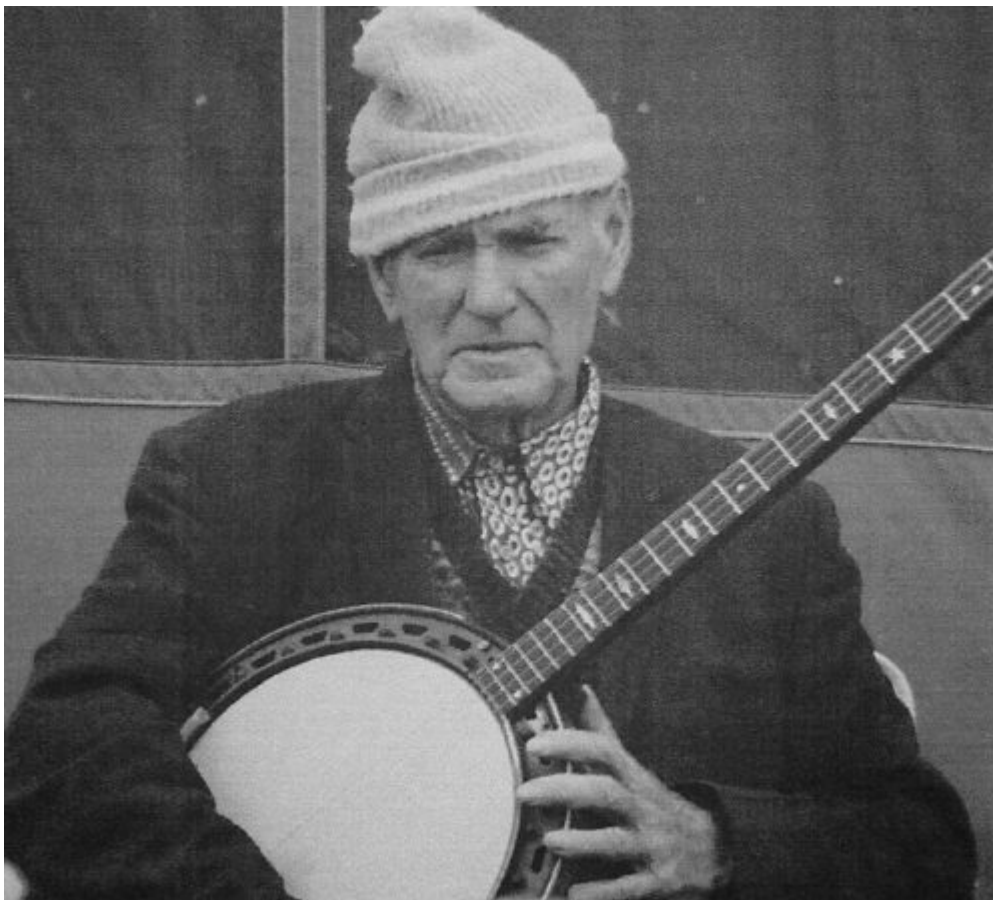


Earlier this year my friend Doug asked me about the 1977 Folkways recording of Outer Banks music, "Between the Sound and the Sea." He only had the vinyl version (but no turntable), so I loaned him my CD. That was my incentive to re-listen to the album, especially since my father, Lawton Howard, was featured playing a few tunes on his mandolin.

I was familiar with all of the songs, especially the Outer Banks classics, "Charlie Mason Pogie Boat," the "Booze Yacht," "Paddy's Holler," and "Let's Keep the Holler Alive." But the ballad of "Tom Daniels" (sung and played by Edgar Howard on his banjo) was less familiar. You can listen to a portion of the song here:

<https://folkways.si.edu/between-the-sound-and-the-sea-music-of-the-north-carolina-outer-banks/american-folk/music/album/smithsonian>. Unfortunately, the sample does not include the four lines of the lyrics (but you can download the track for .99, download the entire album for \$9.99, or buy the CD for \$16.98).



Edgar Howard (1904-1990)

Here are the lyrics:

Now Tom Daniels bought him a breechloader, for hunting down on the Banks.

He asked his friends Dicky and Dexter to join with him in rank.

Quawk Hammock, Quawk Hammock, Quawk Hammock's the place to be gay.

And just about night, sunk the skiff(s) out of sight, and drove the Core sounders away.

The song seems to be just a fragment of a longer piece, and enigmatic, as well. So, what does the song mean?

I'm not absolutely sure who Tom Daniels was, but oral history suggests he was Thomas Tolson (b.1856), a fisherman and the son of a Daniel Tolson (?-?). It was common on Ocracoke to refer to a son by his first name plus his father's first name. Thus, he became Thomas [Tolson], Daniel's son...or simply "Tom Daniels." Dicky may have been Richard (Dick) O'Neal (1877-1944). Dexter is probably William Dexter Ballance (1876-1914). A breechloader is a rifle that is loaded with ammunition from the rear (breech) end of the barrel. "In rank" is probably a military term, used primarily to rhyme with "Banks". Quawk Hammock is a marsh 12 miles NE of the village.

Karen Helms, the collector of the music writes this about the ballad in her liner notes:

"The ballad of Tom Daniels is believed by many Ocracoke villagers to have been composed by [James] Horatio Williams II [1873-1958] in the later part of the 19th century and handed down via the folk musicians there. This tells the partial story of an incident (believed to be true) about a confrontation between some villagers and a group from the Core Sound region of the Banks. Quork [or Quawk] Hammock was once a fishing and hunting camp on Ocracoke Island. Since fishing was then their main source of income, the spot was very competitive. According to this song, some men from Core Sound came up to 'firelight' one evening and were promptly chased away in flat bottom skiffs. As in most folk songs, there is probably another version to be found there among Core Sounders."

When I listened to the song (and read the liner notes) for the first time in many years, I realized that when I initially heard the song almost 35 years ago I had no clue what the song was about, but I was now reminded that I had discovered the last line of the song in 2015 while researching the "1890 Ocracoke Oyster War."

The Oyster War erupted when Lt. Francis Winslow, Jr. (1851-1908), USN, (who had been paid by the government to survey the oyster beds in Pamlico Sound) used his influence and newly-gained knowledge to begin aggressively harvesting oysters with sail-powered dredge boats and a work force from Core Sound, rather than the traditional hand tongs.

Winslow had been warned by Ocracoke oystermen that they would defend their beds with weapons. The situation was volatile, and a rebellion erupted. The Wilmington [NC] Messenger, described the situation in an article titled, "Civil War in Hyde County," published Wednesday, February 5, 1890.

Clearly, I thought, the Ballad of Tom Daniels, contains just a small kernel of the original song composed by Horatio Williams, who was 17 years old when the Ocracoke Oyster War broke out. It recounts the victory of the O-cockers when they drove the Core Sound oyster fishermen out of Pamlico Sound. I wish we had the entire song, but at least a fragment survives.

You can read more about the Ocracoke Oyster War here:
<https://www.villagecraftsmen.com/1890-ocracoke-oyster-war/>)