



### **Milton Hershey School Tradition Marks 50 Year Milestone by**

**James D. McMahon, Jr., Director, Milton Hershey School Department of School History**

“All hail to thee, Milton Hershey; thy loyal sons are we,” are the stirring opening words of the original Milton Hershey School Alma Mater adopted by the School on October 23, 1956 – exactly fifty years ago this month. The MHS Alma Mater replaced an earlier Hershey Industrial School (HIS) Alma Mater written by Robert Evans’32 and sung to the tune of Anchors Aweigh, the official song of the United States Navy. Though the exact circumstances surrounding the writing of the original piece remain a mystery, we do know that it was sung at the dedication of Old Senior Hall on November 15, 1934 and at the first graduation of the Hershey Industrial School on June 25, 1935. Despite the popularity of the tune, many in the School thought the military nature of the piece made it inappropriate as an alma mater. There was also a general consensus that the old song was too difficult to sing and that the School as a whole should have a unique song with its own music.

In May of 1950, the School formed the first of several working committees to investigate the writing of a new song. The creative process went through many trials and tribulations and little progress was made. Then in 1955, the School appointed a new committee whose members included W. Purnell Payne, Spartan Orchestra Director; Virgil Alexander, Glee Club Director; Ray Miller, Band Director; and administrators John O. Hershey, W. Allen Hammond, Melvin Garner '40, and Bill Dearden '40. At the time of his appointment, Mr. Dearden also served as President of the School Alumni Association. Aably assisted by an outside advisory committee composed of professional musicians and music educators, they solicited input from students, staff, alumni, and others before reaching a consensus recommendation on the lyrics and final arrangement.

Staff member W. Purnell Payne is credited with writing the music for the Alma Mater; an adaptation of a theme by Beethoven. Fellow staff member Virgil Alexander is credited with writing the lyrics. The first performance of the new piece was at Homecoming in November 1956. In the student-produced *Spartan* of February 1957, Purnell Payne is quoted as saying,

“We had been trying off-and-on for a long time to find a new school song... After devoting many hours to it we came up with the finished result. We went over a lot of words.” In recognition of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the writing of the MHS Alma Mater, Purnell Payne – pictured here with students Michael Quick '65 and Frederick Bronson '66 – will be an honored guest at this year's All School Founders Day Assembly held on November 13<sup>th</sup>.

Those who look closely at the words will notice two subtle yet distinct changes between the original MHS Alma Mater and the current version. The Alma Mater was written at a time when the student body was all male. In November 1976, when the Deed of Trust was restated to permit the enrollment of female students, the Alma Mater needed to be restated as well to reflect that change. That opening line originally written as, “All hail to thee, Milton Hershey; thy loyal sons are we,” now reads “All hail to thee, Milton Hershey; loyal and true are we.” A later line that originally read, “We're men of Milton Hershey and vow to that great name,” now reads “We're proud of Milton Hershey and vow to that great name.”

Over the last fifty years the Milton Hershey School Alma Mater has remained a stirring tribute to the ideas of the School and a true expression of positive spirit – one of the sacred values included in the Milton Hershey Way.

***The mission of the Milton Hershey School remains true to the ideas upon which it was founded in 1909: to nurture and educate children in social and financial need to lead fulfilling and productive lives. The Department of School History actively collects, preserves, and interprets the history of Milton Hershey School. For more information about Milton Hershey School and its history please visit us at [www.mhs-pa.org](http://www.mhs-pa.org).***