

The Secret Hid at Pemaquid

by Paul H. Blaisdell

[An account of the westward movement of the Blaisdell family, based largely on fact, partially on tradition, freely on anecdotes, and generously on humor.]

“All sails aloft, the tide’s auspicious,
King Charles’ men are not suspicious.
We’ll lose all sight of Bristol town
Before the sun this day goes down.

"Full three days hence, by beacon fires
We’ll see the Milford-Haven spires.
Our stay is brief; we take supplies
For the long days where our journey lies.

"Three passengers, water, naught to trammel;
As we sail into St. George’s Channel.
Then ’cross the sea to the forests hid
By the Rocky cliffs of Pemaquid.”

These words the Captain might have uttered
While his passengers fretted and crewmen muttered.

The journey was dangerous, far and long;
But the *Angel Gabriel* is strong.

Each watch would bring nearer the chance to be free,
Which, for Puritan souls, meant opportunity.
Not knowing that e'er two decades passed,
A Puritan strictness would far surpass
Any hindrances sought by a royal hellion
Before Cromwell won the Great Rebellion.

At Milford-Haven in the black of night;
A small boat, with no sound or light,
Came to the *Angel Gabriel's* side,
Where sharpest eyes might then have spied
Three figures taken o'er the rail –
Ralph, Elizabeth and Henry, goes the tale,

Starting the Blaisdells' westward migration
To new lands, new homes, new life, new nation.
A westward urge that would reach a bay
A mere ten thousand miles away;
Leaving a trail of varied fame
Giving lustre to the Blaisdell name.

For weeks at sea the ship was tossed;
Some fell ill, but none were lost.
'Til the cry, "Land ho!," new hope upbid,
The pines and rocks of Pemaquid!

Alas, the tide is rushing seaward,
There are reefs and bars, so turn to leeward.
Drop anchor and stay just one more night
To enter the harbor by morning's light.

No way of knowing that, rushing east,
Came the spawn of a Caribbean beast;
No radio to loudly proclaim
The approach of a mighty hurricane.

On August 15, just at dawn
A day of terror is rudely born.
Huge waves, great winds, cold rain, salt spray,
As masts and spars are thrown away.

No ship at anchor can withstand the might
Of this storm, so prayerfully and affright.

Small boats are lowered in hope to save
This company from a watery grave.

Some reach the shore to crash asunder
But when all is ended, miraculous wonder.
All but one seaman have reached the shore.
The *Angel* has foundered, she'll sail no more.

The Blaisdell clan has now arrived.
It couldn't be better had it been contrived.
This new world entrance is much more romantic.
Than the trip of the *Mayflower*, dull and pedantic.
And who on Plymouth Rock would skid
When he could wash ashore at Pemaquid?

So soon is wanderlust expressed.
Again the Blaisdell feet point west
As Ralph and family slowly stalk
To the peaceful area known as York.

But land is poor; there are misgivings,
Trying to eke out a living.
And freedom's light is wan and pale
In the shadow of Ye Olde York Gaol.

So Massachusetts calls and beckons,
And Ralph, once more, his future reckons
To Salisbury first, to Amesbury next,
The family grows in a land complex.

From colonial struggles and a far king's taxes,
No time for the joy that ease relaxes.
Yet everywhere these Blaisdells passed
As solid citizens they were classed.

Save one, who fell from Heaven's grace
By embracing the New Hampshire pace.
On history's page her way is rife
From the hangman's noose that closed her life.

First of her sex to so depart
This mortal coil, but please take heart;
Despite her unhappy road to fame,
She bore our illustrious family name.
To a firm, enduring, recorded fate
As the first woman hanged in The Granite State.

What was her crime? There is no word.

No hint. So it is not absurd

That when a Bouton's page we twitch

Some accused her of being a witch!

And we wonder what Ralph would think and say,

If he saw parts of Salisbury town today?

With roller coasters, corn and papers;

With hot dog ends and hippies' capers,

With banana peels and other litter.

It's fair to think Ralph would be bitter.

"Was this the freedom for which I bid

When I washed ashore at Pemaquid?"

For Ralph's descendants there could be no question

As the westward migration began to beckon.

Though many stayed East, as they are today,

The adventurous Blaisdells were on the way

By oxcart, through Pennsylvania's valleys,

Where some pressed on and others tarried,

The travelers, crossing the Alleghenies, came

To that confluence of rivers at Fort Duquesne.

And here, resisting the great temptations
Of this wicked spot in our growing nation,
Obtained the flatboats which were best
For the river journey in the great trip west.

So, loading every good and chattel,
The wives, the children, dogs and cattle,
With smiles of joy and cries of "Heigh-ho!"
They started down the broad Ohio.

Little knowing the depredation
Of this form of drifting navigation:
Aground on sand bars, stuck in reefs,
Toil and trouble beyond belief.

Until suddenly, a change is seen:
The fields are wide, all lush and green.
Like the Siren's of old, this place is a charmer.
A veritable Eden for the hopeful farmer.

So stop they did, bought land and tilled it,
And with generations of Blaisdells filled it.
You'd have met with stares of disbelief
If you'd told them their tenure would be brief.

On a Hoosier day so warm and rare,
Many Blaisdells went to the great State Fair,
Where the elder member, with some inner urge,
Took it upon himself to splurge.

A burst of rhetoric, from an upturned tun,
A speech on the evils of "The Demon Rum."

Unhappy the people of Indiana,
Men mopped their brow with a big bandanna.
Cursing this upstart with flowing hair
Who would temperance preach at their lusty Fair.

Action came swiftly; they found a rail.
The efforts to stop them were to no avail.
With ankles and wrists tied back and front,
Like a tiger trapped in a jungle hunt,
They rode him away with a warning stern,
"Leave us to our pleasures, and don't return."

But this was the end of the family rally
In the lush fields of the Ohio valley.
Once more to westward their minds addressed.
No time to linger and be depressed.

Perhaps fortune, excitement, their lot would be
In St. Louis town, where providentially
All westward travelers must pause, to boot.
For the Santa Fe Trail or the Overland Route.

And sensing the trend with uncanny precision
The Blaisdells reached a great decision.
Wealthy the man who supplied the need
For oxen, stores, hay, grain and feed.

So here on the Mississippi's bank,
In the business world they reached top rank.
And who can say they should be faulted
If, for many years, their wanderings halted?

The wonders here were great to behold,
And inevitably some, who were sharp and bold,
Essayed the years of work to feel
The strength as pilot of a riverboat's wheel.

'Til they won the bridge of those river queens
That puffed and tooted down to New Orleans.

While others watched, with growing zest,
The wagons moved toward the vast Southwest.

Midst the younger Blaisdells that urge held sway
To move ever onward, to be up and away.
And, slowly, they started to venture forth.
A few went south, but more went north.

To mix with the Svenska and Norske strain,
Still influenced by their native Maine.
And most, we know, reached the fateful day
When they fell to the lure of the Santa Fe.

Where new sights unfolded in wild abandon:
The plains, the mountains, the vast, deep canyons.
'Til the time arrived to replenish the larder.
So they settled in what would be Nevada.

And their sojourn there was finally topped
When Henry G., with his beard well-cropped
Won the admiration which fine men rate
And became first Governor of this brand new state.

Now this was in eighteen sixty-four.

Two centuries after the hurricane tore
At old Ralph and his family, but this epic ditty
Can't stop in the State House at Carson City.

The vast Pacific is now at hand.
And the wealth of the California land,
Where the Blaisdell name must emerge once more
With distinguished citizens by the score:

College presidents, doctors, such were factors
To produce a few who were even actors.
And some caused parental hearts to flip
As they won their fame on the Sunset Strip.

But, please, let no one think at all
That the wide Pacific would be a wall
To stop this family of restless feet,
Big noses, long tresses and figures neat.

Just as Mount Whitney cannot shed its snow,
No more could they halt – “To the islands go!”
And spread the fame of this once small band
Where Diamond Head meets the high surf grand.

If in Honolulu their roll you call,
Mayor, Fire Chief and Judge – they had it all.
In Hawaii the name is well engraven
Ten thousand miles from Mildford-Haven.

The frontiers crumble, roll back and are gone
Like the lifting mists of a springtime dawn.
So where to now, oh ye restless people
Who once were huddled near a Welsh church steeple?
If Alaska offers too tame a pace,
You've just one spot left – in Outer Space!

But what of those who stayed back East
On fine Maine lobsters and clams to feast?
Did their accomplishments meet the test
As did those who made the journey west?

Indeed, their influence covers the range
From gallows hill to the stock exchange.
There were lawyers and soldiers, housewives and pipers.
Some made pencils, while others made lighters

And Blaisdells, being people of parts,

Have never neglected the performing arts.

Old Pettingill, a shorty, to play bass viol

Had to stand on a stool, the girls to beguile.

While his sons and grandsons, caught in the middle,

Were ardent devotees of the fiddle:

Victor, Carlyle and Henry G.,

Virtuosos of the symphonies.

And Henri, musically, shared in Maine

A part of the William Chapman fame

By conducting deftly, with beat extraordina

For Maconda, Schumann-Heink and Nordica.

And still today, this talent goes on,

Even though no Blaisdell wields the baton.

There's Frances, the flutist, who Heaven forbear,

Is even better than Georges Barrere.

And there's Amy, who graces the spotlight gleam

As a senior of Ballet Theatre's team.

And if your luck is riding high

Try to get, before the paint is dry,
One of the classic oils, strong and replete
The flow from the brush of the artist, Pete.
But most of us, late as teeny-boppers,
Are either choir singers or Barbershoppers.

And what of that Minnesota strain
Where sub-zero winds rip your soul in twain?
Does the family still to the world relate
When summer comes to the North Star State?

Well, if today you escape the zillions
Of city dwellers at Lake Vermillion,
On the mail boat trip there is great delight
As your eyes behold a remarkable sight.

At Evergreen Island: a boat dressed to a turn
With the name *Angel Gabriel* on the stern.
On the tall, dock flagpole where the breezes blow
Flies the Maine State flag, saying, "Dirigo."

If on mailbox side you seek a name
Of course it's Blaisdell – bright and plain.
But the stronghold still is the Pine Tree State.

A quinquennial after that noted date
When Ralph and company lifted a lid,
And they struggled ashore at Pemaquid.

On this earth, and in the rocket's trajectory,
Nothing yet matches the small directory
Of the telephones in Portsmouth-Dover
For a listing of Blaisdells who were not rovers.

And up and down that rugged coast,
Of many fine folk can the family boast,
Like Leon, bedeviled by budgets and work
As head Selectman of the Town of York;

And Kenneth, who is known far across our nation
As President of the family association.
And Clifton, whose gift lies in great acts and deeds
As a family foundation from his home in North Leeds.

Few of the Blaisdells realize
That their family was not the only prize
To reach these shores well and alive
From the Angel Gabriel in sixteen thirty-five.

For the first of the Cogswells were aboard that ship
And they shared with Ralph that fateful trip.
But little was told of what lay in store
As Blaisdells and Cogswells made for the shore.

No prayers, no greetings, no shouts of praise,
No loud Hosannahs to the Heavens raise.
No sanctuary among the rocks,
But Indians, cold-eyed, with tomahawks.

The time has come to beat our breasts
And admit the reason we started west
Was not for fortune or freedom's help
But the pressing need to save our scalp!

And that is why if, today, you compare
A Blaisdell and Cogswell for a thatch of hair.
The Cogswells are bald – shining domes meet all comers.
For it seems that the Blaisdells were the faster runners.

And this is the secret the family hid
When they brought our name to Pemaquid.

[Paul H. Blaisdell, President of the Blaisdell Family National

Assoc., 1981-1983, presented his poem at the family's 1975
quinquennial reunion at the Sheraton Dunfey Inn, So. Portland,
Maine.]

