



JOHN SAMUEL BLUNT, PAINTER

BORN IN 1798 INTO A FAMILY OF PORTSMOUTH MARINERS, John Samuel Blunt was apprenticed in the Boston workshop of artist John Ritto Penniman where, from age 14 to 21, he mastered the art of ornamentation. Here he met other ambitious young artists who yearned, as he did, to transcend craftwork into the fine art of painting portraits and landscapes. In a career of only a dozen years in Portsmouth and Boston, Blunt was one of an emerging group of American landscape artists to paint directly from nature.



NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE SEAL, 1819

Completing his apprenticeship in 1819, Blunt sketched from nature and painted landscape views. His earliest known work is this Seal of New Hampshire painted for the new state capitol building erected in Concord in 1816. The seal features, as a symbol of the state's economy, a ship under construction at the water's edge, a scene familiar to Blunt from his youth in Portsmouth.

John Samuel Blunt, *New Hampshire State Seal*, painted panel. Courtesy of New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.

ADVERTISEMENT in NH GAZETTE

In 1821, the 23-year-old John S. Blunt began ten years as an ornamental and portrait painter in Portsmouth, occupying rented rooms on Daniel Street. His everyday work included gilding frames, ornamenting lamps and tins, painting fire buckets, lettering and blacking coffin plates, painting signs, decorating rocking chairs, gilding ships' figureheads, numbering church pews, and graining, striping and decorating.

Right: Newspaper Advertisement from the *New Hampshire Gazette*, June 5, 1821. Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenæum.

The scene opposite Blunt's Daniel Street studio (Hale's Hat Store, right), from *J. S. Blunt Sketchbook*.

Right: Drawing, *J.S. Blunt Sketchbook*. Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenæum.



VIEW of PORTSMOUTH

Blunt's landscape masterpiece is a huge *View of Portsmouth from Freeman's Point* painted about 1830. The painting, which is 43 x 62 inches, now hangs in the Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers at Portsmouth City Hall. The heart of his panorama captures the city from a mile upriver. To the left is the wooden pile bridge from Noble's Island to Kittery, built in 1822. Across the North Mill Pond in the foreground are sailing ships beside North End wharves and warehouses. The compact urban skyline is punctuated by a windmill atop a nearby hill and the towers, spires, and cupolas of the city's eight churches.

John Samuel Blunt, Detail, *View of Portsmouth from Freeman's Point*, circa 1830, Oil on canvas. Courtesy City of Portsmouth, Gift of Mayor William H. Sise.



VIEW of PISCATAQUA RIVER

While Blunt supported his growing family by his craft, he also found time to paint a number of water views of ships and the Portsmouth Naval Ship Yard, such as this 1824 *View of the Piscataqua River from Noble's Wharf*. In 1825, he opened a drawing and painting school and soon moved his studio to new rooms at the corner of State and Court Streets. In 1830, Blunt moved to Boston, where he continued to work as an artist until 1835, when he died at age 37 on a voyage home from New Orleans to Boston.

John Samuel Blunt, *View of the Piscataqua River from Noble's Wharf*, 1824, Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenæum, gift of Joseph and Jean Sawtelle.



SELF PORTRAIT

John Samuel Blunt, 1798-1835, *Self Portrait*, Oil on canvas, Private Collection.

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