

POETESS-LAUREATE FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

I have noted many public broadcasts on the subject of poetry and a seeming consensus of thought that the poem is about to return to its lyric and narrative form--story telling. As an amateur in that field, (of story telling by rhymed words,) the thought makes me happy. You know my love of Rudyard Kipling and his "All in Pennsylvania"--another favorite of the narrative type was Robert W. Service. And there is Margaret Junkin Preston, who was probably the most beloved poetess of the last century--a Virginia lady of grace from Pennsylvania--who became known as the nation-wide poet-laureate of the south. She was born and lived long in Pennsylvania--born at Milton, along the Susquehanna, the eldest child of the Rev. George and Julia Rush Miller Junkin. Her father was minister of the Presbyterian Church at Milton. They moved to Germantown where he became headmaster of Manual Labor Academy, then he was called to be the first President of Lafayette College, and the family moved to the forks of the Delaware at Easton. It was at that time that Margaret Junkin began her poetic work. After a respite at Miami of Ohio, then a return to Lafayette, the elder Junkin became President of Washington College, Virginia--now Washington and Lee. Meanwhile, Margaret Junkin continued with her poetry--she was published constantly--such works as "The Old Dominion", "The Polish Boy", "Galileo Before the Inquisition", "The Fate of a Raindrop". She married Major T. L. Preston, professor of Latin at VMI; her sister married professor T. J. Jackson of the same institute. Two sons were born to Margaret. War clouds brewed up the Civil War, she lost her mother and sister and brother Joseph in the years before; wrote many verses of her grief--the war divided her family--brother William espoused the Southern cause and became a captain; brother John served as a surgeon in the Union

Army. Her late sister's husband, T. J. Jackson was the famed "Stonewall", and after his wife's death, Stonewall Jackson's home was the Junkin residence until his own death during the war. This was some family--her father, an abolitionist decided to leave for Philadelphia when war broke out. The story is told that when his wagon of heavy household effects reached the Mason Dixon line, it was halted and all goods unloaded and washed -- including horses harnesses, wagon carriage and themselves, so that, as Doctor Junkin, the Milton Presbyterian said, "he wanted to leave all southern soil behind". Following the war her books of poems became the most popular in the nation, along with her stories of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, published from Lexington and Baltimore. At her death in March 1897, she had won honors as the "poetess of the south", but had remained always proud of her family, the Junkins--all of them--who hailed first from Milton, Pennsylvania.

This is Pe te Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.