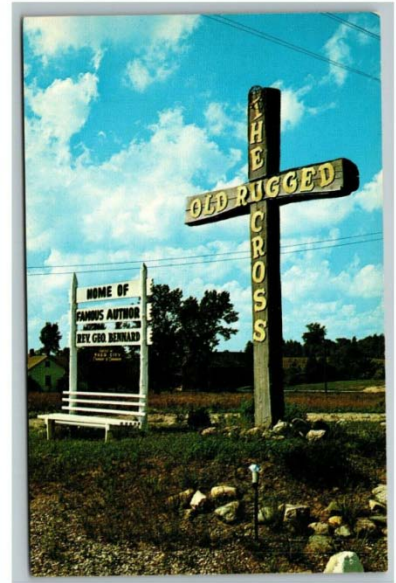


THE OLD RUGGED CROSS HISTORY

Song was consistently named America's favorite gospel hymn between 1925 and 1960, and the most popular of all hymns written in the twentieth century.

Few things were easy in life for George Bernard, the son of a coal miner, born in Youngstown, Ohio. They moved frequently and finally settled in Lucas, Iowa, where young George made his personal acceptance of Christ as his Savior. When he was about to turn sixteen his father died, suddenly, and his dream of going to theological school was replaced with assuming the responsibilities of supporting his sisters and mother. He worked by day and devoted his spare time to books. When his obligations lessened, he moved to Chicago, married and he and his wife served as officers in the Salvation Army.



Later his desire to be in the ministry happened, first with the Salvation Army, and later he was ordained by the Methodist Episcopal Church, and became a traveling evangelist. His ministry was highly esteemed and he maintained a busy schedule, conducting revival services in Michigan and New York. During this time he also struggled, spiritually, and spent hours in anguished prayer and in study of the Bible. He realized he needed to better understand the power of the Cross of Christ. He later said, ***"I was praying for a full understanding of the Cross....I read and studied and prayed....The Christ of the Cross became more than a symbol. Finally, the Christ of the Cross, came to me one day in 1913, when I was staying in Albion, Michigan. The words I first wrote were imperfect. I saw the Christ of the Cross as if I were seeing John 3:15 leave the printed page, take form and act out the meaning of redemption. The more I contemplated these truths, the more convinced I became that the cross was far more than just a religious symbol but rather the very heart of the gospel. The words of the finished hymn were put into my heart in answer to my own need. "***

Bit by bit, piece by piece, the words of "The Old Rugged Cross" came together. It took several months for the words to formulate in his mind. As he preached throughout the Midwest, he carried the words with him, constantly working on them, adjusting, polishing and sometimes singing them in his meetings. Upon returning home from a trip one day, he sat at his piano and it came together.

When he, at last, finished it, he went to the home of his friends, Rev. and Mrs. L.O. Boswick and sang it for them. After the last note, he looked at them and asked. ***"Will it do?"*** The Boswicks were so moved they paid for the fees to have it printed.

It was introduced shortly afterward at a revival service in Pokagon, Michigan, on June 7, 1913, sung by a choir composed of Frank Virgil, Olive Marrs, Clara Virgil, William Thaldorf, and Florence Jones (*who was also the organist*), and then at a large conference of evangelists in Chicago. "The Old Rugged Cross" became one of the most widely published songs, either sacred or secular, in this country. Not long after it began appearing in hymnbooks across America.

Bernard continued his evangelistic ministries for forty more years. On October 8, 1958, at the age of eighty-five, Bernard exchanged his *"Cross for a crown."* He spent the last years of his life in his home near Reed City, Michigan. A twelve foot high cross stands at his home. His home became the "Old Rugged Cross Museum" containing artifacts of his life. It has since been moved and his artifacts are now in the "Reed City Heritage Museum," 138 W Solossom Ave, Reed, City, MI.

References: [Be Still My Soul](#) by Randy Peterson, [A Song In My Heart & Then Sings My Soul](#), by Robert J. Morgan, [101 Hymn Stories](#) by Kenneth W. Osbeck and the Internet (various searches).