

"Alma Mater"

25th in the Keepsakes series, originally published August 2, 2010



Looking East Toward the K-State Campus, 1903

In the spring of 1902, students belonging to K-State's literary societies recognized that, unlike other institutions, their school lacked a college song. Feeling that students needed to express their true devotion to K-State through music, a student committee was formed to devise and supervise a contest to select a college song. The contest was announced in the *Students' Herald* (a predecessor to

the *Collegian*) and students and alumni were encouraged to write and submit a song to committee member Sarah Hougham, a senior in the Class of 1903, by October 1, 1902. The winner would receive a \$25 prize and a lasting "reputation"!

In the August 7 issue of the newspaper, students and alumni were implored to take an interest ("We need a song and need it badly"), an interest that had been extremely high several months earlier when the contest was announced. By September only six entries



had been received so members of the committee urged students to "wake up...and get in the

humor to write a rousing good song for K.S.A.C." before the fast approaching deadline. The song committee again begged students to contribute "a first class song" to the contest for a "chance for development and glory"; an advertisement was also placed in the newspaper.



In the October 30, 1902 issue of the *Students' Herald*, it was announced that 14 songs had been submitted and the committee sent three to the judges for consideration, one each from the faculty, alumni, and student body. The judges concluded that none of them were "entirely suited for the purpose of a K.S.A.C. song." Undaunted and adamant that

— WE WANT —

A College Song

\$25 For the Best Production

Contest open to all until October 1.
Try to win! Address all correspondence to Miss Sarah Hougham, Manhattan, Kansas.

their beloved school needed a college song, the committee extended the contest to January 8, 1903. Again students were presented the opportunity for their name to become "immortal" and win \$25; similar words were used to lure submissions, "the best agricultural college in the best state in the union, is worthy of the best efforts of the best talent in the alumni and student body."

The judges on the College song contest have made their decision, and K. S. A. C. now has a song which it can call its own. The successful competitor is H. W. Jones, '88, of Topeka. Mr. Jones is a teacher of music in the schools of Topeka and his ability as a musical composer is well exhibited in this new production, entitled, "Alma Mater," which has taken the \$25.00 cash prize offered by the literary societies. The song will be published as soon as possible and every one will have the opportunity of purchasing a copy.

[STUDENTS' HERALD, Feb. 28, 1903]

This time, ladies and gentlemen, there was a winner! An announcement in the February 28, 1903 issue of the *Students' Herald* proclaimed that the judges had selected a college song. It was entitled "Alma Mater" and written by Humphrey W. Jones (Class of 1888), a teacher in the Topeka public schools. The song was published by the "Students' Herald Publishing Company" and produced by K-State's printing department; it was included as a supplement in the April 9 issue of the newspaper. Initially, copies were available for

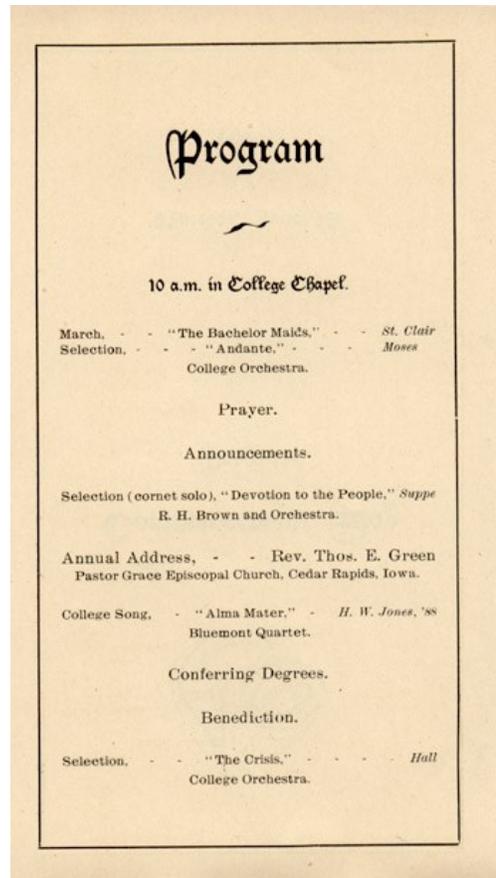
25 cents at the newspaper office or the CO-OP Bookstore, however, on May 8 the newspaper's business manager issued an apology for selling the song at that price after determining the cost of printing it was much lower. The new price for a copy of the "Alma Mater" was now 10 cents! By June 1903, newspaper ads and articles encouraged students to buy copies to take with them as souvenirs once classes ended ("The College song will be a cure for College homesickness this summer")!

In June 1903, the *Industrialist* (the newspaper managed by the college) reported that the song was sung by the "Bluemont Quartet" during commencement on June 18, 1903; this was considered the first public rendition of the piece. It was also sung at the alumni reunion in 1904 which Mr. Jones attended.



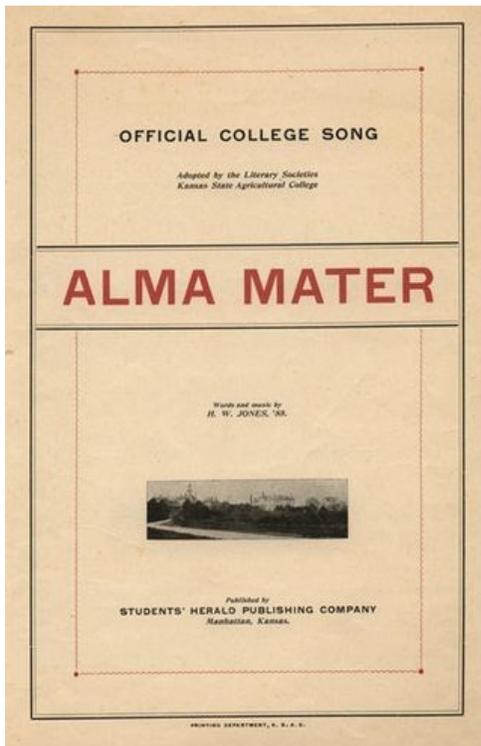
Humphrey W. Jones

Julius T. Willard (K-State college historian, 1936-1950) summarized the career of Humphrey W. Jones at the time of his death on August 13, 1932 at the age of 67. After graduating from K-State in 1888, Jones attended Kansas State Teachers' College in Emporia and spent his career as a teacher and administrator in Kansas public schools. In 1899 he joined the Topeka school system as supervisor of music where he remained until 1904 when he left to



become the principal of Branner School in Topeka. While there he was in charge of the Branner Annex, a school established for the "Mexican" children in 1918. According to Willard, Jones was credited with "handling delicate situations due to race, class or factional differences." He retired in 1932.

Jones was not only a popular instructor, he was in demand as a speaker at meetings of teacher organizations and parent-teacher groups. He also wrote prose and poetry as well as other pieces of music. He is credited with writing the school song for Topeka High School in 1904 and contributing his royalties to the school's music fund. Over the years the "Alma Mater" has been criticized by students less than thrilled with the song! For example, in 1947 a number of newspaper articles appeared addressing the appropriateness of the song. Many pieces contained negative comments from students including those of a sophomore in engineering who was quoted in the Collegian, "The students don't like it, don't know it, and besides--it stinks." Others have doubted its validity as the official school song although Julius Willard always insisted that the "Alma Mater" was the authorized song of the college. As one might expect, the song has received support throughout the years and, in spite of periodic debates, surveys, and studies, the "Alma Mater" remains a fixture at university events; except for "K.S.A.C." being replaced by "KSU," the words have remained constant for over 107 years! "Hail! Hail! Hail! Alma Mater."



"Alma Mater"

I know a spot which I love full well,
'Tis not in forest nor yet in dell;
Ever it holds me with magic spell--
I think of thee, Alma Mater.

KSU, carry thy banner high!
KSU, long may thy colors fly!
Loyal to thee thy children will swell the cry,
Hail! Hail! Hail! Alma Mater.

(Jones also included second and third verses when he submitted the song in 1903).
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Sources in University Archives consulted: Students' Herald, Industrialist, KSU History Index, "Humphrey William Jones" by Julius T. Willard.