“The Schooner E.A. Horton,” which is native to Massachusetts, is based on a true story. On September 1, 1871 the E. A. Horton, a Gloucester-based schooner was captured by the Canadian authorities in Nova Scotia for fishing inside the three mile limit. She was taken by the ship Sweepstakes, stripped of her sails, and secured to a wharf where she was held until a court of custody was convened to decide the case. Capt. Harvey Knowlton, also a part-owner of the vessel, decided that he wanted the ship back. Disguised as a gold prospector to alleviate suspicion, he pretended to return to Cape Ann, but instead headed for Canso, N.S. three weeks later. There, in the home of a notorious smuggler, plans were laid to recapture the schooner. He gathered together a crew of six American sailors and on the night of October 8, attempted to retake the Horton. Unfortunately, when the crew went to put the sails on, they found that they had taken the sails and rigging of another ship. The delay in returning the sails and finding the correct ones meant that by the time they could be off, the ship was aground. Fortunately, no one came down to the wharf at that hour and by 2:30 a.m., the Horton was water-born and made her way back to Gloucester, where she arrived on Oct. 18th to cries of “The Horton's in! The Horton's in!” Knowlton and his crew were given 100 dollars as a reward. In the interest of promoting friendly relations with the Americans, the Canadian government decided not to attempt a recapture of the Horton.

Historically, various treaties have been signed by Americans over fishing rights off the Canadian coast. The treaty of 1818 gave American fishermen the right to fish only in certain Canadian waters. On all other parts of the Canadian coast, they were to keep a distance of three marine miles. The cross border fishing issue still has relevance for us today. As recently as spring 2012, there was a dispute between America and Canada about whether or not to renew a treaty which gave the two countries fishing rights in each other’s waters.

Of four extant poems about this event, the one heard here was the only to have achieved wide circulation. Mrs. Hallett had always understood the song to have been composed by her father. A couple final notes should clear up some details: The “Real ruin” in the third verse is rendered in some versions of the song as “red ruin,” a term for rum. “Johnny” most likely refers to John Bull, a national personification of Britain, much like Uncle Sam for the United States. As was the case in “Heenan and Sayers,” Johnny Bull was used derisively in this ballad. Eckstorm and Smyth suggest that this version of “The Schooner E. A. Horton” may have been based on “Heenan”, both in tune and lyrics.

Lyrics:
1.
Ye sons of Uncle Samuel, come listen for a while,
And I’ll tell you of the capture that was made in Yankee style;
Of the schooner E.A. Horton and her bold, undaunted men,
Commanded by brave Knowlton, a true son of Uncle Sam.

2. Now said brave Knowlton to his comrades, “If you will follow me, We’ll take the Horton back again whate’er the cost may be; We will stand by one another like brothers brave and true, And we’ll show those thieving Britishers what Yankee boys can do.”

3. On the eighth day of October in the year of seventy-one, Those brave undaunted heroes their daring work begun; While the Johnny-boys were sleeping with real ruin on their brain, Our gallant sons of freedom took their vessel back again.

4. Now Johnny there’s a bully time in Gloucester tonight, There heavy guns a-firing and torches burning bright; While the band plays “Yankee Doodle” it’ll make the welcome ring, Young America is shouting for the Horton has got in.

5. Next morning when the Britishers began to look about, They found the gold prospector and the Horton has stepped out; When the truth began to penetrate the British skulls so thick, They finally acknowledged ‘twas a bold Yankee trick.

6. Now you new Dominion government I’ll warn you to beware, And come and sign the treaty and settle this affair; And learn to do by others as you’d have them do to you, And not abuse your neighbors as old Johnny used to do.