

**Toronto Telegram, September 28, 1940**  
**Schooner Days CCCCLIII (453)**  
**By C. H. J. Snider**

### **Three Years in the Greenwood**

IN the second year the *Greenwood* ceased to be the Williams “family residence,” for a baby was coming – little May, now Mrs. Leon Watts, in whose well-appointed home at 57 Islesworth avenue, is now Capt. Williams’ anchorage. Johnny was proud of the *Greenwood*, but he did not exactly fancy her as a nursery for the wee one. So a floor more level for her cradle was found ashore, and Capt. John Williams became a householder as well as a ship-owner and master mariner.

Yes, the schooner had been their home, John’s and Mary’s, for two seasons. A pleasant home, too, with the surroundings ever changing, now blue waves under sunny skies, now greybacks and storm clouds around her; now green shores and singing birds, now the growing cities of the eighties, with their cedar block pavements and lumber yards and red elevators filled roof-high with the wealth of new turned furrows, the gold of grain fields; or coal docks with their shining mountains of black diamonds; or little ports which were just villages, with wharves as narrow as the plank sidewalks which still served city streets.

In the winter it would be different. The *Greenwood*, keeping the lake as long as there was cargo to be carried, would make the Toronto Waterworks dock or the foot of Berkeley street or somewhere on the waterfront, on a crisp morning in November or December, the first “drying day” in a fortnight of rain and sleet and snow. Johnny would leave his sails hanging in the still sunshine, to thoroughly air them, and before night they would all be furled, stripped from their hoops and hanks and gaffs and booms, and safely stowed where they would be dry till spring. Next day all the running gear would be unrove, coiled down, and stored away, and the “gang” – mate, cook and sailors – paid off for the season, and Johnny would begin to make the cabin snug against the snow, with tarpaulins over every chink, and firewood piled to keep the frost away from the outside while the odd ton of salvaged coal worked hard inside in the cabin stove.

Meantime the slow horse and bucket system would be lightening the *Greenwood* of her cargo, inch by inch, a few tons a day. And old Mr. Pearson – W. H. Pearson, Sr., then manager of the Consumers’ Gas Co., would send down a message saying: “Captain, I hope you will be patient, for this coal is for our employes for the winter, and it will take several days more to deliver it all over the city in the small lots they require.”

Here a less honest captain would have worked up much false indignation, and hinted at demurrage, and tried to “settle” for an extra hundred dollars. But Johnny answered that it was all right, the vessel was stripped and berthed for the winter, and the crew paid off, so there was no expense involved.

Others told him he was a fool to be so frank, but he was not. Honesty always pays, and the dividend in this instance came within a year. Johnny had a chance to go to Cleveland for the

Gas Company to load coal at \$1.10 a ton freight, but he had first to take a load of rye to Oswego and bring a load back. While he was away another vessel cut in on him and got the Cleveland cargo at \$1 a ton. When he was ready to go to the same port, the shipping clerk told him he had lost his chance, but he would, as a favor, give him another load at \$1, which was a pretty close figure; indeed there would be no profit unless the voyage proved shorter than usual.

“That’s rather hard,” said Johnny.

“What’s hard?” asked Mr. Pearson, crossing the office floor.

Johnny told him.

“Give him the charter at the original figure,” said Mr. Pearson. “This captain was very reasonable with us when we asked his forbearance.”

By careful attention to all opportunities – much hard work himself, sailing as short handed as the law allowed, doing without tugs and so on – he made the *Greenwood* “pay.”

In 1885 “be jingo we was at Batoche” as The Khan wrote, for the Riel Rebellion. In 1886, the writer of these chronicles started to school, spelled summer with an ‘o’ and got his first and only licking. In 1887 Toronto with the rest of the Christian world jubilated over the fact that good Queen Victoria had been fifty years on the throne. All these years young Johnny Williams, slight, flaxen moustached, with toes tickling for a dance, was master of the *W. T. Greenwood* of Cobourg.

In 1885, the hard year, the “terrible bad year,” she cleared \$600. In 1886 it was \$1,400. In 1887 she made \$3,000. She had been getting her share of the Bay of Quinte barley trade to Oswego, the best freights Lake Ontario schooners ever earned at home.

Three thousand dollars was not all the *Greenwood* cost to build, even in 1867, but it was what she was priced at when Johnny went into her as captain in 1885, paying \$750 for a quarter interest. He had saved money from his wages, in addition to his share of the vessel’s earnings, and in 1887 he wanted to buy her outright.

“Where’d you get the money?” rumbled old Capt. Ewart, Sr., the owner.

“By robbing you all this time I’ve been in her.”

“I know how you’ve robbed me,” chuckled Capt. Ewart. “I knew all about the Oswego tug bills. First you wouldn’t take a tug at all. Then I told you you’d get caught sometime, being so thrifty. And you were. Don’t deny it. You wouldn’t take a tug, and by the time you got in by sailing and towing with the yawlboat, and heaving with the capstan, you had missed your chance at the elevator. So you told the elevator people, who were also the tug owners, you were willing to pay the price of a tug if you could only get unloaded without delay. And they listened to you and unloaded you in overtime, and wouldn’t take the ten spot you offered.

“So you had to take a tug after that, for shame’s sake, whether you wanted to or not. But you beat them down to \$7 from the regular charge of \$10; and when they told you to charge \$10

in your books and keep the difference for yourself, you went on entering exactly what you paid, saving me \$3 a trip, in and out.

“Yes, I know how you’ve robbed me, Johnny Williams. You just keep on robbing me. But I won’t sell you the *Greenwood*. She’s not good enough for you.”

“You mean she’s making too much money for you to part with her,” thought Johnny to himself, but he only said aloud:

“Well, I’d like a little more tonnage, that’s a fact. How about the *Speedwell*? You’ve got her for sale at \$3,200.”

“I’d hate to see you on her decks. She’s soft here and soft there, her sails are in rags, and the spars are shaky. I can’t sail her and I can’t sell her. Nobody can sail her. She won’t steer for anybody. I’d hate to see you stuck with her.”

But Johnny knew that some of her sails were new and she had a new foremast, and, if she was a slow sailer she was a good carrier. Not much longer than the *Greenwood* but carrying more than half as much again. And if she needed repairs, why, he had a good partner for that in sight.

“I was thinking of getting Alex Ure to come in with me,” said he,

“You’ll need him,” growled Capt. Ewart, “He’s a good ship carpenter.”

“Well,” said Johnny, “the two greatest fools on the waterfront may be leaning here on the *Speedwell*’s capstan right now – me for making such an offer, and you for not taking it. But we’ll give you \$3,200 for the *Speedwell* as she stands here, stripped for the winter, and my share of the *Greenwood* is to count for \$750 of it.”

“It’s a deal,” said Capt. Ewart slowly, with a sigh of regret at losing a partner-employee who had made the little *Greenwood* pay so well.

The wind and came around on the offshore tack like a little yacht. All the weak spots in her sails and bulwarks had been found. What was left was good as the wheat. Out into the lake again she fought her way, fathom by fathom, tacking at the end of each mile, so as not to get too far offshore to anchor on the sand. The *Woodbine* slipped past astern, Ashbridge’s Bay, Fisherman’s Island, Simcoe Park, the Eastern Gap, the long weary stretch of the south shore of the Island, and at last Gibraltar Point was abeam. They could hear the clang of the old bell-buoy – which is more than we can do now, for it is out, this year, after a half-century of interrupted service.

Its faithful clatter was music to the toiling schooner. Once she had passed it her close-strapped sheets were eased and she went boiling down the western sandbar, which was then unable to raise its head through the lather of breakers. And so to the five stake-buoys which used to mark the curving channel to the Western Gap and the Queen’s Wharf. Here she squared away for the run down the harbor.

*(Caption) TORONTO WATERFRONT, 1886, from the old "Brock street wharf" at the foot of Spadina avenue, to the old Union Station and the foot of York street. One of the many red-painted grain elevators, which stood opposite the foot of Peter street, is shown towards the right, with the smoking chimney of the waterworks pumping station above it. The roundhouse and turntable for locomotives are prominent features of the Esplanade, which then extended below the high bank of Front street.*