

Falmouth Village: Katharine Lee Bates' Playground

by Leonard Miele

Introduction

On August 12, the town of Falmouth will celebrate the 150th birthday of Katharine Lee Bates. As the most famous native-born resident of the town, she will be honored for her prolific writing career and the authorship of "America the Beautiful." Unfortunately, many people know very little about her life for the only biography written about her, until this year, was written in 1952 by her niece Dorothy Burgess. With the 2009 publication of *Voice of the Tide*, it is an opportune time to share some of the highlights of her life and her successful academic/writing career.

Katharine's father, the Reverend William Bates, was born on January 18, 1816. He was an 1837 graduate of Middlebury College and an 1840 graduate of Andover Theological Seminary. After teaching for two years, he became the minister of the Congregational Church in Northbridge, MA. He held this job for twelve years before moving to Falmouth in 1858 to become the minister of the First Congregational Church on the Village Green. He and his wife Cornelia had three children at this time: Arthur Lee Bates, who was 7, Jane who was 4, and Samuel Lee who was only a year old. Sadly, William Bates died of

a spinal tumor just four weeks after Katharine's birth on August 12, 1859.

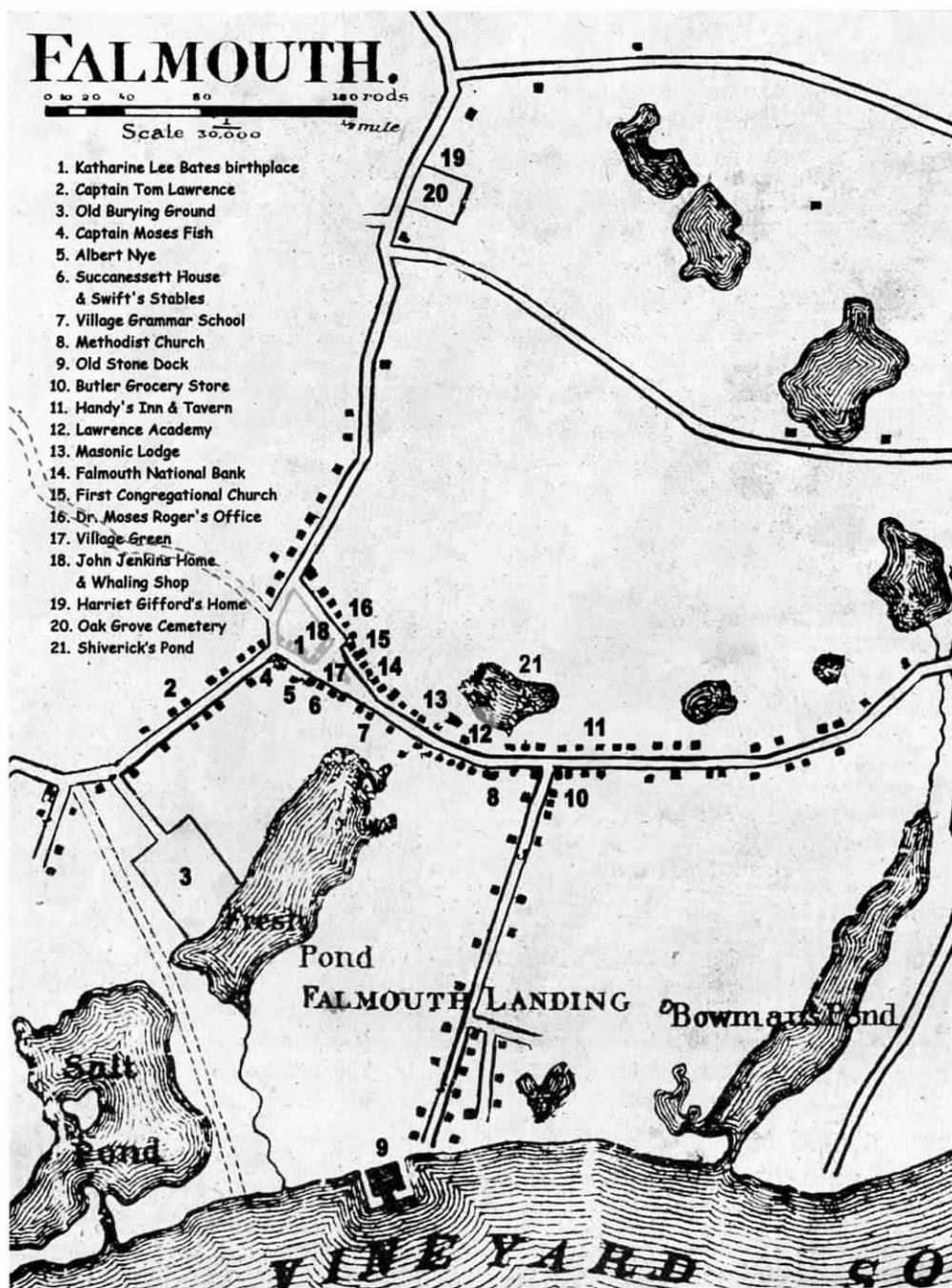
William Bates' greatest hero was his father, the Reverend Joshua Bates. He was the president of Middlebury College for 21 years and the chaplain of the United States House of Representatives in the 26th Congress. William had four brothers, all graduates of Middlebury College, and seven sisters who, unlike their brothers, were home-schooled to become teachers.



Young Katharine Lee Bates in Falmouth. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

Katharine's mother, Cornelia Frances Lee Bates, was a graduate of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, later to become Mount Holyoke College. This was a major social hurdle for a young woman in the first half of the 19th century. Although Cornelia Bates taught for just a short time before marrying William Bates when she was 21, she believed education

was a lifelong endeavor. When she was 71 years old, she began to study Spanish, and she became so proficient in the language that she collaborated with her daughter Katharine to translate the book *Romantic Legends of Spain*. It was said that just a few hours before she died



Map of Falmouth Village adapted from 1858 map of Falmouth by Jay Avila, Spinner Publications. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

in 1908 she quoted the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer in fluent Spanish.

Katharine Lee Bates lived in Falmouth from 1859 to 1871, moving to Wellesley Hills, MA just before her 12th birthday. She graduated from Wellesley High School in 1874, and when the family moved to Newton she went to Newton High School for two years as a post-graduate student preparing for college. She entered Wellesley College in 1876 and was known as "Katie in the class of '80." She was, of course, the class poet and the class president.

After graduation, she taught at Natick High School and the Dana Hall School before joining the faculty at Wellesley College in 1886. She became chairperson of the English department and taught English literature for 39 years. Early in her career, in 1893, she was a guest lecturer during the summer session at Colorado College. During her stay, she traveled to the summit of Pikes Peak and was inspired to write her famous poem "America the Beautiful."

Katharine Lee Bates went on three interesting sabbaticals during her tenure at Wellesley College. Her first trip was to France and Spain. Her second was to Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, and Palestine. And her third sabbatical was to Norway, Denmark, and a return trip to Spain. She was especially fond of Spain and called it her second country. When the Spanish-American War ended in 1899, she went to Spain as a director of the International Institute for Girls in Spain and became a correspondent for The New York Times writing weekly articles about the social, political, and religious lives of the Spanish people.

Throughout her 69 years, Katharine Lee Bates wrote 11 volumes of prose, 12 volumes of poetry, and 31 diverse works as an editor and translator. She retired



Professor Katharine Lee Bates with her dog, Hamlet. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

from Wellesley College in 1924 and died of pneumonia on March 28, 1929. She is buried in the Bates family plot at the Oak Grove Cemetery about a mile from her birthplace at 16 Main Street. The inscription she chose for her gravestone reads, "I will sing unto the Lord a new song." Her longtime friend and colleague Vida Dutton Scudder recalled that "hers was a singing soul; I can hardly imagine what it must be like so to have one's inner consciousness constantly ripple as hers must have done in melody."

Katharine's Playground

The town of Falmouth was first settled in 1660 by Jonathan Hatch and Isaac Robinson. The original settlement was known as Suckanesset, the Wampanoag word for "the place where black wampum is found." The hub of all social, political, and economic activity was located by the Old Burying Ground along Fresh Pond (now Sider's Pond). In 1749, the present Village Green became the new town center, as it was the site of a new meeting house and military training field. By the time Katharine Lee Bates was born in 1859, Falmouth Village extended about a mile east of the Village Green. Because Katharine lived in the parsonage, just two houses west of the Bradford Dimmick house that fronted the Green on

Hewins Street, the entire community was a familiar playground to her. Across the street from her home, at 15 Main Street, lived the family of Captain Moses R. Fish. Between 1850 and 1868, Captain Fish went on four major whaling voyages. It is possible that Katharine first "heard the vaunting tales of bronzed old seamen," as described in her Falmouth poems, from Captain Fish.

Another local whaling captain, Tom Lawrence, lived just around the corner from Katharine, on Locust Street. He first went to sea at seventeen and was one of four brothers who became whaling captains. Before he retired in 1862 at the age of 40, he commanded three whaling ships that kept him away



Main Street, Falmouth, ca. 1870s, from Watson's Corner looking toward the Village Green, showing Katharine Lee Bates' birthplace on the left and the home of Captain Moses R. Fish on the right. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.



Eugene E. C. Swift ran the popular Succanessett House and the hack and livery stables across from the Village Green. Katharine Lee Bates walked by these businesses each day on her way to the Village Grammar School. The house was later moved to Cahoon Court and Saint Barnabas Memorial Church was built on the site. Photo by H. G. Corless. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

from his home and family for three and four years at a time. His last voyage, on the whaling ship *Alto*, was especially memorable for it was attacked by Confederate gunboats on its return home to New Bedford. Katharine Lee Bates would eventually write about Lawrence's travels in her poem "When Cap'n Tom Comes Home."

To the east of the Fish home was the large plantation-style residence of Albert Nye, a wealthy shipping merchant who built the home in 1849 for his Georgian bride, Henrietta. This was the first summer residence in Falmouth, and it had its own furnace for heating and private gas plant for interior and exterior lighting. Because large verandas surrounded the entire home, and 30-foot hallways connected the rooms inside, it became known as Mostly Hall after Nye sold the property in 1872. The entire Bates family must have marveled at the size of this home and the financial good fortune of the Nye family.

The next neighbor on Main Street was Obed Goodspeed, Esq., a prominent lawyer and one of the town's postmasters in 1840. He lived in the house that was built in 1767 by Consider Hatch, a descendant of the early settler Jonathan Hatch. The most popular "swimming hole" in the neighborhood was Fresh Pond, behind Obed Goodspeed's home. Because of Consider Hatch's sobriquet "Sider," Fresh Pond eventually became known as Sider's Pond. The narrow path at the side of the home was probably the shortest route for Katharine and her friends to reach the pond where they could swim and catch frogs and turtles in the summer and go skating in the winter.

Abutting the Goodspeed home and Fresh Pond was the property of Eugene E. C. Swift, which accommodated a couple of businesses. Katharine was surely familiar with Succanessett



The Village Grammar School, now the Odd Fellows Hall, was built in 1856. Katharine Lee Bates attended the school until she was almost 12 years old when her family moved to Wellesley Hills, MA. Most of her early poems and stories were written while she was a student at the school. This photo shows the Odd Fellows Hall decked in bunting for the Town's bicentennial celebration in 1886. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.



The Old Stone Dock at the end of Shore Street, constructed in 1801, was the commercial port of Falmouth. Packet ships and schooners brought needed provisions to the town from larger cities such as New Bedford and New York. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

House, the most successful boarding house in town, and E. E. C. Swift's hack-and-livery stable, which provided the guests with transportation around Falmouth. This site, across the street from the Village Green, was sold in 1888 to the Beebe family, the benefactors who moved the Swift house from the property and built Saint Barnabas Memorial Church in its place. Bordering the busy Swift businesses was the boot and shoe shop of Watson Edwards. It has been written that he was famous for his custom-made boots and shoes, especially the six-dollar calfskin boots that so many Falmouth young men desired.

Beyond Watson's shoe shop, just a quarter-mile from Katharine's home, was the Village Grammar School where she was a student until she was 11 years old. It was here that she developed her early writing skills, recording philosophic thoughts in a small red diary and creating whimsical stories and anecdotes in a weekly school journal with her best friend Hattie Gifford. The Village School

was built in 1856 to replace three smaller village schools on the site of the present Town Hall Square. In 1906, the school was moved one block southeast to One Chancery Lane, next to the Square. At this time, the steeple was removed and the open portico with columns was added. For 30 years, the building was known as Red Men's Hall and was used by the Tataket Tribe #152, the nation's oldest patriotic fraternal organization. In 1938 it was converted into an antique shop, and in 1955 it became the current Odd Fellows Hall. Beyond the school, the last imposing structure to be seen in the Village on the south side of Main Street was the First Methodist Episcopal Church, one of only two churches in the

Village. It was an austere, boxlike building that was dedicated on February 15, 1848, during the ministry of Reverend E. D. Trakey. The structure was razed in 1957 and replaced by the John Wesley Methodist Church on Gifford Street.



In Katharine Lee Bates' early years the Methodist Church (1848-1957) was one of only two churches in Falmouth Village. There were two entrances at the front of this imposing structure, one for men and one for women. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.



Lawrence Academy where the three oldest Bates children attended school. The building is now used by the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

Just past the church was Shore Street, the only road leading to the Old Stone Dock and the town beaches on Vineyard Sound. This street was the commercial lifeline of the town – the major route for transporting all the merchandise entering and leaving Falmouth. The Old Stone Dock, built in 1801, consisted of two long piers, about 150 feet apart, that formed a large square with a 50-foot opening for vessels to enter. It was an important port of call for schooners and packet ships that brought needed provisions and supplies from larger cities such as New Bedford and New York. At the southeast corner of Shore and Main Streets, the location of the Falmouth Hotel building since 1872, was the grocery store owned by John and Knowles Butler. As the leading grocers in town, they had their own vessel that cruised the Atlantic waterways from the Old Stone Dock to New York to transport the provisions needed for their store. Most likely, this store was a convenient location for Katharine and her classmates to treat themselves to sweet candy at the end of a school day.

A few hundred yards to the east of the Butler grocery store on the north side of Main Street was the stagecoach line operated by William Hewins. His coaches were the major source of transportation for visitors and residents needing to travel between Falmouth and the railroad station at Monument Beach in Bourne. Because his business was so successful, William's wife Love Handy Hewins ran a boarding house in their home – Handy's Inn and Tavern – to accommodate the many visitors who came to Falmouth.

To the west on Main Street, toward the Village Green, was the prestigious Lawrence Academy. One of the reasons why Reverend William Bates accepted the call to preach at the First Congregational Church was the reputation of Lawrence Academy, the private high school in Falmouth. While Katharine attended the Village School across the street, the three oldest Bates children, Arthur, Jane, and Sam, attended the academy. This beautiful Greek Revival, temple-style building



The Masonic Lodge Building was built in 1799 by Elijah Swift as reported in the Winter 1998 issue of *Spritsail*. Although it has gone through many structural changes, it remains in the same location today. Besides housing the Masons, this building was a district school and a post office for three decades. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.



The First Congregational Church was built at this Village Green location in 1857, a year before Reverend William Bates accepted the call to be the pastor of the church. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

was erected in 1834 for \$3,000. Through the years it has been known as Falmouth Academy, Lawrence Academy, Lawrence High School, Grand Army Hall, Legion Hall, and again as Lawrence Academy. Currently, it is the headquarters for the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce. Located behind the Academy was Shiverick's Pond, where Katharine and her brothers would ice-skate during the winter months.

Beyond the Academy, the next structure of note was the Masonic Lodge Building, built in 1799 as a Lodge Hall and schoolhouse. Sponsored by the Masonic Society, this building with school facilities on the ground floor was the first to be erected through private subscriptions. Over the years, the Masonic Lodge has housed school-district classrooms, served as the

headquarters for the Succanessett Lodge of Odd Fellows, and housed the Village post office for 32 years. For many Falmouth residents of Katharine's day, this was a major social center of the town. The Lodge was adjacent to Elisha Burgess' tailor shop; next came the old Town Hall, built in 1840, and, at the tip of the Village Green, the Falmouth National Bank which millionaire Elijah Swift helped to establish in 1821. This was the first bank on Cape Cod, and it had a reading room where local whaling captains congregated to read newspapers and to share stories about their adventures at sea.

Facing the Green was the First Congregational Church that was so important to the Bates family. Reverend Bates was the pastor of the church from June 16, 1858 until he died 15 months later. After his death on September 10, 1859, the Bates family continued to attend the church for the nearly twelve years they remained in Falmouth. Katharine's poems "The Falmouth Church" and "The Falmouth Bell" commemorate the church and the bell in the steeple. The original structure of the church was erected on the Village Green in 1796. In 1857, it was dismantled and rebuilt across the street from the Village Green.



While William Hewins ran his successful stagecoach line, his wife Love Handy Hewins operated Handy's Inn and Tavern in their home. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

The belfry houses a Paul Revere bell that was commissioned in 1796 at a cost of \$338.94 or 42 cents a pound.

In the shadow of the church steeple was the home that Dr. Francis Wicks built in 1790, now known as the Julia Wood House and owned by the Falmouth Historical Society. Dr. Wicks was an early advocate of smallpox inoculations and ran a hospital for the treatment of smallpox at Nobska in Woods Hole. In the nineteenth century, Dr. Moses Rogers maintained an office on the property until his death in 1862 at the age of 44. It was Dr. Rogers who assisted in the autopsy of Reverend William Bates as Katharine's eight-year-old brother, Arthur Lee, looked on from the foot of his father's bed.



Dr. Moses Rogers, a graduate of Bowdoin College and a Philadelphia medical school, assisted in the autopsy on Reverend William Bates. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.



The Julia Wood House was built in 1790 by Doctor Francis Wicks. On this property was the medical office of Doctor Moses Rogers. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.

fan window. Although Mr. Jenkins was president of the Falmouth National Bank for nine years, his primary occupation was running a popular whaling supply shop next to his home where most of the mariners in town bought supplies for their whaling adventures.

Across the street from Dr. Rogers' office was the beautiful home of John Jenkins, at the corner of Hewins Street. Situated at the head of the Village Green, this 1822 Federal colonial home had twin chimneys and was adorned with a pediment and

Around the corner, the home where Katharine was born was built in 1810 by William Nye for Mayhew Hatch, another direct descendant of Falmouth's founder, Jonathan Hatch. The home was also owned by whaling captain Benjamin Franklin Jones and his son George Washington Jones, the Falmouth postmaster from 1889 to 1927. The Falmouth Historical Society purchased the two-and-a-half story Federal colonial in 1976 for \$45,000 and opened part of it as a seasonal museum during the '70s and '80s. Until 2008, many of its 19th century features were still in evidence.

The upstairs bedrooms, for example, had no closets – perhaps a taxable luxury in the 1800s – and the dining room at the center of the house had many

doors, which opened to staircases and rooms surrounding the dining room. Beyond the kitchen, seemingly frozen in time, there was a three-hole outhouse which serviced, by size, one child and two adults. In 2008, David and Linda Newton bought the home and restored it historically, maintaining its 19th-century architectural details with 21st-century amenities.

As a child, Katharine and her closest friend, Harriet Gifford, played in the Old Burying Ground located half a mile south of the Bates homestead. Scrambling among the tombstones, they would trace the epitaphs, spell out the names on the graves, play games, and philosophize about life and death. Katharine's poem "Epitome" describes the "lonely burial ground" and the stones "muffled in moss and lichen-overgrown." The Old Burying Ground is at the end of Cemetery Lane off Mill Road. There are

approximately 776 stones in the cemetery, the oldest dating back to 1705. About 30 sea captains and the earliest town ministers are buried on the 4.46 acre site. The cemetery borders Sider's Pond and abutted the first two meeting houses, built in 1690 and 1715. Today contemporary homes surround the burying ground, replacing the meeting houses that were central to the early political and religious life of the town.

Leonard Miele was an English major at college, obtaining a Bachelor's degree from the University of New Mexico and a Master's degree from Northeastern University. Before retiring to Cape Cod, he taught English in the Brockton, MA school system for thirty years. Along with writing articles about Cape Cod history in local newspapers and journals, he gives historical walks and lectures for the Falmouth Historical Society and other regional organizations. He is the president of the Friends of the Falmouth Public Library and of his neighborhood civic association. Leonard resides in Falmouth with his wife Stephanie, a vocalist and piano technician.



The Old Burying Ground was a favorite meeting place for Katharine and Harriet Gifford. They would play among the graves and tombstones and share thoughts about life and death. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.