ALMA MATER
Far Above Cayuga’s Waters

Con spirito

Far above Cayuga’s waters, With its waves of blue,
Far above the busy humming Of the bustling town,

Stands our noble alma mater, Glorious to view.
Reared against the arch of heaven, Looks she proudly down.

Lift the chorus, speed it onward, Loud her praises tell.

Hail to thee, our alma mater! Hail, all hail, Cornell!
ALMA MATER

The best-known Cornell song and one of the most popular of all American college songs, the ALMA MATER is set to the music of “Annie Lisle,” a popular song written in 1857 by H. S. Thompson, a Boston minstrel-musician. “Annie Lisle” is a ballad about a virtuous young lady destined for tragedy—a genre related to Edgar Allan Poe’s “Annabel Lee” and “Lenore.” A newspaper editorial at the time observed that “Annie Lisle” and similar songs “swept the country like a prairie fire.” In a letter to the university librarian dated January 18, 1887, Archibald C. Weeks 1872 explains the origin of the text “Far Above Cayuga’s Waters”:

It was composed about 1870, under the following circumstances. Mr. W. M. Smith ’74 (now district attorney of Suffolk County) and I roomed together in the Woodruff Block on Tioga Street. The blending of our voices, he, tenor, I, bass, pleased us exceedingly in the music of “Annie Lisle.” I proposed that we adapt a college song to the music and suggested the first two lines of the first verse; he responded with the third and fourth, I with the fifth and sixth, and he with the seventh and eighth. The chorus was the result of mutual suggestion.