

THE SECRET HID AT PEMAQUID POINT & THE BLAISDELL TRAIL

Based upon the poem written by Paul H. Blaisdell, President of BFNA in 1975;
Presented by Shirley (Blaisdell) Mendenhall July 19, 2025

The poem written by Paul H. Blaisdell is shown in red. This is 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."

Location of Bristol in the United Kingdom



Clifton Suspension Bridge and Observatory in Bristol, England

Bristol is a city with a prosperous maritime history that straddles the River Avon in the southwest portion of England.

"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."



* Milford Haven – a town in Pembrokeshire, Wales is situated on the north side of the Milford Haven Waterway, and a natural harbor that has been used as a port since the Middle Ages.



"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."

St George's Channel is the sea channel between Ireland and Wales, connecting the Irish Sea to the Celtic Sea.

"Three words the Captain might
have uttered
While his passengers fretted and
crewmembers muttered.
The journey was dangerous, far
and long;
But the Angel Gabriel is strong."

*The Angel Gabriel was a 240 ton
ship carrying settlers to their new lives
in the New England area in
August 1635, when it anchored
at the village of Pemaquid.*



"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."

*The Puritans were a
group of religious
reformers who emerged
in the Church of England
during the 16th century,
and later migrated to
New England.*



"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."

As the weeks went by - the going was slow
- and the James ship left the Angel Gabriel
ship behind and carried on by itself.



As our ancestor's history enlightens us ...

* Ralph Bleasdale was a "tailor" -- likely a trader in wool. He left from Goosnargh Parish near Bleasdale Village, Lancashire County, England, with his wife, Elizabeth (Parker) Bleasdale, and three-year-old son, Henry, to go to America on the Angel Gabriel ship.

* The Angel Gabriel ship left on June 4, 1635, from Bristol, England, stopped at Milford Haven, Wales, and then shipwrecked at Pemaquid Point, Maine on the evening of August 14, 1635. It was destroyed by a hurricane the morning of August 15, 1635. All the possessions and cattle of all 30 passengers (10 families) were lost.



"Starting the Blaisdells' westward migration
To new lands, new homes, new life, and a
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!"

The current town of Bristol was
known as Pemaquid from 1632
to 1765.

So after twelve weeks at sea the Angel Gabriel sighted land. Under cloudy skies, she sailed into a small cove on the coast of Maine and dropped anchor. There was a small settlement at a place called Pemaquid. The ship's passengers were ferried to shore on small boats.

And then passengers immediately began the task of unloading their belongings, but were taken by surprise by a violent storm.

They worked as long as they could, filling the dinghies with trunks, barrels, and livestock, rowing them to shore through the tumbling surf, dragging what they could across the rocks and sand and away from the rising seas.



"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."



Alas Angel Gabriel
is tossed violently
about by the sea . . .

"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."





Thus commenced the most ungodly hurricane ever to hit New England – The Great Hurricane of 1635. This storm surged to twenty two feet – the highest in history, sending wave after wave crashing into the shore, wiping out all before it.

In outer Pemaquid Harbor, the Angel Gabriel began to slip her anchors, her cables strung taught as more than 300 tons fought to rip away from their hold. But the cables could not hold – giving way in snaps like mighty whips, lashing through sails already shredded by the winds.

The ship then drifted at the mercy of wind and waves, bowing and rising like a colossal monster from the sea, keel pointed skyward, only to slam back into the troughs, waves crashing over her decks, bowsprit dipping as though straight to the bottom of the sea. The Angel Gabriel was reduced to splinters, and her crew lost.





"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."



The Old Gaol in York Village was
a former colonial prison.



"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."



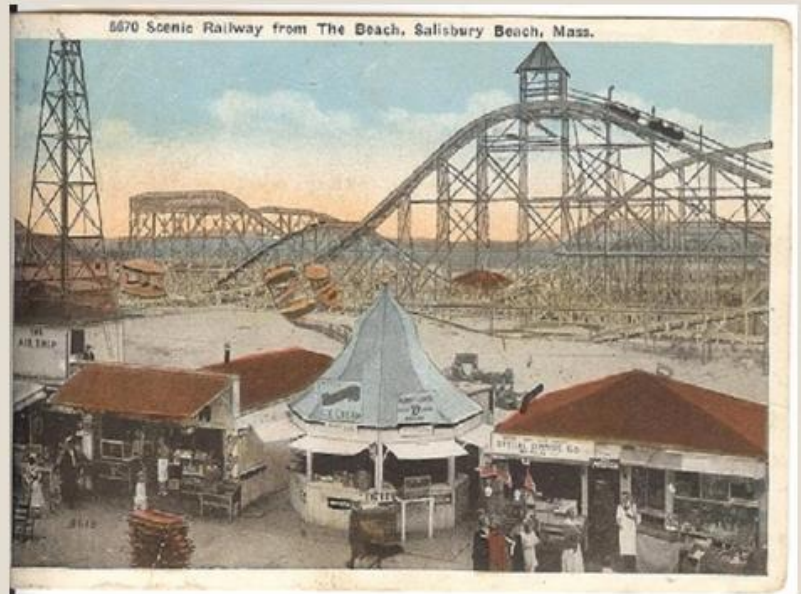
"From colonial struggles and a far king's taxes,
No time for the joy that ease relaxes.
Yet everywhere these Blaisdells passed
As solid citizens they were classed."

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."

* Several of us have a connection to the Salem Witch Trials through Susannah (North) Martin; her daughter Esther; and her granddaughter Hannah Jameson (born in 1678). Hannah married Jonathan Blaisdell. Jonathan was the fifth son of Henry and Mary (Haddon) Blaisdell. Henry was the son of Ralph Bleasdale and Elizabeth (Parker) Bleasdale.

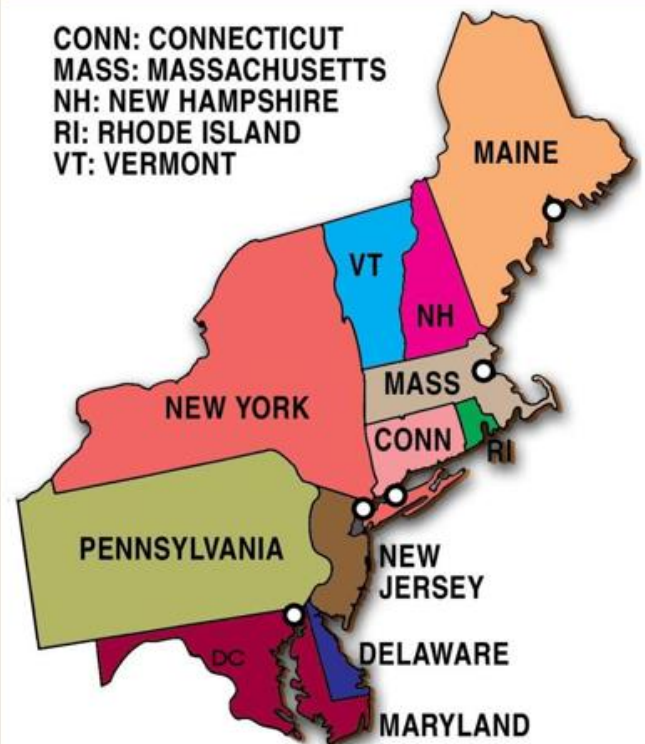
"And we wonder what Ralph would think
and say,
If he saw parts of Salisbury town
today?
With roller coasters, corn and papers;
With hot dog ends and hippies' capers.

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."





The Great Ohio River

"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."

The Blaisdells traveled down the Ohio
River toward the states of Indiana
and Illinois to the Midwest.



"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."

The Iowa State Fair is also a great fair known far and wide – held yearly in Des Moines. I was raised in Perry, Iowa (located 40 miles from Des Moines).

Almost every year, we would venture to the Iowa State Fair to enjoy cotton candy, corn dogs, turkey drumsticks and funnel cakes. Oh how yummy!





Railway transportation was becoming more important as a means of transportation.

"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."

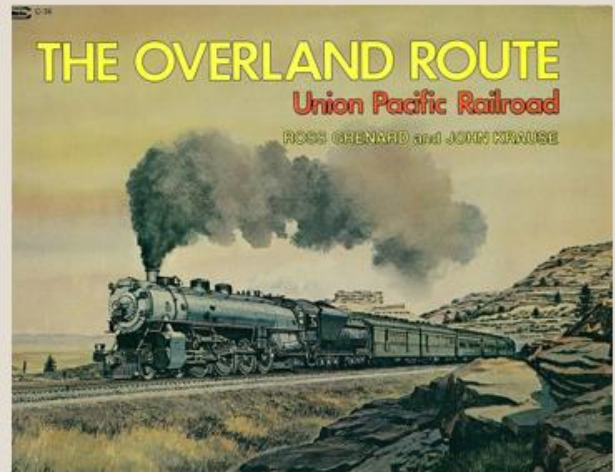
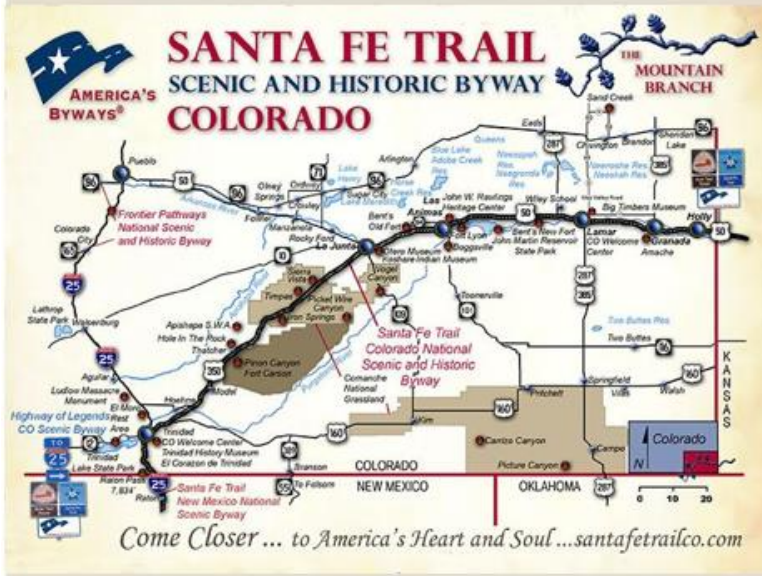


"But this was the end of the family rally
In the lush fields of the Ohio valley.
Once more to westward their minds addressed.
No time to linger and be depressed."



The Great Arch in St. Louis,
Missouri.

"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."



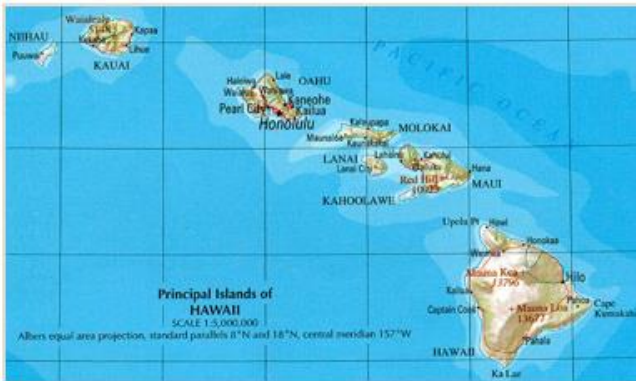
"And their sojourn there was finally topped
When Henry G., with his beard well-cropped
Won the admiration which fine men rate
And became first Governor of this brand new state.

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."



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Self-Sharpening



"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.

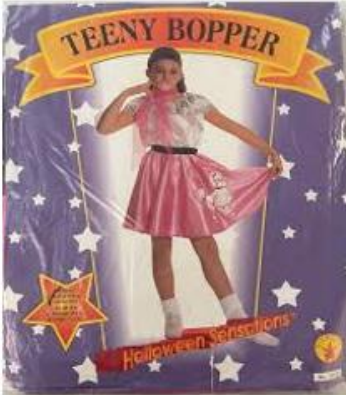
While his sons and grandsons, caught in the middle,
Were ardent devotees of the fiddle:
Victor, Carlyle and Henry G.,
Virtuosos of the symphonies."



"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."

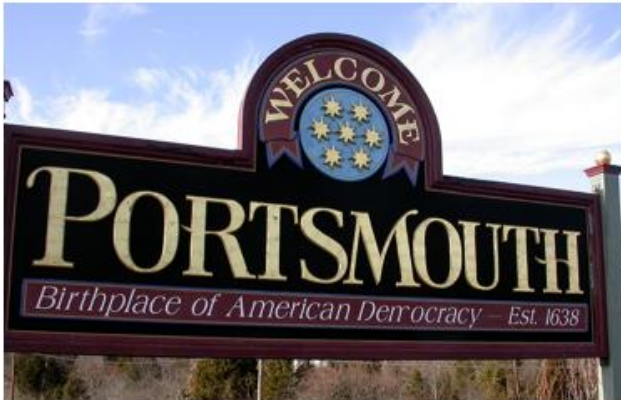
"At Evergreen Island: a boat dressed to a turn
With the name Angel Gabriel on the stern.
On the tall, dock flagpole where the breezes blow
Flies the Maine State flag, saying, "Dirigo."



Maine's flag has the state coat of arms on a blue field. In the center of a heraldic shield, a moose rests under a tall pine tree. A farmer and seaman are meant to represent the traditional reliance on agriculture and the sea by the state.

"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 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."



