

Francis Abraham Burdett

was my grandfather's uncle. He came from Birmingham England as a small child in the 1860's. His family came ashore in New York City and then settled in New England.

East Providence, Rhode Island soon became home to the young family which grew and prospered there.

When Francis was grown, he like his father before him, chose to become a jeweler and a watch-maker. He had a successful shop in busy "Down-City" Providence. One day in that city, he was injured in a streetcar accident and his life was forever changed. In the prime of his middle years, he was blinded.

Unable to pursue his trade any longer, he and his wife moved to Wayne, New Jersey to live with their married daughter and her husband, William Vahrenkamp.

Being a man of optimistic attitude and a cheerful disposition, he overcame his initial depression and looked for something to occupy himself.

What he did made newspaper headlines all over 1920's America, and brought throngs of curious onlookers to see if it was true!

-Norman Burdett January 27, 2011

The HOUSE BUILT IN THE DARK by William Vahrenkamp

The HOUSE BUILT IN THE DARK

ILLUSTRATED



by William Vahrenkamp

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Written by
William Vahrenkamp

Illustrations by
J.W. Greenhaulgh

Photographs by
William Vahrenkamp

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New England History Series

Edited by Norman P. Burdett

Plymouth

<i>Mourt's Relation</i>	Anonymous	1622
<i>Good News From N. England</i>	Edward Winslow	1634
<i>Morton's Memorial</i>	Nathaniel Morton	1669
<i>Chronological History of New England</i>	Thomas Prince	1736

Massachusetts Bay

<i>New England's Prospect</i>	William Wood	1634
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Connecticut

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<i>Easton's Relation</i>	Deputy. Gov. John Easton	1675
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<i>Brief History of the War with The Indians of New England</i>	Rev. Increase Mather	1676

Also

<i>The House Built in the Dark</i>	William Vahrenkamp	1928
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Editor's Note

The affection and respect that William Vahrenkamp had for his father-in-law is apparent in this book. He paints a vivid picture of a clever, hard working and good natured man who persevered in the face of adversity.

Another notable thing in this volume is the quality of the photographs that he supplied to the book. It must be born in mind that these pictures were probably taken with an old Kodak box camera in the 1920's.

The account of Mrs. Burdett's continued labors as a personal nurse to finance the project and keep it going forward are also particularly noteworthy.

The style of the writing and the wonderful illustrations provided by J.W. Greenhalgh place this account firmly in the Roaring Twenties. So this is not only the story of an amazing accomplishment, but also an interesting glimpse into American life in the 1920's. The house was completed and the book written just before the Stock Market crash of 1929 which signaled the start of the Great Depression. — *Norman P. Burdett*

Acknowledgement

Beverly and Keith, thank you for making this material available.





FRANCIS A. BURDETT
The Blind Builder
 DECORATED WITH A FEW OF HIS PETS.

THE HOUSE THE BLIND-MAN BUILT

ILLUSTRATED



A SYNOPSIS

OF A BLIND-MAN'S METHODS OF BUILDING A HOUSE, SHOWING COURAGE AND PATIENCE SELDOM FOUND IN HUMAN BEINGS, ILLUSTRATING ACCOMPLISHED PROOF, AND THE POWER OF CONCENTRATION OF MIND OVER MISFORTUNE, SHOWING THE UNCANNY SKILL AND FORTITUDE OF A BLINDMAN 65 YEARS OLD. A LESSON FOR EVERY LIVING PERSON.

By

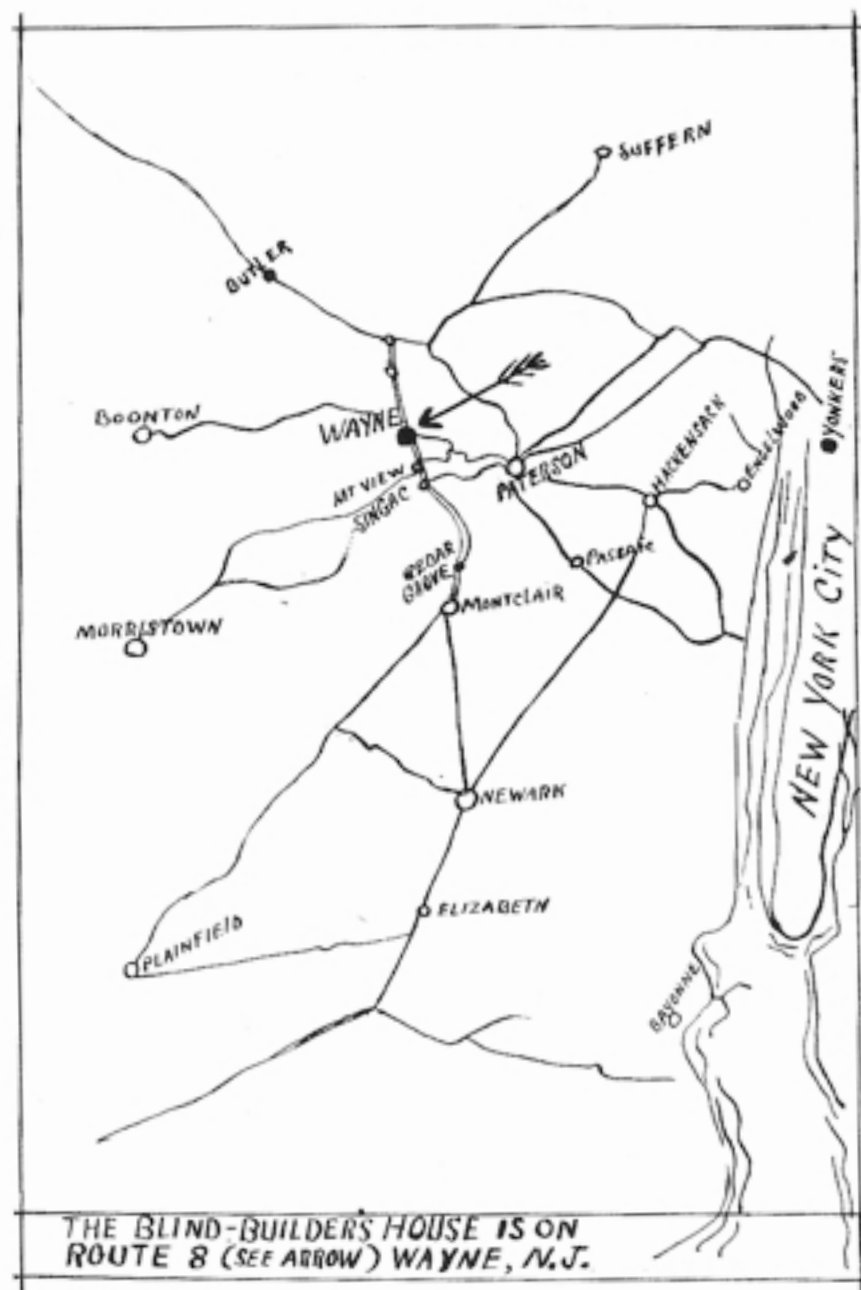
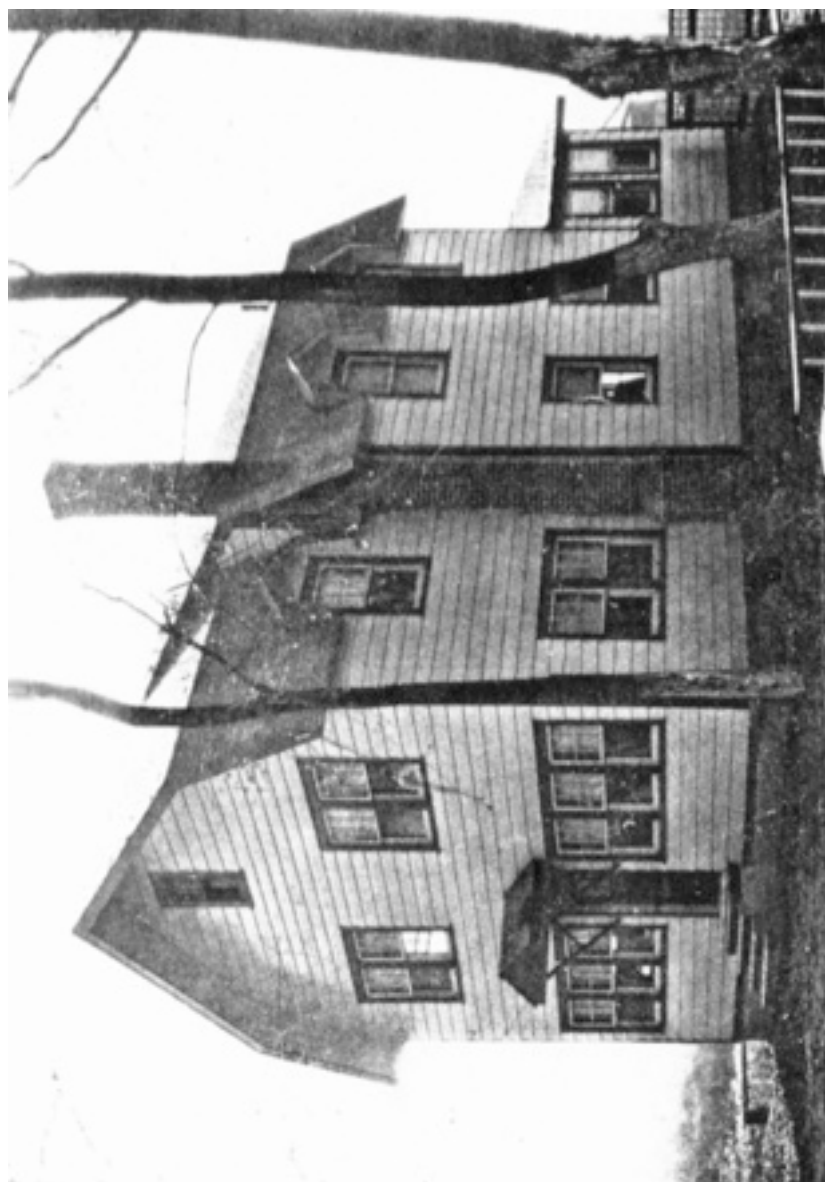
WILLIAM VAHRENKAMP

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Drawings by

J. W. GREENHALGH

Published by
 WILLIAM VAHRENKAMP
 Wayne, New Jersey



FORE-WORD



IN this day and age of scientific wonders, it is hardly possible to think of any new thing produced or act performed that will enthuse people long enough to mention it more than once.

A blind man building a house! This may sound like a fable or maybe stated by some cynic as a joke, or even used to denote an utter impossibility.

Much has been written about clever and seemingly impossible accomplishments of the blind. All kinds of ornamental and useful articles are variously exhibited throughout the world and viewed with awe and astonishment, and often the expression "It seems impossible to believe", and "Why, people with their full sight could do no better", and many other expressions of satisfaction. Much of this merchandise finds its way into homes of the people through the regular trade channels and is accepted as first-class ware.

YES

A Blind Man Did Build A House

And if others in like physical handicap were lauded and commended for producing praiseworthy work, what words are there that can properly define the man that built a house, 3 stories high, seven rooms, bath and large attic,—on the Newark-Pompton Turnpike, Wayne, N. J. A Dutch Colonial house, having those difficult angles, that only experienced builders can rightly erect. Let the reader close his eyes and imagine he is going to do some simple work, or try walking around the house, or find some article. Do this and he will experience a deep interest in the **BLIND BUILDER AND THE HOUSE BUILT IN THE DARK**, mentioned in this book. No one with sight can imagine the moods and tenses of one having lost the sight. Any physical defect, especially blindness will cause one to be more or less depressed and discouraged; but it must be said of Mr. Burdett that he always is in the best humor and his repartee keen; one is yet to hear him complain or speak of his misfortune.

He lost his sight after he was fifty years of age; thirteen years later—and at a time in life when most people look for retirement and ease, he began to build a house. This task would invite a look of incredulity, even if pro-