



1882 News Feature

“Remarkable Developments in Oil,” *Scientific American*, July 22, 1882:

The history of the oil trade in this country does not furnish a parallel to the effect of recent developments. The result of the penetration of a certain rock 1,600 feet below the surface, in the wilderness of Warren County, Pennsylvania, has been to form anew the map of the oil regions, to depreciate the value of oil above ground (30,000,000 barrels) 30 cents per barrel, for a total shrinkage of \$9,000,000, and to enrich a few and impoverish many. The history of well “646” would read like a romance, but the reality of its effect upon the trade is grim and matter-of-fact to the last degree. On the 1st of April last, crude oil was selling at 80 cents per barrel. The producers had good grounds for encouragement in the general situation. Consumption was increasing, and one of the old producing regions (Bradford) was rapidly declining. Its young rival (Richburg, New York) had reached its highest point, and everything in reason pointed to “dollar oil.” Meanwhile, a patient and disappointed driller was nearing the end of his cable and his credit, in the dense hemlock forest of Cherry Grove Township, Warren County, six miles from any oil well, four miles from the nearest gas well, and two miles from a “dry hole.” At 1,612 feet, the sand pump brought up that which threw the owners of the well into a fever of excitement. They suspended all operations, boarded up and locked the derrick, and employed a patrol of armed men to keep out every intruder. Every available acre of land in the vicinity was quietly bought up by the few favored ones, and on May 18 the owners were ready to start the drill into the oil rock. In the interval, the fame of the “Mystery, No. 646” had traveled throughout the region. Producers in general regarded the whole affair as a deep laid plot, but were uneasy nevertheless, and oil had dropped to 73 cents. Since the “Mystery” had exerted an influence on the market, 10,000,000 barrels had been sold “short,” and every producer heartily wished “646” in Jericho. On the date named, fires were lighted and the drill started in the bottom of the well. By the time the soft, pebble-filled rock had been pierced eight feet, the oil was flowing from the top of the well, through two, two-inch pipes, at the rate of 1,400 barrels per day, and the entire trade was, for the time, paralyzed. Today this well is rated at 800 barrels, and, since May 18, a 3,000-, a 2,500-, and a 2,000-barrel well have each been added their

production to the original “Mystery”; a town has grown up in the hemlock forest, and a score more drills are nearing the same long-neglected storehouse. The price of oil has reached 52 cents, and the older oil regions are being depopulated to fill the new field with excited multitudes. One thousand dollars an acre and half the oil is the price for all land on the “45 degree line” along which the larger wells have so far been developed. Garfield City is today the Mecca of the oil producer, and is as strange a creation itself as can be noted in the entire oil country.



1885 Profile

After a youth spent on a farm and some years in the Union Army, Buck Blanchard wanted to direct his own success by becoming an entrepreneur, selling books and making profits from the sales of other “canvassers.”

Life at Home

- Buck Blanchard met his first traveling salesman when he was eight years old.
- The peddler was from Connecticut, a distant, almost unimaginable place for a boy living in rural Ohio in 1841.
- The hawker was impressive in his speech, his dress and the way he displayed the “highest value” mantel clock he had brought, even though most farmhouse wives never knew they needed one until the salesman arrived.
- While strolling together on the quarter-mile run up to the farmhouse, the man asked Buck about that year’s crops, the number of brothers and sisters he had, the foods his mother liked to cook and what church they all attended.
- Buck was delighted by all the attention.
- Buck’s father was not happy to see the peddler.
- Previous waves of Yankees salesmen had left farmers with mediocre goods, merchants unhappy about lost sales and housewives suddenly discontented by the stinginess of their husbands.
- This was especially true if the area had been worked by a traveling lightning rod salesman, who often frightened farmers into signing contracts filled with hidden costs or additional fees.
- Buck’s newfound friend had concerns of his own—Ohio farm wives were well known for their bargaining skills.
- Bartering was a respected skill in a nation without a uniform currency in which three-quarters of its population were farmers and dependent on bargaining to obtain everything from soap to wagon wheels.



Buck Blanchard was a traveling book salesman.

- Each peddler had to calculate the exchange rates of Ohio bank-issued funds, the appropriate value of six large eggs (were they offered as part of the settlement) and the possibility of selling the clock he had on hand later in the year when the harvest was past and farmers were feeling more prosperous.
- Clock peddlers, who charged \$10 or more for their goods, preferred bank notes or coins—commodities which were in short supply in most farmhouses.
- Buck was fascinated with how the peddler talked his normally stubborn father into leaving his plow and listening to a lengthy spiel, before walking to the farmhouse to see how a “genuine Eli Terry” clock looked on the mantel.
- Along the way, the salesman called each of the children by name, as though he were a visiting uncle, mused about the rumored rise in wheat prices and praised God for the moral leadership provided by the Methodist church where the family worshipped.
- He even mentioned the intentions of their nearest neighbor to buy a clock “not nearly so fine as this one.”
- In the end, the salesman asked Buck’s parents to do him a favor: keep the clock for a month so “I don’t have to tote it” around Ohio.
- When he returned 26 days later, Buck’s family had received so many compliments on being sophisticated clock owners, they begged the peddler to let them buy it.



Buck did not want to grow up to be a farmer.

- The experience left Buck dazzled by the power of words and the opportunity to be an entrepreneur free from the seasonal burdens imposed by plowing, planting and picking, all integral to farm life.
- When Buck joined the Union Army in 1862, the clock still stood as one of his mother’s most prized possessions, even though it had stopped working years before.
- Buck was 30 years old when he joined the army in hopes that he could leave small-town Ohio behind; his dream was to study the way the military distributed supplies so he could be a regional mercantile man when the war ended.

- After two years of service in the Quartermaster Corps, he knew a lot about mud, blood, standing around on idle days and working like a demon on busy ones.
- He also learned to love the pomp and ceremony of the military, with all its glitz and glamour, even though General Ulysses S. Grant disappointed Buck with his perennial rumpled look.
- Buck and the general were both in Nashville, Tennessee, in the spring of 1864, when General Grant was asked to assume command of all the Union armies.
- After the war with the South, Buck had little interest in commanders, commands or being commanded.
- He also had less interest in being a farmer; after discovering how big the nation really was, he was convinced that being an entrepreneur was his destiny.
- So Buck rented an apartment in Columbus, Ohio, and then took to the road to claim his fortune selling Bibles, *Webster's American Spelling Book* and the *Farmer's Almanac*.



After the war, Buck took to the road selling books.

- For special customers he carried scandalous titles such as *Fanny Hill* or *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, and read everything he could find on salesmanship including the satirical *The Clockmaker; or, The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville*.
- A dozen magazine and book subscription houses, most headquartered in Hartford, Connecticut, employed as many as 50,000 part-time agents per year, including disabled soldiers, retired ministers and children.
- Book peddlers hawked 600-page volumes detailing the events of the Civil War, natural history, and life in Central America.
- Most agents had to purchase the books at discount and pay their own expenses, and were responsible for tracking down customers to collect payments.
- Contract agents were forbidden from selling any copies to store owners.