Song battle revived after 50 year peace
By William Lasser

As if the country didn't have enough troubles, the citizens of Purley, VI, have given us another one. They have reopened the controversy surrounding our national anthem by suggesting that we change it from "The Star-Spangled Banner" to "America the Beautiful."

This has sparked a debate about which song better represents the country's natural landscape. Make a better national anthem? Both the words and the melody come from "God Save the Queen," disqualified that song by the British. But "America the Beautiful," inspired by the majestic view from the summit of Pike's Peak, sings of amber waves of grain and spacious skies. "America, America, God shed his grace on thee...

They argue that the song is more patriotic and better reflects the country's values. The original "God Save the Queen" was written by John Stafford Smith and was commissioned by the British to celebrate the defense of Fort McHenry. However, the barcarole had begun, and Cohan decided to keep the American on board.

The Defense of Fort McHenry, as the original poem was entitled, was written on the back of an envelope from John Key during the battle. One can imagine the relief, the feeling of joy and patriotism the British felt when they saw the stars and stripes flying above the Fort at the dawn's early light.

The first stanza asks the question, "Of Say does that star-spangled banner yet wave?"

The second answers that question, "Now glory, highly, shall fill the day, in full glory reflected."

The third and fourth verses are an affront to our British antecedents, whose descendants recently spent over $4 million to celebrate their lost at Yorktown. It's a glory to the fact that our "enemies" blood has "washed out their foul footstep's pollution."

Deliverance is to escape "the terror of flight, or the gloom of disheartening," and it expresses a decidedly outdated imperialist doctrine: "Thus conquer we must, when our cause is just."

Admitting that the three verses have failed to displease the muscle is as inappropriate as the words. The tune is derived from a British "Patriotic" song, "There is No Country Ti's Of Thee," which of course comes from "God Save the Queen," disqualified from being the national anthem. Both the words and the music are distinctly American. The poem was written by Katherine Lee Bates of Falmouth, Mass.; the tune has been written 15 years earlier by Samuel A. Ward of New Jersey.

But "America the Beautiful" misses the point. Amber grain, purple mountains and blue skies do not make a nation great. But what is good and what is bad in the United States were created by people, given of course a great number of advantages by nature.

Neither song approaches the perfect national anthem. The second is too military in character, and it is...