

Sweet Land of Liberty



One bleak day in February 1832, a young theological student sat in his room at Andover Theological Seminary in Andover, Massachusetts. Samuel Francis Smith was going over a sheaf of German songs for children, given to him by a friend, the composer Lowell Mason.

Sunset shadows crept into the room, and Smith was tired from a strenuous day of study. He was relieved to spend a few relaxed moments going over his friend's music.

As he hummed over one after another, one struck his fancy. He glanced at the words at the bottom of the page, and his knowledge of German told him that the words were patriotic, but they did not appeal to him.

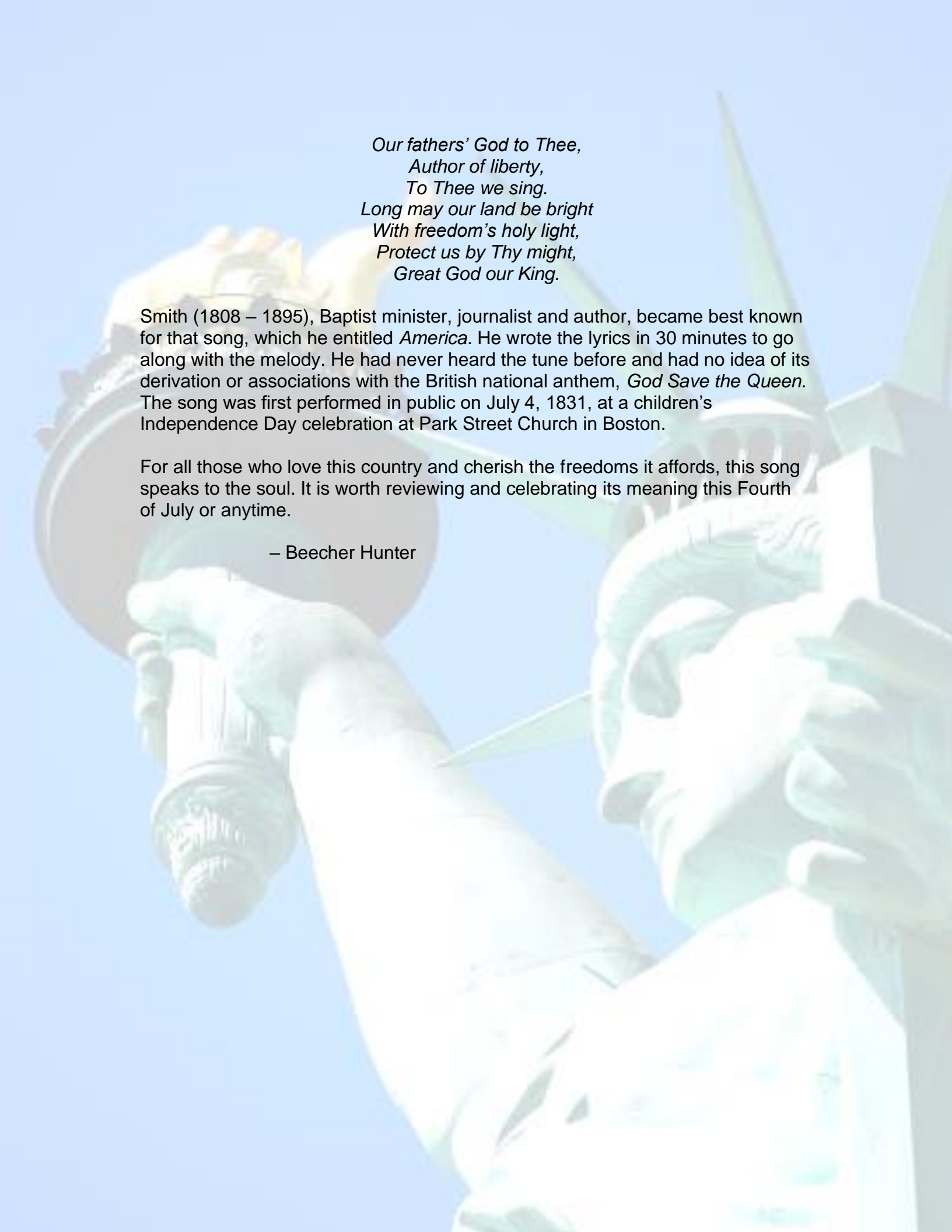
He decided to write his own words. He searched around on his desk until he found a scrap of paper, about five or six inches long and 2½ inches wide. On this, as he tapped out the rhythm of the music, he began to write:

*My country, 'tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From every mountain side
Let freedom ring!*

*My native country, thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills,
Like that above.*

*Let music swell the breeze,
And ring from all the trees
Sweet freedom's song;
Let mortal tongues awake;
Let all that breathe partake;
Let rocks their silence break,
Thy sound prolong.*

(more)



*Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God our King.*

Smith (1808 – 1895), Baptist minister, journalist and author, became best known for that song, which he entitled *America*. He wrote the lyrics in 30 minutes to go along with the melody. He had never heard the tune before and had no idea of its derivation or associations with the British national anthem, *God Save the Queen*. The song was first performed in public on July 4, 1831, at a children's Independence Day celebration at Park Street Church in Boston.

For all those who love this country and cherish the freedoms it affords, this song speaks to the soul. It is worth reviewing and celebrating its meaning this Fourth of July or anytime.

– Beecher Hunter