

"Oklahoma Memories: Official State Song,"
Oklahoma Historical Society, March 24, 2012
Transcript of the podcast

Correction: The podcast incorrectly states that "Oklahoma—A Toast" was written in 1935. The lyrics and music were actually written in 1905.

"Oklahoma, Oklahoma, Fairest daughter of the West, Oklahoma, Oklahoma, 'Tis the land I love the best"

That was the official song of the state of Oklahoma before Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote the Broadway musical *Oklahoma!*, and this week of March is the anniversary of both state songs.

From the Oklahoma History Center, this is *Oklahoma Memories*. I'm Michael Dean.

When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, we didn't have an official state song. Then, in 1935, Mrs. Harriet Parker Camden of Kingfisher wrote the music and words to a song she titled "Oklahoma—A Toast." The song became a local hit, so much so that the state legislature on March 26, 1935, named this song the official song of the state of Oklahoma.

"I give you a land of sun and flowers, and summer a whole year long, I give you a land where the golden hours roll by to the mockingbird's song, Where the cotton blooms 'neath the southern sun, where the vintage hangs thick on the vine. A land whose story has just begun. This wonderful land of mine."

Those are the voices of Mrs. Donovan Campbell, formerly Georgie Beyers, and Ed Brennan. That song was performed on a Washington, D.C., radio station in 1941 as that station was saluting the state of Oklahoma.

On March 31, 1943, the Rodgers and Hammerstein adaptation of Lynn Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs*, the Broadway play *Oklahoma!* opened. The play became a hit and ran for several years.

McAlester native Ridge Bond was the only Oklahoman to play the role of Curly in the original, long-running Broadway production when he took over the role in 1946 from Howard Keel. Bond would go on to portray Curly in more than 2,600 performances of the classic Rodgers and Hammerstein musical.

In 1953, the CBS television program *Omnibus* featured Ridge Bond and the cast of Oklahoma.

"You can keep your rig if you're thinking that I care to swap, For that shiny little surrey with the fringe on the top."

In 1950, at the age of twenty-three, George Nigh became the youngest member of the state legislature when he was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives from Pittsburg County. In 1953 he introduced the bill that would make the song "Oklahoma!" from the Broadway musical the official state song.

Ridge Bond later said when that bill was read, "An old legislator stood up at the microphone and softly sang the old song 'Oklahoma, Oklahoma, 'tis a toast we all can quaff' and started to cry, and everybody there started clapping and carrying on," Bond said. "So, Nigh tabled the bill immediately and called me." Bond added, "He got me together with the choir from the Oklahoma College for Women in Chickasha. We had a quick rehearsal and then went into the legislature and sang the song for the legislature, and they passed it. I think I had as much to do with getting that song passed as anyone, and I've always been proud of that."

In 1991, he was awarded the Lynn Riggs Award, presented by Rogers State University. The Oklahoma Heritage Association named Bond an Ambassador of Goodwill. Ridge Bond passed away in Tulsa in 1997.

You can learn more Oklahoma and the movies by visiting the Oklahoma History Center, NE 23rd Street just east of the state capitol in Oklahoma City. *Oklahoma Memories* is a production of the Oklahoma History Center, dedicated to collecting, preserving, and sharing our state's past. I'm Michael Dean.