

LIFE IS LIKE A MOUNTAIN RAILROAD

M. E. Abbey, Lyrics; Charles D. Tillman, Music; 1890

"Life's Railway to Heaven" is a gospel hymn which has been a favorite song in the railroading community for over a century. It is often referred to by its first line, *"Life is Like a Mountain Railroad"*.

The music was written by Charles Davis Tillman (1861 - 1943). He had a knack for adopting material from eclectic sources into what is now known as southern gospel, becoming one of the formative influences on that genre. This was seen when he published the lyrics of *"Truth Reflects upon Our Senses"* by Mormon poetess Eliza Roxcy Snow together with a tune he wrote & attributed to himself,



when being associated with *"Mormon"* lyrics would have been fraught with risk. The refrain was worded by Georgia Baptist preacher, M. E. Abbey. In 1890, Abbey and Tillman copyrighted the combination as *"Life's Railway to Heaven"*, which has been the best known and most enduring of Tillman's songs. And, even upon his death, the words and music of a line from this song were engraved on the monument where he is buried in *Atlanta's Westview Cemetery*.

"Life is Like a Mountain Railroad" has been recorded by the Carter Family, the Chuck Wagon Gang, Mother Freddie J. Bell, The Oak Ridge Boys, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Johnny Cash, among many others. Tillman's original tune was written in 3/4 time, but a 4/4 version became popular after Patsy Cline recorded it that way in 1959 as a solo and as a duet with Willie Nelson.

This arrangement is also in 4/4 time and has four parts including a backup train effects part.

~ Tull