

Revision of State Song Urged

By TOM WASON
News American Bureau

ANNAPOLIS — A movement is afoot here to change the words of the state song, "Maryland, My Maryland," a tune that arose from the bitterness that followed the passage of Federal troops through Baltimore in 1861.

In the first verse, the federal government is called "despotic" and in the final verse northerners are called "scum." The song advocates that Maryland leave the Union and join the Confederate States of America.

In 1939 the state legislature recognized the song, from a poem written by James Ryder Randall, as the official state song.

ANNE ARUNDEL County Delegate Werner Fornos, D-6C, said he has been approached by constituents who felt that the song is an "inflammatory hold-over from the Civil War." He has been asked to draft legislation to have it changed.

Fornos said he thinks the state should sponsor a contest to see if a better song could be written.

Legislation was not introduced at the last session of the General Assembly to change the song because that is "one more issue we didn't need to have before us," Fornos said.

The distaste for the state song is shared by Maryland's Poet Laureate, Vincent Godfrey Burns, who said the song is in "awfully poor taste."

BURNS SAID that he appeared before the State Senate last March and urged them to adopt a poem he had written

to replace the state song.

"We need a song which children can sing in school," Burns said. "No one knows the words to the song, and it doesn't have any meaning for today."

The song is more than 100 years out of date, he added.

Burns said that his song is

being sung in 10 schools now.

PROFESSOR John W. Baer, of Anne Arundel Community College, who recommended changing the state song during a lecture at Enoch Pratt Library recently, said that what people like about the song is the refrain, "Maryland, My Maryland" — something Burns managed to preserve in his version.

Baer said that there is widespread ignorance about the song among Marylanders, "most of who think that it is about the American revolution."

The first and last verses, he said, are the "most outrageous."

When the song is sung publicly, he said, the first verse is usually skipped. The less offensive second and third verse are the ones generally sung, he said.

"WE HAVE laws against inciting to riot and arson, and we are trying Rap Brown on them, but at the same time, we have a state song advocating violent overthrow of the government," Baer said.

A similar contradiction, Baer, a history professor said, is that Maryland's Religious Toleration Act of 1649, which in the first paragraph set out punishments including hanging and whipping for those who do not believe in God.

The Maryland Poetry Society is considering sponsoring a contest to rewrite the state song, Charles Crane president and an English professor at the Naval Academy, said.

THE SOCIETY "endorsed the idea" of changing the state song, but so far has not taken any action to get it changed.

The poetry society has about 100 members throughout the state.

Crane said Burns' song "was about as bad as the original," and if he submitted it, to the contest, the society is thinking of sponsoring, it would be rejected.

STATE SENATOR Mrs. Verda F. Welcome, D-Baltimore, said that she would not oppose a move to change the state song for one "more appropriate." She does not at present plan to sponsor any legislation along this line.

Senate President William S. James, D-Harford, said he also is opposed to changing the state song.

James said he remembers Burns speaking before the senate, but he was not aware that he was being urged to replace the state song when the poet got up before the Senate and read a few poems.

MRS. MARGARET A. Adams, head of the music department for Anne Arundel County Schools, said that "Maryland, My Maryland" is taught in country schools.

George E. Surgeon, principal of Brooklyn Park Elementary School said that the state song is taught in the fourth grade and the children learn all the verses.

Burns' song, he said, is also taught at Brooklyn Park, but it is not intended to take the place of the official song.

THE SIXTH Massachusetts Regiment while marching between the old President Street Station to Camden Station in Baltimore on April 19, 1861 were attacked by men hurling cobblestone and bricks.

The troops opened fire on the crowd. There were casualties on both sides.

Southern newspapers called it the "Baltimore Massacre."

Reading reports of it in a New Orleans newspaper, where he taught school, Randall, then 23-years-old, wrote the poem, "My Maryland."

THE NEXT day Randall, a native of Baltimore, read the poem to his students.

The poem was printed and became popular overnight throughout the Confederacy. It reached Baltimore a month after the incident that inspired its authorship.



JAMES RYDER RANDALL
author of controversial state song.

"MARYLAND, MY MARYLAND"

(As revised by Vincent Godfrey Burns,
Poet Laureate of Maryland)

My thankful heart with rapture fills,
Maryland, My Maryland.

When I behold thy rolling hills,
Maryland, My Maryland.

I love your rocks and rippling rills,
Your waterways where beauty spills
And nature holds a thousand thrills,
Maryland, My Maryland.

I love thy vistas on the Bay,
Maryland, My Maryland.

The scent of rose and new-mown hay,
Maryland, My Maryland.

The people love their work and play,
Where hopes are high and hearts are gay,
Long may thy noble laws hold sway,
Maryland, My Maryland.

Where heroes of our past have stood,
Maryland, My Maryland.

Where patriots served with hardihood,
Maryland, My Maryland.

Here people live the way they should,
To make life secure and good
And build a broader brotherhood,
Maryland, My Maryland.

Thy providence by freedom fanned,
Maryland, My Maryland.

Spreads happiness on every hand,
Maryland, My Maryland.

Long may thy loyal people stand,
No other state is quite so grand
As our dear state of Maryland,
Maryland, My Maryland.

With constant faith and industry,
Maryland, My Maryland.

We shall serve God, and liberty,
Maryland, My Maryland.

By works of love and charity,
Preserve thy noble destiny
And always keep the Free State free,
Maryland, My Maryland.