

Oley Speaks, singer and composer, was born in Canal , Ohio on June 28, 1874, the youngest of nine children. Shortly after graduating from Canal Winchester High School, his family moved to Columbus, Ohio. Speaks started his career as a railroad clerk at a station in Columbus, Ohio, until he decided to pursue his musical passions. He was a fine baritone singer in churches at Columbus before he moved to New York City in 1898 and started taking lessons. One of his voice teachers was the American soprano Emma Thursby. Speaks had a successful career as a singer, touring the US giving recitals and also appearing in oratorios.

Speaks began to write songs, much of his output being on religious themes. He studied composition with Will Macfarlane and Max Spicker. In 1907, he wrote *On the Road to Mandalay* using the words of Rudyard Kipling's poem "Mandalay" ", which sold over one million copies. The song was a popular parlor ballad, particularly in the UK and British territories worldwide, and was boosted by the recording by Frank Sinatra in 1958. However, after some resistance from the Kipling estate over the omission of several verses, this version of the song remained embargoed in the British Commonwealth until many years later. Speaks had two further million-selling successes, *Morning* to a lyric by Frank Leiby in 1910 and *Sylvia* to a lyric by Clinton Scollard in 1914, but neither has been popular in the age of the gramophone. More recently, American baritone Thomas Hampton has also recorded *On the Road to Mandalay*.

In 1898, Oley went to New York City to further his musical studies. He composed more than 250 compositions. The CWAHS has copies of most of his compositions (including some handwritten by Oley) as well as an oil portrait of Oley by famous artist Howard Chandler Christy.