

*Marion Robertson*

## WILLIAM GREENWOOD OF THE FLYING FISH AND THE SALLY

DURING THE LONG YEARS of the American Revolutionary War, Captain William Greenwood of the *Flying Fish* and the *Sally* was a well-known sea captain along the water front of New England and in his home port of Barrington, Nova Scotia. Like most of the early Barrington settlers, he had come from Cape Cod following the "expulsion" to take up the land that had been held by the Acadians along the shores of Barrington Bay, and, like the others, he was deeply stirred when trouble broke out in the old homeland. The rebellious colonists were their own people fighting for their liberty, a liberty that William Greenwood and the other Barrington settlers cherished as the inherent right of every man of dignity, for their roots went deep into the ideals of their ancestors, who had braved the seas in little ships to possess in a new land the rights denied them in the old.

The early Barrington settlers had little in the way of worldly goods, but they had spunk and determination, and they quickly established a thriving trade with the New England towns, trading their dried fish and cod oil for flour, sugar, rum, and molasses. As the uneasy years of discontent rolled over New England, the Barrington settlers were building their security, a security that was shattered when the grumbling discord broke into open revolt. With their markets gone, and thieving privateersmen swarming over their shores like vultures, hard times were indeed upon them; but they never wavered in their loyalty to their ideals of the rights of man, as all the escaped American prisoners learned when they stumbled over the wilderness trails and along the shores to their homes. It was in the way of helping escaped Americans "over the Bay" and back to "the cause" that William Greenwood's destiny lay. In his schooner *Sally*, which some accounts assert was the first schooner built in Barrington, and later in the *Flying Fish*, many an American found his way back to the warring states, to the battlefield or the deck of a fighting frigate.

William Greenwood seems to have come to Barrington, not with the first

settlers in the early 1760's, but later in the 1770's. Born in Virginia, he ran away from home in his early youth and found his way to Cape Cod, where he learned to be a mariner. When he came to Barrington, he sailed his own vessel laden with timber for a house that he built at the Mill Stream, near that of his wife's brother, Solomon Smith. His name first appears in the records in October, 1776, when he, with twenty-eight other hard-pressed Barrington settlers, addressed a petition to the Congress of Massachusetts Bay for permission to sell in Salem or Beverly the fish and liver oil which they had loaded on the schooner *Hope*. From the sale of their fish they earnestly prayed that Heman Kenney would be allowed to buy provisions, as they were entirely destitute, "and a long winter Approaching—God only knows what will become of us."

To Congress this was an appeal from their old neighbours, and they could not refuse old friends. On November 16 they granted Heman Kenney permission to sell his cargo, and to buy 250 bushels of corn, 30 barrels of pork, 2 hogsheads of molasses, 2 hogsheads of rum, and 200 pounds of coffee, "solely for the purpose", so they wrote, "of enabling the inhabitants of Barrington to transport themselves from thence to this State." If the Barrington settlers had intended returning to their old homes, not many of them did, and a year later came William Greenwood's first chance to help distressed Americans.

Cruising off the coast of Nova Scotia in the fall of 1777, Captain Littlefield Libby and his crew of twenty-one men from Salem, Massachusetts, lost their privateer to a British cutter. Determined that her ribs should not be picked by the British, they drove her into the land, set her on fire, and took to the woods. Pushing their way through seventeen leagues of unbroken wilderness, they came to Barrington, where they bought a boat with their shoe buckles, thirty small arms, and what money they had with them. But fate was against them. They lost her and again had to seek shelter in the homes of Barrington. Entirely destitute, Captain Libby and his men went to William Greenwood, who agreed to take them to Salem in his schooner *Sally*. On the advice of Captain Libby, the *Sally* was loaded with a few quintals of fish, some bushels of salt, and some fish oil. With Captain Libby and his men, and one of Captain Fullerby's men and three others from Boston who had escaped from Halifax and had found their way to Barrington, William Greenwood lifted the sails of the *Sally* for over the Bay. A few days later he was safe in Salem, and on October 31 the Council of Massachusetts Bay gave him permission to sell his cargo and to buy corn for bread.

While lying at the wharf ready to sail, the *Sally* was spotted by a young man

from New Jerusalem (near Shelburne), John Caldwell, who had been captured by the privateer *Dolphin* and taken into Salem. In the peaceful years he had fished and sold his catch, dried and salted, in the ports of New England. When war destroyed his markets he had gone in a merchantman to the West Indies. Later he went on a voyage to Quebec and was captured by the privateer *Dolphin*. Now he wanted to go home. Since he had never sailed in an armed ship against America, the Council of Massachusetts Bay could find no reason why he should not return to his home, and he and William Greenwood set the sails of the *Sally* and made way for Barrington.

A year passed. Then, in the fall of 1778, distressed Americans again sought William Greenwood. They were John Long, late quartermaster of the *Hancock*, Amos Green of Salem, and Ichabo [*sic*] Mattocks of Mt. Desert, escaped prisoners from Halifax seeking a way over the Bay to the port of Boston. Again William Greenwood nosed the bow of the *Sally* down the shore and out over the sea for New England. A few days later he was safe in port and was petitioning the Council of Massachusetts Bay to return to his home in Nova Scotia, and to take with him for the use of his family, and the families of the four men from Barrington who came with him in the *Sally*, 40 bushels of rye and 3 casks of flour. The Council granted his petition, and laden with rye and flour, the little *Sally* was headed back over the Bay.

As the long years of the war dragged on, thieving American privateersmen from the New England States swarmed over the shores of Nova Scotia in ever-increasing numbers. Many were no better than pirates, for they sailed without letters of marque, and plundered defenceless villages and unarmed ships. The little hamlets along the shores that had been settled only a few years before by New Englanders from their own home towns, by men sympathetic with the American cause, were not spared, nor were their fishing boats or the men in them. With what anguish in those days a mother must have watched a privateer making up into the harbour, knowing the bareness of her cupboards and the needs of her family. Many small treasures could be hidden, but the things the settlers could not hide the privateersmen stuffed into the holds of their "shaving mills" and "long splices" (types of privateering coastal vessels). From Ragged Islands and from New Jerusalem, from Liverpool and Chebogue, the people wrote wrathfully to the State of Massachusetts Bay, denouncing the ruffians who robbed their homes and their fish houses, their fishing boats and schooners. Joseph Homer complained that the prize master of the *Dove* even stole his "Hatt", "telling me it fitted him better than

it fitted me", and later stole his buckles and shoes and the handkerchief around his neck.

It does not seem that William Greenwood was troubled by the privateersmen until the summer of 1779. In August of that year a privateer from Rhode Island swept into Barrington Bay, and her crew plundered a warehouse from which William Greenwood was loading his schooner, cut the *Sally* from the wharf, and made off with her. William Greenwood was not one to stand idly aside and have his schooner stolen by a crew of ruffians from Rhode Island. He followed close in her wake; but he never got her back. On the first of December he entered a statement of his losses in the House of Representatives in the State of Massachusetts Bay, and asked permission to return to his home in Nova Scotia, and to take with him twenty-five bushels of corn and twenty-five bushels of rye. The theft of his schooner and the long years of hardship for his family must have made William Greenwood decide to return to his old home in Massachusetts, for he asked for permission to return with his family the next spring. This the House granted and issued a stern command to all armed ships neither to molest nor to impede him on his way to and from Nova Scotia.

As the war continued it became more and more difficult for the Barrington settlers to obtain the necessities of life. It was natural that they had turned to their old home ports when they came to Barrington, but as the war severed their old connections it became necessary to seek elsewhere for their existence. Consequently, in the spring of 1780 William Greenwood, sailing his new shallop, the *Flying Fish*, took a load of potatoes to Halifax to trade for provisions for himself and others. On the evening of April 4 he had sold his potatoes and was lying at the wharf ready to sail, when two men entered his cabin, one with a shirt for sale, the other offering a razor. William Greenwood stepped from the cabin and found six men dressed in American regimentals on the deck of his schooner. They told him they wanted a way to the westward, to Barrington. Greenwood hesitated. He told them it would be bad for him if he were caught with soldiers on board his shallop. The men turned surly. They told him they had been in the gaol at Halifax for months, and now that they had dug their way to freedom they would kill or be killed. William Greenwood assured them he was a friend of America, and would take them where they could get a passage over the Bay, or he would take them there himself.

The wind being fair, about 9 o'clock he hoisted sail and made way to the westward. He sailed thirty leagues and entered a harbour to pick up a cargo of

salt, first hiding the Americans in the hold of the *Flying Fish*. The next day they put to sea again and stood to the westward about five leagues when they sighted a shallop belonging to William Greenwood's brother, with three men and his brother aboard. Again Greenwood hid the Americans below deck that they might not be seen by his brother's crew. He had sailed on about two leagues farther to the westward when the Americans turned on him, stripped him of his clothes and money, pushed him and his man ashore on a desolate island, and went off with the *Flying Fish*. One of the soldiers, William Stanton, knew that William Greenwood was no coward. He told the others that Greenwood would be after them. Two of them snarled that if William Greenwood ever "came to Salem, Marblehead or Boston they would knock him on the head and throw him over the wharf."

William Stanton was not wrong. Greenwood was soon in their wake, and knew where they had taken his schooner. In late April he entered a petition in the House of Representatives requesting the return of his vessel.

The Americans had told a tall tale of bravado to the men who bought the *Flying Fish* from them. They said that they had seized her at the wharf in Halifax at the point of their bayonets, and that William Greenwood had piloted the schooner down the passage to the westward only when they had stood over him, their bayonets pressed against him. Believing their tale, the men who had bought the *Flying Fish* defended their action vigorously. They declared that she was a lawful prize and that as such they had bought her. They did not hesitate to point out that, in the fall of 1779, William Greenwood had purchased the *Flying Fish* in Massachusetts by leave of the Court, with the intention of going immediately to Barrington to bring his family back to the State of Massachusetts, for which he had a permit. Instead of returning to Massachusetts he had tarried all winter in Barrington and then had gone off to Halifax with a load of potatoes, "with which the enemy was probably supplied." Since he had fishing gear on board and had bought a quantity of salt in a neighbouring harbour, "it is probable", they insisted, that "he intended to go on a fishing voyage instead of coming to this State and only use his permit as a protection from American Privateers." Moreover, his clearance papers from the port of Halifax called his shallop the *Peggy* and not the *Flying Fish*.

But they had no case against Greenwood. The Court knew that he was a true friend of America. On June 13 they ordered that the *Flying Fish* should be delivered to him, and issued a sharp warning to all commanders of armed vessels belonging to the State of Massachusetts that they should neither molest nor impede him on his way to his home in Nova Scotia.

William Greenwood made a second voyage over the Bay in that year of 1780, in the month of August, when he took Jonathan Prince of Manchester and Willam Smith of Cape Ann, prisoners on parole, to the State of Massachusetts. In the hold of the *Flying Fish* he had fifty quintals of cod which he was permitted to exchange for corn, rye, sugar, molasses, and rum for himself and eleven families who had an equal share in the fish, and were as distressed for provisions as were he and his family. The laws of the State had grown harsh as the years of war went on. Even so trusted a friend as William Greenwood was required to give to the Naval Officer of the Port of Boston a bond of £2000 that he would take on board his vessel only those provisions permitted by the court.

The year 1781 did not see Greenwood on the water front of New England. In August, 1782, he crossed over to Newburyport with six Americans who had escaped the prison ship at Halifax, and a cargo of a hundred quintals of cod. Although the war was now over, it had left a long trail of bitterness, and all trade with the people of Nova Scotia was forbidden. The *Flying Fish* and her cargo were immediately seized when they entered Newburyport. Perhaps Michael Hodge, the Port Officer, knew William Greenwood, for he wrote John Hancock that he had seized the schooner in the course of his duty, but that the circumstances under which William Greenwood had been induced to cross over the Bay should be, in his opinion, considered, as Greenwood had been assured by the Americans that there was no danger in entering the State, or in bringing a load of dry fish for thirty distressed families in Barrington.

Zebulon Roe, one of the escaped prisoners who had sailed in the privateer *Fox* and had been snapped up by the British frigate *Ceres* and thrust into the prison ship at Halifax, declared that

about the twentieth day of July [we] made our Escape from the Prison Ship & with much difficulty arrived at Barrington . . . without money or Provisions, where we found Mr William Greenwood, who kindly supplied us with whatever we needed Gratis . . . we & one other Prisoner who had got there also, applied to sd Greenwood to bring us to Newbury Port, but it was with great Difficulty that we prevailed with him to consent to bring us, as he had lately lost his wife & had nobody but a girl to leave a family of small children with & was just engaging in his mowing; however we at last did prevail . . . & as he was coming, the People there tho't it a good Oppy to send up some fish to get a few necessaries . . . I further say that the People in general there were friendly to us & Mr Greenwood never charged us a farthing.

Remembering the resolute spirit of William Greenwood and his loyalty to the American cause, the Court was not long in ordering Michael Hodge to free

the *Flying Fish* and her cargo, and to permit Greenwood to return in peace to his home, laden with supplies for the people of Barrington, "they being represented as great friends to the United States."

The long years of war were ended. Distressed Americans no longer came creeping furtively to William Greenwood's door, begging protection and a way over the Bay. With mingled emotions he, and the other settlers of Barrington, must have watched the white billowing sails of the Loyalists' transports passing on their way to Port Roseway (Shelburne), seeking a refuge from the wrath of the Americans who would not tolerate "traitors" in their land. Soon they were to know some of those Loyalist refugees coming to make their homes among them, and as eager as they to build a strong and a lasting community on the shores of Barrington Bay.

Shortly after the war William Greenwood went to live at Indian Brook, now known as Port Saxon, but at that time referred to in official records as East Side Cape Negro Harbour. There he obtained from the crown a grant of 230 acres that stretched along the shores of Cape Negro Harbour north of Indian Brook to Michael Lamey's grant, later the land of the Van Nordens, and ran back in woodland to the lake that bears his name. From Barrington Municipality he purchased an island of five acres lying in the harbour near his grant, and for a sovereign, as an old family tradition claims, he bought seven hundred acres on the east side of the harbour. If he did it was never recorded. Like many of the early settlers making land transactions, William Greenwood was probably given an indenture which he never bothered to record. Land may not have been bought for a song in those early days when most of it was unbroken wilderness, but much of it went for a few shillings and the promise of a peppercorn to be paid if lawfully demanded. The old Loyalist who sold his acres for a sovereign no doubt chuckled that he was rid of his worthless land, and had a sovereign to jingle in his pocket.

On the shores of Cape Negro Harbour, William Greenwood kept the first public house, farmed his land, fished, and cured his catch in the summer sun, and went on voyages in his new schooner *Deborah*. His sons William and Thomas bought land near him at the estuary of the Clyde near Lyle's Bridge, where William kept the Barrington Ferry, which sailed from the public landing on the west bank of the Clyde to the east side of Cape Negro Harbour to the brook where ships watered in the days of sail. His son Thomas was a Methodist and one of the trustees of the first Methodist House in Port Saxon, which was given by Theodore Smith in 1797 to be used as a church. In it were to be preached only the doctrines

of John Wesley as contained in his notes on the New Testament and in his four volumes of sermons, and the only person who could stand in the pulpit and preach was one who had been "appointed at the yearly conference of the Methodist people as established by Deed Poll of the late Rev. John Wesley February 28, 1784 and enrolled in His Majesty's Court of Chancery." In the 1790's Methodism was pouring its spirit like new wine into the lives of the early settlers of Shelburne County, and William Greenwood, like his son, was no doubt a Methodist.

An old tale of William Greenwood and the Indians has been long remembered. One day he went to the home of his son and found that the household was being pestered by a family of Indians. Greenwood asked if they wanted to be rid of them. When they eagerly replied in the affirmative, he assured them that he knew how. A few minutes later the Indians saw him come from his son's house dressed as for a journey and carrying a bundle under his arm. He hurried off up the road, his coat collar well pulled up to his ears. The Indians were astonished. They wanted to know why he was hurrying away. As soon as they heard Greenwood's muttered, "Smallpox", they made for their canoes, and were soon far from his son's house.

But these years of William Greenwood's life were not all peaceful days on his land with fish drying on the flakes, and pranks on the Indians. For some reason in 1789 he needed £140, and to Stephen Skinner, Shelburne merchant and fish dealer, he pledged on a bond his land and the island lying on the east side of Cape Negro Harbour; his house and barns and furniture; two black cows, one pied cow, a steer, a pied bull, and three calves; and his schooner *Deborah* of 27 tons, with her tackle and apparel. All these he would lose if he did not pay to Stephen Skinner £140 before December 28, 1790. It must have been an anxious year for William Greenwood but one that ended happily, for he still possessed his land on the east side of Cape Negro Harbour when he died in 1824. He had worked hard and had made his acres yield more than a meagre living, for his possessions—his cleared and rough land, house and barns, workshop and fish house, cows and heifers, oxen and bull, sheep and pigs, rye and wheat flour, salt and fresh hay, tools and furniture, curtained bedsteads, cupboard of dishes, books and mahogany table and chairs, his pots and pans, spinning wheels and loom—were valued by his old friends, Alexander McLean and Reuben Swain, as worth £203, 1s, 9d. At a time when a good cow sold for less than £2 and a strong ox for £4, William Greenwood had wrested a fortune from his stony acres and from the sea that lay at his door. Following the death of his first wife, Grace Smith, he married Deborah (Bootman) Berry. Of

his thirteen children, at least ten married into Shelburne County families and had children, passing to others the rugged spirit of William Greenwood.

#### NOTES

The following sources were consulted in the composition of this paper: *Annals of Yarmouth and Barrington in the Revolutionary War*, compiled by Edmund Duval Poole; Crowell's *Barrington Township*; old maps of Port Clyde and Port Saxon land grants; *Court of Probate Records, Shelburne*; and *Records, Shelburne Registry Office*, vols. 3, 4, 5, and 6.