

HOUSE BILL 938

By Sparks

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4,
Chapter 1, Part 3, relative to state symbols.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should recognize songs of historic significance that have influenced this State; and

WHEREAS, John Newton struggled against the temptation of profits earned by merchants and slavers and uncertainty as to his religious belief during the first two decades of his life; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Newton's life, rife with "dangers, toils and snares," frequently made him feel as though he had been miraculously spared, despite his struggles; and

WHEREAS, he experienced a spiritual conversion after his ship was caught in a severe storm in 1748; he began reading the Bible and other religious literature during the remainder of his return journey to England; and

WHEREAS, he worked over the next sixteen years to become ordained as a priest with the church and was finally successful in 1764; and

WHEREAS, he became well-known both for his pastoral care and beliefs, and was offered the parish in Olney, England; and

WHEREAS, during his first year serving in Olney, he wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace," which became one of the most celebrated songs in modern history; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Newton's conversion from a merchant and slaver to a man of faith led him to speak out against slavery, and although many of England's large port cities greatly benefited from the slave trade, Mr. Newton and other social critics began to speak out against the practice; and

WHEREAS, by the 1780s, William Wilberforce, a member of Parliament and the nephew of one of Newton's friends in London, added his voice to this critique; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wilberforce was inspired by and felt that his own conversion paralleled Mr. Newton's, and upon Mr. Newton's encouragement used his money and influence to support abolition of the slave trade; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Newton continued to support the abolishment of slavery until it was finally passed by the House of Commons in 1804; and

WHEREAS, he spent the remainder of his life as a priest in Olney, working to help others find a deeper understanding and love through their faith; and

WHEREAS, "Amazing Grace" has since been recorded by various artists with strong connections to Tennessee, including Dolly Parton, Elvis Presley, Tennessee Ernie Ford, the Spirit of Memphis Quartet, the Fairfield Four, Willie Nelson, Aretha Franklin, Little Richard, the Oak Ridge Boys, Merle Haggard, Alan Jackson, and Garth Brooks; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that this body should formally recognize "Amazing Grace" as a State song; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 4-1-302, is amended by adding the following as a new subdivision:

() "Amazing Grace" by John Newton, and as sung by Dolly Parton, as the official hymn of the state of Tennessee;

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.