagon. The giant was then moved to an exhibit hall in the larger city of Syracuse, New York. There, it proved an even bigger sensation. Paying crowds flooded into the hall—sometimes more than four thousand people a day! The mayor and other city leaders were thrilled to have such an important discovery displayed in their town. They begged to extend the show as long as possible. Six weeks after its discovery, the giant had already attracted 60,000 customers!



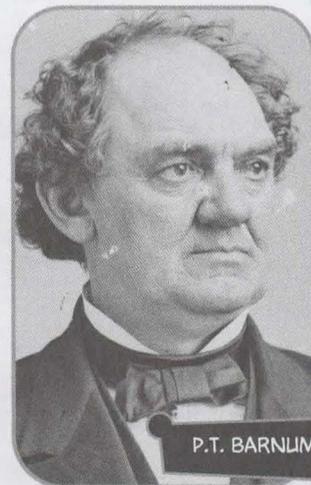
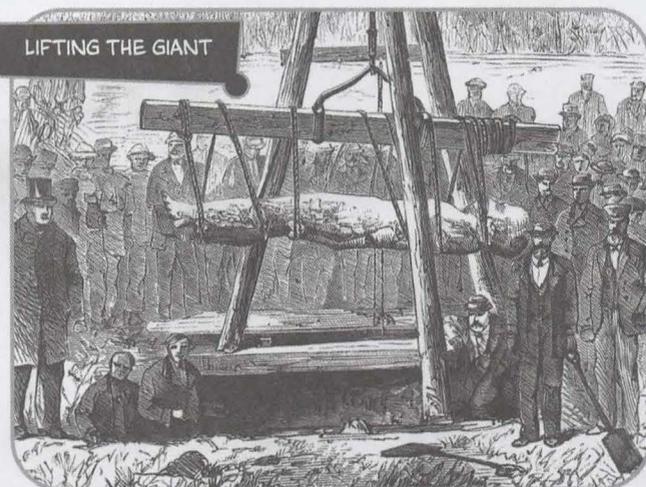
One of those customers was a visitor from Fort Dodge. He was one of many who had seen Hull and his men quarry and transport a huge block of gypsum one year earlier. When this witness viewed the stone giant, “It made me scream outright.” He saw that the giant was made from that same block of Fort Dodge gypsum.

Some famous figures also joined the crowd. One boy gazed in wonder at the giant and then wrote a poem about it. Later he would grow up to write *The Wizard of Oz*. Another visitor was O.C. Marsh, a geologist who would later name many of the best known dinosaurs, including *Triceratops*, *Stegosaurus*, *Apatosaurus*, and *Diplodocus*. Marsh bluntly declared that the Cardiff Giant was of “very recent origin and a most decided humbug.” (“Humbug” means bogus, fake, baloney, or trickery.) Marsh wasn’t surprised that this humbug fooled the public. It was obviously designed to do just that. However, Marsh said, “any scientific observer” should have seen through the fraud right away.

The giant’s most famous visitor was entertainment promoter P. T. Barnum. Barnum was a skeptic who sometimes exposed scams that took advantage of people, such as supposed psychics and fake medicine. And yet, he also delighted in presenting both real and fake wonders to the public. His exhibits included a genuine living elephant and an infamous fake mermaid. He loved to exaggerate as a kind of game, daring audiences to come and decide for themselves. This playful, profitable trickery earned him the nickname “Prince of Humbugs.”

Barnum said he was “puzzled, and at first was inclined to believe” that the Cardiff Giant was a genuine petrified man. Of course it could also be fake. Either way, it was a fact that the exhibit made money! Barnum quickly offered the owners a fortune for the right to show the giant himself. However, the owners were already raking in cash.

They turned Barnum down. This was a decision they’d soon regret!



MULTIPLYING GIANTS

Despite growing skepticism in the press, the Cardiff Giant's weeks in Syracuse were a roaring success. From there, the tour continued to Albany, the New York State capital. This was meant to be a stopover before heading on to a much bigger market: New York City.

But something remarkable happened first: a *second* giant went on display in New York City two weeks before the original giant arrived!

When the original's owners turned down Barnum's offer, he simply bought a sculpted replica. It was a fake of a fake! However, this imitation had the advantage of Barnum's show business expertise.

Barnum was famous for bold marketing. He staged a parade to promote his giant's arrival. People packed the streets to watch twelve horses pull the giant on the back of a wagon while 100 workers marched along. He made sure that newspapers carried breathless stories and advertisements about "THE PHENOMENON OF THE CENTURY." His ads dared audiences to decide, "What is it! Is it a Statue? Is it a Petrification? Is it a Stupendous Fraud?"

Of course it was a fraud, but Barnum exhibited it like a holy relic. It was shown on a special stage draped in black. Dim lights and eerie organ music set the mood. Hushed audiences gazed upon the giant in awe.

The show was a smash hit. This was absolutely infuriating to the owners of the original. They rushed to court to stop Barnum from stealing their customers. The judge refused. He thought both giants were equally phony.

The owners of the two competing giants each claimed—correctly!—that the other giant was a fraud. In the midst of this circus, newspapers became skeptical and even exasperated. "It makes no difference" how many giants there were, one paper joked. "An imitation hoax is just as good as a real one, especially if you can't tell them apart."

When the original Cardiff Giant did finally arrive in town, it just couldn't compete with Barnum's imitation. Barnum's

presentation was better and his show had a head start. The original attracted far smaller audiences. As one paper put it, Barnum had "checkmated the opposition" and "completely triumphed."

Amazingly, Cardiff Giants continued to multiply. The sculptor who made Barnum's imitation simply sold more! Several supposedly genuine Cardiff Giants were shown around the country. Ever the joker, Barnum even bought *another* copy and humorously advertised his "two original Cardiff Giants"!

The Truth Comes Out

The Cardiff Giant was the hoax of the century. It fooled the nation. The skeptical White marveled that even "really thoughtful people" fell for the hoax completely. White never felt "more discouraged" about the "possibility of making right reason prevail among men."

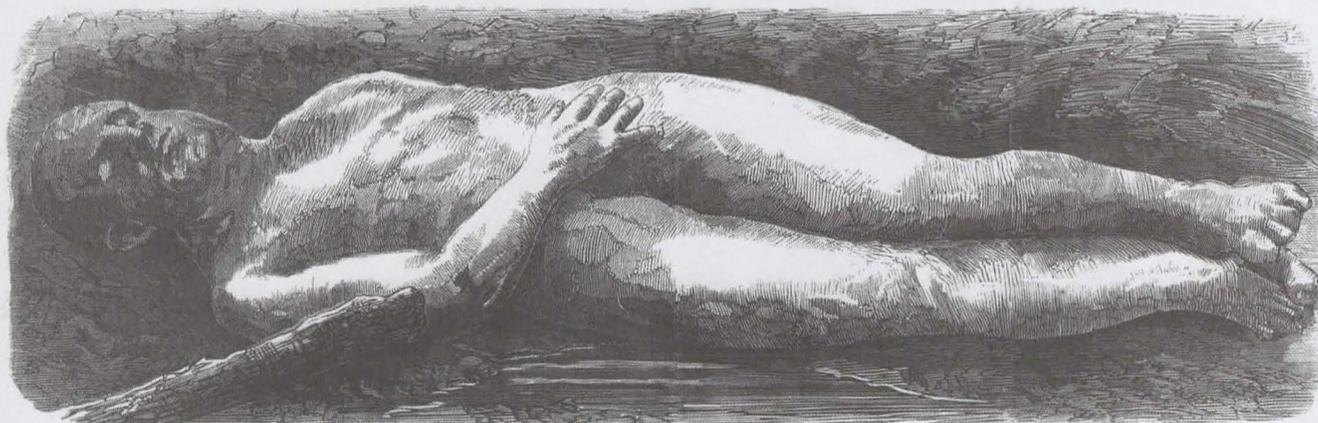
And yet, the hoax couldn't last. There were too many clues. Right away, critics pointed out that petrification claims weren't realistic. It's rare even for bones and teeth to be preserved as fossils. Soft tissues like muscle and skin almost never fossilize. If the giant were real, it would be the rarest, most perfect fossil ever discovered.

In fact, it wasn't even a very good statue. White called it a "wretchedly defective" work by an "inferior stone-carver." Sculptors could plainly see how it was made.

Although the statue appeared old, it was quickly proved to be a recent creation. A young mining engineer pointed out that gypsum dissolves in water. The statue was found in soggy wet soil. In fact, water had badly damaged the giant's gypsum surface. It could not have survived being buried there for centuries.

Reading this, the naturalist Boynton realized he'd been wrong to guess that the statue was ancient. He did tests with gypsum and calculated that the giant had probably only been buried for one year—which was almost exactly correct!

Furthermore, witnesses saw Hull quarry a huge block of stone and later transport a gigantic crate near Newell's farm. There was also Newell's suspicious payment to Hull right



after making a deal with investors. Even the original well-digging story was highly suspicious. There was “no reason why the farmer should dig a well in the spot where the figure was found,” White pointed out. The spot was “was convenient neither to the house nor to the barn,” and farm already had plenty of water.

Despite these clues, the hoax might have lasted longer if Hull wasn’t so greedy and untrustworthy. He broke his deals with other people involved in the scheme. Those who “did not get one penny” became angry enough to tell reporters the truth.

The sculptors confessed that they were the “makers of the so-called Cardiff Giant.” They named Hull as the ringleader, and complained “he has never paid us.” The partner who helped Hull quarry the stone also confessed. Hull hadn’t paid him either.

With these confessions, the Cardiff Giant hoax was completely exposed. Hull was publicly revealed as the culprit.

Aftermath

People remained curious even after the hoax was revealed. The giant toured a while longer. However, crowds began to dwindle. Soon the giant was a mere fairground sideshow exhibit. As decades went by, the giant passed from one owner to another. It spent years in somebody’s barn. Still, the Cardiff Giant was never quite forgotten. Eventually it was reclaimed as a unique piece of American history. Today, the original giant can be admired at the Farmers’ Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

I’m sorry to say that the devious Mr. Hull never did learn his lesson. He remained a greedy swindler. He sued the giant’s investors for money he had tricked them into promising. He was jailed again briefly for cheating others.

But that wasn’t all. Hull also spent years plotting a sequel to the Cardiff Giant! His *second* fraudulent giant was designed to fool people who accepted Darwin’s theory of evolution. It was meant to resemble an ape-like “missing link” ancestor to modern humans. Hull even persuaded Barnum to invest in this new scheme.

By this time, everyone should have known better than to make deals with Hull. He wasn’t just a trickster; he was a crook. When another partner demanded his fair share of possible profits from the new giant, Hull pulled a gun on him! He threatened the partner into signing over his promised share.

Despite years of planning, the second hoax was not very successful. Hull arranged for his new giant to be “discovered” in Colorado. It got attention at first, but quickly fizzled. The whole country remembered the Cardiff Giant hoax. Few people were willing to be fooled by the same trick twice!

Lessons Learned?

It’s been more than 150 years since the Cardiff Giant hoax. Would modern Americans be harder to fool? Perhaps not! People still make similar mistakes.

For example, people who saw the Cardiff Giant leapt to conclusions on subjects they knew nothing about. Today, people are just as prone to thinking they know better than scientists, doctors, or other experts. Another problem was that newspapers promoted the giant hoax before investigating. It’s often still the case that news sources repeat sensational paranormal claims without trying to get to the bottom of them.

Many people accepted the Cardiff Giant because it fit with their religious beliefs. Those same religious beliefs are still very common. Millions of Americans believe that unscientific Bible stories such as Noah’s ark are literally true. A majority think that the mythical Adam and Eve were real people. More than a third of Americans reject the scientific fact that human beings evolved from earlier species.

Simple hoaxes still fool people today. For example, fake films and crudely-made footprints have convinced millions to believe in Bigfoot—a hairy version of a traditional giant.

There are also people who believe in a “lost race” of giant humans. Some of these “giantologists” even claim that the Cardiff Giant was real after all. Fringe books and websites claim that the Smithsonian Institution leads a conspiracy to hide the bones of giants from the public. These writers have to imagine a conspiracy to explain away the complete lack of physical evidence.

In truth, a race of giants is not realistic. It isn’t healthy for people to grow too big. About one out of five American men grow to 6 feet tall. Only about one in a million grow to 7 feet! Average sized people tend to live several years longer than tall people. Extremely tall people often have serious health problems. For example, a famous wrestler and movie actor known as André the Giant had a medical condition that caused him to grow to 7 feet 4 inches tall. Sadly, his enormous size caused constant pain. He died at age 46. The world record for height was set almost a century ago by a man named Robert Wadlow. He grew to the stunning height of 8 feet 11 inches, but only lived to age 22.

Human size has biological limits. But a hoax can be as huge as a trickster dares to imagine.

FURTHER READING

I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THE BOOK *A COLOSSAL HOAX: THE GIANT FROM CARDIFF THAT FOOLED AMERICA* (2009), WRITTEN BY SCOTT TRIBBLE. IT’S VERY THOROUGH AND WAS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE FOR THIS ARTICLE. YOUNGER READERS MAY ENJOY *THE GIANT AND HOW HE HUMBLED AMERICA* (2012), BY JIM MURPHY. FOR A NOTABLE EARLIER HISTORY, SEE *THE CARDIFF GIANT: A HUNDRED YEAR OLD HOAX* (1969), BY BARBARA FRANCO.