

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## **Jesse Andrews, 1867-1919, Scholar and Poet**

Jessie Andrews, first woman graduate of The University of Texas, was a native of Mississippi. Her father concluded that Austin's climate would be good for his health and moved the family there in 1873, but he died within a year. Jessie's mother opened a boardinghouse near the capitol to support her four young children. The family-run establishment gained the reputation of being the most respectable boardinghouse in town.

Young Jessie attended Austin Graded School, the first public school in Texas. From the beginning she earned good grades and excelled in academics. At age 16 she received the Peabody Award as outstanding honor graduate of Austin High School. She completed entrance exams and enrolled in the new University of Texas when it opened in 1883, the first female student on campus.

Three years later Jessie graduated with a B.Litt degree. She had majored in German but was also proficient in math. Phi Beta Kappa recognized and honored her with membership. At the commencement ceremony, she delivered an address, "Truth: The End of All Human Effort." Many universities of the era excluded women from alumni associations, but the University of Texas group presented her with a gold watch inscribed, "Welcome, Jessie Andrews, First Girl Graduate."

In 1887 Jessie set another precedent: appointment as an instructor at The University, its first female faculty member. She taught in the German department for over 30 years and mentored many female students. After devoting nine summers to study at the University of Chicago, she completed her master's degree. She also wrote many poems that were published in magazines. One of her pieces appeared in the New York Times. In 1910 she published a volume of verse, *Rough Rider Rhymes*.

In 1918, disenchanted with Germany's actions during World War I, Jessie resigned her teaching position and joined her sister in operating an antique shop. She died of pneumonia a year later. A residence hall on The University of Texas campus is named for this pioneering and indefatigable female scholar.