

Song, The Old North State ^[1]

State Song of North Carolina: "The Old North State"

The image shows a page of sheet music for the song "The Old North State". At the top, there is handwritten text: "No 185", "Deposited June 4. 1844", "By Geo. Willig 5.", and "as before". The title "THE OLD NORTH STATE" is prominently displayed in a decorative frame, with "A Patriotic Song" written below it. The composer is "Wm. Gaston" and it is noted "Written by the Late Wm. Gaston of North Carolina". Below this, it says "And by him adapted to a German Melody". The arranger is "R. Culver" and it is noted "AND ARRANGED FOR THE PIANO-FORTE by R. Culver." The original key is "Philadelphia George Willig 7/11 (G major)". The music is written for piano and includes the lyrics: "Caro - li - na! Caro - li - na! Heav'n's blessings attend her, While we live we will cherish protect and de - fend her; Tho' the scorner may sneer at, and witling de - fame her, Yet our hearts swell with". At the bottom, there is a small note: "Entered according to Act of Congress by G. Willig in the Year 1844 at the Clerk's Office in and for the Eastern District of Penn."

"The Old North State," lyrics by William Gaston and score by R. Culver. From the Library of Congress, American Sheet Music Collection 1820-1860.

[2]

by Steven Case and Amy Kemp, 2017.
NC Government & Heritage Library.

See also: [North Carolina State Symbols and Official Adoptions main page](#) ^[3]

The song known as "The Old North State" was adopted as the official song of the State of North Carolina by the General Assembly of 1927.

Selection as State Song

"The Old North State" had been sung as the unofficial state popular song since it was written in 1835, but it was not officially put into law until 1927.

About the State Song

The lyrics to "The Old North State" were written by Judge William Gaston ^[4] of the North Carolina supreme court, who was born in New Bern in 1778. According to the traditional story, Judge Gaston overheard a group of young girls singing the tune, which they had heard previously at a local concert of the "Swiss bell-ringers." Gaston thought that such a pretty tune should have words, and wrote the current lyrics in 1835. In 1928 the Caswell-Nash chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a bronze tablet honoring Gaston on the corner of Hargett and Salisbury streets, where it is thought that Gaston penned the song.

There were few arrangements and printings of the song prior to 1926, and the anthem was largely passed down orally through the generations. This resulted in slight variations in the notes and words throughout the state. After it was adopted as the state song in 1927, the tune and words were standardized, and additional sheet music printings and band arrangements were commissioned.

The below recording is an instrumental version of the "Old North State" as performed by the North Carolina Symphony ^[5] as conducted by Ben Swalin. The recording is courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives and has been taken from 78 RPM Archives Records, WPTF-Radio, Raleigh, NC. (Call number NonTextTR.72.1)

▶ [Listen to the state song.](#)

THE OLD NORTH STATE

(words by William Gaston)

"Carolina! Carolina! Heaven's blessings attend her!
While we live we will cherish, protect and defend her;
Though the scorner may sneer at and witlings defame her,
Our hearts swell with gladness whenever we name her.

Hurrah! Hurrah! The Old North State forever!

Hurrah! Hurrah! The good Old North State!

Though she envies not others their merited glory,
Say, whose name stands the foremost in Liberty's story!
Though too true to herself e'er to crouch to oppression,
Who can yield to just rule more loyal submission?

Plain and artless her sons, but whose doors open faster
At the knock of a stranger, or the tale of disaster?
How like to the rudeness of their dear native mountains,
With rich ore in their bosoms and life in their fountains.

And her daughters, the Queen of the Forest resembling—
So graceful, so constant, yet to gentlest breath trembling;
And true lightwood at heart, let the match be applied them,
How they kindle and flame! Oh! none know but who've tried them.

Then let all who love us, love the land that we live in
(As happy a region on this side of Heaven),
Where Plenty and Freedom, Love and Peace smile before us,
Raise aloud, raise together, the heart-thrilling chorus!"

Audio:



[Show help](#)

Additional reference:

North Carolina General Statutes. Chapter 149: State Song and Toast ^[6]

North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State. *North Carolina Manual*. "Chapter 1: State Symbols." <https://www.secretary.state.nc.us/pubsweb/manual.aspx> ^[7]

Sheet music for several versions is available online:

Gaston, W. and R. Culver. 1900. Old North State song and chorus. Raleigh: Alfred Williams & Co. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1844.400060/> ^[2].

Randolph, E. E. 1942. The Old North State: A study lesson on the state song. Includes sheet music. <https://www.ncpedia.org/printpdf/105> ^[8].

Image Credits:

Gaston, Wm.; Culver, R. "The Old North State." Sheet music. Library of Congress, American Sheet Music 1820-1860.

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=sm1820&fileName=sm2/sm1844/400000/400060/mussm400060.db&recNum=0&itemLink=D?mussm:1:/temp/~ammem_7XSg::&linkText=0 [9] (accessed December 9, 2014).

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Source URL: <https://ncpedia.org/symbols/song>

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