

# Katharine Lee Bates

## Wellesley College Professor was Prolific Poet

Probably best known as the author of the words to "America the Beautiful," Katharine Lee Bates (August 1859 - March 1929) was a prolific poet and a professor of English and head of the English department at Wellesley, where she had been a student in its earliest years.

Her father, a Congregational minister, died when Katharine was less than a month old. Her brothers had to go

to work to help support the family, but Katharine was given an education. She received her B.A. from Wellesley College in 1880. She wrote to supplement her income. "Sleep" was published by The Atlantic Monthly during her undergraduate years at Wellesley.

A trip to Colorado in 1893 and the view from Pikes Peak inspired Katharine Lee Bates to write the poem, "America the Beautiful," which was published in The Congregationalist two years after she wrote it. The Boston Evening Transcript published a revised version in 1904, and the public adopted the idealistic poem



quickly.

Katharine Lee Bates helped found the New England Poetry Club in 1915 and served for a time as its president, and she was involved in a few social reform activities, working for labor reform and planning the College Settlements Association with Vida Scudder. She was raised in the Congregational faith of her ancestors; as an adult, she was deeply religious but could not find a church in whose

faith she could be certain.

Katharine Lee Bates lived for twenty-five years with Katharine Coman in a committed partnership that has sometimes been described as a "romantic friendship." Bates wrote, after Coman died, "So much of me died with Katharine Coman that I'm sometimes not quite sure whether I'm alive or not."

Bates' teaching career was the central interest of her adult life. She believed that through literature, human values could be revealed and developed.