

## THE NEW YORK MAKERS FROM THE BLUNT FAMILY

by Dale R. Beeks

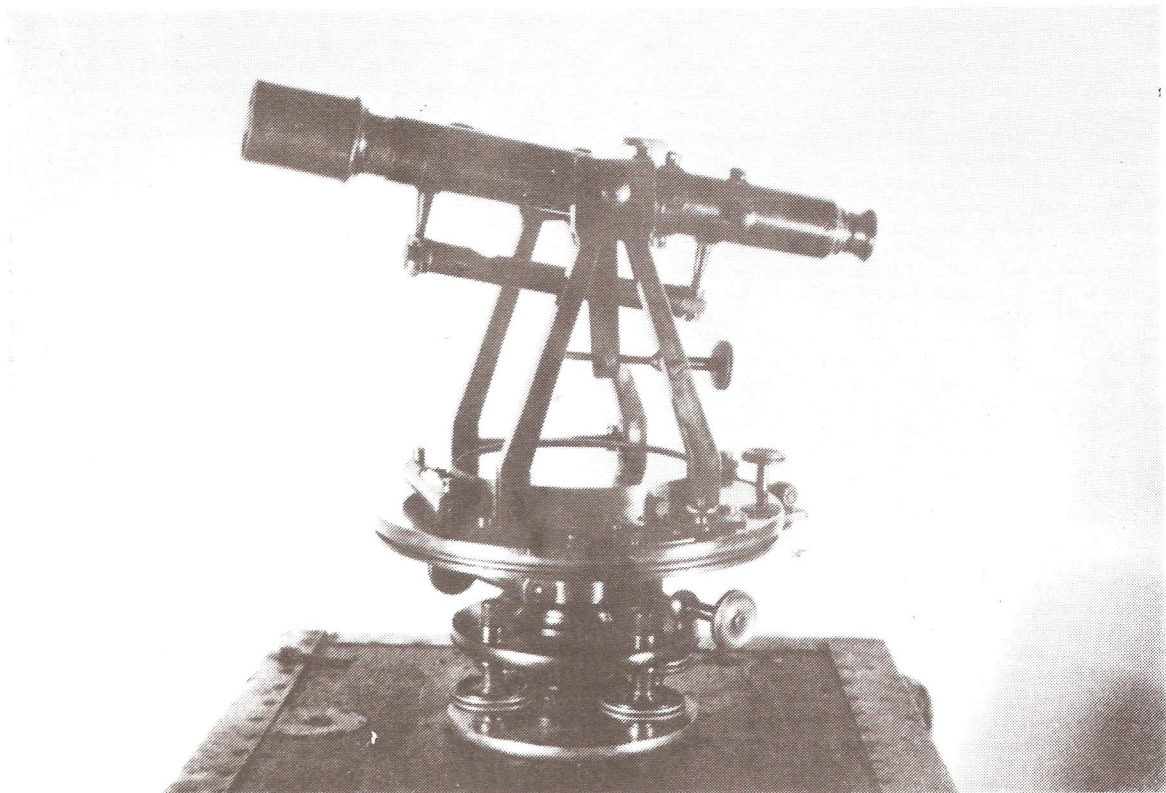
Edmund March Blunt was born in 1770 and died in New York on January 4th, 1862. It is noted in Charles Smart, *The Makers of Surveying Instruments in America since 1700*, that in New York in the year 1812, he was involved in printing and publishing charts; a specialty later taken up by his two sons, Edmund and George William. At the age of 53, Edmund senior retired from manufacturing and left his business to his two sons and son-in-law William Hooker. That firm, "E. & G.W. Blunt," existed from about 1826 through 1866. Edmund worked with the Coast Survey as First Assistant from 1833 until his death in 1866. He built a dividing engine in 1831 and another in 1851 which was completed in 1857. After the completion of the 2nd engine, Blunt began producing instruments for the Coast Survey instead of importing them.

During their existence the Blunts produced maps and during the Civil War provided the Union Army with

detailed maps of militarily active areas. Edmund had two sons, Edmund Junior, born in 1842, and William Sinclair, born in 1837. Both were of a ripe age for service in the Civil War. Edmund, Jr., served as a Captain in the Fifth New York Cavalry and it is probable that he was involved with initial reconnaissance for data needed to produce the maps by his father's company. The firm may have produced instruments for that purpose. The other son served on the U.S.S. Saranac.

After the death of his father in 1866, Edmund, Jr., went into partnership with F.M. Nash and John Nichols. The name of "Blunt & Nichols" was short-lived, however, and was dissolved after only two years in 1868. Edmund, Jr., then established the New York Optical works and "Blunt & Company;" the latter was in use as late as 1872.

Considering the Blunt family's 50 years in business during the mid-19th century it is not surprising that there remain many of their instruments extant in museums and private collections.



The firm of E. & G. W. Blunt with that trade name was established in New York in 1824 and continued until 1866, so that your "staff compass" was made within that period. Edmund and George W. Blunt were the sons of Edmund March Blunt, a publisher of nautical books in Newburyport, Massachusetts. The senior Blunt moved his business to 391 Broadway in New York City in 1811, and added a shop for mathematical instruments at 202 Water Street in the following year.

After a career at sea, George Blunt established his own shop for mathematical instruments in 1821 at 149 Fly-Market, and in 1824 was joined as a partner by his brother, Edmund Blunt, Jr. The elder Edmund Blunt retired from his instrument business in 1826 or 1827 and the shop was continued first by a son-in-law and then by his two sons. In 1826 the firm of E. & G. W. Blunt moved first to 147 Maiden Lane, then to 123 Maiden Lane. It moved again in 1837 to 154 Water Street and finally to 179 Water Street, where it remained until 1866 when the firm changed hands and firm name. The Blunt brothers imported many nautical instruments from England in addition to those they produced themselves. In about 1836 they had their own astronomical observatory in Brooklyn.