

# Archival Minute

August 2011

## IN SEARCH OF THE SCHOOL SONG

The term *alma mater* (Latin for *nourishing mother*) can refer either to the school or college from which one graduated or a song celebrating or honoring that school. The *alma mater* song can enkindle school spirit and, for alumni, bring back fond memories of their school days. Although having an *alma mater* is a seemingly requisite tradition for a school or college to have, it took Wayne State more than a decade to get one.

James Pile's Nebraska Normal College did have a school song. The words to that song, although written by the great poet and alumnus John G. Neihardt, were not suitable for the new state normal. The first mention of any song for the Wayne State Normal appeared in the January 1913 issue of *The Goldenrod*:



*“Friday morning, January 10, during chapel period Mr. Lackey [who taught in the department of Geography] presented to the student body two school songs approved by the Student and Faculty Co-operative Association. One of these songs, written to the tune of ‘Tramp, Tramp, Tramp,’ was received enthusiastically by the students as was shown by the hearty way in which they sang it. The War Song written to that good old air, ‘The Soldiers’ Chorus,’ certainly promises to be of great inspirational value in athletics of all sorts....*

*“Such excellent demonstration of talent in the school encourages us to look forward hopefully to the composition ultimately of THE school song.” [emphasis in original].*

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The following month *The Goldenrod* published the lyrics to the two songs. The lyrics to the first song were written by Mabel Banks, a student in the Class of 1913. The song, “*the product of Miss Mabel Banks’ ever fertile mind*,” was sung to the tune “Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! (The Prisoner’s Hope),” a very popular song of the Civil War era. Over the years since the tune has been incorporated into other songs, such as the children’s song, “Jesus Loves the Little Children.” Here’s a recording of that original song: <http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/mp3s/1000/1360/cusb-cyl1360d.mp3>

These are the words Mabel Banks wrote:

*There’s a Normal on the Hill,  
That our hearts with love does fill,  
There we seek to learn and ever upward grow.  
Dear to us is every scene,  
Loyalty, its colors mean,  
May we from their lofty standards go.*

*Chorus.  
To our Normal we’ll be faithful,  
To our Normal we’ll be true;  
We’ll grow stronger every year,  
Till of every school we’re peer.  
Seeking ever high ideals in all we do.*

*In all things that we do,  
Basket ball and foot ball, too, [sic]  
In debates and tests of strength of any kind  
Black and orange [the original school colors], colors brave,  
Always will in triumph wave,  
Black and orange o’er all colors we shall find.*

*As the years roll swiftly on  
School days soon are past and gone,  
Only mem’ries then are left of days at Wayne,  
But with smiles we’ll thin[k] once more  
Of those happy scenes of yore  
As we fain would live those happy days again.*



The lyrics to the second song were written by faculty member J. G. W. (John Greenleaf Whittier) Lewis, who taught history and political science at the college from 1910 to 1935. Lewis evidently based his song on “The Soldiers’ Chorus” from Charles Gounod’s opera, *Faust*, which can be heard here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04g5enTpJs0&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04g5enTpJs0&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

The lyrics to Lewis’ “The War Song” are as follows:

*Glory and love to the Normal old,  
Her sons shall copy her virtues bold.  
Courage in heart and soul and hand,  
We’re ready to fight, for her we would die  
As for Fatherland.*

*Glory and love to the Normal old,  
Her sons shall copy her virtues bold.  
Courage in heart, with soul and hand,  
We’re ready to fight, for her we would die  
As for Fatherland.*

*Who needs bidding to dare,  
Defend the Orange and the Black?  
Who needs bidding to cheer,  
When our victors come back?*

Banks’ song was indeed popular and appears to have been sung for sometime afterward. For example, it was sung by the large crowd at the dedication of the new Administration Building [now Brandenburg] in July 1915.

Lewis’s song does not seem to have shared the same popularity. Perhaps the extreme lyrics (“*for her we would die as for Fatherland*”) had something to do with it; or perhaps it was the tune. Banks’ lyrics were put to a popular tune while Lewis’s music was operatic and may not have been as familiar or as easy to sing. In any case, while Bank’s song may have attained an unofficial status as college song, neither song officially became THE school song.



Nearly a decade later in the March 11, 1922 issue of *The Goldenrod*, Bonnie R. Hess, editor-in-chief, wrote:

*“We have sometimes wondered what factor of the social, student activity side of the college life the student retains the longest. Is it the memory of parties, football games, basketball games, track contests, literary contests, banquets, entertainments and incidents of dormitory life, or is it just the general amalgamation of all these little pleasantries which go to make up college life?”*

*“But somewhere back of all these things and acting as a thread between them all, are there not some real live college songs? We have repeatedly noted that in reunion affairs in all the older and larger schools, old college yells and college songs always seem to play a big part in strengthening the ties of fellowship between alumni.*

*“Furthermore, what produces more enthusiasm and pep in any assembly than music? True, the Wayne Normal has a splendid band and orchestra and several other musical organizations of which we can justly be proud. But why not give these organizations some ‘peppy’ Wayne Normal songs to play and sing? Wouldn’t it be thrilling to come back on Homecoming Day and have some good old college songs to sing over again?*

*“What about it students and alumni? In some colleges some particular organization of the school offers prizes for the best composed and most appropriate school songs. Have you any suggestions? Let’s send them in.”*

It’s interesting that she made no mention of Bank’s song (nor Lewis’s). Perhaps students and alumni had lost the initial enthusiasm felt on that day in Chapel n January 1913.

Hess continued her plea two weeks later (March 25):

*“Where are those rousing college songs, students and alumni? Each week we have peeped into the lowest and farthest corners of the contribution box for a manuscript of words or a composition of music, but, alas, in vain!*

*“But now literary societies, students and alumni, comes a new proposal. Professor [Willis C.] Hunter is very enthusiastic about the idea of some real Wayne Normal songs and he has promised that if the literary societies of the school will begin and sponsor the undertaking of appropriate for our college songs, the pupils of his advanced harmony class will set the words to music. Indeed, the members of his class have already composed several selections which would be especially adaptable to words. Or perhaps words could be arranged for the tunes of some familiar old songs.*

*“So step into line with your ideas, students and literary societies! Let’s have some songs!”*

Her campaign evidently succeeded, for in the April 8 issue she announced:

*“At last the ‘W.S.N. School Song Movement’ campaign is to be launched. Definite steps toward the contest are being taken by the largest and most influential organization of the school—the Alumni Club and the Alumni Association. But the rest of the story will come in Chapel next week. So—come to Chapel, students, and read next week’s Goldenrod.”*

In the April 15 issue, *The Goldenrod* carried the story of the Wayne Teachers College Song Contest which had been announced at Chapel that week. After several selections were played by the band “*and everyone was feeling young again,*” Bonnie Hess spoke in defense of the position she had taken in *The Goldenrod* “*to arouse school spirit.*” “*The fact that the school does not have a recognized song,*” according to *The Goldenrod’s* account of Hess’s address to those gathered in Chapel, “*is a matter of the greatest importance since the college song is really a vital part of any institution.*”

Edith Beechel, 1912 Wayne State graduate and Intermediate Supervisor in the Training School, spoke next. She had been named chair of a committee appointed by the Wayne State Normal Alumni Club to conduct the campaign. Beechel outlined the plan. To be eligible, one would have to be (a) a student of the college, present and former, who had attended at least one semester (including students of the Nebraska Normal School); (2) a graduate of the college; or (3) a past or present faculty member.

Four prizes were to be offered. *The Wayne Herald* of April 13, 1922 described them:

*“The Rollie W. Ley prize of \$25 will be awarded to the best Alma Mater song. The song ranking second in this class will receive a cash prize of \$15. The President U. S. Conn prize of \$15 will go to the author of the best ‘pep’ song. A \$10 prize will be awarded the ‘pep’ song, ranking second.”*

Rollie Ley, of course, was a member of the Ley family, long time supporters of the Nebraska Normal College and Wayne State College. His father, Henry E. Ley, founded the State National Bank. Rollie served as president and board chairman of the bank. He was a graduate of the N.N.C. and was a member of the Wayne State Alumni Association. The prize of \$25 he offered would be the equivalent of over \$300 today. President Conn’s prize of \$15 would be the equivalent of about \$200 today. Certainly they were not small prizes.

At Chapel that day J. T. (Julius Temple) House, Professor of English and Sociology and a very close friend and supporter of John G. Neihardt, spoke “*on the characteristics of good Alma Mater songs and read several well-known college songs*” according to *The Wayne Herald*. *The Goldenrod* added that House “*said that the sentiment expressed should not be confined to the institution alone but should be a declaration of general principles as well. His idea is that not only a few of the songs but all would be compiled into a book.*”

*The Herald* wrote that “*Prof. W. C. Hunter spoke from a musician’s viewpoint of school songs, calling attention to the importance of using music, which would endure, and express the school spirit.*” *The Goldenrod* put it this way: “*Professor Hunter then told about the music or ‘tune’ which he stated must be such that it too will reflect the spirit of the school and be a fitting expression of the words.*”

Lastly Julius Young, president of the alumni association, spoke. He urged all students and faculty to enter the contest. He also talked of a proposed compilation of the songs in book form at the conclusion of the contest.

*The Goldenrod* story concluded:

*“The point is that every college needs a real song which embodies the spirit and life found there. Our school is no exception. The need is vital. But where shall we get a real song? Of course, it must be from students or from someone who has attended the school and can express in words and music the sentiment that is found here. This is an appeal from the school and an opportunity for every student and alumni [sic] as well as members of the faculty, to do a real service.*

*“Write a song that will not ‘wear out’ but will mean the same a century from now as it does today!”*



The first phase of the contest was to find suitable lyrics for an alma mater and a pep song; the second phase to find appropriate music for those lyrics would follow. The contest to find lyrics opened on April 12, 1922. Entries were to be submitted by “Wayne Day,” November 5, 1922. The March 26, 1923 issue of *The Goldenrod* reported the results. There had been nine manuscripts submitted. There were two panels of judges:

*“The judges on the theme of the poems were Dr. J. G. Neihardt, Nebraska’s poet, now living in Branson, Missouri; Prof. and Mrs. C. H. Bright, formerly mathematics instructor and librarian at the college [respectively], now at the Chadron State Normal; Mrs. M. A. Phillips, now in Omaha and a teacher of English in the Wayne high school a few years ago; and Dr. J. T. House, head of the English department at the College.*

*“The judges of adaptability to music or singableness [sic], were Prof. C. E. Fouser, instructor of music at Northwestern University School of Music, Evanston, Illinois, formerly in the music department here; Prof. L. F. Beery and Prof. W. C. Hunter, music instructors in the W. S. N.”*

For the alma mater song, the judges selected the entry, "Alma Mater, Stately Mother," by Tillie Faye Solfermoser:

*From the boundless plains around us,  
Hear our voices gladly ring.  
Wind-swept cities, turquoise waters  
Echo back the song we sing.  
Stately Mother, Alma Mater,  
With thy grace our hopes entwine,  
Justice, dignity, compassion,  
All of these in thee combine.*

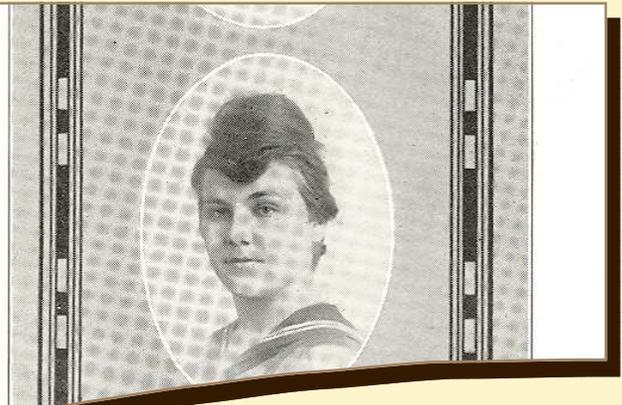
*Reared aloft upon the hillside,  
Rend'ring good that ne'er abates,  
Pregnant with anticipation  
Thy expected Forum waits.  
Move we on, and ever onward,  
Joyful,—yet in awe of thee,  
Proud thy singing sons and daughters,  
Alma Mater, hail to thee!*

*Columned high in brilliant azure,  
Gath'ring grandeur with the years,  
Alma Mater, torch eternal,  
Love of thee each thought endears.  
Thy conceptions, ever-wid'ning,  
Sentinel in western plain,  
Guardian of old Nebraska,  
Thus we hail thee, Mother Wayne!*

TILLIE FAY SOLFERMOSER West Point, Nebr.

Vice President Zarathustra  
Y. W. C. A.  
Goldenrod  
Spizz Staff  
Orpheus  
Fine Arts  
Basketball

*"A laugh is worth a hundred groans in any  
market." Tee! Hee!*



Tillie Faye Solfermoser had completed the two-year at Wayne State in 1920. At the time of winning the prize she was completing a master's degree at the University of Chicago while teaching in the Chicago public school system. She continued working in the Chicago school system until her retirement.

The second prize for an alma mater song went to Mrs. S. A. Lutgen (Grace Welsh Lutgen). Grace Welsh Lutgen was the wife of S. A. (Sidney Anson) Lutgen, Wayne physician, who founded the first Wayne hospital in 1913. She was a student at the college in 1917. This was her submission:

*Dear Old Wayne*

*The purpling hills, our mountains;  
The billowing grain, our sea;  
Great flocks and herds, our mines of wealth:  
And oh, how proud are we!  
While towering o'er the rolling plains  
With massive halls and dome,  
Is our beloved State Normal,  
Our own dear college home.*

*Wayne, Wayne, how much you mean to me!  
Wayne, Wayne, my boast you'll ever be!  
No matter where my feet may roam  
I'll always love you, college home,  
And backward oft my thoughts will turn  
To dear old Wayne*

*Oh, spacious halls of knowledge!  
Oh, dear familiar ways!  
What sheen and glamour you have wrought  
To bless our yesterdays!  
Bright rosy dreams you weave for all  
Of service and of fame.  
God grant that none shall ever bring  
Dishonor to your name!*



Although taking second prize, Lutgen was the winner in another song contest. Her song, "Nebraska, My Native Land," (with music by Leon Beery of the music department of Wayne State) was selected as the song of the Nebraska Federation of Women's clubs. She was also successful in other areas of writing, as she explained in an outline of her work quoted in the March 29, 1928 issue of *The Wayne Herald*:

*“In all I have had some twenty short stories published; perhaps forty short poems; several one-act plays; two serials—one of which, ‘Penny Pictures,’ will soon be put into book form; and besides ‘Nebraska, May Native Land,’ Mr. Beery and I have another song offering, ‘Straying,’ which will soon be on the market; and still another rustic ballad, ‘When Turtle Doves Are Cooing in the Lane,’ has been set to music by Lynn Robertson and is now being considered by publishers.*

*“Then two years ago I tried a new venture—that of pageant writing. A three-part historical pageant, ‘Wayne County,’ was presented at the county fair under my personal direction and so successful was it that last fall I wrote and directed another, ‘Nebraska, Dream of the Pioneer’.”*

In subsequent years she continued to publish plays and pageants.

While the first phase of the search for the alma mater song was successful, the search for a pep song was not. *The Goldenrod* sadly reported that *“The committee agreed that the pep songs entered in the contest were of subordinate rank and all were rejected.”*



Now the search to find music began. This second phase was to begin March 20, 1923 and close on May 1 of that same year. A prize of \$25 would be awarded to the best music for Tillie Faye Solfermoser’s “Alma Mater, Stately Mother,” while \$15 would be awarded for the best music for Grace Welsh Lutgen’s “Dear Old Wayne.”

The May deadline came and passed, however, without a mention of the contest in either *The Goldenrod* or *The Wayne Herald*. As a matter of fact, there’s no mention of the contest or the song itself until the March 17, 1924 issue of *The Goldenrod*. On its front page of that issue is the score for “Alma Mater, Stately Mother” with Leon Beery’s name alongside Tillie Faye Solfermoser’s. There’s no accompanying caption, story or editorial comment.



The 1924 *Spizz* published a copy of the score with this brief explanation:

*“Last year the Wayne Alumni Club offered a prize for the best poem that could be set to music as a school song. This prize was awarded to Miss Tillie Faye Solfermoser, class of 1920, whose words were set to music by Mr. Leon F. Berry.*

*“The Alumni Club has supplied the school song books with pages of this song and has kindly consented to loan the cut for use in the 1924 Spizzerinktum.*

*“We are please to print our Alma Mater Song.”*

Given the ardent campaign for an alma mater song in *The Goldenrod* leading up to the contest one would expect some grand announcement in the newspaper—but there was none. It’s true that Bonnie Hess who had spurred the campaign was no longer the editor of the newspaper (she graduated in 1922), but still it’s puzzling why more attention was not given to the final decision. Considering that there had been only nine submissions of lyrics, perhaps there were only a few (or no) submissions of music. Perhaps the musical submissions were all deemed of “*subordinate rank*” and rejected as were the entries for the pep song. Leon Beery of the music faculty was then called upon to compose the music. Without more evidence one can only speculate. One can say with certainty, however, that the song by Tillie Faye Solfermoser with music by Leon Beery selected by the judges in 1923 is approaching a century as THE school song for Wayne State.

