

America the Beautiful

Katharine Lee Bates, a 33-year-old music teacher at Wellesley College in Massachusetts took a train trip in 1893 to Colorado Springs, Colorado, to teach a short summer school session at Colorado College.



According to *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia, several of the sights on her trip inspired her, and they found their way into a poem – including the World’s Colombian Exposition in Chicago, the “White City” with its promise of the future contained within its alabaster buildings; the wheat fields of America’s heartland Kansas, through which her train was riding on July 16; and the majestic view of the Great Plains from high atop Zebulon’s Pike’s Peak.

It was on the pinnacle of that mountain that the words of the poem started to come to her, and she wrote them down upon returning to her hotel room at the original Antlers Hotel. The poem, originally titled *Pike’s Peak*, was initially published two years later in *The Congregationalist* to commemorate the Fourth of July. It quickly caught the public’s fancy. Amended versions were published in 1904 and 1913.

A hymn tune composed by Samuel A. Ward was generally considered the best music for adaptation to the poem as early as 1910, and is still the popular tune today. Ward’s music combined with Bates’ poem were first published together in 1910 and titled *America the Beautiful*. On this Fourth of July 2015, let’s allow the beauty and message of the lyrics touch our souls:

*O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!*

(over)

*O beautiful for pilgrim feet
Whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare of freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!*

*O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife.
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness
And every gain divine!*

*O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!*

May the praises and the prayers contained in the lyrics of this song ring in our hearts this Fourth of July and beyond.

– Beecher Hunter