

BEAUTIFUL RIVER

Robert Lowery; 1864

"Beautiful River", "Shall We Gather at the River?" or simply "*At the River*", are some of the popular names for the traditional Christian tune: HANSON PLACE, written in 1864 by American poet and gospel music composer Robert Lowry. The tune's title is a reference to the original Hanson Place Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York, where Lowry was pastor. It was on a particularly hot and sticky July afternoon when he began contemplating a passage from the book of Revelations that describes "*a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb*". He decided too many hymns spoke to the 'river of death', and he wanted one that described this glorious vision of the apocalypse, and set about describing it in words and music.

This hymn was first published as "*Beautiful River*" in "*Happy Voices*", 1865, and many subsequent hymnals of various denominations, as well as titles. This hymn has become a favorite song of camp meetings, water baptismal services, and funerals. It was sung at the funeral of American Supreme Court Justice William Douglas. It was often employed in Western soundtracks, particularly by director John Ford, in his, "*Tobacco Road*" (1941), "*My Darling Clementine*" (1946), "*Three Godfathers*" (1948). The hymn tune was paired with the 1876 Swedish hymn, "*O, hur saligt att få vandra*" ("*O, how blessed it is to walk*") and became one of the most popular songs of the widespread Swedish revivalist movement. In 1937, the tune was adopted to the Japanese popular enka song, "*Tobacco Ya no Musume*". The University of Antioquia in Medellin, Colombia also uses the same melody in its official song.

Robert Lowry (1826-1899) was a professor of literature, a Baptist pastor of several large churches and a music editor at Biglow Publishing Company. He wrote close to 500 hymns, including, "*Low in the Grave He Lay*", "*How Can I Keep from Singing?*", and "*We're Marching to Zion*".

~ *Tull*