

# KATHARINE LEE BATES

b. August 12, 1859

d. March 28, 1929

## SONGWRITER

*“That the hymn has gained a hold is clearly due to the fact that Americans are at heart idealists.”*

**In 1970, she was inducted posthumously into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.**

Katharine Lee Bates was a songwriter, poet and educator. She is best known for writing “America the Beautiful.”

Born in Massachusetts, Bates was the daughter of a Congregational pastor. After spending a year at Oxford University in England, she graduated from Wellesley College. She remained at Wellesley to teach literature. Bates wrote children’s books, textbooks and travel books about her trips to the Middle East and Europe.

In 1893, Bates taught a summer course at Colorado College. While hiking Pike’s Peak, she became overwhelmed with the scenery. She wrote down a four-verse poem originally titled “Pike’s Peak,” now known as “America the Beautiful.” When published in local newspapers, the poem became wildly popular. Although set to various tunes, the poem is traditionally sung to the tune of Samuel Ward’s hymn “Materna,” and has become the unofficial national anthem. There have been efforts to give “America the Beautiful” legal status as the national anthem.

In 1915, Bates cofounded and served as the president of the New England Poetry Club. She was actively involved in social and labor reform.

While teaching at Wellesley, Bates became involved with professor, poet and dean Katharine Coman. Bates described their relationship as a “romantic friendship.” The couple lived together for 25 years until Coman died. “So much of me died with Katharine Coman,” Bates said, “that I’m sometimes not quite sure whether I’m alive or not.” To honor her partner and celebrate their shared love and scholarship, Bates wrote “Yellow Clover: A Remembrance of Love” (1922).

The Falmouth Historical Society preserved Bates’s family home as a historical landmark. In 1970, she was inducted posthumously into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

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