

## Common Ground on the Hill

### Finding Common Ground Through Song

Owen Hooks, Thom Nolan and Bill Troxler

[www.3sheets.band](http://www.3sheets.band)   <https://soundcloud.com/3sheets>

### Songs that Use History to Make a Point

#### Recorded Examples

##### Hattie Dunn

<https://soundcloud.com/3sheets/hattie-dunn>

##### Lost to Coal

<https://soundcloud.com/3sheets/lost-to-coal>

##### Last Ghost of Assateague

<https://soundcloud.com/3sheets/last-ghost-of-assateague-1>

##### Mic Ryan's Lament

About the Civil War and Battle of Little Big Horn and the futility of war

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--qvlaWL9R8>

##### Paddy's Lamentation

A warning to young Irishmen not to come to America and fight in the Civil War

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at35olfhMVM>

### Back Stories

#### Lost to Coal

In the pre-dawn hours of February 12, 1983 thirty-one men died when the forty-year old, rusting, ill-maintained Marine Electric sank off the coast of Assateague Island. Three crew members were rescued and taken to Peninsula General Hospital in Salisbury, MD. Twenty-eight recovered bodies were brought to Coast Guard Station Chincoteague. Three crewmen were never recovered from the engine room of the doomed ship.

Marine Electric was one of more than 500 T2 tankers built during WWII. At the time these ships were the largest oilers in the U.S. Navy and vital to the war effort. However, the T2 tanker class was notorious for the low quality of steel and welding techniques used during production. T2 tanker Schenectady cracked in half and sank at the dock just after its sea trials. In 1952 two T2s, Pendleton and Fort Mercer, split in half off Cape Cod. In 1962



#### US Coast Guard Message

S/S MARINE ELECTRIC SUNK ON 2/12/83 IN  
APPROX. POS. LAT. 37-52-47N, LONG. 74-46-00W  
IN APPROX. 118 FT. OF WATER;  
APPROX. 30 NM OFF COAST OF CHINCOTEAGUE, VA.

*(31 men lost, 3 Survivors)*

Marine Electric was refitted to be a bulk cargo carrier. The ship's length was increased to 605 feet from its original 523 feet.

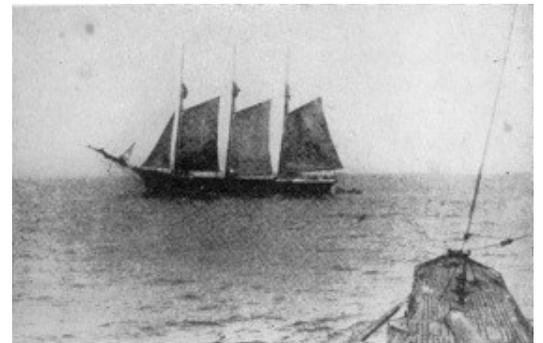
The Marine Electric left Hampton Roads on February 10, 1983 with a cargo of 25,000 tons of granulated coal. The destination was a power plant on the Taunton River off Buzzards Bay in Massachusetts. A devastating winter storm developed quickly and became a "snow-mageddon" for the east coast. By Friday morning, seas were running 40 feet and winds were clocking at 60 knots. Marine Electric sent a distress call about 4 a.m. on February 12. The rescue helicopter arrived on scene about 6:30 a.m. By then most of the crew had succumbed to hypothermia.

The likely cause of the sinking was a failure of the forward cargo hatch cover or covers. The Chief Mate had documented more than ninety holes in the forward hatch that he had patched with coffee can lids and epoxy. Safety "inspections" had certified the ship as seaworthy. But many of these reports were either falsified or failed to cite serious safety issues. Some of the "inspections" were dated at times when the ship was actually at sea carrying cargo.

The ship's radio call sign, WOOH, was repeated three times at the beginning of each message sent from the foundering ship. That's how we begin the chorus of the song. Parts of the lyrics were lifted verbatim from the transcript of the radio traffic recording during the disaster.

### **Hattie Dunn**

The blurry image was taken by the crew of the German submarine U-151 that sank the defenseless, 43-year old schooner Hattie Dunn with explosive charges. The vessel sank with sails set as seen in the image. The Hattie Dunn was sunk on May 25, 1918 as the schooner made its way in ballast to Charleston, SC from New York City. The schooner had been hired to pick up a load of cotton and deliver that to mills in the north. Hattie Dunn has the dubious distinction of being the first American ship sunk in home waters by an enemy since the war of 1812. When the crew of Hattie Dunn was released about a week later, the German crew asked Captain Holbrook to mail their letters home. Some chutzpah! U-151 quickly sank another seven more unarmed merchant ships. The U Boat spent ninety-four days on the East coast, laid mines at the Virginia and Delaware capes and sank twenty-three ships. At the end of The Great War, U-151 was taken by the British Navy and sunk off the English coast.



### **Last Ghost of Assateague**

At its peak population, the village of Assateague Island, Virginia numbered about 225 people. From roughly 1915 until its final abandonment in the mid-1920s, the Village suffered several irreversible economic blows.



The Life Saving Station on the Island was merged into the U.S. Coast Guard and many of the men in the village lost their jobs. The harbor of Tom's Cove began to silt and large vessels could no longer reach the two fish processing factories. More men lost jobs. Then, for an unaccounted reason, Sam Field, the man who owned the property between the village and the shore and Tom's Cove, decided to prevent Villagers from crossing his

property to reach their employment at the fish plants or the clam beds in Tom's cove. Now, there was no employment available for the men of Assateague Village.

The property owner hired a Wyoming cowboy complete with chaps and a six-shooter to patrol the property line and prevent villagers from crossing the land. While these three economic blows spelled the end of Assateague Village, it's also likely that the appeal of electric lights, automobiles and greater economic opportunity were strong forces pulling people off the Island.

This song tells only part of the story. The lyrics focus on the property owner and his quest to keep villagers off his land. It's told from the point of view of the last living person who was born in Assateague Village. At the time of writing, Roy Jones was 97 years old. He has been the most important source of information about life in Assateague Village including a drawing a map of house locations and names of the family members who lived on the Island.

### **Mic Ryan's Lament**

This is a fine example of recycling. The melody is the well known Irish jig Garryowen. Robert Emmet Dunlap wrote the lyrics using Garryowen to tell the tale. The song speaks of two Irish immigrant brothers who get caught up in the American Civil War. One dies at Vicksburg. The other dies with Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Lots of irony in this song. Young men trying to escape the raging poverty and colonization of Ireland who end up dying in wars of independence. A notable irony is that George Armstrong Custer picked Garryowen as the marching theme for his 7th Cavalry. BTW, Garryowen is NOT a man's name, In Gaelic "garry" is a park. The title translates as "Owen's Park". It was an infamous park in Dublin where young men gathered to sport and wring the necks of geese. Read about the Irishmen who died during "Custer's Last Stand": <http://thewildgeese.irish/profiles/blogs/custer-s-last-irishmen-the-irish-who-fought-at-the-battle-of-3>

### **Paddy's Lamentation**

The lyrics of this song are both poignant and accurate. For great detail about the young Irishmen who fought in the American Civil War, look at this website: <https://irishamericancivilwar.com/>

The song is traditional. It was revived and made popular because of the movie Gangs of New York (2002).