

Common Ground on the Hill

Finding Common Ground Through Song

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www.3sheets.band <https://soundcloud.com/3sheets>

Songs that State the History Without Comment

Recorded Examples

Killoch Shoal Light

<https://soundcloud.com/3sheets/killoch-shoal-light>

The Light of Assateague

http://3sheets.band/listen/s/light_of_assateague

Captain Chandler's Lament

<https://store.cdbaby.com/cd/billtroxler>

Live Examples

Isle of Hope

Back Stories

Killoch Shoal Light

This ballad tells the story of the first African-American lighthouse keeper. William Major Parker tended Killoch Shoal Light in Chincoteague Bay from 1885 until his death in 1910. His service was exemplary. Yet some folks in the Town of Chincoteague took actions to have him replaced. He was even put in jail once for refusing to abandon the light, after being ordered to join a posse! Although Killoch Shoal Light was a tiny clapboard structure in shallow, sandy waters, no less than the New York Times published an obituary noting Parker's long, loyal

service. In January 1910, with his hands lock in prayer, William Major Parker was found by his wife, Venus, on his knees, slumped over the bed in the residence of the lighthouse. Mr. Parker was a trustee of Friendship United Methodist Church on Chincoteague Road. He is buried in the graveyard behind the sanctuary. Venus continued to tend Killoch Shoal Light by herself for a year after Mr. Parker died. The light was electrified in 1929 and demolished in 1939. All that is left is the decaying steel foundation on which the Killoch Shoal Light once stood. Oh, local legend holds that during Prohibition, Killoch Shoal Light became a safe place to get a drink and party. That legend isn't in the song!



The Light of Assateague

The original Assateague Lighthouse was built in 1833. Confederate sympathizers from Assateague Village extinguished the light during the Civil War. But the men of Assateague quickly restored the light and stood guard over it. The current light was constructed in 1867. Most of the labor was provided by Union Soldiers.

The Light remains an active aid to navigation maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard. However, the structure is owned by the U.S. Park Service. The original 1st order Fresnel Lens is on display at the Museum of Chincoteague Island. It's a stunning mix of physics and art.

The most compelling story of Assateague Light is that of James Alone.

James Alone was the only survivor off the Juno, a treasure ship traveling from Mexico to Cadiz, Spain, that sank off of Assateague during in a storm in 1802. He was an olive-skinned baby tied to a hatch cover, who washed up on the southern end of Assateague Island. James was named and raised raised by the Lunn family on the island. When he was 20, James Alone crossed Chincoteague Bay, walked 20 miles to the Accomack County Courthouse and changed his name to Lunn. Roughly one-third of those born and living on Chincoteague trace their heritage back to James Alone.

Captain Chandler's Lament

Where the asphalt of North Main Street ends and the gravel road to my house begins, there is a solitary grave located within a low rise embraced by concrete retaining beams. Captain Joshua L. Chandler is buried there. He was killed during a thunderstorm while tonging for oysters on Chincoteague Bay. The Captain and two of his sons had anchored their sloop in Cat Creek when the storm struck. It is unclear whether he was struck by lightning or the falling mast. His sons, Ebe and J.B. poled the disabled vessel four miles across the Bay to reach port. The Captain's grave site is located in a part of the Island locals call "up the neck". The grave is well tended by family and frequented by visitors curious as to who this man was and why he was interred in a lone grave. The final verse of this song is a verbatim statement of the inscription cast into Captain Chandler's headstone.



A native of Delaware, Captain Joshua L. Chandler (1829-1877) served in the U.S. Army as a private during the Civil War. He moved to the Island to engage the economic opportunity created by the postwar boom in the market for Chincoteague oysters. The lyric makes use of an old sailing term that may be unfamiliar to many: "I've crossed the bar". That kind of bar is the shoal at the mouth of an inlet that leads to the open sea. During days of sail, Captains had to plan when to cross a bar with great care. In high wind seas would be steep. At low tide the ship might ground. Crossing the bar as a tricky thing. Sailors would often say "he's crossed the bar now" rather than saying "he's dead". The metaphor is one of leaving the known and confined harbor to enter the vast unknown of the sea. That is from life to death.

