

The Alma Mater

by Barbara L. Krieger

On March 31, 1887, Henry M. Baker, Class of 1863, wrote to Prof. John Lord King submitting "a general plan for prizes which," he said, "I hope to secure a very acceptable Dartmouth Song." Then, toward the end of April, Baker dispatched to the College his check in the amount of two hundred dollars, intended to cover, as he declared, "two prizes of \$100 each."

The projected competition, according to a still-surviving outline of its terms, was "to be announced on or before Commencement 1887" and would involve one prize rewarding "the best original music" and another "the best original words" for the desired song. Eligible to participate in the contest would be "all undergraduates and alumni of the College." Beyond this, there was stipulated the appointment of "a committee of three gentlemen skilled in musical and literary matters who shall consider the music and words submitted for competition and shall award the prizes, or either of them, if in their judgement the contributions justify an award." And it was further specified, "If the Committee shall decide that no contribution is worthy an award, or to award only one of the prizes, then the prizes or the unawarded prize, shall remain open for competition at each succeeding Commencement until both prizes are awarded...."

It was not until more than eight years later that the prize for suitable lyrics was finally bestowed. In September of 1896, Baker wrote to President William Jewett Tucker:

"Having been advised that the Committee of award on the prizes offered by me for a distinctively Dartmouth song have awarded the prize for the words of the song to Mr. Richard Hovey of the Class of 1885 and have rejected all the music submitted; after careful consideration, I suggest that the terms of the competition be enlarged so as to permit composers everywhere to compete for the remaining prize to the end that the best possible music be secured and the heart of every Dartmouth man be made glad."

In addition to garnering the prize established by Henry M. Baker, Richard Hovey, who by 1896 was already well established as a poet and man of letters, had received another award for this same composition (initially called simply "Dartmouth Song"). Edwin O. Grover, Class of 1894, states in a letter published in the October 1931 number of the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*: "... The poem was written at the suggestion of a member of the Dartmouth Lunch Club of Boston, which offered a prize for the best poem about Dartmouth. Some months later the poem won a \$100 prize offered by Henry M. Baker ... for the best poem suitable for a Dartmouth song." And Grover went on to declare, "I had the pleasure of first publishing 'Men of Dartmouth' in the June 1894 issue of the *Dartmouth Literary Monthly*, of which I was editor."

Dated "Boston, Easter Day 1894," a manuscript of the Hovey poem (two of its three stanzas

carrying crossings-out and verbal emendations) is now preserved within the College Archives.

Grover's June 1894 publication of the text in the *Literary Monthly* contains - either because of his not having the original manuscript or by some undocumented discussion with the poet - a few minor divergences from the Easter Day 1894 manuscript. For example, the final two lines of the first verse read, as printed, "And the granite of New Hampshire / In their muscles and brains." Whereas this passage in Hovey's manuscript has "muscle," singular - which indeed does change the meaning somewhat. And in the third verse, where the printed version reads "Men of Dartmouth, set a watch," Hovey's manuscript has "keep a watch."

Certainly neither of these were substantive alterations, but they constituted, at any rate, ones that were to persist over the years that followed.

Whatever the wording, the Richard Hovey poem appeared to have no trouble in winning wide approval. On the other hand, the securing of a suitable and enduring musical setting would prove to take many years, and involve many different composers. Among those who tried their hands at setting music to "Men of Dartmouth" were Addison F. Andrews 1878 (whose version appears in the first edition of *Dartmouth Songs*, published in 1898); Frederic Field Bullard; Marie Wurm (who set a number of Hovey's poems to music); Charles H. Morse (Dartmouth music professor, whose version was sung at the laying of the cornerstone of Webster Hall in 1901); and Louis P. Benezet 1899 (whose setting was performed in 1904 when the cornerstone was laid for the rebuilding of Dartmouth Hall).

In 1908, Ernest Martin Hopkins, then secretary to President William Jewett Tucker, approached Harry R Wellman, 1907, who was at that period serving as Secretary of the College Club in Hanover, and asked him to attempt a new musical setting for Hovey's poem. Prof. Paul R. Zeller (director of the Dartmouth Glee Club 1947-79) in his 1950 reminiscence, provided more than forty years later, of what ensued:

"I went to my room, sat down at the piano, fastened the poem to the music rack and went at it. The first few lines went fairly easy, since they lent themselves to broad, homeric chord treatment. In fact, up to the phrase 'with a will' - it wrote itself. Then Mr. Hovey had changed his meter beginning with 'For the Sons' and I was left swinging on the stool! Not being a trained musician or even a musician, I didn't know what to do. So I kept fooling around doing one phrase at a time, until I had completed the changed meter. It sounded terrible to me; it didn't make sense. So to cover it up, I wound up the last few measures as I had started, with broad, full chord structure. It wasn't until 30 years later when I was introduced by the head of the Music Department to a real composer, that I learned that 'the treatment of the recitative was nothing short of genius!'"

The Wellman setting was sung at Commencement in 1910, a tradition that has continued with

few exceptions - including 1942, when "Dartmouth Undying" was sung, and during the years of World War II, when there were no Commencement exercises - from that time onward.

From the time of the Wellman composition, the only serious competitor of "Men of Dartmouth" for the role of Alma Mater was one the words of which begin:

Come, fellows let us raise a song,
And sing it loud and clear;
Our Alma Mater is our theme,
Old Dartmouth, loved and dear.
Dartmouth! Dartmouth! challenge thus we fling!
Dartmouth! Dartmouth! Hear the echoes ring.

Of this Professor Zeller has written: "In the fall of 1891, W. B. Segur '92 set out to satisfy the Glee Club's need for a distinctive Dartmouth song to use as a finale for its programs. He wrote the lyrics for 'Come, Fellows Let Us Raise a Song,' and together with Guy W. Cox '93, Glee Club pianist, worked out a tune for it. Known as 'The Dartmouth Song' it was the College's first Alma Mater and held this position until 'Men of Dartmouth' superseded it...."

A vote of the senior class in 1918 indicated a preference for "Men of Dartmouth," and in 1926, with the urging of President Hopkins, it officially became the College's Alma Mater. In a whimsical letter published in the November 15, 1926, number of *The Dartmouth* Mr. Hopkins said, in part:

"... It has been said that the secret of good administration is to decide quickly, and sometimes right. On this particular matter, however, I have been so solicitous not to aid and abet any lurking sentiment that might be existent somewhere in behalf of the old song that I have tried to school myself to a complete neutrality of feeling. The contention at the present time, however, has so definitely appealed to my desire to see a change that with all the risks of doing so, I am impelled to state my position.

"Personally, I can see no argument for the use of the old Alma Mater song as compared with 'Men of Dartmouth' for any occasion which demands an expression of worthy College feeling. My antipathy to the older song began nearly 30 years ago with my first enrollment in the College, and has consistently held ever since, with only this difference, that for the last two decades we have had an alternative in "'Men of Dartmouth,' set to appropriate music, which we did not have before."

"I have sometimes reflected in more recent years that perhaps the older song had a use in that it made defeat in athletic competitions more terrible than it would otherwise have had to be in anticipation of necessity of singing the older song...."

"I am not as enthusiastic as many of the undergraduates of the present day for the overthrowing of all tradition and the eliminating of all color and dramatic fire and pungent atmosphere from College life. When, however, the undergraduates of the present College turn on the administration of a half a decade or so hence, and urge the restoration of many of those things for whose elimination they have been largely responsible, it would be a source of immense satisfaction to me if amidst the much harmful violence which has been done to tradition, it should be found that so worthy a purpose had been achieved as the obliteration of a song wholly inadequate to and unworthy of the College in whose behalf it had been presumably sung from time to time."

Nearly half a century later, in 1972, responding to the coeducation decision of the Board of Trustees, Dartmouth admitted its first class to include women. President John Kemeny opened the College that year by addressing the "men and women of Dartmouth" , and closed the Convocation ceremony with the singing of "Dartmouth Undying."

Kemeny's decision to substitute "Dartmouth Undying" for "Men of Dartmouth" was of course made out of sensitivity to the presence of women in the new entering class, and was arrived at by the President with the approval of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. It did not, however, meet with the full approval of the student body. After Convocation, *The Dartmouth* decided to poll the women for their feelings about the College's decidedly male-oriented Alma Mater. Although few of the women responded to the questionnaire, the majority of those who did favored retaining the Hovey lyrics. (As one respondent noted, "If men want to sing about rocks in their heads, it's fine with me.") The Trustees took the survey results into consideration at their October meeting and voted to retain "Men of Dartmouth" as the Alma Mater.

The issue of a gender-inclusive College song arose again 1980 when Cobra, a women's senior society, composed an additional verse for "Men of Dartmouth." The verse, placed between verses one and three of the original version (Hovey's second verse had been rarely sung, except in time of war or at memorial services), was introduced at Commencement exercises that year - the one and only time that the Cobra verse appeared in a Commencement program.

Several years passed before serious consideration of revising the Alma Mater would be revisited. Then, in its May 1986 report, the Council on Diversity offered this recommendation:

"Because 'Men of Dartmouth' is an inappropriate school song for a coeducational institution, the College community should explore three possible ways to address the situation: a.) through modification of the present language and/or the creation of wholly new verses to replace the old ones; b.) through the substitution of another traditional Dartmouth song that is not sex-specific; or c.) through the creation of a wholly new song...."

The report also suggested that until such changes could be made, only other traditional

Dartmouth songs be sung at formal College functions.

The Council's report was issued too late in the spring to have much impact on the 1986 graduation exercises, and accounts of Commencement that year do not indicate that there was any significant protest over the inclusion of the traditional version of "Men of Dartmouth" in the printed program. This would be, however, the original song's last solo appearance in that publication.

Convocation in September of 1986 was another story. Protest fliers, as well as active protest at the ceremony itself, evidenced an increasing desire for change in the College's official song. In response, President David T. McLaughlin requested the creation of a committee, formed from the Student Assembly and the Alumni Council, to investigate the Alma Mater issue. Despite results of their own poll, which showed that sixty-one percent of the students supported retention of the original song and lyrics, the Committee on the Alma Mater recommended revision of the original verses.

Still under the title "Men of Dartmouth," both the traditional version and a revised set of lyrics (offered by the senior class executive council) appeared in the 1987 Commencement program. The Dartmouth community was invited to join in singing either of the two versions presented.

Another year would pass before the lyrics as they are sung today would make their official appearance. Worked on by Prof. Charles Hamm, Lynne Gaudet, '81, Douglas Wheeler, '59, Caroline Luft, '89, and Dean Edward Shanahan, the new version provided eight changes to Hovey's original poem. On May 28, 1988, President James Freedman announced these changes to the College, and in the Commencement program that year, the new version, and only the new version, was printed. The title? Simply "Alma Mater".

Dear old Dartmouth, give a rouse
For the college on the hill!
For the Lone Pine above her,
And the loyal ones who love her,
Give a rouse, give a rouse, with a will!
For the sons of old Dartmouth,
For the daughters of Dartmouth.
Though 'round the girdled earth they roam,
Her spell on them remains;
They have the still North in their hearts,
The hill-winds in their veins,
And the granite of New Hampshire
In their muscles and their brains.

Dear old Dartmouth, set a watch
Lest the old traditions fail!
Stand as sister stands by brother!
Dare a deed for the old Mother!
Greet the world, from the hills, with a hail!
For the sons of old Dartmouth,
For the daughters of Dartmouth.
Around the world they keep for her
Their old undying faith;
They have the still North in their soul,
The hill-winds in their breath,
And the granite of New Hampshire
Is made part of them till death.

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