

Songs of Iowa

There is frequently much confusion as to the status of the so-called State songs, due largely to the fact that they may be chosen by official action, by popular approval, or by a combination of the two methods. In the Middle West particularly, where state boundaries are artificial and the population has constantly shifted, it is not surprising that there should be much uncertainty. There have been many aspirants to the honor of writing the State song for Iowa, but only three or four of these songs have received noteworthy official or popular recognition.

First in point of time and official recognition is *The Song of Iowa*, the words of which were written by S. H. M. Byers, who gives the following account of the inspiration of the song:

“At the great battle of Lookout Mountain I was captured, in a charge, and taken to Libby Prison, Richmond, Va. I was there seven months, in one room. The rebel bands often passed the prison, and for our discomfiture, sometimes played the tune ‘My Maryland,’ set to Southern and bitter words. Hearing it once through our barred windows, I said to myself, ‘I would like some day to put that tune to loyal words.’ ”

Many years later, in 1897, Mr. Byers carried

out his wish and wrote a song to the music of *Tannenbaum*, the old German folk-song which the Confederates had used for *My Maryland*. The next night a French concert singer at the Foster Opera House in Des Moines sang the new song upon the request of Mr. Byers. The number was a great success and was encored again and again. These were the words:

You ask what land I love the best,

Iowa, 'tis Iowa,

The fairest State of all the West,

Iowa, O! Iowa.

From yonder Mississippi's stream

To where Missouri's waters gleam,

O! fair it is as poet's dream,

Iowa, in Iowa.

See yonder fields of tasseled corn,

Iowa, in Iowa,

Where plenty fills her golden horn,

Iowa, in Iowa.

See how her wondrous prairies shine

To yonder sunset's purpling line,

O! happy land, O! land of mine,

Iowa, O! Iowa.

And she has maids whose laughing eyes,

Iowa, O! Iowa.

To him who loves were Paradise,

Iowa, O! Iowa.

O! happiest fate that e'er was known,

Such eyes to shine for one alone,

To call such beauty all his own,

Iowa, O! Iowa.

Go read the story of thy past,
Iowa, O! Iowa.
What glorious deeds, what fame thou hast!
Iowa, O! Iowa.
So long as time's great cycle runs,
Or nation's weep their fallen ones,
Thou'lt not forget thy patriot sons,
Iowa, O! Iowa.

This is the only song thus far to receive official recognition as well as popular favor. In 1911, C. J. Fulton introduced the following resolution in the Iowa House of Representatives:

"Whereas, The patriotic song of Iowa by S. H. M. Byers, has, for years, been sung in all the schools of the state, and on thousands of public occasions, political and social, and wherever Iowa people come together in other states, therefore, be it

"Resolved by the House, the Senate concurring, that it be hereby declared to be recognized as the State Song."

This resolution was adopted by the House on March 18, 1911, and the Senate concurred on March 24th. It was not printed among the laws, however, for concurrent resolutions are merely expressions of the sentiment of the legislators and are not statutes. The song has been sung for many years and by popular consent, as well as legislative action, deserves a prominent place in the patriotic music of Iowa.

Another song which has no official status but is

popular throughout the State, especially in the schools and for quartette work, is *Iowa* — "*Beautiful Land*," the words of which were written by Tacitus Hussey in 1899 and read as follows:

A song for our dear Hawkeye State!
Iowa — "Beautiful Land;"
As a bird sings of love to his mate,
In Iowa — "Beautiful Land."
The land of wide prairies and trees;
Sweet clover and humming of bees,
While kine breath adds perfume to these,
In Iowa — "Beautiful Land!"

Chorus:

Crown her! Crown her! Crown her!
Crown her with corn, this Queen of the West,
Who wears the wild rose on her breast;
The fairest, the richest and best!
Iowa — "Beautiful Land!"
Iowa — "Beautiful Land!"

The cornfields of billowy gold,
In Iowa — "Beautiful Land,"
Are smiling with treasure untold,
In Iowa — "Beautiful Land."
The food hope of nations is she,
With love overflowing and free
As her rivers, which run to the sea,
In Iowa — "Beautiful Land!"

Her tale of the past has been told,
Of Iowa — "Beautiful Land;"
The future is not yet unrolled,

Of Iowa — "Beautiful Land."
The Past! How high on fame's scroll
She has written her dead heroes roll!
The Future! Fear not for thy goal,
O Iowa — "Beautiful Land!"

Then sing to the praise of our God,
Of Iowa — "Beautiful Land,"
And our fathers, whose feet early trod
This Iowa — "Beautiful Land."
A land kissed by sunshine and show'rs;
Of corn land, wild roses and flow'rs —
Oh! thrice blessed land, this of ours!
Our Iowa — "Beautiful Land!"

The music was composed by Horace M. Towner of Corning, later Governor of Porto Rico.

An example of somewhat hasty action concerning a patriotic song is to be found in the adoption of *Iowa, Proud Iowa* by the Iowa Federation of Music Clubs as their State song. The words are by Virginia Knight Logan. An effort was made in 1921 to have this song adopted by legislative action, the bill providing that it "shall be used as a State Song on all occasions where a State Song is to be used, either at home or abroad, and on all public or official occasions where the use of a State Song is proper or advisable." No action was taken, however. At least the last stanza of the song, which appears below, was evidently written in response to the war sentiment which was prevalent at that time.

All hail! to Proud Iowa,
Queen of the West,
With broad rolling prairies
So fertile and blest.
Where cool shady streams flow,
'Mid verdure so rare,
With Iowa's beauty,
No State can compare.

Refrain:

Then hail! to Proud Iowa,
Queen of the West!
To the strains of grandest music
Proclaim her the best;
"Our liberties we prize and
Our rights we'll maintain"
"In God is our trust" to
Preserve her great fame.

From fields all aglow
With her ripe golden grain;
And Iowa garners
Her bounties again.
The world offers homage
From every shore,
For blessings abounding
From Iowa's store.

When war's desolation reigns
Over the sea;
And "To Arms" came the call to
Defend Liberty,
Her brave sons and daughters
"Old Glory" unfurl'd
And Iowa's "Rainbow"
Gleam'd over the world.

Perhaps the best loved and most widely known of Iowa songs is the *Iowa Corn Song* — that rollicking “booster” song which became famous at the time of the Shriner conclave held at Des Moines in 1921. This song originated some ten years earlier when George E. Hamilton, captain of the Za-Ga-Zig Temple drill team, wrote a verse and chorus to the old tune of “Travelling” while en route to the Shriner conclave at Los Angeles. Additional verses have been improvised by other people and sung on later occasions. Many of these no doubt have been lost or forgotten, as in the case of the folk-songs of Europe. Indeed, the *Iowa Corn Song* is in many respects a true folk-song.

In 1921 a revision of the song was printed and put on sale, Ray W. Lockard being associated with Mr. Hamilton as author. Although the words have little to commend them as an official State song, the music, adapted by Edward Riley, is catchy, and the chorus has a swing which has made the song popular wherever there are Iowa people. It has become known the length and breadth of the country.

Here are the two stanzas and the chorus included in the published edition:

Let's sing of Grand old I-O-WAY,
Yo-ho, yo-ho, yo-ho,
Our love is stronger ev'ry day,
Yo-ho, yo-ho, yo-ho.

So come along and join the throng,
Sev'ral hundred thousand strong,
As you come just sing this song,
Yo-ho, yo-ho, yo-ho.

Chorus:

We're from
I-o-way, I-o-way.
State of all the land,
Joy on ev'ry hand.
We're from I-o-way, I-o-way.
That's where the tall corn grows.

Our land is full of ripening corn,
Yo-ho, yo-ho, yo-ho,
We've watched it grow both night and morn,
Yo-ho, yo-ho, yo-ho.
But now we rest, we've stood the test,
All that's good we have the best,
I-o-way has reached the crest,
Yo-ho, yo-ho, yo-ho.

There has not been sufficient time as yet, to test its popularity: like most popular favorites it may run its course like a Fourth of July sky rocket to vanish into the darkness of oblivion, or it may find a place among such songs as *Yankee Doodle* which, though they have no spiritual inspiration, have lived because they help people to throw aside every-day cares and move forward with a quicker step.

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