

Dr. Virgil W. Blanchard: The “Multifarious” Physician

By

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“It is a fact that during the last dozen years I have been a pretty busy man.”

Virgil Blanchard (1889)

When seventy-seven-year-old Dr. Virgil W. Blanchard died at his Middlebury home in 1910, attributed in part to morphine addiction, he left behind an extraordinary legacy. The possessor of an estimated 500 patents (perhaps inflated), exceeded only by the creative genius of Thomas Edison, and reported (wrongly) one of the richest men in Vermont, Blanchard occupied an exuberant entrepreneurial class seizing the opportunities becoming available in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mid-century steam-driven inventions, led by the railroad industry, unleashed a wave of inventive creativity throughout the country to meet the demands of newly-arrived modernity.<sup>1</sup> Propelled by the heady challenges posed in the years during and after the Civil War, the imaginative Blanchard exemplified that ideal in a wide range of endeavors. They included an eclectic list of interests that saw him contribute to the fields of medicine and health, agriculture, metallurgy, electricity, building construction, and even the typewriter, coffee pot and fire escapes. He also worked in other ways to explore the transformation of steam power into practical everyday domestic applications required for heating devices, stoves, and washing machines. His relentless drive extended to the end of his life when, over the course of just two years, he received a heady fifty more patents for inventions involving the increasing use of gas in appliances. His ambitious drive propelled him further into additional ventures as he associated himself with other inventors to consolidate their shared interests and collectively leverage and market them to the growing capitalist interests. Deeply committed to the effects wrought by modernity, he became a state leader and recognized champion of workers’ rights and the interests of hard-working farmers. He repeatedly advocated on their behalf in a time of rapid change when the laboring and elite classes redefined and repositioned themselves within Vermont society.

Blanchard also experienced significant personal hardship beyond his consumption of morphine by the spoonful at the end of his life. It included threatening a friend with a knife and to kill his ailing wife forced to seek court intervention to appoint a guardian because of his deteriorating mental health. Blanchard also witnessed the death of a beloved daughter at a young age, the passing of another due to

an overdose of suspected morphine, the court-ordered confinement of his son living out his life in the care of the Vermont State Hospital for the Insane, and the suicide of a business associate delaying his inventive efforts. No accounts of Blanchard's frenzied, frantic life exist in any of the state's vast historiography. It is, perhaps, a neglect attributable to his strong independent, at times mean, streak (a "vile temper" one detractor said), a political suasion marking him as a "raging democrat" in a decidedly republican state, his strong temperance advocacy and manic personality accentuated by flashes of poetic eccentricity; all exacerbated by a distinct lack of business acumen. Derisively called a "Middlebury character" in one of that community's newspapers, Blanchard fought back unabashedly against his accuser and gave as good as he got.<sup>2</sup> As he consistently demonstrated on this, and other occasions, his unique personality that marked him as one of Vermont's most colorful individuals in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### Early Years

Virgil Warren Blanchard was born into a Wilmington farming family (also identified as living in Dover at the time) on July 26, 1833, headed by father Warren and mother Elvira (precisely nine months after their marriage), joined by sister Augusta seven years later. They subsequently moved to Guilford and established a residence in the so-called Gregory District, living "near the bridge leading to Weatherhead Hollow" where Virgil attended school.<sup>3</sup> By 1850, the four relocated once again, moving east a short distance to the Brattleboro community on the Connecticut River where Warren continued to work as a farmer assisted by Virgil.<sup>4</sup> The opportune timing of their arrival coincided precisely with the surveying and construction crews of Vermont's first railroads passing northward through the area on their way into the Green Mountains to connect the Atlantic seaboard with the country's interior regions. The profound impact of the steam industry to a wide-eyed public could not have failed to impress the seventeen-year-old Virgil witnessing the rapid changes taking place across the landscape. Rail lines crossing mountains, valleys and streams bearing behemoth, smoke and ash-spewing steam-belching engines and cars groaning with commodities so difficult to obtain beforehand and the ease experienced by travelers on personal and business errands posed an absolute wonder to the mountain-isolated Vermonters. Years later, Blanchard looked back specifically at 1850 as the year when the powerful "intellectual might" represented by steam-driven inventions intervened to overcome the "dwarfed in intellect" subsistence farmers of Vermont eking out a living on the land.<sup>5</sup>

While information concerning the extent of Blanchard's education after 1850 is lacking, in June 1859 he graduated from the University of Vermont's (UVM) medical department in Burlington. As

others of his twenty-seven classmates completed their degree requirements writing theses on various medical-related problems, Blanchard chose the more mundane aspects of their education and life together and wrote a lackluster account entitled "Medical Student Life."<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding this seemingly disinterested display of intellect in his courses, he fully engaged the medical profession in the next years and vigorously pursued a wide range of interests related to health to gain an understanding of the challenges physicians faced. To come to such an appreciation, he professed later to closely studying the practices employed by the two prevailing schools of medical theory battling each other for much of the nineteenth century that included "eight years allopathy, four years homeopathy."<sup>7</sup> His reputation appears early on when he acted as preceptor (mentor) to medical school student John Lorenzo Allen who attended courses at UVM in 1864.<sup>8</sup>

Blanchard was also proud of his inherent ability to examine complex problems outside of the medical field and identify ways to solve them. His relentless drive for self-education in other arenas was vast leading him to explain that he could "lay out a railroad, build a steam engine, or a railroad bridge, [and] calculate an eclipse of the moon."<sup>9</sup> In an article he wrote entitled "The Transmission of Sound," Blanchard described a meeting he attended in Washington, D. C. in 1884 that included several knowledgeable scientists discussing wave theory, among them the chief examiner of the U. S. Patent Office, a man he described as "an old, valued friend of mine."<sup>10</sup> When some of the more educated scientists solicited his opinion on their discussion, Blanchard offered an alternative explanation based "not from the accepted scientific authorities, but from the innate philosophy [he possessed] and facts bearing on the subject." Challenged further to prove his viewpoint, Blanchard retrieved an authoritative engineering treatise from the well-stocked library where they met that proved his point. Deeply curious and possessed of a unique ability to discern solutions to seemingly intractable problems, Blanchard repeatedly brought his unique "innate philosophy" to the forefront in many different pursuits throughout his life.

The twenty-six-year-old Blanchard soon demonstrated his inquisitive nature after graduation from medical school in November 1859, unleashed to delve into the challenges posed in treating diphtheria patients. In a first-of-its-kind application of heat and cold to afflicted parts of sufferers' bodies, he encountered such success that he proudly reported it to the esteemed *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1864 for publication.<sup>11</sup> Fiercely protective of his treatment methods, he used the *Journal* to discount the similar claims made by an English physician two decades later believing he sought to appropriate his work without attribution.<sup>12</sup> Blanchard also reported successes in treating other diseases with the same process that allowed him to gain further confidence to explore additional

aspects of his patients' health using his creative approaches. These years of modernity in mid-century marked the time when Vermonters became increasingly addicted to various substances in the wake of the prohibition law of 1852 that made it illegal to manufacture or sell alcohol.<sup>13</sup> Unstoppable, alcohol remained readily available, but also tobacco and a growing opium-infused patent medicine industry that allowed people ready access to these substances. Blanchard recognized the threat they posed and sought to intervene and alleviate their addictive behavior, identifying this particular time as when he began to develop the theory behind one of his later creations, his so-called "brain food," that became wildly popular in later years.<sup>14</sup>

### Blossoming Creativity

On October 22, 1860, Blanchard married Mary Eliza Smith, the daughter of Bridport farmer Luther Smith into whose house the couple appear to have moved after their wedding. The following year, Mary delivered a son, also named Luther, followed by the arrival of daughter Bertha in 1863. Shortly after her birth, on August 8, 1863 the state's Provost Marshal's Office listed Blanchard as exempt from military service in the Civil War "By reason of Scrofula," a condition attributable to tuberculosis affecting the lining of the lungs.<sup>15</sup> Despite this infliction, it did not hinder his ability to pursue other interests in fields outside of medicine for the remainder of his life. The timing was ripe for improvements in a wide range of endeavors for him to engage in as noted by the prestigious *Scientific American* towards the end of war. The "scarcity of labor has necessitated a demand for new inventions," it wrote in 1864, and "never had a more favorable prospect for obtaining lucrative employment in devising new labor-saving mechanism[s]" existed before this time.<sup>16</sup> Eager to take on that challenge while bridging the past with the present, Blanchard, a distant relative of Thomas Blanchard, the inventor of the water-powered lathe that revolutionized the production of gun stocks (1819), soon replicated his ancestor's creativity. Whether he worked to assist his father-in-law with his farming labors is unknown, but in December 1863 "Virgil W. Blanchard, Bridport, Vt." received his first patent for, according to the U. S. Patent Office, "Improvement in Harvesters." His invention addressed a particular aspect of the mechanism engaging the machine's sickle cutting grain and grass that Blanchard believed distinguished his improvement from any others. In the hotly contested field of harvester improvement that saw many inventors seeking advantage over one another, the Patent Office granted sixty-two patents that year to others sharing Blanchard's particular interest.<sup>17</sup>

**40,812.—Harvester.—Virgil W. Blanchard, Bridport, Vt.:**

I claim, first, The employment or use of a sliding shaft, E, one or two, provided with arms, H, in combination with two co-centric circles of cogs, b b', attached to the driving wheel, D, or to a wheel connected therewith for the purpose of varying the speed of the shaft, E, and throwing the same in and out of gear, substantially as set forth.

Second, The employment or use of springs, G G, applied to or connected with the shaft or shafts, E, in the manner shown, or in any equivalent way for the purpose of equalizing the movement of the sickle, or causing it to operate smoothly without jars or concussions as herein set forth.

Third, The curved stay bar, T, attached to the bar, O, and shoe, P, substantially as shown; in combination with the roller, e\*, connected to the finger bar, S, as shown, and the cylindrical pin, w, by which the finger bar is attached to the shoe; all arranged as shown, to admit of the finger bar and sickle being raised and lowered, and at the same time serve to hold or retain the same in a proper working position.

Fourth, The connecting of the cylindrical pin, w, to the lever, U, by means of the chain, e\*, passing over and around the pulleys, f\* g\*, in the bar, O, and around the pulleys, h\*, on the frame, A, and attached to the lever, U, for the purpose of raising the finger bar and sickle as set forth.

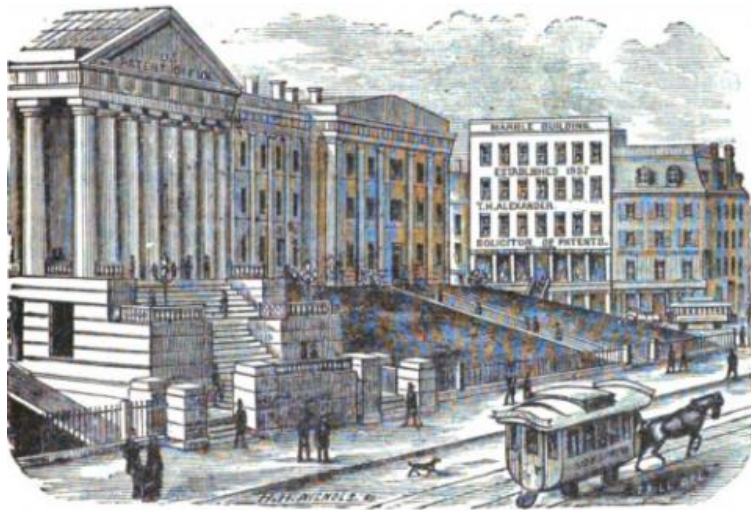
Fifth, Securing the bar, O, or staying the same in proper position by means of the roller, v, placed in the arm, Q, and fitted in the pendant frame, R, attached to the frame, A, substantially as herein described.

[The object of this invention is to obtain a grain and grass harvester which will be of light draught, admit of having a more or less rapid movement communicated to its sickle as occasion may require, be durable, free from all unnecessary friction in the operation of its working parts, and admit of having its finger bar adjusted with the greatest facility so as to clear obstructions which may lie in its path.

Virgil Blanchard's first patent announcement, 1863

Obtaining a patent from the U. S. Patent Office required the specialized assistance of expert legal advice able to navigate the complexities presented by the myriad of inventions flooding in from around the country in mid-century seeking to improve an array of interests. It is not known specifically when the two started working together, but the specialized language used to gain Blanchard's first patent was probably drafted by Washington, D. C. "Solicitor of Patents, and Attorney and Counsel in Patent Cases" T. H. Alexander. The Kentucky native began his practice in the city in 1857, establishing his office immediately adjacent to the Patent Office that allowed him ready access to the seat of government. He quickly became one of the most prominent patent attorneys in great demand in the next decades and worked vigorously on Blanchard's behalf thereafter to obtain his many patents. When a book describing and illustrating the wonders of Washington was published in 1890, Alexander is prominently identified as one of its patent attorneys in a lengthy entry that included an image of his business near the Patent Office. In explaining the extent of his practice, the entry describes that "His clients come from all parts of the United States and foreign lands, and among prominent inventors who have employed [him] may be mentioned Virgil W. Blanchard, M. D., for whom Mr. Alexander has prosecuted some five hundred applications for patents," which were "to the entire satisfaction of the

inventor.”<sup>18</sup> Because of the diverse range of services that Alexander provided to Blanchard and his associates in various ventures over the years, it is not possible to identify each of them specifically. His recollection of working on 500 patents on their behalf may be accurate but does not mean that each of them were actually approved by the Patent Office. Instead, they could also have been, as recorded in Alexander’s records found in Blanchard’s files after his death in 1910, as simply “cases.” His interest in protecting Blanchard’s work extended thereafter when his firm communicated with the estate representative to provide legal advice preserving the validity of several of his domestic and foreign patents.<sup>19</sup>



T. H. Alexander’s Washington, D. C. office, behind the prominent patent office building

Blanchard continued to pursue agriculture-related inventions in the next years in addition to his medical practice as one of two physicians living in Bridport.<sup>20</sup> He also obtained patents for another improvement for harvesters in 1865 (relating to the speed of cutters and drive mechanism) and a car brake in 1866 (involving the application of shoes to slow rotating wheels).<sup>21</sup> His work on harvesters continued and on January 1, 1867 he received a third patent concerning the regulation of the speed of cutters.<sup>22</sup> Just days later, on January 8 the Patent Office awarded him a patent for an improvement on a device much different from his agricultural pursuits. Described as a “hot air furnace,” this creation involved the forcible injection of heated air into a confined combustion chamber containing a substance in order to release any flammable gases it might contain.<sup>23</sup> Months later, on June 4, 1867 he received another patent for a “stone-channeling machine,” described as a device “mounted on car wheels” carrying rotating chisels and saws used to cut deep grooves into stone.<sup>24</sup>

Blanchard's furnace and stone-channeling inventions marked an important milestone in his life that triggered a series of events he could never have imagined. The inventions that followed them and the associations he entered into with others blossomed thereafter into a bevy of trouble that brought much heartache to many in exchange for little gain. His efforts also came to raise and dash the hopes of the Middlebury community he occupied, seeking its own betterment as it held Blanchard in high esteem despite the troubles he encountered and which never abandoned him throughout his lifetime. As his life's story has never been recorded and primary documents from his inventions are virtually nonexistent, only limited information about this particular period exists. It comes from the probate records held by the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration pertaining to Blanchard's estate. It also involves the estate files of a close associate of his that, read together, conveys their shared personal and business relationships in a raw, unadulterated manner. In particular, a small sheaf of papers wrapped in a period newspaper marked as Blanchard's "private ofc. papers" tell the interesting story of how their friendship started, developed and ended upon his friend's death in 1875. They further describe the litigation that ensued when Blanchard fought the administrators of his will and claimed an eye-popping \$1.1 million from it for damages he suffered when their ventures soured. Some of the papers can be easily read, while others are scorched from fire and fragile, their edges falling away, but still able to convey a wealth of valuable information.<sup>25</sup>

As Blanchard's furnace and stone-channeling inventions progressed, he recognized the need to associate himself with investors able to assure their success. At first, he consulted with former Middlebury representative and Addison County senator Joseph Warner, a beloved man recognized in the community as always ready "to help forward all benevolent objects."<sup>26</sup> However, after his sudden death in early 1866, and while a sample of Blanchard's stone-channeling machine was already in production at the Rutland foundry of Mansfield & Stinson in its bustling rail yard, he was approached by another local man interested in his work. Friend Perry Fletcher was Bridport's postmaster, local merchant, a mason, colonel of the Middlebury Light Guards and an entrepreneur in his own right. It appears that the two established their relationship around this time as Blanchard recalled he became the Fletcher family's physician beginning in 1867. Marrying nineteen-year-old Charlotte "Lottie" Russel (the daughter of well-known Middlebury physician William P. Russel) in 1862 at age forty-five for his fourth marriage, Fletcher was fourteen years Blanchard's senior. He was also an 1839 graduate and former trustee of Norwich University with his own diverse concerns in farming and across Lake Champlain where he pursued his "large interests in the manufacture of iron and lumber at Port Huron and Westport, N. Y."<sup>27</sup> A short time before the two men began their association, Fletcher entered into

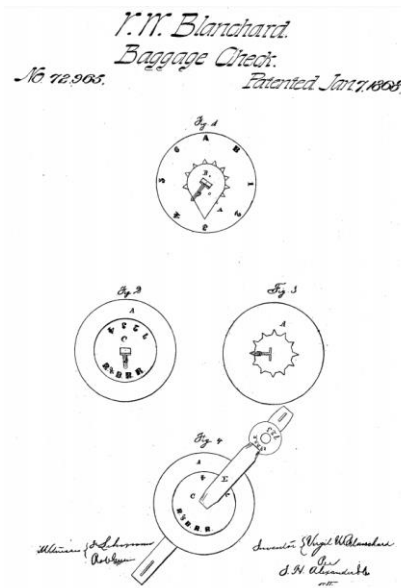
agreements with others to extract iron ore from beneath the 4,000 acres of timbered New York land he owned that became known as Fletcherville. Between 1864 and 1865 the forty-five-foot-tall chimney of the huge Fletcherville Charcoal Furnace rose up on the premises, powered by a steam engine producing seven tons of pig iron each day for the Troy, New York market, made possible by the labors of dozens of men living in the primitive community. The furnace proved successful and thrived for the next decade until a combination of economic woes and Fletcher's death forced it to close.<sup>28</sup>

On March 27, 1867 Blanchard and Fletcher entered into an agreement concerning the stone-channeling machine, the first of several loose "gentleman" arrangements between them that became fodder for significant disagreement in settling Fletcher's estate in 1875-76. The problem with them concerned the use of undefined, subjective terms lending themselves to confused interpretation, accentuated by Blanchard's assertions of Fletcher's self-serving oral statements used to fill in the blanks. Defined by Blanchard as Fletcher's verbal "social comments" and "social promises and agreements," his attempts to assign huge amounts of liability to Fletcher's estate without written proof the deceased intended that outcome did not help him in establishing his claims. The gist of their poorly drafted agreements, both written and oral, envisioned Blanchard taking his inventions to attorney Alexander in Washington to obtain patents that Fletcher agreed to fund. Should an invention prove "successful" (a subjective determination left to Fletcher's sole discretion), the two agreed to share a one-half interest in any profits it generated.

As the two men planned for Blanchard to meet with Alexander and obtain the stone-channeling patent (awarded in June 1867), that spring Fletcher traveled to Troy, New York to investigate reports of improved methods in refining ore. The Bessemer Works in that city (established in 1865) represented the most advanced smelting operation of its kind in the northeast.<sup>29</sup> In the Spring of 1867 it added another innovation to its process, a so-called "five-ton plant, that drew Fletcher's attention since he was already doing similar work in Fletcherville. While there, he also visited Griswold & Company, a second operation employing the Bessemer process that utilized the injection of air blown through molten iron to remove impurities resulting in the production of steel. As Blanchard explained what happened when he next saw Fletcher, "He returned & consulted me as to the cost of making steel. I suggested a light blast to work on the stream of molten iron. Mr. F. became excited & we arranged to go to his furnace to experiment" where "He arranged an air blast & stream of metal." They repeated the process a few more times and continued to obtain "some very satisfactory results." As Blanchard reported, "We produced a specimen of high steel, it more than doubled the strength of the metal." Both agreed that their discovery was of "great worth and value and [promised] large profit" that led to the two entering

into their second agreement on June 18, 1867 whereupon Blanchard returned to Alexander's Washington office to obtain another patent. It issued on August 6, described by the Patent Office as a "Process of converting cast iron into steel and malleable iron," placing Fletcher's name before Blanchard's as its inventor.<sup>30</sup> In addition to obtaining that patent, on August 23 Alexander filed a provisional patent application (one that preceded a formal request) with British authorities for the invention identifying only Blanchard as the inventor.<sup>31</sup> Savoring the possibility of great success, in March 1868 the two men entered into another agreement that allowed Fletcher favorable terms should the invention succeed in England, Belgium, Prussia, Italy, Austria, Spain, Greece and Russia.<sup>32</sup> Despite their burst of activity pushing the process forward, Blanchard recalled that in the years between 1868 and 1872 "nothing was done but talk."

Before 1867 ended, and in apparent recognition of his increasing knowledge of agricultural implements and creative inventions, in September Blanchard attended the Crown Point & Bridport Farmers' & Mechanics' Association (FMA) fair in Crown Point. There, he participated on a three-man committee judging and awarding the best plows, harrows, cultivators, mowing machines, and horse rakes on display.<sup>33</sup> He also pursued other more mundane interests when he sought a patent for a "Baggage-Check" that the Patent Office granted on January 7, 1868; one of four similar inventions permitted that year. Blanchard's particular improvement sought to assure the security of luggage transported by the railroads utilizing a circular piece of metal with station names stamped on the periphery, accompanied by an identifiable number.<sup>34</sup>



Virgil Blanchard's Baggage Check patent, 1868

The restless Blanchard continued to pursue other inventions in 1868 and into the next year offering greater promise than his past efforts. One of them involved, in much the same way that ancestor Thomas Blanchard's did with gun stocks, a process permitting the repeated, accurate duplication of models carved into wood, stone and metal. Blanchard's refinement meant that artists, architects, and anyone seeking to replicate original creations for sale, display or to place ornamentation and capstones on buildings could obtain the most accurate renditions that technology allowed at the time. Although he envisioned its rough outlines in 1863, it was not sufficiently complete in his mind until 1868 when he arranged for the Mansfield & Stinson foundry a second time to create a working model. Money for its development and obtaining a patent meant that Fletcher also participated and on March 16, 1868 the two entered into another of their agreements envisioning them splitting the profits of the "Sculpting Machine" if it proved successful enough in the American and European markets. While a patent was later received on May 11, 1869 for what the Patent Office identified as a "Machine for Carving," it was not until 1871 when it was deemed ready enough to introduce to the public that propelled the two men into a venture they could not have imagined.<sup>35</sup>

Ever the entrepreneur, during the summer of 1869 Blanchard replicated the successes that Fletcher experienced in his New York mineral extraction endeavors and opened up his own marble quarry near him in Fort Crown Point that, one newspaper claimed, promised him "a rich return for his labors."<sup>36</sup> A second project brought the two together in 1868 to expand further on their mineralogical and furnace work that resulted in their obtaining another patent, once again naming Fletcher first, on November 16, 1869 for the "Manufacture of Iron and Steel." Continuing to maintain his distinct individuality, that same day Blanchard received a separate one in his own name for "Furnace and Process for Treating and Reducing Ores" and another for "Preserving Fruits, Meats, and other Substances."<sup>37</sup> He also exhibited further evidence of his eclectic interests that year when on March 9, 1869 he received two other patents: one for a pinion (a small gear used in a machine's drive mechanism) and another for work he completed with Bridport selectman and FMA secretary T. Bailey to improve the gearing mechanism for washing machines.<sup>38</sup> Ending out the year, in September another patent was awarded to Blanchard for a process to preserve wood (cutting perforations into it to allow the introduction of tar or pulverized stone).<sup>39</sup> His efforts and increasing reputation in the Middlebury community drew the attention of the local railroad agent and future museum founder Henry Sheldon around this time. Sheldon maintained a side interest collecting hundreds of autographs of noted individuals and next to a brief note Blanchard wrote to him penned his brief, cryptic impression of him: "an M. D., an inventor and many other things," finding him "slightly visionary."<sup>40</sup>

As the new year opened and apparently in pursuit of his recent quarry acquisition in New York, on January 25, 1870 Blanchard received a patent for a second “Stone-Channeling Machine” device that he immediately reassigned in both his name and to experienced Middlebury quarryman A. J. Severance.<sup>41</sup> Just months later, his continued work on machinery earned him a patent for another pinion innovation, followed immediately thereafter by the arrival of his third child, Isabel, born on May 20.<sup>42</sup> In 1870, nine individuals occupied the busy Blanchard household, including himself, Mary and their children, her retired farmer-father (who owned the 140 acre farm), her mother, a twenty-three-year-old laborer from Canada and a twenty-one-year-old domestic servant. While his farming neighbor estimated to a census taker that his own estate was worth \$33,000 and business associate Friend Fletcher characterized himself as a “Merchant, ret[ired] possessing one valued at over \$300,000, Blanchard admitted to a more modest amount of \$11,000.<sup>43</sup> Identifying himself as a physician, the local clerk entering newborn Isabel’s name into the town’s registry of births recognized his life’s work in a more expansive manner and wrote “Physician-Multifarious” as his profession.<sup>44</sup>

The two men continued to share a close relationship and for two weeks in February 1870 Blanchard treated Fletcher’s son for an undisclosed illness; one that another record appears to refer to in describing the August death of one-year-old Thaddeus Fletcher due to cerebro spinal meningitis.<sup>45</sup> Unable to discern the problem at first, Fletcher’s father-in-law, Middlebury physician Dr. William Russel, summoned Blanchard to the house to consult with him. After Blanchard examined the boy, Russel told him “I want you to take this case, your diagnosis has proved correct and I surrender the case to you.”<sup>46</sup> Attending the boy, remaining overnight and returning at other times to monitor his progress meant a ten-dollar fee from Blanchard for services rendered followed by more bills in the next years when he continued to respond to the family’s calls for medical assistance. Defending himself during the Fletcher estate proceedings protesting that he only sought reasonable fees from his patients based on time, distance, and ability to pay, widow Lottie Fletcher countered in a petty manner and said that Blanchard’s bills were “too numerous.”<sup>47</sup>

#### Friend to Farmers and Laborers

At age thirty-seven and advancing in local stature, Blanchard decided to venture into making public statements about a number of issues affecting Vermonters. Through several articles and poems in the years after 1870, he expressed himself in an unabashed, heartfelt manner on things that mattered to him. Addressing women’s suffrage just before Isabel’s birth in an opinion piece entitled “A Rejoinder to the Female Suffrage Convention, Recently Held in Rutland, Vt.,” he issued a blistering attack

broaching no acceptance of female voting.<sup>48</sup> Donning his physician's cloak, he looked superficially at the physical differences between men and women and concluded that since Nature intended different occupations for each that the arguments advanced by suffrage proponents the two sexes should be treated as equal was erroneous. As one who closely studied the human body, Blanchard pointed to the different "weight and volume" between men and women identified by "the osseous and muscular tissues," the "intellectual nervous tissues" and, aiming directly at females, the greater weight of adipose (fat-storing) tissues they held. He further ridiculed arguments of their equality and dismissed inferences that males could engage in the "the fabrication of pin-cushions, the elaboration of embroidery and to nursery duties" and women to "leveling of forests, the opening and working of mines and quarries, the fabrication of cities and navies, and the solution of problems in science and philosophy."

A year later, Blanchard took on another issue and attacked what he perceived as the degradation of language "approaching the extreme boundary of tolerance" appearing in books available to the public. In a lengthy article entitled "The Sensational and Slang Element in American Literature" that first appeared in a Pennsylvania real estate journal, Blanchard took popular authors, including F. Bret Harte, to task for their use of coarse, base language in their writings. Their work was distinguishable from literary masters of the past, he said, because they catered to "an innate love of the popular mind of the exaggerated, the unique, and grotesque, and . . . to the want of appreciation of true ideal excellence."<sup>49</sup> His ire drew a similar response from the editor of the *Burlington Free Press* ridiculing Blanchard personally in a piece entitled "A second Virgil 'Come to Judgment.'"<sup>50</sup> Making fun of his grammar, the writer mocked Blanchard's use of "unknown nouns and adjectives" as he ranted "in polysyllabic frenzy" to produce his personal Aeneid. The editor apologized to his readers for taking the time to make this response in "answering a fool according to his folly," and wished that in the future Blanchard might "be able to write, in intelligible English, a marriage notice, patent medical advertisement, or something of that sort."

The exchanges between Blanchard and the *Free Press* editor coincided precisely with another of the inventor's important creations. In the same issue of the *Middlebury Register* on June 13, 1871, the paper carried a front page, multi-columned response from Blanchard to the editor for his "black vomit," while on page three it announced the arrival of his "Sculpting Machine." The creation he labored on for the past several years and associated himself with Fletcher on two years earlier finally made its public debut at Middlebury machinists' shop of Martin & Langworthy where it drew immediate praise. An enraptured public flocked to see it in action, carving a stone bust of Daniel Webster from a wood model. "We had the pleasure of admiring," a reporter wrote in an article entitled "Art by Machinery," "its

beautiful and intricate parts, and of seeing their operations upon the rough block, and observing how the features of the great statesman gradually came out under the delicate touches of this wonderful machine." Pronounced an "unrivalled" invention by experts, the reporter praised Blanchard and said that "We can hardly express our admiration of the genius which has brought to perfection at one bound so delicate, so complicated and so promising an invention."<sup>51</sup>

Success did not seem far off and with calls for investors to participate to advance the project Blanchard and Fletcher aggressively pursued the opportunity. On the same day that his invention appeared, the Blanchard Mechanical Exposition Company sprang into existence marking an important moment in Middlebury's history. Agreeing to pay \$500 each to form their company, four men gathered together to name Blanchard as president, Fletcher as vice-president, local physician Edward P. Russell as secretary, and Manchester attorney William G. Blaisdell as treasurer. The company, "organized in the interests of the inventor," a newspaper reported, sought through "unimpeachable respectability, the highest scientific, mechanical and financial ability, and fairness and honesty in deal, to elevate the traffic in patented property above that suspicious reproach into which it has been cast by sharpers and scoundrels."<sup>52</sup> The organizers hoped that Blanchard's fascinating sculpting machine would also attract other inventors to associate with them and use the power of their collective numbers in the marketplace to sway capitalists to invest in their endeavors.<sup>53</sup> Their laudable goals, however, waited and did not become evident in the Middlebury community for the next three years as the men remained quiet to formulate their plans that quickly allowed Blanchard's reputation to soar above them all.

In the interim, Blanchard did not remain idle for the remainder of 1871. Among his other interests, improving the heating ability of residential stoves posed a challenge that he took up and eventually promised a Midas reward in 1897 when he sold a patented version of it.<sup>54</sup> As the Exposition partners continued with their planning, Blanchard contacted Middlebury tinsmith J. H. Sargent to prepare a model of the stove that he could work on to perfect. He labored over it for many years to improve other aspects of it that included the use of state-of-the-art fire bricks able to withstand the high temperatures it produced. Although the specific timing is not known, his search for the correct type of clay to produce them eventually took him to the hills of Pennsylvania where he found the right materials and arranged for their production. Meanwhile, in October 1871 Blanchard acted as the representative of the estate of his recently deceased father-in-law, Luther Smith, and offered for sale to the public the 140-acre Bridport farm the family lived on, calling it "a splendid piece of real estate . . . in a high state of cultivation."<sup>55</sup> When the paper published a second printing of the notice in November, it placed another of Blanchard's literary creations, a poem entitled "Presentment," on its front page. In a brief three

stanzas, opening with “In the solemn silent night, In the silvery sunshine’s light,” Blanchard appears to acknowledge Smith’s recent passing and the nearness of Heaven to everyday existence. It is a place he looks forward to seeing he writes, “Where life’s waters flow forever, Where the Spirit thirsteth never, In the land of light and glory, in its Native, sinless sphere.”<sup>56</sup>

Blanchard had other social interests beyond the suppression of suffrage efforts that included advancing the well-being of the laboring class. His reputation grew within the Addison County farming community where he worked to improve the increasingly sophisticated implements it used and he became known as a strong advocate on its behalf. In early 1872, newspapers identified Blanchard as labor’s “acknowledged champion in our state,” as a delegate of the national party advancing labor reform and author of supporting articles he submitted to the *Pennsylvanian and Labor Tribune* (Lancaster, PA).<sup>57</sup> Continuing to wax poetic, Blanchard penned another of his poems that year proclaiming a brighter future for workers that appeared in a West Virginia newspaper just after his “Presentment” piece. In “The Coming Conflict” he called on workers to hold their heads high and to “Rally! Rally! To the battle, That for Labor *must* be won, Or be like the driven cattle, With no *rights* but *to be dumb*.”<sup>58</sup>

In late January 1872, Blanchard expanded in his quest to explain the inventive process to the public and gave an hour-long lecture at Castleton’s Liberal Church, entitled “The True Spirit of Progress.” While attendance was reportedly “small but progressive,” the curious attendees appreciated the opportunity to hear from the well-known inventor of the recently released Sculpting Machine on a subject one described as “unknown.” In the process Blanchard succeeded in conveying his views in characteristic “unmeasured terms,” but with a flare employing “truly eloquent” language that few understood. Repeatedly using the phrase “corporeal intellectual visual conception” required one newspaper reporter to interpret it for readers as a concept that Blanchard seemed enamored of. In short, he wrote in explanation, once an inventor identified a possible creation he first built it in his mind before he did anything else, constructing every part and assembling it together to see if it would work “before there is a thing done towards its construction out of materials.”<sup>59</sup> Presumably this also meant that working models of crude stoves fashioned by tin smiths according to Blanchard’s direction were only created after this first phase of the creative process was completed. Blanchard’s meticulous description of how he proceeded to fashion an invention coincided with the deep analysis he engaged in, however flawed it proved to be, during a following phase of his life searching for ways to treat Vermonter’s increasing addiction of various substances for the rest of the nineteenth century.

Blanchard's inventions gained further attention outside of Vermont and just weeks after his Castleton lecture he appeared before the American Institute of the City of New York on March 1, 1872, an influential body of like-minded inventors advocating on the behalf of those participating in the creating craze. Undergoing close questioning by its learned members, Blanchard expounded on three topics: Cutting Irregular Forms (his Sculpting Machine); the Manufacture of Steel and Malleable Iron (related to the patent he received with Fletcher in 1867 and which he brought samples of for the attendees to see); and Roofing (describing his process to inject preservative chemicals into wood).<sup>60</sup> The discussion about sculpting addressed the need for delicate cutting instruments to rotate at high speeds concentrating their soft points on the surface of hard materials such as stone, wood and metal to create replicas. When asked how he came to employ his particular process, Blanchard explained that he drew his inspiration ("It was the great fact," he said) from a well-known local incident. It occurred when a diminutive wooden steamboat called the *Sparrow* collided with and deeply penetrated into a city pier "filled in with stone" inflicting a surprising amount of damage to the pier. Blanchard studied the collision closely and concluded that the concentrated force delivered by the boat's pointed bow onto a stationary object aided by his introduction of a rapidly rotating cutter at its tip would enable him to use that combination of forces to fashion impressions onto hard objects. Pleased with his success, he reported that his invention "does not require skilled labor; it is automatic." He also explained that the process employed ten to twelve cutting points able to "cut marble ten superficial feet, two inches deep, in ten hours, using four-horse power." His appreciative audience issued supportive observations of his work and the organization's president praised it as "peculiarly an American invention." He also addressed Blanchard's steel manufacturing process and found it unique because its particular use of compressed air forced into molten metal appeared to improve the Bessemer process then in general use and could "be readily applied to any ordinary furnace." The meeting was an unqualified success for Blanchard and he could now cite the organization's favorable support as he proceeded with his future innovations.

#### Increasing Notoriety

The specific date of Blanchard's association with a notorious individual that played an important role in his life in the next decades, Pennsylvania entrepreneur George Washington Newton Yost (1831-1895), is unknown. It appears to have taken place around the time he made his presentation before the American Institute. As Blanchard recalled their first meeting during the Fletcher estate proceedings, "In '72 we met some parties from Syracuse," inferring the individuals traveled to Vermont for the occasion.

Immediately afterwards, Blanchard explained that “I went to Syracuse & then Fletcher, Youst [sic], Hubbard & myself formed a partnership to go on & develop this plan of making steel.” The “plan” he referred to concerned reviving their efforts for the 1867 patent he and Fletcher obtained or the “Process of converting cast iron into steel and malleable iron” that lay dormant.

Despite Blanchard’s and Fletcher’s assessment that Yost was “a good man,” his recent past indicated otherwise. Credited with inventing a version of the typewriter and the recipient of many patents over the preceding two decades for improvements in plows, planters, harvesters, cultivators, soap, chains, and the transportation of petroleum, Yost faced a heated legal battle in a Pennsylvania federal court in 1870 alleging patent infringement. It concerned his Climax Reaping and Mowing Machine and allegations made by harvester inventor William Heston that Yost had misappropriated his invention. In legal proceedings later described by the New York Supreme Court (County of New York) in an 1888 lawsuit involving Yost and Blanchard as defendants, Yost testified before a federal grand jury about his invention in January 1871. His testimony was deemed untruthful and the grand jury indicted him for perjury in October. Yost was arrested, arraigned, tried by the United States attorney and found guilty, and on April 30, 1872 fined \$1,000 and ordered to serve two years hard labor at the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania.<sup>61</sup> Less than a month later, a successful appeal to President Ulysses S. Grant resulted in Yost receiving an unconditional pardon and his freedom.<sup>62</sup>

Recently removed out from under that test, Yost now associated himself with Blanchard and Fletcher in an arrangement that permitted him to obtain one-half of their interest in the smelting process if he could solve a particular problem they faced. Yost, together with the briefly named Hubbard, then consulted with a James Haskins who appears to have had specialized machinery to fashion the piping necessary to address the problem. Unfortunately, soon afterwards the intemperate Haskins committed suicide while in the throes of delirium tremens. While the association with Yost and Hubbard ended (“occasioned by Haskin’s suicide,” Blanchard said), the two Vermonters persisted and formed themselves into the short-lived Fletcher and Blanchard Iron & Steel Company, based in Syracuse. Seeking additional support for their invention later in 1872, they consulted with R. Vander Naillen, the Chicago-based principal of the Institute of Practical Civil Engineering, Surveying and Drawing. Vander Naillen possessed the necessary credentials to assess the viability of their invention and in the next decades he went on to assume important engineering roles in California. “After careful investigation of your new system of Blast Furnace,” he wrote to them, “I can not but fully concur in your view, viz: that it will produce at a comparatively small cost, a very superior [obliterated].” Confident of the new system’s future and “Knowing that you will succeed in your enterprise beyond your expectations,” Vander Naillen

cautioned the two men to employ a knowledgeable mineralogist. This was necessary, he said, in order to add further credibility to the process allowing it to extend “all over the world” and recommended that they hurry and contact an experienced Frenchman for assistance and to “get him even if he had returned to France.”<sup>63</sup> As promising as their new form of blast furnace was, nothing more in Blanchard’s story concerns it as he turned to face other challenges closer to home.

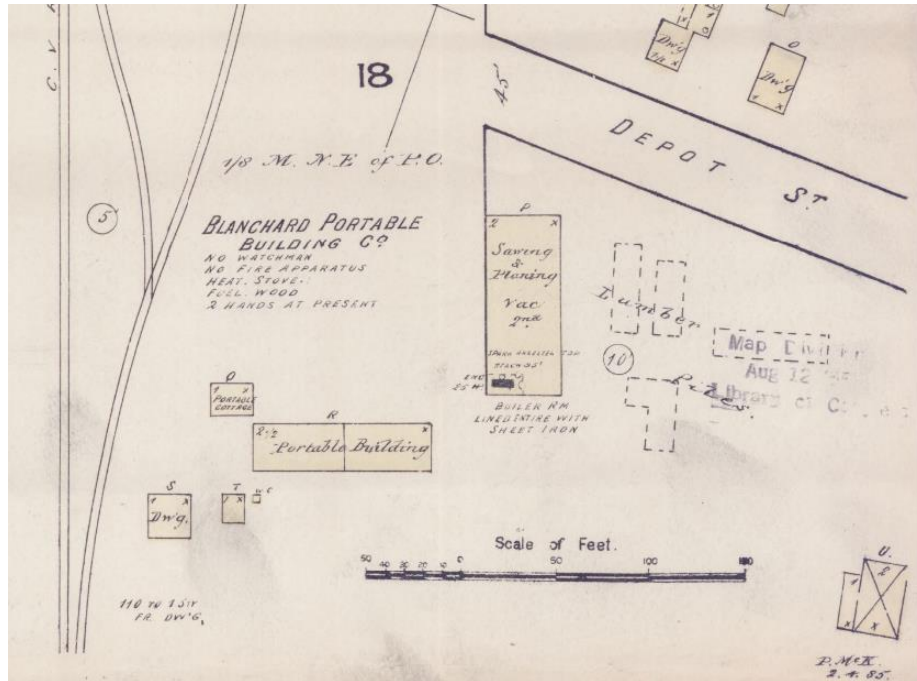
Contemporaneously with the blast furnace and steel manufacturing efforts, Blanchard and Fletcher pursued the development of the sculpting machine, the primary reason for creating the Blanchard Mechanical Exposition Company in 1871. On October 4, 1872, the two entered into an agreement calling for Fletcher to provide \$30,000 for the production of two of the machines able to perform “the work of 200 men per diem” that they planned to sell for \$40,000 and split the profits.<sup>64</sup> Brief entries in Fletcher’s probate proceedings reveal further that the two associated that year to manufacture 200 mowing machines, calling once again on the Rutland foundry of Mansfield & Stinson to do the work. While the production of the sculpting machines appears to have proceeded without much trouble, the mowing machines presented significant difficulties when Blanchard finally saw the first twenty-five that the foundry tried to deliver to him. Refusing to accept them as “worthless,” he described the machines as made out of “old iron” lacking the necessary sickles and the company guilty of committing “blunders.” However, Fletcher appears to have disagreed and did take possession of them resulting in his estate administrators’ attempting to transfer their \$8,392 cost solely onto Blanchard. When the inventor contested and argued that he was not in partnership with Fletcher on the cutting machine venture, testimony from a representative of Mansfield & Stinson issued a blistering attack on Blanchard. Fletcher’s well-known reputation of probity and being “a man of judgment, a keen and discriminating man of business not liable to be fascinated by any man” was countered by the foundry representative’s assessment of the inventor’s character. Regarding his stone-channeling invention, he called it “a monument to the barrenness of Dr. [Blanchard’s] brain,” and “a monument of folly.” He also alleged that Blanchard duped his associate concerning the mowing machines, “succeeding in making Fletcher believe that there was a large amount of money to be made by their invention. He made a fool of Fletcher!” While other allegations that Blanchard had swindled Fletcher also arose, counter arguments insisted that Fletcher padded his expenses when seeking reimbursements from the inventor. When Blanchard wrote to Fletcher in 1873 requesting that he pay money for an unspecified matter, Fletcher refused. “I have put up on the Doctor over 30,000 dollars,” he penned in the letter’s margin, “& nothing has come of it.” Calling Blanchard “ungrateful” for Fletcher’s contributions, his estate administrators contested any responsibility for the cutting machine bill and

argued that the deceased suffered to his last days “harbor[ing] in his bosom this most unkindest cut of all.”<sup>65</sup>

As Blanchard’s and Fletcher’s relationship soured, the inventor continued with another of his cutting machine innovations. While G. W. N. Yost’s name does not appear alongside Blanchard’s in any extant patents, the two continued to associate in some fashion in June 1873 concerning a notorious harvesting contest conducted in Weybridge, Vermont involving mowing machines. The high stakes trials pitted Blanchard’s Acme mower, reportedly co-invented with Yost, against machines from Vermont and other states bearing the notable names of Iron Buckeye, Clipper, Eagle, Little Giant, Sprague, and Meadow King.<sup>66</sup> The Acme already garnered great attention in the past four years outside of Vermont, taking first place awards in twenty-six other competitions marking this moment the first time it appeared in a New England field. Already in production by “*five first class shops*” around the country, with arrangements underway for 5,000 more for the New England trade alone, the contest was Acme’s to lose.<sup>67</sup> The outcome of trials taking place at town clerk John A. Child’s farm are not clear, but the Acme’s performance was reportedly flawless. According to one spectator, who described it in terms that only a farmer could truly appreciate, the machine “did its work at the trial – perfect work - with *one third less motion of its sickle*, and with less than *one half of the noise* of any other machines.” However, good performance was only one factor when lucrative contracts from the farming community were sought by envious competitors trying to undercut the winner. Inevitably, the event saw its share of discord when an agent for one manufacturer sold five machines at prices lower than what Blanchard sought. An acrimonious public exchange ensued in newspapers when Blanchard’s supporters came to his defense describing him in glowing terms undeserving of that kind of treatment. The doctor-inventor was recognized as “a well known resident of this vicinity,” one wrote, who “has been a most faithful servant” to farmers, confirmed by a second observer who described him as “one of the friends of the laboring farming community.” Blanchard’s reputation and ability to speak out on his own behalf was also recognized (able to “vindicate his own cause, being, as we believe, perfectly competent for the task”), prodded him to enter the fray and provide a lengthy response to the price-cutting allegation by his losing competitor. Shaking off any concern that the loser’s mower presented a credible challenge, he ended his missive by simply pointing out that his Acme mower was a proven product while the other was not.<sup>68</sup> Local merchant Albert Chapman agreed and published notice of his intention to sell the mower, priced more than others, advising that “Farmers will do well to examine thoroughly these machines with their improved [cutting] points before purchasing others. We warrant them to give satisfaction.”<sup>69</sup>

Blanchard continued to draw attention and admiration within the farming community leading to his appearing before an audience of some sixty people in Vergennes as the first speaker at the February 3, 1874 meeting of the Vermont Board of Agriculture, Manufactures and Mining.<sup>70</sup> His topic expanded on the “True Spirit of Progress” lecture he made in Castleton in 1872 when he used confusing language to describe the inventive process. On this occasion, he examined more deeply how the result of those processes affected farmers in this more recent time, addressing the effects of modernity on agriculture.<sup>71</sup> He first accurately identified 1850 as the year when Vermont farmers experienced the significant winds of technological change as the railroad industry thrust itself into the Green Mountains. Before then, he said, they labored in their fields dependent on simple tools and beasts of burden that did not require imagination to use or for them to engage in innovative changes separating them from their traditional life styles. However, with the new steam technology after 1850, an entirely new environment existed calling on farmers to invent what Blanchard termed “intellectualized mechanical appliances” to alleviate their historic drudgeries. Specifically excluding academics from the effort, he said that only farmers tied so closely to the land could sponsor such change; an effort delayed for the past two decades, he said, because they did not appreciate their ability to do so. Discussing other issues facing farmers (the use of chemistry, new ways to dry hay and exploiting water power on the farm), he unabashedly praised them and said that “We see in the future the ultimate domination of the agriculturalists, as a class, over all others.” His comments understandably drew praise from his audience as one said he enjoyed “hearing this address from a man who had spent twenty-five years in the invention and improvement of agricultural implements [and] regretted there were not more of the farmers of the county [present] to hear it.”

Blanchard remained busy for the balance of 1874, obtaining a patent once again through the efforts of Washington attorney Alexander for a new, stronger lamp chimney and pushing forward with his Mechanical Exposition project in Middlebury. “The object of this invention,” he wrote in his lamp patent application, “is to provide, by one or more series of corrugations in its wall, a lamp chimney that will not easily be fractured by the contraction and expansion resulting from a sudden variation of temperature.”<sup>72</sup> The effort was well received locally when a newspaper called it “a decided improvement on the brittle cylinders now in use.”<sup>73</sup> By the end of the summer, Blanchard had his “Blanchard Reflecting Corrugated Lamp Chimney” (“the demand is already beyond the means of supply,” he wrote) and the “Excelsior Coffee Pot” for sale soliciting “anyone who wishes a sure chance to make money” to apply to him to become his agents.<sup>74</sup> He also suffered a tragic personal loss on May 24 when four-year-old daughter Isabel, described as “a beautiful little girl,” died of scarlet fever.<sup>75</sup>



Blanchard's Portable Building Co. at the Middlebury Railyard

In the fall of 1874, the four members of the Blanchard Mechanical Exposition Company, who first entered into their association in 1871, finally had their new building. Described by the *Burlington Free Press* as “probably one of handsomest in the country,” it became the centerpiece of their dreams to advance Blanchard’s inventions.<sup>76</sup> The partners’ envisioned the building being disassembled and, together with its contents valued at \$30,000 (the sculpting machine alone weighed four tons) transported by rail throughout the country to attract the attention of investing capitalists to their venture. They also hoped to create branch organizations, splitting up the country into various divisions where they could establish similar operations. Measuring twenty-five feet wide by one-hundred feet long and thirty-six feet tall, the imposing structure built in Burlington by the Hatch & Walker Company had been transported to the Middlebury rail yard in sections where workmen joined them together. It was an extraordinary structure, a newspaper reported, constructed “without reference to cost,” of innovative design adorned with iron work brought in from Ohio and capped by “highly ornamented finicals, balustrades, flag staffs and beautiful flags [that] will give the entire front a very lively and gala-day appearance.” The workmanship deemed excellent made the Burlington community proud “that we can send out such cards of artistic and mechanical skill” into the world. It opened in November after the Company allowed the Middlebury “young people” to hold a ball there and where the main room “was well filled and all seemed to enjoy the occasion.”<sup>77</sup>

As excited as Blanchard and his partners were, Fletcher's health posed a problem. Inflicted with paralysis months earlier, and shortly after the building opened, on January 21, 1875 the fifty-five-year-old suddenly died. He was greatly missed by many, described in the local paper as "one of the most prominent and active of all business men of Addison county, as well as one of the most successful."<sup>78</sup> Blanchard, who one newspaper said "perhaps, knew the deceased better than any other man living," also contributed to memorialize Fletcher with another of his poems entitled "Say, Who Will Fill His Place?"<sup>79</sup> A month later, he wrote another entitled "Death" that may be attributed to his continuing feelings of loss. It appeared in the same vein as his 1871 poem "Presentment" lamenting the transition from life to death, calling it "The final blow of fate."<sup>80</sup> Blanchard's penchant for writing poems drew the attention of another local resident whose similar efforts were rejected for publication in the *Middlebury Register*. Seeking ways to solve the editor's problem in concocting reasons to justify further rejections, the wag wrote a column with proposals that included reference to the renowned local doctor-inventor. Perhaps, he said, the editor should apply "to Dr. Blanchard for the invention of a special patent, a right and left-handed, double spring, back action, self-adjusting, poet extinguisher."<sup>81</sup> The levity notwithstanding, Blanchard's feelings for Fletcher soured that summer when the administrators of his estate, initially valued at over \$91,000, made demands that he pay it thousands of dollars. In turn, Blanchard listed the extensive damages he suffered because of his association with Fletcher: the steel contract (\$400,000); chiseling machine (\$100,000); sculpting machine (\$400,000); loans (\$10,000); and refusal by administrators to pay what they owed him (\$400,000). That effort set off a firestorm of claims, counterclaims and recrimination on both sides before it was finally settled in 1883 with the estate paying Blanchard \$6,300 to settle the dispute. Appearances were deceptive and Fletcher, purportedly rich before his death, sustained debts in his lifetime that substantially diminished his assets to a level that his wife and two children each received equal shares amounting to a mere \$3,193 each.<sup>82</sup>

Despite Fletcher's passing, Blanchard continued to exhibit his strong character to assure the exposition's building future and that his career continued to advance. In June, partner William Blaisdell separated from the company under strained relations with its founder because his sculpting machine did not perform as promised. Clearly frustrated at the hemorrhaging costs of their venture, Blaisdell testified during the Fletcher estate litigation, with particular emphasis, that "We established the [Exposition Company] on the basis of this Machine. We depended on it. I had confidence in the Machine till our means were exhausted. I am thro' with the [Exposition Company and] with Blanchard."<sup>83</sup> Undeterred at his leaving, Blanchard promptly notified the public that from then he would personally pursue the venture using "the same firm name."<sup>84</sup> That included using it and the building for

his medical practice. In advertising those services, he advised patients seeking help with “diseases of the lungs, obscure kidney difficulties, and chronic diseases peculiar to the female sex” to contact him at his office in the Mechanical Exposition Building.<sup>85</sup> He also used the location as a means to branch out from his traditional medical practice and into another of his innovations that quickly became a national phenomenon.

#### Blanchard Food Cure Company

By the mid-1870s, the country’s attraction for a variety of stimulants, exacerbated in Vermont by its 1852 prohibition law, meant that increased instances of addiction occurred at the same time. Vermonters already exhibited a marked inclination to consume large amounts of opium and Blanchard understood this as another of society’s woes that required his intervention. Using the same in-depth, albeit at times confusing, analysis he employed in creating his agricultural inventions and explaining the “intellectualization” and practical utilization of technology by farmers, Blanchard delved into solving the addiction problem. He theorized that society’s rapidly changing times presented a wholly new situation where the growing ranks of professionals taxing their intellectual capacities, such as bankers, accountants and teachers, tired themselves in ways different from the past. While Blanchard characterized the addictions resulting from the “mental dyspepsia” these professionals experienced, it appears to have been a way for him to advance on the efforts of another physician who called the pre-existing nervous condition “neurasthenia.” It first appeared in 1869 in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, the same publication Blanchard used in 1864 to explain his work on diphtheria.<sup>86</sup> The challenge as defined by Blanchard in resolving addiction was to substitute a concentrated substance of some form to replace the effects of alcohol, opium and tobacco and replenish depleted brain cells. “Critical examination of the human brain,” one summary of his theory described, “shows its component parts to be of a character susceptible of reconstruction, the more rapid and effectual in proportion to the nature and ingredients of the food consumed from which its sustenance is drawn.”<sup>87</sup> In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Kellogg and Post created their own concoctions using kernels of grain to treat patients suffering various ailments, but Blanchard chose instead to use a process utilizing its exterior husk. Taken together with milk, Blanchard said, this “nerve food” worked rapidly and “*affords almost instantaneous relief to that sense of physical and mental depression which leads to the use of brain stimulants, alcohol, opium and tobacco.*”<sup>88</sup>

Beginning in the summer of 1875 Blanchard began a huge advertising program for his “brain food” that started in Vermont and spread quickly throughout the country. Hawking “The Blanchard Concentrated Blood and Nerve Food, or Tonic Extract of Wheat,” he claimed that it concentrated the

benefits of an entire bushel of wheat into “a SINGLE QUART OF THIS PREPARATION.”<sup>89</sup> “As a substitute for Alcohol, Opium or Tobacco,” its instructions read that “an adult should commence with the use of ½ dessert-spoonful after each meal, the quantity to be increased to one dessert-spoonful in the course of one week.” It appeared under a banner proclaiming, “FOOD! FOOD! FOOD! FOOD AT LAST A SUBSTITUTE FOR DRUGS!” and had an immediate effect in Middlebury. “Dr. V. W. Blanchard’s Blood and Nerve Food is coming into quite extensive use in this vicinity,” one paper wrote, “and with very satisfactory results” telling readers that “It is prepared by the Blanchard Mechanical Exposition Company of Middlebury.”<sup>90</sup> Two years later, a newspaper announced ongoing success because of Blanchard’s work that “seem to run of themselves” and that his Nerve Food “has a strong hold upon the community.”<sup>91</sup> “Dear Sir,” one Whiting admirer wrote to Blanchard, “A few weeks ago I was in Middlebury, tried to find you. Hear you were sick at your house, so did not go to your palaci [sic]. I wanted to get more of your ‘food.’”<sup>92</sup> Convinced to try a competitor’s brand instead, the writer reported that “we do not like it as well as yours,” before requesting that Blanchard send him “one half dozen bottles” of his product. He also asked him to send a special bottle of the substance “for myself as you did in the summer, if you remember my trouble is with my back,” indicating that Blanchard had infused it with a pain killer of some kind, possibly opium or morphine. Another correspondent from Troy, New York also wrote to him explaining that despite consulting fourteen different doctors and traveling to Europe to find relief from an ailment, only his Nerve Food worked.<sup>93</sup>

In December 1875, Blanchard conducted a series of lectures over several days in Charlotte “consisting of a scientific exposition of the cause of the evils of the present age,” leading with “treating of intemperance intellectually.”<sup>94</sup> Steadfast in continuing to convey his theories to the public on why people fell victim to addictive substances, he soon appeared in Castleton once again to deliver a second set of lectures on the subject of “proper food for man.”<sup>95</sup> Blanchard told his audience that he “had treated hundreds of cases of delirium tremens” in the past and was currently assisting three more. On each of those occasions, he said, he “had never known a case of genuine delirium tremens” to exist “in which the patient was not addicted to the use of tobacco in some form.” He refused to assign sole responsibility for the ailment to alcohol itself and left open the possibility that tobacco may instead be the underlying cause. Blanchard’s strong temperance attitude, inquisitive mind, credentials as an educated doctor, unquestioned devotion to alleviating suffering and proven ability to create innovative machinery beneficial to an admiring farming community set him apart from the growing numbers of quacks around the country pursuing their own bogus remedies to treat intemperance. This enabled him to refine his advertising to the public combining both his abilities as a “Physician and Surgeon” together

with his Prepared Food invention in order to give “Special attention . . . to the tobacco, alcohol and opium habit.”<sup>96</sup>

The year 1876 presented Blanchard with a variety of challenges combining to convince him the time was right to leave Middlebury. In April, two men assaulted him for an unspecified reason. Despite positively identifying one of his attackers, the two culprits ultimately avoided prosecution that no doubt left him unsatisfied.<sup>97</sup> The highly contentious presidential election that fall pitting Republican nominee Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio against Democrat Samuel J. Tilden of New York drew Blanchard into the fray in his role as a recognized “raging democrat.” During the summer, he attended county democrat meetings where, on one occasion, “our talented townsman,” a reporter wrote, “disgusted with Republicanism,” delivered “a long address.” Consistent with some of his other public speaking efforts, this one was also deemed “somewhat cloudy [that] left rather illy defined ideas upon the minds of most of his hearers.”<sup>98</sup> Notwithstanding, days later he was elected vice-president of the Tilden and Hendricks Club and appointed to a committee to create its constitution and by-laws.<sup>99</sup>

On September 2, 1876, Blanchard attended a political temperance meeting in Vergennes that explosively revealed the deep divisions within the ranks of the Middlebury Temperance Reform Club and Woman’s Temperance League. The event also demonstrated the same kinds of divisive attitudes that Vermonters held in general about a highly controversial health-related subject apart from politics. While the topic under discussion concerned naming a candidate to stand for election of state’s attorney, the underlying issue involved the large numbers of criminal abortions taking place in their community that nobody but Blanchard wanted to acknowledge. In their family planning practices, when effective forms of contraception awaited the future, Vermonters tolerated the presence of a large population of physicians conducting clandestine abortions in violation of the law.<sup>100</sup> Sometime around 1872, Blanchard was advised by a local physician (“one of the ablest practitioners of medicine in Addison County,” he said) that he believed three deaths, possibly murder, had occurred in Middlebury.<sup>101</sup> Blanchard understood his complaint as referring to the deaths of women and children taking place during the course of criminal abortions in a rampant practice he described as a “rioting in our midst.” His observation was reinforced by the requests he received from three other women in the preceding six months to conduct the same procedure on them, but which he declined. Knowledge of the deaths passed freely within the Middlebury community, but nobody wanted to take the initiative to advise authorities of their suspicions.

However, Blanchard did act and, after consulting with his own attorney, wrote to county state’s attorney J. Hayward Lucia asking him to conduct a post-mortem of one of the victims. The topic was so

explosive that Lucia wrote back to Blanchard telling him “to mind my own business.” When Lucia’s name came for re-election during the temperance meeting in 1876, Blanchard rose to ask questions about his worthiness for the position that angered some of the attendees. One of them called him “a liar,” that led Blanchard to retort in another of his articles, entitled “The Lucia Raid,” his surprise that he, a strong supporter of temperance, should see the cause used to suppress free speech. He also asked a deeper question of whether it was appropriate for the temperance movement to “become a buckler on the arm of the abortionists of Addison County to shield them in the perpetration of their hellish deeds.” “Let the public mind,” he said, “ponder upon these questions.”<sup>102</sup> Others did, and one of the meeting attendees came to Blanchard’s defense. “He has never been a drinker,” he wrote, “but for years has practiced temperance in the strictest sense of the word. He has labored with his pen and his medical skill, to discourage drinking habits, [and] he has used his time and talents in lecturing upon the subject.”<sup>103</sup> Notwithstanding such support, Blanchard’s intrusive questioning during the temperance meeting and his ensuing protestations also drew the ire of the editor of the *Middlebury Register* who singled him out as a troublemaker, derisively calling him a “Middlebury character.”<sup>104</sup> Predictably, Blanchard blasted back a response attacking the editor for throwing “stinking mud balls . . . on the same principle that a certain odiferous fluid is secreted by an excretory organ of a small animal denominated the skunk.” In the same paper, he also advertised the Blanchard Mechanical Company as the general agent soliciting others to sell his increasing number of inventions, including Blanchard’s Prepared Foods, Blanchard’s Reflecting Corrugated Lamp Chimneys, Blanchard’s Coffee Cooker, Blanchard’s Force Pump Washing Machine and Blanchard’s Portable Building.<sup>105</sup>

After the fall election and receiving a patent for a “self-cleaning rake” in January 1877, Blanchard began traveling to New York City, splitting his residence between Vermont and New York for the next several years. By May 1877 he established a storefront at 27 Union Square “in one of the best business locations in the city,” where he occupied the first two floors for the next two decades, called the “Blanchard Parlors.”<sup>106</sup> One Middlebury resident visited the business and described that on the second floor Blanchard placed his consulting parlors and a lecture room, They were filled with “luxurious lounges and chairs” that were “often filled by learned and fashionable audiences who gather to hear [him] expound his theories on the cause and cure of disease.” The first floor was manned by an assistant who aided Blanchard with his inventions and oversaw the sale of his various remedies and cups of “delicious coffee prepared in the Blanchard Coffee Pot, in which quite a business is done, requiring the constant attendance of a girl.” Reportedly, the visitor said, “the sale of his Food Cures is very large, reaching many thousands of dollars yearly.” Witnessing his interaction with local businessmen, the

Vermonters observed further that “his business judgment is recognized and consulted by his friends in the city, which speaks more plainly than anything else for his standing in business circles.” “No Middleburian,” the correspondent concluded, “who visits New York should fail to call upon Dr. Blanchard. At least, if he treats them as well as he did the writer, we can promise them a famous time, and they will know more of the city and of the city life than they ever did before.”

**THE BLANCHARD  
CONCENTRATED BLOOD AND NERVE FOOD,  
OR  
TONIC EXTRACT of WHEAT.**

A Form of NERVE-BUILDING FOOD or Material, that INVIGORATES and SUSTAINS without Stimulating.

THE VITAL NUTRITIVE ELEMENTS, the iron, phosphorous, lime, etc., qualities that serve in the highest degree as food to the plastic element of the blood and nervous systems, that are contained in a BUSHEL OF WHEAT, are concentrated into a SINGLE QUART OF THIS PREPARATION.

The great value of the Food Compound consists in the fact, that the Vitalized condition of the mineral properties that are in the grain, has not been destroyed in their elimination from the exterior of the Wheat Kernel.

Every disease associated with an IMPOVERISHED STATE OF THE BLOOD AND NERVOUS PROSTRATION, will receive from this preparation an immediate and permanent benefit. Dyspepsia, Constipation, Diarrhoea, Consumption or Scrofala in any of its forms, Catarrh, Rheumatism, Neuralgia, all yield to the regulating and nourishing properties of its Food Elements.

During the period of convalescence from the debilitating effects of fever, this preparation is without a rival. For sickly children this Food has no equal as a constitutional remedy.

In the train of chronic diseases peculiar to females, the first symptom is NERVOUS DEBILITY. This can only be cured by invigorating and energizing the NERVOUS SYSTEM, and FOOD CONCRETE, VITALIZING FOOD, as found in the Tonic Extract of Wheat, is the natural means for a sure and permanent relief.

**This article is**

**A PURE FOOD TONIC,**

**Feeding and Vitalizing the Blood and Nervous Centres.**



**A FOOD SUPPORT**

**For the Overtaxed Brain and Nerve.**

All who are engaged in Intellectual pursuits will find in this Food a Sustaining, Invigorating Cordial, the effects of which will be appreciated. Being free from stimulating elements, it sustains and nourishes the Brain, when in discharge of the most laborious functions, since it really performs what alcoholic mixtures pretend to do.

**A SUBSTITUTE FOR ALCOHOL, OPIUM AND TOBACCO.**

It FEEDS AND VITALIZES THE BLOOD AND NERVOUS CENTERS in the highest degree, and gives the victim of tobacco and alcohol an easy means to escape the intolerable sense of depression and prostration that follows the endeavor to reverse these habits.

SINGLE BOTTLES, \$1.00, or SIX for \$5.00; Sent by Express paid. Send direct, or ask your Druggist for it.

**BLANCHARD FOOD CURE COMPANY.**

*27 Union Square, New York.*

Chronic Disease and Intemperance treated under the Supervision of DR. VIRGIL W. BLANCHARD.

DR. BLANCHARD'S Essay on "Physical Culture," together with his articles on the "Relations of Intemperance to Food,"—"Proper Food the Fundamental Element of True Culture,"—"Chronic Disease, its Cause and Remedy,"—"Reparation and Excretion,"—"Mental Dyspepsia,"—"Relations of Fatigue and Sleep to Food,"—all in one binding, sent post-paid on receipt of 25 cents in postage stamps or currency.

Blanchard Concentrated Blood and Nerve Food

The parlors were also where Blanchard wrote, and delivered the first of many lectures on May 5, 1877, *Blanchard's System of Physical Culture; Embodied in the Scientific Application of Food for the Prevention and Cure of Physical & Mental Disease, Intemperance, & c.* describing his system of treatment. This effort precipitated the production of several other pamphlets of the same genre: “Relations of Intemperance to Food,” “Proper Food, the Fundamental Element of the True Culture,” “Chronic Disease, its Cause and Remedy,” “Reparation and Excretion,” “Mental Dyspepsia,” and “Relations of Fatigue and Sleep to Food” that Blanchard bound together into a sixty-seven page portfolio and sold for twenty-five cents. His lectures also provided the public with free advice on “NERVOUS DISEASES AND DISEASES OF DIGESTIVE ORGANS SPECIALTIES and THE FOOD CURE SYSTEM.”<sup>107</sup> Refusing

to be fooled by such propaganda from Blanchard and others it viewed as quacks seeking to exploit the addiction-treating craze, one local scientific journal attacked him directly. "It is probably useless to expose the fallacies of this sort of trash," it wrote," so long as people are content to remain in ignorance of hygienic rules, and ignore the laws of waste and supply [of cellular function], the platitudes of these vendors will have readers, and their nostrums find sale."<sup>108</sup> It also drew the derision of others in the community who considered Blanchard's Parlors as a place to "Throw physic [medicine] to the dogs." As Hawaiians learned from one city correspondent in a letter that denigrated the glowing observations made by the Middlebury visitor, upon entering the business a customer was met by a young lady offering to help. She sold them a glass of milk for ten cents into which she poured "a spoonful of [a] brown colored fluid" from a bottle labeled "Life Food" and offered them "unpalatable little biscuits which adorn the counter." Customers could also purchase a copy of the recently published *Blanchard Quarterly* containing several of Blanchard's poems and see images advertising his coffee-pot and harvester alongside them for sale. Ridiculing him, the correspondent wrote further, "Just think from poetry to hay rakes! What a wonderful man this must be! What a comprehensive brain! No wonder people believe in him, and consult him, and drink his 'Life Food' and so forth. No wonder that the wonderful Blanchard compounds are sent to all parts of the country. No wonder that the dollars roll into the Blanchard pockets, no wonder indeed, as long as charlatans are shrewd and fools are plentiful."<sup>109</sup> Removed from such controversy, in Montpelier Marcus D. Gilman prepared his ambitious manifesto, *The Bibliography of Vermont*, seeking to list all publications and papers pertaining to the state's history that included a reference to Blanchard's 1864 *New Mode of Treating Disease by the application of Heat and Cold*.<sup>110</sup> Continuing to write poems, he published "Fate" in 1878, a brief ditty touching on the impact of unseen powers guiding one's fortune.<sup>111</sup>

At the same time, the Blanchard Parlors drew the attention of the city's literary and musical devotees when they gathered at the monthly meetings of the Woman's American Temperance League of New York City conducted there. Not necessarily interested in temperance issues, but to listen to these cultural offerings, people flocked in where Blanchard, described as "favorably known in the medical profession, is chairman of the Executive Committee," hosted the galas.<sup>112</sup> He made frequent appearances throughout New York City and New Haven, Connecticut in the next few years where he provided free lectures telling curious audiences about his Life Food able to remove the distresses of those suffering from alcohol, opium and tobacco addiction. Accolades rolled in as professionals throughout New England reported favorable results treating "blood poison, chronic disease, or over drug dosing" and one calling it "the most valuable and reliable Tonic I have ever met with." In 1878 the

prestigious *National Journal of Education* published another of his articles, “The Proper Diet for the Over-Worked Brain,” that led the editor to characterize his efforts as “a movement in the right direction” to replace drugs in treating ailments.”<sup>113</sup> Advertisements appeared throughout the country selling his products and Blanchard appeared on the cusp of great success at the head of a company reportedly valued at \$100,000.<sup>114</sup> Excited company agents in Boston, Chicago and New Orleans entered into agreements for exclusive rights to sell its products and proclaim its successes. “One of the most scientific men of the age,” Boston agent J. Jay Watson enthusiastically wrote in referring to Blanchard, created his Life Food business that “has grown to immense proportions, and today tens of thousands, from Maine to California, can bear testimony to the life-giving elements therein contained, which infuse strength and vitality into the human body.”<sup>115</sup>

“Dr. V. W. Blanchard is in town,” the *Middlebury Register* announced in May 1880, “looking after the construction and working on some of his contrivances. He reports business to be booming with the Blanchard Manufacturing Co., of New York, of which he is the head. He is still a raging Democrat.”<sup>116</sup> That month, his stay-at-home wife, Mary, was elected treasurer of the local Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, having served previously as chairman of its nominating committee. Issues surrounding substance abuse within the community arose and led the women to firmly resolve that “Intemperance is the great bar to public safety and of private peace.”<sup>117</sup> When Blanchard returned again to Middlebury in November, the newspaper reported his presence and work on a new invention at the Exposition Building, overseen by one of his engineers. It concerned the recovery and utilization of heat from steam engines that the engineer estimated reduced the consumption of coal by one-half. If successful, it could gain “merited recognition and bid fair to prove extremely valuable.”<sup>118</sup> Weeks later, he was back in New York City advertising a “Free Lecture Course on Dietic Science” at his Food Cure Lecture Hall where “professional nurses and mothers [are] specially invited.”<sup>119</sup> Meanwhile, as he traveled between the two cities, wife Mary (“Keeps house,” the 1880 census described) and teenage children Luther (“Farmer”) and Bertha (“At school”) occupied their Weybridge home on the Middlebury line, together with two others, a female “servant” and a male “farm laborer.”<sup>120</sup>

### Electricity and Portable Buildings

Restless with his medical practice, nerve food business and inventions advancing at the Mechanical Exposition building, in the early 1880s Blanchard decided to branch into a wholly new endeavor: electricity. On January 11, 1881, with two other investors, he incorporated and became president of the Blanchard Electric Light Power Company in New York City, changing its name in 1884 to

the Blanchard Electric Light and Power Company. Fellow harvester inventor, typewriter architect and presidentially-pardoned G. W. N. Yost also joined in the effort as treasurer. Their new association allowed the two to pursue a grandiose, dizzying number of other ventures using Blanchard's Union Street address as their headquarters. It also afforded Blanchard's daughter, Bertha, the opportunity to become Yost's agent for his Caligraph, "one of the best of the type of writing machines" on the market and to display it at the doctor's Middlebury home.<sup>121</sup>

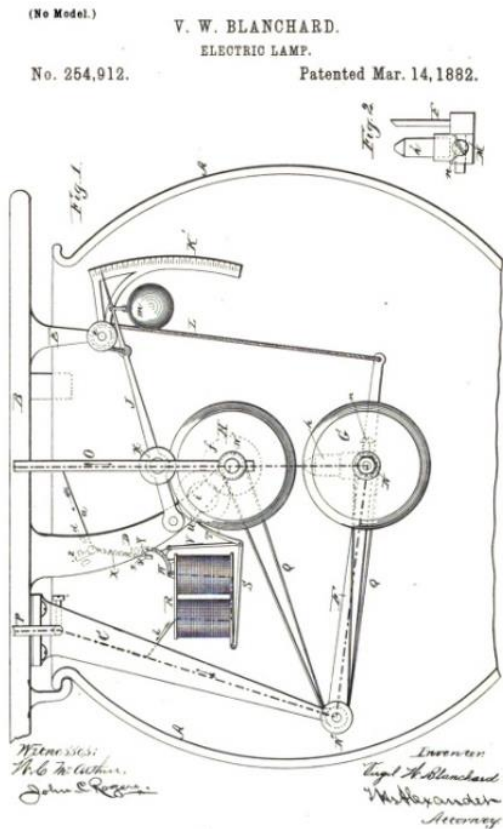
As Blanchard recalled of this period in 1888, "It is a fact that during the last dozen years I have been a pretty busy man. Every business man has a great many matters on hand and many things to occupy his mind and attention. Perhaps I have been especially busy. In the care of my numerous inventions I have had many matters to attract my attention. I could not tell you about how many patents for inventions I have taken out; it might reach five hundred, not a thousand."<sup>122</sup> His friendship with Yost during this time blurred the professional line between them resulting in Yost participating in both the work Blanchard was doing as well as his own "in the financial management and development of his system of inventions, embracing furnace, boiler, engine, electric light, etc."<sup>123</sup> On February 14, 1884, the two formed a separate partnership called "Yost & Blanchard" to consolidate their inventions under the control of a single legal entity that included Yost's work on the typewriter at the American Writing Machine Company. This included Blanchard assigning one of his draftsmen from the electric company to work for Yost improving his typewriter. Soliciting funds from investors in New York, Boston and Philadelphia to advance their work, they convinced several of them to provide large amounts of cash in exchange for shares in various companies.<sup>124</sup>

Although their partnership dissolved in 1885, the names of the other companies the two men were involved with continued to intermingle repeatedly in the next few years. They included the Blanchard Manufacturing Company, the Blanchard Food Cure Company, the Blanchard Furnace and Steam Engine Company, the Blanchard Development Company, the Blanchard Marine Power Company and the Blanchard Inland Marine Power Company utilizing the "Blanchard System" for stationary and marine power, all overseen by a Board of Engineers. To implement their ambitious goals, the companies planned to utilize Blanchard's inventions that he transferred the patent rights to. This included the innovations he made in extracting heat discharged from coal-fired engines to increase their efficiency, especially designed for ships passing between North America and Europe. Capitalization for the companies was listed in the millions of dollars offering thousands of shares for sale to the public at wildly fluctuating prices.

It all began to deteriorate in the mid-1880s exemplified by a lengthy court dispute pitting Blanchard and Yost as defendants in a suit brought by a disgruntled officer of one of the companies, the former draftsman working on Yost's typewriter. Testimony revealed that the two appear to have utilized the various companies in a form of early Ponzi scheme to shift funds between them giving the appearance of financial success when, in actuality, they rested on a very unstable foundation. Blanchard set a tone for the trial when he admitted that upon his leaving the presidency of his electric company, where he also served as the "mechanical engineer" in charge of the "mechanical department," that "the financial condition of the company was disastrous." Similarly, a skeptical prospect that Yost approached to invest in their endeavors recounted a conversation he had with him saying that "It is no use to put my money in a hole there, if it is all going to run out the other end, and [yet] you want more money." When the New York Supreme Court resolved the matter in 1888, it succinctly characterized one aspect of their operation in terms reflective of the rest as "an absolute and entire failure."<sup>125</sup> While the Blanchard Electric Light & Power Company appears to have diminished thereafter, in 1889 Blanchard assigned his interests in more than thirty of his inventions to a "J. A. Davis" of New York City.<sup>126</sup> He may have done it either to cover expenses related to his many other endeavors or to further finance the company, listed in an 1890 city business directory as capitalized by \$10,000,000 in funds, with Blanchard as its president, but occupying a physical location at "no address."<sup>127</sup> Meanwhile, Yost departed company to pursue his typewriter fortunes and engage in bizarre spiritual seances that used the machine to communicate with the hereafter.<sup>128</sup>

The prospect of failure in the marketplace interfered little with Blanchard's strong entrepreneurial spirit, able to separate out his inventive inclinations from business demands. Throughout the 1880s, he continued to pursue many other avenues distinctly different from past interests. His passion for patents remained and he obtained many more for innovations that, consistent with most of his companies' experiences, appear to have resulted in little financial gain. In 1882, that meant obtaining patents for creations using electricity: a Dynamo-Electric Machine, Electric Lamp, Secondary Battery, Apparatus for Charging Electric Storage Batteries, Electric Generator, Electro magnet, and one for another Hydrocarbon Furnace.<sup>129</sup> For some of his work, he employed a Trenton, New Jersey tinsmith to construct an electrical storage battery that became an important event in litigation in 1892 when a competitor sought to argue his invention pre-dated Blanchard's.<sup>130</sup> His efforts with electricity drew such attention that *Burlington Free Press* noted, despite his past patents for more "impracticable and useless inventions than any other man in America," his recent works "are so valuable that the versatile doctor has undoubtedly struck oil at last." Hopefully, it continued "Dr. Blanchard has good

prospects of becoming several times a millionaire before he dies.”<sup>131</sup> Blanchard’s electrical innovations aside, he also applied for a patent in 1882 for his “portable building,” the invention that he advertised the sale at the Blanchard Mechanical Exposition in 1876 that soon became popular in the Middlebury community.

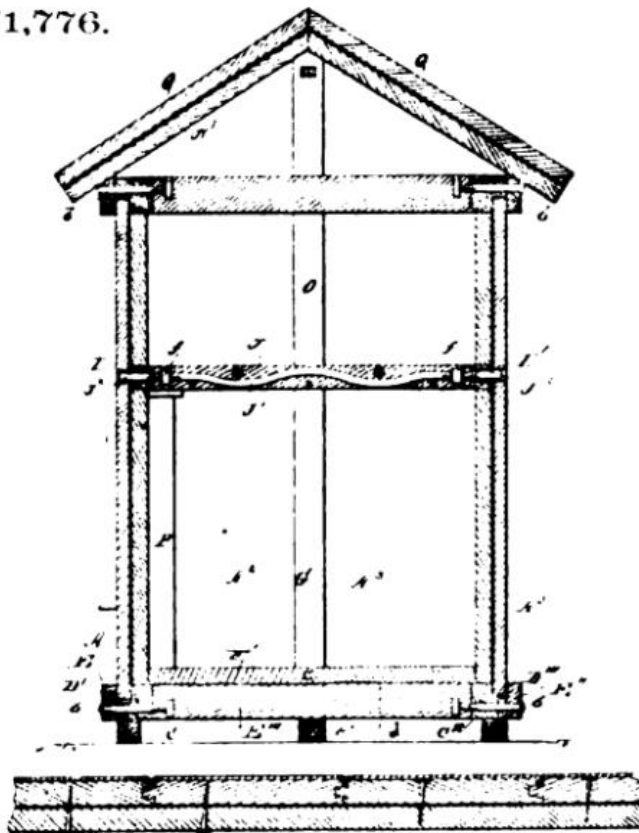


Blanchard Electric Lamp patent, 1882

Before that fortunate event, Blanchard underwent significant embarrassment in April 1882 when authorities searched his home looking for, and recovering, stolen property attributed to the actions of twenty-year-old old son Luther, taken away to the local lockup charged with larceny. “This community enjoyed a first-class sensation,” the *Middlebury Register* announced in describing the incident.<sup>132</sup> While Blanchard was working in New York City, it reported, Luther spent the past winter stealing robes, blankets and harnesses from several homes around Middlebury, storing them at his father’s home. The thefts came to light after Luther attended a sheep-shearing contest and another man recognized the blanket on his horse as his own. When confronted, Luther provided misleading statements that the surprised Blanchard, recently returned from New York, tried to innocently corroborate, but which proved unavailing. The local magistrate ordered Luther to face charges and allowed him free on a \$750 bond. While the outcome of that case is not known and the young man’s

reputation remained tainted, his association with his father only intensified. In court proceedings in 1892 questioning Luther's sanity, Blanchard sought to ameliorate his son's situation and identified over two-dozen inventions that he contributed to between 1883 and 1885. How Luther gained sufficient insights to assist his father is not clear, but Blanchard swore he provided him with guidance and diagrams allowing him to apply for patents. These included an eclectic assortment of items: furnaces, steam boilers and engines, valves, heaters, a dynamo machine, electric motor, threshing machine, methods of treating lumber, the typewriter and coffee pot.<sup>133</sup> The legal work was conducted by Blanchard's Washington, D. C. patent attorney, T. H. Alexander who traveled to New York City in 1884 and established himself temporarily at Blanchard's Electric Light Office in the Blanchard Parlors at 27 Union Square. Promising his availability between 11:00 a.m. and 4 p.m., Alexander announced to the public he wanted "to meet old or new clients, concerning patent litigation or the purchasing of patents."<sup>134</sup>

271,776.



Blanchard Portable Building patent, 1883

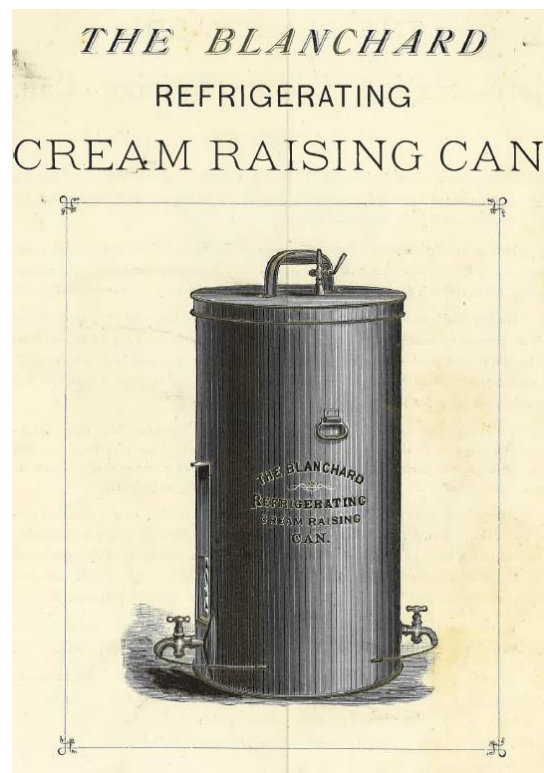
On February 6, 1883, Blanchard received a patent for a Portable Building that appears a modification of the construction methods used by Burlington contractors when they erected the

Blanchard Mechanical Exposition building in Middlebury in 1871.<sup>135</sup> In 1882, he arranged for the addition of another floor to the building that included rooms described as “handsomely finished off in ash and black walnut” and the exterior repainted “a pleasing color.” Anticipating the building’s reconfiguration upon approval of his patent, Blanchard explained that he planned to convert it from its pre-existing use to the production of portable buildings in order to fulfill a contract “making and delivering a large number of buildings to a New York capitalist.”<sup>136</sup> Focused on the appliances used inside of buildings, his innovative ideas continued to evolve when he obtained two additional patents for improvements to heat them: a furnace and an air-heater for furnaces.<sup>137</sup> He also anticipated the need for building’s occupants to hurriedly exit in a time of emergency and obtained a fire escape patent (one of forty-three issued nationally that year) equipped with a unique “water conductor.”<sup>138</sup> Just weeks after he received the portable building patent, the community learned more of his new enterprise when the *Burlington Free Press* reported that “Dr. Blanchard has got up a way of erecting buildings without using nails or screws, and these buildings can be taken apart any time and transported from place to place” in the same manner used in creating his mechanical exposition building.<sup>139</sup> Changing the name of the Blanchard Manufacturing Company to the Blanchard Portable Building Company, he used the newly reconfigured structure to begin filling orders for thirty-four “cottages” utilizing the Blanchard Portable Building System to ship out via the railroad. His new endeavor planned to employ between fifteen and twenty-five men using a twenty-five-horsepower engine and boiler to drive the machinery.<sup>140</sup>

While the operations remained in Middlebury, all business was transacted at his New York City office where, according to emphatic corporate officials, Blanchard maintained “*absolute control*” over all operations.<sup>141</sup> He also faced charges in 1883 of committing perjury (later dropped) in a lawsuit brought against him by a disgruntled Ripton lumber supplier to build his exposition building.<sup>142</sup> Notwithstanding, the portable building business flourished and expanded its Middlebury operations in the next years, leasing two saw mills to assist in production and purchasing large amounts of lumber operating under the name of the Blanchard Process Lumber Company.<sup>143</sup> Workers then employed his new methods to dry it in thirty-six hours, as well as other “new and greatly improved methods of working and finishing hard woods [that] materially facilitate operations.”<sup>144</sup> By 1892 the frenzied company reportedly “finished and shipped six carloads of houses. They are running night and day and are crowded to their full capacity.”<sup>145</sup>

Blanchard’s health appears to have begun experiencing bouts requiring him to retreat from New York City to Middlebury to recuperate. His return to the town is noted in several newspaper articles between the 1880s and his death in 1910 indicating periods of ill-health and the course of his

recovery.<sup>146</sup> In 1881, one account related that he “is still confined to his bed and is quite unwell . . . . It takes considerable sickness to keep the doctor to his bed.” When feeling better, he walked the streets and made public appearances earning him accolades from the press as “a noted inventor and capitalist of New York City” who “bids fair to be a very rich man yet.”<sup>147</sup> On one occasion in 1886, he was unable to attend to business, reportedly “at home sick abed from malarial rheumatism” which may have marked when he began using morphine that only increased in the next years, contributing to his eventual death.<sup>148</sup> When healthy, Blanchard also engaged in reminiscing about his southern Vermont childhood home and in 1884 penned another of his poems, “Broad Brook,” that first appeared in a Vermont newspaper.<sup>149</sup> Following his death, it was published once again in 1961 in a selection of notable Vermont poems, described as “one of the finest things ever written in or about Guilford.”<sup>150</sup> He also took time in the 1880s to return to his earlier agriculture-oriented pursuits and created his Refrigerating Cream Raising Can. Utilizing either ice or running water, his invention promised farmers that it could preserve their milk in an economical manner less costly than other processes.



Blanchard Refrigerating Cream Raising Can (courtesy Henry Sheldon Museum)

On January 19, 1885, Blanchard received two more patents for innovating heating devices for a Furnace and a Steam Boiler.<sup>151</sup> More followed and that summer “The Blanchard System for the Production of Power,” proclaimed “a revolution” by the press in Boston, Memphis and Cleveland, jolted the scientific community.<sup>152</sup> Blanchard’s new system, the result of years of work, reportedly reversed the huge ninety percent loss of heat from burning coal that allowed its recovery to convert into mechanical energy and thereby substantially reduce the need and cost for it. Backed by over 250 “separate and distinct” patents leading up to its creation, Blanchard had reportedly superseded Thomas Edison in the number of patents obtained to this time. It caused one enthused reporter to proclaim him “greater” than the inventor of the light bulb and announce that the Vermonter’s inventions “greatly exceed them in point of value to the human race.”<sup>153</sup> To witness the phenomenon, a party of reporters traveled by train from New York City to Ansonia, Connecticut to visit the Wallace & Sons brass works and see it in operation. While it proved an interesting episode for the attendees prompting Blanchard to consider publishing “a very elaborate work” of illustrations and explanations of how it worked and garnered glowing reports by the press, the project does not appear to have attracted other capitalists to invest at that time; a result that would radically change in 1897.

In 1892 Blanchard turned his attention to invigorating the sale of his Prepared Foods as an effective substitute for drugs from his Middlebury headquarters. He announced his intentions to the community reporting that despite discontinuing advertising for the past ten years for his products, more than a million packages of the foods had sold over the course of twenty years “entirely on their merits.” Seeking “500 capable, energetic lady agents” throughout New England to sell to invalids (who “abound everywhere”), he touted his well-known Concentrated Blood and Nerve Food accompanied by Blanchard Fibrin and Wheat, Blanchard Beef and Milk, Blanchard Life Food and Blanchard Fat Forming Food.<sup>154</sup> He also faced another lawsuit alleging his failure to pay a supplier of machinery used in his manufacturing businesses that resulted in an award to the plaintiff of one cent.<sup>155</sup> In his homelife, and despite his reported contributions to Blanchard’s inventions during this time period, thirty-one-year-old son Luther who escaped punishment for thefts a decade earlier, presented a new problem. The circumstances are not disclosed, but on August 8, 1892, the Addison County probate court appointed Blanchard guardian over Luther, now “adjudged insane and incapable of taking care of himself.”<sup>156</sup> While there is no formal order of commitment, Luther is listed as a resident of the Brattleboro Retreat, a home for the insane, beginning in late 1892.<sup>157</sup>

For the next three years, with Luther safely removed from their Weybridge home, Blanchard largely absented himself from his family, returning only infrequently from New York City.<sup>158</sup> He

continued advertising his food products and providing medical services to patients. One notable case in 1895 concerned a woman suffering from “lupus tuberculosis” affecting her nose that Blanchard treated for two years before referring her to another city doctor. The case garnered sufficient attention within the medical community that it appeared in a professional publication describing Blanchard’s first treatments of her, identifying him as “a very able and experienced physician.” While the second physician finally succeeded in providing her with relief, that result did not diminish the importance of Blanchard’s work demonstrating his continuing competence in the field as he worked on his inventions.<sup>159</sup> The late nineteenth century saw the medical community employ aggressive methods to treat disease through the inhalation of various treatments. Perhaps challenged by the difficulties presented by this most recent patient, Blanchard embraced the concept. In another of his writings, he vigorously argued that oxygen, “combined with food, heat, moisture and volatile antiseptic agents” could provide relief to patients to such an extent it “*never had its equal in the history of therapeutic science.*”<sup>160</sup> Furthering that belief, in 1895 he received a patent for an inhaler and partnered with the New York City firm of G. B. Underwood & Co. to market his invention, the “Ideal Pulmonary Inspirator.”<sup>161</sup> Utilizing concepts he used to inject air into molten ore bubbling in furnaces, his new creation employed heated oxygen mixed with carefully monitored amounts of antiseptic remedies before introducing it into a patient’s body through a device they breathed in and out of. The invention drew immediate attention when physicians at the Loomis Sanitorium in Liberty, New York successfully used it to treat patients.<sup>162</sup> He appears to have refined his work and in 1897 received a second patent for an inhaler.<sup>163</sup>

During the last decade of his life, Blanchard focused his attention on the increasing use of gas in various appliances that eventually drew him back to Middlebury. In 1896 he received additional patents for improvements to gas stoves, an air and gas mixer and a hydrocarbon furnace, followed the next year by another for a gas burner.<sup>164</sup> His work on stoves that began in Middlebury in 1871 increasing their efficiency to extract ninety percent of the energy in coal by 1885, together with his gas burners drew the attention of the Odorless Gas Company of West Virginia in 1897. As related by the *Washington Reporter* (“the official organ of the United States patent office”) it proved a lucrative relationship when Blanchard “assigned all his right, title and interest in his patents on gas-mixers and hydro-carbon furnace, gas stoves and improvements” to the company in exchange for an eye-popping \$4,999,500. “This will make Dr. Blanchard,” Vermont newspapers announced, “one of the richest men in Vermont”; a claim that eventually proved questionable.<sup>165</sup>

In 1898, unstoppable in his quest to improve the efficiency of stoves used in homes, businesses and on farms for heating and cooking, Blanchard made further advances in a field crowded with competitors around the country. “A Great Invention,” the *Middlebury Register* announced in January 1898, “Dr. V. W. Blanchard Perfects his ‘Total Combustion’ Stove.” “A Saving of Six Hundred Per Cent in Heat-Producing Power – Perfect Combustion of Fuel at Last – Will Revolutionize the Cost of Burning Fuel,” it proclaimed further, calling Blanchard’s latest effort “one of the most remarkable [and] valuable inventions of the present century.”<sup>166</sup> Placing the new stove in a large room in his Middlebury home, Blanchard invited the public to come and experience its heat producing capabilities. There, they could witness the results of extensive, close testing demonstrating that, purportedly, “one ton of coal . . . will gain the same results in the production of heat as six tons burned in the average house heating apparatus now in use.” The stove also offered the prospect of using gas and oil as a fuel source that increased its attraction. Excitement infused the business community anticipating the arrival of “a mammoth manufacturing company . . . second in magnitude to no manufacturing corporation in New England” able to employ “immense number of workmen.”<sup>167</sup> The International Improved Combustion Company reportedly formed in Middlebury at this time (notwithstanding a trade publication identifying its \$3,000,000 capitalized presence in 1893) to market the new system, called the Blanchard Sanitary Perfect-Combustion House-Heating System, with the inventor as its consulting engineer.<sup>168</sup> The “poor man’s friend,” some called it, as the company sought agents to market three versions of the stove (gas, coal and the Perfect-Combustion plant) throughout New England, with an anticipated production of 100,000 units in the next three years.<sup>169</sup> Just as quickly as the venture entered into the Middlebury imagination, it disappeared from view. Perhaps overtaken by more successful inventions elsewhere, both the stoves and the company seem short-lived and no additional information about them appears.

#### Last Years

By 1900, Blanchard’s exposition building and its replacement, his portable building company described as “the old eye-sore opposite the depot” and “a mere wooden shell,” also disappeared. In the early morning hours of April 28, a night watchman discovered the structure on fire and summoned the fire department. Despite its efforts, “it burned like tinder and in a very short time fell in,” the newspaper reported. It also destroyed all its contents that included many machines, models of Blanchard’s inventions valued at the uninsured sum of \$4,000 and numerous wagons stored in the vacant space.<sup>170</sup>

Blanchard continued to face personal disappointment when the mental condition of thirty-eight-year-old son Luther appears to have worsened. The national census for 1900 describes that the man no longer resided within the less restrictive environment at the Brattleboro Retreat where he was confined in 1892 and now occupied a bed at the Vermont State Hospital for the Insane in Waterbury. On January 22, 1902, his married thirty-eight-year-old daughter, Bertha Augusta Wright, died in Middlebury at the boarding house her husband, Walter, ran and where they raised their two young daughters. Reportedly “out of health for some time, suffering from a nervous trouble,” a newspaper reported, she consumed “some narcotic poison” the night before and fell unconscious for the next ten hours. Despite the attentions of two physicians (one living in the house responding immediately), she passed away the next morning. Whether by accident or intentional, the official cause of death listed by one of the physicians attributed it to an “overdose of unknown medicine.” However and perhaps more accurately, a newspaper identified the cause as “the effects of morphine or chloral [hydrate, a sedative].”<sup>171</sup> Bertha’s death is not surprising and is representative of the many Vermonters who died during this time during the course of the state’s first opium epidemic that took decades to lessen before resurging in the 1960s.<sup>172</sup> A month after her death and identifying himself as a resident of the “City, County and State of New York,” Blanchard executed his will in Middlebury, leaving \$25 to son Luther and the remainder of his estate to wife Mary.<sup>173</sup>

For one of the “richest men in Vermont” at the beginning of the twentieth century, Blanchard’s personal financial condition followed the failed experiences of his businesses. After Bertha’s passing, her husband and daughters moved into his and Mary’s Pleasant Street home where they soon faced foreclosure proceedings in April 1903. Failing to make the necessary monthly mortgage payments, the Boston owner sought to evict all of them and obtained a decree of forfeiture on June 12, 1903 that permitted them to redeem ownership of the residence if they paid the outstanding balance within the next year.<sup>174</sup> Because Blanchard was a New York resident and never personally appeared to contest the case, the foreclosure order did not apply to him. Notwithstanding, working to accumulate the money needed to assist his family, on June 6, 1903, he prevailed on a New York City woman to loan him a miniscule \$100, promising to repay it, with interest, in six months. He failed to complete his obligation and the transaction later became a source of great heartache for her when she engaged in lengthy litigation to recover it from Blanchard’s estate following his death. Even then, she recouped only a small part of the expenses incurred in prosecuting the matter.<sup>175</sup> In Middlebury, the family appears to have avoided eviction when son-in-law Walter intervened to pay the mortgage that later resulted in Blanchard purchasing the home from him in 1907.<sup>176</sup>

While the family remained in Vermont, Blanchard returned to the city where he engaged in a frenetic round of inventing. The records of the U. S. Patent office reveal that between 1906 and 1907 he received patents for a staggering fifty creations, an average of one every two weeks. They included a dizzying list of items utilizing gas as a popular energy source: stoves, burners, ovens, heaters and furnaces, accompanied by one for a specialized fastener to secure their doors.<sup>177</sup> Still watching over his son's legacy, one patent for a hydro-carbon burner identifies the inventor as "Virgil W. Blanchard and Virgil W. Blanchard, guardian of Luther S. Blanchard (an insane person)."<sup>178</sup> More followed in 1908 when the patent office awarded several additional ones for gas burners and a stove that appear the last ones he ever received.<sup>179</sup>

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, Blanchard's health began to deteriorate forcing him to leave the city periodically to recuperate in Middlebury. Confined at home recovering from illness, in April 1907, the *Middlebury Register* reprinted his brief poem, "Presentment," written in 1871 when father-in-law Luther Smith died, that focused on death and an afterlife in Heaven.<sup>180</sup> Two months later, writing from the city after his return he penned his last published poem, styled as a "Soliloquy-Prayer." It indicated he experienced some form of inner torment and a fear that, in the end, his life meant little.<sup>181</sup> "Will inner life survive, when outer life has ceased?," he asked. "Was mine a guilty soul" he inquired, deserving of the "poisonous serpent fangs endowed with hellish art" that made his life so troublesome? Would the "Creative Pow'r" that watched over creation "blot out a hopeless life, in its last mortal hour of anguish, woe and strife?" Or, he asked, would he suffer a long quiet death where his "soul torturing cells" must complete their doom "within successive hells?"

The first half of 1910 reveals the travails the renowned inventor experienced and depths to which his life had fallen before his death that summer. The circumstances of son Luther's release from state custody for his insanity are not clear, but on January 24 the Weybridge overseer of the poor and selectmen petitioned the Addison County probate court to institute proceedings alleging that he was "an insane person, and dangerous." Certified by two physicians that the forty-nine-nine-year old man was indeed insane, the state's attorney presented sufficient evidence allowing the court to conclude that Luther "has no relatives within this state who are bound by law to support him, and is destitute of the means of support . . . and is found and adjudged to be insane and dangerous." Ordering his immediate confinement at the Brattleboro Retreat for the Insane, authorities took him into custody and delivered him as directed on March 7, 1910.<sup>182</sup>

On May 7, Blanchard returned to Middlebury for the last time, arriving in bad health.<sup>183</sup> At the same time, wife Mary experienced such physical ailments that observers feared "her death was looked

for hourly.”<sup>184</sup> While she later recovered, her husband was reportedly “Suffering from a complication of diseases including a brain trouble” that, in actuality, proved more troublesome.<sup>185</sup> Following the same course that resulted in his daughter’s death by drugs in 1902, the inventor of the popular “brain food” to counter their effects had also fallen into their use. Witnesses to his conduct on multiple occasions after his return included three physicians and a friend, William Morcomb, who provided testimony during a competency hearing a month later.<sup>186</sup> Each of them observed Blanchard’s behavior and interactions with his feeble wife lying in bed, fearful he wanted to harm her. “He is a morphine taker,” one physician said, confirmed by Morcomb who observed him take “a heaping teaspoonful of morphine and threw it up but lay unconscious [for] 17 hours.” He also described Blanchard as “crazy, wild. He has to take a grain of morphine to go to sleep . . . . He eats very little, lies abed a good deal.” On one occasion, Morcomb recounted that Blanchard “came at me . . . with an open jack knife, struck at me with it. I took it away from him. He was crazy.” When awake, he verbally harangued Mary greatly upsetting her saying she was not his wife and would not receive any of his property, threatening to throw her out, demanding she wait on him and that he wanted to kill her. According to one physician, that possibility seemed real enough and said that “I think he would if he had a fair chance.” Another said that Blanchard “always had a vile temper [and] appeared to me about as he used to. He is an old man and quite deaf.” The witness testimony also alleged that Blanchard tried to write a \$1,200 check to himself but became confused and unable to get a bank to cash it. Based on their accounts, on May 31 an attorney for Mary sought court intervention for the appointment of a guardian alleging that her husband “is mentally incapable of taking care of himself or his property.” The next day, Blanchard experienced the indignity of the presence of Deputy Sheriff N. J. Sanford at his door handing him a copy of the papers. After a hearing on June 8 and listening to the witnesses, Judge William H. Bliss readily agreed to Mary’s request and appointed future Vermont governor John E. Weeks (1927-1931) to assume the responsibility of Blanchard’s guardianship.<sup>187</sup>

As his health declined further, Blanchard lived for the next few weeks in his home, attended by only by Mary, Morcomb and a nurse, “Miss Barrows.” There is no indication that either his violent behavior or use of morphine lessened up to the moment of his death at 10:45 p.m. on July 29, a time consistent when one retires and which may have included one last ingestion of the drug. Completing the official Certificate of Death for his patient that he identified as “Vergil” and whom he testified about in June, attending physician E. H. Martin attributed it to arteriosclerosis and “morphinism,” or addiction to morphine.<sup>188</sup> Following a funeral conducted at his home “attended by many friends from this and other towns,” Blanchard was interred in Middlebury’s West cemetery.<sup>189</sup>

Blanchard did not die a millionaire. After Mary refused to accept her husband's wishes expressed in his will that she assume the role of administrator of his estate, Weeks took over the duties to expose what the inventor of a reported 500 inventions ("200 different products of his brain," a medical journal reported at the time of his death) actually owned.<sup>190</sup> It included the Middlebury house and lot (\$3,500) subject to a mortgage (\$1,623.32), furniture (\$100), cash and deposits in two banks (\$1,549.62) and stock in the "Vera Cruz Mining Company in Mexico" (estimated value \$2,000).<sup>191</sup> In sum, his estate amounted to little, leaving only a minimal disbursement to Mary and a token \$25 bequest conveyed to the Brattleboro Retreat "for the special use and benefit of his son, Luther S., a patient at this Institution."<sup>192</sup> Mary lived for five more years, dying on October 14, 1915 in the home of a friend where she appears to have moved after her husband's death, probably because of monetary difficulties.<sup>193</sup> A description of her assets shows that she died virtually destitute with an estate valued at a mere \$930.06.<sup>194</sup> Despite the difficulties she faced in his last days, Mary completed her own will that March directing its administrator to utilize not more than \$150 of her estate "in the purchase and erection of a suitable monument in the cemetery to mark the last resting place of my late husband, Dr. Blanchard and myself." Bequeathing fifty dollars each to son-in-law Walter and granddaughter Eva, she also directed "to my son Luther S. Blanchard, now a patient at the Brattleboro Retreat for the Insane, the sum of five dollars."<sup>195</sup> Luther remained a resident at the Retreat, dying at age sixty-five on November 28, 1927.<sup>196</sup> Separated from the graves of his immediate family in Middlebury, he was interred in the southern Vermont town where his father first came and rests in the family lot in Guilford.<sup>197</sup>

### Conclusion

Virgil W. Blanchard's presence on the Vermont landscape exemplified the kinds of robust creativity displayed by those exploiting modernity's advantages in the last half of the nineteenth century. Beginning modestly as a farmer's son working in fields witnessing the arrival of the steam-driven railroad industry, Blanchard thoroughly embraced its many possibilities thereafter in ways that few envisioned. Initially, his UVM medical degree conferred on him aspects of credibility and advantage over others because it demonstrated he possessed an intellect able to analyze and solve difficult problems. He began that endeavor suggesting improvements in treating diphtheria patients, extending that work into other ailments. He also recognized the increasing problems that Vermonters experienced with widespread addiction to alcohol and drugs in mid-century, especially opium, and began to fashion imaginative remedies, albeit ultimately ineffective ones, to alleviate their sufferings.

While Blanchard continued to offer medical services to the public, his imagination caught fire and expanded into refining the agricultural implements farmers used in their fields that he was so familiar with. After the Civil War, advances in steam technology drew him further into areas he had little knowledge about, but which did not deter him from learning on his own. Improving the efficiency of furnaces to refine ore and methods to machine wood, stone and metal fascinated him, resulting in his close association with Washington, D. C. attorney T. H. Alexander obtaining his many patents over the course of decades to protect his interests. His ingenuity attracted others to his side that included his associations with Bridport entrepreneur Friend Fletcher to exploit his creations and the intriguing inventor G. W. N. Yost of Pennsylvania who introduced his version of the typewriter into the mix. In the process, Blanchard did not forget where he came from and maintained close relationships with the farming and laboring communities as he sought to assist their wellbeing with his inventions and writing tracts to increase their public standing. To aid the common man, he invented other more mundane items including baggage checks to assist travelers, washing machines and coffee pots for households, and fire escapes to modernize homes and businesses. Noted politically as a “raging democrat,” the steadfast temperance man, and trusted physician called upon to confidentially perform criminal abortions on Addison County women (which he refused), maintained a respected presence in Middlebury that all recognized. He spoke many times before it, sometimes using confusing language, but also exposed his deep feelings on personal matters more simply through the several published, and republished, poems he loved to write.

The Blanchard Mechanical Exposition Building erected in the Middlebury rail yard that opened in 1874 announced Blanchard’s intention to robustly display his work for public consumption and to attract capitalist investors. The effort evolved and the building afforded him the ability to develop new methods to easily transport buildings via the railroad able to be easily erected and disassembled by using nuts and bolts. Blanchard’s building also served as his Vermont base of operations to manufacture his popular wheat-based products to treat drug addiction, marketed by the Blanchard Food Cure Company at Blanchard Parlors in New York City. As advances in electricity presented themselves in the metropolis, he saw additional opportunities drawing his inventive inclinations to create other kinds of devices and founded the Blanchard Electric Light & Power Company offering and selling shares of stock to the public. The improvements Blanchard made to heating stoves for homes, farms and businesses eventually meant that one of them made him the richest man in Vermont by 1897 that extant records fail to confirm. Instead, they reveal a man with gifted talents, but possessing a woeful lack of

understanding how the capitalist world functioned demonstrated by the lack of interest that many of his inventions garnered and repeated business failures.

Blanchard's personal life also saw much trouble that probably contributed to his decision to split his time between Middlebury and New York City for many years. Business interests prevailed leaving wife Mary to deal with the difficulties presented by their son Luther's thefts and insanity and daughter Bertha's use of drugs that killed her. Unable to escape the effects of his own declining health, Blanchard also indulged in the relief provided by morphine as his own mental health descended and he harangued and threatened to kill poor Mary. Perhaps his behavior and introspective episodes can be attributed to the manic thoughts that flashed in his head or were simply the inclinations that seem to present themselves in the lives of creative inventors. Regardless of the cause, Vermont history is richer because of the presence of such men as Virgil Warren Blanchard who deserve recognition for their eclectic contributions during a time of great change in the state.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gary G. Shattuck, *By the Wand of Some Magician: Embracing Modernity in Mid-Century Vermont* (Burlington: Center for Research on Vermont, 2020), *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 16 September 1876.

<sup>3</sup> *Official History of Guilford, Vermont 1678-1961* (Brattleboro: Broad Brook Grange No. 151, 1961), 176; *Vermont Phoenix* (Brattleboro), 28 August 1885.

<sup>4</sup> Brattleboro schedule, U. S. Census, 1850.

<sup>5</sup> Virgil W. Blanchard, "Effects of Mechanical Appliances Upon the Farmer's Condition," *Second Biennial Report of the Vermont State Board of Agriculture, Manufactures and Mining for the Years 1873-1874* (Montpelier: Freeman Steam Printing House and Bindery, 1874), 579-580.

<sup>6</sup> *A Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the University of Vermont, for the Academical Year 1859-60* (Burlington: Sentinel Print, 1859), 7.

<sup>7</sup> *New Haven Register* (New Haven, Connecticut), 22 March 1879.

<sup>8</sup> *Catalogue and Twenty-Fifth Annual Announcement of the Medical Department of the University of Vermont for the Session of 1864* (Burlington: Times Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1864), 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Addison County Journal* (Middlebury), 14 September 1876.

<sup>10</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 10 July 1908.

<sup>11</sup> Virgil W. Blanchard, "The Use of Heat and Cold Applied to the Sympathetic Nervous System," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. LXX, no. 12, April 21, 1864; *A New Mode of Treating Disease by the application of Heat and Cold over the Ganglionic Centres of the sympathetic Nervous System* (Boston: David Clapp Printer, 1864).

<sup>12</sup> *New York Times*, 28 July 1884 and 8 September 1884.

<sup>13</sup> Gary G. Shattuck, *Green Mountain Opium Eaters: A History of Early Addiction in Vermont* (Charleston: History Press, 2017), *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 22 November 1876.

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Journal* (Montpelier), 15 August 1863.

<sup>16</sup> *The Scientific American*, vol. 9, no. 26 (New York: Munn & Company, 1868), 407.

<sup>17</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1863*, vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 811; *Scientific American*, vol. 9 (New York: Munn & Co., 1863), 408.

<sup>18</sup> *Illustrated Washington: Our Capital* (New York: American Publishing and Engraving Co., 1890), 137.

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- <sup>19</sup> Alexander & Dowell, Attorneys at Law, Washington, D. C. to the Executor or Administrator of Dr. V. W. Blanchard's Estate, December 31, 1910, regarding an English patent and "other inventions and cases of the Doctor's." Estate case files, 1873-1959, ADP-00011, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration (VSARA).
- <sup>20</sup> W. W. Atwater, *The Vermont Directory, 1868*, no. 13 (Claremont Manufacturing Co, 1868), 44.
- <sup>21</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1865*, vol. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1867), 802; *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1866*, vol. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1867), 502.
- <sup>22</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1867*, vol. 1 (Washington: GPO), 437.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 860.
- <sup>25</sup> *In re: Petition for Guardian of Virgil W. Blanchard, June 1, 1910*, Guardianship case files, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>26</sup> *Burlington Daily Times*, 3 January 1866.
- <sup>27</sup> William Arba Ellis, ed., *Norwich University 1819-1911: Her History, Her Graduates, Her Roll of Honor*, vol. 2 (Montpelier: Capital City Press, 1911), 299.
- <sup>28</sup> T. F. Witherbee, "The Manufacture of Bessemer Pig-Metal at the Fletcherville Charcoal Furnace, Near Mineville, Essex County, New York," *Transactions of the American Institute of Mining Engineers*, vol. 2 (Easton, PA: Published by the Institute, 1875), 65; "The Invisible Town of Fletcherville," Lakes to Locks Passage, Inc., <https://passageport.org/journey/the-story-of-iron-in-crown-point-moriah/14-the-invisible-town-of-fletcherville/>
- <sup>29</sup> H. Bauerman, *A Treatise on the Metallurgy of Iron* (New York: Virtue & Yorston, 1867), 13.
- <sup>30</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner, 1867*, 92.
- <sup>31</sup> *Scientific American*, vol. 17, 222.
- <sup>32</sup> Virgil W. Blanchard and F. P. Fletcher agreement, March 16, 1868, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>33</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 3 September 1867.
- <sup>34</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1868*, vol. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1869), 61, 473.
- <sup>35</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 13 June 1871; *Ibid.*, 182.
- <sup>36</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 31 August 1869.
- <sup>37</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1869*, vol. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1871), 665, 669.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 517; 665.
- <sup>40</sup> Henry L. Sheldon Scrapbook 23: Autographs of Middlebury citizens, ca. 1880-1900, Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History, Middlebury, Vermont. The author is grateful to museum archivist Eva Garcelon-Hart for tracking down this information.
- <sup>41</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1870*, vol. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1872), 53; H. P. Smith, ed., *History of Addison County Vermont* (Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1886), 331.
- <sup>42</sup> *Annual Report, 1870*, 321.
- <sup>43</sup> Bridport schedule, U. S. Census, 1870.
- <sup>44</sup> Vermont Registration Returns, Births Registered in the Town of Bridport for the Year Ending December 31, 1870, VSARA.
- <sup>45</sup> Vermont Registration Returns, Deaths Registered in the Town of Bridport for the Year Ending December 31, 1870, VSARA.
- <sup>46</sup> Dr. Blanchard's Papers, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> *Rutland Daily Herald*, 2 May 1870.
- <sup>49</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 9 May 1871.
- <sup>50</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 24 June 1871.
- <sup>51</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 13 and 20 June 1871.
- <sup>52</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 10 September 1874.
- <sup>53</sup> Agreement, June 13, 1871, Dr. Blanchard's Papers, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>54</sup> *St. Johnsbury Caledonian*, 19 February 1897.
- <sup>55</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 31 October 1871.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 November 1871.
- <sup>57</sup> *Rutland Independent*, 3 February 1872; *Rutland Daily Herald*, 30 January 1872.
- <sup>58</sup> *Spirit of Jefferson* (Charles Town, West Virginia), 16 January 1872.
- <sup>59</sup> *Rutland Independent*, 3 February 1872; *Rutland Daily Herald*, 30 January 1872.

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- <sup>60</sup> *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the American Institute, of the City of New York, for the Year 1871-1872* (Albany: The Argus Company, 1872), 849-855.
- <sup>61</sup> *Henry P. Sisson vs. George W. N. Yost and Virgil W. Blanchard* (New York: Evening Post Job Printing Office, 1890), 91-97; *Sisson v. Yost*, 12 N.Y.S. 373 (1890).
- <sup>62</sup> *Jamestown Journal* (Jamestown, NY), 24 May 1872.
- <sup>63</sup> R. Vander Naillen to Fletcher and Blanchard Iron & Steel Co., November 28, 1872, Dr. Blanchard's Papers, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>64</sup> Testimony and Comments in the matter of Virgil W. Blanchard against the Estate of Friend P. Fletcher, deceased, September 1875, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 1 July 1873.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 July 1873.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 July and 29 July 1873.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 July 1873.
- <sup>70</sup> *Rutland Daily Globe*, 5 February 1874.
- <sup>71</sup> Blanchard, "Effects of Mechanical Appliances," 578-594.
- <sup>72</sup> *Specifications and Drawings of Patents Issued from the United States Patent Office for August 1874* (Washington: GPO, 1874), 324.
- <sup>73</sup> *Vermont Phoenix*, 1 May 1874.
- <sup>74</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 15 September 1874.
- <sup>75</sup> *Rutland Daily Globe*, 27 May 1874.
- <sup>76</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 10 September 1874.
- <sup>77</sup> *Rutland Daily Globe*, 12 November 1874.
- <sup>78</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 26 January 1875.
- <sup>79</sup> *Rutland Daily Globe*, 2 February 1875.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 February 1875.
- <sup>81</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 2 February 1875.
- <sup>82</sup> *Virgil W. Blanchard v. Friend P. Fletcher*, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002; Estate of Friend P. Fletcher, Probate records, 1880-1885, ADP-00298, VSARA.
- <sup>83</sup> Testimony and Comments, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>84</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 13 July 1875.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 August 1875.
- <sup>86</sup> Laura Goering, "'Russian Nervousness': Neurasthenia and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Medical History*, 47 (2003), 25.
- <sup>87</sup> *The Public: A Journal of Finance, Commercial Interests, and Political Science*, vol. 11 (New York: The Financier Association, 1877), 415.
- <sup>88</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 22 November 1876; Virgil W. Blanchard, *The Blanchard System of Physical Culture* (Blanchard Food Company, 1877), 21.
- <sup>89</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 17 August 1875.
- <sup>90</sup> *Vermont Phoenix*, 14 May 1875.
- <sup>91</sup> *Addison County Journal*, 8 March 1877.
- <sup>92</sup> A. H. Hubbard to Mr. V. W. Blanchard, January 28, 1876, *Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
- <sup>93</sup> *Addison County Journal*, 8 March 1877.
- <sup>94</sup> *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 17 December 1875.
- <sup>95</sup> *Rutland Daily Globe*, 10 February 1876.
- <sup>96</sup> *Addison County Journal*, 30 November 1876.
- <sup>97</sup> *Argus and Patriot* (Montpelier), 13 April 1876.
- <sup>98</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 12 August 1876.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 August 1876.
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- <sup>101</sup> *Addison County Journal*, 7 September 1876.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 September 1876.

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- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 November 1880.
- <sup>119</sup> *New York Herald*, 21 December 1880.
- <sup>120</sup> U. S. Census 1880, Weybridge return.
- <sup>121</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 17 November 1882.
- <sup>122</sup> *Sisson v. Yost and Blanchard*, 45.
- <sup>123</sup> *History of Erie County, Pennsylvania*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Warner, Beers & Co., 1884), 1006.
- <sup>124</sup> *Sisson v. Yost and Blanchard*, 7-8.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>126</sup> *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1889* (Washington: GPO, 1890), 34-35.
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- <sup>128</sup> Jessica Hilburn, *Hidden History of Northwestern Pennsylvania* (Charleston: History Press, 2019), 42.
- <sup>129</sup> *The Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office*, vol. 22, no. 14, October 3, 1882, 15.
- <sup>130</sup> *Rutland Daily Herald*, 26 March 1892.
- <sup>131</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 31 January 1884.
- <sup>132</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 21 April 1882.
- <sup>133</sup> Luther L. Blanchard guardianship proceedings, October 31 and November 28, 1892, Probate records, Guardianships, 1886-1912, ADP-00307, VSARA.
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- <sup>157</sup> *Vermont State Officers' Reports for 1893-94* (Rutland: The Tuttle Company, 1894), 121.
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- <sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 October 1898.
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- <sup>169</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 21 October 1898.
- <sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 May 1900; *St. Johnsbury Caledonian*, 2 May 1900; *The Enterprise and Vermonter*, 3 May 1900.
- <sup>171</sup> Vermont Vital Records, 1760-1954, VSARA; *St. Albans Messenger*, 23 January 1902.
- <sup>172</sup> Shattuck, *Green Mountain Opium Eaters, passim*.
- <sup>173</sup> Last Will and Testament of Virgil W. Blanchard, February 19, 1902, Estate case files, 1873-1959, ADP-00011, VSARA. The official court record copying the same document appears in error and does not recite the bequest to Luther. Probate records, testate, 1908-1912, ADP-00337, VSARA.
- <sup>174</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 12 June 1903.
- <sup>175</sup> *Minnie A. Blanchard vs. Virgil W. Blanchard's Administrator*, June 7, 1911, State of Vermont, Addison County Probate Court, ADP-00011, VSARA.
- <sup>176</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 10 May 1907.
- <sup>177</sup> Alphabetical List of Patentees for the Months of September and October 1906, 8, in *The Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office*, vol. 124, no. 8 (Washington: GPO, 1906); Alphabetical List of Patentees for the Year 1907, 56-57 in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1907* (Washington: GPO, 1908); *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office*, vol. 127 (Washington: GPO, 1907), 1945; *Domestic Engineering*, vol. 41, no. 3 (New York: 1907), 67; <https://patents.google.com/?inventor=Virgil+W+Blanchard>
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- <sup>182</sup> "In re: Luther S. Blanchard, insane," Probate records, guardians, District of Addison, ADP-00343, VSARA.
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- <sup>186</sup> Witness testimony, "In re: Guardianship of Virgil W. Blanchard. Probate Court, June 8, 1910. 10 a.m.," *In Re Petition for Guardian*, ADP-00002, VSARA.
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<sup>189</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 5 August 1910.

<sup>190</sup> *Vermont Medical Monthly*, vol. 16, no. 8 (Burlington: 1910), 207.

<sup>191</sup> "An inventory of the Estate of Dr. V. W. Blanchard," John E. Weeks, Executor, December 15, 1911, Estate case files, ADP-00011, VSARA.

<sup>192</sup> Brattleboro Retreat, January 25, 1912, *ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Middlebury Register*, 15 October 1915.

<sup>194</sup> Mary E. Blanchard estate account, January 27, 1917, Estate case files, ADP-00011, VSARA.

<sup>195</sup> Will of Mary E. Blanchard, March 2, 1915, Probate records, testate, 1913-1916, ADP-00349, VSARA.

<sup>196</sup> Vermont Vital Records, 1760-1954, VSARA.

<sup>197</sup> *Brattleboro Reformer*, 2 December 1927.