

Ellenwood, Henry Small ^[1]

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by Percival Perry, 1986

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Henry Small Ellenwood, teacher, author, poet, and newspaper editor, was born in Newburyport, Mass., the eldest son of Elisha Small, a mariner who died in the West Indies in 1806, leaving a widow and two young sons. Just before her husband's death, Mrs. Small moved to Boston and worked as a domestic in the family of Chief Justice Theophilus Parsons. At the age of sixteen Henry Small was apprenticed to Joseph T. Buckingham, printer for the largest bookselling establishment in New England and later editor of the *Boston Courier*. In the course of his association with Buckingham, or perhaps self-taught, he acquired the elements of a classical education and developed a propensity for rhyming. He also began to contribute anonymous paragraphs and epigrams to local newspapers which were highly praised. Buckingham later commented that "His perception was so rapid, that, without seeming to study, he usually mastered the contents of every book that came in his way in a surprisingly short time. . . . He had a fund of varied intelligence, and possessed an extensive knowledge of history, the sciences, and politics, and, even when a boy, was a skillful disputant on almost every point of theological controversy."

In 1811, when he was twenty-one, Henry Small legally changed his surname to Ellenwood and in the same year began to work for Samuel Etheridge, a printer in Charlestown, Mass. After two or three years he returned to his birthplace and purchased the *Newburyport Herald*, but due to a misunderstanding between him and the original owner he soon relinquished the paper and for a short time became a schoolmaster. In the spring of 1816 he opened a school in Boston for boys and girls and operated it with considerable success. Abandoning the classroom for personal reasons, he briefly operated a shop selling stationery and schoolbooks before moving to New York where he undertook the management of a school in Brooklyn. There he became acquainted with the rector of the *Episcopal church* ^[2] and, as Ellenwood expressed it, "fell in love with the Liturgy of the Church." He became an Episcopalian and considered studying for Holy Orders. For the rest of his life devotion to the church was his only constant sentiment.

From New York, where he had remained about two years, Ellenwood returned to Boston for another stint at teaching. Here it was said he "trifled with his talent" and was not diligent in his employment. About 1820, after some three years, he relinquished his position and took a packet for North Carolina, where he joined a settlement of New England tradesmen who around 1810 had established a *shipbuilding* ^[3] business on the *Tar River* ^[4] near Pactolus, *Pitt County* ^[5]. The settlement, known as Yankee Hall, included a school of which Ellenwood was principal for a year. After a period of time spent in "the Depths of a wilderness," he was employed in the spring of 1825 to head an academy in *Greenville* ^[6]. He was still in the area as late as 1827 but in 1829 was in *Raleigh* ^[7]. Afterward he moved to Hillsborough where he probably taught school for a time. Early in 1833 he moved to *Wilmington* ^[8] and became editor of the *Wilmington Advertiser*.

Ellenwood was a man of unusual gifts and keenly observant of his environment. A polished writer, he made regular contributions to newspapers, particularly the *Raleigh Register* but also to the *Newbern Centinel* and the *American Recorder*. He wrote a series of sketches about North Carolina published in the *Boston Courier* describing the state's politics, physical geography, wildlife, people, religion, social customs, agriculture, schools, and other features. He was also a poet of note. He is particularly remembered for "The Marriage of the Sun and the Moon," a poem inspired by an annular eclipse of the sun and the moon in February 1831 and widely circulated throughout the country. A number of his poems were published in the *New-England Magazine* of June 1833; one appears in *Mary Bayard Clarke* ^[9]'s *WoodNotes*. While residing in Hillsborough, Ellenwood, under the *pseudonym* ^[10] of Dr. Barnabus Bolus, launched an attack on quack doctors. In 1832 he delivered an address on "Elocution" before the *North Carolina Institute of Education at Chapel Hill* ^[11].

Generous by nature, Ellenwood was warm in his friendships and delighted in intellectual companionship. As a native New Englander he held strong anti-Jackson views in politics. Reportedly in his youth he was "disqualified by a disease in the knee—a sort of scrofulous affection—which afflicted him severely for three or four years, and which was not entirely cured before the age of twenty-five." A bachelor, he died suddenly from a paralytic stroke and was buried in Wilmington.

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