

# BETWEEN THE SOUND & THE SEA

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3848

ORAL TRADITION: MUSIC OF THE NORTH CAROLINA OUTER BANKS

COLLECTED BY KAREN G. HELMS  
RECORDED BY OTTO HENRY & KAREN G. HELMS



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1977

MUSIC LP

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3848

**SIDE I:**

Johnny O'Lou — Dile Gallop (d. 1976)

Harmonica Medley — Isabel Etheridge

1. Home Sweet Home

2. Kitty Wells

Amber Tresses — Isabel Etheridge and Mary Basnight

Lullaby/Children's Song — Elizabeth Howard

1. Ole Tucky Buzzard

2. Oh, Pray Doctor

Mandolin Medley — Lawton Howard

1. Little Sydney (Cindy)

2. Round the Mountain

Seventy-Two — Dick Tillett

Tom Dan's — Edgar Howard (whistle), Jule Garrish,  
Maurice Ballance

Matilda Jane Lee — Edgar Howard (whistle), Jule  
Garrish, Maurice Ballance

**SIDE II:**

The Sailor Boy — Dick Tillett

Nellie Cropsey — Isabel Etheridge

Charlie Mason Pogie Boat — Charles Stowe

Carolina Cannonball — Charles Stowe

Harmonica Medley — Jule Garrish

1. Casey Jones

2. The Old Sow (Jumped Over the Fence, The Little  
Ones Crawled Under)

Booze Yacht — Jule Garrish

Paddy's Hollow — Edgar Howard (soloist), Jule Garrish,  
Maurice Ballance

Let's Keep the Holler Alive — Edgar Howard

Collected by Karen G. Helms, 1973-76.

Engineered by Otto Henry & Karen G. Helms

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER PHOTO BY DOUG HELMS

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FS 3848

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FS 3848

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# MUSIC OF THE NORTH CAROLINA OUTER BANKS

Collected by Karen G. Helms

Recorded by Otto Henry

Photography by Doug Helms & Otto Henry

## ABOUT THE ALBUM

This album is the product of fieldwork and research from 1973-6 conducted by Karen G. Helms, a native of North Carolina, while earning the Master of Arts degree in Ethnomusicology from East Carolina University, Greenville.

So much emphasis has been placed historically on the folk music of the mountainous western portions of North Carolina, with little or no attention paid to the coastal plains and particularly to the unique Outer Banks.

A land of history and beginnings in America, the North Carolina Outer Banks have seen such events take place as the Raleigh Expedition of 1585 (later to become the Lost Colony) and the famous first flight of Orville and Wilbur Wright at Kitty Hawk. The well-known pirate Blackbeard had a home port on Ocracoke Island during his infamous reign of the "Graveyard of the Atlantic." Legends and folklore have abounded on this chain of narrow barrier islands for centuries, while little mention has been made of the oral tradition in ballads and original music. However, families who have lived along the Outer Banks since the first settlements carry on in some respects much more than the endurance and strength which helped them survive the whims of nature for centuries.

In the old oral tradition ballads of the area, one can still discover some of the uniqueness and beauty of the culture, its world view, and its values. Many of the original songs of the Outer Banks contain a more colorful and often more accurate account of past events which influenced the lives of the people than any history book or written record.

It is the hope of the collector that the examples included here will be enjoyed, perhaps learned and passed down by word of mouth much in the same manner as they have been for years on the North Carolina Coast. The songs and ballads represent not only those which are indigenous to the Outer Banks, but familiar tradition songs enjoyed by the people there as in other parts of our nation. Since the essence of a folk song is its ability to change or vary slightly with each performance and each performer, one should accept these songs and ballads as only one variant, with many more possibilities depending on the context, the singer's memory and mood, and other dynamic factors.

Oral tradition is on the decline in many areas of the

country due to advanced technology, increased mobility, and other contemporary factors. This is certainly true on the Outer Banks as well, especially during their past two decades of rapid change, increased contact with the mainland, and the tourism industry. Most of the folk musicians still able to hand down songs and ballads, many of which have never been written down or recorded, are from their early fifties to early nineties in age. The hope of the collector is that the young people of this area as well as other regions of our nation will see the wealth of musical heritage found in these people and take advantage of this, leaving a similar legacy to their descendants.

## ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

All performers on this album are native folk musicians of the North Carolina Outer Banks. Their ages range from early fifties to early nineties. The music performed was either learned by ear, handed down by word of mouth through the years, or composed on the Outer Banks. Songs from the familiar popular repertoire of these musicians represent their interpretation of music from the mainland. The original music has never been written down in notation until this publication. Only one musician appearing on this album has ever done professional musical performance. Edgar Howard, a major source of information about many of the original songs of the Ocracoke area, performed in earlier days with such stars as Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and the Milton Berle Review.

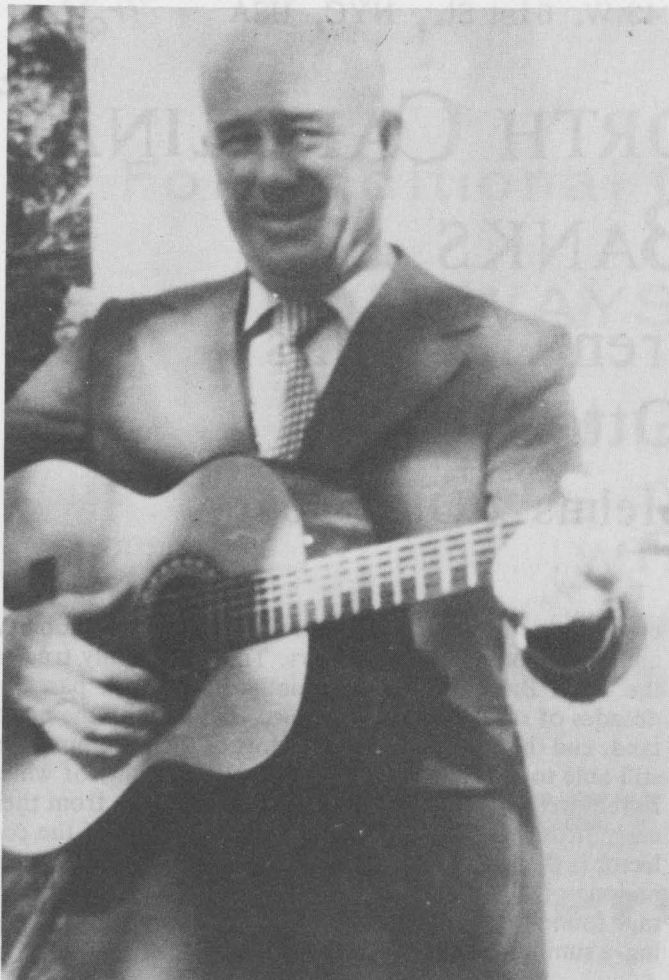
## ABOUT THE MUSIC

### SIDE I:

**Johnny O'Lou**— This is an original ballad by Martha Etheridge of Wanchese, a small shrimping village on the northern end of the Outer Banks. Less than 50 years old, this song relates a part truth-part fiction story of a local love triangle. Singer Dile Gallop illustrates a most unusual and unique vocal style here, calling one's attention to the accent of the Bankers, often associated with an early form of English speech.\*

\* Dile Gallop, age 89, died in an automobile accident 30 miles from her home Jan. 1976.

Jule Garrish—Ocracoke, N.C.



Karen G. Helms



Dile Gallop—Wanchese, N.C.

**Harmonica Medley**—These are traditional tunes learned by Isavel Etheridge in her childhood years while her father was the keeper of the Bodie Island Lighthouse. "Kitty Wells" is often called a "slave song" by its Outer Banks singers. It was one of hundreds in the C. K. Tillett repertoire during the turn of this century. "Home Sweet Home" as played by Mrs. Etheridge embodies some of the typical love of her seaside home.

**Amber Tresses**—A most unusual female duet for the region, "Amber Tresses" is sung by Isabel Etheridge and her sister, Mary Basnight of Manteo. Although this is not an original song, it is typical of the type of popular songs enjoyed by natives of the oral tradition age. It exemplifies the simplicity and beauty of the folk voice as well as the romantic lyrics so often found in this area.

**Lullaby/Children's Song**—"Ole Tucky (turkey) Buzzard" may have been an old fiddle tune or square dance tune at one time, but was sung as a lullaby around the turn of this century on Ocracoke Island by native Bill Wahab. Elizabeth Howard learned the song and sang it as a lullaby to her children as she sings here. "Oh, Pray Doctor" utilizes a typical folk technique by substituting familiar names and places in the song, making it more personal. The song was often sung to a sick child and intended to make the child laugh.

**Mandolin Medley**—Lawton Howard of Ocracoke Island plays 2 old standards, "Little Sidney (Cindy)" and "Round the Mountain" in a true folk style, with irregular interludes and individual interpretation of the melodies.

**Seventy-Two**—This is an old oral tradition song, a favorite of C. K. Tillett of Wanchese which he handed down to his son Dick Tillett, the singer here. Dick is one of the last people of the Outer Banks who are willing or able to carry on the wealth of oral tradition musical heritage which was once theirs.

**Tom Dan's**—The ballad of Tom Daniels is believed by many Ocracoke villagers to have been composed by Horatio Williams II 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 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.

**Matilda Jane Lee**—Most Ocracoke natives give Alexander Garrish or his brother Callas credit for having composed this song around the turn of the century. Now almost a nonsense song to listeners and singers, this is made up of several different parts of "songs"—from the story of Matilda Jane Lee and her lover, Mr. McGown, to the middle section about the P. T. Barnum circus, to the final story of a wife's plan to collect her husband's insurance money. Edgar Howard, a much loved native musician of Ocracoke Island, is responsible for continuing many of the oral tradition songs there. He is the soloist for both "Tom Dan's" and "Matilda Jane Lee".

#### SIDE II:

**Sailor Boy**—This song from the oral tradition of Wanchese, typifies the feeling or emotional core of many seaside ballads in the C. K. and Dick Tillett repertoire. A fatalistic outlook is often expressed, but with the Outer Bankers' unique ability to accept life "as naturally as the tide." Dick Tillett recalls having heard his father sing this old song frequently during boyhood.

**Nellie Cropsey**—The author of this ballad is uncertain, but the basis is a true story, the murder of a beautiful young girl from Elizabeth City named Nell Cropsey. The tragic event took place in 1901 near the Pasquotank River. Her lover, Jim Wilcox was accused of the murder and had to be protected by a militia until the trial due to strong community feelings. He was convicted and sentenced to 30 years in prison. After his release, he returned to Bodie Island Lighthouse for a visit. Some people give him credit for having composed the first ballad about Nellie Cropsey, but since then the ballad has spread over much of the state, with dozens of variants. This version sung by Isabel Etheridge of Manteo was learned during her childhood days spent at the lighthouse. It is unusual because it is told from Jim Wilcox's point of view and leaves much to fill in between the lines. Another variant of the Nellie Cropsey ballad ends with a moral warning: "Now girls, I pray you take warning—be careful how you trust a man, for they will pretend they love you, but they'll kill you if they can." One variant can be traced back to an old oral tradition melody from England.

**Charlie Mason Pogie Boat**—This ballad is sung by its composer, Charles Stowe, a native of Hatteras Island, and tells of a real incident which happened in 1948 off the coast of Ocracoke. It contains nautical and technical terms, as well as in-group humor about the local seamen and events which took place when the **Charles Mason** had her mishap.

**Carolina Cannonball**—Charles Stowe took the basic tune of the **Wabash Cannonball** and made up his own lyrics about some local fishermen friends and their often humorous lifestyle on Ocracoke Island. This is a good example of the role of humor in the attitudes and worldviews of many Outer Banks natives—perhaps the reason they are able to withstand the whims of nature and occasional adverse conditions there.

**Harmonica Medley**—Old familiar tunes are played by Jule Garrish here in a folk style on the mouth harp and learned by ear. Without previous musical training, Jule learned to play the guitar and the chromatic harmonica. He has sons who now perform in a local rock band.

**Casey Jones and The Old Sow Jumped Over the Fence** (but the little ones just crawled under) represent two familiar old songs included in Jule's harmonica repertoire.

**Booze Yacht**—This song is probably one of the most popular of the oral tradition original Outer Banks songs today. Although the author is uncertain, many people give credit for its lyrics to Ivey Scott of Harker's Island. The tune used is **The Sidewalks of New York**; a popular song of the early part of this century when

Dick Tillett—Wanchese, N.C.



Isabel Etheridge—Manteo, N.C.

the **Booze Yacht** ballad was probably composed. During the Prohibition era, the Outer Banks was ironically "dry" and the mishap of the ship **Adventure** was viewed as slightly less tragic than most along the "graveyard of the Atlantic". Many stories circulate about the truth of this incident, but one relates the time that a ship loaded with illegal whiskey ran aground off the coast of Cape Lookout, losing much of its liquid cargo to the waters. Natives of the surrounding areas then frantically rowed, swam, (or however) to the place where they netted in the bounties. According to the wife of one participant, it was an amazing two weeks that followed. This song is now preserved on Ocracoke Island by the handful of folk musicians appearing on this album.

**Paddy's Hollow**—Walter Howard, brother of Edgar Howard—the soloist here, wrote this song several decades ago, probably around the late forties or early fifties. It is probably the one oral tradition song which has the potential for appealing to the young people of Ocracoke Island, and thus be able to encourage the continuation of this tradition. Now a quiet residential community, **Paddy's Hollow** was once a wooded, rolling little meadow near the village where much music-making, dancing, and meal-wine-making and drinking took place. It is recalled today with nostalgia and humor and no ill intentions. "After all," Edgar remarked, "I'm kin to most of these good people down here in the holler."

**Let's Keep the Holler Alive**—This song is a rather new composition by Edgar Howard of Ocracoke. It represents a sort of musical plea to keep the spirit of fun and merriment alive that once filled the area known lovingly as Paddy's Hollow. Composed in 1973, it is a call to preserve the oral tradition and musical folk heritage of a very special and unique area of the world—the North Carolina Outer Banks.



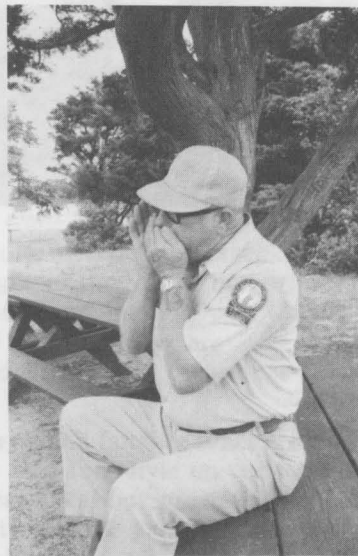
Left—Edgar Howard Right—Maurice Ballance  
—Ocracoke, N.C.

Photo: Otto Henry

#### ABOUT THE COLLECTORS

**Karen G. Helms** holds a Bachelor of Music from Queens College, Charlotte, N.C. and a Master of Arts in Ethnomusicology and Voice from East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. During the summers of 1974-5 she worked closely with the National Park Service, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, serving in 1975 as the Cultural Research Co-ordinator, giving concerts at the Bodie Island Lighthouse. For two years, 1974-6, she served as Visiting Artist for Richmond Technical Institute in Hamlet, North Carolina, under a program sponsored by the N.C. Arts Council. There she performed in concerts ranging from operatic and art music to folk and local oral tradition music, and composed and directed the musical portion of the outdoor drama, **The Justice of our Cause** for Richmond County Bicentennial Commission. She is the author of a children's folklore preservation booklet, **S.O.S.—Save Our Songs**, and a book on the music and culture of Ocracoke Island and the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Currently, she is working under a N.C. Arts Council 1976-7 matching folk arts grant for Wingate College and Anson County Schools as Musician-in-Residence, where she gives concerts and lectures on ethnic and N.C. oral tradition music and cultures and directs the drama productions.

**Otto Henry**, the recording engineer of this album, is Director of the Electronic Music and Ethnomusicology programs at East Carolina University. He is a composer of electronic music, a native of N.C., holding degrees from Boston and Tulane Universities.



Jule Garrish—Ocracoke, N.C.

Photo: Otto Henry