

The Life of Captain Phineas Banning Blanchard

By Lila Solberg

Captain Phineas Banning Blanchard, a Maine sea captain during the turn of the 19th century, was an accomplished mariner, soldier and stevedore. He lacks prominent recognition, and therefore I chose to research his life in hope of revitalizing his impressive past. I chose him specifically because of his connection to the sea, along with his interesting family life and his overall legacy. By researching Phineas Blanchard, I intend to commemorate his accomplishments and acknowledge his impact on Maine maritime history.



Figure 1. Phineas Banning Blanchard

Phineas Banning Blanchard was born on February 20th, 1879, aboard the Bark *Wealthy Pendleton*, a cargo ship carrying Oregon timber of which his father was the captain¹. The ship docked in Searsport, Maine², where Blanchard spent the majority of his childhood. For context, in the year of his birth, Rutherford B. Hayes was president, and important events such as the bill that allowed female attorneys to argue in Supreme Court cases was passed, Madison Square Garden was opened by William Henry Vanderbilt, and Henry George advocated a single tax on land in his publication, "Progress and Poverty"³. Phineas Banning Blanchard was born to William H. Blanchard and Clara E. Pendleton Blanchard⁴, who were both residents of Searsport, Maine⁵. Blanchard's



Figure 2. Searsport, Maine Shipyard circa 1913

mother lived from June 14th, 1843 to February 16th, 1931⁶ and was the primary caretaker of Phineas and his five other siblings both on land in Searsport, along with on the sea when accompanying her husband on his voyages. Clara beared, raised, and educated their children at primarily at sea⁷. Phineas' siblings included Matilda L.

Blanchard (1865–1873), Albert Nickels Blanchard (1868–1928), William Blanchard (1873–1873), Frederick P. Blanchard (1876–1904), and Scott Blanchard (1883–1959)⁸. Besides his sister Matilda who died before he was born⁹ and his brother William Blanchard who died within only 9 days¹⁰, his other brothers Albert Nickels Blanchard and Scott Blanchard pursued the sea as well, as a captain for 20 years¹¹ and a captain of the SS Oregonian¹². William Houston Blanchard, Phineas' father, was born in 1836 and died in September of



Figure 3. William Houston Blanchard

1904¹³. Throughout his life, he commanded the Ship *Alice Buck*; the Ship *Bosphorus*, 1863-65 (wrecked at Valencia, Spain); the Bark *Wealthy Pendleton*, 1874-83; the Ship *Phineas Pendleton*, 1883-85 (burned in Manila, 1885); the Ship *Governor Robie*, 1886-88; the Bark *Evanell*, 1891-95; the Bark *Henry Buck*, 1876; the Bark *Herbert Black*, 1890-91, 1896, 1900-01; the Bark *Addie Morell*, 1902; the Bark *Tijuca*; and the Bark *Czarina*¹⁴. An accomplished mariner to say the least, Phineas Blanchard's father inspired his son to take to the seas at a young age; however, initially in the military. Blanchard served 8 months in the American Navy during the Spanish-American War. Specifically, in 1898 he was Boatswain's mate 1/c on the U.S.S. Aux.

Cruiser *Prairie*¹⁵. He returned home to Searsport at the end of the war, where he was able to finally pursue becoming a captain. Living in a central port town on the coast that had 17 shipyards and built 200 ships¹⁶, Phineas Blanchard was able to achieve his goals inspired by his father and the rest of his naval family. Phineas Banning began his life as a sea captain at only age

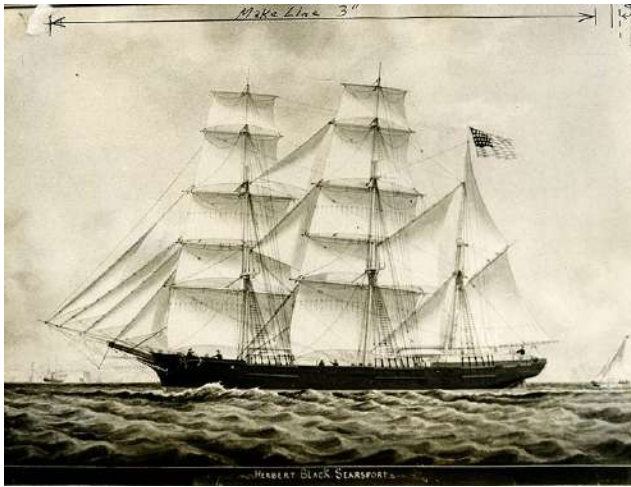


Figure 4. Bark *Herbert Black*

20, commanding his first vessel, the Bark *Herbert Black*.

Blanchard captained the Bark *Herbert Black* from 1899 to 1900 on its journey as a merchant ship to New York with the shipping company J. H. Flitner and Company¹⁷. Over the course of the next ten years, Blanchard commanded many ships and established himself as one of

the most prominent captains of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His second bark captained was the *Willard Mudgett*, which he commanded from 1901-1904. After three long years sailing the shipping circles carrying coal, Phineas took a break from commandment, allowing his father and Captain Fred Blanchard to gain control of the ship. However, during a strong storm off of Fenwick's island on September 14th, 1904, the boat was wrecked, taking down all ten of its crew members¹⁸. In this wreck, Phineas' own father died, which took a large toll on Phineas due to the personal responsibility he felt in relation to the accident; however, this did not stop his maritime career. He set sail again the following year as the captain of the steamship the *S.S. Hermosa* in 1905¹⁹. This was a passenger steamship, ran by the Wilmington Transportation Company²⁰, which Phineas captained until he decided he wanted to return to the Northeast. He traveled back

to Searsport, and commanded small voyages there. One specifically notable event occurred during one of his fleeting trips home, when he met twenty-year-old Georgia Maria Gilkey of Searsport, Maine²¹. The couple immediately fell in love with and were married one week later on October 3, 1906²². The newly married couple then took a

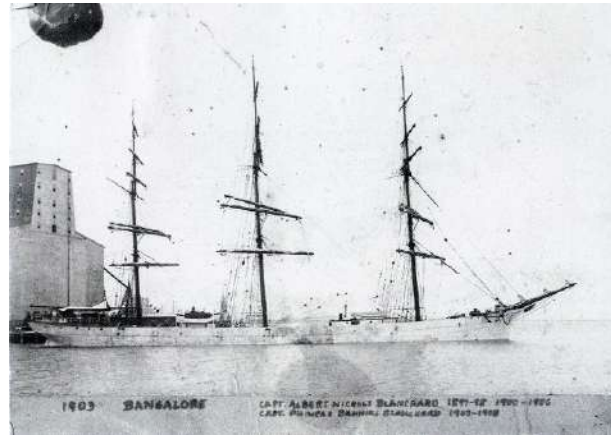


Figure 5. Ship *Bangalore*

train to Philadelphia, where they embarked on their great square-rigger *Bangalore* for a honeymoon voyage around Cape Horn, captained by none other than Blanchard himself. The 1,700 ton ship was loaded with coal in pursuit of San Francisco²³. Georgia continued accompanying Blanchard on his expeditions, breaking free from the common female stereotypes of the time with her adventurous persona. Though Blanchard continued his maritime career up until 1915 by participating in small voyages, he did not captain any ships following his commandment of the *Bangalore*. This was because of the birth of his daughter, Clara Blanchard Howes, who was born on September 22nd, 1912 in San Pedro, California²⁴ while he was there on a voyage. After her birth, he decided to turn his attention to his family, and moved to Brooklyn, New York²⁵. There, he had two more daughters, Anne B. Jacobus (1917)²⁶ and Georgia M. Handler (1920)²⁷. With his increased family size and need for substantial income, Blanchard began work for Turner and Blanchard Stevedores waterfront in Brooklyn, initially as a manual laborer that participated in loading and unloading ships²⁸. While employed there, the company provided service to shipping businesses such as the Norwegian American Line and the Inces

Line, passenger lines from Great Britain and Norway²⁹. At this company, he progressively moved up the ranks, eventually becoming the main manager of Turner and Blanchard Stevedores and the board chairman of the National Association of Stevedores from 1939 to 1941³⁰. This position of authority gave Blanchard many new opportunities. He was the president of the Maritime



Figure 6. Captain James M. Blanchard (owner of Turner and Blanchard Stevedores)



Figure 7. Phineas Blanchard's Obituary

Association of the Port of New York, where

he was in charge of a committee that

compiled the Maritime Safety Code for stevedoring and freight handling operations³¹. Additionally, he was elected a

Commissioner of Pilots by the Chamber of Commerce of New York State in 1942³², a director of the Life Saving Benevolent

Association³³, and made a member of organizations such as

India House, the Downtown Athletic Club, and the Chamber of

Commerce of New York State³⁴. Phineas Blanchard was then

not only known as a wise and accomplished sea captain, but as well a notable businessman and manager.

Phineas Banning Blanchard died on April

23rd of 1962 at the age of 83 at his home in Kings

County, New York³⁵ of unreported causes, but likely due to old age. He was outlived by his widow and his three daughters. The sea captain is buried at the Gordon Cemetery in Searsport, Maine³⁶ where his seafaring career began. His legacy continues to live on through his impact on the maritime history of Maine and his contributions to his associations in New York.

Endnotes

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