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HOW "OLD MISSOURI" CAME TO BE

By John H. Casey '20

"Old Missouri, Fair Missouri,
Dear Old Varsity—"

It has come to light after these many years that those famous words, and the rest of that famous song, "Old Missouri," were written in a single night in the old house at 900 Conley Ave., a house that still stands in Allen Place across from the New Law Building. The author is a former assistant professor in English who taught at the University from 1891 to 1895, George Armstrong Wauchope, now Dr. Wauchope, 65 years old, head of the South Carolina University English department, and third ranking member of that southern university's faculty and administrative staff.

John H. Casey, the author of this article about "Old Missouri" was formerly a member of the faculty of the School of Journalism. He taught last summer in the George Peabody College at Nashville. He is now at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, starting a group of courses in country Journalism, similar to the courses which he taught here. He is also secretary of the Oklahoma University Publications Board. Mr. Casey married Mary Ellen McKay, B.J. '18, of Columbia.

Many were the interesting anecdotes about old times around the University that this man Wauchope related to me one warm evening this summer as we chatted in his room in the main dormitory of Ward-Belmont College, where we were both lodging for the summer, while engaged for summer lectures on the faculty of George Peabody College for Teachers at Nashville, Tenn.

"It was during these early years, '91 to '95, that the Old University Building burned to the ground," he began, and I knew we were off for an excursion into the past. "Those were years when President Jesse was running things at M. U. To this young English teacher it seemed that President Jesse was about the greatest university president of all time, and to the present Dr. George Armstrong Wauchope, A.B., A.M., Ph.D., and LL.D., the name of Jesse still stands for the ideal college president.

He recalled how it was that memorable University fire that had given the University those famous Columns around which later grew up such fine traditions and around which has grown up that group of red brick buildings which now encloses Francis Quadrangle. Dr. Edward A. Allen, late father-in-law of Dr. Belden, was the head of the English department, and it was in Dr. Allen's home that the young author of "Old Missouri" lived, and wrote the time honored words of our alma mater.

E. W. Stephens was a member of the Board of Curators at the time. Gov. Francis was president of the Board. To be exact, "Old Missouri" was written and adopted in the spring of 1895. The author recalled, too, that the song was first publicly sung by the glee



Dr. G. A. Wauchope

club, which was M. U.'s original and first glee club, in a Columbia theater, and that the words first went into print on the program of the glee club's opening night performance. The Columbia Herald printery, of which Mr. Stephens was the owner, printed the programs. The author doesn't know whatever became of the manuscript, probably went into the printer's or proofreader's waste basket, he thinks, but he possesses one of the first printed copies of the song—a complete glee club program of the evening, which he treasures. It is known that several others connected with the University during the early Nineties still have copies.

An original print of the glee club concert program, supplied to me by Dr. Wauchope since his return to South Carolina in September, carries the names of these eight Columbia ladies as patronesses:

Mrs. R. H. Jesse, Mrs. G. B. Rollins, Mrs. J. C. Jones, Mrs. Frank Thilly, Mrs. J. D. Lawson, Mrs. Woodson Moss, Mrs. C. W. Marx, and Mrs. W. J. Quigg.

The program was held on a Tuesday evening, April 16, 1895. It was described as the "First Home Concert of the University of Missouri Glee, Banjo, and Mandolin Clubs." H. T. Cory was manager of the musical organization and H. K. White the leader. Their names appear prominently on the printed program. The entire personnel of the three clubs as constituted in April 1895 was as follows, and in this form they appeared on page four of the printed program:

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
GLEE, BANJO AND MANDOLIN CLUBS
H. T. Cory, Manager
GLEE CLUB
H. K. White, Leader
First Tenors
F. M. Roberts, L.S. '95; I. E. O'Keefe, '97;
G. H. English, '98; G. C. Broadhead, G.
Second Tenors
A. Rhett, Jr., '96; G. A. Thompson, '98;
A. E. Russell, '98.
First Basses
L. C. Johnson, L.S. '95; A. H. Place; H.
T. Cory.
Second Basses
A. S. Cumming, L.S. '95; E. Hendrick,
L.S. '96; L. V. Darrow, '98.
Mandolin Club
C. R. Hall, '98, leader; C. E. Langford, '98;
C. L. Willoughby, '97; J. E. McClane, Med.
'97; G. C. Broadhead, G.; E. T. McGaugh,
'97; F. T. Reed, '98; W. H. Dulany, '97.

Banjo Club

H. T. Cory, leader; M. W. Gottschalk, L.S. '96; C. E. Langford, '98; L. C. Johnson, L.S. '95; A. J. Sears, '97; C. C. Conover, '95; W. H. Dulany, '97.

Two of these young men became prominent attorneys in Missouri, both being still active in their profession. They are Guy A. Thompson of St. Louis and George H. English of Kansas City.

What I wanted to know was how this man Wauchope came to write "Old Missouri." What was the inspiration of so noble an effort? That it has lasted down through the years is proof enough for me that it was a noble effort and that it will survive for many years to come. And did he write both the words and the music? So, I asked him. This is the story:

"Ever write any verse?" Henry K. White, leader of the glee club one day asked the young English professor.

"Hardly any," was the modest reply. "We must have a college song. Won't you try?" was the immediate proposal.

"I'll try," was the brief rejoinder.

So, it seems, this story has bound up with it the historical background for Missouri's now nationally famous glee club, as well. Perhaps it is significant, and again perhaps not, that "Old Missouri" was not only sung for the first time publicly by Missouri's first glee club, but that it was sung at that first glee club's initial public appearance.

Wauchope wrote the words in a single night, "dashed them off," as the author puts it. "I have always written rapidly when in the mood for composing," he explained. The next day, as he recalls after these many years, the polishing and shaping-up process took place. "Then it was," he said "that White worked on the musical setting. Then I showed it to Dr. Jesse for his judgment."

Because Dr. Wauchope's recollection of details concerning the origin of the song was admittedly a bit hazy in spots, it became advisable to get in touch with some of the student-members of the 1895 musical aggregation. Guy Thompson and George English both responded with letters that not only have helped to clear up doubtful points but which netted some interesting supplementary material on the subject as well.

Circumstances attendant on selection of the tune Mr. Thompson recalled very distinctly in his letter, which runs as follows and is probably authentic in every detail:

"After we had received the words from Professor Wauchope, it became necessary to select an appropriate tune to fit the words. George English and I enlisted the assistance of Mrs. J. C. Jones, wife of Dr. J. C. Jones, now president emeritus of the University. She had a thick book of old familiar tunes and, with Mrs. Jones at the piano in her home, and George English and me standing by, we spent all one Sunday afternoon trying out these old familiar tunes, and finally the three of us agreed that 'Annie Lisle' was the most suitable and it is the tune to which the words ever since have been sung."

It developed that Mr. Thompson also has saved a copy of the original glee club program. And now comes another chapter in the history of the Missouri alma mater song, which song, as revealed in the St. Louis lawyer-alumnus' letter, was for a time lost.

"There was no glee club at the University in the years '98, '99 and 1900," writes Mr. Thompson. "In 1901 Mrs. J. C. Jones organized and directed the glee club of that year. Meanwhile 'Old Missouri' was not being sung and the words had been lost. At least, no one at the University was sure of the words. Mrs. Jones wrote me for them. I sent them to her. Though I wrote them from memory, I am sure that I gave them correctly. Mrs. Jones' glee club revived the song and it has stuck. Thus you will see the University is indebted both to Dr. Wauchope and to Mrs. Jones for her varsity song. Dr. Wauchope wrote it and Mrs. Jones rescued it from threatened oblivion."