



## General Green, 1791

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General Nathanael Greene, born in Warwick, R.I., 7 August 1742, was elected to the colonial assembly in 1770 and became a strong champion of colonial liberty and an early advocate of independence. He commanded the militia during the siege of Boston; and served with Washington at Trenton, Brandywine, Germantown, and Valley Forge. He rendered outstanding service as Quartermaster General (1778-80), then took command of southern forces in the Carolinas campaign. By cunning strategy, he divided the forces under Cornwallis and turned the tide in the Carolinas. In this feat he was aided by his lieutenants, notably Daniel Morgan, Light-Horse Harry Lee, and partisan bands under Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens. When he sold his estates to honor personal notes given to secure supplies for the Continental Army, the grateful people of Georgia voted to give him a plantation.

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TYPE/RIG/CLASS: Schooner

LAUNCHED: 7 July 1791

DECOMMISSIONED: Sold December 1797

DISPLACEMENT:

PROPULSION: Sail

LENGTH: ?

BEAM: ?

DRAFT: ?

ARMAMENT: Ten muskets with bayonets; twenty pistols; two chisels; one broad axe.

COMPLEMENT: 4 officers, 4 enlisted, 2 boys

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### Remarks:

Although little documentation exists regarding any of the first ten cutters' activities--most of the correspondence and logbooks from the era were destroyed by fire when the British Army burned Washington, DC (including the Treasury Department building in which these records were stored) during the War of 1812 and another fire at the Treasury Department in 1833 (through no fault of the British this time)--these government vessels undoubtedly carried out a myriad of tasks. Many of these duties were spelled out in letters from the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, to the various collectors of customs, who were in direct charge of the cutters and their crews. The duties specifically assigned to the cutters and their crews as legislated by Congress and expounded by Hamilton included:

- boarding incoming and outgoing vessels and checking their papers (ownership, registration, admeasurement, manifests, etc.)
- ensuring that all cargoes were properly documented
- sealing the cargo holds of incoming vessels
- seizing those vessels in violation of the law

They were also tasked with a number of other duties that were not related to protecting the revenue. These included:

- enforcing quarantine restrictions established by the federal, state or local governments
- charting the local coastline
- enforcing the neutrality and embargo acts
- carrying supplies to lighthouse stations
- carrying official (and unofficial) passengers
- other duties as assigned by the collector

Their primary purpose, however, was to protect the revenue of the new nation by deterring smuggling. That meant sailing out of the port to which they were assigned and intercepting vessels before they came too close to the shore. It was here, well out of the harbor but within sight of the coast, that smugglers unloaded part of their cargoes into smaller "coaster" vessels or directly onshore to avoid

customs duties. The collectors usually had smaller boats that could check vessels as they sailed into port. Therefore these ten cutters were not harbor vessels; they were designed to sail out to sea, survive in heavy weather, and sail swiftly so that they might overtake most merchant vessels. They were the nation's first line of defense against attempts to circumvent the new nation's duties, the country's major source of income during this period.

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### **Cutter History:**

*General Green* was one of the first ten cutters. She was named for the Revolutionary War hero Major General Nathaniel Greene and note that her name was misspelled, probably by the man who oversaw her construction, the Collector of Customs in Philadelphia, Sharp Delany. Apparently the cutter was to have been originally named for the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, but Delany changed the name for reasons unknown.

There is little or no information on her original design and unfortunately her monthly journals have not survived but some correspondence regarding her has, particularly the exchange of letters between her master, James Montgomery, and Delany. Indeed, there is a letter dated 23 July 1791 from the collector at Boston, Benjamin Lincoln, to Hamilton that states the *General Green* left Adam Foulk's wharf in Philadelphia, completely outfitted, on 7 July of that year, making her one of the first of the cutters to actually enter into service. Isaac Roach was appointed as the first mate and Benjamin Rue was appointed as the second mate in March, 1791.

Montgomery was the commanding officer of the Collector's barge in Philadelphia and so had some experience in revenue work prior to his commission as the master of the new cutter. He had also seen service during the Revolution as an officer in the Pennsylvania State Navy and later saw action as the commanding officer of a privateer.

The cutter had an active career patrolling the waters off Philadelphia and carrying out the federal laws of the land as instituted during President George Washington's administration. When Great Britain and France went to war in 1793, Washington declared the neutrality of the United States and the cutters acted as the government's law enforcement arm at sea. Her most exciting mission was undoubtedly when she was ordered to seize the French privateer *Les Jumeaux*, which was outfitting in Philadelphia, in direct violation of the neutrality laws. The privateer got underway in December 1794 and the *General Green* overtook her 40 miles off Wilmington, Delaware. The Deputy Collector, Robinett, sailed on board the cutter and was in overall command of this seizure.

The *General Green* was sold in 1798 to William Moodie of Philadelphia.

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### **Commanding Officers:**

James Montgomery, Master; 1791-1797

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### **Sources:**

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